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Participation, action  
research and the politics of  
change in working class

ABSTRACT

Fundamental educational change is necessarily an outcome of authentic participation confirmed in community struggle against defined forms of oppression: this is the proposition explored in the course of the three case study experiences presented here. Similarly, the contexts, conditions and terms of participation are considered with regard to defining the character of authentic 'political' success.

DECLARATION

This thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university. To the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference is made in the text of the thesis.



Julie Ingleby

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It is impossible to acknowledge individually all those who participated in making this study possible. But any participant coming into contact with this work will know such acknowledgement occurred at the time and in a manner most appropriate to all who took part in the events explored here; the acknowledgement of an experience shared; the acknowledgement that comes with shared struggle.

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## INTRODUCTION

As children of our times, few of us escape the reverberations of global upheaval in our daily lives.

The collective murmurings for fundamental social change are gathering momentum and if we listen carefully to the future we will know that it rumbles. Change is already upon us; and it is for each and all of us to face its challenge with every resource we can bring to bear. In this respect effective educational change is crucial and charged with unprecedented urgency.

Yet despite the imminence of chaos in our schools and in the community at large, educators remain seemingly in a state of catharsis. Or perhaps they are cocooned in the abstractions of armchair activism. If we are to effectively take up the challenge of educational change, all 'talk' of it must be provided with its proper context: action; doing. For it is time to 'do it' and to 'do it together'. Now.

This perspective proposes authentic educational change as an outcome of authentic participation; participation confirmed in community struggle against defined oppression; participation as a process of politicisation towards fundamental social change.

## APPROACHING THE STUDY

At the outset it is necessary to appreciate that this study is not a report on research conducted in the familiar/traditional mode. Since the reading of the work itself will make the reasons for this choice apparent in their own right, it is unnecessary to elaborate them here.

Rather, it is more useful to consider this study as a structured presentation of one person's reflections on personal and collective efforts to effectively engage the processes of educational change; and the implications of those experiences for the 'theoretical' views enunciated by current proponents of Action Research. At one level then, it may be fairly described

as a review of Action Research 'theory'. However, it is most fruitfully comprehended as a sharing of real experiences ground in the enactment of change: experiences that essentially predicate success and failure on authentic participation: politicisation.

Similarly and unashamedly it is an incitement for teachers to stand up and be counted; to become political activists in the truest sense; to participate in the social/political changes that are the imperative of our times. It is an encouragement for teachers to explore at first hand their own politicisation.

It is to these readers that the concluding chapter is addressed. For although the scope of this exploration and its concluding remarks are confined to three case studies of school situations, the essential concerns explored are of general relevance to any consciously directed effort towards fundamental social change. It would therefore be mistaken to conceive the essence of this work as applying solely to an explicitly educational environment.

With this in mind, the concluding chapter offers specific considerations from which readers may wish to commence their own engagement in research of this type.

It will be noted that the case studies are preceded by a broad outline of the historical events informing the conceptual development of 'participation' as a means for constructive social change. The study then proceeds to trace an outline of coinciding conceptual developments in the context of education, and define the specific relationship between the three elements forming the scope of the exploration; schools, unions and social class.

In this it is concerned to do three things:

It is concerned to provide an historical context for both the political definition of the process itself, and for each of the specific situations explored.

It is concerned to draw attention to the relationship of class consciousness (or lack thereof) to the perceptual problems associated with the promotion of the participatory process.

Finally it is concerned to draw attention to the need for a greater understanding of the industrial organisation of and amongst the working class (i.e. trade unions); as a factor integral to the actualisation of participation as a means for redistributing wealth and power in the post-industrial community.

In all of these aspects, the process of participation is viewed as congruent with the question of class struggle.

## CHAPTER ONE

**PARTICIPATION: THE METHODOLOGY OF POLITICISATION**

METHODOLOGY: Some Perspectives and Complexities

The dominance of the empirical perspective over many generations of science served to define the notion of 'objectivity' within the largely unquestioned parameters of empirical assumptions. The advent of the psychological sciences, and more recently the new physics, has revealed an epistemological imperative for change in the definition of 'objectivity'.

To best come to grips, therefore, with this study, it is necessary to address the question of objectivity at the outset. Jonathon Silvey offers us a point of commencement:

Knowledge is objective, in this view, to the extent that different observers, preferably with varying perceptions, arrive at the same conclusions about the 'facts' when using the same method of enquiry. The derived facts are thus independent of the observers preconceptions (my emphasis).(1)

This conception is rooted in the 'mechanics' of Newtonian Physics which couches its world view in a belief in fundamental properties (ultimately synonymous with seventeenth century conceptions of God).

The social sciences, in their zealousness to establish their status on a par with the physical sciences, have adopted a similar epistemological perspective. Developments in the 'New Physics' and some challenge to familiar epistemic conceptualisations of the social sciences have suggested the need for a shift away from 'old scientific notions'. In the words of Heinz Pagels, these developments have exposed "a new picture of reality requiring a conversion of our imaginations". Physicist Fritjof Capra succinctly describes his perception of the nature of this new view of reality:

In the new world view, the universe is seen as a dynamic web of inter-related events. None of the properties of any part of this web is fundamental; they all follow from the properties of the other parts, and the overall consistency of their mutual inter-relations determines the structure of the entire web (my emphasis).(2)

A pioneer of the new physics, Werner Heisenberg, describes the methodological imperative of this perspective in the following terms:

What we observe is not nature itself, but nature exposed to our method of questioning (my emphasis).(3)

It is primarily this perspective that informs the methodology of the explorations undertaken in this work. Questionnaires and other 'empirical' techniques might ostensibly be the efficient means of producing soundly based information that is convenient for general application. However, while information culled through these techniques may lend itself to impressive and at times useful configurations, it is limited to the description of characteristics already identified by virtue of their amenability to measurement. Further, the measurements themselves are predetermined by the tools/mode applied; and these in turn are arguably determined by a perspective seeking its own validation.

Consequently, in their classical form these techniques contribute little to the areas of greatest concern to an enquiry that hinges on the flux of people's attitudes and the contextual developments of situations which in themselves are dynamic models of change. These elements are tightly interwoven with subjective experience. Thus, even the new physics is limited in the methodological assistance it can provide here, for the mediating consciousness of both the observed and the observer must be accounted for. In this we are forced to commence from the assumption that consciousness is more readily accessible to inference than to empirical measurement. Assuming this to be the case, I take it upon myself to construct a conceptual tool called 'inferential measurement'; its effective form is the indispensable richness of language as distinct from the symbolism of statistics and math. The application of this tool is based on the supposition that, when apprehended as language, conscious experience will open itself to the rules of translation and transformation. However, it is accepted that these rules cannot objectify it in the sense desired by the empiricist since they are applied always within the context of consciousness itself. That this is so does not preclude scientific exploration of processes intimately related to consciousness. As Heisenberg commented:

Contemporary science... has been forced by nature herself to pose again the old question of the possibility of comprehending reality by mental processes, and to answer it in a slightly different way.(4)

It is not the intention here to dismiss the usefulness of empirical techniques. Rather, it is to point to their incompatibility with both the exploratory nature of the enquiry and the predominantly qualitative character of its concerns.

It is in the light of these considerations that participatory observation was chosen as the research method for this study; the specific mode being Action Research.

Action-research is a process of open ended enquiry and growth developed alongside a continuous process of monitoring and evaluation. It has been geared to meet the specific needs of participants and is action oriented in that it necessarily embodies change as an aspect of enquiry.(5)

For the benefit of the skeptic, I again turn to Heisenberg:

In atomic physics... The scientist cannot play the role of a detached observer, but becomes involved in the world he observes to the extent that he(she) influences the properties of the observed objects.(6)

This is the underlying rationale of what in physics is known as Heisenberg's Uncertainty Principle. The dynamic processes which made this principle particularly valuable to modern physics are similar in effect to those that the social scientist deals with, and I believe that Action Research is a conceptual principle equivalent to that of Heisenberg. In fact the former goes one step further. For while Heisenberg recognises the observer's influence on the object observed, Action Research seeks to be conscious of such influence while it is being applied and admits the contributing consciousness of the observed as a legitimate factor.

It seeks to actively modify the situation studied rather than to produce unassailable, transferable generalizations. It is simply a structured refinement of the way we always make sense of the events and situations which surround us. It is characterised, however, by a more disciplined systematic approach to the process of observation and has an inbuilt cyclic process of review and reflection.(7)

Clearly, within this framework there is a role for the more traditional methods to be applied, but these are neither integral nor necessary to the process. Rather they are seen to be possible options in an educational process which brings its participants to a greater awareness of the politics of interaction of human beings at various situational levels.

Some readers may be tempted to confuse this approach with that of Grounded Theory. In concise terms the latter may be described as (to use Strauss and Glasser's words) "...the discovery of theory from data - systematically obtained and analysed in social research". This definition reflects an approach that remains essentially linear and empirical in character. Conversely, Action Research is a holistic process that describes a spiral motif.

Action Research provides a way of working which links theory and practice into the one whole: ideas-in-action.(8)

Proponents of Grounded Theory may object to Action Research as a research mode applied to wider social investigation. They may point to its development as an educational tool devised for classroom purposes in an attempt to define its inherent limitations.

But this view merely describes perceptual limits circumscribing the process to date. It does not address its potential and validity for wider employment. Indeed it is perhaps its educational emphasis that make it the most fitting approach given this work's interest in participation as a means for redistribution of power. In this context the functional validity of Action Research, theoretically at least, lies in the explicitness of its political potential.

A distinctive feature of Action Research is that those affected by planned change have primary responsibility for deciding on courses of action which seem likely to lead to improvement, and for evaluating the results of strategies in practice.(9)

This feature includes both the observed and the observing consciousness and explicitly effects the redistribution of skills and the relocation of decision making. In this it is conceived as a process of (and for) the transformation of consciousness; individually and collectively. Habermas refers to it as the "organisation of enlightenment". Jung may have embraced it with the phrase "individual and collective self-realisation".

It may assist us at this point to consider briefly the discoveries in quantum physics. Reflect for a moment upon the implications of these statements:

...the quantum world implies that objective reality must be replaced by observer created reality.(10)

Further

The unity of our experience, like the unity of science, is conceptual, not sensual.(11)

If the unity of our experience is indeed conceptual, and reality is observer created, the notion of transforming our world view holds meanings transcending those we would habitually associate with a 'change of mind'.

If we are prepared to entertain this 'revolutionary' view of reality, it would further follow that we are responsible for the world we live in. Responsible in the most significant way possible - by choice.

The increasingly frenetic efforts to 'deal' with the current global problems suggest that, if we believed we had the option of a more harmonious world, we would choose it. But choosing requires of us to seek two things. The options available to us and an understanding of the meaning of the world we choose. Implicit in this is the need to know the meaning we wish it to represent.

In an observer created world then, choice amounts to a requirement to understand ourselves and the relationship between our personal world view and that of the collective human mind, i.e. society. Admitting the possibility of choice requires us to consider the foundations of the conceptual structures prefiguring our experience of the world we perceive ourselves to be a part of. These structures might be most simply described as being a comprehensive web of assumptions and beliefs that reflect (in a representative form), a more deeply established 'choice' in values/ethics. Our conceptual structures are perhaps the accumulated residue of values acquired for their relevance to an earlier stage of evolution, perpetuated in multifarious and ever varying formulations that constitute our sensory impressions of material reality as we 'know' it today.

This is neither to suggest nor imply that reality can be changed in a simple, singular act of concocting a fantasy and living within it. For our world is ultimately constructed in the interaction of many millions of individual minds. Consequently, it is the collective mind that proposes itself as an objective context within which the individual mind must struggle to realise its choice.

In terms of our personal image of the 'real' world, this translates as the requirement for what Capra calls, "an ecological perspective".(12) In the course of 'everyday' human relations an ecological perspective demands recognition of our personal image of reality (self) as a relative truth; as are the truths held by others.

Clearly this perspective precludes any one of us being 'expert' enough to justify ourselves (personally or professionally) as primary decision makers in collective matters. It requires that the personal 'realities' of all participants be admitted at all stages in any consideration of change; be it the setting of objectives, planning of directions and resources, decisions on tactics and strategies or the evaluation of an outcome.

In this event the configuration of the collective commitment will determine and authenticate the relevant knowledge and skills contributed by each individual. Thus each individual is confirmed as both student and teacher, expert and novice, knower and known, observer and observed. This constitutes change in the traditional constellation of power and thus must be regarded as a process that is essentially political.

It is in its political function that Action Research effectively (where applied) extends the tools and skills of scientific research from the hands of the elite and the expert and places it in the hands of people in general. It is therefore a political tool because it has the potential to diffuse the mystique of science and the monopoly of its power (and epistemology), by empirical interests in furtherance of the imperial politics that nourish them. Its political features do not make the approach any the less scientific however. As Weber points out:

...it is cultural (that is, value) interests which indicate the direction even of empirical scientific work.(13)

#### A NOTE ON OBJECTIVES

It is appropriate at this point to return from consideration of authentic Action Research to specify the objectives informing the general plan of the first action step in terms of the study as a whole.

Higley, Deacon and Smart offer a useful context for these objectives:

Although formal decision-making power is rarely actually transferred to these non-elite participants, it becomes more and more difficult for elites to take decisions to which a large number of interested parties object.(14)

This suggests that, rare though the case may be, actual transfer of power from the elite to a broader spectrum of participants does occur. One of the objects of this study has been to seek an example of such a transfer (on whatever scale), and examine the

dynamics of participant interaction in relation to the more broadly operational balance of power. A further interest of the study is to make some evaluation, from case study material, of the nature of genuine participatory decision making and its implications for solutions of conflict. Again to refer to Higley, Deacon and Smart's study on Elites In Australia:

...politics arise out of real and not rationally reconcilable conflicts of interest in society; that the results of political actions are never 'solutions' to the conflicts but only 'settlements' of them; that these settlements are normally unfair to someone; that they almost always involve coercion; that without such settlements, however, civilised life would be impossible; and that in an effective political system that is well managed by consensual unified elites one of the main problems is to combat the widespread illusion that these assumptions are not true.(15)

The question here is not so much one of whether a 'settlement' or a 'solution' is the resolution of conflict, but rather how much of a solution a settlement may be. For the implication of the earlier statement is that change away from the status quo results, in that it becomes "more and more difficult for elites to take decisions to which a large number of interested parties object". It is precisely this type of change that this study is concerned to further define. Not the sudden upheaval, but the slowly evolving dynamic.

Change is not something absolute, chaotic, and kaleidoscopic; its manifestation is a relative one, something connected with fixed points and given order.(16)

It is these fixed points that I have sought to identify in terms of concrete reality: in the microcosm of school/union/community politics.

In seeking these fixed points it has been necessary to address the notion that the act of participation itself is the direct experience of change and may constitute a leap in conscious experience for some. In this respect the product of participation is merged with and further generates the process. Thus it

is not the generality of interaction that is of concern here. This has been dealt with extensively in numerous other studies. Rather, it is interaction in the context of particular issues; interaction with particular issues and the role of class awareness in the development of political and social consciousness of what Caudwell refers to as:

...the machine in society as it is known to the Proletariat who form part of it.(17)

In pursuing these particulars Weber's contention provides a useful conceptual framework:

...a concrete effect cannot be regarded as the outcome of a conflict between causes which tend to bring it about and causes which are opposed to it. Rather, the totality of all conditions to which the causal regress from an 'effect' leads must 'work together' in exactly the way that they do in order to enable the concrete effect to occur in exactly the way that it does:...(18)

#### THE ACTION RESEARCH LITERATURE: Reading It and Reacting to It

Current literature on Action Research is primarily (one could say exclusively), focussed on classroom and teachers' professional concerns. With regard for the latter, it proposes 'handy' blueprints of 'the process'. 'The General Plan' marks the commencement of activities that may be said to have much in common with Hesse's 'Glass Bead Game'. From this it dynamically spirals forth, in an aesthetically satisfying sequence of steps: planning, action, observation and reflection. Whilst there is no intention here to enter debate over the perspectives offered in such literature, it is necessary to point out that the perspective taken in this work differs in two fundamental respects from the mainstream literature currently influencing Action Research considerations.

First, it can be noted that a bulk of the current literature on the subject is concerned to appropriate 'the process' for the purpose of 'professionalising' teachers as a group; i.e. to bring the teaching profession to the same levels of 'expertise'

and 'self-regulation' as exists in the medical and legal professions. This is particularly explicit in the work of Carr and Kemmis despite their efforts to persuade readers that 'the process' cannot be appropriated without effectively distorting it; obstructing it.

Such literature is effectively in contradiction with its purported context, for its aim is to utilise 'the process' as a means of elevating a particular group to a status and power that, in the wider social context, can only be viewed as elite.

Secondly, the same literature, by virtue of its content and tone, proposes itself as a means of understanding and apprehending 'the process'. The reader is acquainted in great detail with its structural features, its epistemological constitution, the nature of its dialectic relations and so on. The need to cloak 'the process' in academic respectability is evident in the language created to accommodate 'the process' in rarified debates and theory construction. In theory of course, the literature prohibits this; in practice it violates 'the process'. Comprehension of participation becomes a matter of technical exercise since it is seconded to the constraints of terminology only accessible to the already privileged. Even putting conscious intentions aside, such language equates with possession. 'This process is ours for only we have the terminology with which to comprehend it'. It is the language of those holding power and status of a particular kind. Such literature becomes a vehicle for the rise of yet another 'priestly' caste into the competition of the power brokers market place; praxis becomes Abraxas.

Contrary to these trends, the perspective taken here asserts that this process is no more and no less than the act of participation. As such it is not subject, in any constructive sense, to abstraction, analysis or consideration as a discrete event or property. It can be neither of these for it does not exist in or of itself. Its only existence and reality lies in and of particular combinations and recombinations of participants, issues, commitments and events within social/economic/political environments; locally and broadly historical.

In this light the case studies here may be considered as somewhat analogous to a series of moving postcards, recording particular configurations of both the participation process itself, and its counterfeits (for at present the latter proliferate to the demise of the former). In seeking to differentiate between the two, we can consider the Action Research process as essentially pre-figured within the 'being' mode of experience, whereas its counterfeits remain extrapolations of the 'having' mode.

Fromm's definition of love stimulates some insight into the values and mode of authentic participatory experience:

Can one have love? If we could, love would need to be a thing, a substance that one can have, own, possess. The truth is, there is no such thing as 'love'. 'Love' is an abstraction, perhaps a goddess or an alien being, although nobody has ever seen this goddess. In reality, there exists only the act of loving. To love is a productive activity. It implies caring for, knowing, responding, affirming, enjoying; the person, the tree, the painting, the idea. It means bringing to life, increasing his/her/its aliveness. It is a process, self-renewing and self-increasing.(19)

Moreover, although current consideration of the participatory process abounds in the rhetoric of social change and redistribution of power, it is sadly silent on political commitment.

We can trace the Carr and Kemmis 'moments' in Action Research; the planning, action, observation and reflection activities proposed in the mode. We can awe ourselves with the conceptual symmetries of the dialectic of theory and practice, stimulate each other in 'discourse' and generate our own and others 'authentic insights'. But out of the context of a consciousness of global, national and local political/economic and social reality; out of the context of a class based society (the dialectic of 'the haves' and the 'have nots'); out of the context of actual participation, nought will be fundamentally changed. Our consequent 'critical insights' will be shaped by, and mirrored in, the myopism of isolated, fragmented interests.

As Fromm comments:

...from the standpoint of... need for a frame of orientation,... His(her) world makes sense... and (s)he feels certain about ideas through the consensus with those around him(her).(20)

Consider this in the context of Capra's observations:

We have high inflation and unemployment, we have an energy crisis, pollution and other environmental disasters, the threat of nuclear war, a rising wave of violence, crime and so on. All these can be seen as different aspects of one and the same crisis, which derives from the fact that we are trying to apply the concepts of an outdated world view - the mechanistic world view of Cartesian/Newtonian science - to a reality that can no longer be understood in terms of these concepts. We live today in a globally interconnected world in which biological, psychological, social and environmental phenomena are all interdependent. To describe this world we need an ecological perspective...(21)

In terms of social relations, an ecological perspective demands political awareness and commitment with regard to human well-being. This necessitates insight into the nature of class oppression. While the notion of participation remains confined to the redefinition of power within the terms of a particular social group or role function, without due cognisance of the ecological configuration of the overall social/political environment, fundamental social change cannot occur. The action 'moments' of the Action Research spiral may be conscientiously engaged, but the authority of the social group or role function will remain confused with the authority of knowledge, since the interests of the former constitute the 'frame of orientation'.

Also, Action Research theorists (a contradiction in terms that warrants particular note), are further concerned to impress upon readers the importance of language as a medium for our reflection upon, and interpretation of, experience. However, such analysis outside of the context of living reality remain but hollow observations and conceptual artifacts.

We may observe that language, like knowledge, has been dissected, packaged according to utility and commodicised. Any ethnic community, Anglo-Saxon or otherwise, is in itself a veritable 'Tower of Babel'. We may conceive of the fragmentation of language as reflecting fragmentation of human kind: fragmentation into labour functions, role functions, cultural functions, class functions. Ultimately we arrive at the concept of fragmented understanding, in and of the individual and collective experience.

We may proceed to string together our observations on language in this manner and no doubt reward ourselves with some scintillating 'insights'. But to what end if the political nature of authentic participation is not recognised as anything more than a theoretical element? If the political functioning of language itself is not experienced?

Professional jargons, the languages of the cultural effetes, colloquial language of the working classes; many are the variations. Each describes its own social parameters. All represent limitations of freedom of discourse (limitations to access to ideas, influence on the collective reality, expansion of self-awareness; access to participation). Yet freedom to partake of discourse requires more than a right to be heard. It demands the right to be understood and to understand others. It is here that we may identify the nub of the contradiction inherent in the current approach to 'Action Research'. Taking Carr and Kemmis as representative of this, it is useful to consider their following proposition.

...the profession is to have a right to make autonomous and independent judgements about its practices, free from external non-professional judgements and constraints... The professional teacher must take into account the values and interests of the various client groups served by the school. The professional judgement of the teacher nevertheless remains a professional prerogative...(my emphasis).(22)

This is a proposition for consultation with parents, students and community; not for their participation in education. It is the 'knowledge as a commodity' mentality speaking. Whilst day-to-day

'on the spot' decisions clearly have to be made by every 'teacher', it is not 'professional prerogative' that ascribes this as a right. Rather, it is the logical necessity posed by the situation for the person in it.

If Lewin's three main characteristics of Action Research, "its participatory character, its democratic impulse, and its simultaneous contribution to social science and social change", (23) are accepted then 'professional prerogative' must be seen for what it is; knowledge authorised by role.

If teachers as a group social function (for that is effectively what education is at this time) believe themselves bereft of power and control over their own labours then this is no more and no less than the oppression experienced in every working class life. In this consciousness of themselves teachers may well find comfort in Freire's words:

To achieve critical consciousness of the facts that it is necessary to be the 'owner of ones own labour', that labour 'constitutes a part of the human person', and that 'a human being can neither be sold nor can sell his(her) self', is to go a step beyond the step of palliative solutions. It is to engage in authentic transformation of reality in order, by humanizing that reality, to humanize (people). (24)

The experience of oppression must be identified within the full extent of its collective parameters, class parameters, before critical awareness of one's own oppression can be brought to bear by way of effective action. For while knowledge of ourselves and others is identified by our roles and specific social functions, we remain bound in the Cartesian world view that perpetuates our subservient relations in a social machine.

Consider for a moment the relationship between the Cartesian perspective and our current social reality:

I wish you to consider, finally, that all the functions which I attribute to this machine, such as... digestion... nutrition... respiration, waking and sleeping; the reception of light, sounds, odours...

the impression of ideas in the memory; the inferior movements of all the external members...; I desire, I say, that you consider that these functions occur naturally in this machine solely by the disposition of its organs, not less than the movements of a clock (Rene Descartes, Trait de l'Homme).(25)

This is the perspective upon which our current society, our daily individual and collective experience, is constructed. As Carr and Kemmis rightly suggest, the Action Research process constitutes the transformation of this reality by way of personal and collective liberation. However, the parameters of liberation are global not professional. And if the social sciences still need to be validated by Science, then let eminent physicist David Bohm provide the necessary reassurance.

Ultimately, the entire universe (with all its 'particles', including those constituting human beings, their laboratories, observing instruments etc.) has to be understood as a single undivided whole in which analysis into separately and independently existing parts has no fundamental status.(26)

Translated into social meanings we are brought to understand that there can be no effective liberation unless it is achieved collectively. For the personal and collective experiences are integral to each other. It is perhaps this perspective that informs the deepest understanding of the work of Paolo Freire.

If they are truly committed to liberation, their action and reflection cannot proceed without the action and reflection of others. .

Revolutionary praxis cannot tolerate an absurd dichotomy in which the praxis of the people is merely that of following the leaders decisions - a dichotomy reflecting the prescriptive methods of the dominant elites.(27)

It is the contention here that the current approach to Action Research represents the praxis of the elite. The proponents of this approach may properly point to 'curriculum' as an essential arena for parent and community participation. However, it is significant that they are loath to recognise the logical necessity of praxis as it pertains to relations between curriculum and

classroom practice. One cannot participate in curriculum activity if excluded from considerations of classroom practice.

If teachers choose to deny this logical necessity of the authentic Action Research process they will similarly deny themselves authentic liberation. For as Freire observes:

It is absolutely essential that the oppressed participate in the revolutionary process with an increasingly critical awareness of their role as subjects of transformation. If they are drawn into the process as ambiguous beings, partly themselves and partly the oppressors housed within them - and if they come to power still embodying that ambiguity imposed on them by the situation of oppression... they will merely imagine they have reached power.(28)

All this presupposes a desire for liberation. Yet there are those amongst both the oppressed and oppressors, for whom it is seemingly irrelevant. Sadly, it seems probable that liberation will remain an unconsidered, undesired state for these people, until it becomes a term and condition for personal or familial survival. That this is so is evidenced in the circumstances of many of those already moved to seek it (consider Chile and South Africa for instance). In the perspective taken here, liberation is not a solution to prevailing problems (be they personal or global). Rather, it is the term and the condition of such solution.

#### QUESTIONS ARISING

So, where then do we begin? The world is as it is and we are as we are. Can we realistically expect to determine fundamental change? Under what conditions, in what contexts, on what terms is participation possible? What are its change related outcomes and how might we distinguish their authentic reality? Indeed, on what basis and terms do we inform their character and influence, and evaluate our own relations to/within them?

These questions provide a useful framework for consideration of the case studies that follow.

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## CHAPTER TWO

### THE RESEARCH METHOD

## IN THE FIELD

The approach to this study is that of a participant observer; participant observer of three action research experiences. These were respectively located in the communities of Footscray, Melton and Collingwood Technical schools.

From the outset participant observation at Footscray equated with headlong initiation into the early stages of what was quickly to become an industrial dispute of significant proportions. Parent involvement was already firmly established and evidence of their participation was apparent through the school's reading scheme and family film nights. The atmosphere was alive with debate and discussion around the 'needs of the kids', the politics of educational change, and strategies and tactics for achieving it. There was a pervasive sense of comradeship, determination and confidence in the face of adverse circumstances. Staff social evenings were common, informal and mostly spontaneous events. If someone 'threw a party' it was automatically assumed everyone who wanted to come was invited (including parents though their attendance was rare). Questions of 'how', 'what about' and 'what if we', proliferated as daily stimulants.

Footscray Technical School in 1976 was in a state of mobilisation. Its internal communications networks were firmly defined in the strong interaction (in teaching and social activity) between Humanities, Maths/Science, Art and Trade departments. The fundamental links with parents were sufficiently established to admit a substantial degree of confidence in parents' support and the subsequent events justified this.

In contrast to this, the participant observer at Melton was part of an apolitical effort to construct a 'model' for educational change (in the form of a new school). Again the atmosphere was alive at the outset: this time with the serious busy-ness of constructing programs, establishing mutual support structures, organising participation by way of regular meetings and inaugurating a school evaluation program, (the latter achieving

ostensible success with parents). Despite its massive resources problem the school shunned any consideration of an industrial solution. Melton was too busy establishing a model for change. There was no time left over for participation in industrial affairs. While all were union members few were unionists, as the total absence of union meetings and disregard for union communication networks suggests. Like Footscray, questions abounded; the same questions. But rooted in a confidence that diminished, and stress that escalated, as the year wore on. The always well-planned social evenings became organised events aimed at retaining some semblance of social cohesion and intra-school support. The Melton experience was one of collective depletion and isolation.

In its earliest moments, participation in the Collingwood situation was similarly participation in collective strategies for survival in the classroom. One nervous breakdown and high absenteeism in the first school term testified to the extent of Collingwood's problems. Compared with Footscray and Melton, Collingwood could be described as doubly busy. Busy with survival and busy with the structured transformation of the school towards participatory decision making. Commencing from a state of abject demoralisation, the Collingwood experience moved towards industrially based solutions. Union meetings were revitalised into well attended events. 'Recuperation' time was contributed to 'doing something about it'. Similarly, the spectre of hope prevailed sufficiently to engage rudimentary participation in 'across the school decision making'. The questions of 'how', 'what about me' and 'what if' progressively transferred their focus from that of personal survival to address industrial, curricula and school organisation.

In terms of the thesis then - that educational change is an outcome of participation in community struggle against defined oppression - these three experiences may be characterised as follows:

Footscray        participant observation of the collective will to struggle (in its action mode);

Melton            participant observation of the collective desire for change in the absence of the will to struggle;

Collingwood     participant observation of a revival of the will to struggle (predominantly struggle in its planning mode).

### THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE CASE STUDIES

It should be noted that these experiences span a total of eight years all told. From the standpoint of the participant observer this was useful for it permitted a discrete period of 'gestation'. It was conducive to reflection upon each experience as an experience in its own right.

The construction of these experiences into comparative case studies necessitated sympathetic consideration of their historical location. This need is apparent if we consider the essential character and sequence of the experiences observed. Footscray's success followed by Melton's failure and defeat, and finally Collingwood - an experience of revival. Isolated from an historical context their content is readily trivialised, inviting attention as vignettes of the 'human condition', to the demise of their contents immediate relevance.

The study responds to these concerns in the construction of two historical 'axes', the first being presented as an overview of the wider historical events encapsulating all three experiences. This is provided in chapter 3. The second axis permits the location of each experience in its respective historical moment. This is the purpose of chapter 7.

The former chapter sketches the historical outlines of the sixties decade. The style of presentation attempts to reflect the pace, kaleidoscopic richness, the unabashed idealism and the rising morale that characterised the period. It should be emphasised that the intention here is to share an impression of the sixties. To acquaint the reader with the 'flavour' of the

period forshadowing those experiences recorded in the case studies. A more substantial treatment of political/economic background and ideological analysis is not within the scope of the intentions underlying the study as a whole.

The literary construction of chapter 7 is mindful of the character and morale informing teacher industrial organisation during the two decades pre-empting the eighties. These aspects supplement the substance of the historical context.

This chapter sets out to trace an outline history of the Technical Teachers' Union of Victoria (T.T.U.V. originally established as the T.T.A.V.): the aims, approach and events characterising its development from the time of its birth in the sixties through to its role in the eighties. It is the industrial context encapsulating all three experiences. Further, it invites the interested reader to locate each case study within its adjacent period of the T.T.U.V.'s industrial development. Thus it is possible to consider the implications of, and relations between, the state of industrial organisation recorded in each case study and that of the parent organisation.

Combined, these two chapters suggest a range of 'co-ordinate points' for reflection upon the patterns of interaction emerging at various levels of the case studies themselves - patterns comprising collective morale and expectations; political awareness, aims, conceptions of authority and so forth. The primary intention in this is to provide the reader with several frames of reference for comparison. Here, we may readily identify four levels. That between the respective experience and the wider collective sharing the same historical moment (in this case exemplified in the T.T.U.V.). That between the respective experience and its encapsulating industrial context; and thirdly, that which may be made between the respective experiences themselves. Finally, one is invited to compare the collective environment, ideals (as expressed in aims), and approach informing each experience with those informing the movement for fundamental change in the sixties.

Moreover, the construction of this range of 'historical co-ordinates' seeks to encourage the readers' avoidance of undue concentration on causal relations. The most fruitful comparison will attend to the patterns of relations within and between each experience.

#### THE APPROACH TO THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE CASE STUDIES

This study was undertaken in its own right as a consequence of participant observation of the Footscray experience. That experience shaped the explorations of Melton and Collingwood. The Footscray experience promoted the question, 'why not others', to a high profile in subsequent consideration of fundamental educational/social change. In this sense Footscray is the reference point for the study as a whole.

At the outset, a pilot study of interviews of people involved in Footscray was conducted to determine the potential of a study on participation. Given the significant role played by parents in the dispute, particular attention was given to their perception of events. Similarly, extensive time was spent in discussion with Melton's parents. Questions discussed ranged from the role of the teacher, the criteria and aims of 'good' education, attitudes towards industrial action and parent participation in education. Since Collingwood was not accessible to the study at that time it was not party to the pilot study. However, a small random sample of interviews with parents not connected with either school was included, as were interviews with officers of the Victorian Parent Federation of State Schools Organisation.

The study proceeded and the case studies were subsequently constructed from a combination of document analysis, interviews, work diaries and the sharing of data with the researched school communities.

As might be expected, this occurred chronologically, during the 'gestation' periods between experiences, the main body of the documented history of the Footscray dispute being constructed before the study was formally undertaken. In this respect the

participant observer acted as self-appointed recorder of events, in the personal conviction that their significance should not be absorbed unconsidered, into anonymity; into unconscious history. Consequently, the section dealing with the development of the dispute was constructed in the freshness of the events it encapsulated. The contents of the 'Footscray Dispute File' served as the primary source of evidence. These comprised copies of all propaganda, correspondence, press releases, news clippings, meeting and planning notes generated in the course of the dispute, and includes material pertinent to the period immediately preceding it. Personal work diaries and notes supplemented this.

Moreover, the form of the presentation is intended to provide an 'objective' measure of the mood, attitudes, political perspectives and morale informing the events recorded. In terms of form then, this section is a montage of extracts from original material, quotes and observations. Participants in similar action research experiences will immediately appreciate the reason for this.

For while the record remains essentially a construction by the participant observer, to be 'true' to the experience recorded it must be authenticated by the collective in all possible respects. Since all correspondence, press releases, propaganda, meeting and planning notes were determined collectively, they constitute a concrete distillation of the collective experience of the time. They constitute the 'fossil' evidence as it were, of collective morale, aims, objectives, activities and the nature of its political/industrial commitment.

In this it also furthers the purpose of encouraging teachers to participate in their own (and others) politicisation. Participant observation of the Collingwood experience noted that teachers moving from an apolitical and/or traditional frame of reference in a demoralised environment had (in the initial stages), little notion of the range and form of strategies for developing organisation, or the paper propagation of their cause. For the 'uninitiated' and/or demoralised teacher reconsidering the value of cynicism, the montage suggests a range of authentic

samples of 'how it's done'; a handy 'getting started' guide for considering leaflet design, press releases, simple format logs of claim, form letters and the detailing of negotiated agreement. Whether any or all of these samples are useful will be determined by the circumstances and intentions of the reader.

Those readers already confident of their 'all purpose' communication skills may find the length of quoted material tiresome at times (particularly in chapter 4). Yet, perseverance may be rewarded if attention is focussed on the tone and form of the material, keeping in mind its source, its purpose and its correspondent/s.

Subsequent to the drafting of this section, the interpretative material was constructed. This was necessarily constituted in the participant observer's personal reflections upon the collective experience. However, it takes account of reflections shared with several participants in the course of ongoing social contact. Further, draft copies of the completed chapter were forwarded to four other participants. The comments returned indicated concurrence of views and contributed further concrete examples of working class influence and parent participation.

The Melton case study was essentially constructed around the material presented here as appendices 2 and 3. These constitute actual working documents of the time, written on the school's behalf in my role as scribe. I have included them here for two reasons. Firstly, each document may be considered as the outcome of several full staff meetings, having been approved by consensus as representative of the staff's view of itself (in respect to the specific purposes informing the contents). Secondly, the content of each serves to provide an objectified account of: (a) the school's self-image as promoted in the first term of 1980, a period when optimism prevailed (see Appendix 2); and (b) an extract from Melton's response to 'The Green Paper' which, in being (ostensibly) the most political act undertaken by the school in 1980, objectifies to some extent the degree to which Melton lacked active political participation (see Appendix 3). It should be noted that, unlike Appendix 2, this document was adopted by staff in the atmosphere of despondent, mechanical

formality described in the latter part of the Melton chapter. Adoption of this document might therefore be most properly interpreted as an indication of support for the effort of others, rather than support for the document per se.

The body of the Melton chapter is constituted in reflection upon participant observation of the raw experience, informing (and extending beyond), the actual working documents, personal work diaries and documents of the period - newspaper clippings, journals, meeting minutes, school organisational notes, staff bulletins, and contemporary union and seminar material.

The completed draft was forwarded to four of the participants for comment. The principal and two senior teachers responded in writing. I have included the senior teachers' responses in the appropriate Notes and References section. The principal's response, because of its form, has been reprinted as Appendix 4.

The first half of the chapter on Collingwood is an amended version of a document compiled from my first term experience and participation in the school. The first stage object of writing this document (in the true spirit of Action Research) was to provide a 'mirror' for the staff and administration at a time of confusion and extensive demoralisation, and to attempt to forestall the tendency for staff to withdraw from the dialogue and debate surrounding the introduction of 'participatory decision making' in the school. It was hoped that the document would provide a focus for constructive reflection and interchange between and within the various staff factions. It further functioned as a vehicle for drawing the administration's attention to the specific nature and degree of doubt amongst staff in respect to 'how things are done'.

The document, as presented here in the chapter on Collingwood, is the final product as amended in its detail and emphasis by fifteen Collingwood Tech. staff members and the principal. Twenty-two copies were distributed. Fifteen returns were forthcoming, (representative of all indentifiable factions). All carried some form of comment, correction or amendment. The document created wide interest and did succeed in generating a

period of positive discussion between and within factions of the staff. The amended version was unanimously accepted (by vote of a full staff meeting held on the first day of the 1984 school year), as representing the situation at Collingwood Tech. The same meeting voted to have the document distributed, as an information sheet, amongst various local community groups, Members of Parliament and local councillors, along with a covering letter seeking support for Collingwood's attempts to increase staff and space. A number of community groups responded and, along with other lobbying (including the active lobbying of the principal), Collingwood succeeded in gaining extra staff in the '85 school year. Unfortunately, the question of space and facilities remained unaddressed by the Education Department. Consequently, although the staff's efforts were rewarded in a concrete form, the irony remained that much of the potential contribution of the additional staff found no room for development and was wasted for most intents and purposes; (other than illustrating perhaps, that organisation and participation can advance a genuine cause).

#### A NOTE ON THE CHRONOLOGICAL CONSTRUCTION OF CHAPTERS

While the reasons for chronological presentation of the case studies may be self-apparent, certain considerations of the chronology bear mention. In sharing participant observations with a wider and distanced collective, subtle questions are raised. Is it possible to share, (be it in small degree, by hint or nuance), the original sense of the experience recorded? To share the sense of exploration; share the questioning, the proposing, the reflecting and concluding acts? To encounter the recorded experience through a sequence of moments similar to those generated as the participant observed the original experience? In other words, is it possible for the reader to share the participant observer's pathway to conclusions in sense as distinct from (and in addition to) logic? The answer necessarily lies with the reader. But these were the questions predisposing the chronological consideration of presentation.

The presentation therefore encompasses two levels of chronology. At the macro level the chapters proceed from the encapsulating context of the sixties through Footscray, Melton and Collingwood, to chapter 7. In presenting the industrial context of the wider collective, this chapter similarly recapitulates the temporal progression of influences from the early sixties through to 1983.

At the micro level of chronology each case is constructed as a broad chronology of the original experience. Footscray for instance progresses through the order of events to the subsequent reflection upon them and tentative propositions emerge that predispose the perspective from which Melton is encountered.

Here the readers' point of encounter with the Melton case study concurs in sequence with that of the participant observer's initiation into the original experience; Melton's aims and assumptions. From this point the study moves again through the order of events to share a similar sense of moment and context for reflection. For the participant observer, these reflections unavoidably raise points of comparison with Footscray. Propositions are explored and 'micro' conclusions are drawn. Their presentation at this point is essential if the readers' first encounter with Collingwood is to share the conceptual context of embarkation with that of the participant observer. Collingwood, then, is experienced in the light of both Footscray and Melton experiences.

Finally, the reader is returned (by virtue of recapitulation), to the macro level where consideration of 'macro' conclusions moves from an acquaintance with the wider industrial context. This similarly returns the reader to the frame and orientation of the study as a whole: its purpose and concerns (as outlined in the introduction).

THE PARTICIPANT OBSERVERS PERCEPTUAL PARAMETERS

Recognising the essential subjectivity of participant observation does not preclude us from accounting for it in our final evaluation of the substance and implication of the case studies themselves. Rather, it obliges consideration of the perceptual parameters informing the participant observer's record of experience. For it is to be expected that a thoughtful reading of the case studies will generate inevitable questions. Where is the participant observer 'coming from'? What are the personal contextual perspectives determining the shape and relevance of the given observations and reflections recorded?

In order that such questions may be properly accommodated, each case study is immediately preceded by a brief outline of background factors characterising and locating the participant observer's relation to the experience recorded. Each takes the form of a summary of pertinent factors influencing the participant's response in the initial encounter with the experience observed. Then follows a brief outline of the personal roles immediate to the particular case study's perspective; the roles from which the participant most immediately observed.

These then, are the readers' measure of the perceptual parameters informing each record of experience.

## CHAPTER THREE

### THE CASE STUDIES IN CONTEXT

THE CASE STUDIES IN CONTEXT

Over the decade of the seventies in particular, social workers, teachers, community leaders and political activists became increasingly preoccupied with the notion of participatory democracy. In the course of the decade much of this interest narrowed to focus on the decision-making process and for many this preoccupation was an expression of their commitment to social change; a response to unchecked concentration of political power and economic wealth.(1)

Events and literature of the sixties saw the spectre of Orwell's Nineteen Eighty Four(2) and Huxley's Brave New World(3) clearly located in western reality for the first time. While novels, films, artwork and documented research alike dwelt on the theme of individual and community alienation, the advent and escalation of nationwide debate on the Vietnam War couched the 'causes' of alienation in political and economic interests. From all appearances there was a general climate of awakening. The educated classes seriously addressed their attention to the implications of centralised media control of information(4) and the vestment of authoritative knowledge in the expert.(5) Government was similarly viewed with suspicion. Significant portions of the community came to perceive the government as a legislative function of corporate interests.(6)

By the late sixties the climate was ripe for a broad reception of the concept of participation. In the Australian context, the initial acts engaging participation accompanied the mass mobilisation of the Anti-Vietnam War Movement: the main impetus came from tertiary students.(7) The urgent need for concerted, coherent action by many diverse groups generated a broad acceptance of participatory decision-making (commonly equated with participatory democracy). In this it was viewed as a means to expose and negate the basis of social inequalities. It would be misleading to suggest that participatory decision-making was a concern consciously enunciated by all community activists at this time. However, the preconditions for the coalition of groups opposed to the War in Vietnam included exploration of the role of decision-making; in policy formulation and organisational

decisions consistent with participatory democracy.(8) Increasing public fear of manipulation by government, media(9) and other unseen interests became a catalyst for general mistrust of authority and an active unwillingness to leave any decisions to 'older' and 'wiser' heads.(10) The consequent broad-based organisational activity might reasonably be construed as exploration of participatory decision-making (from a more radical perspective than that which developed in the seventies).(11)

Born of this milieu and extrapolating from it, were the mushrooming new community advocate groups. Tenants unions, prison and law reform groups, local resident's action committees, community artists, environmental, education, social reform and women's rights groups: all of which made the participatory process a central element in their functional platform philosophy. Participation became singularly synonymous with the sharing and learning of diverse skills and experience.(12) The aim was to free the individual from the restrictions of conditioned, compartmentalised roles and thinking; to equip the individual for confident participation in the wide range of social and political events impinging on their lives.(13)

A coherent understanding of the relationship between these concerns and the actual needs within the wider community was not always achieved. Those mobilised amongst the educated classes saw their own interests essentially linked with, and representative of, community needs.(14) The logical and political necessity inherent in this view conceived of the community as a power base for social democratisation structured around 'issues'.(15) It was in this context that community participation in decision-making was co-opted as the 'means' and 'ends' of fundamental social change.(16) For the middle classes, the concept fitted comfortably with the accepted notions of democracy. It promised an apolitical redistribution of power. Direct alignment with specific political parties or ideologies seemed unnecessary.(17) The emphasis was on people. If people could make the decisions the currently ignored needs of the community could be identified and met. Government and corporate interests could be monitored and structured to ensure community needs were given rightful priority. This, needless to say, is an over-simplified view of

the reasoning behind mainstream enthusiasm for community participation. But it does grasp the essential appeal and the class interests informing its impact in the seventies.

The mainstream spirit was founded upon a general assumption of certain inalienable rights and freedoms. While there appears to have been relatively limited analysis of the empirical nature of these rights, there was something akin to intuitive recognition of their necessary relationship to the political and economic power base. Many citizen action groups spent considerable time and energy lobbying trade union support(18): (However, there appeared to be no concerted analysis of the role of labour in relation to capital.) Co-option of the once disreputable industrial muscle was seen as an important adjunct to citizen action, particularly in Melbourne: until perhaps the Newport Power Station issue when some of the key unions appeared to turn a blind eye towards scab labour in return for redundancy agreements. This issue, following the Whitlam sacking as it did, and coinciding with the first public indications of long term unemployment, established a chronic skepticism amongst many Melbourne leftist community activists. The mainstream community participation advocates settled into a sense of impotence in the face of impending crisis. From some points of view, the loss of momentum in the Anti-Uranium campaign and the arrogant disregard of community opinion displayed by the authorities over the F(freeway)9 issue, seemed to consolidate the mood and set the pattern for reassessment of participatory needs. This was not necessarily an indication of doubt in the concept of participation. More probably it reflected a need to modify, and further develop, the framework of community based decisions and actions (as effective means to democratise/socialise society).(19)

While events of the sixties and early seventies may historically validate the potential of community based decision-making, in the face of the current economic and social depression it does not seem to function in the way, and to the extent, that its advocates had envisaged. The ever increasing alienation of fiscal powers from community needs in the context of high levels of unemployment, a disintegrating economy and concerted attacks

on the trade unions,(20) lend credibility to those who surmise a swing towards an Australian Fascist state.(21) Against this background, questions on the viability of community action informed by community decisions become urgent and pragmatic if the process of democratisation is not to be perverted into further promoting non-community interests.(22)

Although cursory, this background sketch is perhaps sufficient to acquaint the reader with the overall perspective from which this study commences and (implicitly) from which participatory decision-making may be broadly defined for the purposes of this paper. However, while participatory decision-making is a central motif in this study it is not of itself the central concern. Much has been documented of the process, the forms it has taken and the results it has yielded. Some attention shall be addressed to these matters. However, the hypothesis being explored focusses on the given conditions (if any) under which the participatory process may promote radical democratisation, in the light of the problems and successes experienced so far.

Clearly, this opens a wide and diverse field of enquiry which would be unmanageable given the resources available to its investigation here. For this reason, and others which I shall elaborate upon presently, the scope has been confined in the main to a school context, the emphasis being on models for community schools.

The reader will no doubt be familiar, even if only incidentally, with the vast movement towards 'open' education during the sixties and early seventies. The writings of Illich, Neill, Goodman, Friere and others of similar sympathies on the international scene, reinforced by the many outspoken Australian educationalists of the period (Schoenheimer, Holt, Bessant and Spaul to name but a few), articulated concerns essentially related to, and difficult to separate from, those informing the growth of mass opposition to the Vietnam War.

At the broadest level of interpretation, the development of 'open' schools' philosophy and practice may be seen as a single aspect of an overall shift in consciousness (related to conscience?) in western society. The questioning of institutionalised authority and conditioned perceptions was a phenomenon manifest in almost every field and was equated by many with the search for self liberation. While Llaing and Keasey challenged society's definition of sanity, particular physicists usurped the assumed infallibility of science with the public disclosure that objective scientific observers were in fact subjective human beings.(23)

On the popular culture scene Dylan crooned his riddles to an international public:

How many years can some people exist,  
before they're allowed to be free?

How many times can a man turn his head  
and pretend that he just doesn't see?

And Lennon (John) imagined a world without war, possessions, religion and political powers; a world peopled with authentic individuals. Upon this seemingly apolitical backdrop arrived the 'Thoughts of Chairman Mao' and 'The Little Red School Book'.

All in all it could be claimed that the cultural milieu at this time constituted what Berger calls the "pressure of historical convergence".(24) And such it was that directed the climate of public questioning of established authority,(25) at the same time causing teachers, amongst others, to question their own.

The question is, convergence of what? If we were to wonder about the 'causes' of this phenomenon, there is every reason to believe that we'd find ourselves addressing a new wave of the inherent contradictions in capitalism: coinciding, as might be expected in socialist theory, with a new peak in capitalist organisation. In this case reflecting the massive task of what has since been termed The New International Division of Labour.

The definitive role of these contradictions in the context of education was observed by Gramsci as early as 1933:(26)

The social character (of the school) is determined by the fact that each social group has its own type of school, intended to perpetuate a specific traditional function, ruling or subordinate. If one wishes to break this pattern one needs, instead of multiplying and grading different types of vocational school, to create a single type of formative school (primary-secondary) which would take the child up to the threshold of his/her choice of job, forming him/her during this time as a person capable of thinking studying and ruling - or controlling those who rule...

The multiplication of types of vocational school thus tends to perpetuate traditional social differences, but since, within these differences, it tends to encourage internal diversification, it gives the impression of being democratic in tendency... But democracy, by definition, cannot mean merely that an unskilled worker can become skilled. It must mean that every 'citizen' can 'govern' and that society places him/her even if only abstractly, in a general condition to achieve this... But the type of school which is now developing as the school for the people does not tend even to keep up this illusion. For it is organised even more fully in such a way as to restrict recruitment to the technically qualified governing stratum, in a social and political context which makes it increasingly difficult for 'personal initiative' to acquire such skills and technical-political preparation. Thus we are really going back to a division into juridically fixed and crystallised estates rather than moving towards the transcendence of class divisions.

By 1977 organisations like U.N.I.C.E.F. were broaching similar conclusions. In a study of six industrialised countries, an article in the U.N.I.C.E.F. News (issue 93, Vol.3, 1977) noted that:

education which aims at encouraging an awareness in children of the social and political problems of our time and at forming responsible men and women capable of taking action for justice, and equality presupposes a school which is itself a place for exchange, dialogue and experimentation - in short a school open to life (my emphasis).

On page 23 of the same journal a further article from a leading educationalist (Paolo Freire) pointed out that,

Education can either function as an instrument of oppression or become the instrument of liberation. If it is the latter, it helps people deal critically and creatively with reality and discover how to participate in the transformation of their world (my emphasis).

Similarly, the experiments of educationalists like A.S. Neill were prompted by the inherent contradictions between traditional educational practice and personal experience with the 'socially disadvantaged' young conscripted into the system, society's rejects. The kids who posed insoluble questions for mass education and in so doing questioned the basis of its authority.(27)

At the domestic level we may look to the Western, Northern and Inner suburban government schools of Melbourne where the ratio of 'problem' or 'difficult' students to teachers prompted "the real educationalists" to explore their students' socio (and economic) milieu;(28) while at a national level tertiary students campaigned against inequality in education.(29)

The philosophy informing 'open' education has been attributed to, and elaborated and refined by, the pens of theoreticians. However, its authenticity is rooted in the practising educators' direct exploration of the social factors predetermining real educational needs, (prompted by their students). In this they identified needs distinct from those prescribed in accordance with elitist requirements.

The development of 'open' schools was the assertion of inalienable human rights. A concept of freedom which, when measured against the social and political realities of the time,

interpreted western democracy as no more than a pretext: an image superimposed upon reality by means of sophisticated techniques for manipulating mass perception,(30) and behaviour control aided by equally sophisticated technology. Exposed to this view of education as a form of social control, many teachers were moved to participate in the establishment of open education as a matter of social conscience.(31) In the process, some of these teachers developed approaches based in class-consciousness. In particular they became aware of the role of exploitation in "defining social relationships based on the division of society into classes".(32)

### UNIONISM AND EDUCATIONAL CHANGE

The central political/cultural role of education in society's preparation for the future remains the context for any consideration of open education. In this, schools provide the most appropriate foci for a study of participation and its relation to radical social change. Since much of the open school experiment in Victorian government schools is inextricably linked with the development of teacher union policy and activity, an examination centred on schools lends itself easily to any attempt to define the potential of direct union contribution to community participation.

The evident influence of unions on the promotion of participation at Footscray Technical School shaped many of the questions pre-empting this study. Amongst the strongest union branches in the state, this school offered a concrete 'model' for exploring union contribution to, and participation in, educational change. It similarly invited concrete exploration of the thesis of this study: For the experiences recorded described themselves in class-consciousness and industrial organisation; focussed on well defined aims and at well defined opposition. As such they proposed participation as an explicitly political process: in its character, its influence, and in the configuration of personal relations within the changes experienced. Moreover, the change related outcomes were distinct, varied and authentic.

For the purposes of this study then, Footscray is proposed as the measure for authentic participation. By way of contrast, Melton Technical School is included for its 'counter-change' value; being exemplary of those schools founded on 'participation' in the absence of active political commitment.

Differing from both Footscray and Melton, the chapter on Collingwood Technical School is essentially a case study of transition; from a firmly entrenched authoritarian mode to one of participation. Its immediate relevance is to be found in its working conditions/environment and the political/educational configuration of its operation during transition between modes.

In the former it provides some insight into the nature and extent of difficulties most government schools will encounter in the near future. In the latter it is more closely representative of schools in general. This combination of factors in the context of a rudimentary class consciousness/industrial organisation, offers a ready point of commencement for those seeking to evaluate and promote authentic participation to the levels achieved at Footscray.

It should be recalled however, that the Footscray referred to exists in a particular historical moment: 1976-'77. No doubt this fact will prompt some readers to enquire of Footscray's fate over subsequent years. Moreover, a reading of the Collingwood case study may cause some to question the possibility of participation effectively resolving its extensive educational problems. Such questions require separate and extensive exploration, and therefore will not be dealt with here. Nevertheless, these questions may prove less vexing to the reader if it is remembered (particularly with regard to chapter 8), that contexts are relative. There are contexts for contexts - 'meta contexts'. Clearly, these will exert their influence in ascribing of relevance.

It is therefore useful to approach each case study as a microcosm of possibility, relevant to the larger whole because it is a part of it.

In succinct terms, it could be said that Collingwood locates 'where we are now' (or where most of us will be shortly); Melton locates some of the dangers to be traversed; Footscray locates where we need to be if fundamental educational change is to occur in real terms.

NOTES AND REFERENCES FOR CHAPTER THREE

- (1) E.L. WHEELWRIGHT: Concentration of Private Economic Power, Australian Capitalism, J. Playford, & D. Kirsner, (eds.), Pelican, 1972, p.67-70.  
Also see Gallagher, Michael, The Restructuring of the Australian Education System and the International Division of Labour, Labour Resource Centre, June 1979, p.12-14.
- (2) See, Politics of Nuclear Disarmament, Left Review, July 1981, p.29.
- (3) William OPHULS: The Scarcity of Society, Harpers Magazine, April 1974, p.52.  
"At best, governments seem likely to rest on engineered consent, so we are manipulated by Platonic guardians in one or another version of Brave New World."
- (4) Humphrey McQUEEN: Australia's Media Monopolies, VISA, 1977, Ch.8.  
Also see Trevor Barr, Australian Publishing, ARENA 35, 1974, p.23-24.
- (5) Neil POSTMAN & Charles WEINGARTNER: Teaching As A Subversive Activity, Penguin, 1979, Ch. 1, 2.
- (6) Jim CAIRNS: Oil In Troubled Waters, Widescope, 1976, p.2.  
"...real power does not lie in Parliament, but in the economy - with those who own and control industry."  
Also refer to Maurice Levitas, Marxist Perspectives In The Sociology of Education, Routledge Kegan Paul, 1974, p.2-3 for reference to effects on education systems.
- (7) Michael HAMEL-GREEN: Australia's Vietnam, Peter King (ed.), George Allen & Unwin, London, 1983, Ch.6.  
Also refer to Richard Campbell: The Political Faith Healers, Bulletin, Jan. 25th, 1969, p.34-35.
- (8) RADICAL ACTION: S.D.S., Moratorium, Catch 22, 7/6/71.

- (9) Paul CORRIGAN & Simon FRITH: Resistance Through Rituals, The Politics of Youth Culture, Hall, Stuart & Jefferson (eds.), Hutchinson, 1980, p.75-79.  
Some Notes On The Relationship Between The Societal Control Culture and The News Media. This presents an excellent diagrammatic summary of the dialectics of media/culture.
- (10) Ian McIVOR: Dissertation On The Philosophy Of The New Left, Sirius, Vol.1, May 15, 1969, p.8-9.
- (11) Richard CAMPBELL: The Political Faith Healers, Bulletin, Jan. 25th, 1969, p.34-35.
- (12) An examination of the catalogues of 'most popular' sellers in the rising alternative bookshops of the time would give an idea of the demand for material specialising in exploration of these concerns. Bookstores that grew on this demand in Melbourne include Whole Earth, Space-Age, Readings, etc.
- (13) Examples of this are expressed in Scarlet Woman, No.3, Feb. 1976; also in Anti-mass Australian Tomato Press, 1970 and Digger, issues 16, 20 (1973), 4, 27, 33 (1974).
- (14) See Marjaleena REPO's critique (from the perspective of a participant) in 'The Fallacy of Community Control', Transformations, Vol.1, 1970.
- (15) Dennis ALTMAN: Rehearsals for Change, Politics and Culture in Australia, Fontana, 1979, p.192.  
This provides a brief but useful summary of the broad issues.
- (16) Op. Cit.

- (17) Marjaleena REPO: op. cit.: p.155.  
"...this power must at some point be transformed into conventional political power and must be able to impinge in major ways on what governments do. For many new-style radicals this step is threatening, implying a search for power and the inevitable compromises and corruption that orthodox politics seem to represent."
- (18) IBID.: p.173.
- (19) IBID.: p.190.
- (20) See TRANSNATIONAL BRIEF, No.7, September, 1981.
- (21) Laurie CARMICHAEL, (Interview): A Peoples Programme, Intervention 9, October 1977, p.53.  
"Q. Given the increasing dominance of imperialist capital in Australia, and the prospects of the crisis deepening,... do you see the possibility of a rapid shift to the right in Australia, even to the point of a fascist state?  
A. Yes, well there's no doubt that some of the leaders of the Labour Party have decided to adopt the accommodation position,... that they are dead bloody scared of what is likely to occur beyond what they have already experienced on November 11th, 1975. What we have now is a considerable amount of fear leading to accommodation of facism."
- (22) Refer to Marjaleena Repo's critique in 'The Fallacy of Community Control', Transformation.
- (23) Fritjof CAPRA: The Turning Point, Flamingo, 1982, p.71-72.  
While it is accepted that debate on this matter was well underway in scientific circles during the 1920's (Einstein & Bohr), there was little available to the general public until the late 1960's-early 70's.

- (24) John BERGER: The Success and Failure of Picasso, Pantheon, 1980, p.67-71, 83.
- (25) Nonie SHARP: Action and Reaction, D.H. McKay, letter to 'The Age' 18/10/68, Arena 17, Summer 68-69, p.42.
- (26) Michael GALLAGHER: The Restructuring Of The Australian Education System And The New International Division Of Labour, Labour Resource Centre, June 1979, p.1.
- (27) Paul CORRIGAN & Simon FRITH: op. cit., p.235.  
"... the evidence is that working-class kids do,... resist something in the school system - how else explain... that a school is a battleground, the pupils' weapons ranging from apathy through indiscipline to straight absence."
- (28) K. MANNHEIM: The Democratization Of Culture, Essays On The Sociology Of Culture, Part 3, Routledge Kegan Paul, London, 1956, p.238.  
"...For the true educators, the pupils are not identical targets of 'education', but individualists with their own social backgrounds and their own psychologically and biologically determined needs..."
- (29) Courier-Mail, 9/9/1969, article headed 'Students Urging Education Review'.
- (30) Bill BONNEY & Helen WILSON: Australian Commercial Media, Macmillan, 1983, Chs. 2, 4, 8.
- (31) Maurice LEVITAS: Marxist Perspectives In The Sociology Of Education, Routledge Kegan Paul, 1974, p.173.  
"Thus those who attempt to understand schools find themselves compelled to examine those forces, inside and outside schools, which express and sustain goals other than and opposed to either selection or legitimation of capitalism - or both."
- (32) IBID.: p.VII-VIII.

CHAPTER FOUR

FOOTSCRAY TECHNICAL SCHOOL 1976-1977

## INTRODUCTION

### FOOTSCRAY: THE YEAR PRIOR

Nineteen seventy-five was a year of conflicting responsibilities. The broad field offered by the Humanities for teaching/learning experience had, over the years, exerted its attraction for future 'professional' explorations. Yet in 1974, my training as a Fine-Art painter restricted participant observation to the teaching/learning environment of Art Departments. In determining to qualify as a Humanities teacher, half-time study leave was sought and granted to undertake full-time study at the Footscray Institute of Technology. By mid 1975 it was apparent that my capacity to meet study requirements whilst simultaneously maintaining a meaningful level of participation in school affairs, would be logistically improved by a transfer from Altona North to Footscray Technical School. The school's location (in the Institute's environs), facilitated more effective co-ordination of teaching and study responsibilities.

Consequently, I commenced duty at Footscray Technical School at the outset of the 1976 school year.

### PERSONAL ROLES IMMEDIATE TO THE STUDY'S PERSPECTIVE

Being a parent of two students attending Western suburban schools (one at High/one at Tech.), permitted ready identification with Footscray Tech parents. For although differences existed between the particular circumstances promoting our respective parental concerns, at root the concerns were the same; the educational well-being of children; and in the first instance, those children most immediately sharing the circumstances of the parents.

It was therefore from the combined perspectives of parent, student and humanities teacher that I participated in all departmental meetings involving the reading scheme, family film nights and curriculum planning. These meetings were attended by all Humanities staff and, at times, included parents and staff from other faculties of the school.

As an active union member, participant observation of the campaign for a new school ranged from attendance of all union branch and associated public meetings, to assisting with written material, organisation of door knocks, speaking at factories and local school union branch meetings; (in all these respects I was but one of many).

Finally, as one of the nine people arrested at the vigil established at the Education Department, I was intimately involved in the collective preparations for legal self-defence.

### ANATOMY OF EVENTS: an overview

#### THE PROBLEMS

Nominating a date that marks the first claim for a new Footscray Technical School building proves to be a somewhat arbitrary matter. There are those in the local community who trace it back as far as 27 years. However, the most clearly critical need for a new school finds its beginnings in 1968 when the Technical School site was legally transferred to the control of the Footscray Institute of Technology by order of Governor in Council.

It was not this act in itself that precipitated the problems to follow. Rather it was this act in the absence of any concrete planning and provision for the ongoing needs of the Technical School. The presence of a tertiary education facility based in the western suburbs had been long awaited and was welcomed, but, parents and teachers found themselves questioning the value of the facility when the secondary school facilities, already considered inadequate, appeared to be further disadvantaged as a result. As one parent was to comment,

We've waited a long time for something like the institute to be built here. But what's the point if our kids don't get the education they need to make use of it. It will just become another facility for those on the other side of the city who've got it all anyway.(1)

Nevertheless, in 1968 the Institute was considered an unqualified boon to the community and received as such. It took eight years to become apparent that the junior technical school was to be placed at continued disadvantage by F.I.T. construction. During that time the Education Department had purchased the local tip as a site for the new school. However no plans for construction had been drawn up. No dates set for tender or funding. Meanwhile the second stage of the massive building program that eventually established F.I.T. proceeded and by 1976 had created environmental conditions that threatened the functional existence of the school. A teacher working there at the time describes it:

The (school's) surrounds were turned into a large building site with overhead cranes, jackhammers and other construction noises. This was compounded by the noise of heavy traffic in Ballarat Road.(2)

It is worth expanding this description that the impact on the school be more readily comprehended.

Ballarat Road is the suburban section of the Western Highway. It carries large volumes of heavy duty transport and its peak-hour flow is barely distinguishable from the general rate of traffic flowing from 8.00 a.m. to 5.30 p.m. each day. Its proximity to the school raised two major problems: one directly caused by the construction progress of F.I.T., the other exacerbated by it. Since the front of the school was situated some 20 feet from the road curbing, all classrooms were exposed to heavy duty traffic noise. Construction noises compounded a problem that was already barely tolerable. Then there was the question of student safety.

By 1976 some of the school's classrooms had already been removed to accommodate F.I.T. needs. This necessitated the school's use of portable classrooms on the other side of Ballarat Road, yet no traffic regulators were installed to assist the school's transfer of students to and from the main school area. Timetabling limitations required that at least three transfers of up to 20 children at a time, were made each day.

Further problems were encountered as the growth of F.I.T. building activity all but eliminated readily supervised outdoor recreation space. As a consequence most of the 430 junior pupils found their recreation confined to the indoor stairways and corridors or alternatively, crossing the extensive construction area to the sports field at the far rear of the site.

These problems - noise, safety and lack of space - compounded already substantial difficulties faced by teachers and a student body comprising 68% ethnic background, 38% of which was functionally illiterate. Special program and approaches devised by teachers to meet language problems were constantly undermined by the environment imposed by F.I.T. developments.

Time much needed to attend to individual language problems became increasingly redirected into policing safety measures and coping with the additional physical and emotional strains of 430 active junior students with little room to move in.

#### IN DISPUTE

It was the noise level that first brought the issue of a new school to a head. Teachers and students found themselves shouting at each other across the classroom in an effort to be heard over noise levels which, when measured under E.P.A. standards, were two and a half times in excess of acceptable levels.

On February 25, 1976 the school held its first stop work meeting on the matter. The meeting expressed two main concerns:

1. it determined to press for a new school; and
2. it demanded the up-grading of conditions on the present site.

In the face of no response from the Education Department, the school held a second stop work meeting on March 2, 1976. Correspondence addressed to the Director of then Sunshine Regional Directorate (Mr. Ron Ginger) dated March 2, 1976 describes the situation.

Seventy-one staff at Footscray Technical School took stopwork action this afternoon... over conditions at our school.

These teachers, together with parents, accompanied a deputation to the offices of Mr. Hamer and the Education Dept. Since Mr. Hamer was busy, a petition of 1,665 names was left at his office together with the same list of demands that accompanies this letter. We then left the same demands at Mr. Thompson's and Dr. Shears' offices.

Mr. Barwick, A.D.G.E. (Buildings), agreed to speak to our deputation, which consisted of two teachers, one parent, and Alan Marriage, President of the T.T.A.V. (union).

We made Mr. Barwick aware of our two concerns; (a) pressing for our new school, and (b) upgrading conditions on the present site (which, to be realistic, we will occupy for a few years yet). He excused the Education Department's inaction on the grounds that the responsibility for buildings etc., had now been handed over to the Regions.

It is to you, therefore that we must direct our urgent request that planning and funding for our new school be given immediate priority.

Mr. Barwick did agree to fund several of our suggested modifications at the present site in conjunction with Footscray Institute of Technology. Our representatives will meet with Mr. Wills, the building officer, in the next few days to work out details.

Exceptional noise in the last week, which made meaningful learning impossible, precipitated our stopwork action. We request that representatives of our staff and parents meet with you to put our case, preferably within the next week. Enclosed is a copy of the document we left for Mr. Hamer, the Minister and Education Department officials. We presume that you are familiar with the rather special history of our situation at Footscray Technical School. We look forward to putting our case to you in the near future.

The letter was signed: by T.T.A.V. Branch Secretary.(3)

The stopwork action facilitated previously evaded dialogue and an undertaking that the F.I.T. would adequately sound-proof the crane and perhaps assist the Education Department Buildings Branch with modifications to sound-proof classrooms. But nothing concrete by way of guarantees had been achieved and feelings of discontent amongst parents and teachers continued to simmer. The situation became further inflamed when, on March 19, 1976 a student was hit by a passing car whilst crossing Ballarat Road.

Once again staff and parents met in stopwork action. While the incident clarified the issues, the question of accountability became increasingly complex. Already the Education Department had pointed to the Regional Directorate for funding responsibility and the F.I.T. for environment responsibility. In turn these bodies insisted that resolution of the dispute rested with the power of the central education authority. The crossing accident brought local council involvement when teachers and parents demanded a properly regulated crossing at the front of the school, with the consequence that yet another voice joined the debate on accountability.

Pressure was further escalated on March 30, 1976. The following extract from a parents' newsletter succinctly describes the incident that led to the declaration of an indefinite strike on March 31, 1976.

A huge truck loading rocks on the Institute site next to our school rolled down a hill out of control. 17 cars were smashed. This area is used by students.(4)

#### WELDING ORGANISATION

The staffroom was established as a strike headquarters. Staff and parents attended each day to plan and organise towards making their action effective. It was decided to call a public meeting on the issue. Determination to have a new school had set fast and became the overriding context for the growing list of demands formulated in discussions.

The leaflet publicising the public meeting also publicised a summary of the demands:

- a proper pedestrian crossing in front of the school.
- Safety on the Institute building site next to our school.
- Control of ear-shattering noise from the building site and Ballarat Road traffic.
- No further take-over of classrooms and playing space by the Institute.
- Money to plan a new school
- Money for the new school NOW !!(5)

The leaflet proceeded to invite the community to "come and have a cup of tea or coffee with the teachers in the main staffroom and talk it over".

Organisation proceeded. Personal letters of explanation in appropriate languages were sent to senior students' parents, personal visits made to junior students' homes. Meanwhile everyone took a rostered turn to visit other schools and factories in the area; to explain the situation and solicit support. A publicity committee was formed to co-ordinate speaking arrangements, leafletting and press releases. For most people involved the experience of speaking and handing leaflets to strangers was new and approached with apprehension. But events had knitted a sense of solidarity and strength of commitment which enabled them to participate. "I don't think I could have done it on my own though".(6) This statement from a participating teacher expressed the experience related by most.

The mutual support gained in organising speakers in pairs enabled a rapid growth in confidence.

COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

Extract from Parents' Newsletter, April 6, 1976

300 parents, teachers and members of the public filled Footscray Town Hall completely for the Public Meeting, called by staff and parents. Interpreters translated the proceedings into Yugoslav, Italian, Greek and Spanish.(7)

Extract from press release on Public Meeting held April 5, 1976

Many parents of boys at the school spoke strongly in support of the teachers actions and their demands.

Mr. Ken Izzard (Vic Pres. P.C.A.) said that parents and teachers have been reasonable and realistic for too long. 'Our sons should not have to suffer while the F.I.T. expansion continues'.

Parents at the meeting made the following resolutions which were carried overwhelmingly. (Teachers did not vote.)

1. That this meeting demands that the Government and Education Department give a written assurance that there will be no further encroachments on school playing space, no further excavation or demolition of buildings on the secondary school site.
2. That this meeting approaches the T.H.C. and A.C.T.U. and ask them to call an immediate and complete stop to all construction work at F.I.T. until our sons are housed in a new school.
3. That a pedestrian overpass be provided for the students across Ballarat Road outside the school.
4. That the State Government and Footscray City Council be requested to fill the tip site with proper filling within 6 months so that the required landscaping, ovals and grounds are themselves finished when the school is occupied.(8)

The new school was not at this stage guaranteed anymore than it had been in 1975. However, the determination that the current industrial action would win it was confirmed in the meeting.

In response to the meeting's call, the Victorian Trades Hall Council sent Tony Vella (President) to discuss the matter with both F.I.T. and the secondary school's representatives.

Pressure seemed to be at its peak and dialogue between parties gathered a momentum of its own. A further public meeting was called; this time inviting the Education Department's presence to answer community questions on the issue.

Press release dated April 14, 1976

#### Situation at Footscray Technical School.

1. A public meeting (called by parents) was held at Footscray Town Hall at 7.30 on 13th April, 1976.  
...Dr. John Stearne (chairman of School Council) chaired the meeting and answered questions. Mr. Neville Barwick (Ass. Dir. Gen. of Education) spoke to the meeting and answered questions. He has promised to make certain written assurances to teacher and parent demands.
2. The teachers and parents have made a compromise proposal which has been put to Mr. Doug Mills (Director of F.I.T.). The request is that A Block, now used by F.I.T. (but originally used by secondary school) be given over to the secondary school to meet classroom and playing space needs.

Initial negotiations have begun. However, Mr. Mills has only offered 3 rooms and proposed structure on the roof of the building. The parents and teachers view this offer as being totally inadequate. The parents have given support to this demand and the continuation of the strike and the industrial bans on the Institute's building program.(9)

The article went on to quote the parents' support of a resolution which had been carried overwhelmingly.

The parents totally support any action that the teachers have taken on behalf of the students.(10)

An accompanying sheet detailed the areas of agreement reached.

1. Funding for the new Footscray Technical School will be available immediately that all planning is completed (estimated planning time and time for drawing up architectural plans and tendering to be 14-18 months - thus money needed during 1977-78 financial year).
2. Pedestrian press button control traffic lights be installed directly opposite the Middle Building of F.T.S. Funding will immediately be made available from Education Department sources.  
These pedestrian lights will be synchronised with lights planned for the Farnsworth Avenue/Ballarat Road Intersection.
3. A building liaison officer be provided by the Education Department for the use of F.T.S. to supervise modifications to the existing accommodation in relation to the noise problem. That the building liaison officer call on the expertise of an acoustics engineer.
4. In order to upgrade the playground, the Department is to fund basic material and organise for the services of Kevin Heinze to oversee landscaping. Parents, students and staff to be involved in this project.(11)

Written agreement on major concerns had been publicly promised and a compromise proposal on the safety issue formulated. The local paper (The Mail) publicised the promise in banner headlines.

#### Promise on Tech Planning

Footscray's 77 striking technical school teachers yesterday were promised immediate planning and funding for a new technical school.(12)

On the May 26, 1976 the letter of confirmation arrived carrying the signature of Mr. Hobbs (building liaison officer).(13) By late May, Barwick had instructed an independent (at staff and parents' insistence) firm of acoustic engineers to examine the noise levels in classrooms and to recommend means of sound-proofing the building.

The survey showed that classroom noise was consistently above the level where a strained voice is intelligible, and recommended that the noise level be reduced from its 70 decibels down to an acceptable 30-40 decibels. Double glazing and an air ventilation system were advised to reduce the noise level.(14)

Meanwhile, negotiations with F.I.T. proceeded in the presence of a V.T.H.C. representative since parents and teachers were reluctant to withdraw the call for a black ban until the safety issue was resolved. As one parent put it publicly, "We're already suffering from a history of broken promises. That's why we're here".

But F.I.T. refused the compromise proposal and on May 13, 1976 the V.T.H.C. implemented a black ban on the Institute (with all the authority of a unanimous vote from its member unions).

The first indication that the Education Department's unconditional promises may have changed context came with a telephone conversation between the Footscray Branch President of the T.T.A.V. and the Director of F.I.T.; the latter confidently stating that there would be no sound-proofing until the bans on the Institute were lifted.

The uneasy peace that had settled between the school community and the Education Department flared again into outrage on September 16, 1976, when a letter from Neville Barwick arrived at the school, confirming that "monies were being sought for sound-proofing and other works, but that no work would commence until all bans imposed by the V.T.H.C. on F.I.T. were lifted". (15)

The School responded with its account of events:

Mr. Barwick, through his building liaison officer, Mr. H. Hobbs, gave an unconditional assurance that after the noise level survey, the measures to sound-proof "S. Block" would be initiated and completed by February of 1977. The Education Department has gone back on its promise and inserted a new condition to its assurance... It seems that the Education Department has fully taken up the cause of the Footscray Institute of Technology... The Education Department's duty is to the secondary students and it should support the parents' and teachers' demands for upgrading the now poor learning environment of the students.(16)

A meeting between parents, teachers and Mr. Barwick was convened with urgency at the school; "So he can see and hear what our kids have to put up with", explained one of the mothers.(17)

Seventy-five parents, more than half of whom took time off from work to be present, and a small number of off-duty teachers, met with Neville Barwick in the afternoon. Parents' comment was angry and bitter.

You're content to leave our kids without the proper facilities. I bet your kids go to a private school. The west's kids are just factory fodder to you - that's how you treat them. (Comment of a mother long involved in the school's remedial reading scheme.)(18)

The meeting ended in a stalemate with Neville Barwick reiterating his ongoing refusal to negotiate with anyone other than the "responsible body at the school", evading the point that the school council had urged him to carry out the sound-proofing irrespective of lifting bans.

Further attempts to convince F.I.T. to accept the compromise safety proposal met with failure and on November 24, 1976 the branch held a half-day stoppage, hired a bus and accompanied a parent-led delegation to Neville Barwick's office.

When the delegation was refused reception the group as a whole (some 85 people) held an impromptu meeting and, after lengthy discussion, voted to sit in the foyer until the required assurances were obtained from Mr. Barwick. Armed with a continuous tape of traffic noises recorded in a classroom, the meeting settled down to await response.

Four-thirty arrived and the building was becoming empty of its daily occupants. Parents and parent-teachers with home commitments were pressed to leave but the meeting was reluctant to leave the situation unattended now the action had been embarked upon. The problem was resolved by electing nine teachers to maintain the vigil with others offering to return later. Seven o'clock that evening the nine were arrested by State police and charged with trespass.

Although the year was rapidly drawing to a close parents and teachers continued to meet; mainly to prepare for the court appearance.

The prospect of a court hearing, rather than intimidating the school community, served to solidify its determination. On the day of the hearing in 1977, the school stopped work again. Parents and teachers filled the courtroom and adjacent corridor. The indicted teachers undertook their own defence and subpoenaed Neville Barwick to the stand to testify to the fact of broken agreement. Parents in turn took the stand to testify in support of the teachers' actions. The teachers received a six-month good-behaviour bond with no recorded convictions.

In the wake of these events and in the light of the black ban's effect on F.I.T. funding, further negotiation proceeded. In July 1977 agreement between F.I.T., Footscray Technical School, the State Education Department and the V.T.H.C. was finally reached. Work on sound-proofing commenced and tenders for the new school were let.

The activity of parents and teachers was then channelled into the consultative processes designing the new school, for the victory had included a,

...school planned by private architectural consultants... who would consult closely with the local community, for their ideas and their perceptions of what a school should provide in the particular area.(19)

Press Release - February 24, 1978

A contract has been signed for the building of the new Footscray Technical School. The builder is K.G. Hooker Pty. Ltd. The \$7.7 million building program commenced on February 2, 1978 and will be completed by November 1979. The school will be opened and ready for the 1980 school year. The piling works were completed on February 13, 1978 and concrete is now being poured. The Footscray Tip where the new school is sited, will be progressively filled away from the site to provide more space for the opening of the school. This is being done with the co-operation of the Footscray City Council.

Following an agreement signed by the Footscray Technical School, Footscray Institute of Technology and the Trades Hall Council, upgrading of the present school site is proceeding.

The sound-proofing of the south side of the Ballarat Road building has been completed with forced air ventilation facilities. Renovation and refurbishment of the trade block area is underway and the first stage should be completed by early March.

The Migrant Centre has re-housed at 2 Peter Street. It was partly burnt down last December, but was re-built during January.

The staff consider the building of the new school and the up-grading of the present school site as a justification for the actions which teachers, parents and the people of Footscray employed in the last two years. The staff feel that sound-proofing has definitely improved the learning conditions for the boys at the school.(20)

## A SENSE OF ACCOMPLISHMENT

The school opened on time and with great fanfare. A collective delight and pride was apparent in the opening ceremony devised by the school community.

The spirit of that opening and the speeches that gave shape to collective emotions were foreshadowed in an article written for the union journal by one of the participating trade teachers.

First there is the delight in his description of the new school's features.

The school is already a mixed sex school for the first time in its seventy-four year history. It is based on the sub-school system where the school is broken down into mini-schools, three in fact, so instead of being one of 750 you are one of 250.

This mini-school is further broken down into home groups so each student has a greater sense of belonging. The school is designed around this concept with the main area such as a full-size gymnasium at the centre with a theatre, library, student and teachers' lounge. Another feature of the school is the magnificent art area with a 45 degree window from floor to ceiling to give natural light for art and pottery and an outdoor art area. There is also a colour T.V. studio worth \$100,000.(21)

And he sums his article up with

The excellent facilities we fought so hard for will be shared with all people and schools in the region, for this was not a fight by selfish people for their own ends, but a fight for the educational opportunities of the children in the Western Suburbs. The school will be opened by the parents, teachers and trade unionists who at great personal cost achieved the impossible dream for a deprived group.(22)

SOME OBSERVATIONS, INTERPRETATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE ACTORS INVOLVED

On the one hand this dispute could be considered a watershed in a number of respects. Its successes were seemingly unprecedented (with the exception perhaps, of Princess Hill High) and served as concrete evidence of what a coalition between parents, teachers, community and trade-unions could achieve. These achievements can be seen to extend beyond the new school jointly planned to the specifications of parents and teachers, (although this fact alone is worthy of special note). But what is of considerable interest at this stage (some eight years hence, in a period that exhibits considerable scepticism towards the concept and application of participatory decision-making),(23) is the very real redistribution of power vested in school level decisions made in the course of this dispute. Of further significance is the dispute's determination by and within a context of working-class interests.

There is some truth in the claim that the nature and outcome of the dispute were symptomatic of the period: that it was but another example of a community/union alliance mobilised around a specific and limited issue. 'So this time it's education, What else is new?' For of course it came at the tail-end of a decade of alliances against the Vietnam War and supporting Conscientious Objection, environment (The Green Bans) and, concurrent with the Footscray dispute, the anti-freeway (F.19) and Newport Power-House campaigns: all of which represented a community/unions alliance.

On the other hand, viewed from this general perspective, it is easy to dismiss the significance of the Footscray dispute and to overlook one of its main characteristics, i.e. it effectively enunciated a working-class position on the question of education. A section of the working-class entered an arena historically withheld from them by the combined influence of a highly structured professional mystique,(24) and a centralized bureaucracy.(25)

That the dispute evolved a context of class-consciousness was evident not only from the demography of the school community, but enunciated explicitly by the parents themselves, at deputations, public meetings and parent/teacher meetings. It was also illustrated in the choice of spokespeople elected by the parents,(26) both of whom were working-class mothers with little or no hesitation in articulating working-class needs.(27)

It is this factor of a direct and determining role for working-class parents in the school's decisions that distinguishes this dispute from other campaigns of the period. The latter could be viewed more as evidence for Repo's(28) observations on how the middle-class co-opted working-class organisations for their own purposes. For property devaluation by freeways cannot be a prime concern to a class struggling to find housing. Environment remains an issue of amorphous demands to a class economically restricted to the experience of high density living and factory estates. Similarly the question of pollution is a fresher threat to the educated and affluent classes than for those who have worked and lived amidst the chemical and factory wastes of the western suburbs all of their lives. It perhaps indicates a broader set of life values on the part of the working-class organisations that they supported these issues to any degree at all, given that there is yet to be seen any concrete interest from the middle-class on issues of worker living environments and working wages and conditions.

As Repo bitterly points out, citizen participation has not in general affected any fundamental redistribution of power. It has for the most part operated to assist the middle-classes to maintain their power within the community structure during a period of global economic restructuring.(29) As she shows in her lucid analysis, the processes invoked have not, in the main, addressed the economic imperatives informing established power structures and further, most attempts at propagating participatory processes maintain the middle-class in the roles of experts, guides and spokespeople.(30) Thus in the general course of events, the middle-class 'participants' satisfy themselves with a role in benevolent paternalism while the circumstances of the working-class remain unaltered and their values unexpressed and

irrelevant. It is this effective co-option of the working-class by middle-class interests that has, in objective terms, seen the middle-class itself remain a class aligned primarily with the forces of exploitation. For despite initiating and promulgating the vision of participatory democracy, that vision remains, at this stage, a myopic one; developed without recognition of the fundamental relationship between capital and the division of labour.

This point enables us to identify yet another noteworthy contribution to the Footscray dispute. Although the working-class parents effectively participated on their own terms (based in their own values), their confidence owed something to the specific character of participatory democracy that evolved amongst the teaching community at the school. This character may find part of its genesis in the late 50's which saw an increase in social-mobility whereby, many working-class young people entered various professions, not the least popular being the arts, humanities and maths/science faculties of teaching.

Certainly, a number of the teachers who worked these subject areas at Footscray came from the working-class and further, were conscious of the fact that,

A mobilising working-class creates a form of power that is collectively based and experienced in the capitalist mode of production.(31)

#### DEVELOPING A STRUCTURE FOR SHARING POWER

At the outset it should be apparent that there was no blueprint for developing a structure for sharing power. Many factors coincided for its development at Footscray, some of which were recognised and consciously utilized at the time. Others could only be identified retrospectively.

The factors to be addressed here, lifted from the web of events as it were, are the least ambiguous, and therefore most readily identified contributions to the outcome of the dispute.

## The Beginnings of Participation

In 1974 Footscray Technical School developed substantial program for 'remedial' students and gained extra staff to support these.(32) The program provided the embryo of an environmental structure conducive to the growth of a strong emphasis on the school's relationship to its parent-community and to the community generally. The extra staff gained for the 1974 program allowed teachers to work with smaller groups of young people. These improved circumstances enabled teachers to transfer efforts from a class-control emphasis to one of greater concentration on the specific characteristics of the 'students' literacy/numeracy problems. Observations, supported by literature and a broad spectrum of educational case study material of the period, confirmed a strong correlation between the socio-economic circumstances of the students and their learning responses. This engendered the strong impetus for developing an 'adult-listener' program which introduced parents and other members of the community to an in-school educational role; a first step conducive to the development of participatory decision-making. As one parent reflected,

Parents provide valuable knowledge to teachers;  
children's background, interests, problems etc.

During the same period the school restructured itself to provide for class sizes of 10 in Humanities and Maths for all year 7 students. The key was the extra staff. The result was to enable intensive exploration of students' needs and adequate teacher response during the students' most critical period of orientation in the school. It also enabled a concerted effort to be made on the part of teachers towards exploration of a regular, purposeful working relationship with parents (with particular attention given to the parents of year 7 students), based on educational needs. This generated both the necessity and the means (time to develop common ground) for dissolving the education mystique that is now widely recognised as a major obstruction to communication between parents and teachers.

Parents working with the children of other parents formulated specific questions arising from their own observations of the learning process. Teachers, retaining a sense of primary responsibility for the students, were hungry for the parents' observations which generated questions of their own.

The resulting interactions exposed the necessity for dispensing with professional jargon and a conscious practice of 'plain-english' on the part of teachers, while parents found confidence to explore words like 'curriculum' and question its content.

If parents want to contribute to curriculum they should. Particularly if it is the curriculum their own child will have to work with (comment of a Footscray parent).

Although the extra staff did not provide for all recognised needs, being deployed in a way that pre-empted a strong working contact with parents enabled the two-way sharing of knowledge, perspectives(33) and observations essential to the growth of mutual understanding and a level of trust healthily qualified by continual negotiation.

This was furthered by the parents' entry into the planning aspects of the reading scheme, and the introduction of a family film night run on a regular monthly basis.

As parents gained confidence and a sense of familiarity with their 'in-school' experiences(34) they more readily identified the specific parameters of the schools problems.(35) This placed them in a position to speak 'authoritatively' to other parents(36) and the general community during the dispute and was a pre-requisite for the formation of a 'united front' of parents and teachers.

## The Role and Influence of the Union Branch

It could be observed that the activity levels of the Footscray T.T.U.V. branch fluctuated during the seventies, and this would be saying no more than could be said of most union branches in the same period. What differentiates Footscray here is that each period of high level activity left in its wake a residue stimulus that accumulated into a constant interest in and identification with the union.(37) Apart from two members of the V.T.U. and three members of V.A.T., the staff (including administration) were all T.T.U.V. members. Of these it could be said that approximately one-third consistently undertook some form of active, ongoing responsibility and a third of these again would share most acts of initiative in branch affairs. It is significant that even the least active members participated fully in all major planning and decision-making activity.

The administration was cautious in its union involvements. The principal usually declined attendance of decision-making meetings on the grounds of conflict of interest and there was some criticism of this attitude as being a 'cop-out'. Such criticisms came not only from within the teaching ranks of the school but also from some of the small group of 'progressive' principals throughout the metropolitan area: "I would never have opted out of things like D... I would be seen to be supporting a particular line. I would support parents, maybe encourage activity", was the position put by one principal interviewed on the subject.

Part of the administration's reservations clearly lay in the potential for the Education Department to invoke a range of disciplinary procedures against a principal who was seen to be moved by union persuasions (and these fears were not unwarranted as was to be subsequently shown in the forced transfer of two of the schools administrators in 1981; in the wake of continued collective action at Footscray).(38) The same applied to teachers of course,(39) but the teachers saw their commitment as a clear-cut one, centering on their responsibilities to their students beyond all else. By contrast, the principal's role imbued an ambiguity to that commitment in that while the students

were in principle the prime concern, a centrally controlled education system subverted that principle with its effective demands for the principal to act as its direct agent.(40)

The extent of the principal's dilemma may have been due to two coinciding factors:

1. he was a newly appointed principal;
2. he had been a moderately, but consistently interested union member throughout his teaching career.

If Mannheim's view is correct,(41) i.e. "Dominating the lower groups is not merely a matter of giving orders and enforcing obedience; it consists to a very large extent, in maintenance of a vertical distance which becomes an organic part of thinking...", it would be reasonable to assume that the principal's union background, the time of his appointment as principal and the staff's sensitive (though guarded) response to his dilemma, combined to inhibit the development of the psychic distance that would otherwise have confirmed the principal as bureaucratic opposition.

The administration's union membership was clearly more than token as was evidenced by a preparedness to abide by the union branch's decisions. In the process of events the administration, in particular the Vice Principal, became solidly identified with the branch priorities. This did not occur without substantial personal cost to the principal (in the form of ill health) throughout the dispute which left the branch in no doubt as to the degree of Departmental pressure being applied. While staff remained watchful for signs of administrative compromise they also remained sympathetic and sensitive to the need to provide personal support for the administration throughout the dispute.

With these difficulties noted, it remains to be observed that relations between union and administration developed a true sense of solidarity which permitted a concerted approach to the school's problems. Unlike most teacher union branches, the Footscray T.T.U.V. did not have to divide its fighting efforts between school administration and the Education Department. Their adversary was singular and clearly identified.

## Parental Involvement and the Democratic Process

As the '77 dispute mobilised, it became a matter taken for granted that parents should be invited to attend branch meetings on the issue. It was seen to be a simple, logical extension of the relationship already developed between parents and staff through the adult listening scheme. The only questions raised related to procedures and voting rights. Parents were invited to attend, to speak for and against motions and generally participate with the exception of voting, since voting rights could only apply to membership if the decision was to be a union decision as distinct from a joint parent/teacher decision. While the question of voting powers might ostensibly make Footscray subject to Arnstein's generally relevant criticisms,(42) two factors countered this potential demise. One was the general recognition that the specific mode of organisation characteristic of high level union activity was essential to the outcome of the dispute and was only accessible if the integrity of the union's identity as an industrial organisation was preserved.

Secondly, there was the high profile of a common priority which could only be pursued successfully if all constituent parties moved in accord.

Parents did attend and participate at these meetings. Debate was often intense and highly animated but with a strong tendency towards a seeking of consensus. Where any critical doubts on differences of opinion appeared (be it individual or group), these were laboriously talked through. There was a prevalent reluctance to let weight of numbers alone decide a course of action.

Mannheim(43) observed that

...in genuine discussion, all participants are equally and jointly responsible for the conclusions reached. This equal distribution of responsibility is one of the characteristics of democratic society.

The union/parent meetings reflected a concurrence with this view and it was not unusual for a voice, from one corner of the room or another, to remind the group as a whole that, "it's more important to arrive at our decisions by the right process than to have a decision that looks right".

The course of events extended the educational coalition of parents/teachers to one of industrial organisation.

Parents had needed the support of the teachers to participate. Reflective of the parents' attitudes is the comment, "It's up to teachers to bring the parents into these activities. It's the way the community operates. In the stone-age the parents taught the kids skills. Now the teaching is done by special groups".(44)

### Extending Participation

Teachers had needed the support of informed parents to fight effectively. With the forming of this symbiotic relationship a further need became identifiable. Teachers could take industrial action, parents could protest loudly but even as a united group they remained Footscray Tech. vs. the Education Department. it was clear that support outside of the immediate school community must be gained. Two sources were identified: trade unions for their capacity to effectively black-ban and the local community for political pressure. Both parents and teachers had direct access to support from the trade union movement: teachers by way of their union's membership of, the Trades Hall Council and parents through membership of their appropriate unions. In turn this assisted in the building of community support through factory meetings and given that the western suburbs consists of a highly unionised workforce, it was safe to assume the community as a whole would be responsive to the appeal being made.

Through these avenues sufficient momentum and resources were built for a direct approach to the local shopping centres with leaflets publicising the issue and encouraging support. The local papers took up the issue in a consistently sympathetic way.

This period of activity provides substance to Arnstein's view that,

...attention should be directed to negotiating techniques, intervention strategies, and the publication and politicization of results.(45)

Although the outcome was very much the result of a joint effort, the structure and attitudes of the union branch played a critical role.

### The Role of Social Networks

If we were to view the Footscray Tech. teaching community as a network (which would be valid if considered as an aspect), ...relations in (the) network could be viewed in terms of the expectations each participant had of the other on account of some social characteristic or attribute.(46)

While it is not within the scope of our enquiry here to attempt a person-by-person analysis, it is perhaps relevant to give some consideration to those factors which by their nature imply a general insight into the range of expectations active in communications. The composition and backgrounds of staff may be one we can begin with.

Like most western suburban schools, the annual staff turnover at Footscray was considerably high - running at approximately 25%. A balance to this occurred through the (approx.) 9% of teachers who had worked at the school for between 12 and 20 years. A further 50% had worked there from 4 to 6 years. This tends to suggest that while the superficial impression (staff turnover rate) is one of instability, there is a substantial number of staff with ongoing tenure at the school, the length of which has been conducive to an identification with the community. That this identification existed is strongly suggested in the pride that many teachers took in not, "Copping out just because it's tough."

Consolidating this relative stability was the number of long-term (anything over 4 years) teachers (and the Principal) who lived in the western suburbs. Indeed, an increasing number of the more recent arrivals took dwellings in the Footscray area in order to better identify with the social milieu of the students and their families. The number of teachers living in the immediate school region would be approximately 20%; highly unusual for a western suburban school (with the exception of Williamstown which developed as a middle-class enclave in the seventies).

It is of further interest that at least 14 teachers on the staff of '77 had experienced (in varying degrees and circumstances) direct conflict with government authorities. This occurred through participation in the Anti-Vietnam War movement in particular and extended to involvement in other issues of pronounced public concern at the time.

Of the 14, six had been active in various areas of the women's movement and were not only vocal advocates of women's rights but effective negotiators of equality for women in day to day circumstances. These women not only brought about a high level of awareness amongst other staff, on questions of sexism, they provided a strong support for the women parents as they entered the school. It was largely due to their insights and encouragement that these parents became as confident as quickly as they did.(47)

The presence of these 14 people perhaps lends some credence to Hamilton-Smith's view(48) that the "rich, politically skilled and knowledgeable are most likely to act". While the 14 were not rich by any stretch of the imagination, relative to the community they serviced their salaries were lucrative and it may be relevant that their active political experiences provided a bank of knowledge and strategy options otherwise unavailable for the school's community as a whole to consider.

They were more inclined to be critical, aware, and to see things from an uncommon perspective. Their marginality gave them greater freedom to act.(49)

## Social Understanding and Integration

It is appropriate to note that the strategies undertaken by the school drew much from the public protests and the reactions of authorities of the late 60's. Also a legacy of the sixties was the uncompromising belief that, "Democracy... is essentially predicated upon the mobilization of all individuals as vital centres, not as a mere ideological or abstract principle, but as a living reality", (50) and the preparedness to explore the logical necessity of what that actually means in practice. Such explorations led a number of the academic staff to work at various forms of manual labour prior to entering the teaching service (work as builder's labourer or on the meat chains were the most common). Such experience may on the one hand be seen as tokenistic since it was obtained with the understanding that preferred options remain available. The experience is therefore not only limited by time but also by expectations (based on real choice) not consistent with those of their fellow workers at the time.

On the other hand however, it provided those concerned with a degree of firsthand acquaintance with values and working circumstances equatable with those most prevalent amongst the families constituting the school's community. In this respect it extended the teachers' awareness beyond the general middle-class perception of 'workers' that Repo describes:

The 'visible' workers are mainly service workers, whom the middle-class encounters as individuals. They do not come into contact with the production workers and office workers as a group. (51)

Certainly these teachers understood and sympathized with the view of many parents that, "Teachers go from one side of the desk to the other".

Similarly, the number of 'first generation Australian' (perhaps 17%) teachers contributed to extending communication potential and practice in a school with a diverse ethnic population (22 language groups - 68% ethnic families). The form of these teachers' contributions went beyond mere interpreting practice

(indeed some were conscious of a significant loss of fluency with their language of origin). They were actively concerned to counter the dissolution of ethnic cultures actively fostered by the education system. The efforts of these teachers to encourage pride and dignity amongst students of ethnic background (as opposed to perpetuating passive acceptance of being 'a wog' in an environment that demanded negation of their cultural heritage), found fertile ground for extending the communication and involvement of ethnic parents.

Amongst Anglo-Saxon parents of the time, there appeared little distinction made on cultural grounds. Attitudes seem to be representatively expressed by the following comments of Anglo-Saxon parents.

I listen to the Greeks. They're hard-working people just wanting a decent life for them and their kids.

I get on well with foreigners because I've been kicked about and can see the tough edge of life.

Within this web of relationships, the role of the social welfare officer in the school developed as one of liaison for change. Although the enactment of this role commenced from a conventional welfare perspective(52) of "making existing ends meet", the class-based thrust of the dispute redirected the role towards reinforcing an impetus for change.

The importance of the social worker's skills, at times overlooked in the tumult of events, lay in the capacity to weld communication over the broad spectrum of human variables participating: in particular, the monitoring of the process of decision-making.

The following notes on this contribution are based on the supposition that the social worker's middle-class background, coupled with acquaintance with the counter-culture influence of the early 70's provided the mainstay of her approach. For, although receptive and sympathetically responsive to the strong class/political overtones of the dispute, her personal momentum derived more from the concerns of the early counter-culture described by Roszak.(53) It would be true to say that much of

the sentiment informing the counter-culture era had been integrated into the collective philosophy of the Footscray Tech. community. However, without the strong class/political emphasis of the campaign's formative context, the social worker's contribution could have readily become a basis for the type of inaction, apathy, that Repo alludes to when she observes:

Most significantly, social change,... is seen as a threat to the 'indigenous culture' of the so-called poor, as unwarranted intrusion of 'middle-class values', a notion which seriously hampers discussions on what effective social change consists of.(54)

In acknowledging the importance of the social worker's contribution, with an emphasis on the context of the class orientation of the dispute as a whole, it is more readily seen that the Footscray Tech. community succeeded in utilizing the participatory decision-making processes without allowing the analysis of those processes to become an end in itself; or a pass-time for dilettantes.

#### CONCLUDING REMARKS AND OBSERVATIONS

In embarking on some final observations it may be useful to examine Hamilton-Smith's "first step" in generating participation. Hamilton-Smith maintains that,

A first step is to make information available, not just to the professional, the rich and the already well-informed, but to our hypothetical ordinary citizen... it is probably the most difficult element in the whole process, for he" (and presumably she), "may not be very literate, nor may he wish to spend a lot of time acquiring new knowledge, particularly if its relevance is not immediately obvious.(55)

It may seem like splitting hairs to accept that the availability of information is essential on the one hand, whilst on the other claiming that it should be the second step in the process. Although Hamilton-Smith recognises that the "immediate relevance" of information relates to its likelihood of finding a reception, the question of how to make it relevant has been passed over.

The relevance of information is decided by the context it is applied to. The process of finding the right context is the process of finding a point of mutual common-ground for exchange; a meeting point so to speak. It was finding this meeting point that, in retrospect, constituted the first step to participation (as distinct from involvement). It was the students who taught the teachers the necessity of this by their reluctance to participate in learning activities until teachers negotiated a context immediately relevant to them. (An example of teachers' response was to work with a small group of students towards gaining a grant to have a popular writer of children's stories spend a year at Footscray as 'writer in residence'. The aim was to produce reading material based on local events, characters and culture. It would have to be said that this particular project failed due to the writer's inability to identify the characteristics of working-class culture. However, at least one teacher has since taken the challenge and written literature that has proven successful with students.(56) In many cases students participated in planning classroom sessions and excursions, though this was spasmodic and tended only to occur when strong objections were held about the teacher-designed sessions.)

In any event the lessons learned by the Footscray teachers, in particular the humanities department, supports Corrigan and Frith's contention(57) that:

...the politics of education must focus on class and not just classroom relations... working-class young people are... an actual and potential labour force and it is this (not their youth) which determines their social situation and structures their institutional relationships (and it is this which unifies their diverse experience, links them to their elders and gives their culture its political potential).

Identifying the key meeting point with parents was not difficult once the need for a conscious 'outreach' was recognised. For the central mutual interest with both groups was the students themselves. This is not to imply that the conscious intentions of the staff focussed on establishing parent/community participation per se. The word 'participation' was hardly used and the

concept was certainly not the catch-cry, panacea of ills that it became in '79-'80. Rather the actions and thought evolved in this direction and were the expression of raw exploration of the most effective means of meeting students' learning needs.

...the development of new kinds of learning techniques where with a complementary relationship can permit a strengthening of the group process,(58)

and the recognition that

...cognitive learning parallels the emotional learning... It is important to develop the notion that the use of the community as a laboratory is an essential part of a child's education, another part of participation and exposure.(59)

What could be said to have operated in the teachers' 'outreach' to parents was perhaps a combination of Mannheim's 'democratic mind'(60) and the fact that the preconditions for participation had already evolved; a hybrid of the web of expectations, attitudes, circumstances and needs of the staff and students in the school in a context of an awareness of class politics.

The demand for participation involves a radical change of human relationships and in the extreme, the destruction of hierarchical organisations.(61)

Schools are amongst the classical examples of hierarchical organisation. It is indicative of the developments at Footscray that the fluid structure of the union branch reflected the fluid structure of the overall school operations. Two traditionally segregated departments, Maths/Science and Humanities, worked together closely at the year 7 level. This working relationship between two areas usually considered as the antithesis of each other, most clearly illustrates the breakdown of competitive elements inherent in hierarchy. The fact that this occurred by voluntary response rather than orchestrated decree is also significant.

These factors go some way towards explaining why, unlike many schools exploring similar possibilities, the staff in general felt little threat from the parents working presence in the school.

It is neither surprising nor a reflection on staff/parent relationships, that parents and teachers maintained their respective group identities. As a whole the situation may be described as a symbioses of the two groups.

In common with the general views and feelings noted from parents in the pilot investigation, Footscray parents held initial fears and reservations: What would be expected of them? How would they cope, with students, with teachers? Would they make fools of themselves, not knowing what to say, what to do, how to say it, how to do it? And of course there were the memories of old school days.

But outweighing the fears was the desire to have their "kids able to cope with life" and in terms of employment options (all parents wanted to see their kids have better opportunities than they had), literacy and numeracy were essential. The school had a high rate of illiteracy and the concern amongst parents was sufficiently widespread for an invitation to help to receive a willing response.

And it was from this deceptively small step that the industrial collective of parents and teachers developed and an arduous struggle for a new school won.

Three years later, 1981, a Footscray parent (who was involved in a dispute over the forced transfer of staff in '79), proudly informed me that:

Footscray has a long history of parent involvement, particularly going back to the '77 dispute. If they had a kid in the school then, in year 7, the kid would be in year 11 now. The building of the new school kicked the department in the backside. The development of the new school construction kept interest alive.

They still talk about how parents and teachers struggled together to get the new school.

NOTES AND REFERENCES FOR CHAPTER FOUR

- (1) FOOTSCRAY TECH. DISPUTE FILE, held by Jim Reynolds (publicity officer during the dispute). Comment made by parent member of school council.
- (2) Jim KENNEDY: Footscray Wins a Battle, T.T.A.V. News, No.6, 1980, p.6.
- (3) FOOTSCRAY TECH. DISPUTE FILE.
- (4) IBID.
- (5) IBID.
- (6) J. INGLEBY: notes from work diary.
- (7) FOOTSCRAY TECH. DISPUTE FILE.
- (8) IBID.
- (9) IBID.
- (10) IBID.
- (11) IBID.
- (12) IBID.: (news clipping undated)
- (13) IBID.
- (14) IBID.
- (15) IBID.
- (16) IBID.
- (17) J. INGLEBY: notes from work diary.
- (18) IBID.

- (19) FOOTSCRAY TECH. DISPUTE FILE.
- (20) IBID.
- (21) Jim KENNEDY: Footscray Wins a Battle, T.T.A.V. News, No.6, 1980, p.6.
- (22) IBID.
- (23) J. BREHAUT: The Participation Game, Polis No.5, 1978, p.22.  
"There is an increasing body of empirical evidence to suggest that, far from achieving any real redistribution of power between the 'haves' and 'have-nots', what is occurring is an extension of governing elite... Much of the earlier justification for participation centred around the ideas of democratization of the decision making process to involve people in the making of decisions which concerned their own lives... However, if we examine the schemes of participation which have been introduced, if we look at the practice of participation, it is difficult to justify their introduction in democratic theory terms."  
I do not question the relevance of Brehaut's views. But it is the general relevance and applicability of this view that makes the Footscray situation worth a close examination as an exceptional circumstance that may offer sound reasons for inhibiting the current tendency to relegate "participatory decision-making" to that corner reserved for the rejected and failed.
- (24) Basil BERNSTEIN: Class, Codes and Control, Paladin 1973, p.196.  
"It is not only capital, in the strict economic sense, which is subject to appropriation, manipulation and exploitation, but also cultural capital in the form of the symbolic systems through which (people) can extend and change the boundaries of (their) experience".

- (25) B. BESSANT & A. SPAUL: Politics of Schooling, Pitman, 1976, p.x.  
"The institutions of schooling not only exist to serve and preserve these systems but, through their administrative structures, political systems exercise a direct and all embracing control over these institutions."
- (26) F. HAMTEL: The Structure of Power in the Regional City, Community Power Structure, 1953, p.64.  
The "leadership" at Footscray Tech., could be likened to the fluidity inherent in the structural processes observed by Hamtel:  
"...the total personnel involved in a major community project might possibly form a pyramid of power, but the constituency of the pyramid would change according to the (aspect of the) project being acted upon. In other words, the personnel of the pyramid would change depending on what needs to be done at a particular time."
- (27) Marjaleena REPO: The Fallacy of Community Control, Transformations, Vol.1, No.1, 1971, p.11.  
"You will find that typical working-class parents are most concerned about the basic skills, 'the three R's', as well as with 'good behaviour'. They will, on their own, press for more effective teaching methods; but will not criticize the learning climate and the discipline in the schools, unless the latter is extraordinarily punitive."  
While Repo's contentions here are supported to some degree by the pilot interviews conducted for this research, the Footscray dispute offers refreshing evidence that it is more a question of circumstances being conducive to working-class parents' appropriation of the means to express an integrated set of related concerns.
- (28) IBID.: p.15.  
"It (the working-class) is being misled and defeated by an ideologically committed middle-class element that operates in its own interests; and it is being misled and defeated by an element of that same class that, although 'well meaning', lacks an understanding of social classes

in operation and does not act from a working-class perspective. The resulting middle-class ideology has determined the nature of the organisations in the neighbourhood, and has through them succeeded in controlling the working-class."

- (29) Michael GALLAGHER: The Restructuring of the Australian Education System and the New International Division of Labour, Labour Resource Centre, June 1979.

This document provides well-documented observations on the effects of the global restructure on education in Australia. As such it contributes valuably to the context for more community participation in education.

- (30) Marjaleena REPO: Op. cit., p.13.

- (31) R.W. CONNELL & T.H. IRVING: Class Structure in Australian History, Longman Cheshire, 1980, p.195.

- (32) Ken TAYLOR: Parents Take Up the Fight for Quality, T.T.U.V. News, Vol.17, No.6, 1981, p.11.

- (33) K. MANNHEIM: The Sociology of Knowledge, Gerald Duckworth and Co., London, 1970, p.115.

"'Perspective' in this sense signifies the manner in which one views an object, what one perceives in it, and how one construes it in... thinking. Perspective, therefore, is something more than a merely formal determination of thinking. It refers also to qualitative elements in the structure of thought, elements that must necessarily be overlooked by a purely formal logic. It is precisely these factors that are responsible for the fact that two persons, even if they apply the same formal-logical rules, e.g. the law of contradiction or the formula of the syllogism, in an identical manner, may judge the object very differently."

- (34) F. HAMTEL: Op. cit., p.105.  
"People) "who work together over a long period of time become comfortable in their working relationships with one another. Mutual sentiments of liking will grow up between them, and these sentiments in turn will lead to further interaction."
- (35) Russell KEAT & John UNCY: Social Theory As Science, Routledge, Kegan Paul, 1975, p.137.  
"Between the structure of a given social formation and typical patterns of individual action lie sets of shared meanings by which actors identify, interpret, evaluate and indicate to themselves and others, the significance of objects and events present in their social world."
- (36) K. MANNHEIM: The Democratization of Culture, Essays on the Sociology of Culture, part 3, Routledge, Kegan Paul, London, 1956.  
"...knowing achieved by doing establishes an organic relationship between the knower and the known" (p.238).  
"...human and social environment must first develop in such a way that (one) can become a person for others and be addressed as such on numerous occasion before (one) can see (oneself) as a person" (p.244).
- (37) IBID.: p.194.  
"In modern mature democracy, solidarity is not automatic; it must be realized anew all the time through conflict and stress. Since all social units are fully autonomous agents they would prefer to go their own way."  
The ongoing nature of Footscray's problems seemingly generated circumstances that lend support to this view.
- (38) FOOTSCRAY: VICTIMISATION OF PAUL ROVIS: T.T.U.V. Secondary Bulletin, No.1, Feb. 3, 1982.  
"Late on the last day of the school year 1981, Paul Rovis received a telegram telling him he had been transferred to another school. Paul Rovis was acting as Vice-Principal at Footscray. The Principal of Footscray, Doug Lindsay, had already been transferred. The transfer was made under

Section 54(2) of the Teaching Service Act. This section gives the Director-General power to transfer a teacher 'in the public interest or in the interest of efficiency'."

Section 54(2) is rarely used. The Minister of Education, Mr. Hunt, stated in Parliament that Paul Rovis had been transferred 'in the public interest'.

- (39) Ken TAYLOR: Op. cit., p.11.  
"1979: Forced transfer campaign. Parents support Branch in protection of staff and program."
- (40) R.T. FITZGERALD & D.W. PETTIT: The New School Councils, Burwood Monograph Series, No.3, 1978, p.90.  
"Outside of those specific areas of finance for which councils are responsible, principals remain accountable to the Education Department."
- (41) K. MANNHEIM: Op. cit., p.210
- (42) S.R. ARNSTEIN: A Ladder of Citizen Participation, Yin, K. (ed.), The City in the Seventies, F. E. Peacock Pub. Inc., 1972, p.111.  
"There is a critical difference between going through the empty ritual of participation and having the real power to affect the outcome of the process... Participation without redistribution of power is an empty and frustrating process for the powerless. It allows the power holders to claim that all sides were considered but makes it possible for only some of those sides to benefit. It maintains Status Quo."
- (43) Op. Cit, p.194.
- (44) Barbara ANDERSON: parent at Footscray Tech.
- (45) S.R. ARNSTEIN: A Ladder of Citizen Participation, Yin, K. (ed.), The City in the Seventies, F. E. Peacock Pub. Inc., 1972, p.49.

- (46) J. BREHAUT: The Participation Game, Polis 5, 1978, p.22.
- (47) Jim KENNEDY (Trade teacher at Footscray Tech.):  
"The same thing happened at Princess Hill High School. Evan Walker (now Min. for Agriculture) was president of school council.  
June English was principal (removed from state parliament for demonstrating).  
The family film night that was held on Friday nights (once a month at F.T.S.) built a bridge between parents and teachers and the parents who helped there (I forget their names) were invaluable in the Strike Action. One was Barbara Anderson.  
The new year 12 is a student negotiated curriculum. This is probably irrelevant.  
Parent involvement was the key word in my opinion.  
I think your paper is very balanced. I think the part the plumbers played in pressuring the T.H.C. through Crawford (Union Secretary) was crucial in attaining the black bans on the institute."
- (48) E. HAMILTON-SMITH: Public Policy and Community Action, R.A.P.I.J., Jan. 1975, p.13.
- (49) Ray BRADLEY & Alan LEVETT: Citizen Action and Urban Political Change, Journal of Sociology, Vol.9, No.2, June 1973, p.51.
- (50) K. MANNHEIM: Op. cit., p.176.
- (51) Marjaleena REPO: Organising the Poor Against the Working Class, Transformations, p.2.
- (52) Ray BRADLEY & Alan LEVETT: Op. cit., p.51.  
"...the traditional social worker role, in large bureaucratic organisations, or accountable to conservative committees, allows little scope for initiating or facilitating social change."

- (53) Theodore ROSZAK: The Making of a Counter Culture, Anchor, 1969, p.233.  
"Discovering ways to live from day to day that integrate the whole of our nature by way of yielding nobility of conduct, honest fellowship and joy."
- (54) Marjaleena REPO: Op. cit., p.1.
- (55) E. HAMILTON-SMITH: Op. cit., p.12.
- (56) Michael HYDE: The Hulks of Hobsons Bay, The Day the Bridge Fell Down and others now published by Jacaranda Press and used widely in many working-class technical schools.
- (57) Paul CORRIGAN & Simon FRITH: Resistance Through Rituals, Youth Subcultures in Post War Britain, Stuart Hall and Tony Jefferson (eds.), Hutchinson University Library, 1980, p.236.
- (58) EKISTICS: On Goals and Processes, Oct. 1968, p.339.
- (59) IBID.: p.338.
- (60) K. MANNHEIM: Op. cit., p.184.  
"The democratic mind rejects all alleged knowledge that must be gained through special channels, open to a chosen few only. It accepts as truth only that which can be ascertained by everybody in ordinary experience, or that which can be cogently proved by steps that everybody can reproduce."
- (61) Op. Cit., p.349.

## CHAPTER FIVE

**MELTON TECHNICAL SCHOOL - 1980:**

## INTRODUCTION

### MELTON: THE YEAR PRIOR

In 1979 I was employed as an industrial officer with the Technical Teachers Union of Victoria. In this my primary task was to liaise with Footscray Technical School in its battle to resist forced staff transfers. Nineteen seventy-nine was similarly the year of the Third International Conference on Community Education, which took place in Melbourne. Several unions participated in the conference and, as representative of the T.T.U.V., I acted as scribe and discussion 'leader' in two trade-union workshops in addition to participating as 'resident artist' for the first week of the conference.

### PERSONAL ROLES IMMEDIATE TO THE STUDY'S PERSPECTIVE

'Co-ordinator of Parent/Community Participation In Curriculum And Evaluation' turned out to be a synonym for 'Jill of all trades'. Within this umbrella I was similarly convenor of Melton Teacher Centre meetings, co-ordinator of the school's reading scheme, submission writer and teacher responsible for the adult 'Return To Study' course, and school representative at two state-wide conferences on curriculum and parent participation.

Activities more immediate to the job profile ranged from ongoing participation in various meetings (administration consultative meetings, staff meetings, school 'council' meetings, some workshop and mothers club meetings, along with the community based meetings external to the school), to liaison with staff, parents, students and community groups. In this latter regard I also performed the duties of school scribe; producing its public relations material, preparing all position papers related to evaluation and parent/community participation, and writing the submissions for T.E.A.C. and Innovations Grant funding for 1981.

It remains to be noted that while I attended Regional union meetings held during 1980, it cannot be properly claimed that Melton was represented.

## AN OVERVIEW OF AIMS AND ASSUMPTIONS

Melton Technical School was one of the few state secondary schools to be founded on a policy of parent/community participation.

A number of 'community' schools were established in Melbourne in the late 60's, early 70's (e.g. Swinburne, Sydney Road, St. Kilda, Lionell-Hall),(1) but these were in fact annexes to mainstream secondary schools. Most of these operated with a large degree of (if not complete) autonomy, but the scale of their operation was small and intimate from the outset. Unlike Footscray Tech., they were fully orchestrated experiments established in an era of comparatively benevolent government funding for education. Almbiotic relationship a further need became identifiable. Teachers could take industrial action, parents could protest loas a whole, their published successes did much to popularise the concept of community schools per se. This in turn provided the impetus for schools like Templestowe High and the Doveton cluster schools to explore means of transition from the traditional structures to those of a 'community' based school.(2)

Melton differed from both these categories of community school. It differed from the early experimental schools in that it was not an annexe. It was a secondary school with an anticipated population of some 1,100 students. It differed from other secondary schools attempting transition to the participatory mode in that it was a new school established on a philosophy and policy of participatory decision-making.

So for Melton it was more a case of 'In the beginning there was the principal'; no staff, no school council, no students. Melton Tech. started with a 'clean slate' and the first mark chalked on it was a direction encapsulating community participation in educational decision-making.

It is perhaps appropriate at this point to address the fundamental assumptions underlying Melton's early direction. They are these: That a true community school grows from community

participation. Its activities (curricula) and other educational forms are at any stage a reflection of the needs, efforts, and individual/social characteristics of its participants. Melton's application of the concept of community defines it abstractly as participants and as such transcends economic, class and geographical factors (although it is recognised that these exercise an influence, if a somewhat amorphous one, on the characteristics of the organic whole).

In this view the school is not necessarily confined to its buildings and grounds and neither is 'the community' seen to be solely an environment for the school. The school and the community are seen to be one - are simultaneously the learner and the learning environment. A quantitative description of the school must at any one time be in flux. Even though attendance records required by the Education Department may show set figures which appear to vary little from year to year, the actual numbers in fact will fluctuate intangibly outside of the institutional illusion of a set school population. So too with the age factor. While the Education Department requires that the school be responsible (educationally) for persons between the ages of twelve and seventeen, the school accepts age in the learning situation, either for recipient or designer and facilitator, as no barrier to participation.

Thus 'the school' was seen to comprise the formally identified students, the staff, the parents and any other individual or group contributing to the school's being by directly participating in its decision-making and activities.

This perhaps raises the question of "what do we mean by participation?" It should be noted that Melton drew a conscious distinction between 'participation' and 'involvement'. The critical difference seen between these two modes of experience determined that 'participation' was necessarily active whilst 'involvement' often described passive acceptance without conscious contribution. Participation, from this perspective, requires people to define problems and needs and address them by way of sharing in the creation of solutions. It is necessarily bound to communication which is inherent in its development.(3)

The broad assumptions underlying the aims of Melton Tech. are composed of yet further assumptions. Whilst it is not within the scope of this overview to examine each of these exhaustively, it may be useful to draw attention to three aspects particularly relevant here.

Firstly, there is the implication that the distinction between 'schooling' and 'education'(4) is readily and widely understood with agreement on the desirability of the latter remaining only to be expressed by all potential participants.

Secondly, there is the assumption that there is inherent in the community the desire to participate in educational decision-making; if only avenues to facilitate this can be made available.

Thirdly, that participation in formulating the curriculum is essential to a redistribution of power in educational decision-making.

It remains to be observed that the educational aims of Melton Tech. do not vary in essence from those of Footscray Tech. However, a considerable distinction between the two is the absence in the latter of any expression of a class-context. It is the role of this element (or the lack thereof), in Melton's attempt to develop a 'true' community school that lends credence to the view that, in its underlying assumptions, Melton was founded in 'bourgeois' intentions.

...we have two systems; the system as the bourgeois believes it to be, and as it really is. The first system, the ideal, is subject to the categories of mechanism, i.e. to the characteristics of the machine in society as the bourgeois believes it to be; the second, the real, is subject to the categories of dialectics of the machine in society as it is known to the proletariat who form part of it.(5)

It is this question that the analysis of Melton Tech.'s development primarily addresses.

## IN THE BEGINNING

Melton Technical School was established in 1979; four or five portable rooms arranged at one end of a paddock in South Melton, the 'not-so-good' end of town. Its foundation numbered some one hundred and twelve students and twelve staff, a ratio predisposing towards effective teaching/learning situations, all else being equal.

The principal had been head of the Humanities Department at Footscray Tech. in the early seventies. He played a significant role in 'drawing the links' in the early stages of its community reading scheme. Subsequently, he was seconded to work with the Statewide Curriculum Development team under the Education Department; a position that developed a broad range of contacts within the upper-bureaucracy and sufficient personal influence to hand-pick his senior staff members for the first operating year of the school.(6)

The senior staff members had for the most part worked in western suburban schools. All had accrued some reputation for 'progressive', innovative teaching, dedication and competence. The broad parameters of their approach encompassed exploration of participatory decision-making, and it was this as much as their skills that effected the principal's choice. Each, in common with the principal, saw Melton as a unique opportunity to put treasured educational visions into practice. In relation to the staff as a whole, these people were of the few who exhibited confidence and a decisive attitude towards the idea of participatory decision-making - applied to a school staff and also to the inclusion of parents and community members. Other staff members ranged from those who were openly receptive but unsure of its practical application, to those of a more hardened skepticism who would nevertheless "give it a go".

However, the main difficulties experienced by the school in its first year were not due to differences in approach and/or understanding amongst staff. Rather they centred on questions of inadequate space and facilities for teaching/learning.

Although staff relied heavily on the principal's reputed 'influence' and negotiating 'know-how' to resolve these problems, it became increasingly apparent as the year advanced that there was strong resistance from the Education Department towards any concessions for the specific needs of a new community school. Towards the end of 1979, the need to ensure staff with the necessary experience and expertise for 1980 was added to the list of major concerns. There was a general fear that the Education Department would allocate a proportionally large number of 'first year out' teachers despite the fact that the school's resources were too slender to provide orientation support.

The first year managed to maintain, if somewhat precariously, a cohesion between staff. There was a degree of collective pride in "surviving despite adversity". "Melton will be a model for future schools"; "we're doing something genuinely new".

There was no apparent formal demarcation exercised between administrative and other functions in the first year. Indeed the size and nature of establishment work did not make such divisions economical. Further, the principal saw the school as an opportunity to experiment with a non-hierarchical structure, though paradoxically the complete acceptance of this approach came as a result of the principal's authority, vested in this case in his 'charisma'.

"There is such a thing as charisma you know", he commented one day. "I believe I have it to a degree". The comment was not intended to be boastful; simply a statement of fact that reflected (to some extent) the fact that most staff were reluctant to take any initiatives without first seeking the principal's assurance and support.

"J...s not your usual principal. He's Mr. Good-Guy" (staff members comment to new evaluation co-ordinator). While the principal recognised this attitude as a prime problem for the school's development, his own ambivalence made it impossible to deal with: "I wanted the staff to trust and challenge me at the same time."

Since it was agreed that union business was educational business (and vice-versa), an autonomous union organisational identity was considered unnecessary and uneconomical (in terms of time). Melton was 'different'. All staff members were union members including the administration, so it 'stood to reason' that a staff meeting and a union meeting were effectively one and the same thing. "Anyone can raise a union matter at a staff meeting" the principal assured, since it was all viewed as compatible with the context of participatory decision-making. This attitude was fostered by the belief that the principal held sufficient influence and 'know-how' to be able to resolve any industrial conflict by personal persuasion and 'pulling the right strings'. This influence of the principal's middle management skills served to further lull any union consciousness. These skills were directed towards developing compromise between the potential political divisions in the school. Retrospectively, he agreed that he had fostered a situation "where right and left divisions in the school would look to a conciliatory position for the sake of the kids", at the expense of union consciousness and organisation.

Regular weekly staff meetings were the instituted form of communication and from these the school determined a basis for curriculum, workshop-structures approach to students and parents, and any or all procedures connected with the ongoing functions of the school.

In contrast to the development of participatory decision-making at Footscray Tech., the Melton model was the orchestrated dream of the principal supported by senior staff with dreams constituting a variation on the theme. While there was recognition of the inherent contradiction this posed for the aims, the contradiction itself was never transcended.

I kept operating like that (middle-management) but all I did was expose the situation. I then decided to be the person who provides the environment i.e.: the policy support. But to do the work I'd need new skills; to operate from this position (principal). With a lot of people I found I was interfering, taking over their jobs.

A direct insight into the principal's conception of 'participation' is provided in this reflection: "How should I give people the right sort of framework - it is the middle management people who make or break a school". It is this comment of the principal that most succinctly exposes the 'bourgeois' context of his understanding of 'participation'. For as Freire rightly points out, "...not even the best-intentioned leadership can bestow independence as a gift".(7)

This flaw in understanding could not fail to pervade the formative influences on the school's directions and activities. Firstly because of the nature of the principal's authority (couched in high personal standing amongst staff) and secondly, because the few (three) who regarded a union identity as important were overwhelmed; by the magnitude of school organisational tasks, the excitement of being part of a new school that might be different from all others and personal friendship with the principal.

This then is the formative base and tone of the school's collective perceptions and directions.

In place of a school council, public meetings were called on a monthly basis and it was from these that the school obtained a small but interested group of parents and community members. These became the core of the parent/community component in decision making.

By the close of the first year the school approached a learning atmosphere and environment comparable with the early stages of community school annexes of the late sixties/early seventies.

However, it was generally perceived as a year of great adversity (despite rewarding student responses), and staff were acutely conscious that the increased size of the school in 1980 bode even greater stresses and strains for their energies and resources.

The looming second year of the school's life became a strong impetus to contend with the curriculum and this became a planning priority.

At this time government cutbacks in expenditure on education were being tied to the growing pressure which mooted the nationwide introduction of a 'core-curriculum'.(8) However, the demands of establishing the new school had somewhat insulated the Melton staff from the debate that raged around this issue. Likewise they obscured the urgent need to consider the effect of future government policy on the school's efforts. Consequently, it was with the valour that stems from a degree of ignorance that staff unanimously agreed to a course which, though consistent with the school's aims, was in conflict with the demands for a 'core-curriculum' and attendant implications stemming from external assessment procedures. The debate on core-curriculum raised to equal prominence (through the voices of its opponents) the contention that, "control of evaluation/assessment procedures was tantamount to control of curriculum".(9) Amongst the staff at Melton there was little evidence (excepting administration and senior staff who were clearly in touch), of any cohesive or clear understanding of the arguments that placed evaluation procedures as determinants of curriculum. Having isolated themselves from a union identity they had isolated themselves from the main source of 'intra-professional' information. In abrogating union organisation in the school they removed a primary obligation to remain informed on union issues and concerns, so that while literature frequently entered the school it was seldom read; there wasn't time.(10)

But being receptive to the notion as it was vigorously promoted by the principal and the senior staff, the staff as a whole resolved to make 'evaluation the heart of the school' (the central foci of participation) in 1980.

FROM THE IDEALS TO THE REALITY

The 'Evaluation Program' implemented in 1980 showed every indication of successfully meeting its aims and objectives. The person employed to co-ordinate the program had worked at Footscray Tech. in 1976-77, the main period of its struggle for a new school. Much of the experience of the development of parent/ community participation at Footscray readily lent itself to the rapid and effective establishment of the 'Evaluation Program' at Melton. However, what had evolved in an organic way at Footscray as part of exploring and meeting needs, was redirected by Melton's formative influences into an institutionalised method for orchestrating parent (and staff) participation.

The employment of a 'project co-ordinator' on twelve month's funding did much to reinforce and exacerbate the contradiction between aims and understanding. It exposed the school's efforts to additional external pressures to 'conform' to bureaucratic formulas for participation since to gain funding beyond twelve months, the school had to 'prove itself' to external assessors. It must be kept in mind that the project was undertaken at a time when 'community/parent participation' had reached its climax as a catch-cry for funding and source of kudos. A lot had been written about the 'whys and wherefores', and the attendant philosophical milieu in educational circles impinged on the meaning and content attributed to 'participation in education'. The anticipatable outcome was a trend towards utilising 'participation in education': of transforming it into activities for dilettantes; into means for gaining extra resources for schools still fundamentally hierarchical in disposition and intent. Certainly, the introduction of funding pressures severely qualified any successful development of Melton's project.

The program was well underway and had achieved a high degree of parent/community participation (in day-to-day school activity) by the second school term of 1980. Indeed, parallel in growth (and giving impetus to this activity) was the demand on Melton to become an information resource (on 'How it's done') for other

schools with similar aims and aspirations. Melton was in fact fast becoming a 'model' (as its foundation staff had hoped it would), for other schools to build upon.

The school was encouraged to provide a presence at various conferences on educational issues (e.g. 'Who Owns the Curriculum', Humanities Teachers Conference, State Conference of Parent Bodies on Curriculum).

However, whilst proud of the attention and accolades their efforts were receiving, the Melton staff were finding the program establishment exceptionally demanding.(10)

Nineteen-eighty had increased student numbers to 207 and the staff (including administration) to 15. While cursory reflection may interpret this staff/student ratio as more than adequate by accepted standards, the reality was somewhat different.

Extra curriculum duties soared with the school's second year of life. With the pressure of government cutbacks and the more stringent application of staff ceilings, all schools experienced greater demands to justify not only their activities, but in some cases their very existence.(11) Strong competition for student enrolments was developing between the well established local high school and the new Tech. With this, much of staff time and energy was channelled into effecting a competitive primary to secondary school 'transition program'. These same competitive pressures pre-empted the Tech.'s premature implementation of extended services in the form of various adult evening classes, 'school to work' transition courses, along with educational services to the unemployed (via C.Y.S.S.). A tight circle of stress was weaving itself solid in the process. For the extended services were prematurely embarked upon to prove the school's viability in order to justify the funds and resources it desperately needed before the services were implemented. The major costs were human costs, most immediately observed in lowered resilience amongst staff and increased disturbance amongst students. For the extended services offered by the school drew

further on the energies of a staff already overburdened with the design and implementation of relevant curriculum for their day students and still in the throes of structuring the fundamental operations of the component faculty workshops of the school.

Conscientiously pursuing the school's policy on participatory decision-making, staff found themselves more frequently at meetings; considering ongoing problems such as the need for extra temporary classrooms, and the planning requirements for the eventual permanent buildings to be constructed. This mish-mash of demands on time and energy combined with escalating classroom problems (student discipline was a growing concern and perhaps symptomatic of the students' sensitivity to a growing sense of chaos), insufficient resources, getting 'correction' work done, led to high stress levels and lowering morale. Not the least person affected was the principal whose increasing periods of absence from the immediate school situation gave impetus to general depression.

Against this backdrop the evaluation program, though seen to foster many cherished educational aims and objectives, could not fail to be yet another imposition (willingly accepted or not). By the end of the school year no amount of kudos attracted by the program's growing success could stave off the survival pressures amongst staff for a return to a more traditional mode of assessment and indeed, administration of the school generally. While the principal attempted to salvage the evaluation project itself, the stress of the year had undermined his confidence and energies - "I lost confidence in my skills. I became deskilled".

So it was with relief that the school reverted to traditional form; foreshadowing in the process the dismantling of the 'participation in evaluation' project - 'the heart of the school'.

## INTERPRETATIONS OBSERVATIONS AND REFLECTIONS

### A SKETCH OF PARAMETERS

In attempting to implement parent/student/community participation, Melton Tech. saw itself as breaking new ground; as bringing into reality the ideals of education as distinct from schooling. Implicit in the school's vision was the redistribution of power held by virtue of knowledge and expertise. Why then did those efforts collapse so completely within the first two years of the school's life? While events may ostensibly speak for themselves, the answer requires a closer examination of factors.

The process of breakdown in the collective effort generated its own variations on this question; some of which were raised as a collective phenomenon, and many more addressed in individual solitude as a sense of desperation and impotence to deal with the demands of the school induced undeclared withdrawal from collective activity and open communication, (somewhat reminiscent of 'voting with the feet'). While ever more frequent meetings were held and the liturgy of 'participation' and 'education' promulgated, the collective substance informing its content had vacated, leaving in its wake empty ritual and a growing resentment that coloured the answers individually seized to satisfy the needs of personal stability.

### REFLECTIONS ON THE NATURE OF COMMITMENT

A primary distinction between Melton's approach and that of Footscray Tech. is the apolitical context and content of the former.

For Footscray participation was a political form integral to a political context that defined and rejected oppression on a class basis. More precisely perhaps, it was a by-product of struggle. Its approach was couched in a conviction of the need for struggle and reflected Freire's contention that:

This conviction cannot be packaged and sold; it is reached, rather, by means of a totality of reflection and action.(12)

Melton's approach on the other hand, saw participation as a new, creative form of education. A form that transcended class politics. It assumed that the design and implementation of 'appropriate' structures would/could, give rise to the authentic participatory process. It further assumed that these structures could be developed outside of the process and without due regard to the economic/political forces of the wider social arena.

In this light Footscray's commitment to educational change can be seen as being part of a commitment for social change, and as such locates education itself as a political factor in a wider political context. In contrast to this Melton's commitment to educational change formed the parameter of its total collective commitment and had no clearly defined context beyond itself.

The apolitical middle-class factor, more than any other, seems to provide the soundest base for explaining the ephemeral quality of Melton's aims and efforts.

Bruno Bettelheim cites interesting evidence suggesting similar conclusions on responses to adversity and stress:

Non-political middle-class...

They were utterly unable to understand what had happened to them... No consistent philosophy, either moral, political, or social, protected their integrity or gave them strength for an inner stand... political... resented their fate, but somehow accepted it as something that fit their understanding of the course of events.(13)

Melton's breakdown was ostensibly due to overload - not simply in terms of what was required by the aims and objectives themselves, but more by the perspective that formulated the aims and the logical consequence of those particular aims being decreed rather than evolved. For Melton's aims were effectively distorted by a paradoxical situation whereby 'participatory decision-making' was made the inaugural policy of the school by the decision of one person - the principal. As such its authenticity was subverted and redirected by intentions, "to carry out the transformation for the oppressed rather than with them".(14)

Hence, although the principal's intentions may have been motivated by a desire to contribute to liberation, his perspective hinged on what Caudwell described as "the system as the bourgeois believes it to be", for it did not take into account the "dialectics of the machine in society as it is known to the proletariat who form part of it". Repo's observations also support this view:

The underlying and all pervasive physical distance and alienation of the middle class was never considered a problem in itself.(15)

From its conception then, the school's policy was unavoidably an imposition. Implementation relied on the submission of staff rather than a conviction generated from shared definitions of concrete experience. (As pointed out earlier, the senior staff were perhaps amongst the few exceptions, since they came to the school as a result of notions held in common with the principal.)

Because Footscray developed from a point (or points) of shared definitions of concrete experiences, the superimposition of weighty communication structures were unnecessary. The burden of meetings was minimal for the participants were genuinely mobilised as active agents of information exchange and the initiative available to the collective was not located in a centralised bureaucratic source.

Melton, to the contrary had its centre of initiative in the principal and, to a minimally lesser degree, his three senior staff. When the staff embraced the aims, it was by way of the same impetus acting in any traditional school. The authority vested in hierarchy. The result was that meetings were the primary means of communication (since communication was institutionalised, not organic), and the primary means for 'constructing' participation. The increasing frequency of these (escalating with the frequency of collision between isolated ideal and reality), added to working time and working load so that, like most artificially constructed environments, it became uneconomical in relation to the resources available to it.

From this it is not unreasonable to suggest that Melton's failure stemmed from attempting to institutionalise a process that is inherently organic and from viewing that process as an end in itself.

It was a problem of means and ends from the beginning. For in his attempt to liberate education at Melton, the principal utilised the authority of his position in traditional hierarchy to effect the 'means' to the 'end'. In so doing he took 'advantage of the emotional dependence' of the staff who had not developed any concrete shared experience spontaneously defined by the group; either in respect to their identification to education at the school or in the school's relationship to the wider community experience.

The consequences went beyond the collapse of the school's implementation of its aims. For that collapse was merely symptomatic of the school's psychic isolation from the wider socio-economic environment.

#### THE QUESTION OF STRUGGLE: OR NO-STRUGGLE

The self generating tasks resulting from the paradox of superimposing participation created a work and experience overload that could only be rectified by more staff, more space and more facilities (at least until the transition of mode of operation was complete). This made it uneconomical to pursue within the given resources of the school itself, particularly when such shortages were apparent before the 'parent/community participation project' was embarked upon.

Footscray was faced with the same problem of resources and facilities for relevant education. But Footscray chose to struggle to obtain what was seen to be necessary. Why didn't Melton? It may be some explanation to look to the nature of Melton's commitment to the parent/community participation project. But since the shortages existed prior to that project's implementation the essential question would remain unanswered.

The answer lies more in the factors influencing staff acceptance of the project, i.e. the ambiguous position of the principal. On the one hand the principal was a holder of vested traditional authority. On the other the principal was a 'participant'. The collective conceptual parameters for the latter were drawn by terminology which clearly stated that 'participant' meant one of equal status. Yet the emotional parameters drawn by experience equated 'principal' as one of higher authority. The consequent experience of dichotomy seemed to lead to a degree of intellectual paralysis (in respect to questions of status and quality of decisions), somewhat analogous to that potentially induced by Epimenides Paradox.(16)

This sense of ambiguity in roles and functions extended to union organisation within the school. It was expressed in a simple logic: everyone is in the union, including the principal, therefore union and staff organisation are one and the same thing. Whilst the principal promoted this approach, and its ready acceptance may have been influenced by his undoubted personal standing amongst the staff, to propose this as a total explanation would be misleading. For the general attitude accommodating this approach seemed also to be a rationale for avoiding potential unpleasantness and effort associated with coming to terms with parent understanding of teacher industrial action.

In 1979 Melton had answered the call for a statewide stoppage on the 'limited tenure' issue. Parents had complained bitterly. As a result the school resolved to keep the union in 'low profile' on the basis that parents could never be convinced of educational issues and the demands of establishing the school were too great for effort to be directed into educating the parents on these matters - "Maybe later when the school is established".

Footscray staff suffered from no such ambiguities; either in their conception of the principal's role or of the need for a clear industrial identity. While Melton's reaction to the parent's criticism is not an isolated instance(17) it nevertheless reflects an absence of class consciousness. For Footscray's parent support reflects the fact that parents can be convinced of

educational issues if priority in effort is given to obtaining the necessary mutual understanding. Again, such priorities are more likely to be determined if education itself is perceived as a socio-political factor in a political/economic context. (Contrary to the emphasis of Fewster's analysis of industrial action amongst Victorian teachers in the 70's, neither the period itself nor the generality of the issue are primary determinants in the success or otherwise in gaining parental support. The fact that Footscray parents withdrew their children from school in support of the 'Forced Transfer' issue in 1979 suggests that the central moving factor is the priority given to ensuring parents are well informed participants in the educational decisions of the school.)

Melton's view of taking a stand was to have a 'word on the side' with individual staff members or a 'ring around' of already active parents, asking them to write letters asking the Minister for more staff and facilities. When two members of staff ventured to suggest calling a public meeting of parents, agreement was given after great hesitation on the principal's part. When consideration of how the meeting should be organised was raised there was neither time nor appropriate avenues available that did not leave the principal convinced that he would be seen by the Department to be totally responsible.

Whereas Footscray would have called a union meeting and declared a stop work period to enable them to properly inform and seek support from parents, Melton couldn't call a union meeting because there was 'no elected union authority' to call it; and there was no union identity within the minds of most staff. If a staff meeting was called to determine a stop work it would have to be called on the principal's authority because whether he personally called it or not, being a staff meeting, he was, according to the rules of bureaucracy the one primarily responsible for any resolution to stop work. Hence no industrial action.

Around the same period the Victorian Minister for Education issued a document called the 'Green Paper' which proposed a restructuring of the Victorian education system in such a manner

that perceived responsibility for education would be 'decentralised', while financial decisions were tightly centralised and further removed from public access. The paper effectively appropriated the language symbolism of 'participation' for the purpose of diffusing any coherent objections from the public: a tactic comparable with the British approach described by Cochrane and Dicker:

...all the talk is of regeneration, both industrial and community (i.e. voluntary based). In practice this means that councils are able to abdicate their responsibilities, so that voluntary organisations (as long as they don't get too critical of the council) can pull the areas up by their bootstraps.(18)

Again, Melton put its plea to paper. This plea was singularly its greatest political effort to defend itself (see appendix 2c). All other effort remained confined to the principal's negotiating power, by this stage entrenched as the parameter for options.

#### A GLANCE AT PROCESSES

Finally it may be useful to consider some of the characteristics of the processes informing Melton's development. Such considerations must remain incomplete within the scope of this study and therefore will only be regarded for their suggestive rather than conclusive contribution to the interpersonal transactions composing the collective loci of decisions at Melton.

Firstly it should be understood that the role of parents in decision-making was minimal. The indications of success in the 'parent/community participation' in the evaluation project (prior to its collapse) were exactly that - indications. Parents had responded positively to the first staff 'outreach' attempts and in doing so dispelled the myth of 'lack of parent interest'. The degree and enthusiasm of that response (given the brevity of the 'gestation' period), provided a confirmation of Footscray's experience that the commitment to participation entailed collective time and energy being devoted to generating mutual confidence; trust being essential to the process of sharing

skills and knowledge. Parents commenced to move out of traditional school support roles into 'the classroom' (both figuratively and literally); with timidity but nevertheless determined to openly meet the invitation to participate.

However, the staff and space shortages forced an early reckoning for the school's aims. For as parents response grew, the demand on the already insufficient resources increased (time and energy equating with human resources = need for more staff/space). The limited resources posed a question of priorities that tested the ground of the staffs' intentions (since bureaucratic authority was still vested in the school system). For staffs' intentions to be authenticated, a priority of time and energy had to be given to working with parents and students together. If resource shortages posed a choice between parents and students, authentic intentions must of necessity pre-empt a struggle for the resources to accommodate the needs of all persons affected (to each according to need, from each according to ability?) Authentic participation is a practical question:

(people) must prove the truth, i.e. the reality and power, the 'this-sidedness' of (their) thinking in practice. The dispute over the reality or non-reality of thinking that is isolated from practice is a purely scholastic question.(19)

Surely the process of directing sufficient resources to the growth of human freedom(20) is the economic principle inherent in participation.

Evidence suggests that collective staff attitudes remained grounded in the traditional community power structure which according to Hamtel's findings,

... is held together by common interests, mutual obligations, money, habit, delegated responsibilities, and in some cases by coercion and force.(21)

As a consequence Melton parents remained essentially isolated from the decision-making on the economic requirements for participation. For reasons apparent in attitudes expressed by the parents in the pilot study, and summed up by the Footscray parents' statement, "It's up to teachers to bring the parents

into these activities". Melton's commitment was grounded in a collective staff attitude clearly contradictory to the requirements of the aims it set itself.

The predicament of the staff reflects an essential similarity with parents in that it was based in an inarticulate sense of oppression:

their self esteem had rested on a status and respect that came with their positions, depended on their jobs, on being head of a family, or similar external factors...(22)

The relationship between this state at Melton and the state of Victorian Teacher unions will be examined later. What is of relevance here is that the contradiction manifested itself as a collective aim undertaken in the absence of a collective meaning flexible enough to accommodate its realisation.

The resultant incongruent realities experienced by staff escalated 'normal' working tensions into high stress levels:

Stress... taken to mean... an experience of unpleasant emotional tension which results when people have to function under conditions which do not meet their need or which imply demands beyond people's physical or mental capacities.(23)

The pattern of stress at Melton was not significantly different from anywhere else despite collective recognition of its destructive presence and genuine attempts to deal with it.

Teachers having difficulties", (which at Melton was everyone including the principal), "nearly always tend to struggle on alone for fear of being thought incompetent. The results can be tragic.(24)

Footscray exhibited evidence of constant high tension levels but these seldom developed into stress as experienced by Melton staff. It may be reasonable to suppose that the shared singular reality that guided Footscray's approach, and effectively embraced the need for struggle, was a condition that simultaneously met the collective need and inhibited demands that might otherwise be beyond peoples' immediate physical or mental capacities.

For apart from a predominantly Anglo-Saxon population (7 of the 207 students were from other ethnic backgrounds - none being first generation Australian), the reluctance of staff to live in Melton (three exceptions) and the age and size of the school itself, there was little else to distinguish the influences to which the staff of each school were subject.

One possible exception is the fact that both principal and acting vice-principal had close family ties with Members of Parliament. It is conceivable that knowledge of this, reinforced by the more than usual personal regard that existed between staff and administration, combined to influence staffs' heavy (total?) reliance on negotiating with bureaucracy (armed with access to 'behind the scenes' party politics). Particularly in the first school year when staff numbers were small and the total absence of established organisation left them most vulnerable to feelings of insecurity.

However, this does not adequately explain the almost complete (three exceptions) absence of union consciousness amongst staff. But this is perhaps best addressed in the section examining the overall union development of the time.

NOTES AND REFERENCES FOR CHAPTER FIVE

- (1) Barry HILLS: The Schools, Pelican, 1977, Ch.7.  
Although this chapter does not give specific reference to Victorian community schools, the description of educational decision-making developments could be seen as generally applicable to those schools I have mentioned.
- (2) David PETTIT: Opening Up Schools, Pelican, 1980, pp.80, 91-3, 202.  
The Doveton approach described could be viewed as generally representative of the most common pattern appearing amongst those established Victorian secondary schools seeking to emphasise community participation.
- (3) Ruth HOADLEY & Jennifer BEECHAM: Participation v. Involvement, Educational Innovations, Vol.5, No.1, 1979, p.4, 5.
- (4) BESSANT & SPAULL: The Politics of Schooling, Pitman, 1976, p.ix.  
"In many ways the differences between education and schooling are the differences between institutions and people. Institutions organise. They allow and disallow. They limit individual choice in a manner which is in the interests of the preservation of the institution. People can restrict their own choices but when left to their own devices they tend to explore and broaden their experience. This revelation to the individual of a broader spectrum of knowledge and experience is an essential part of the educative process."
- (5) Christopher CAUDWELL: The Concept of Freedom, Laurence Wishart, London, 1977, p.217.  
Note: Response of Melton senior teachers criticises language use here as archaic.  
"Further we think or wonder at some of your language, i.e. use of terms such as 'struggle', 'bourgeois', 'proletariat' etc. all seem a bit 'old' - I guess that's a matter for you."

- (6) The following observations were added by two Melton senior teachers:  
"J... only chose (4) staff originally: C..., E... (not totally), K... and myself. All the others were appointed - these three areas had I believe incredible effort on curriculum and philosophy, therefore practice etc. etc."
- (7) Paolo FRIERE: Pedagogy Of The Oppressed, Penguin, 1982, p.42.
- (8) Malcolm SKILBECK: Curriculum: Core-plus or School Based? Who Owns The Curriculum? Report of the curriculum conference for parents and teachers, Monash University, August 15-16, 1980, p.12-17.  
To a degree, this article promotes a compromise and this is reflected by the absence of urgency that energised the rhetoric of the 'living' debate. Nevertheless, the article gives some hint of the debate's critical parameters. For a comprehensive view of Teacher Unions approach see: A Content For Working Class Schooling, T.T.U.V. News, Vol.17, No.6, Aug. 20th, 1981, p.17.
- (9) ASSESSMENT 3: Some Guidelines For Descriptive Assessments, T.T.U.V. News, Vol.15, No.9, Nov. 27, 1981, p.30.  
In addition to reaffirming the link between assessment and curriculum control this article addresses many of the criteria and concerns examined by Melton staff in 1979. However, it falls short of Melton's perspective in that it makes no distinction between evaluation and assessment. The former, in Melton's view, encompasses the latter; but extends beyond it in that it incorporates the broader range of criteria and data collection and involves the processes of Action Research.
- (10) Marjaleena REPO: Organising The Poor; Transformations, p.2.  
"The middle class is physically removed from both (the bourgeoisie and the working class) and consequently does not understand the nature of power or the nature of wage slavery."

Applied to the Melton of 1980, this statement goes some way towards explaining the staffs' attitudes towards politics and the tendency to undertake 'educational' directions without giving cognisance to the political decision-making beyond the school's boundaries.

- (11) Tricia CASWELL: How Many Schools Should Be Closed? T.T.U.V. News, Vol.16, No.3, May 3, 1982, p.24.  
This article confirms much that was mere rumour in 1980. It further provides some indication of the degree of seriousness with which such rumours were received at the time and the nature of survival responses it engendered from schools. For Melton Tech. the rumours meant a strong possibility that the school would be taken 'off the drawing board' before it was fully established.  
Note: Melton senior teacher response focuses on bureaucratic decision making:  
"With respect to the rest of the paper we have no argument, probably a different perception, i.e. The efforts of such dept. or bureaucratic decisions as buildings - core plus - handled by public servants rather than educationalists; money cuts - re decrease in ancillary staff allowances, teacher aids etc., again decision made by public servants and politicians without reference to educationalists and staffing cuts etc."
- (12) Paolo FREIRE: Op. cit., p.42.
- (13) Eric FROMM: The Anatomy Of Human Destructiveness, Penguin, 1977, p.98-99.  
Bettleheim is actually referring to the responses of prisoners in the German Concentration Camps in World War II. Though there are clear differences in his application of these results and my own, I believe such differences remain ones of degree rather than essential validity.
- (14) Paolo FREIRE: Op. cit., p.43.
- (15) Marjaleena REPO: Organising The Poor Against The Working Class, Transformations, Vol.1, No.1, 1971, p.2.

- (16) Douglas HOFSTADTER: Godel, Escher, Bach, Penguin, 1980, p.17.
- (17) Mike FEWSTER: The Strike Weapon And Other Tactics, T.T.U.V. News, Vol.15, No.4, 1981, p.35.  
This article indicates a deep concern on the part of the Teacher Unions about the degree (71%) of parent opposition to teacher strikes in Victoria. It goes on to give an effective analysis of the background to the change in parent attitudes. However, I find it somewhat ambivalent in its approach to tactics. The emphasis remains on using traditional structures - in this case school councils and parent advisory committees. In other words it still assumes democratisation can be institutionalised.
- (18) A. COCHRANE & R. DICKER: Jobs And The Inner City, The State And The Local Economy, Russell Press, 1979, p.10.
- (19) Ernst FISCHER: Marx In His Own Words, Penguin, 1970, p.153.
- (20) Eric FROMM: To Have Or To Be, Abacus, 1979.  
"Freedom does not imply lack of constraint, since any growth occurs only within a structure, and any structure requires constraint. What matters is whether the constraint functions primarily for the sake of another person or institution, or whether it is autonomous - i.e. that it results from the necessities of growth."
- (21) F. HAMTEL: The Structure Of Power In The Regional City, Community Power Structure, 1953, p.113.
- (22) Op. Cit.: p.98.
- (23) Teachers In Distress, The Australian Teacher, No.1, 1982, p.15.

- (24) Brian DERUM: Sick And Tired, T.T.U.V. News, Vol.17, No.5, July 17, 1981, p.19.

This article provides a useful summary of reaction patterns as they appear to correlate with particular teaching subject areas.

It also provides a documented breakdown of 'stress factors', most of which can be directly applied to Melton's situation.

**CHAPTER SIX**

**COLLINGWOOD TECHNICAL SCHOOL - 1983**

## INTRODUCTION

### COLLINGWOOD: THE YEAR PRIOR

Nineteen eighty-two emerged as the second year of my employment as a trade union organiser with the Australian Theatrical and Amusement Employees Association. Similarly, it was my second year as delegate to the Victorian Trades Hall Council. In the same year, in the dual role of union representative and chairperson of the Coalition Against Poverty and Unemployment, I participated in the establishment of (and served on), the first administration committee for the Trade Union Unemployment Centre.

### PERSONAL ROLES IMMEDIATE TO THE STUDY'S PERSPECTIVE

My second reinstatement in the Education Department returned me to the role of humanities teacher; this time at Collingwood Technical School. In the course of 1983 I participated in a wide range of school activities (as did most other women and a number of men on the staff). These included meetings (all staff and Humanities department meetings, some Supplementary Grants and School Council meetings, and parent/community evenings); co-ordination of the parent/community reading scheme and the early development of a students' council. My role in the latter included assisting students prepare and conduct an across-the-school survey of student needs. The results of this survey were utilised by both students and staff in debate surrounding the issue of student participation in school decision making, (in this respect the survey may be regarded as an example of 'hard data' within the 'umbrella' of action research). This survey influenced my willingness to prepare a submission for T.E.A.C. funding of a 'School/Community Participation Project' for 1984.

My role at regional union and humanities meetings was undertaken by default. My initial attendances at these meetings were aimed at developing and maintaining contact with the inter-school/union information networks. However, in the course of the branch exploring the potential of a campaign for improved conditions, my attendance extended to representation.

The 'Womens' Group was an important element in these explorations. In the first instance it was the main source of branch initiatives. Along with several others, I participated in this group's evolution; and evolve it did. The women coalesced in direct response to an environment that was predominantly male and still largely in the grip of sexist attitudes. This group was informal/sociable in its meetings, but generally coherent and cohesive in its approach to union affairs.

#### OBSERVATIONS AND DATA ON BACKGROUND AND PROBLEMS

Collingwood Technical School (hereon referred to as C.T.S.) is as useful a model as any other for an understanding of the most pressing problems facing the Victorian education system. The nature of its problems vary little if at all (excepting perhaps in degree), from those experienced by most western, northern and inner suburban regions of Melbourne.

Pressing problems are not surprising given that these regions are all depressed socio-economic areas with high and diverse ethnic populations. They have been so for many decades now. But the current mass unemployment has added a new dimension to the old problems, and with the worsening of this crisis, the continued viability of schools in these areas is held in very real doubt by many who teach in them. The most apparent and immediate source of this doubt for teachers might be most adequately identified (though somewhat impressionistically), in the growing 'no future' syndrome underlying much of the collective student perceptions of their world.

The 1982 unemployment figures for Collingwood provide a substantial explanation for students' attitudes. 17.92% of Collingwood's workforce unemployed equals 2-1/2 times the total Victorian average.(1) Clearly this percentage will have increased since 1982. The levels of corresponding poverty in the area reflect this pattern.

St. Joseph's Church in Otter Street Collingwood handed out 40,000 (forty thousand) food vouchers in 1982, compared with 20,000 (twenty thousand) the previous year. And this is a city with a population of only 15,500 (fifteen thousand five hundred).(2)

The neighbouring district of Fitzroy fared similar circumstances. The growing desperation within the community as a whole is reflected in the Fitzroy Town Clerk's statement:

We're running out of ways to help... the welfare agencies such as the Salvation Army are running out of money... As time goes on the problem gets worse. We can't raise as much money as a council because so many of the ratepayers are on unemployed benefits.(3)

C.T.S. is situated in Johnston Street, one of the busier roads in the inner suburbs. A road that hosts peak hour traffic from 8am through to around 6pm six days a week.

There has been some question raised about the high lead content of the air and the possible effect on the students and inhabitants of the district as a whole. For environmentally conscious staff at C.T.S. this poses a probable explanation for what often appears as hyperactivity in the students; although a broader view may associate this state primarily with the stresses of close living (lack of privacy, noise) which can also lead to hypertense and aggressive behaviour as the need arises to protect territory and define personal space. However, no data has been collected by staff to either support or deny sources with precision since, while concern is real, it falls into that category of problems that should be investigated but aren't, for neither time nor energy are available after 'surviving' a schoolday. Indeed, concern for 'survival' has common currency in C.T.S. staffroom exchanges.

The school itself is housed in four two-storey brick wings, the architecture suggesting late twenties origin and industrial affinities. The interior for most part consists of high ceilinged classrooms arranged to one side of long corridors running the full length of the buildings. Discoloured paint is flaking from many of its walls but Education Department approval

sets renovation back to 1986. The corridors of the 'academic' wing are lined with dented lockers, some with doors hanging from the hinges, others with no doors at all. Occasional tattered display boards add a folorn air to the walls. The library is perhaps the friendliest room but too small and ill equipped for its influence to be felt more widely than its own four walls. A few classrooms show evidence of stoic attempts to inspire with charts and projects from some other year, displayed in the company of 1983 efforts. Other classrooms have surrendered to bare walls.

The school has little playing space. Apart from the narrow passageways between its red brick workshops it accommodates two playing areas, each little more than the size of two large basketball courts; all asphalt and hemmed by high, cyclone wire fencing on the sides unbordered by buildings. The front of the school abuts directly onto the footpath of Johnston Street. There's no sign of outdoor greenery except for one sad, struggling sapling and the odd blade of weed grass pushing through asphalt cracks or creeping along the fenceline. Nor are there any green spaces within ready walking distance of the school. The adjacent streets are lined with closely built shops, factories and high rise flats.

Under the Supplementary Grants criteria C.T.S. is the most disadvantaged technical school in Victoria, as are its six feeder schools.

In common with most technical schools in low socio-economic areas, C.T.S. receives (in the main) those students identified as 'at risk' or 'least able to cope' with the demands of standardised schooling. Less kindly labelled, they are the 'problem kids'. The feeder schools function (increasingly so), as filters which direct 'those most able to cope' and 'most likely to succeed' to the secondary high schools. It is the long established process of shuffling, sorting and branding. The remaining students (other than those whose parents associate technical schools with greater job opportunity in a period of new technology), are deemed to be 'better with their hands' and so proceed to the technical school. The school's reputation as a

'caring school' attracts those students undertaking their second, third or final chance to 'succeed'; an image that acts to compound disadvantage since it effectively concentrates cases of advanced social neglect. These students are not necessarily considered to have learning problems. Rather they are regarded as behavioural problems although low motivation is often a correlative factor.

But the manner by which students find themselves at C.T.S. is not the source of either the school's problems or their own. It is merely a factor that compounds and accentuates disadvantage established beyond the bounds of the school. And the school itself remains hamstrung as part of an education system that functions to maintain society's status quo: a system that operates politically whilst purporting to be apolitical;(4) a system functioning to meet the needs of middle-class anglo saxons and fulfil the arbitrary demands of industry.(5) Disparities between the content of the service and the needs of a working class clientele are more readily hidden in a climate of economic growth and greater employment opportunity. In the current crisis they cannot be ignored.

So what is the nature of the difficulties faced by these students? Of the C.T.S. population (408 in total), more than half reside in high rise flats. Statistics available indicate that more than half of the total Collingwood population receive an annual income of \$10,000 or less (54.7%) in 1981. Students' maintenance grants' records for 1983 indicate that at least 40% of C.T.S. students are from families with an income of around \$6,000 per annum or less. The total population of Collingwood on \$6,000 or less equaled 44% in 1981. 36% were on \$4,000 or less.(6)

Close to half of the student population is from single parent families in high rise flats, and the high incidence of families currently in the process of breakdown suggests that this aspect of socio-economic circumstances is on the increase.

Current estimates hold that approximately 70% of the student population is of non-anglo saxon origin. Nineteen language and cultural groups are represented at the school, the most recent arrivals being Turkish and Vietnamese.(7)

The combination of these circumstances creates a complex milieu of educational needs which in all respects (perhaps excepting degree) is common to all schools in the low income regions of Melbourne. Experienced in the context of negligible job opportunity and staff ceilings, familiar stresses are intensified to breaking point.

It is not uncommon for teachers to suffer a degree of 'burn-out' towards the end of each school term. It is however, uncommon for the symptoms of severe stress to appear within the first month of the school year and for such symptoms to be generalised across the entire staff. This was the case at C.T.S. in the first term of 1983. Few staff members were exempt. A number of staff sought medical assistance. Many teachers, some who had worked at the school for thirteen years or more, considered transfer for the first time. New teachers, transferred in from similar circumstances, have discovered that transfer does not guarantee the desired (needed) change. There is little option in resignation in a period of record unemployment. And so strategies for survival become a preoccupation out of necessity.

From the point of view of staff, student behaviour is the most observable symptom of decline in the school's ability to cope. Although the staff turnover is high (as is common in schools in depressed regions) there remains just over 50% who constitute 'long term' staff, i.e. have been at the school three years or more. Most of these have expressed the view that students' attitudes have deteriorated rapidly over the foregoing two years. A small number saw a correlation between this phenomena and the disappearance of corporal punishment as a means of class control. For others the explanation lies in the students awareness of disappearing employment opportunity, intensified socio-economic pressures in the home and the lack of support staff to cater for the special needs of students (the latter is obviated in the absence of any full time remedial and welfare staff). While the

initial reaction to high stress levels was to seek individual and personal means of coping, as a whole the staff see the situation requiring resolution in educational terms (although opinions may differ as to what this means). However, for most these terms centre on curriculum, staffing and space.

Before addressing these further, it is perhaps appropriate to briefly illustrate some of the situations typifying staff/student relations, and the symptoms and degree of student alienation from the educational process as disclosed by C.T.S. conditions.

### A DAY AT C.T.S.

Under the Supplementary Grants Scheme C.T.S. has employed a nurse. Due to lack of space the first aid room is small and located in the lower part of the school. It's one of the few cosy indoor spaces available to students on a cold, wet day. The nurse herself is often a source of advice as well as administering the patching up of battle scars and monitoring the school's ongoing medical problems. She's a sort of confidant for kids who have pregnant girlfriends or fear they have.

Lunchtime is signalled, bodies pour into corridors and down staircases; pushing, jostling, thumping, cursing and laughing. Once the first pleasures of release are satisfied there's the search for something to do. It's cold and wet. There's nowhere to go. A year 8 boy makes his way to the first aid room, but it's full. There's already 8 kids in there. They've claimed it as their territory for the hour. The door is pushed closed to make the point and there's the weight of a solid year nine boy pressed close to it to hold it so. He makes a half-hearted attempt at forced entry, thumps and pleads a couple of times, fails, feels a surge of frustration, is antagonised by the triumphant laughter behind the door and it's too much. He pulls back his arm level with his shoulder, aims his fist and thrusts it through the glass panel of the door. Casualties at lunchtime?

One boy with a severely lacerated hand and wrist. A second with lacerations to the face and glass splinters in the mouth and gums. It has all happened within seconds. No time for intervention.

Eighteen year 9 boys tumble into the classroom; arguing, chortling and wise cracking: Scraping chairs and slamming bags on tables. There's a scuffle in the corner of the room but it breaks up and within minutes everyone is seated and the uproar at entry has subsided to a fluctuating titter with one or two impatient "C'mon, let's get on with it", yelled at no-one in particular. The door swings open and a latecomer saunters in with twinkling eyes and a 'so what?' smile. Out of the blue there is a leaping, pirouetting figure by the window. A chair is thrust to the floor and a table slams into the middle of the room to clear a passage for a face red with fury and hand grasping at watering eyes. In a second flash of action a figure dives past the latecomer, hand outreached for the door; but he doesn't quite make it. By the time the teacher reaches the writhing, cursing bodies on the floor they are inseparable and half the class is in on the act: Some with a genuine intent to salvage the situation, others in response to the demands of adrenalin and the promise of a fleeting moment of 'fun'.

It's all over in a matter of minutes. The conquered limps out of the room and down the corridor grasping his neck. The conqueror restores the table and chair to a workable position, mumbling apologies, "Sorry... but he got me in the eye".

A year 7 art class. Everyone's drawing today but there aren't any rubbers (rubbers disappear as fast as they appear). Three students simultaneously demand rubbers. Teacher is in the middle of helping a student; two other students begin wailing at each other; another playfully forces a lurid contribution to his mate's drawing. Teacher manages to make it to three places at once: fossicks around, finds a cut off end of rubber and offers it to the first student asking. Immediately there is a howling dispute as to who should use it first. Teacher reminds them to take it in turns. No go. "I asked first." "No I did." "I've been waiting forever." "You never help me."

There's a spate of thumping, pushing and grabbing for the rubber end. The teacher's voice doesn't register amidst the din. They're still too intent on the game of the rubber end. Meanwhile the plaintive wails in the background. "My drawing's stuffed. He's stuffed it." And, "You haven't finished helping me yet. You never help ME".

A year 7 boy; very quiet, cringes when he walks and cringes when he sits. He never wants to come to school and will often throw a tantrum in protest. His pastoral teacher picks him up every morning to ensure he gets there. She then spends varying amounts of time convincing him he will make it through the day.

He's in class and really doesn't want to be there. He'd told them that. They know very well he doesn't want to be there. He isn't going to do the work. He can't do the work. Someone said you can kill a person with a pencil, by pushing it through at the back of the ear. He sits there for the entire period, patiently drilling; drilling and pushing and turning: Pushing and turning his pencil into his neck at the back of his ear; for the whole period. It breaks through just before recess sounds. Blood gushes and spurts. Amidst the excitement, the shouts of alarm and scraping furniture coming to life; bobbing, interested, curious, frightened faces; all around him. He fingers the bloody area, draws his fingers to his mouth and sucks; tentative, meditative. "It tastes alright", he informs them.

Finally the scuffling, quipping and whistling drops to a regular hum. Everyone seems to be cheerfully busy. A boy casually wanders across the room and leans over a table in a confidential way.

"Give us a lend", he whispers, fingers taking up a felt pen.

"No".

"Why not?"

"I need it".

"Only for a minute", he insists snatching it away and darting back to his own table. The owner of the felt pen leaps up in protest. He's usually shy and unsure of himself. But now he grits his teeth and his face is flushed. "Give us it", he yells.

"I didn't say you could". Heads swivel towards him. He stares balefully around, pauses a moment in a frustrated outrage that is rapidly dissolving into embarrassment. He flings his book to the floor and walks from the room; silent and determined. "He just can't hack the pace, that's all", the others explain solemnly matter of fact.

A year ten boy sits hunched in silent tears. His mate eyes him with embarrassed concern and gives him a supportive nudge, one eye flickering watchfully towards the teacher. The rest of the group appear to be working, ignoring the pool of misery in the front row. At recess the teacher takes him aside. "What's the problem? Why the tears?" "It's nothing". Much coaxing and encouragement. He mumbles from somewhere inside his jumper. "It's always like this; they tease me. Sometimes I can't take it anymore". He's a quiet, sensitive boy. The teacher is unsure of what to do. "Do you think I should intervene?" "No. That will make it worse. I'll be alright. It's always been like this. They're just messing around. It just gets to me sometimes."

The literary value of the incidents described above may be lacking but the content and character is representative of substantial areas of difficulty in the spectrum of student response within the school.

There is rarely a day that does not include a fight threatening serious consequences for the participants. But these moments are not, generally speaking, a result of forethought or malice. Fighting appears to be a way of legitimising body contact in an all boys context, although one teacher has observed that, "Students seem to burst into 'fight mode' as soon as a teacher appears", and queries whether it is a means of getting attention or a means of, "Releasing aggressions safely, i.e. with the knowledge that the teacher will stop it before it goes too far". Nevertheless it is noted by most staff that there is little malicious feeling exhibited by the students. While their behaviour grows increasingly unruly even the most severe actions of rebuke bring forth very little display of resentment. After the severest dressing down a student will grin a cheerful

greeting in the corridor at the next meeting; as though nothing has happened; there has been no altercation between them. While some apologies are forced and laboured affairs, in most cases they are carried out as part of a protocol for peace, although often accompanied by a justification (for the offensive act) that either draws attention to the irrelevance of the work, the boring nature of school, the teachers inability to "catch the others" or the lack of individual attention to learning difficulties. But the readily made apologies also camouflage an urge to rebel which is inverted and expressed in aggressive acts against each other and often themselves. Intensified socio-economic pressures could well produce a volatility susceptible to the triggering of 'riot' situations if this element of student behaviour is not seriously addressed.

Many teachers agree in comment that, "as individuals or even small groups of four or five, they are bright, responsive people. Enthusiastic kids with a healthy curiosity and warm regard", (although as one teacher commented, "Their curiosity is limited by very narrow horizons. They do not see the rest of Australia, let alone anywhere outside it, as being relevant to them"). But put them in an average sized class and the mass mind takes over. "Even retiring and more serious students get caught up in it".

And while there are, in some cases, specific peer groups who can be identified as wielding a strong influence on a class, it cannot be assumed that these are always, or even most often, responsible for the degree of disruption. As often as not, the apparently 'well adjusted' individual will initiate an incident.

#### WHAT THE STUDENTS SAY

When given the opportunity to talk through these difficulties (as individuals or in small groups) the students' response is all too familiar but nevertheless expressed with seriousness. With varying degrees of competence, they articulate queries on the relevance of work and the availability of personal assistance (or the lack thereof).

"I don't like the work. It's crap".

"What do we need this shit for? I want to be a motor mechanic. I don't need to know what x multiplied by y is".

"I don't mean to do it. It just happens".

"They were doing it too. You just didn't catch them".

"I was finished my work and I was bored... Why should I do more than the others just because I finished first?"

"I don't know why I mess around. It's just good fun".

"Everyone else does. Why shouldn't I. You can't work here anyway".

"I just get sort of involved".

"I got sick of waiting for you to come and help".

"I want to learn something that will get me a job".

"I can't work here. I'd rather do it at home".

"I can't do the work".

"You're always helping the others; the bad kids".

"If they pick on me it's fair I get them back".

"I try not to but it's too hard. It's boring".

"It's too boring".

"I just can't hack it".

Discussions on behaviour and classwork from time to time elicit the general response that the students want to see things change. In one sense their general behaviour seems to reflect their own sense of impotence in events that take up 6 hours of each week day in their young lives. They want secure, interesting work situations and "no messing around". In discussion they seem for the most part unable (or unwilling?) to say what is meaningful to them in terms of learning experience. They seem able only to identify what is not. They appear full of contradictions; yearning for freedom without "comprehending the need to take responsibility for their own actions. They want the teacher to be a policeman and equate the teachers' refusal to act so with 'bad teaching'." (8) Much of the confusion is underlined by sexist attitudes. And further defying all attempts to easily categorize these people, their perceptions and attitudes, are the frequent flashes of warmth and openness that give a glimpse of their essential vulnerability and carefully protected desire for mutual acceptance.

However, carrying on from these general observations, collected from staff and student discussions, a survey was carried out on 60 students from years 8, 9, 10 and 11, asking what they would most like to see in the school. The following represents the most common responses (in tone and content) submitted.

- \* We need girls in this school.
- \* Sex education.
- \* I just want grass.
- \* School should help us get jobs.
- \* I'm sick of getting a different teacher everytime we have science. We never get to do anything.
- \* When are we getting a maths teacher?
- \* More interesting work. Excursions.
- \* I think we should have electives.
- \* Put back the motor mechanics course.
- \* A place to go on wet days.
- \* Better recreation facilities. All the table tennis bats have holes in them.
- \* Computer education for everyone.
- \* I want to learn more reading and spelling.
- \* No fights.
- \* Carpets in the classrooms and new furniture.
- \* Proper lockers that lock.
- \* No staff cars in the playground.

It is perhaps significant that during the periods used to carry out the survey, the level of student enthusiasm increased observably. Even students who have a lengthy history of non-participation in class work (particularly written work), contributed lists of comments. The lists were largely identical in content and differed only slightly in order of preference. The highest order of preference was given to co-education and sex education (although it is already apparent from the school's Ethnic Evenings that there is substantial parent opposition to these types of changes). Yet almost 75% of the 60 lists gave these first and second place. Outdoor environment came third for just on 50%. Conscious protest against staff shortages in Maths and Science was expressed by close to 24%.

## A VIEW OF THE STAFF

It is an interesting and perhaps indicative of C.T.S. staff's attitudes that blame for student behaviour is seldom identified with the students themselves. There is a prevalent sympathy with the students. This is readily explained by the close knowledge a number of staff have of their students' personal histories and the resulting staffroom discussions in the face of the challenge such histories pose to the current structures and functioning of the school. On the other hand the prospect of investigating alternatives is, for many, limited by a sense of apprehension and the lack of concrete assurance that alternatives will reward the considerable effort entailed. For these people there is still some currency in the postulate, "better the devil you know". And there are those whose expectations foster complacency on the basis that, "a few of the kids make it". Despite personal differences in philosophies and approach, there exists a moderate degree of cohesion and mutual support amongst the staff as a whole. For new staff the settling in period is demonstrably demoralising. The main difficulty appears in the adjustment to new levels of expectation in relation to student response and new definitions of 'acceptable' behaviour and language: Definitions that fit the reality they confront and permit problems to be perceived in more manageable proportions. As one teacher explained, "If you are going to be offended by students using the word 'fuck', and you intend to administer punishment for it, you have to realise that the logical extension of that position requires you to devote every minute of your time to acts of punishment. You will have to accept six periods a day of solid conflict". There are others who will counter such advice saying, "Most students will realise the extent of each teacher's tolerance. Those who won't accept 'fuck' hear it a lot less than those who take no action."

Other advice offered includes:

"It takes at least twelve months for them to trust you. They'll try you out continuously until they see you come back for the second year. If you come back you will have passed the test, as far as they are concerned, and they'll accept you".

Or, to take a variation on the same theme, "In fairness, term I is always the worst. It takes time for the students to settle down - in this school a long time - but by second term they've established a working relationship with the teacher."

On the question of students written work: "There are some kids who won't write. You won't get anything from them at all. Don't let it get you down, They can't. They know nothing but failure experiences in writing. They are terrified of it. If you can give them the confidence to write a paragraph by the end of the year you will have done well. That means gaining their trust."

"The kids here are basically good kids. They will give you a hard time but that's because that is all they know for themselves and we haven't got the resources to change that. The main thing is to keep on trying to give them what we can and keep looking for better ways of doing it."

There remains the occasional member of staff who will still advise, "We have some good kids here but you always get a few bad apples."

#### AN OVERVIEW

The commencement of the 1983 school year saw the staffing numbers cut back from 40 to 35 (despite the fact that the school population had risen by fifty): This was to comply with the Education Department's regulation 1:14 ratio, (what is generally referred to as the established figure), a figure that has long deceived the public into believing that for every fourteen students there is a full-time classroom teacher with no other duties.(9)

This affected the school in three ways. The first effect increased pastoral groups from 10 to 20 students each. Secondly, existing programs had to be cut back(10) and thirdly, year 7 and 8 class sizes were raised from their previous 16 students to 20. The overall effect of this on class control and its correlate, staff morale, was devastating. Inevitably this affected the

levels of ingenuity and the creative problem solving energies available. There was a brief spate of staff absences which are rare in the first six weeks of term I, and although there was no concrete evidence that this was due to low morale, haggard faces and a vocal reluctance to enter the classroom clearly reflected a general struggle to cope. In this period four teachers sought medical attention for stress, (one was finally placed on indefinite leave at the end of term, due to actual breakdown). But the more generally indicative symptoms were apparent in the tense atmosphere developing in the staffroom and the depressed undertones of staff conversations. Individual reactions differed in the form of expression only. There were those who quipped cynically about their classroom experiences, while others would stare fixedly at newspapers or memos. Yet others openly confessed their concern at the growth of aggressive urges within themselves. The latter appeared to suffer great confusion and frustration because these urges conflicted with their particularly strong sympathy for the students. The degree of experience in teaching did not appear to vary the degree of demoralisation experienced.

"Everytime I see my doctor he tells me I must get out of here because it's too damaging to my health." (This statement is from a teacher of ten years experience.)

"I had to leave the room because if I hadn't I would have hit him. I'm frightened that I had such a strong urge to hit a kid." (A statement from a teacher with thirteen years experience.)

"Last year we just held it together. This year I'm thinking of getting out. It's the first time I've seriously considered it but I can't go on this way."

"I love the kids here. I love Collingwood. But maybe I've been here too long. I'm thinking of transferring out at the end of the year."

"I've come to hate teaching. If I can get another job I'll take it."

"I don't see how we can go on this way. Some kid's going to get seriously hurt sooner or later. Some staff are already showing signs of cracking and we've only been back a month."

"You can't teach here. At best you can child mind; at worst you're a gaoler."

These comments can be regarded as an accurate reflection of the critical level of distress experienced by many (most) staff. Very few managed a degree of immunity and these were involved in less class contact because of other duties and responsibilities. In general morale flagged and a general consensus formed around the view that:

"We can't blame the kids but we have to survive."

Discipline became a preoccupation for many and what positive morale remained did so from determined, conscious efforts to nurture it.

A small number of staff expressed regret that corporal punishment could not be applied. According to some staff responses to the initial draft of this report, this was probably due to these staff's reliance on the strap for survival. Others who had supported its abolition began to doubt the wisdom of this given there appeared little other means of class control in the circumstances they now faced. Staff response to this suggested that, "no effective discipline was the initial problem. Now there is effective discipline, morale is returning". However, given that a number of students had been suspended around the time that staff forwarded responses to the initial draft, it seems likely that this may constitute the idea of 'effective discipline' some staff had in mind. There remained however, a substantial majority of the staff who saw staffing and space as the crux of the problem. While there appeared to be no dissension from the view that more staff would alleviate the pressure, the immediate question remained: How could the school continue to function in the meantime? The Education Department's refusal to recognise needs based staffing had been consistently demonstrated despite the election promises.(11) Any campaign to increase staffing

levels would be lengthy and (at this stage) relied on the progress made by the state body of the teachers union. Success could be a year or years away. In any event achieving success would entail the pressure of industrial action and this prospect was unwelcome. Apart from the memory of the 'teacher bashing' in the late seventies there was the ever-present financial commitments of the individual unionist. In a period of rapid inflation this amounted to substantial discouragement to undertake strike action.

Further complicating all attempts at solution was the space problem. Even if the necessary staff were obtained, smaller class sizes necessitated more spaces to work in. The school was already borrowing space from its T.A.F.E. neighbour.

A suggestion was floated that the intake of the school be cut in 1984, thus effecting a more workable student:space ratio. Despite agreement that this would help meet student needs, it was dismissed because the Education Department's Regional Rationalisation program favoured the retention of larger schools (700 plus) and thus threatened closure of C.T.S. with its smaller population of 408 students. The benefits of a smaller, more intimate learning environment seemed to be generally well recognised by staff. But the idea of undertaking a struggle that might ultimately focus on keeping the school open was considered more unpalatable (and less likely to succeed), than a campaign for additional staff.

A further suggestion examined the possibility of purchasing the hotel next to the school. This proposal was considered by a small group of teachers who believed a mini-school structure would assist. The hotel comprised the necessary space and lent itself to suitable modification, much of which might involve students in relevant and interesting learning experience. It had the added advantage of a small garden space at the rear. This proposal also failed to gain enthusiastic support. Again because it seemed to pose an unreachable goal in the context of government policy of cut backs in expenditure; (although, as one staff member pointed out, "It would be difficult to get enthusiastic support for anything unless it is seriously canvassed. All I

recall of this was gossip in the staffroom. No serious proposal was floated or plans formulated to the staff"). Nevertheless, such comment ignores the fact that the initiators of the idea (who were the more politically active members of staff), had insufficient confidence in their capacity to develop support for its development. Yet a decade ago, such an idea would have been pursued enthusiastically and explored thoroughly. It is indicative of the prevailing sense of impotence and the acceptance of disadvantage that they were so readily discouraged at this time.

The school's administration had not been unaware of, or unconcerned about, staff morale. The administration had (and continues to have), a stated and fairly apparent commitment to staff, student and parent participation in decision making. For some staff this policy added to demoralisation. Up until 1981 the school had operated on an authoritarian model. Consequently the staff from that period were accustomed to following administrative decisions rather than participating in their making. As one staff member explained, "There were a lot of people who tried to change things but became demoralised because of the attitude of the administration; conservative". There were also those who, "thought they were safe because of friendship links with the (former) principal; (these) feel particularly threatened (under the new administration)". While there was some welcoming of the opportunity to participate in the school's overall decisions the full ramifications of the process (i.e. shared decisions equates with shared initiative and responsibility), was not fully realised by some staff. Nor was it sufficiently developed to satisfy the needs and understanding of others. It was not until 1983, with the impact of further staff shortages, that the change in decision-making processes attracted more serious (though still ambivalent) attention.

The demoralising influences began to find expression in criticism levelled at administration by a significant minority of the staff. The administration was not providing strong leadership. Strong leadership in this context appeared to equate with the initiation and implementation of solutions to staffing and student discipline problems. In previous years, a principal with influential connections in the Education Department could gain

extra staff fairly readily. With the strict implementation of staff ceilings personal influence became less productive. Unlike many schools who had gained and maintained their learning conditions by collective action, Collingwood was left the legacy of a suddenly vanished paternalism. There was little understanding of the role that collective staff initiative might play in finding solutions.

In the light of the foregoing, the desire for 'strong leadership' is understandable. Democratic decision-making is not a matter of decree and requires adjustment in the perception (and reality) of power distribution within a collective purpose. While there is some evidence to suggest that communications were inadequate and that this compounded the confusion and frustration feeding criticism, there is also evidence that the administration made serious attempts to deal with the complex dimensions of demoralisation. The administration, along with a number of staff, were aware that the school's problems were rapidly developing a closed cycle character.

#### COMMUNICATIONS AND STRATEGIES (A BRIEF OUTLINE)

Whether a strategy evolved spontaneously out of necessity or was subtly and deliberately employed (equally from necessity), by the administration is uncertain. Probably it was a combination of these. On March 7th the weekly meetings of the Education Council (which comprises the whole staff) took on a new character.

A proposal was put, and agreed, that full Education Council meetings should be held during one week out of every four. The remaining three weeks were to be hitherto set aside for the activity of working groups assigned to specific tasks. Staff were invited to suggest priority concerns requiring the ongoing attention of a working group. A large sheet of paper was divided into columns, headed with suggestions and hung on the staff noticeboard, the expectation being that each staff member would place their name in the columns denoting the working group of their choice for participation. Although there was some criticism of this approach, "It presupposed that staff found any of

these (denoted) areas relevant and believed working parties could and would achieve anything", such criticism remained unexpressed within the forum of the meeting despite encouragement from the chair for opinion. It is perhaps not surprising that the critics were, in the main, those most unsettled by the new administrative approach. The working groups were based on the following priorities (most of which were merely the reaffirmed results of the previous year's considerations): Health and Human Relations, Assessment, Computer Studies, Primary/Secondary Transition, Parent/Community Participation.

Each working group was invited to utilize its first meeting to define its short-term and long-term aims and objectives, and to report back its findings to the next full staff meeting.

On the one hand the working groups covered areas widely recognised as important to the future educational viability of the school. The working groups provided a means of co-ordinating the implementation of useful changes to the curriculum and the structure of the school as a whole. Still there remained a residue of cynicism. Was it really just an exercise in 'rubber stamping' decisions made elsewhere? Would decisions arrived at be implemented in real terms? And there was the need to cope with the present. Implementing new forms and structures in the school meant that more time would be required in order to manage the additional responsibility.

"We're not coping now. How can we manage the extra load that is entailed in making the working groups really function?"

"We have to solve the problems we have now before we take on anything more."

Do overworked classroom teachers need to spend time doing the administration's work?"

Statements in favour of the working groups took up the roles of co-education, parent participation and curriculum.

"Co-education and 'health and human relations' courses are both factors which will introduce a healthier and more human environment. The introduction of both these can be expected to modify student behaviour in a positive way."

"Parent participation brings the home and school closer together and this can be expected to play a role in bringing about the necessary changes in the school. Student relationships within the school must be affected by the sort of exchanges that closer parent/teacher relations would make possible."

"We have to face the need for change to the curriculum. Technology is taking a dominant position in all respects and we have to face this technological reality and how that affects the future of the kids we teach. It's important for us to move quickly towards relevant forms of computer education. Not for jobs necessarily, but for the kids to have some familiarity with the implications and the language."

"The school has to be made more relevant to kids. I don't know what that means but I do know that a lot of what we are doing isn't relevant. That might mean more staff. Whatever it means, someone is going to have to sit down and work out the possibilities and how to implement them. Some sort of working groups will be necessary to do that."

(These statements have been paraphrased in part.)

Whether the arguments were convincing, or the will to resist them absent, is difficult to judge. The decision supported the working groups. The arguments in favour of the decision were made by a small number of staff only. Those who had earlier expressed reservations remained silent in the latter part of the meeting. Although there was no overt pressure exerted by administration, their short opening statements on the proposal

clearly favoured its acceptance by the meeting. From this it might be supposed that the decision represented a lack of coherent opposition rather than a position of commitment.

The immediate value of this meeting was not the working groups however. For the first time that term, staff openly expressed their anxieties and doubts as a staff body rather than as isolated individuals or small groups. This generated a degree of released tension (a shared burden), which translated itself into an expressed willingness to persevere as a collective (temporarily at least).

On March 9th, a brief 'special' staff meeting was held at morning recess to request staff support for using the forthcoming in-service day as an opportunity to examine the introduction of a Health and Human Relations course into the curriculum. Agreement was given and the date set for March 25th. Again the question of priorities was raised in the discussion; the urgent need to establish a means to cope with 'student discipline' NOW. It was clear that the intention to persevere was conditional. Anxieties had to be addressed by concrete action.

It seemed generally agreed that for classroom control to be maintained it was essential to be able to remove students central to incidents of disruption immediately. Firstly, to enable the teacher to restore order to the situation. Secondly, to isolate the student concerned from the inevitable peer group encouragement to further exacerbation of disruption, and to assist the student to recover himself sufficiently to rejoin the class in a calmer frame of mind. The difficulty raised related to the need for supervision outside of the classroom on these occasions. Left in the corridors, the students wandered to adjacent classrooms, tapped on windows, climbed out of windows and down drainpipes from second storey windows. These circumstances increased disruption rather than effectively alleviating it. With the number of students involved at any one time (from various class settings), it was impossible for the administration to personally assist the situation. Similarly, department heads could not be spared from their co-ordinating duties and 'off duty' teachers were unavailable since existing 'preparation' time was already

inadequate for meeting the demands of class contact. Yet it was clearly apparent that a constantly staffed space was required for attending to students temporarily withdrawn from the classroom. The decision to shuffle resources to provide this facility was the first to satisfy the heavy demand for immediate concrete action on 'discipline'.

The duties of two senior teachers were reshuffled to accommodate this arrangement. Staff left the meeting with some confidence that the new arrangements would improve classroom manageability; even if only marginally. Whilst not entirely satisfactory it did open options. Staff members were no longer locked into isolation and volatile situations with only their own limited resources to rely upon; there was now an identifiable support structure outside of the classroom.

On March 14th the work groups met. The parent/community group drew up a proposal for a reading scheme. It was reasoned that this scheme would answer a number of immediate needs. It would involve parents and community in learning situations that would contribute to personalising the reading experience for a small number of students. It would assist in building students self-esteem and confidence in their own communication skills. An important by-product would be the drawing together of a core group of parents and general community members within the context of the school in its day to day operations. While the project would be small, if successful it could boost staff morale by functioning to launch more extensive parent/community participation in the school generally, and in the curriculum specifically. The program would also provide the adult participants with the necessary knowledge and skills for full participation in school decision-making.

Again, the acceptance of this program by staff as a whole was more a matter of absent opposition than positive commitment. The acceptance amounted to agreement to let a small group of interested staff pilot the scheme.

On March 25th, the in-service day brought staff together for 6 hours to consider the amalgum of C.T.S. problems. As a result, the subject of Health and Human Relations managed to gain greater recognition in its relevance to all classroom situations.

Discussion continually isolated the schools pastoral program as a centre of concern. These still operated as chaotic sessions. The day was productive in providing a new sense of direction in the collectivity of the staff. It had permitted sufficient detachment for staff to refresh their perspectives on curriculum and organisation. A further important outcome was the re-organisation of pastoral groups into more manageable sizes (ten students each).

Small and insignificant these changes may seem. However, they were substantial enough for the staff to accommodate the overall problems; until the last week of term I. In the meantime morale was boosted at regular intervals by progress reports on the parent involvement in the Supplementary Grants Committee, the reading program, the newly reached agreement between the Education Department and the union regarding the covering subject shortfalls in staff, and the monitoring of pastoral groups. More visible was the arrival of a teaching aid for audio-visual work, a new school bus and the replacement of the old worn out photocopier. These movements were all small in the context of the overall situation, but important as evidence that a 'holding' position had been reached. The staffing situation had been stabilised on the lowest common denominator. In this case stabilisation was seen as progress.

The last two weeks of the term brought a resurgence of the staffing issue and raised it to new levels of urgency. It began with the unions' confirmation that the Education Department's new agreement to fill subject shortfalls could not be honored in the areas of Maths and Science. As Simon Marginson's report(9) had predicted, the cutback of teacher training facilities in the late seventies was now making it impossible to supply sufficient numbers of qualified teachers. Maths and Science was one of the most heavily affected areas.

Staff had to consider alternatives to cover those Maths/Science classes not catered for in staffing allotment. First term had been covered by emergency teachers in the expectation that full-time teachers would be forthcoming. Some year levels had received no consistent grounding in those subjects for the entire term. For most part the classes had been exercises in class control for the teacher and increasingly vocalised frustration for the students. Only two viable alternatives offered themselves at this juncture. Apply for a domestic science teacher and introduce an emphasis on foods and nutrition for the younger students in science, or introduce an environmental science component which could be taken by a humanities teacher and apply for extra humanities staff to cover it. While both components were viewed as valuable contributors to curriculum, it was considered that to implement them as stop-gap measures would be deleterious to content of all areas concerned. Nevertheless, the approach allowed for available science teachers to concentrate on senior classes and for junior maths to be covered by a trade teacher. Nobody was happy with the proposal. But choices were limited.

It is interesting, although arguable in merit, that the perspectives bearing on the solution maintained learning in discrete units and subject boundaries. Also of interest and equally dubious is the proposal's assumption that senior students require more concentrated and specialist attention than junior students.

However, piece-meal though the solution was, it did (perhaps) incidentally provide an avenue towards more open curriculum. Despite verbal recognition of the influence of economic disadvantage on the relevance of traditional educational forms, the staff as a whole appeared unable to translate that intellectual knowledge into direct strategies for remedy.

No sooner had this proposal established a settlement of the maths/science staffing problem when a further problem arose. Two teachers were leaving the school and communication with the Education Department suggested that they would not be replaced. This new threat to status quo breached previous reservations towards utilising the union for direct resolution. On the second last day of term an urgent meeting of the union branch was

called. It was clearly the most well attended meeting of the year. The meeting resolved to send a deputation to speak with the local member of parliament that afternoon. The following day, close to two-thirds of the staff attended a second meeting which resolved to enter grievance procedures(10) immediately and to embark on a full campaign in support of the claim. The campaign outline included a public meeting, liaison with local schools and media publicity. The tenor of term II was already established. The prospect of an industrial campaign, though leaving some staff apprehensive of industrial action, generated a sense of collective positive purpose for the first time in 1983, and according to longer term observers, the first time in five years.

### THE CURRICULUM

Collingwood's curriculum had always functioned on a traditional format of discrete subject areas and a chalk and talk methodology. At the time of this report, the subject areas themselves also conformed to traditional selection of core academic areas (English, Social Studies, Maths, Science) with the also traditional (in technical schools) trade supplements of Woodwork, Sheetmetal and Graphics. As commonly practised, space was time-tabled for art where available, the senior students having highest options.

The influx of innovation in the seventies seemingly did little more than modify Collingwood's curriculum by way of appendages to it. The residual evidence of what may once have been a substantial foundation for change now existed in three areas. One was the Migrant English program which operated on the basis of classroom withdrawal of students. A second area was the school camp (located at Buxton): "This provides for many students their only chance to get away from a high rise, inner suburban environment".(11) The third area was the school's "...extensive audio-visual facilities which can only be used effectively if adequate teacher time is available". In comparison with many schools these facilities were not extensive at all. The claim that they were at Collingwood may be considered as either a

reflection of the school's very modest expectations or the insular nature of its awareness of technology's potential to contribute to educational method.

Although the collective staff awareness favoured the traditional curriculum mould, and there was a perceptible apprehension of curriculum change, there was a significant minority of teachers who believed a more open ended curriculum crucial to providing relevant educational experience for the students. Indeed, the priorities apparent in the 1983 expenditure of equipment funds; the school bus, the choice of a teaching aide for the audio-visual department and even perhaps the decision to accept replacement of standard junior science with environmental science seemed to hint of preliminary moves towards opening the curriculum.

The new, twenty seater school bus replaced a worn-out ten seater mainly used to transport students on camp. This enabled a more effective use of staff (since previously a teacher could only take half a class at a time) and thus made it possible for more extensive and flexible use of camp excursions. The bus also provided limited access to mobile classes. The problem of having to leave half a class group at school (as with the old bus) discouraged teachers from exploring the full potential of excursion based learning since much of this was not readily accessible through public transport.

Although these difficulties do not fully explain the emphasis on the 'chalk and talk' method in the school, nor the discrete subject unit structure of the curriculum, they provide a perspective for explaining why attempts to develop alternative learning models have not endured.

The addition of a teaching aide in the audio-visual department provided a means by which the available audio-visual technology could be extended beyond its previous confinement as a discrete subject, and brought into general utilisation across subject areas. This choice offered both the incentive and the means to develop more flexible learning models by providing concrete support expertise. The acceptance of an environmental studies

component offered a similar base of support for integrating and enriching both the science and the humanities.

However, none of these promising potentials could be assumed to be self realising. The development of that potential depended upon the initiative of individual staff in developing workable models for change and the capacity of staff as a whole to accommodate a wider version of educational possibilities at Collingwood.

There was some evidence from the processes observable in term I, 1983 that a context more conducive to such change was tentatively posing its presence.

Nevertheless none of this diminished the need for more staff; it was apparent in the choices made that a more relevant curriculum needed specialist support staff. However, it did mean that 'special needs' staff, if and when granted could be employed more effectively and therefore more economically (re quality:quantity ratios).

#### PARENT AND COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION

There was virtually no parent or community participation (as distinct from parent involvement) at Collingwood.

The involvement developed in 1983 had occurred through the work experience program, the migrant English activities, the traditional parent/teacher nights and the Supplementary Grants Committee.

The Work Experience Program: This functioned with considerable success from the point of view of obtaining ongoing co-operation from local commercial and industrial elements in the community. It was claimed that these interests gave Collingwood Tech.'s program priority consideration over similar programs in other local secondary schools. It was seemingly inevitable that the success of C.T.S.'s program should impinge on the success of similar programs in neighbouring schools, as must remain the case

while schools are forced by circumstance to compete with each other for limited resources. However, the success to some degree exemplified the strength of commitment of the career's teacher at C.T.S.

Clearly, in the context of the work experience program the notion of community participation had a very narrow application. But this should not necessarily be seen as a reflection of perspectives or intentions. Rather, it was the inevitable outcome of slender personnel resources since the career's teacher was also a senior trades' teacher and camp co-ordinator. Despite these extensive and diverse responsibilities he ensured that the majority of students from years 9 to 11, received at least one week of work experience each year, and in this light his achievement was quite remarkable.

The "Migrant English" Program: This was also a successful program; both in its direct assistance to the students with 'second language' difficulties and in developing security and thrust between ethnic parents and the school. Although the value of its contribution to both student communication and welfare was well evidenced, the limited staffing and facilities were unable to effect more than superficial assistance, i.e. create circumstances more tolerable for a limited number of students. It was, in the main, only the most recently arrived immigrants who had benefit of the specialist skills in this area. While most students with non-anglo saxon backgrounds had gained fluency in the spoken language, the written language remained largely inaccessible to a significant minority and a severe handicap to the majority. Security and trust was fostered through two avenues:

1. Assistance and personal follow-up of welfare problems (which inevitably impinged on the students' capacity to cope with the school environment).
2. Ethnic evenings. These functioned as evening 'get-togethers' of a specific cultural group. Parents contributed to supper arrangements and the school supplied beverages. These evenings attracted between thirty and forty parents each time. Discussion was for most part informal with a brief time put aside for information exchange.

In 1981 the school had the additional assistance of a community languages co-ordinator who established, what appears to have been, a successful avenue for the participation of ethnic parents in the school's activities. A pilot languages program operated to involve ethnic parents in the teaching of their first language. The funding cuts at the end of 1981 forced this program to close for lack of co-ordination whilst still in early establishment stages. However, the residue of its influence in developing mutual tolerance and acceptance between various cultural groupings in the school remained. Student interest in learning a second language also remained, as a number of requests for the reintroduction of the program testified.

Parent/Teacher Nights: In general these were unsuccessful as either a means of attracting parents to the school in great number, or creating the confidence to participate in its affairs. The pattern at C.T.S. further validated the observations and research of Jenny Beecham and Ruth Hoadley,(13) and the Parents Federation position on the issue of parent participation.(14) The evenings merely provided time for formal contact and were rarely enabled to transcend the more superficial aspects of assessment and behaviour. Consequently many parents avoided attending in anticipation of a troublesome report and most of those who did come were inhibited by memories of their own school days, the professional jargon of teachers and a general sense of inferiority which both the time available and the structure of the situation were inadequate to overcome. Similarly, many teachers lacked the confidence to deformalise the relationship between themselves and the parent, and found themselves bound into the security of a 'specialist adviser' role.

Some teachers made home visits where individual students' difficulties necessitated it. However, such visits were rare and were usually a last resort. The results of enquiries amongst students suggested that there was little reluctance on the students' part, to have home visits. The possibility elicited pleased surprise from a number of students. Conversely, some parents appeared to have experienced a sense of threat on such occasions (this may be readily explained by the rarity of visits and the pattern of circumstances usually underlying them).

While home visits may have been mutually productive if developed on a basis of more positive purpose, lack of time limited this avenue of personalised communication to a context of less pleasant circumstances.

Clearly this left the most positive potential of this avenue untapped. While few teachers saw this avenue as the most viable for ongoing parent/teacher communication, many agreed that for each year seven student, a home visit in the first year would be beneficial and productive.

#### THE SUPPLEMENTARY GRANTS COMMITTEE

In previous years this functioned with only token parent involvement. Some three or four parents attended meetings and only one of these exhibited the confidence to initiate contributions to discussions.

The 1983 school year disclosed a change in observable levels of parent interest. The first meeting called for the year attracted more than forty parents and most ethnic groupings were represented. Twelve of these parents offered their services to the committee and twenty attended the second meeting. In a period of severe demoralisation amongst staff, this concrete evidence of parent commitment made its contribution felt and assisted in developing a more positive perspective from which to approach the day to day school problems.

It is perhaps significant that the large majority of those in attendance were parents of year seven students. Many staff attributed this success to the Primary/Secondary Transition Committee's efforts of the previous year and the known growth of parents' involvement in some of the primary 'feeder' schools.

While there remained a mild skepticism amongst some staff towards the prospect of maintaining this level of interest amongst parents ("See how many turn up at the next meeting"), there were also conscious efforts being made to nurture this involvement and extend it into participation.

## DECISION-MAKING IN THE SCHOOL

This was in the process of transition from an authoritarian towards a participatory mode. Consequently it was neither one nor the other and featured elements of both. 1983 was the second year of operating under a new school administration and the process of transition was perhaps in its most complex and delicate phase. It was a period of seemingly unavoidable contradictions which challenged both the authenticity of intentions and the pragmatic validity of the process itself. The administration's approach seemed to be one of gentle persuasion. It is indicative of the dilemma faced by administration that, while some staff interpreted this approach as evidence of weakness, lack of initiative and lack of 'leadership' qualities, other staff criticised the insufficient consultation.

In some respects both these perspectives were correct. Those from an authoritarian background felt most comfortable with hierarchical decision-making whereas those committed to participatory decision-making were extremely sensitive to deficiencies in communication processes. Were it a situation where all staff members (or the vast majority) held the conviction that participatory decision-making was both desirable and functional, and if all threat to personal security and confidence had been transcended, then its immediate implementation would have been a simple matter of collective decree. But such was not the case for a staff of diverse teaching histories. For most, ideas and attitudes had been formed within an authoritarian mode of education and little more than twelve months experience of an alternative mode of administration was insufficient to affect confidence and convictions predisposing to change.

Nevertheless there was a small number of staff who had had direct experience in collective decision-making; from other schools or community organisations. These had the necessary convictions, commitment and skills acquired through experience, to foster its development at C.T.S..

The main collective initiating force in the school appeared to be the Education Committee. This was attended by the administration and a number of senior teachers. However, it was an open committee and gave verbal encouragement for all staff to attend; "It is hoped that ALL staff will attend at least one meeting a term". The 'hope' expressed more a spirit of cohesion than a limited invitation. It represented an attempt to encourage staff to explore the potential of the committee and their own potential to contribute to decision-making. Unfortunately, little apparent follow-up occurred nor was a structure developed conducive to expanding participation in this area. A conducive structure was necessary. Few staff participated in this area. Consequently, proposals put to staff tended to reinforce the ambiguity of the decision-making mode in operation. This appeared to be recognised by the committee and it may have been that the creation of the working groups was designed to function as a preliminary structure for the evolution of broader participation. Those recommendations arising from these groups were seen to be finally decided upon by the staff as a whole rather than the administration (though it must also be noted that little of a controversial nature arose to test the situation).

Ambiguity also arose in problem solving situations at the 'faculty' level. Here the main focus of consultation seemed to remain with exchanges between the administration and departmental heads. Whilst this may have been the result of residual protocol from the more authoritarian period, it posed the clear danger of reinforcing skepticism and weakening the development of participatory processes. Availability of time further limited the administration's capacity to undertake more appropriate (effective) means of consultation. Nevertheless, the use of consultation in place of participation remains questionable. The answer (or part thereof), possibly resided in the fact that in the transition to full participatory decision-making, the role of administration remained ambiguous in that the administrators remained personally accountable for the day to day functioning of the school. The principal in particular had a dual accountability: that of the traditional role 'for the time being', and also the responsibility for affecting structures designed to make the traditional role obsolete. This transitional phase clearly

required a full-time co-ordinator (liaison person) to take prime responsibility for the redistribution of decision-making powers in the school. This need was even more acute when considering student participation. The school's S.R.C. was inaugurated in the first half of Term I, 1983 and was struggling to gain credibility amongst the student body. This was not surprising given that it was not initiated by student demand and there were few effective support structures available.

The staff body had an important role to play in the initial establishment activities of the S.R.C. But conscious definition of that role largely relied on the state of participatory decision-making existing within the staff as a body.

#### THE UNION AT C.T.S.

Approximately 90% of the staff were members of the Technical Teachers Union of Victoria (T.T.U.V.). The exceptions existed in one member of the Victorian Association of Teachers (V.A.T.) and three teachers expressing disinterest in union membership.

The Collingwood T.T.U.V. branch could not (by any means) be considered a militant or generally active branch. In recent years the branch met at irregular intervals to pass on information or consider proposals forwarded from the central union office. Meetings were usually small, fluctuating between six and fifteen members; the latter being more usual if a regional or statewide stoppage was under consideration. Where a stopwork was called, between fifteen and twenty members reliably responded in support action.

During the early 70's the branch was considered amongst the more active and stronger union branches in the state. However, similar to many branches in the mid and late seventies, it became demoralised and apathetic in the face of limited tenure employment policies and the effective media campaigns against unions (and seemingly teachers in general).(15) For many, the attendance of meetings appeared to be motivated by a sense of obligation and polite interest and thus it is not surprising that the

level of participation in discussion was low. For others the meetings remained an important institution and union business a matter worthy of serious, though routine, consideration. Five events occurred to progressively alter this pattern in Term I, 1983:

1. The threat of industrial action arising from staffing shortages at Brunswick and Broadmeadows Techs. in particular.
2. The introduction of a 'no strike' clause in a union agreement on the filling of subject shortfalls in technical schools throughout the state.
3. Suggestion that government influence was being effectively brought to bear towards centralising the union.
4. The threat of breakdown in negotiations over the union's log of claims.
5. The prospect of no replacements for two members of staff leaving C.T.S. at the end of term I.

The first of these issues injected a degree of vitality into staffroom discussions where union business had previously warranted little attention or comment. There was a ready though subdued identification with Brunswick Tech.'s situation, since it was an inner suburban school with students of a similar socio-economic background to those of Collingwood. Speculation on industrial action grew with the calling of a branch officers' meeting in early March. Speculation developed into tentative expectation, but the prevailing atmosphere remained one of detachment ("We're not actually involved; yet"). However, there was sufficient impetus to ensure that the branch was well represented at the central meeting.

The central meeting of the branch officers was a volatile one. The union's negotiators had accepted the inclusion of a carelessly worded 'no strike' clause in a minor agreement. There had been neither membership consultation nor ratification. Those branches most severely affected by staffing cuts were the most

outspoken in their criticisms, as the agreement prevented the exertion of any industrial pressure on the problems their schools confronted. The suggestion of a 'sell-out' was widespread amongst metropolitan branches.

The effect of these events on the C.T.S. branch was to deepen the level of concern and present a clearer focus on the branch's relationship to the union as a whole. Branch discussion on the report of the Branch Officers Meeting was noticeably animated and generated wider participation than usual. The appearance, in the union Bulletin, of an article suggesting centralisation of the union decision-making structures also figured prominently in discussion. While the branch did not have the necessary cohesion in perspectives and drive to undertake industrial action on its own behalf (despite the critical staff and curriculum problems in the school), discussion evidenced a foresight that such action may at some stage become necessary. This enabled a ready recognition of the implications of both the 'no strike' clause and any proposal to negate branch based power and autonomy. These discussions implicitly posed the branch's (C.T.S.) own industrial potential in relation to the school's staffing problems. In a period of low morale, the reminder of their own potential as a branch opened options for cautious, tentative consideration. This was reflected not so much in the branch meeting discussion as in subsequent casual discussion amongst staff. Talk developed around a proposal to formulate a new staff submission couched in terms of 'needs based' staffing for the school. Meanwhile, the union's log of claims campaign continued and towards the end of term industrial action seemed inevitable. Although no votes had been taken at the branch level it seemed likely from discussion that a call to stop work would effectively close the C.T.S.

It is important that the observations recorded so far in this section should be read in conjunction with the developments occurring in the broader spectrum of the school's life. Each influenced the other and each contributed to the fluctuations and changes in levels of staff morale over the term. Most members with an active interest in branch affairs saw union conditions as being integrally bound to effective teaching/learning conditions.

Even so, it should be understood that a branch with a history long lacking autonomous activity resented branch initiated action, as it appeared a forced option (forced by circumstances that could have been avoided by more concerned policies at the government levels).

It is significant that the increased interest in union affairs at C.T.S. was largely projected from those staff most involved in fostering participatory decision-making. Those working towards parent participation, the establishment of the S.R.C. and the development of relevant curriculum. The peak of this interest and its translation into a preparedness for action expressed itself in the last week of term I. The news that two staff members leaving the school might not be replaced, prompted the branch to undertake a 'full industrial campaign' in support of replacement staff. There were still those who were reluctant to engage in such a campaign. Indeed no-one expressed any enthusiasm for it. But most members saw it as a logical consequence of necessity and were prepared to commit themselves within those terms.

Whether or not the campaign eventuated is unimportant to the considerations here; (if the staff were replaced the decision became obsolete). What is significant is the fact that the commitment was made and the initial requirements implemented (notification was sent to the Minister for Education, local M.P.'S and the press). The importance lies in the new (if fragile) level of cohesion amongst a large number of staff and their preparedness to undertake collective action to assert the educational needs of the school; and to insist they be met. While there remained some ambivalence in perceived motives (was the concern primarily teaching conditions or learning conditions?) it seemed that the students needs, implicitly and explicitly central to any consideration of 'needs based' staffing, must increasingly predominate in directing the branch's efforts.

POST SCRIPT OBSERVATIONS

Term II at C.T.S. brought a continuance of effort towards developing student, community and teacher participation in decision making in the school. However, two areas of concern made themselves evident. Whereas, towards the end of second term, union branch dialogue suggested the growth of preparedness to take action around the question of students needs, by the end of second term much of this growth had been dissipated. Discussion at Education Council meetings and privately (around proposed changes to curriculum), increasingly defined options in terms of existing staffing and financial resources in the school. By the last week of term II disbelief in the school's ability to acquire the additional resources for a needs based curriculum was openly expressed.

"Well let's face it, we're not going to get the staff we need are we?"

This change of heart is perhaps not surprising in the light of the controversial agreement reached between the T.T.U.V. and the Education Department early in second term. The impact of this agreement can be effectively measured by the bitter division it created in the union's membership, those from the inner suburban, western and northern region schools being most vocal in their outrage against what they saw as a 'sellout' of the under-privileged schools in the state.(16)

The realisation that the agreement effectively curtailed any support from the central union body for action taken by individual branches or regions around questions of staffing, left Collingwood members feeling cynical and impotent. Consequently, the preparedness to pursue curriculum and learning conditions based on the needs of students dissolved into an acceptance of an 'electives' program that, in content and overall structure, varied little from the traditional structure and content it was initially intended to replace. The drop in the morale of the

more active and educationally involved members of staff served to reinforce the fears of those staff more tentative in their convictions on needs based education. This equated with a strong shift towards conservatism in the staff's interpersonal politics and professional expectations.

It was in the light of these developments that low-profile strategies were explored.

Given the apparent demise of the T.T.U.V., the branch set about seeking its own support from other trade unions and the wider community. Indeed, as noted earlier, the first half of this chapter comprises the documentation utilised to that end. A campaign developed (predominantly built on lobbying), with the verbal support, but little encouragement, from the T.T.U.V.

This primarily depended upon the successful lobbying efforts of sympathetic trade unions, community and welfare groups, church organisations, local and state government representatives; and last but not least, a supportive principal. By virtue of this combination, sufficient collective pressure was mobilised to embarass the Education Department into 'relieving' the Collingwood situation.

However, the significance of this 'relief' in respect to the concerns of this study, lies not in its provision, but rather, in its tokenism. Since without the necessary space, the additional staff provided could not be effectively deployed. This observation in no way detracts from Collingwood's achievement. For the school had, from its own sources of initiative, visibly gained teaching resources. Nevertheless, in the context of the urgent need for fundamental change in the school's educational circumstances, they remained largely ineffectual and token in real terms.

In the light of the case studies as a whole (and Footscray in particular), this fact is surely cause to reflect upon the constitution of effective industrial/community organisation. But for such reflection to be fruitful, the broader industrial context must be considered; i.e. those industrial developments encapsulating all three experiences. For if we are to properly avoid the 'traps' laid by facile comparison, we must necessarily acknowledge the contextual peculiarities of each experience as they pertain to their respective historical moment. In this respect it is useful to consider, if but briefly, the historical/industrial development of the T.T.U.V. itself.

NOTES AND REFERENCES FOR CHAPTER SIX

- (1) The Sun newspaper: It's Hard Going In Magpie Territory, December 8th, 1982, p.11.

This article quotes the statistics from the Ministry of Employment and Training.

- (2) IBID.

- (3) IBID.

- (4) Michael PUSSEY: The Legitimation Of State Education Systems: A discussion paper for Weekend Seminar, Understanding the Current Crisis in Education, Macquarie University, September 22nd-23rd, 1979, p.4.

"...As the privileges of the upper and middle classes become more visible to the working class, so also is the education system threatened by a broader public recognition of its role as an agent in the reproduction of social inequality. In this way real or promised changes in the social structure threaten educational administrations with unmanageable political conflicts."

- (5) Michael GALLAGHER: The Restructuring Of The Australian Education System And The New International Division Of Labour, Labour Resource Centre, June 1979, pp.34, 37 respectively.

"...The implication for education is that as a result of increased international labour mobility and the deskilling of labour through the introduction of computer related technology the need for the training of skilled workers will be restricted to a narrow range of workers. The majority of the workforce will require minimal skill training... educational credentials will function to justify stratification and to cultivate appropriate employee attitudes."

- (6) Collingwood annual income figures taken from 1981 census figures (as quoted in The Herald newspaper, May 3rd., 1983). Estimates directly relating to C.T.S. students' families taken from school records of Maintenance Grants for 1983. Information available to the school in December 1983 indicates a rise in the number of students eligible for Maintenance Grants in 1984. Estimates by the school administration place 50% of students in this category for the new school year.
- (7) These figures were provided by the Migrant English Dept. at C.T.S., June 1983.
- (8) This is an interpretation that is considered by some members of staff as misleading. For these members a more adequate explanation would draw attention to the existing evidence that neither school nor teachers (as a group) have any credibility in the eyes of many students. Thus for many who attend it is a matter of filling in time until a job comes up, leaving age is reached or parents can be convinced they won't "end up on the streets" if they leave. For these students the "If YOU reckon it's good for me YOU MAKE ME learn it" game is popular but may be misread as an appeal for external discipline.
- (9) The Technical Teachers Union of Victoria rightly asserts that formula staffing is a totally inadequate means of addressing Needs Based Education. For a comprehensive documentation of the arguments refer to T.T.U.V. Needs Based Education Campaign documents of 1981-82.
- (10) Year 8 students had Science withdrawn from their timetable due to lack of teachers. A number of student groups had their camps cancelled due to the limitations placed on many teachers by extra duties in the school. The Migrant English Dept. had to turn back many students who required the service in order to cope with basic learning. There was no student counsellor for the 1983 school year.

Generally, it could also be fairly said that most of the programs that remained, effectively only existed on paper since the resources were not available to implement them beyond token gestures; (e.g. no sporting equipment but a sports program listed on the timetable). Pastoral time was seen by most staff to be essential to developing students' self esteem within the framework of a small intimate group that would enable the essential sense of security to be established quickly and effectively. With the increase in Pastoral size the program remained intact on paper but in effect became a regular timeslot for the testing of teachers' survival skills.

(11) Tricia CASWELL: Six Months Hard Labour, The Victorian Teacher, No.1, October 1982, p.6.

(12) Simon MARGINSON: Creating A Teacher Shortage: The Projections of Teacher Supply and Demand, V.S.T.A. research paper, Melbourne, July 7, 1980.

(13) Jenny BEECHAM & Ruth HOADLEY: Techniques For Participation In Decision Making For Previously Uninvolved Groups, School Community Interaction Trust, East Doncaster, Victoria, 1980, p.6-18.

(14) Needs Based Staffing Campaign Booklet, 1982, Working With Parents, V.S.T.A., T.T.U.V., V.T.U., p.5.

This section quotes Joan Kirner, Executive Officer of the Victorian Federation of State Schools' Parents Clubs.

"Until... teachers are prepared to talk about quality of staffing and curriculum with parents in an open way, in which parents have some power in the matter, then the parent/teacher campaign is not really going to win over parents, because they won't feel that they're influencing the decisions which really count for their kids."

This view of parent participation represents a more general criticism of teachers' tendency to avoid genuine parent participation.

- (15) John GOLDLUST: How The Media Report On Unions And Industrial Conflict, Department Of Sociology, Latrobe University.

This paper provides a succinct analysis of the media campaigns against unions during the 70's.

- (16) The following letter was published in the Tech. Teacher, Vol.2, June 1983, No.9.

It exemplifies the deep antagonism directed at the union executive and indicates the nature of the division developing within the union as a whole.

"Dear Executive,

(You pack of weak S....!!)

We the undersigned being fully paid up and working members of the TTUV wish to express our complete and utter disgust and revulsion at the attitude presented by the Executive at today's meeting.

We feel that you have sold out that section of the membership which for years has supported and fought for the teaching conditions laid down by the Union and endorsed at Annual Conference. To give up these conditions under the threat applied by the Government goes against the tradition of this Union, and to us is completely incomprehensible.

Disappointedly yours,

13 members of the Aspendale TTUV Branch.

PS: Why disadvantage and blame those schools already working to TTUV conditions by Kow-Towing to disguised threats of blackmail by the Government. Surely this is a deplorable tactic you could not possibly condone, except that you have! We all know how hard you've worked, but we've worked hard too, and now we'll have to work a damn sight harder next year.

PPS: We're p..... off with whinging p..... from other schools who haven't achieved the conditions we have fought for and achieved, but who then came along and voted for the easy way out, the 'Exec's' soft option.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### UNIONISM AND PARTICIPATION

### THE T.T.U.V.: Early Years

The T.T.U.V. was founded (under the name of T.T.A.V.) in the mid-sixties when the Technical Teachers branch of the Victorian Teachers Union voted en-masse to form an autonomous union of their own.(1)

It is unnecessary to detail here the specific issues that led to this decision. However, it is useful to an understanding of the union context for the developments at Footscray in '76-'77, to briefly consider two main factors determining the break away, since these significantly influenced the prevailing perspectives and attitudes founding the T.T.U.V.

The first of these factors was the V.T.U.'s refusal to grant any right of autonomy to its post-primary constituent groups.

This meant that neither high-school teachers nor technical school teachers had the right to determine an industrial position directly related to their working needs.

A related factor was the decision-making structure of the V.T.U. Since the primary teachers' numerical strength dominated any and all voting situations, the post-primary teachers could influence union policy only in so far as they could influence defections from the primary teachers' voting ranks by way of convincing argument. Obstructing any progress was the combined effect of an entrenched conservative leadership, supported by the consistent block-vote of primary teachers. The effects of the attacks, initiated and sustained against the V.T.U. in the 40's, still held sway in the early sixties under the leadership of Hilma Cranley.(2)

Consequently, when the T.T.U.V. was formed, its constitution and structure were sensitive to the dangers of entrenched, centralised leadership, and the rights of minority groups to effective decision-making powers. Reflecting these concerns, the T.T.U.V. structured itself essentially on a base of branch (school based) decision-making. Effectively, this gave each branch the right to take an industrial position and determine industrial action on

its own behalf within the policy parameters of the union as a whole. The structure was an inverted version of the V.T.U.'s. Its power was based in the 'grass-roots'; the school based membership. Essentially, this structure presupposed and relied on member participation.

The second factor formed a context shared by all teachers of the early sixties. It was the emergence of 'the crisis in education'. This effectively functioned to galvanise post-primary teachers in particular, into a coherent and active industrial force for 'radical reforms' in the education system.

For the first time in more than two decades, education became a central political issue and was exposed as a political process. Bessant and Spaul's analysis of the period supports this view.

The crisis in schooling was a vital factor in the politicization of schooling.(3)

Complementary elements, converging into a phenomenon of general politicisation in the education arena, included use of articulate community lobby groups (Action For Better Education in Victoria), and in the late sixties, the development of viable students unions (e.g. the Victorian Secondary Students Union).

With its organisational freedom and the impetus of its times, the newly founded T.T.A.V. successfully applied itself to upgrading technical school teaching-learning conditions, the salaries of its membership and curriculum advances.

Keat and Urey's observations may serve to clarify the nature of the process governing the union's development.

"As a result of performing the necessary functions, the objective needs imposed on the individuals become their subjective aims."(4)

Applied to the T.T.U.V. this succinctly describes how the rapid rise in school ethnic populations, the influx of women in post-primary education, the poverty of the state school system and the irrelevance of its curriculum, all served as impetus for expanding the industrial grounds of T.T.A.V.'s demands. While traditional industrial issues of salaries, employment opportunity

and work-loads were dominant issues in media features of the day, these were pursued from a base of broad educational issues. The T.T.U.V. actively pursued policies against sexism, racism, state aid and the Vietnam War, and policies supporting equal opportunity, student rights, parent/teacher alliance, the democratisation of school councils and the development of relevant curriculum.

Fewster provides a succinct description of the developments of this period.

I don't think we can separate Vietnam, the Whitlam period, the Schools Commission, Innovation Grants, notions of community education etc. from a climate in which teacher strikes were likely to succeed, and they did.

...Success on inspection, erosion of the centralized examination system, work-experience programs, alternative schools and small class sizes are impressive.

In this golden era the public image of teachers was somewhat akin to that of the clergy. When we struck it was now and potent. People felt our action was based on concern.(5)

By the advent of the 70's the T.T.U.V. had developed a wide reputation as a militant union. Unlike the early stance of the V.S.T.A., it strongly identified itself with the trade union movement. In the course of consolidating its organisational identity in the late sixties, the T.T.U.V. sought a friendly relationship with the Victorian left-wing unions. This developed into a clear alliance when it became the first teacher union to apply for (and gain), membership of the Victorian Trades Hall Council.

THE T.T.U.V. AND THE FOOTSCRAY DISPUTE: (In The Process)

It is difficult to ascertain with precision the relationship between the degree of autonomy exercised by Footscray Tech. and the role of the T.T.U.V. in the events of '76-'77.

Primarily the T.T.U.V. presence was limited to the membership in the school. The umbrella organisation accompanied delegations and assisted in formal communication, but the critical decision-making remained located in the school. Yet the perceived 'state of the union' (as a strong, supportive and industrially effective entity), was an important factor in determining options for action. How did this seeming contradiction of autonomy/reliance develop and operate?

It has been stated that:

Between the structure of a given social formation and typical patterns of individual action lie sets of shared meanings by which actors identify, interpret, evaluate and indicate to themselves and others, the significance of objects and events present in their social world.(6)

Indeed, the Footscray case study provides an intimate and concrete illustration of this principle in operation. However, while the patterns identified in the Footscray situation may be assumed to reflect comparable patterns dominant in the umbrella industrial organisation, it is useful to an understanding of the nature and degree of interaction between the two, to briefly explore the basis of both in terms of process.

As the approach to this enquiry already implies, the process is essentially viewed as historical (though not lineal in all its features). But maintaining this as a generalisation does not acquaint us with the forms that process takes in evolving the shared meanings underlying the confidence and achievements at Footscray.

Consider these summarised factors as nodes in a process:

1. The dynamics between the individual (and the various extensions of the individual into group) and collective psychology.(7)

In this context it can be said that there is an "affective value (which) gives the measure of the intensity of an idea, and the intensity in its turn expresses that idea's energetic tension, its effective potential".(8)

Applying this to the emergence of the attitudes characterising the sixties, it might be said that the idea of Human Rights attained an all-embracing, highly 'affective value' which permeated the community and generated a unifying ground and vitality for the identification of specific related issues, e.g. racism, sexism, class-discrimination.

2. The language of 'Human Rights' appealed to the public's background assumptions in a way conducive to its translation into (and by), countless and diverse activist and community interest groups; and trade unions. In the process of events it confirmed these groups' activities as being in the community interest. In other words, the 'Human Rights' value became the organic ground for dominant shared meanings. It was a schema that renewed and enhanced the credibility of individual struggle, group struggle, cultural struggle and class struggle.

3. The convergence of this value with the crisis in education extended and translated its shared meaning into educational terms; thus effecting the link between the aims and objectives of teachers and those of the community. For a brief period education was seen to be the panacea for all social ills.

4. The formation and development of the T.T.U.V. forged direct organisational links between the left trade union movement and teachers, thus further refining the translation of educational meanings into (a degree of), shared industrial meaning. This reinforced the tentative growth of technical teachers' consciousness of working class interests.
5. For teachers, the 'affective value' of these translations attained the greatest vigour in those schools most subject to the effects of protracted crises; the western, northern and inner city regions. The membership in these regions were the most active formative influences on, and participants in, T.T.U.V. organisation, (the western region being, by all appearances the most cohesive in organisation/communication and consequently the strongest industrial element).

Given this strongly established set of shared meanings (that appealed to expectations of democracy), the nature and degree of interaction between Footscray Tech. and the T.T.U.V. as a whole appears analogous (organisationally), to the process effecting interaction between the various elements of the Footscray Tech. school community.

However, to assume that, in '76-'77, the T.T.U.V.'s participatory processes retained the measure of vitality expressed at Footscray Tech. would be to overlook factors that signified a turning point in the T.T.U.V.'s industrial capacities.

While these factors did not affect the Footscray situation in '76-'77, they were to play a significant role in both the Melton and Collingwood developments. It is appropriate to explore the reasons for the former state of affairs at this stage since these, by way of counterpoint, help explain the latter.

This requires a brief return of attention to the sixties. Perhaps these points might be considered as interactions between nodes in a process.

1. Although Technical Schools had historically a closer link with the working class than other divisions,(9) its teachers were almost solely drawn from the middle classes and tradesmen, the latter's aspirations and attitudes identifying them as the most conservative element in Technical Schools.(10)

The increased class mobility of the late 50's, early 60's, brought a large number of young working class people into the teaching profession. A substantial proportion of these came through the Technical Schools Division.

2. These 'working class academics' had been exposed to and/or participated in, the rising political activity of the 60's university campuses.

For many this activity inhibited their entrance into 'no-class land'(11) and enabled them to remain identified with, and even proud of, their working class origins.

A significant number of these people came from the western suburbs and returned there to teach.

3. The western region was the area of highest concentration of the industrial work force and achieved the most effective and extensive union organisation. As such its schools attracted a large number of radical middle class graduates seeking to play a role in stimulating revolutionary change by working with and on behalf of the 'proletariate'.

Considering these factors, it is not surprising that the western region developed and maintained a regional identity that expressed itself in highly politicised interaction between branches, and strong confidence in its own industrial bargaining power. As a highly active participant in regional affairs, Footscray could justifiably remain confident of the ready support of the strongest industrial region of the T.T.U.V., were it required. This fact obscured realisation of the deteriorating industrial strength of the T.T.U.V. as a total organisation. This was not

made evident until 1979 with the 'limited tenure' issue. That such realisation could be obscured from the strongest industrial region, is an indication that this region was also turning in on itself and becoming confined by parochial perspectives.

### EXPLORING THE DECLINE

The deterioration of the T.T.U.V.' industrial strength reflects a process of 'depoliticisation' within its 'rank and file'. An exploration of this process is similarly an exploration of the pre-conditions for the demise of participation at Melton. For while Melton's principal's approach has been examined as a central factor in those developments, it could not have exercised such a decisive influence amongst mobilised and self-motivated staff. Indeed, the passivity of the staff as a collective could be said to have exacerbated the contradictions inherent in the principal's approach.

While there is no readily identifiable 'turning point', there is a convergence of factors(12) that might be considered as such, and these can be roughly located in the 'Whitlam years'.

Central, in terms of the considerations here, are the changes in T.T.U.V. elected leadership, the establishment of the Australian Schools Commission, innovation grants, and the rising profile of community education.

From its first days of struggle,,through to the early 70's, the T.T.U.V. functioned with an elected leadership that exercised the authority ('being' mode) of commitment. These people had come through the 'radical' ranks of the teaching profession in the late 50's.

Their consistent display of political integrity and insight won the overwhelming confidence of the general membership. In the years of their office they provided the union with responsive, cohesive and unchallenged administration.

For most trade unions, the secretary is the identified central figure.(13) For the T.T.U.V. the president was the identified spokesperson and central public figure. That this emphasis changed in the early 70's (when the last, of what was later known as the 'old guard', vacated office), was symptomatic of a vacuum developing in the T.T.U.V.'s political/industrial administration. This may be directly related to two particular features of the union's evolution at that time. One was the consequence of numerical growth and ongoing turnover of membership (created by retirement or resignation from the service). An increasingly large number of the membership comprised young teachers who had not been directly involved in the union's formative years, and were readily absorbed into its ready made web of relations, with little demand on their political understanding of the union's role. For most part these formed two categories. Those willing to participate in union affairs but lacking confidence and political initiative: And those who were highly confident and politicised in their activity. While many of the latter displayed both skills and initiative, there existed amongst them a prevalent disdain for elected leadership roles; the main grounds being that "power corrupts and compromises", and that "those most highly committed to change are most useful to the union in the schools". (If the Footscray and western regions industrial strength appeared to validate this view, the declining vitalities in T.T.U.V. administration equally challenged it).

A second and reinforcing feature relates to the ranks of the founding membership. Amongst these there had developed a complacency born of industrial success and complete confidence in their elected union administration. This caused few to consider the future of elected leadership roles, and most to undertake extensive commitments at the school level. The presidency of the union was consequently filled from the moderate ranks of the old guard.

It was therefore with a mixture of confidence, and the beginnings of wider diversification of understandings and commitment, that the T.T.U.V. entered the Whitlam years. These years were conducive to deepening complacency and obscuring the diminishing industrial commitment.

The union's residual reputation as an effective and militant industrial power maintained the assumptions of many teachers that the organisation's capacity to mobilise remained intact; ready to be wielded if the occasion required it. With the unprecedented levels of funding available through the Australian Schools Commission(14) and particularly the innovation grants,(15) teachers' energies were redirected into project and funding committees and in-school experimental projects. It was a big band-wagon and many interests rode on it.

Along with the proliferation of projects came a proliferation of promotional opportunity. Many of the most creative teachers and active unionists were seconded to one or another of the mushrooming committees, and/or absorbed into co-ordinating alternative schooling projects. It was new, exciting and full of opportunities; for both the altruistic and the opportunistic. Initially the latter appeared to be few, but not-so-gradual absorption into the power politics and bureaucracy of committee work created many, as their activities became increasingly specialised and removed from the industrial context.

An increasing specialization of activities will bring about a decrease in the range of interaction of a person... and will limit the field in which (that person) can originate action.(16)

Those on committees became distanced from the living school/ industrial forum, whilst those involved in alternative projects were so absorbed by the challenges posed, that the bulk of school-level reality passed them by. The identity of these people increasingly invested itself into the projects they initiated and vice-versa. Consequently, their perspectives were diminished to the point where the overall contextual purpose of the projects were lost. The projects became (in many or even most cases), ends in themselves and identity crutches for their participants as a new educational elite developed.

Mirroring this process was the dwindling participation in union rank and file committees. These committees were perhaps the only mechanism available at the time, that could have inhibited or even prevented the inward-turn of the profession and its

consequent loss of broader social-political perspectives. That there was insufficient rank and file participation to maintain the vitality of its influence is perhaps symptomatic of the ultimately 'bourgeois' basis of the educational ideals of the time. The Footscray experience, by virtue of its political emphasis, tends to validate this supposition.

These factors, combined with the lowered political coherence of the union administration, and the continued assumption of 'shared meanings' in the face of a new generation of educational mystiques, constituted the essence of the depoliticisation of the teaching profession in the seventies. The subversion of the authentic content of education occurred almost unnoticed as it became increasingly fragmented, contained and ossified in projects, kits and committees removed from the living source of their intentions.

The western region, though caught up in the wave of euphoria, was substantially buffered against its effects. The size and homogeneous composition of its socio-economic environment in conjunction with a residue of cadre-like interaction between schools, and the comparatively large number of political activists established there since the sixties, all served to inhibit the process of depoliticisation.

However, in general the process gained a distinct momentum from the confusion wrought by the Whitlam sacking, rising unemployment, the unexpected virtuosity of Frazer's 'razor gang', and the concerted campaign of union bashing ruthlessly and effectively conducted by the media of the mid-70's;(17) these all being components of the restructuring of education in Australia.(18) The fragmentation in industrial understanding and the distancing of union administration from rank and file, was further fostered internally by the accumulated effects of membership turnover in a period of demobilising tertiary campuses.

The extent of deterioration was fully exposed in 1979 when the 'limited tenure' issue demanded of the union its effective exercise of industrial strength; only to find significant sections of the organisation in an advanced stage of atrophy.

The industrial climate in which Melton was established can then be seen as a relevant factor influencing, if not determining, Melton's efforts.

### CONSIDERATIONS ON MELTON AND COLLINGWOOD

The developments of the 70's raise three further points for consideration of the Melton situation.

One being the distancing process the principal had been subjected to through his secondment to the Regional Curriculum Development Committee.

The second relating to the large proportion of Melton staff who had entered teaching in the early to mid-seventies (all but 5). And thirdly, the fact that it was a new school established in a satellite town some 35kms from the city and thus substantially isolated from the activities, influence and support mechanisms of the western region organisation.

However, consideration of the wider industrial context of the Collingwood situation requires an acquaintance with the union in the early 80's. By this time the union administration had developed the characteristics of an entrenched centralised power. Mirroring this, the general membership exhibited widespread apathy.

With the arrival of the Cain government came government industrial policies that favoured centralisation, notwithstanding rhetoric to the contrary. Further, it was agreed between the Victorian left trade unions not to, "rock the labour government's boat". This being the wider scenerio (and given that the central power figures of the T.T.U.V. were labour party members), it is not surprising that the political logistics they were a part of influenced the union to submit itself to an agreement that effectively cut union conditions and essential school programs. And included a no-strike clause. Events leading to this flowed in rapid succession, catching the 'left' membership unprepared. The events served to bring the 'left' to a full

realisation of their own fragmentation. They were now exposed as discrete regional identities with parochial and spasmodic communication. This recognition perhaps represents a new turning point for the T.T.U.V., for as Manneheim pointed out:

In modern mature democracy, solidarity is not automatic; it must be realised anew all the time through conflict and stress. Since all social units are fully autonomous agents they would prefer to go their own way.(19)

If it is indeed the beginnings of a revitalisation/politicisation process, then Collingwood's efforts stand a good chance of succeeding, since the process of reinvesting the union branches with industrial power is the process of generating authentic participation. This process can only reinforce and give momentum to any schools' efforts to share its powers within its own community. However, such a schema rests on assumptions that the schools' efforts themselves are authentic.

It would therefore seem reasonable to suppose that if Collingwood's central commitment to participation is authentic, it will contribute its own initiatives to rebuilding the industrial strength of the T.T.U.V. (and view such initiatives as warranting priority consideration and effort).

NOTES AND REFERENCES FOR CHAPTER SEVEN

(1) High school teachers left the V.T.U. a year prior to form the Victorian Secondary Teachers Association.

(2) A. BESSANT & A. SPAULL: Politics of Schooling, Pitman, 1976, p.32-35.

This provides a concise documentation of the events leading to the defeat of the progressive elements in the V.T.U. in the 40's, and the consequent birth of "a new era of conservative politics in the V.T.U."

The effects are summed up on page 35; "As such their support for industrial and professional policies became distracted just when the teachers' unions were needed to contribute to post war educational reform."

(3) IBID.: p.184.

(4) Russel KEAT & John UNCY: Social Theory As Science, Routledge Kegan Paul, 1975, p.136.

(5) Mike FEWSTER: The Strike Weapon, (Special Joint Union issue), T.T.U.V. News, Vol.15, No.4, 1981, p.35.

(6) Op. Cit.: p.137.

(7) C.J. JUNG: Archetypes And The Collective Unconscious, Bollingen Series, 1967.

(8) C.J. JUNG: Aion, Bollingen Series, 1968, p.28.

The perspective taken here suggests that 'shared meanings' do not equate with the concept of 'lowest common denominator'. (This concept is heirarchical in essence and does not further an understanding of participation.) Rather, it is a schema that appeals to, and evokes responses grounded in, public assumptions. Such a schema is operative in so far as it accommodates the needs informing individual and group assumptions, and to the degree that congruence occurs within the spectrum of needs experienced at a particular point in time.

Like the wave vs. particle theory of light, it depends on the frame employed by the observer whether the meaning is experienced as shared or otherwise. The forces generating congruence in the spectrum of needs in the sixties conferred a universal validation of intentions and this constituted an experience of public perspective. The same forces gave rise to the formation of specific group interests defining the content of the schema. Particular combinations of individual needs determined the emphasis distinguishing the functions of respective social and community groups and gave specific shape to their demands. Consequently, community/social groups experienced 'shared meaning' when looking towards the public arena, and diversity of meanings within the same schema when viewing of the phenomena was located in the public arena itself.

- (9) B. BESSANT & A. SPAULL.: Op. cit., p.55-69.  
See section on The Technical Schools Struggle For Identity.
- (10) R. MERTON & A. ROSSI: Class Status And Power, Reference Group Theory and Social Mobility, Bendix & Litsets, 1970, p.511.  
"For the individual who adopts the values of a group to which he aspires but does not belong, this orientation may serve the twin functions of aiding his rise into that group and easing his adjustment after he has become part of it".  
For most part, trade teaching is regarded by its practitioners as a move from 'blue-collar' to 'white-collar' status.
- (11) Richard HOGGART: The Uses Of Literacy, Pelican, 1976, p.302.  
Hoggart devotes a full chapter to exploring this experience. It is perhaps summed up adequately for the present purposes in these lines:

"(they) have left (their) class, at least in spirit, by being in certain ways unusual; and (they are) unusual in another class... (They are) usually ill at ease with the middle-classes... (they) mistrust or even a little despise them."

- (12) In referring to a "convergence of factors", attention should be drawn to the distinction between events and their patterns of influence. Events may form a loose knit lineal sequence but the consequent patterns of influence extrapolating from and between each event, overlap to effect a reinforcement of those central characteristics appearing in common.
- (13) Braham DABSCHECK & John NILAND: Industrial Relations In Australia, George Allen & Unwin, 1981, p.119.
- (14) B. BESSANT & A. SPAULL: Op. cit., p.133.  
The Australian Schools Commission was established by the Whitlam government in its first eleven days of office. Professor Karmel was appointed as its chairperson at this time.  
The commission was seen to be a body, "which could attempt to broaden the Labor's educational objectives and build upon the areas of the Karmel Report such as community control, alternative schooling approaches, teacher development."
- (15) The Innovations Grants, as the terminology implies, were the main avenue for directing substantial amounts of educational funds towards exploration of alternative schooling.
- (16) F. HAMTEL: The Structure Of Power In The Regional City, Community Power Structure, 1953, p.107.
- (17) John GOLDLUST: How The Media Report On Unions And Industrial Conflict, Dept. Sociology, Latrobe University.

- (18) Michael GALLAGHER: The Restructuring Of The Australian Education System And The New International Division Of Labour, Labour Resource Centre, Melbourne, June 1979.
- (19) K. MANNEHEIM: The Democratization Of Culture, Essays On Sociology of Culture, Part 3, Routledge Kegan Paul, London, 1956, p.194.

## CHAPTER EIGHT

**PARTICIPATION: CONDITIONS, CONTEXTS AND TERMS**

OBSERVATIONS, REFLECTIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

Footscray, Melton and Collingwood. Each is but a moment in a tapestry of events loomed over more than two decades. And they are moments past and gone. What then is their significance (if any), for the 'now' that we, the wider collective, must respond to; the 'now' that expresses itself in new, enveloping dimensions of crisis? We are challenged to change our world. We are posed options, and from these we choose and weave the fabric of our future. The challenge is irrevocably there and cannot be avoided. Not to choose equates with choosing the status quo.

There are those who are brought to question the essential nature of this challenge, 'human nature being what it is'. And it is perhaps to readers of this mind that Coleridge poses his question:

What if you slept, and what if in your sleep you dreamed, and what if in your dream you went to heaven and there plucked a strange and beautiful flower, and what if when you awoke you had that flower in your hand? Ah, what then?

The Footscray experience surely affirms the answer implicit in this question. For it could be said that in 1977 Footscray plucked a petal from Coleridge's Rose. Although that petal ostensibly took the form of a new school, in its substance and effect it constituted fundamental educational change. The act of its plucking was similarly the act of locating the purpose and substance of education in the needs of its participants. In so doing, and doing together, a collective understanding of the nature of oppression, and a collective will to struggle against it, was confirmed.

It is said that we may learn from history but that history never repeats itself. What then do the case studies (and the Footscray experience in particular), offer by way of constants relevant to 'now'? Indeed, are there any constants? Can we really expect fundamental change; lasting change? Is Footscray perhaps but a child of its own times?

The answer to the latter might well be yes, were the construction of a new school the 'be all and end all' of the experience. But as the case study indicates, the essential substance of Footscray extends well beyond immediate material measures.

In contrast to this we have cause to reflect upon Melton's singular failure to engage authentic participation. And in the light of both Footscray and Melton, we might surmise the future outcomes of Collingwood's continuing efforts to pick a viable path through transition.

It is at this point that we are brought to consider the conditions, contexts and terms constituting authentic participation and its relationship with political success.

#### THE CONDITIONS

At the outset we can distinguish Footscray by its activist stance. A stance informed by a perspective admitting class based oppression as a political/economic/social reality. In this there is a sense in which Footscray can be said to be a 'child of its own times'. Its consciousness was, for all intents and purposes, shaped by the events of the sixties decade; politically, industrially and educationally. However, both the principals of Melton and Collingwood, and their senior members of staff, were similarly subject to these events. Consequently, the Footscray experience cannot readily be dismissed as one merely symptomatic of a period. Moreover, it would be too blithe to assume that the number of experienced activists on the Footscray staff, and the dearth of similar experience at Melton, explains the former's political/educational success and the latter's failure. These factors simply imply particular pathways to a world view. To imbue them with any greater significance would be to obscure the relevance of the world view itself to actual educational realities. Indeed, the question of ideological compatibility must surely be regarded as the crux of Footscray's success and Melton's failure, and will similarly determine Collingwood's future.

In this there are two aspects demanding consideration. One being the compatibility of practice with theory, the other being the compatibility of the informing world view with the wider political/economic/social realities of the time. The ultimate viability of the former is necessarily dependent upon the latter. In the absence of an awareness of the wider socio/political ecology, our activities remain dominated by personal/professional interests. They become mere symptoms of narcissism.

#### EDUCATION AS PART OF THE SOCIO-POLITICAL ECOLOGY

At one level it is the absence of an ecological awareness that characterises the Melton experience, and its presence that invigorates Footscray. We may note for instance, that Melton commenced with a detailed 'blueprint for educational change'. A blueprint developed in professional isolation, without input from, or direct consideration of, the experienced needs of the community. Whilst Melton's vocabulary was peppered with the terminology of community/parent participation, its perspective remained essentially embedded in professional prerogative. Educational change was conceived as an object in and of itself; unconnected with and independent from, any wider reality. This perspective effectively substituted cosmetic change in place of fundamental change, for in its myopism it failed to translate an intellectual understanding of the political function of education into political action for fundamental social change. The insistent reliance on 'wheeling and dealing' and the blind resistance to developing a political/industrial identity, testify to Melton's naivety more clearly than any other facet of the experience. The absence of an ecological awareness frustrated identification of the nature and relations of oppression, and the necessary strategies to deal with it.

Footscray, by contrast, displayed little familiarity with the theory and vocabulary of participation. However, its socio-political awareness transcended professional constraints and informed its understanding of both the educationally relevant and educational change. For instance, students' (and parents') literacy and numeracy problems were considered as extrapolations

of a particular convergence of socio/economic/cultural circumstances. Not only of the individual home, but of the local community as a whole. Further, interpretation and understanding of those circumstances were not constructed within an apolitical, welfare oriented perspective. Rather, they described themselves as outcomes of class/cultural relations.

From the outset then, educational needs were defined with respect to the socio-economic relations of a given working class collective (Footscray being a working class suburb). The act of locating literacy and numeracy functions within the wider functions constituting class relations, promoted positive feedback (an auto-catalysis), for collective organisation and for the generation of an ecological frame of reference in both personal and collective awareness of 'self'.

This wider frame of reference enabled both parents and students to re-evaluate the significance of failure experience. New patterns of educational/socio-economic relations were disclosed in a form stimulating collective confidence in strategies grounded in direct and shared experience. Literacy and numeracy could be related not only to staffing levels and the availability of resources generally ('from each according to ability to each according to need'), but also to the content/value and general relevance of the reading/learning material itself.

Thus we may note Footscray's active participation at one level in both the identification and provision of appropriate learning materials. The resident writer, project for example and Hyde's short stories; all were directed towards developing reading materials based in local class/cultural events, interests and values.

With the class roots of problems identified, the school community's needs were disclosed as sharing an essential 'sameness' with wider socio-economic problems; the broader socio/political ecology. It was with regard to the intricate web of implications so generated, that professional obligations and responsibilities were defined, and actions determined.

Consequently, teachers unashamedly discarded their status as 'experts'; inviting students, parents and the community at large, to participate in educational problem solving. Experience was pooled in the interests of effective collective strategies.

Further, and far from being cause for resistance, a political/ industrial identity was conceived as essential. For the wider political reality defined the web of opposition to change in terms that similarly defined the need and shape of effective collective strategies. Coherent, cohesive, 'grassroots' political organisation disclosed itself as a logical and indispensable necessity for successful change.

In the process of a widening 'school' collective, the curriculum itself was transformed as it became increasingly ground in shared definitions of oppression and shared experience of struggle. This promoted an epistemological justification of education within the wider collective. This in itself constituted significant educational change. For politically speaking, it is the reinvestment of responsible power in the people at large that constitutes fundamental change - educationally, socially. In Footscray's case this is most clearly exemplified in the collective determination of the design and terms of construction for the new school.

It is in these respects then, that the elements constituting the Footscray experience can be regarded as ideologically compatible with each other and (more importantly) with the wider reality; educationally, socially, politically and economically.

Similarly, the case studies indicate Collingwood's collective perspective as one predisposing to an ecological awareness. The school's efforts to develop an industrially effective campaign on needs based education and, in the face of central T.T.U.V. impotence, its efforts to mobilise community support, imply a recognition of the inherent relations between educational change and social change.

## IDENTIFYING THE CONTEXT

What then might an ecological awareness imply for the contexts of authentic participation? While we may concede its function in defining and locating opposition to change, this does not serve to acquaint us with the process of its translation into authentic participation. Nor does its extrapolation as ideologically compatible activity clarify understanding of the contexts of participation. For ideological compatibility is measurable only within the experience as a whole. Identifying and locating the relevant source and nature of opposition is but a facet of such experience. But it is from the collective experience of this act that we perhaps attain some insight into contextual necessities. In this respect ecological awareness and ideological compatibility may be regarded as interacting facets in the evolution of participant relations.

The wider political/social realities (and their perceived ramifications for the future), in conjunction with the needs of all parties constituting the school community, define and shape educational issues. The process of shaping the issue similarly discloses the form and location of its opposition. From the interaction between the latter and the collective strategies of the issue protagonists, the substance and outcomes of the experience are subsequently determined.

At this point it is worth noting that whilst Melton's circumstances mooted an issue of similar dimensions to those of Footscray and Collingwood, the shape and substance of that issue (and consequently the shape and substance of its opposition), failed to emerge in the collective consciousness. At Collingwood the issues' parameters were identified sufficiently for the substance of the opposition to be exposed and made the object of ongoing strategies for change. These strategies meaningfully engaged a wider collective in action for change.

The Footscray experience represents a comprehensive exploration of the issue as a context for authentic participation. While the shape of the issue described itself in the demand for a new school, its dimensions and substance were constituted in the

experience of shared struggle against perceived oppression. This combination of shared interests shaping the issue and substantiated by struggle, established the contextual viability of authentic participation. (It similarly distinguished the issues from professional interests.) This constituted the ground necessary for the transcendence of traditionally discrete social-role functions (teacher, student, parent, unionist). Each were all and all were each. It synthesised otherwise disparate backgrounds, needs and understandings into a field promoting shared 'meaning making' and the evolution of shared knowledge and power.

The demand for a new school was in essence a demand for relevant education and conditions conducive to its realisation. It equated with an outright rejection of schooling; of service in the interests of the status quo. A more isolated professional perspective would ultimately have accommodated in-school solutions as the Melton case study testifies.

Without the wider socio-political perspective constituting educational change schooling becomes a comfortable option. An irrelevant curriculum interprets itself as student delinquency, most readily resolvable by persuasion techniques or, failing those being effective, expulsion. Relegation to the caste of the untouchables. Relegation to the 'no-future'. In this context professional prerogative functions only too often to transpose society's inadequacies into personal blame; failure experience for the individual student.

At Footscray educational change was perceived as irrevocably connected with social change. Curriculum relevance was, at root, determined by students' needs, and these included the need for a social-political understanding of their own lives and the lives of others. This attitudinal environment was similarly conducive to parents making new meanings (socio-political meanings), of their children's failure experiences. In the process they formulated and contributed to the meaning of educational change.

It is also useful to reflect upon the development of 'issues within issues'. Consider for example the situation wherein a student was hit by a car whilst crossing the highway to attend a class. Occurring as it did, in the midst of a collective experience of struggle, this event acquired a socio-political significance; a significance it seems most unlikely to have acquired had it happened prior to the field of struggle being identified. But in the light of experience with bureaucratic thinking, the event was perceived as exemplary of the political expedience employed by the Education Department; of neglect for student welfare in the course of bureaucratic decision making. The instance of the runaway truck further extended political 'meaning-making'. For although recognised as 'accidents' at one level, both events described the dimensions of what might be termed 'the politics of bureaucratic omission'. Consequently, collective determination hardened and campaign efforts escalated, clarifying in the process the political parameters of the apparently apolitical.

For Footscray then, it is the issue that constitutes the field for authentic participation; the context. And the substance of this context is struggle against a collectively defined opposition.

#### THE TERMS OF AUTHENTICITY

The issue may be clearly distinguished from professional interests in that it embraces and welds the concerns of a number of otherwise discrete social-role function groupings. By virtue of this, it constitutes a broad but unified field of action. In this respect, the issue as a context for authentic participation similarly pre-empts or prescribes the terms for authentic participation.

The Moratorium mobilisation in the late sixties is perhaps most representative of large scale exploration of the terms for participation. Although the impetus for this may be perceived as originating in the 'democratic impulse', logical necessity substantiated the effort. For it was recognised that groups

disenfranchised from decision making were simultaneously denied the relevance of their own experience and concerns. Consequently their capacity to partake in events was demobilised.

Footscray learned from these rudimentary explorations. Sufficiently so, to perceive the broad outlines differentiating participation from co-option. Nevertheless, as the case study shows, it was by process of evolution that the terms emerged and clarified themselves in specific relation to situational realities.

The evolution of mutuality in parent/teacher relations is traceable to the inception of parent involvement in the reading scheme and the organisation of family film nights. These experiences (apolitical in and of themselves), became the ground for exchange and reflection upon the school's social/economic/educational problems. They provided an experiential meeting point wherein parents gained rudimentary access to the political/economic aspects of education. Similarly, staff were accessed to the nature of working class relations with education.

But it is the impulse informing this meeting point that requires our deepest consideration; concern for the welfare of the child. And in this we need note that the teachers were not responding to a departmental regulation stipulating a professional obligation to act as 'parentis in locus'. Rather, they experienced the authentic responsibility of one human being for the welfare of another. It is in the extrapolation of this singular, all embracing term, that attempts to share understandings of educational and social class experiences are disclosed as constituent terms of authentic participation.

In this process the barriers to authentic communication are identified and made the object of strategies for elimination. For instance, the predominantly female demography of parent involvement at Footscray raised an awareness of the subtler obstructions of sexism. And as the mutuality of relations evolved to disclose itself in increased frankness, language itself (in particular professional jargon), was exposed as a

central obstruction to mutual understanding. Thus teachers were accessed to an experiential understanding of language as a political structure. A structure which in the context of a society based on capital and the division of labour, served to limit access to skills and knowledge; access to the sharing of power.

If the experience of participation at Footscray is accepted as authentic, the terms of that authenticity may be briefly summarised as: a shared recognition of working class values and perspectives; a mutual trust based on mutual respect; shared knowledge, shared language, shared responsibility and shared decision making. Implicit in these terms is the necessity to abdicate professional prerogative and reinstate professional responsibility. The latter defines itself as the responsibility to actively engage in social change from the basis of authentic knowledge (knowledge grounded in personal and collective experience). Historically, educational prerogative has effectively operated to territorialise education; to exclude parent/community participation. Consequently, the dissolution of this barrier relies, in the first instance, on teachers' intentions and initiatives.

#### PARTICIPATION AND SCHOOL ADMINISTRATION

In considering the terms of authentic participation it would be remiss to neglect school administrations' relations to the process at its inception. For at the school level, it is perhaps the administrative role that most clearly embodies the concept of professional prerogative. The concept of professional authority. Further, the approach adopted by a school administration contributes to determining the form (though not content) of the approach of other elements of the social organism identified as 'the School'.

In Footscray's formative period the administration was a non-obstructing (though uncommitted) influence that, in the course of events, developed into clear-cut support (participation). It became part of the process without attempting to dominate it.

In contrast, Melton's administration could well be regarded as the subject of Brunner's accusation.

You give lip-service to the process, but you won't accept it. On the contrary, you strive to dominate it. And that can't be done unless you stand outside it.(1)

Differing from both of these, the approach of Collingwood's administration appears as an attempt to reconcile those of Footscray and Melton.

It utilised an intervention strategy, as did Melton, for the policy directions of the school. However, in common with Footscray (in its formative phase), it maintained a clear identity as administration. (In either case this was pre-empted but seems nevertheless relevant.)

It is difficult to conclusively determine the importance of the latter to Collingwood's particular stage of development, since 'participation' at Collingwood remains in flux. It has neither attained the heady-heights of Footscray's '76-'77 experience, nor yet is perceptibly doomed to the disillusionment experienced by Melton.

It is therefore perhaps most appropriate at this point to explore the apparent value of maintaining a clearly identified administration during the transition between modes of operation.

In the Footscray example, the administration's role was transformed, not in terms of its base functions, but in terms of the authority informing those functions. The role developed an integrity that stemmed from administering primarily to the decisions of the school collective in the context of an authority external to the school, as opposed to acting as an agent for an external authority. In this situation the school community could not be compromised except by their own responsibility. While the administration's identity remained clear, the influences informing its functions were more readily apprehended and evaluated. As democratisation/participation developed it absorbed the

sympathetic administrative identity into the collective identity (to a degree determined by the stage of completeness reached within the process at any given time).

The ambiguous position of the Melton administration made it virtually impossible to locate specifically, the sources of influence informing its functions. Consequently, the school collective, at all stages, remained vulnerable to compromise from outside the bounds determined by its own constituency.

Because Collingwood's administration remained clearly identified as such, the staff were more readily able to maintain clarity in the parameters of their collective understanding of struggle (fragmented and demoralised as it was), and relate this understanding to formulating industrial tactics and strategies.

To some extent Melton's principal recognised this in hindsight: "You really have to teach to understand", he commented, reflecting on the ambivalence of his approach in Melton's early development and its affect on the school's industrial identity (or lack thereof).

For Collingwood, the administration remains primarily a fostering element as distinct from a determining or obstructing element. Having administered the reorientation of authoritarian policies to policies conducive to the development of 'participation', the principal proceeded to function as a 'governor' between, the as yet, disparate elements of the school community.

The term 'governor' is employed here to denote an influence applied to enable co-ordination to occur between the pace of activity afforded by one element and that of another in congruent circumstances. Such influence does not determine the sum pace, the constituent patterns of integrating movements or the collective direction (the latter being sanctioned by a school policy favouring the efforts of those elements developing in a participatory mode).

In the Collingwood context, the function of 'governor' maintains an organic integrity compatible with transition to full participation, since the specific activity of the 'governor' at any one time is determined by specific expressions of disparity in the pace of the elements governed.

Successful application of this role, all else being equal, could be expected to eventuate in its absorption into the collective responsibility as the process of participation gained its own momentum.

In other words the principal's main efforts were directed towards maintenance of conditions for staff unity whilst relying on the framework of the new school policies to enhance and protect the efforts of 'progressive' staff, and inhibit obstructions posed by those more disposed towards authoritarian organisation.

As with Melton, the Collingwood administration was subject to ambivalence. But it was an ambivalence unrelated to a confusion of identity and function. Rather, it related to the 'principle of uncertainty' and the dictates of transformation between two reference frames; i.e. value judgements on the degree of placation/compromise with authoritarian individuals' circumstances affordable within the parameters of developing participation.

The outcome of such negotiations were often experienced as obstructions by the 'progressive' staff of the school, and combined with poor communication gave rise to suspicions that solidified into direct challenge of the principal's integrity. This pattern of interaction both monitored the principal's intentions and inhibited compromise whilst extending both the credibility of the 'progressives' and the exercise of the participatory process. Further, it contributed to revitalising the dormant sense of group solidarity and initiative of the 'progressives' as their group identity emerged with greater clarity.

Mirroring these developments (in common with the formative phase of Footscray), was the trend towards dissolution of solidarity amongst the 'authoritarian' staff elements.

Merton and Rossi contribute some insight into this process with their observations on 'anticipatory socialisation'.

Although anticipatory socialization may be functional for the individual, it is apparently dysfunctional for the solidarity of the group or stratum to which it belongs. For allegiance to the contrasting mores of another group means defection from the mores of the in-group.(2)

Interpreted in the context of Collingwood, this suggests that each individual is subject to the process of socialisation within parameters mooting a restructuring of power. This entails an erosion of solidarity in the 'authoritarian' group (for reasons comparable, in some respects, to those effecting dissolution at Melton, i.e. the paradox confronting an 'authoritarian' when an authority figure authorises the sharing of its power).

Fromm's succinct distinction between modes of authority contributes to a clearer understanding of how the process of anticipatory socialisation functioned to reinforce the participatory mode.

...'authority' is a broad term with two entirely different meanings: it can be either 'rational' or 'irrational' authority. Rational authority is based on competence, and it helps the person who leans on it to grow. Irrational authority is based on power and serves to exploit the person subjected to it.(3)

However, the question may still be legitimately posed as to whether the Collingwood administration's approach is based on the 'bourgeois ideal'. This is difficult to determine.

The prospect of founding a school on 'participation' excites possibilities and temptations to 'short-cut' that the principal of an old, established school does not contend with to the same degree.

At Collingwood a union identity was long entrenched, if dormant in initiative, prior to the arrival of the new administration. Therefore the question of 'staff unity', by necessity, addressed identified groups and alliances as well as individuals. Similarly, questions of strategies and tactics were formulated in the context of a recognised industrial base in the school.

However, neither these factors, nor the administration's participation in union meetings, serve to clarify the nature of the principal's commitment to 'participation' per se. (Although it is fair to say that the administration was not inhibited about seeking parent and school council support for union issues.)(4)

It should be noted that the 'progressive' staff group was initially comparable in size and degree of militancy, to the 'authoritarian' group, with a further third of the staff essentially uncommitted and conservative in posture. This being the 'political/attitudinal demography' of the school, it is possible to interpret the principal's approach as one reflecting a 'holistic' rather than 'bourgeois' view. Seemingly it will require a crisis situation, of similar dimensions to that experienced by Melton, to expose the particular nature of the commitment to 'participation' at Collingwood.

Further, it remains to be noted that the process of politicisation (that informed the development of participation at Footscray), suffered intervention in its formative stages at Collingwood. This occurred by way of events in the wider political arena effecting the dismantling of the T.T.U.V. industrial power.

To what degree, and for how long, this factor inhibits the development of authentic 'participation' at Collingwood is yet to be determined by events. Both in the immediate Collingwood school community and in the wider spectrum of teacher union affairs.

## THE ROLE OF SOCIAL NETWORKS

Reflection upon both the Footscray and Collingwood experiences promotes particular measures of political success. In the former we are readily drawn to encapsulate success in terms of a new school constructed to a design, and by a firm, determined by the teachers, parents and community members. It is this moment of the Footscray experience that exemplifies the unity of outcomes; the spectrum of attainments constituting the realisation of participation. For this was a moment when knowledge and power were, for all conscious intents and purposes, redistributed.

We may ostensibly measure Collingwood's success in the modest terms of increased staffing levels. Ultimately, however, we are surely brought to recognise the substance of its political success in the rehabilitation of staff morale and initiatives. In this we might measure a strength expressed in defiance of ever demoralising circumstance.

But although the terms of political success may in essence be equated with the terms of authentic participation, the significance of those terms, as they are shaped by the wider collective, is readily overlooked. In this it is useful to briefly consider the role of social networks in the evolution of political success.

At the height of its struggle, the Footscray situation described itself as a complex web of communication reflecting similarly complex patterns of participation. From the industrial perspective for example, we can note a multi-tiered circuitry of action and response; interaction. The hub traces itself in the primary relations between individual faculties of the school as they comprise the union branch on the one hand, while on the other, function as an industrial nexus for the parents. From here, the latter moves to promote its own networks at neighbourhood, local council and at local workplaces. A further branch of the communications/resource circuitry is disclosed in the school's relations with the central T.T.U.V. which, by extension, accesses the school to the Victorian Trades Hall Council at one point and the left trade unions at another.

Further substantiating this tier is the school's direct communication with workplaces in the western suburbs, street pamphleting of the local community and lobbying of local council and local members of parliament.

The multi-dimensional character of the industrial communications network alone, protected the school from any concerted attack from the mass-media. For any attack by print, in the context of information sourced through direct contact with the school, merely served to expose the nature of mass-media politics; thus served to harden resolve.

One could further point to the community issue networks represented in the school. For example, the school's direct access to current source information on the Newport Power House Dispute, The F.19, Uranium mining, Nuclear Disarmament and the Aboriginal Land Rights. All contributed current relevance to educational activities and educational change. For in all respects these links were two-way in effect. Not by way of obligation, but by way of relevance to the perceived needs of educational and social change. They served to access the school community to the current social/political activities of the wider social collective. Similarly, they effected a widening of avenues for promoting awareness of the school's educational problems.

While not yet as comprehensive in development as those describing Footscray, we can note the rudimentary presence of similar networks at Collingwood. As with the Footscray experience, the effective relations between these networks and Collingwood's measure of success is readily perceived.

By way of counterpoint we may note Melton's self-inflicted, almost elitist, isolation. The total absence of industrial and community issue networks. While contact was established with local council and local schools they were, in the main, one-way avenues; avenues for selling 'the school's image'. Since the political/economic/educational problems of the school stood in contradiction to the image being sold, they remained unpromoted.

Nor indeed is there any evidence of the school attempting to access itself to current issues of concern to the wider community. Melton promulgated itself as a community resource but lacked the impulse to participate in the concerns of the wider collective. Thus there was no basis of mutuality established whereby the community could, in any meaningful sense, participate in the school's life. The school remained irrelevant to the community to the same extent that the community's concerns were irrelevant to education at Melton.

#### THE CASE STUDIES AND ACTION RESEARCH LITERATURE

Both within their respective moments and in their comparative relations, the case studies (the Footscray experience in particular), propose very distinct conditions, contexts and terms for authentic participation. Indeed, were we seeking terms that succinctly characterise the Footscray experience, we might readily and justifiably apply Lewin's three main characteristics of the action research process: 'its participatory character, its democratic impulse and its simultaneous contribution to social science and social change'. Here we may add 'educational change'.

In respect to the action research process itself, we find it readily identifiable with the 'being' mode of experience: 'It implies caring for, knowing, responding, affirming, enjoying... It means bringing to life, increasing his/her/its aliveness. It is a process, self-renewing and self-increasing'.(5)

The Footscray case study tends to exemplify this process. Melton on the other hand remains more characteristic of the counterfeit process, whilst the Collingwood situation discloses elements of both. In comparing each of the case studies in this way there is the temptation perhaps, to interpret each experience within the theoretical framework of current action research literature. While it is true that the models of the process promoted in such literature identify many of the conceptual characteristics of the participatory process, they do so at the expense of its living context; its corporeality. Consequently, such models presume to standardise the process and in this propose themselves as blue-

prints or formulae prescribing terms for initiation to a 'rite'. Terms which, by their abstract nature create a contradiction in experience as the Melton case study illustrates.

The conceptual structure implied in blue-prints (formulae) similarly imply limited access. Access limited to those literate in abstract conceptions. It further implies that the process is subject to banking activity; to containment in the 'having' mode of experience. This in itself represents a negation of the 'being' mode of authentic action research.

As Melton was forced to recognise in the final analysis of its failure, the participatory process requires the authentic response of the unrehearsed to the unanticipated, since it is shaped and structured by a wider, heterogeneous collective in relation to specific opposition. Diagrams and descriptions of 'action moments', of the 'spiral', are but inducements to follow Melton's path into isolated reality. They serve to choreograph the process. In this they identify it in terms predisposing to individualised/homogeneous experience and effectively obscure its essentially collective/heterogeneous character. This similarly acts to convert the inherent political thrust of the process into the bureaucratic configurations exemplified in the Melton experience.

This danger is particularly apparent in the Carr and Kemmis approach which effectively appropriates the process for the purposes of promoting professional 'prerogative' and professional status. Such aims clearly describe the counterfeit process, for they maintain existing confusion between professional authority and authentic knowledge. They similarly deny the relevance of an ecological/political perspective to educational change. This approach prefigures Melton's attempt to engage educational change in effective isolation from the wider socio-political realities. It maintains the credibility of a power structure rooted in 'divine territorial rights'. It seeks not to redistribute power, but rather to redefine the territory of professional interests. Thus the interests of the wider collective remain separated from, and subjected to, political terms established by a relatively few.

This aspect of the counterfeit process describes itself in various configurations throughout the Melton experience, and implies itself in some elements of the Collingwood situation. Footscray contrasts with Melton in particular, by its active political commitment grounded in a recognition of the relation between oppression, the division of labour and capital. Consequently, discourse at Footscray transcended roles and functions, and the knowledge shared derived its authority from pooled experience.

It is significant that the notions of 'action research' and 'participation' were never addressed as processes in their own right at Footscray. Nor was anyone familiar with the vocabulary of the 'professional action researcher'. Footscray lived participation. Melton attempted to implement participation according to preconceived notions of educational change. Its language and communications were model oriented.

The Carr and Kemmis approach anticipates the Melton experience. It remains an approach removed from the living political realities of education. Politics remain fascinating conceptual patterns upon which language may be exercised, honed, perfected. Such will remain the reality of the theorists and the 'professional action researcher'. For while the professional interest is a political interest, it is not a political issue. As the case study experiences indicate, for an issue to inform the field of action it must engage the concerns and circumstances of more than one group. In so doing, it must be accepted that joint interests prefigure a joint right to participate (as distinct from being consulted).

It is in this respect that the Footscray experience distinguishes itself from Melton and from current approaches to participatory research. In the latter it is the vocabulary and model that constitute the field of strategic action and the meaning of consensus. For the Footscray experience, it was the political configuration of the issue that described the orientation of strategies and tactics, and the consequent negotiation of collective 'meaning making'.

In this respect the Footscray experience also suggests itself as a context for a reappraisal of language relations. Integral to such relations is the perception of role and function which, during the period of dispute at Footscray, evolved a mutuality (as distinct from complementarity). Every participant was simultaneously teacher and student. Thus the dialectic relation was internalised and accessible to individual conceptual experience. The Footscray dispute generated a recognition of language as a political experience. It proposed a necessity for parents and students to participate in education, as distinct from being passive consumers of knowledge commodities. A prerequisite for full participation was identified as access to appropriate language. From this it followed that, if teachers were concerned to provide access to discourse, they must have an understanding of class relations as they pertain to oppression. For these prefigure the conceptual experience of parents, students and themselves. It was in the course of these mutual explorations, in the context of a strong mutual interest, that appropriate language was defined by all participants and the 'meaning making' became a shared function, a shared act, a shared experience.

As the action research theorists have noted, language is a medium. It is a reflective activity that occurs in the context of actions. In this it similarly describes a significant dimension of the issue as it is disclosed in the case studies. Melton possessed the vocabulary and the model of participation whilst Footscray possessed neither.

Participation evolved at Footscray and in this the 'action research moments' were at all times subject to the requirements of the political commitment to resolve political issues. Education itself was a political issue. As all three case studies testify in their respective significance, action research conceived of in participatory reflection and decision making, is an apolitical concept. It is an effective strategy for change only when it is politicised in terms of class struggle (as it was with Footscray).

NOTES AND REFERENCES FOR CHAPTER EIGHT

- (1) John BRUNNER: The Shockwave Rider, Ballantine Books, 1976, p.104.
- (2) R. MERTON & A. ROSSI: Reference Group Theory and Social Mobility, Class Status and Power, Bendix, R. and Lipset, S. (eds.), 1970, p.512.
- (3) Eric FROMM: To Have Or To Be, Abacus, 1979, p.44-45.
- (4) Letter sent by Collingwood Technical School Council to the Minister of Education.  
"...Council views the T.T.U.V. Log of Claims as a realistic base for negotiation."  
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- (5) Eric FROMM: Op. cit., p.52.

## CHAPTER NINE

ON THE POSSIBILITY OF CHANGE

ON THE POSSIBILITY OF CHANGE

The problem of establishing priorities in relation to the time and energy resources available, is one that besets teachers, trade unions and parents alike.

The sharp decline in teaching/learning conditions (in working class schools in particular), has created a 'survival' mentality amongst teachers; (both Collingwood Tech. and Melton provide examples of this, though others proliferate).

Similarly, trade unions are pressed into priorities dictated by retrenchment patterns, escalating unemployment and growing public antagonism to their struggles. Parents are subject to increased isolation by the combination of all these factors.

So questions pose themselves:

What can trade unions do to foster the development of participation in education amongst their memberships?

How can teacher unions contribute effectively to the development of genuine participation if it is accepted that the mass of teachers remain entrenched in 'bourgeois' perspectives?

What initiatives are open to parents, given the continuing inaccessibility of schools?

Indeed, is there a possibility of changing anything at all if all sections are caught in a seemingly self-perpetuating cycle: With the theme of 'everyone for themselves' rising to dominate an arena crowded with survival strategies?

Clearly there are no blueprints to offer in answer to these questions.

Nevertheless, there are suggestions that can be considered as possible agenda items for formulating starting points for change in education; for creating a new self-perpetuating cycle or, more to the point, a spiral of developments grounded in constructive processes and leading towards genuine participation.

This necessarily requires that the current cycle be broken and the means for achieving this remain subject to the degree of commitment consciously developed, where it is located and the extent to which it is organic in structure.

On the evidence available here, it would appear that the first initiatives must arise from within the teaching unions and this requires teachers to recognise the class nature of oppression and the political nature of education: To recognise 'the facts'.(1)

The prospects of this occurring 'spontaneously' in the current climate seem dim.(2) However, the introduction of the teaching profession into the trade union movement has widened the context of the profession's consideration of industrial strategies. Both in regard to 'parent power' and direct industrial power. It is conceivable that this new context will eventually effect the teaching profession's absorption of 'working class' identity, (to the degree that teachers are motivated to seek higher priority on the active agenda of the left trade union movement).(3)

The need to counter media propaganda might be one source of such motivation. With 58% of the workforce unionised, the trade union movement is potentially a significant avenue for organised and concerted dissemination of alternative information on education. While this potential has been spasmodically explored in the past, there has not been any consistent will or organised effort on the part of teacher unions to develop it.

A further motivating factor may prove itself in the progressive deskilling of teaching resulting from satellite and computer technology.(4) These developments (not yet apparent to teachers generally) will surely act to subvert the class barrier inherent in 'professional' identification. This possibly provides the most concrete ground for a merging with the working class

interests. Such a merging has an inestimable potential for change. For, of all particular industrial organisations, the teachers unions are perhaps the best situated, in terms of their membership's location geographically and vocationally, to initiate and develop the necessary primary links for a cohesive, coherent and well co-ordinated movement for change across society. A glimmer of this potential was evident in the development of the Footscray Tech. dispute. Consider the Footscray dispute's industrial tactics and strategies as guidelines (keeping in mind the 'tone' of relationships they were grounded in). In applying those strategies in a co-ordinated way throughout the union, in conjunction with co-ordinated information dissemination to general industry work locations via the trade unions, we engage in an approach that can conceivably construct an almost impenetrable spiral of change.

For with parents, teachers, students and trade unions acting in concert, there is little room for wedges to be placed. In the process 'education' may become united with living reality and direct itself to meeting needs at their source - for should not local industrial disputes be part of 'current events' pursued in any curriculum, should not local issues of poverty and unemployment be matters that all these bodies can act on together? And doesn't authentic participation in education mean learning by doing?

As Footscray and Melton both suggest (as opposite sides of the same coin), teachers with a commitment to participation rooted in class consciousness can effectively catalyse authentic and meaningful action.

Extrapolation of Footscray's approach presents the possibility of making education meaningful and relevant. The communication webs that would develop in such situations would be multi-directional/dimensional. In the process of shaping itself, the web would generate relevant questions for all participants. Formulating the answers would similarly be a process of exploring options and this in turn identify the contribution of respective participants at any one time.

stopworks would be regarded as opportunities to inform parents and community, to organise support, as well as expressing protest.

Footscray's approach relied on personal contact: With parents, with bureaucrats, local community and local workshops. When they stopped work it was often enough purely to give time to communication; to fundamental organisation. Such events were also regarded as part of the students' education. Consider parents, teachers, students and trade unions as a cohesive, mobilised body and you are considering a substantial section of the community in authentic accord. What is the effective impact of mass-media on direct personal experience?

The media attacks in the seventies were effective in the main because they picked unions off one-by-one. At any one time a small body was isolated and identified as irresponsible. Meanwhile, in the absence of any immediate alternative information, the larger mass saw themselves presented in the media as 'victims'.

Living politics have always been taboo to schools. But if schools are to genuinely educate for life they have to take a direct part in the overall struggle for a redistribution of power. To do this effectively, they must be prepared to take an active role in mobilising the community. The starting point for this resides in the immediate issues of curriculum and teaching/learning conditions in working class schools. The former has also to recognise the validity of 'learning by doing' in terms of both student power and direct action on the wider spectrum of community issues. What hope have the young to explore their capacity for constructive organisation if 'issues' are things to be read about, discussed, but not participated in? And what are schools effectively teaching at present as they refrain from encouraging students (as part of the curriculum), to directly investigate and explore these issues at their source - the people directly affected.

In this respect the 'education' of the working class students can become a relevant contribution to the collective development of 'shared meanings' between teachers, parents and the working class industrial organisations. Each becoming better equipped to support the other and each less vulnerable to media manipulation.

The Footscray dispute reveals a glimpse of the potential. The Melton situation provides, by way of omission, a measure of the nature of the commitment necessary.

Collingwood represents the essential reality currently pervading most working class schools. The contextual starting point where efforts towards change are, as yet, tentative gropings in the absence of a coherent, collective vision. A critical step forward will be made if, and when, schools like Collingwood make the decision to stopwork for the day and contact each parent by personal visit; inviting each to participate in formulating strategies for changing the educational environment. Such a step may be considered significant since, to be taken at all, the quality and nature of commitment that gave authenticity to Footscray's efforts would by necessity have been effectively explored.

#### EVERY TEACHER A POTENTIAL ACTIVIST?

"Democracy,... is essentially predicated upon the mobilization of all individuals as vital centres."

(Karl Manneheim)(5)

One of the most pernicious features of the cycle of demoralisation and cynicism is the fact that many of its 'participants' recognise what needs to be done, but wait for someone else to do it. The fact that nobody else does do it becomes justification for cynicism and a rationale for not undertaking responsibility and commitment.

Similarly, there is a widespread assumption on the part of many teachers that unions are somehow like insurance companies. Pay an annual fee and this entitles assistance if and when needed. Consequently, many teachers are currently waiting for the union 'to do something' about their plight. This fact, perhaps more than any other, exposes the current demise of teacher unions.

It is a critical requirement for regenerating teacher union industrial viability, that the membership face reality. Union only exist in so far as members are actively part of it. The union will do/can do, nothing until the members themselves are engaged in 'doing'. This fact brings the question of unionism very much to the point of individual commitment.

While it may be true that the individual cannot 'change the world', an individual act of commitment can be a catalyst for arousing dormant (sublimated), urges for change in others. Once aroused, these urges seek group expression. This can give rise to the ground for the organic processes of participation. For it is, in its first instance, a confirmation of shared recognition of need.

However, there are dangers inherent in the process - for both individual and group development. For often the context giving rise to an individual catalyst will generate a tendency to imbue the individual with 'big L' leadership status: (The principal of Melton offers an example of this, though it remains readily confused with his formal authority). This tendency appears at an early phase of the process and, if disregarded, effectively diverts progressive trends into a cycle duplicating in all essentials, the characteristics of the old, hierarchical model.

This tendency becomes effectively defeating only where the individual catalysts are unable to recognise the validity of responses and ideas of others, and to locate their personal initiatives in a collective context. Recognition of, and response to, the gestures of others, implies an awareness of the nature of one's own responses.

The individual "mobilised as a vital centre" will find useful food for thought in Meltzer's observation:

"The relation of human beings to one another arises from the developed ability of the human being to respond to his own gestures."(6)

As to how much change may develop from or within any specific situation, there are neither guarantees or blueprints. It remains strictly dishonest for any individual or group to mobilise on the promise of specific changes, since genuine change can only equate with democratisation. This manifests its character, strategies and goals within itself as a process (i.e. the relationships between participants).(7)

The crux of every individual's decision to partake of change lies in their recognition of their own oppressed state and their desire to fully realise their own humanity. Humanity then is the co-ordinate of individual and group effort.

Indeed, (peoples') striving for freedom, dignity, solidarity, and truth has been one of the strongest motivations to bring about historical change...(8)

Effectively expressing such decisions in action requires full comprehension of the social structure we are part of. This necessitates recognition of class, and an understanding of the concept of need, in the context of the working class. The process of participation based on class reality must remain essentially a process of politicisation. For its full realisation requires the abolition of oppression in all its forms.

NOTES AND REFERENCES TO CHAPTER NINE

- (1) Doris LESSING: The Sirian Experiments, Granada, 1981, p.186.  
The definition supplied by Lessing seems most appropriate here:  
"Facts, the more experienced one becomes (are) always to be understood, garnered, taken in, with that part of oneself most deeply involved with processes, with life as it work(s) its way out. Facts (are) not best understood as formulas or summings up, but through this inward groping and recognition."
- (2) Michael GALLAGHER: Op. cit., p.24-26.  
Gallagher's projections on the effect of the fiscal crisis on education in the 80's is extremely accurate. However, given the all-pervasive nature of this crisis i.e. the collapse of the manufacturing industry base in Victoria in particular, it is likely that the morale and expectations necessary to motivate change in education will remain in a state of catharsis for some time. Indeed it seems reasonable to expect that it will be the students' resistance, accumulated to a point of challenging the very existence of 'teachers', that eventually presses teachers to seek support outside of thier own ranks.
- (3) R. MERTON & A. ROSSI: Op. cit., p.514.  
"The transfer of allegiance of upper class individuals from their own to a lower class - whether this be in the pre-revolutionary period of 18th Century France of of 20th Century Russia - belongs to the same family of sociological problems as the more familiar identification of lower class individuals with a higher class."
- (4) Michael GALLAGHER: Op. cit., p.36-37.
- (5) K. MANNEHEIM: Op. cit., p.177.
- (6) B.N. MELTZER: Meads Social Psychology, Symbolic Interaction, 1972, p.8.

- (7) EKISTICS: On Goals And Processes, Oct. 1968, p.343.  
"... emphasis on simultaneity and widespread participation pushes us away from any hope that we can produce lineally defined goals that will be viable."
- (8) Eric FROMM: Anatomy Of Human Destructiveness, Penguin, 1977, p.345.  
Fromm goes on to comment: "the fact remains that built-in higher tendencies have thus far been largely defeated". This surely depends on perspective and expectations relative to time. One can point also to 'facts' that imply change by degree, e.g. we no longer have children from upwards of 3 years old as chimney sweeps or working their short lives in coal mines for up to 16 hours a day. The concept of human rights, as distinct from the divine right of kings, could be viewed as a significant change in the grounds of social thought in the western world.

**APPENDIX 1**

**Footscray Dispute:  
Extract From Newsletter Detailing Developments**

EXTRACT FROM NEWSLETTER DETAILING DEVELOPMENTS

The Education Department has known for a number of years the expansion plans of F.I.T. The Premier, the Minister, the Education Department officials are invited to come and inspect the deplorable effects of this expansion on the secondary school...

Last year our petition called for:

- (a) A written statement be given to the Footscray Technical School Council that no further encroachments will take place on the premises under dispute until a new school has been completed; and
- (b) That funds be supplied to enable the Footscray Technical School Council to employ an educational consultant team to channel the ideas and energies of the whole Footscray community into planning a new school.

These demands still stand, together with the following measures:

1. On-site crane be sound-proofed
2. Sound baffles on outside walls
3. Sound absorption material for all inside walls
4. Carpet in all rooms, corridors and stairs
5. Double glazing of windows
6. Air-conditioning for building (since double glazing would mean closed windows)
7. Explosives, drills and other loud machines to be used outside school hours
8. Imposition of speed limit outside school, i.e. between corner Ballarat and Geelong Roads and Ballarat Road and Farnsworth Avenue
9. Erection of a pedestrian bridge walkway over Ballarat Road as an alternative to the badly placed traffic lights nearby, which brings traffic noisily to a halt constantly.

DETAILED DEMANDS COMPILED APRIL 1, 1976

That a written guarantee be given that the following will be implemented within 5 days.

1. A written assurance be given of immediate funding for our new school.
2. A written assurance be given for funds to be supplied (\$25,000) to enable F.T.S. Council to employ an educational consultant team to channel the energies of the Footscray community in the planning of the new school.
3. In view of the already high risks and possible further risks a written assurance be given that there will be no further excavation.
4. Due to broken promises on the part of the F.I.T. (i.e. failing to adequately sound-proof the crane, failing to complete the agreed modifications to classrooms etc.), we request the continuous and full-time use of an officer of the Building Branch to finalise all modifications to these premises to the satisfaction of the staff.
5. A written assurance that no further encroachment will be made onto the students' already tiny playing area and that positive steps be taken to upgrade their recreational facilities, e.g. terracing and landscaping the grassy slopes between A and D Blocks, and further measures and that funding be made available for this purpose.
6. A written assurance be given that no further demolition of classrooms used by secondary school or F.T.C. will occur.
7. A written assurance be given that no further alterations occur to existing rooms without the permission of the staff of the secondary school or F.T.C.
8. That the Footscray City Council re-direct heavy traffic via Droop Street and Geelong Road during school hours (i.e.8-5).
9. That the Footscray City Council construct a pedestrian overpass or traffic light control pedestrian crossing in Ballarat Road in front of the school of at least 30 metres in width and that this crossing be manned at Council expense during school hours (i.e. 8-5).
10. The crane to be properly sound-proofed.
11. The crane not to slew in the direction of, or over students' playground during school hours (i.e. 8-5).

## **APPENDIX 2**

### **The Melton Tech. Evaluation Scheme**

## THE MELTON TECH EVALUATION SCHEME

### First a bit about the School:

Melton Tech is a newly established school currently working with 211 students at year 7 and year 8 levels. Originally the school was organised into four workshops as a basis for operating language across the curriculum (this of course embraces maths as language). These workshops functioned as core activity areas for the development of language on the assumption that meaningful learning occurred in relation to practical application.

The workshop organisation expressed itself as:

1. Technology Workshop - encompassing trade and graphic activities.
2. Science Workshop - dealing with science based activities.
3. Lifestudies Workshop - centred on cooking and craft activities.
4. Arts Workshop - based on art and drama activity.

All of these workshops undertook responsibility for the development of language, social awareness, and physical co-ordination which are the central aims of the school.

**Caring and Sharing:** This is a theme which has been organisationally expressed in the development of home-group structures. This means that each teacher undertook personal and intimate responsibility for 14 students. Superficially this may appear little different from the old pastoral system but in fact it demands a close liaison with students and their families outside of the constraints of the classroom situation.

Initially two half days per week were devoted to home group activity. However, the Education Department has consistently refused to recognise the pressing needs of the school in the process of establishing itself and the further needs of its attempt to construct a learning environment capable of enabling its participants to meet the challenges of the current economically imposed social upheaval.

Consequently, the home group element has been peeled back to a skeleton of fifteen minutes per day and one hour on Fridays. The workshops have increased their number by one with the advent of a Humanities workshop, and an accompanying trend to revert to traditional departments suggests that the school as it was originally conceived is at a critical stage in its struggle for survival.

### The School and Its Community

At the risk of being overly prolonged with this background information, let me say something of the school in relation to its community.

Melton Tech regards itself as a community school; a community school in the sense that not only its facilities, but its decision-making and overall development aims at sharing with, and engaging the participation of, both its immediate community and the community of Melton at large.

To some extent the Melton-Sunbury Interim Co-ordinating Committee's planning report 1976 provided a context conducive to the fulfillment of these aims. Amongst the report's recommendations for government funding of community shared facilities was the explicit belief that educational institutions be shared with, and developed through, a participating community.

Clearly the initial implementation of such aims falls largely onto the shoulders of the principal and staff of the school concerned. Equally clear is the responsibility of the Education Department to support the school-community efforts with the necessary staff and funds to transform "devolution" into reality.

In spite of the absence of support from government bodies the school has persevered with its aims with some success.

With a total student population of 211 students the more than forty parents involved directly in school activity is promising - apart from the traditional avenues of parent involvement e.g. canteen, social club; parents have worked with students on their

magazine, produced a fortnightly parents newsletter, invited home-room groups to their homes for a morning's activities, accompanied students on camp, and are currently negotiating with staff to work with students in the classroom, both as fellow students, reading aids, and just being people to relate to.

In its effort to establish its role as a community resource the school has endeavoured to provide simple community services. Consequently, two play groups and a women's drop-in group have been established on its grounds and organisation for a book exchange is currently underway. While appearing relatively trivial on the surface these services and the newly formed avenues of parent participation in the school's function form a prerequisite basis for informed, mutually-understanding use of the decision-making structures the school provides.

Having been locked out of schools for more than one hundred years, both parents and the community at large are understandably skeptical about "devolution" and "participation"; as are the many teachers who have been locked away from the community into the professional isolation chambers that now serve to distinguish schooling from real education.

Without the dissolution of the perceptual barriers dividing school and community, meaningful participation in the decision-making parocesses which ultimately decide the functional expression of the school cannot occur. In recognition of the need for decision-making machinery to be compatible with participation, irrespective of socio-educational backgrounds, the school has developed "planning committees" (there is no school council). These are actually regular public meetings open to both parents and the general community. They operate on as informal a basis as fluctuating numbers permit and formulate policy on a one person one vote basis.

The apparent open nature of the planning committee concept is deceptive however, if viewed in isolation of that central determinant of any school - THE CURRICULUM.

Ultimately devolution must remain a token gesture, open planning committees, parent involvement and all, if the curriculum is permitted to be dominated by either the central authorities or the school itself. Parent/community decision-making can be no more than a pre-empted affair if that decision-making does not extend to the curriculum. But the way through is fraught with difficulty. The crux of that difficulty is perceptual in that the conditioned role responses which students, parents and teachers have been allotted, act as subversive elements in any attempt to open meaningful negotiation of curriculum between teachers, students, parents and their community. The sense of territorial rights imparts a fragility to the early stages of developing recognition from all parties that there are no vested keepers of knowledge relevant to education and that parents, students and teachers must all contribute to the formulation of a curriculum if it is to serve rather than be served.

It is within the context of these considerations that the Melton Tech Evaluation Program has evolved.

#### THE EVALUATION PROGRAM

The program is deceptively simple on first impression. The implementation is couched in the home-room structure of the school and indeed may be seen as an extension of it. The paraphernalia that accompanies conventional evaluation programs is for the most part eliminated - the system rests totally in the dynamics of direct interchange between people.

Let me begin by outlining briefly its raw mechanics. Its implications I will deal with later.

The focus of the program is a consultation/discussion session every six weeks between the student, the parent and the home group teacher. This is a half hour session held at a time negotiated between the parties involved and its purpose is to evaluate the student's development during the preceding six weeks period (and in the process evaluate the school and parent contribution). By extension the session is also a planning period for the forthcoming six weeks.

A reference point for constructive discussion is provided in the form of a folder, containing all of the written work attempted by the student during the previous six weeks. The short term aim of the discussion is to negotiate a selection for the central filing system as part of an ongoing record of the students development over the entire period of attendance at the school.

This process of negotiating a selection for record is the process of interpreting information from its raw state. It is the process of evaluation.

It is apparent from the above that the home room teacher plays a key role in the situation.

The weight of this role necessitates close communication between all members of staff since the home room teacher must bring to the interviews a comprehensive range of information on the students development in activity areas not represented in the students written work. The practical projects present little problem since they are accessible directly to all parties upon completion. However, physical co-ordination skills and social-awareness require information transfer that can only occur through "staffroom talk" and memo-notes. Memo notes to be included in the discussion material are required only when there is a significant change or development in the students relationship to the work in hand, to the teacher concerned, or to the situation in general. They may indicate need for direct contact with particular workshop teachers or may be omitted altogether - according to the specific case. The form of the memo could be described as an anecdotal record.

Apart from the obvious implications for devolution and access to the curriculum the Melton Tech approach to evaluation assumes that -

1. Our prime concern is with the development of the total child.
2. Our basic criteria for assessment of progress is the individual students previous achievements.
3. Evaluation is an ongoing, continuous process.

The latter is particularly relevant here in that we know that all parties are constantly evaluating their relationship to the school: the parent compares current education with their own, the student response is often a judgement of the relevance of school to personal need and the student knows first hand the level of effort being made in relation to capacity; the teachers are constantly making mental notes on the students' performance and general relationship to activities. In other words the process occurs all along but conclusions are for most part developed within the isolated context of particular roles. The aim of our approach is to bring this process into the open that it may foster greater mutual understanding of needs and provide a co-operative structure for meeting them. It is a "caring and sharing" process. It is an ongoing "inservice education" for all involved. It is a basis for creatively approaching an education potential as dynamic as the social flux it is a part of. Probably the most important aspect of all is that our approach invites its participants to put social roles aside and receive each other as people.

But, you might say, this doesn't just happen; you can't just set up a consultation/discussion situation and a file to talk about and expect it to work: and of course you are right. When we accept this approach to evaluation we in fact make a commitment to questioning many of our own favourite notions on education, people and society in general; that means questioning ourselves and that is sometimes a difficult thing to do because it entails the growing pains of coming to grips with a bigger reality than the one we are so comfortably familiar with.

#### Preparing for the approach

Earlier on I referred to the Melton Tech Evaluation program as having evolved. I used that term deliberately because my ideas were formulated in relation to the starting point the school community offered me. In another school I may have had to develop what in my view would be a more primitive structure which would nevertheless function as a stage leading to the one that Melton Tech has decided to pilot.

In the light of this it is important to consider the preconditions existing at Melton Tech on my arrival in order that the viability of our preparations be understood. Some of these I have already hinted at in my initial outline of the school.

The central precondition existing was the strength of commitment between administration and staff to the development of the total child and to the implementation of devolution. The importance of this commitment and the difference between commitment and infatuation with fashionable notions cannot be overemphasised. In the former one is called upon to persevere in spite of all difficulty, in the latter the notion can be readily discarded if things become uncomfortable.

This commitment was expressed in a number of ways. The most noteworthy, given the constraints of space in this paper, were regular Monday night meetings held to discuss the students, and at least one other night per fortnight (often more) where the development of devolution in workshops, was discussed. These meetings are ongoing. As an interesting aside it is worth noting that union issues were an integrated part of discussion (although recently staffing considerations have necessitated a more direct approach to these). I make mention of this because contrary to common belief, it graphically illustrates that teacher union issues are not arbitrarily raised but grow in relation to their relevance to the meeting of educational needs.

Structurally the organisation that existed for parent teacher interviews provided the sort of experience required to impart the necessary confidence for teachers to embark upon the new program. Two home-group weeks a year formally expressed the recognition of parents right and need for easy access to their childrens day to day environment. This was reinforced by the schools active encouragement of parents to "drop-in" to the school at will (sharing morning tea with the staff) without needing the students "behaviour" or "progress rate" as justification for their presence. Needless to say the school was not overwhelmed by parents "dropping in", but the numbers of adventurous souls that did venture to cross the threshold represented a rate that staff could comfortably cope with and learn from.

This is not to suggest that teachers at the school have gained all of the confidence required. The shadow of the old role divisions still lingers. Not only the roles of parent and teacher, but the roles related to subject divisions in learning. The responsibility of entering into dialogue on skills outside of familiar subject bounds has caused some dilemma and much discussion. Nevertheless a starting point offers itself in the recognition of co-operative learning as a theme. This of course extends from the practical application of language across the curriculum. In-service workshops covering trade, maths and literacy made use of drama activities, as an experienced based confidence builder and undoubtedly more of this will be required from time to time as the fears and frustrations, are worked through to reach a more operative understanding. Progress is slow but given the "pioneering" element in the process this is neither damaging or unexpected (although it is frustrating).

Clearly the implementation of this program without the consent of the parents would have trivialised the concept of devolution. In fact part of the process of formulating the program itself was an evening meeting of all parents (consolidated by subsequent bulletins).

One hundred and sixty-three attended which tends to make parent lack of interest somewhat mythical. The evening was designed as a series of workshops culminating in a full meeting which approved the formulation of a new proposal for evaluation. The workshops were lead by the homeroom teachers since these were the most familiar link between the parents and the school. Discussion was directed towards establishing the priorities in the education of their children. The outcome was a reaffirmation of the schools development of the "total" child and the process of arriving at this position proved mutually informative and rewarding.

When the current project was eventually formulated and teachers had expressed their willingness to pilot it, further parent workshops were organised - both to work through the implications of the proposal and to seek approval and co-operation. It was warmly received and contributions were made which substantially

improved the mechanical and educational usefulness of the filing system. Despite these contributions parents confidence in themselves as valuable contributors to the process of evaluating is low. The same role fears and sense of skill inadequacies are raised for them as with the teachers in their subject areas. However, although formal in-service maybe of value later on, the current approach to confidence building is to engage parents in various areas of school activity; the most promising of these is their entry into the classroom which necessitates ongoing involvement in the Humanities workshops' work preparation. Needless to say all parties involved are acutely sensitive to the need to proceed with care - to ensure that threatening situations are avoided until there is sufficient confidence built to deal with them.

At this stage let me say that the inadequate attention given to student participation in the preceeding pages should not be construed as a lack of consideration of their importance. Indeed the school revolves around them and there are times when the affection and seriousness in the staffs regard to students may be confused with the sense of indulgence and overprotectiveness all parents experience from time to time.

However the long term implications of student participation in evaluation raises somewhat "hairy" questions and foreshadows the need for a delicate "lifting of the veil" that currently defies recognition of the young as "complete" people. The common and limited conception of the young has long been responsible for the arbitrary development of behaviour conventions distinguishing the accepted roles of children and adults. The process of gaining real participation from students is the process of breaking down those arbitrary conventions.

In anticipation of the argument that there are genuine differences in nature and degree of experience between children and adults I will point out that such is the difference and similarity between all people; and the relevance of accumulated experience in the fast changing social environment we deal with is negated by the need to respond directly to new stimuli and develop language appropriate to designating its significance.

Although staff have not yet given comprehensive consideration to these implications in the evaluation program there's recognition of the need to dismantle the arbitrary role-play between students and teachers (however not yet fully articulate). This is evident in the students free access to the staffroom and administration quarters which has caused some growing pains to accommodate.

With predictable exceptions the staff-student relationships are friendly and casually respectful. As might be expected in any negotiation to restructure power there is a trial and error period with new students needing to learn the difference between freedom and licence as there is with new teachers. There are intermittent periods of strain on staff, students and parents alike when the question of discipline evokes a sense of self doubt and frustration; fortunately timely breakthroughs re-establish the confidence to proceed.

In this atmosphere participation of students in evaluation is a logical step. The need for the student body to gain an articulate awareness of the evaluation and decision-making processes in the school is evident and it is important that the development of student decision-making structures occur at a rate conducive to meaningful participation in the central evaluation and decision-making processes. The experience gained through the evaluation program should provide a springboard for general application. Formal consolidating experience may be gained through a combination of regional exchange student programs and seminars similar in emphasis to the National Seminar on Youth Participation in Education Projects.

Entry into community based evaluation and decision-making may occur through a variety of structures from junior councils to action groups like the Coalition Against Poverty and Unemployment, both of which are valid areas for youth to explore their potential for constructive evaluation and decision-making in differing forms.

Finally I will express my view that the real value of the Melton Tech Evaluation Program is that it offers a modest further step towards a responsible and creative freedom because it revolves around meeting peoples needs on a "caring and sharing basis".

The question now is will the extra staff be provided to make meeting peoples needs viable - and if not, can real participatory evaluation and decision-making be brought about through recognition of what it means for any government department to refuse support for meeting peoples needs?

**APPENDIX 3**

**A Melton Tech. Response To The Green Paper:  
A Social and Community Context**

ON THE SOCIAL AND COMMUNITY CONTEXT OF THE SCHOOL RE DEVOLUTION OF DECISION MAKING.

It is with some concern that we observe the Green Paper's proposition in 4.10 that the curriculum, the core of any school, is required to develop in response to the needs of society first, and gives second place to the needs of the individual student and their local and wider communities.

This position places itself into open conflict with the practical requirements of applied devolution of decision making as distinct from that notion of devolution which still withholds from its participants any effective influence on the determinants of their children's education.

As the Green Paper quite rightly asserts, "There is insufficient recognition that resources are, and will always be limited. The Government must also provide from those limited funds for many services beside education" (p.3, 2.8). However, this statement may be justifiably applied to the overall emphasis of the Green Paper itself.

Let us first point out that the statement in 4.10 is based on the bland assumption that our society is a stable relationship between many community groups, all of which revolve around a central set of uniform values. As the day to day evidence of numerous community groupings' conflict with central authorities for recognition of their needs testifies, there is substantial difference of opinion reflecting substantial differences in values.

The fact that the Aboriginal groupings have found it necessary to appeal to an international body for support in gaining recognition of their cultural values is but one instance. Widespread industrial unrest and the vocal opposition of church and welfare groups to the central authorities' policies on unemployment are further testimony that there is a clear divergence of opinion between a substantial number of community elements and the central authority, as to what constitutes "society's needs".

The assumptions expressed in 4.10 then, when considered in relation to the limited resources noted in 2.8, are actually posing the super-imposition of centrally determined values on the school community as a solution to the problem of distributing limited resources throughout the community at large.

This approach is both deceptive and dangerous because it equates the notion of equal opportunity with the use of education as an instrument to legitimise the values of an economically and socially secure minority at the expense of the larger number of people coming from diverse backgrounds and living conditions, and holding diverse value structures.

Given that resources are limited the question arises as to how much "locally derived curriculum options" any state school can afford if its fundamental energies and resources are diverted into fulfilling requirements determined centrally.

Far from facilitating any real devolved decision making the Green Paper's position determines that the individual and community has no effective access to decisions on the crucial question of curriculum or the distribution of educational resources. Rather, the Green Paper adopts a paternalistic position which asserts that a particular minority group knows what is best for the rest of the community, and the decisions on which community needs will be given priority is pre-empted by the same decision which defines who's values should be central to the education system as a whole.

This attitude runs contrary to the positions expressed in U.N.I.C.E.F. publications which include research and opinions on educational developments from leading educationalists throughout the world.

Articles in U.N.I.C.E.F. NEWS (issue 93/Vol.3/1977) expressed the urgent need for schools to become less centrally determined than ever. In a study of six industrialised countries one article noted that - "education which aims at encouraging an awareness in children of the social and political problems of our time and at forming responsible men and women capable of taking action for

justice, and equality presupposes a school which is itself a place for exchange, dialogue and experimentation - in short a school open to life" (p.22).

On page 23 of the same journal a further article from a leading educationalist (Paulo Frierre) pointed out that - "Education can either function as an instrument of oppression or become the instrument of liberation. If it is the latter, it helps people deal critically and creatively with reality and discover how to participate in the transformation of their world".

The Melton Technical School Community is cognisant of this wider context of educational considerations. We would draw your attention to the practical inconsistencies involved in applying the concept of devolved decision making when the curriculum and distribution of educational resources remain essentially determined from a centre. Further, we point out that people cannot "participate in the transformation of their world" if the crucial decisions i.e. those decisions which by their nature preempt the rest; are made by a select group of people removed from the situation in which need is experienced.

As a school that has attempted to apply the concept of devolution of decision making to all educational undertakings, Melton Tech must hold serious reservations about the intentions expressed in the Green Paper. We speak from hard earned experience when we say that neither current departmental practice nor policy considerations in the Green Paper offer any support to the practical application of community participation in Schools, or to meeting specific needs of the individual.

The needs at Melton are clear cut for all who are interested to see. It is a dormitory suburb isolated from the main western suburbs conglomerate. The rate of its growth in relation to the absence of any parallel development of services and facilities has created social problems of a type demanding more from its schools than current departmental staffing and resource distribution procedures recognise.

The inadequate transport puts our young at a further disadvantage on the job market. The closest C.E.S. is Sunshine and according to July 1980 figures the ratio of juniors to job vacancies was 702. In this context the argument of the 3RRR's being a solution to the unemployment problems our current students will face is received with some skepticism. While our school remains committed to the concept of literacy we would note that we do so, not from some misguided belief that it will enable our students to get jobs that are clearly non-existent; but rather because it is the basis for extending communication and understanding, and is therefore essential to their capacity to participate in identifying and meeting their own needs and those of their community.

It is in recognition of our students' and community's diverse needs that we have developed our school as a community school.

Melton Tech regards itself as a community school; a community school in the sense that not only its facilities, but its decision making and overall development aims at sharing with, and engaging the participation of, both its immediate community and the community of Melton at large.

To some extent the Melton-Sunbury Interim Co-ordinating Committee's planning report 1976 provided a context conducive to the fulfillment of these aims. Amongst the report's recommendations for government funding of community shared facilities was the explicit belief that educational institutions be shared with, and developed through, a participating community.

Clearly the initial implementation of such aims falls largely onto the shoulders of the principal and staff of the school concerned. Equally clear is the responsibility of the Education Department to support the school-community efforts with the necessary staff and funds to transform "devolution" into reality.

In spite of the absence of support from government bodies the school has persevered with its aims with some success.

With a total student population of 211 students the more than forty parents involved directly in school activity is promising - apart from the traditional avenues of parent involvement e.g. canteen, social club; parents have worked with students on their magazine, produced a fortnightly parents newsletter, invited home-room groups to their homes for a morning's activities, accompanied students on camp, and are currently negotiating with staff to work with students in the classroom, both as fellow students, reading aids, and just being people to relate to.

In its effort to establish its role as a community resource the school has endeavoured to provide simple community services. Consequently, two play groups and a women's drop-in group have been established on its grounds and organisation for a book exchange is currently underway. While appearing relatively trivial on the surface these services and the newly formed avenues of parent participation in the school's function form a prerequisite basis for informed, mutually-understanding use of the decision-making structures the school provides.

Our community based programs are showing some success in spite of the lack of support staff to carry them out. We know from our experience so far that if our programs eventually disintegrate it will not be from lack of parent interest - because many parents have exhibited their interest in practical contributions: nor will it be from lack of teacher commitment because teachers have regularly contributed time and energy outside of timetabled hours - regular after school meetings to monitor students' progress and the development of devolution structures in the school. Rather, it will be because the department does not support devolution in practical terms; i.e. has failed to supply the support staff necessary to alleviate the working pressures of implementing the initial structure for devolution. Teachers must have time to discuss at length, and regularly, educational questions and possibilities with parents. Sharing power and responsibility inevitably requires the sharing of knowledge and experience with all people affected by the decision concerned.

The teachers' role in making devolution workable is essential, and initially the requirements of the process require a restructure of teaching time to allow for liaison activities. This means more support staff. If we are talking about sufficient and economic education then we are talking about the sort of education that develops independent, responsible and articulate people capable of participating in developing a viable future that takes account of everyone's needs. We are talking about the type of education that makes the best use of its resources, i.e. its environment, its funds, its staffing. The community is one of the richest learning environments available to any school and it is purely inefficient economics that permits that resource to remain untapped just for the want of sufficient support staff and funds required to develop the necessary structures to make that resource accessible.

Our experience at Melton Tech supports the Karmel committee's findings that "The openness of a school to parents is a means both of extending its educational influence and of reinforcing pupil motivation" (para. 2.19).

Our school has not requested either funding or staff on the basis of fanciful educational possibilities. Our requests for recognition of need have been firmly couched in the reality of already operating programs requiring assistance in development.

The argument in 2.8 of the Green paper rings a little hollow. "If the needs of any individual school are looked at in isolation and without regard to the requirements and constraints of the system as a whole, those associated with that school may well believe that their needs are inadequately met."

It is with regard to the requirements and constraints of the system as a whole that we observe public funds subsidising the introduction of technology into private enterprise - in effect subsidising the destruction of employment opportunity without regard to the extra burden that places on the community and its schools; and we observe the larger portion of Federal Education funds being directed to private schools who cater for the smaller portion of the student community; further, we note that the

priority in education is not given to adequately staffing and funding the early years of education - to counter the establishment of failure experience in students when their learning potential is highest. Rather, such resources are inefficiently diverted into programs aimed at curing the problems that inadequately supported earlier education produced: the development of programs for people in their late teens identified as "Students at risk".

It is with grave concern for the future of education and the rights of people in general that we view the Green Paper proposals.

**APPENDIX 4**

**Melton Principal's Response**

MELTON PRINCIPAL'S RESPONSE

To answer your request for comments may lead me into writing a thesis myself. (By the way, I would be interested in the total final product.) I enjoyed reading your "theories" on what happened at Melton - '79 to '82 are far enough away to be history rather than recent events. One error of fact - there were 112 students in 1979.

You make the observation that there was a big difference between Melton and Footscray in what happened to participants as a result of high tension, namely that at Melton stress on parents, students and staff was the direct result of this high tension. I agree with this but could never work out why. Tension - even high tension - is a part of school life but it was the first time I was effected by stress. (...) was even more effected by stress with some disasterous consequences. For me, to be effected by stress, was both new and disturbing - I believe it weakened my resolve to play a leadership role in maintaining the structural design of the curriculum.

The biggest change in the original Melton Project was the subject based T/T introduced in April 1980. Although "workshops" remained they became administrative structures rather than integrated program workshops. The creation of humanities as a workshop was significant. This change left the Evaluation Project and the Community School without a proper base to operate.

My failure to get extra staff in 1980 was also significant. Direct union action needed to be used to get what my methods failed to get. Your emphasis on the subservience of the union is an interesting view point. The union made a dramatic separation at the beginning of 1984 with (...) as president. I supported this move for a strong branch but its big test came when it needed to confront the "agreement". The local branch's failure to take on both the union and government for the sake of Melton Tech. showed that unions can be great defenders of a "status quo". Yes, a strong union branch was needed to get the resources that I failed to get. (By the way, if I hadn't offended (...) in 1978 we may have received more staff and who knows!!)

Another major problem was the energy needed to tackle "Core Plus" - my criticisms - our criticisms - in 1979-80 have all been verified to such an extent that the policy has been abandoned. My efforts also to make the building fit a mini school concept was probably the most frustrating issue. I have since seen how supportive a building structure can be when I see both Footscray and Mount Clear in action. Yet it was the cost of both these schools which caused the bureaucrats to balk at any efforts to do the same.

If I can "read between the lines" I can understand your emphasis on the union in the school. You have something significant to say about unionism in the struggle for rights of working class people in education. At the moment I have little faith in the role of the union - it will only cement the policies which are currently distributing resources by formula. Unions - especially large ones - fear the maverick - both its criticisms and its needs requests.

**APPENDIX 5**

**The Trade Union Movement And Education**

TRADE UNIONS AND EDUCATION: A Brief Overview

Despite the role of education in maintaining the status quo, trade unions have rarely, if ever, taken a major interest in either its power structure or its content. While the sixties witnessed education become a major domestic issue, this did not appear to essentially change the assumptions implicit in the trade union's approach to public education. With exceptions (notable for the fact that they were exceptions), most trade union officials still approached education as though it was a commodity for compulsory consumption. That it provided the majority with at least rudimentary literacy and numeracy skills, and thereby assisted the young obtain a niche in the working world. Thus despite inherent suspicion of the middle class, it was left in the hands of the teaching profession to determine the educational needs of the working class.

For most part the political/social/industrial functions of schooling escaped their attention. The trade union understanding and interest in these aspects was primarily directed to areas of general trade training and the apprenticeship system.

However, the sixties did set in motion the basis for change; firstly with the teacher unions entrance into the trade union movement and secondly with the development of new perspectives in the trade unions themselves.

As noted earlier, the climate of the times was one of militant and widespread radicalism where issues based in 'Human Rights' proliferated and the middle class radicals courted the trade union movement. The responsive unions were those of the left; in the main the Australian Metal Workers Union (A.M.W.U.) and the building-trades unions. While residue suspicion of the middle classes maintained the trade unions at a discrete distance, their support for the community issues of the times was evidenced as more than token; the most readily recognised being the anti-war, and the environmental issues. This wide ranging exchange between the middle class radicals and the unions served to broaden the overall left trade union perspectives and deepen commitment to working class issues on the part of many student radicals. The

'working class intellectuals' of the day (the most prominent and influential being Laurie Carmichael), were both receptive to new ideas and quick to ascertain their specific relevance to trade union/working class interests. The influence and vision of Carmichael on the anti-war/conscription issues, and Mundy (of the Builders Labourers Federation) on the environmental issues, combined to generate trade union awareness of its extensive potential in community affairs; and did much to improve community/trade union relations.(1) In the process additional responsibilities and priorities were defined and a new, more sophisticated emphasis placed on communication. By the early 70's the internal organisation of many unions reflected this in the creation of positions for journal editors and educational officers.(2) That these were often recruited from the ranks of the radical student movement (as were many of the research officers of the time),(3) reflected a recognition of need for skills unavailable from union rank and file experience; for it breached the general practice of leadership recruitment from internal sources only (though there was evidence to suggest that the power potential of these positions was not clearly recognised at the time, and therefore not seen to have leadership associations).

Trade union training programs gained a high profile both in the establishment of the government funded body, Trade Union Training Authority (T.U.T.A.) and in terms of the larger unions (particularly the A.M.W.U.), directing union funds into training programs of their own.(4) The question of paid study leave to attend these courses became a standard inclusion in unions' logs of claims.(5)

While these moves reflect a new awareness of, and emphasis on, the role of 'education' in the trade union movement, it is one that remains generally contained in a perspective dominated by short-term rather than long-term needs. There are some exceptions to this, notable by virtue of their rarity; among these might be included the A.M.W.S.U.'s effectively researched and relevantly presented publications 'Australia Ripped Off' and 'Australia On The Rock', and the extensive participation of trade unions in the 'Australian Community Education Conference' in

1980. For the most part however, the trade union movement's educational activity remains geared to training needs - training of shop-stewards, advocates and officials. Wider questions of industrial politics such as the domestic satellite issue, and women's issues, unemployment, worker participation and the 'arts in the workplace' have a regular but infrequent presence in the annual course schedules of both T.U.T.A. and individual unions. But this presence, and the course structures themselves, are determined by the immediate pressures of the industrial environment current at the time. This of course is what provides the measure of relevance and impetus required for rank and file participation; and in this respect the approach can be viewed as both necessary and appropriate - for the short-term. Nevertheless, without a broader and longer-term framework operating such courses maintain the unions in an essentially reactionary stance and reinforce the duality of the membership's identity; (as union members struggling for their rights on the one hand and members of a public victimised by union action on the other). Indeed the media in particular, effectively made use of this in its attacks on trade union industrial action in the 70's.(6)

The ambivalent identity of the individual unionist has enabled union membership to be effectively manipulated against itself and perhaps explains in part the contradiction posed whereby more than 58% of the Australian workforce is unionised,(7) while almost as large a portion of the public express the belief that unions have too much power and wield it without due consideration for public interest.

While unions recognise only too well the source and extent of the media's power on public/membership attitudes, with perhaps the exception of the B.L.F., it has done little to effectively educate its membership in these matters.

Further, and in the long-term perhaps more importantly, there is the question of the number of school leavers entering the workforce. For the most part, these people have a ready made view of unions absorbed from the media in the absence of any alternative information being available; for a significant portion of young entrants to the workforce form a spectrum of responses running

between total indifference to outright antagonism to union membership. When considered in the light of workforce turnover (particularly in times of high unemployment when the young are vulnerable to recruitment as scab labour), the 'union education' of this element considerably drains the morale and resources of the organisation; the latter in terms of organisational time and industrial bargaining power.

The fact that this problem exists to the degree it does cannot totally be laid at the door of the media, for the media manipulates and inhibits development of the already existing levels of public understanding (or lack thereof). The crux of both the doppleganger element in the membership's consciousness of itself, and the attitudes of the young entrants to the workforce raises substantial questions of the content and practice of educational establishments that purport to prepare the young for adulthood. 'Critical thinking' has long been a traditional component in English courses, however always in the absence of class content and in this remained facile and tokenistic. The history of the working classes and their organisations has been for most, absent in the 'critical thinking' of the teaching profession; and this is reflected in the content of curriculum. The exceptions to this lay largely in the early 70's when some western suburban schools, and a smattering of schools in the northern and inner regions of Melbourne, provided 'units' on 'trade unions' and related material. But at no time has there existed amongst teachers a consciousness of the importance of class history; and through this the conscious preparation of the working class young for a critical awareness of themselves as a class with a specific interest in democratisation processes. Nor can the teaching profession be held to be solely responsible for this lack in the educational perspectives, since the trade union movement itself has not (in any concerted way), challenged the education system in terms of working class rights. Indeed where such challenges have been made (the most notable being Footscray), it was initiated by the teachers themselves, and while those trade unions in an an effective strategic position lent invaluable industrial support to such campaigns, it was primarily in a framework of union solidarity, based on demands for a greater share of material resources for working class

students. The question of the right to have working class content in education was never seriously considered.

An extensive analysis of why this was the case is not within the scope of considerations here. But it is reasonable to suggest that the trade unions were subject to the 'education mystique' to a degree that paralysed any suggestion that they may have a legitimate right to participate in determining the content of education for working class young. Reinforcing the limits of trade union thinking on the matter, is the possessive jealousies guarding and delineating each specific union's industrial identity. Thus there is a strong inhibition against 'interfering' in the policies and practices of another union unless there is a direct and immediate collision of interests experienced.(8)

This places trade union attitudes towards public education in a similar context to those of parents (not surprising given the overlap of roles), whereby participation occurs only upon invitation, and then only within parameters determined by the teaching profession.

The fact that such invitations have only been issued in the context of specific campaigns undertaken by the teaching profession (e.g limited tenure, public funding etc.), is a reflection of an attitude amongst the teaching profession that makes an industrial convenience of interaction with the trade union movement as a whole. For at present there is no coherent organisational commitment to working class interests within the teaching profession itself. In this the teaching union membership (by virtue of the factors identified earlier), is a product of its own curriculum omissions; reinforced by the fact that the middle class interests have not ostensibly been challenged by educational content other than when the events of the sixties forced a recognition of a wider context for evaluating education per se. In the light of the seventies it seems reasonable to suggest that this recognition, in the main, did not penetrate into an awareness of the fundamental reality of class based society. Consequently, the underlying 'bourgeois' framework of the teaching unions collective perspective was ultimately retained and sublimated the development of a wider consciousness.

NOTES AND REFERENCES FOR APPENDIX 5

- (1) Ian TURNER: In Union Is Strength, Nelson, 1978, p.141.
- (2) Ross MARTIN: Trade Unions In Australia, Officials and Activists, Pelican, 1980, p.68-70.
- (3) IBID.: p.69.
- (4) Amalgamated Metal Workers Union, Addresses, Reports and Decisions of the Second Commonwealth Conference, 30th May-7th June, 1974, Education Committee Report:  
"... We urge provision of a tiered program of National College, State College and Trades and Labor Council College and independent union education programs which, while operating independently, will cooperate at all possible levels on subjects of common interest..."
- (5) IBID.:  
"...Conference notes the N.S.W. and Victorian state committees' appointment of Education Officers financed by appropriate levies in those states. The breakthrough in the vehicle industry and some state and Commonwealth Government employees for paid study leave, paves the way for extensive participation in the unions education program."
- (6) BONNEY & WILSON
- (7) John HIGLEY, Desley DEACON & Don SMART: Elites In Australia, Routledge Kegan Paul, 1979, p.37.
- (8) Christopher CAUDWELL: The Concept Of Freedom, Laurence and Wishart, London, 1977, p.232.  
It is tempting to view these factors as evidence for Caudwell's contention;

"The proletariat, alone, cannot rise beyond trade union consciousness. This consciousness, although it sees freedom to be the outcome of restrictions of the market and thus denies bourgeois ideology, yet proposes a freedom which is dependent upon the existence of a bourgeoisie, a freedom within the pores of bourgeois society. It is thus a consciousness limited on every side by bourgeois consciousness and unable to make itself independent, unable to advance to the status of a new world view."

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