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Radical Education Dossier

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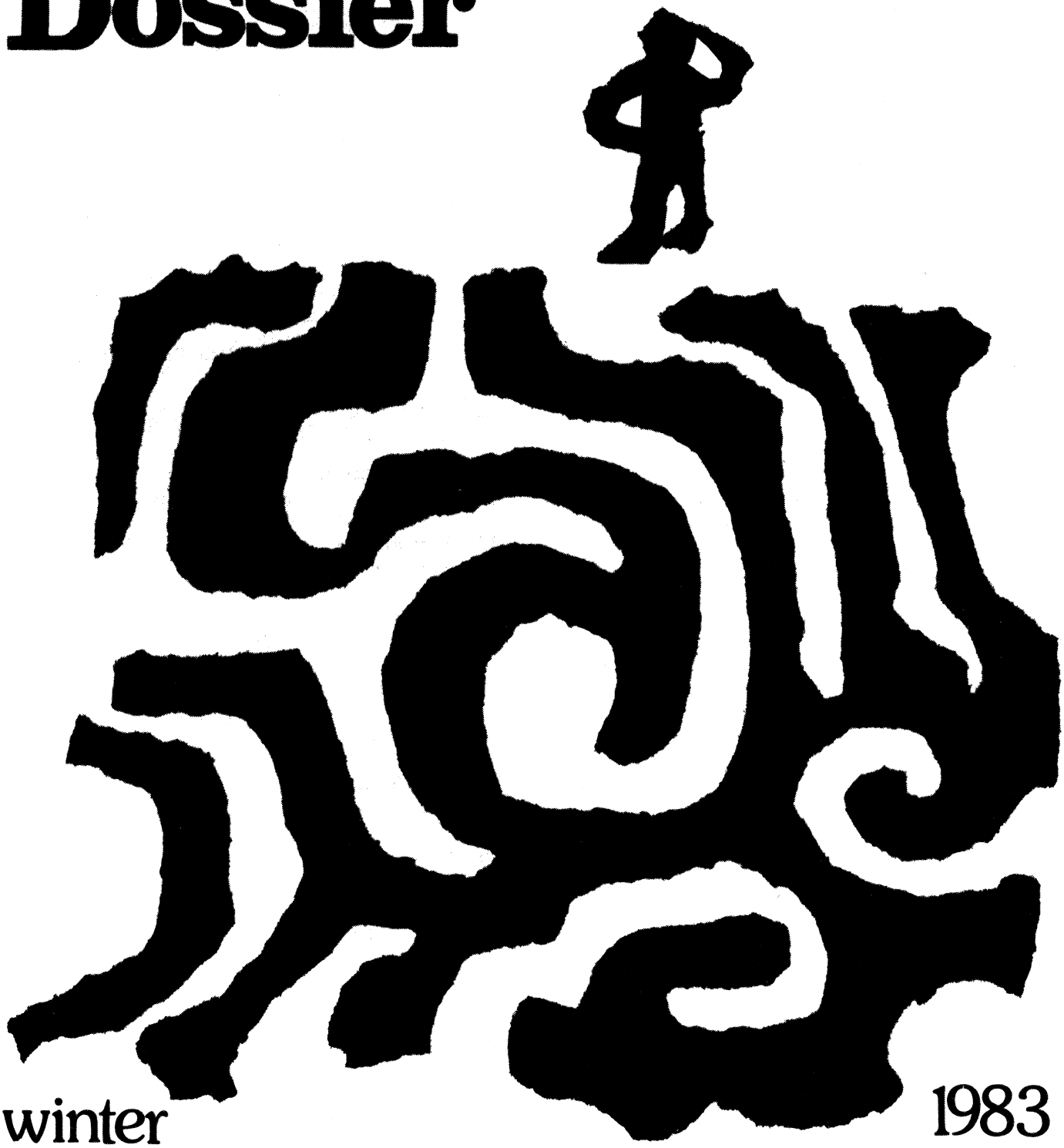

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RADICAL EDUCATION DOSSIER

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Radical Education Dossier is produced by a group of teachers, students and university staff working to bring about democratic and socially progressive change in Australian schooling, as part of a broad political movement towards socialism in Australia. The magazine aims to present a socialist analysis of a wide range of theoretical and practical issues in education and is not affiliated with any political party.

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RED 20 has been compiled and produced by **Fay Grear, Noelene Hall, Ken Johnston, Scott Poynting, Sue Rosen, Linley Samuel and Terri Seddon.**

the working class and education

It has become the normal practice of *RED* to devote each issue to a particular theme. The past few issues, for example, have covered peace education, the future of public schooling, discipline and school resistance, worker education and media education. To cover such disparate areas is taxing enough in itself, but the task is made even more difficult by the demand that we place on ourselves to locate these concerns within a socialist perspective.

In the early days of the Dossier (1976 seems like another generation) there was a greater assurance and consensus as to what a socialist perspective meant. *RED* grew out of the conference, 'What To Do About Schools', at which Sam Bowles and Herb Gintis were the key speakers. It all seemed so much simpler then. It was as if the rediscovery of the marxist critique of schooling had suddenly provided us with a blueprint that we could use for deciding our position on all manner of practical issues. We were faced with multicultural education, we apply the blueprint and read off our position. What about computer education? Simply apply the master key and the socialist perspective is revealed.

Of course we soon discovered that the blueprint was not a finished product and that in the construction of a socialist education we were in fact producing the blueprint as we engaged in practical politics around schooling and reflected on our actions. *RED* is committed to this task of constructing a socialist theory and practice of education. If we seem in 1983 to have lost the coherence and purity of our earlier conceptions, then we need to examine why it is so. Was the apparent simplicity gained at the expense of political reality? Why has the left analysis failed to mobilise teachers, students and parents whereas conservative appeals have gained popular support? There is a lot of work to be done. Much less certainty about this task, but hopefully a more broad-based, effective politics.

How are these issues of *RED* produced? In the case of the Peace and Disarmament Education issue we formed a special Peace Education Collective consisting of people who had a special interest in developing that theme. That collective really took off, and produced enough excellent copy to fill two issues of *RED*. (The second one will be out later this year.) With other themes, the *RED* collective has set out to educate itself on the practicalities of the topic. With the Discipline issue, for example, the collective invited a number of teachers and researchers in the area of school resistance to meet several times so as to thrash out the key issues, their political and educational implications and how we might produce the material. On other topics, the collective has depended on its own resources. For the collective, it's a continuing process of self-education. Why don't you become part of it? Join the collective!

A word about *RED 20*. As the issue approached completion, a theme began to emerge, which we could broadly call the working class and education. (It's obviously a theme that we must deal with more explicitly in a future issue.)

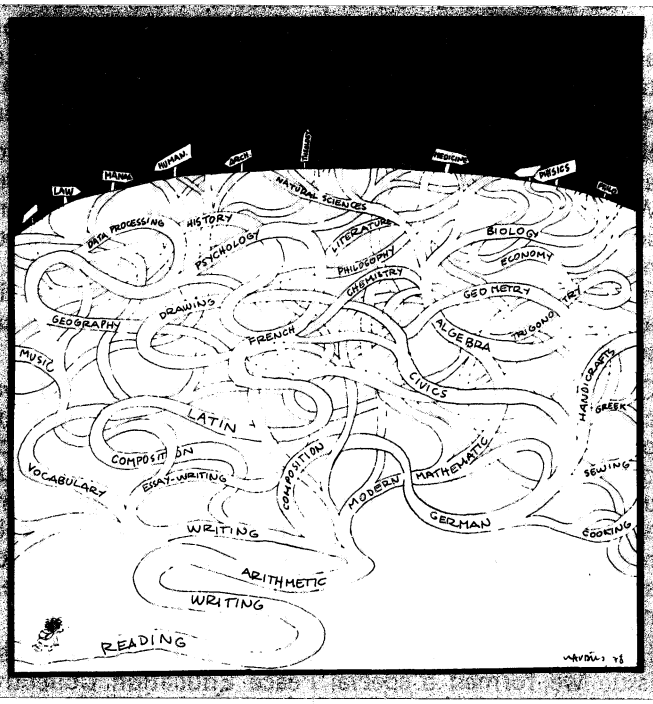
The lead article is centrally on this theme. Les Cameron, Kerry O'Neil and Bruce Wilson explore the relationships between class and curriculum, and support their general points with an interesting case study of a remarkable working class high school. In another piece, *RED* interviews Sam Altman about the problems and potential of Transed programs in working class schools. This interview is an up-date of an article by Sam about his Transed program that appeared in *RED 16.* Also on the theme of working class schooling is a short review of an excellent video-resource produced by Sally Ingleton in Victoria in which a group of high school students talk about their schooling, work and future. Lin Samuels continues the theme with an extended essay review of the recent book *Making the Difference* which compared working class and ruling class schools. It's an important book, and Lin provides a valuable assessment of its impact.

Several other articles refer to earlier issues of the Dossier. Mats Jonsson is interviewed about worker education in Sweden. Jim Walker and Patricia Moran raise important questions about recent writing on school resistance and discipline and present an alternative research model. Neryl Jeanneret also addresses this issue in her reflections on teaching at her school.

The remaining article is by Rob White who gives a sober assessment of changes in education that might flow from the ALP victory in Canberra.

What is an appropriate curriculum for working class students? In New South Wales, the debate around the McGowan Report and the Swan-McKinnon recommendations to restructure secondary schooling has forced us to confront this question. We can learn much from theory and practice in Victoria! In this article, the authors highlight some central elements in working class culture and describe how one Melbourne high school has tried to discover what an appropriate working class curriculum might look like.

Class and Curriculum - a basis for action



Les Cameron, Kerry O'Neill, Bruce Wilson

Introduction

It is now beyond question that educational achievement in Australia is very directly related to social class. From the work in the 1960s by McLaren and Fensham, to the Karmel Report in 1973, the Poverty and Education Report in 1975, and even the recent work of the Williams Report, it is clearly demonstrated that young people from working class families are much more likely to leave school early, without credentials, and hence become locked into a pattern of unemployment, casual jobs or debilitating unskilled labour, without "prospects". The consequences of failure are much more severe now, than they were twenty years ago.

There have been many attempts to adequately explain and to change this situation, both in Australia and in other advanced industrialised societies. Indeed there has been a substantial investment of public monies into schemes aimed at producing a greater equality of educational outcomes: for example, Headstart in the US, and the Disadvantaged Schools Program in Australia. They have produced a range of innovative practices which help schools to be more pleasant places for some working class students; however, there have as yet been few apparent changes in the relationship between social class and educational achievement.

Les Cameron and Kerry O'Neil teach in Melbourne at Kensington Community High School. Bruce Wilson teaches at Melbourne CAE.

An explanation which helps to illustrate these problems has emerged in the work undertaken by Connell, Ashenden, Kessler and Dowsett in their School Home and Work Project. They have suggested that there is a particular congruence between home and school for students from ruling class homes which contrasts with a basic **lack** of congruence experienced by working class young people. This is reflected in the different experiences and approaches which ruling class and working class families adopt with respect to schooling.

In addition, there is evidence to suggest that the different responses of young people from each class to school are related to cultural perspectives which extend well beyond the school, to the very core of daily experience. Australia does not have, and has never had, a monocultural society; there have always been conflicting, albeit intertwined, interpretations of life and its possibilities, which reflect the fundamentally different material conditions under which people work and live their lives. It is true, however, that one particular culture has occupied a dominant position and has established the context within which other cultural perspectives have been maintained. In the same way that capitalist society implies an antagonistic relationship (overt or covert) between two principal classes over the material

conditions of life, so elements of the ruling culture are opposed or counteracted by other cultural elements which originate within the working class.

This is not to gloss over the immense difficulties of cultural analysis. The picture is further complicated by the fragmentation and alienation which are also part of the life experience of working class people. In discussing key elements of working class cultural perspectives, there is no single unambiguous reality, but one which is shaped by local, historical and social influences, in a dynamic relationship with the dominant culture.

Class, Culture and Curriculum

In developing a curriculum for working class students, it is important to recognise a number of positive elements which are not only central to the interpretation of reality generated from within working class cultural perspectives, but are also in conflict with some of the assumptions which underpin "ruling culture". These elements are grounded in traditions and experiences which have for the most part, a rich and extensive history and are gathered by children from their parents. The perspectives which working class young people consequently bring to every day life represent the basis for their responses to school. There are four elements, expressed in general terms, which are commonly reflected in what working class students say about school, and actually do. (For a much more detailed elaboration of this analysis, see Dwyer and Wilson 1981a and b, and Dwyer, Wilson and Wook, forthcoming).

The irrelevance of many school subjects to working class students can be linked to an attitude of disregard for ideas which are seen to exist for their own sake . . .

1 Solidarity

One of the persistent strengths of working class people is that, in the face of the public emphasis on private wealth, and its demonstration through home ownership, its members continue to place an opposing emphasis on elements of **solidarity**, both within the workplace and within their neighbourhoods. This is not to suggest that workers constitute an "altruistic" class, nor even that no divisions exist among them, nor that private wealth is of no concern to them. Rather, the point is that solidarity and mutual support continue to be values that are clearly identifiable within working class cultural perspectives.

These values are partly represented in a sense of neighbourhood, still a distinctive aspect of working-class areas, with the emphasis on local identity, familiarity and mutual acceptance. Despite some contradictions and a lack of clarity in the available evidence, it seems that the links between working class people are very strong, if mainly at an informal level, and if especially in time of crisis. Whether because of population density, frequent utilisation of local public resources, or simply shared experience, a significantly different perspective on the relationships between people, and the purpose of wealth, can be detected.

A very interesting reflection of this in relation to schooling in Australia has been observed in the Tagori project in Hobart (Middleton 1982: 136-62). Tagori was a special project established by the Tasmanian Education Department, in which it seemed that the working class students demonstrated a clear preference to work in a group with each other, rather than to pursue individual interests.

2 Lived Knowledge

The pattern of inequality in Australia, as in other capitalist societies has maintained privileged access for a minority to all kinds of social benefits, and the provision of acceptable working conditions, neighbourhood services, medical care and education for members of the working class has been less important. The net result of this class bias in Australia has been to throw the working class back onto their own resources to provide for themselves through their own efforts, or, to use a more abstract term through **lived knowledge**. This understanding of the relationship between theory and practice is markedly different from that espoused by the dominant culture.

The irrelevance of many school subjects to working class students can be linked to an attitude of disregard for ideas which are seen to exist for their own sake, in contrast to the capacity of workers and their children to develop sophisticated problem-solving techniques and theories that can be validated in the context of direct personal experience. There is a substantial section of the Poverty Commission's *Outcomes of Schooling* report which indicates the relevance of this for schooling (Woppa's pedagogy).

3 Informality

A genuine popular tradition has survived in Australia which expresses itself by means of a high degree of informality, and a quite conscious effort to break down the formalities that exist both in the workplace and in social events. Within the hierarchical and bureaucratic structures of the work situation, for example, informal networks among workers become a basis for establishing a measure of control over the work process.

The pattern of informal relationships between people extends outside of the job and is also a key to social identity, and extends to most aspects of life, public or private. Whilst there always seems to be a suspicion of formal structures, informal networks often develop in working class areas, with considerable effectiveness. This is also related to a degree of openness and a lack of pretentions in social interaction, which carry with them a quite distinctive brand of humour.

The implications of this for school organisation are obviously important, and Paul Willis has documented clearly how the kids in one school use informality as a means of undermining authority and attempting to establish their own control over the schooling process. (Willis 1977).

4 Labour Power

In our society work is regarded as being synonymous with paid employment; working for someone else in a paid job. This leads the young working class to define their future lives as adults very much in terms of labour power, which

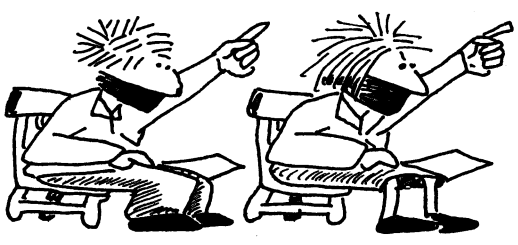
they must sell as wage-labour. Their perception of adulthood within their own neighbourhoods, and their negative experience of schooling highlight for them the special significance of entering the workforce or, more simply, "landing a job". At the time of leaving school, at least, this seems to be true for both males and females.

A report on *Youth Needs and Public Policies* (Wright and Headlam 1976) makes it quite clear that the factors associated with work include challenge, variety, autonomy and use of one's abilities. Furthermore, their evidence clearly discounts the myth of the "work-shy" teenager, and emphasises the destructive impact of unemployment: it is "leisure" that is boring (Wilson and Wyn 1982). Work, therefore, for them is most important for its intrinsic satisfaction, as a source of income, and as a measure of personal independence.

Clearly then, it is not surprising that many working class youth see little relevance in the activities in schools, given the attractions of getting a job.

A Problem for Teachers

There are a wide range of ideological and structural constraints which make it very difficult for teachers to value and take seriously the interests, experiences and cultural perspectives of working class people. Not least important in this regard is the process of ideological filtering which all teachers have endured in their own schooling, which presents a particular perspective on working class people. Even more important in a daily sense is the deep-seated perpetuation of the myth of a distinction between mental and manual abilities, which is at odds with the element of "lived knowledge". It is this distinction which, although false, has become pivotal in our society, and in all western industrialised societies, as a basis for legitimating a social hierarchy. "Not coping with the work" becomes a distinct status which reflects stupidity. In addition, many teachers are repeatedly affronted by the appearance and behaviour of working class kids, whose energy and directness is often irritating when compared to the habits, values and perspectives which they have come to take for granted, even if only through their own success in schooling. It is important to value **all** working class kids, not only for the positive aspects of their approach to life, but also for the wealth of knowledge and particular skills which they've gained in their own domain, the local neighbourhood. Those teachers who have taught in working class schools already know that this can be difficult and exhausting. However, it can also be rewarding and can lead to positive outcomes in the long run.



Not least important . . . is the process of ideological filtering which all teachers have endured in their own schooling, which presents a particular perspective on working class people . . . "Not coping with the work" becomes a distinct status which reflects stupidity.

An Approach to Curriculum

The brief overview of particular themes which are apparent in working class cultural perspectives provides a basis for reviewing various aspects of schooling which mitigate against successful learning by working class youth and for establishing a more appropriate approach to curriculum development. In the context of curriculum, there are several key premises to be considered:

1 The claim that there is a common culture from which a core curriculum for all young people can be developed with a common, prescribed mode of achievement, cannot be substantiated. A common culture may be an **objective** of education but it cannot be assumed as a basis for curriculum planning.
2 For the learning process to be effective and positive teachers must be able to enter different types of relationships with students, and to take seriously the experiences of the students.
3 A curriculum must serve the interests of **all** young people in a school (Schools Commission 1980) and if there are aspects of school organisation and credentialling, which constrain this, then ultimately the curriculum must include attempts to change these aspects.

The point of this is not to confine the horizons of working class students, but to ensure that the curriculum is grounded in their experience and perspectives. There are a number of steps which teachers have taken in schools in Victoria which suggest how a more appropriate curriculum may be implemented in working-class schools. Some principles seem to be particularly important:

1 Meaning.
The first is to take time to listen to kids and their parents, to learn about their interests and perspectives, and what it is that is at the heart of their interpretation of reality. This may involve, initially at least, a conscious "suspension of judgement" to counteract the usual filtering that occurs. It may be possible to use open-ended teaching strategies which provide opportunities for the kids to express themselves in ways which will convey aspects of their cultural perspectives.

2 Resources.
Young people themselves often have an extraordinary depth of knowledge about the neighbourhood of the school. It may be limited in terms of breadth but it has a richness that is often unnoticed. Community-based research can be a way of organising this knowledge, and providing an opportunity for critical examination of it. Attention to local community

issues can be a basis for comparison with other areas, and even lead to plans for change.

3 Skill-development

Teachers need to be sure of the general and analytic skills which their subject-areas offer to kids, and how they will be useful to working class people, both within and outside the classroom. Teachers are appropriate people to provide a context for the specific studies of their students, to assist in extending skill development, and in providing experiences which will enable them to gain a broader perspective on their society. Team teaching both within and between subject areas, can be particularly useful. Working class youth need to learn that there are connections between all aspects of their society.

4 Parent participation

Parents are not only important for their knowledge of local history and traditions, and their understanding of their own children, but also for the contribution they can make in the learning process itself. Parental involvement in the school's decision-making process can ensure the political legitimation of a new curriculum. In addition, parents can intervene in extremely positive ways in the struggles between teachers and departmental authorities. Working class parents have shown themselves to be enthusiastic about being involved in these processes, providing the school is genuinely receptive and supportive of their participation.

5 Action

If teachers take seriously the educational needs of all working class young people there will inevitably be a need for change not only in school but in the wider society as well. It is obvious that schools exist for particular purposes in our society, and that by themselves, they will not change society. However, young people need to learn that action to bring about change can be taken, and to learn some of the techniques for doing so successfully.

In any working class school, there will also be tensions and perhaps open conflict among the students. It is in the very nature of a capitalist society to foster divisions among working class people, whether on the basis of gender, ethnicity, race or skill differentials, and this is as common in schools as it is in any other area of society. However, there has been considerable progress in recent years, on the development of approaches and materials for non-sexist education and for multicultural education. It will be necessary for teachers to draw also on the strategies and ideas which are emerging from this work.

An Inner Suburban School

One school in the inner suburbs of Melbourne has taken advantage of its relative freedom from bureaucratic constraints, to confront directly, the question of what a curriculum for working class people in its neighbourhood might look like. After seven years in very limited accommodation, Kensington Community High School is now housed in a disused factory. It has 15 teachers and teachers' aides, and approximately one hundred students, mostly teenagers with about a dozen adults. Although there is a nominal coordinator, the structure of the school aims at collective decision-making, with the whole school, the school staff, and the School Council each having particular responsibilities. In addition, the students, staff and School Council each has an executive which has the responsibility for coordination. The school is organised into four workshops, each of which is a distinct entity, with a particular group of staff and students and its own program. Each workshop provides a student, staff and parent representative to the School Council. There is also provision for four community representatives on the School Council, although not all of these places have been filled.

The educational program of the school is organised through four workshops: production, industrial, recreation and adventure. Each workshop operates relatively autonomously, with a particular group of staff and students. School policy is decided at the School Council but the members of each workshop are responsible for determining the group's program, managing its resources, and even choosing new staff.

The school policy is summed up in the general aim of developing a curriculum which will enable students from the neighbourhood to be proud of themselves and their community, whilst they develop skills which will give them access to good work, later in their lives. In order to achieve this, the school has specified a number of particular objectives:

- Ensuring that all students have access to satisfying work or continued education (school does not end at age 18).
- Emphasising the potential of working together co-operatively, rather than the particular characteristics of individuals, by choosing activities which allow for maximum group action and reflection;
- Ensuring that the students and parents have the effective control over school organisation, curriculum and staffing;
- Reinforcing those parts of local culture which promote creativity, a sense of belonging, happiness and empowerment to students and their parents;
- Understanding those pressures which lead to aggressive anti-social, anti-school behaviour and attempting to alter them through taking and engaging in the struggle for improved social, economic and material conditions;
- Developing academic, social and technical skills through activities or tasks which have a real purpose and a practical outcome;
- Developing a well-resourced community facility which can be available to all members of the local neighbourhood.

The workshop structure is based on the premise that each student brings particular strengths, knowledge and skills to school, and that the educational process should build upon, and extend those strengths. By valuing the positive attributes and characteristics which each group of students possesses, the workshops provide a solid foundation for developing broader social, communication, mathematical and technical skills.

Each workshop has provided the local neighbourhood with an outline of its activities:

1 Production Workshop

Staff and students work together to investigate issues about the school, jobs or the neighbourhood, which are seen to be

important to the staff and students involved. The workshop produces a newsletter for the school each week. Quite a bit of time is spent watching films, discussing important issues, photography, writing and producing posters and pamphlets and assessing films.

The workshop has also acquired an offset printer, on which they do printing jobs for community groups. They also do screen printing. The students are involved in all aspects of the process, including the managing of the accounts.

They also have the use of a video machine to interview people from the school and the community. It is also hoped that parents will write articles or stories for a publication of local writing. The group is also undertaking a study of nearby saleyeards, and the proposed redevelopment. By taking part in these activities, the students feel that it is an important way of learning to use the media and to learn about the world around us and the experiences of other people.

2 Industrial Workshop

In this workshop, students are able to participate in a range of activities, including catering, craft, motor mechanics, pottery, graphics, welding and metal fabrication, painting, needlework, woodwork cabinet making.

So far, the group has made such things as aprons, clowns and pillows. They ran a very successful restaurant one night, which raised over $200. They have also raised donations from Forges, Andersons Hosiery, Class Hosiery and Coats Patons.

The workshop allows students with in interest in technical areas to generate short and long term projects. Skills are developed through an integrated approach to design, funding, drawing, reporting, presenting and analysing each product.

3 Recreation, Drama and Music Workshop

Students are encouraged to develop their already exceptional talents in sporting and music areas. In addition, special short courses are offered in research skills, leadership, first aid, and a range of recreational skills. Through work experience in related areas and a community outreach program, students will be helped to achieve their goals, as community workers, youth workers, recreation leaders and teachers.

This workshop is planning a tour to the United States during this year, in which they will visit ten states. The group will include both a band, and the basketball team which will compete against teams from different schools.

4 Adventure Workshop

This provides a range of urban and rural activities which engage younger students in outdoor activities. The emphasis is on planning, fund-raising, conducting safe and exciting activities, and reviewing and documenting the events.

Through writing up the outcomes of these activities, the students will not only develop their reading, writing and maths skills, but will also provide other groups with information about things that they can do.

In the long run, it is hoped that students will feel that they are able to offer programs to many others in outdoor recreational settings whilst helping to develop a strong environmental consciousness.

The school has already joined the STC (alternative Year 12) group of schools in Victoria, and there have been negotiations with particular tertiary institutions to ensure that the students have access to tertiary courses in which they may be interested. The school has also obtained special grants from different funding sources (such as the Victorian Employment Initiatives Program) with which ex-students and other local adults have been employed. It also has close links with the local work cooperative.

Conclusion

Kensington Community High School is one school which has explicitly set out to develop a working class curriculum. There are many other schools, however, with particular components of their curriculum, or special projects funded by the Disadvantaged Schools Program or Transition Education, in which aspects of this approach are being used.

In some ways, these suggestions are not new: Friere, Kozol, Kohl and others have been emphasising for many years the importance of a pedagogy which takes learners seriously, and in which learners and teachers together engage with the real issues of people's lives. Unfortunately, despite the amount of interest in these writings, there has been little change in the parameters of schooling for working class young people in Australia. School structures are essentially the same, subject offerings are not greatly different, and the outcomes are still as bad, if not worse. In this context, a radical reappraisal of curriculum is crucial, and one would hope that the approach outlined here might be useful to others in that process.

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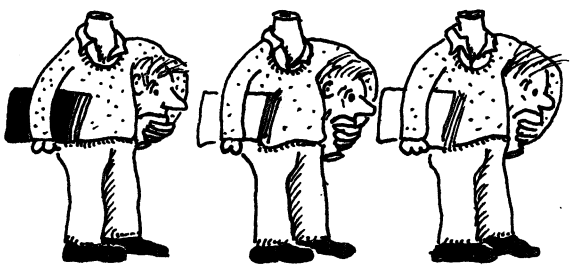


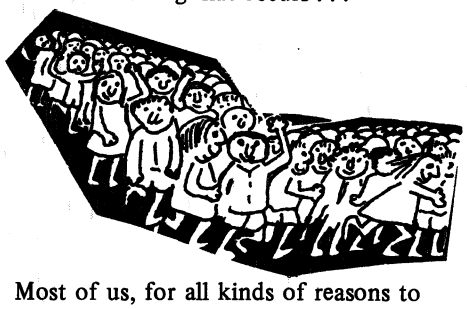
'Better Life Than Them'

Ken Johnston

A 30 minute colour video produced and directed by Sally Ingleton. Distributed through the Audio-Visual Resources Branch, Education Dept. of Victoria.

An appropriate curriculum for working class students is grounded in their experience and perspectives. For many of us, write the authors of the previous article, constructing such a curriculum means a conscious effort:

> "... to take time to listen to the kids ... to learn about their interests and perspectives, and what it is that is at the heart of their interpretation of reality. This may involve, initially at least, a conscious 'suspension of judgement' to counteract the usual filtering that occurs ..."



Most of us, for all kinds of reasons to do with our position as teachers and adults find it very difficult to "listen" in this way.

It's for this reason that this new video is extremely helpful. Sally Ingleton spent a great deal of time listening to students while she worked on a Transed program at a Melbourne inner-city High School, and on the completion of the program she interviewed seven young people about their futures. They talk about their parents, work, unemployment, friends and how school prepares them for leaving.

What are their central concerns? A major and persistent theme running through their views concerns schooling. Their views on this are complex, involving on the one hand a recognition of the value of education as a way of improving their prospects in the job market, and on the other a consistent feeling that school is irrelevant to everyday life. In Joanne's words:

> "... school's just somewhere to go, and that's where my friends are. But it doesn't really interest me. I wanna learn, but learn real things not like what they teach you at school."

The students struggle to express the tensions between the academic demands of schooling and the priorities of the informal group. When Peter was asked whether he wanted to leave school, he replied:

> "Not now. I did in Grade 6. I wanted to leave school. I'd had enough of school. I thought another 6 years of my life gone for nothing, but now I want to go on. I know I want to get a job. I don't want to be a dole bludger."

He is aware of the need to succeed academically while acknowledging at the same time that his friends have other priorities:

> "It's just because I was brought up different to some other kids, you know, some kids go to private schools and that, but me, I'm with these guys here – it's pretty hard. You gotta sort of ... they're not the kids that will sit down and work all day, they'll work – but they won't work, that's it."

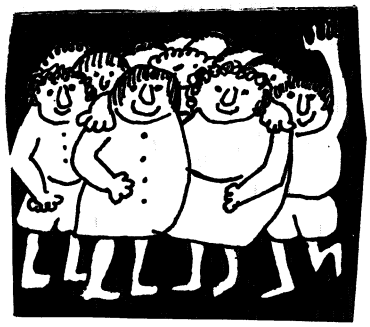
Their views on friendship express a strong sense of solidarity, a sense of mutual sharing, responsibility and sheer enjoyment. It seems to be the main thing these young people have going for them. When times get tough, it's friends who will be the main source of support and confirmation. Recognising this has obvious effects on how school itself is viewed. As Julie puts it, when asked why she didn't like being regarded as a "brain":

> "I don't want everyone looking at me and saying 'ooh look she works ...' 'cause if you're too smart you have no friends. [Is it more important to have friends?] I reckon, no book's going to help you when you need help – friends will, books don't."

We may not agree with everything they say, we may think their views are limited and partial, we may be impatient to push their insights even further. These are valid reactions, but the important point is to comprehend and acknowledge what these young people are saying and to begin the dialogue from that basis.

The video has been produced for teachers and students, and has been used with great success by teachers and high school students in Victoria. Sally is working with others to complete a discussion kit which will be available with the video. The kit will include transcriptions from the video and a range of questions about school, work, parents, unemployment and expectations of the future. There is a sensitivity to questions of gender and ethnicity in both the video and the kit.

At a time when we are thinking again about working class schooling and curriculum, a "Better Life Than Them" is an excellent teaching resource. Make sure your region's education centre buys a copy. Borrow it and use it!



In July, 1982, Mats Jonsson, the International Secretary of the Swedish Metalworkers Union was brought to Australia by the AMWSU to address a national conference on Worker Education. This article is a transcript of an interview with Mats by Kaye Schofield. Details about the Swedish system of trade union education can be found in *RED 14* and *RED 16*, 1982.

Worker Education - Swedish Style

Mats Jonsson

In the past few years we have seen a huge expansion of trade union education in Europe. The expansion in Australia is only just beginning. However, many unions regard this as undesirable, that formalised trade union education diverts the energies of unionists away from the education through struggle. What is your response to this line of thinking?
Of course the experience of trade union struggle is very important. But we are concerned to make this experience go hand in hand with theoretical understanding. We think it is important to educate people in the politics of trade unionism. If, during this time of recession, we simply deal with redundancies, wage bargaining and general working conditions, we will have very little impact. We see unions as an important **political** force. We regard that political work as being just as important as the industrial struggle against the employer. That fight is just one part of our work. We know that regardless of what you achieve in the bargaining situation, you can still have the politics working against you – taxes, the social wage – and you won't achieve anything beyond a pay increase. Our idea is to try to get more influence on the company. In this broader struggle, trade union education through the study circles in particular, is essential.

In Australia there seems to be a tendency to direct trade union education towards elected reps, show stewards and union officials. Is this tendency evident in Sweden?
Our basic idea is to provide education for the entire membership. It's a step-by-step education, moving from the basic to the more advanced courses. There are few specific differences between education for the rank and file and education for the elected reps. Everybody attends the basic training. However, in the more advanced study circles, you tend to find more elected reps who, as they become more active, become more involved in the education programs. But of course there are also a number of residential courses which we organise specifically for elected reps to help them perform their specific duties within the union.

We think there is great value in trade union education for the rank and file members, to help them make use of their democratic rights within the union and also to improve their knowledge of agreements and legislation so that they can protect their rights each day at work. Because we are trying to build a strong and active union, it is important to try to educate all members. We want as many members as possible to understand why they are part of the union. This is the way to build a better union. It is also a good way of providing the union with active people.

Sharp distinctions exist here between narrow trade union training, broader political education and general adult education. Do these distinctions appear in Sweden?
We believe we have a responsibility not only to look after our members' interests in the workplace, but also to cover their social, political and cultural interests as well. That's why we offer a wide range of courses other than specific trade union training courses. Many times, these more general study circles open up for members opportunities for continuing education. They often move from one study circle into another. Their interests are extended.

We do have our own study circles, developed by the union, which are offered to workers. But there are also study circles developed by the Swedish workers' education association (RBF) on subjects such as mathematics, languages, statistics and things like that. When we go out to a plant, we try to encourage participation not only in the union study circles but also in the more general subjects such as labour history, theatre, working with clay etc. In Sweden we do not put education into such clear boxes like you seem to do here.

How is education organised at plant level?
Each plant annually elects a Plant Committee which has a number of sub-committees: for bargaining; for information; for health and safety etc. The Education Sub-committee is elected and the study organiser at the plant is usually the convenor of this committee. We also have plant reps help the committee by talking to people, pushing education issues, trying to get people to participate in study circles or residential courses.

I understand that the study circles are designed by the union with the assistance of members. However, what opportunities exist for one off study circles to operate in particular situations?
You can start a study circle on almost any issue. Let's say that ten people working at a plant decide they want to do a study circle. They can go to the study organiser or to the education committee or direct to the workers education association to get help to organise it. They will get a room

and some funding. The RBF will help find suitable materials. Maybe someone in the group itself wants to be a study group leader. If not, RBF will help them find someone to act as leader. It is open to any union member to get a group together.

Is there any training for study circle leaders?
The RBF organise two residential week long courses which are offered to study circle leaders. The courses do not deal with specific subjects but rather are concerned with the techniques of leading a group. How to ensure that everyone in the group participates. How to gently and softly put down the loudmouths. How to help shy members participate.

Seventeen per cent of the membership of the Swedish metalworkers is female. Are women well represented in your education program?
I don't think women are under-represented at study circle level, but they are under-represented at residential courses. To try to solve this problem we offer each year some residential courses in a centre which has childcare facilities. Also, if you are able to arrange for a relative or a friend to mind your child while you attend a course, the union pays the additional costs which might be associated with this childcare. We have a complicated formula for this which is based on the rates paid for a community child care system similar to your family day care.

What is your union's position on equality of the sexes?
We have a policy and a program on equality which we try to push. We have a fulltime national officer, a woman, who works on this issue. We also organise residential courses on equal opportunity. We also try to have, in the larger plants, a committee on equality of the sexes.

One of our study circles is on equality of the sexes but it is no more popular than any of our other courses. One related study circle which has however proved very popular, and which brings men and women workers together deals with the effects of working environment on the health of the unborn child. Equality of the sexes moves slowly, but it does move forward.

Blue collar unions in Sweden are organised in a labour confederation separate from the confederation of white collar unions. What relationships exist at a plant level between blue collar and white collar workers?
We have different confederations for historical reasons. The blue collar workers organised about one hundred years ago but it wasn't until the '30s and '40s that white collar workers organised, and at that time they viewed themselves as something else. We are active in our support for the labour party while white collar workers see themselves as "neutral". While the two confederations have developed closer working relations at an organisational level, it is rare for them to come together at a plant level. But there is a growing awareness amongst white collar workers that their problems are really the same as ours, and there is a growing understanding. We are moving closer together. With new technology there is the realisation that much white collar work is being deskilled. While some sectors of the white collar workforce are getting more skilled jobs, there is a much larger group being deskilled. If you look at a drawing office, blueprints are being churned out in ten seconds whereas before it took one person ten days to draw them up. In this sort of changing work situation, workers are drawn together.

What access do workers have to general educational provisions in Sweden?
We are concerned to reduce some of the educational inequalities which exist between age groups and between sectors of the Swedish population. The labour party and the labour movement has sought to increase funding for adult and community education. People are paid a living allowance while they study part time or full time. It is a legal right in Sweden to take time off work for education. If you want to go to uni for a couple of years, you have the right to have your job back when you finish your studies, even though a lot of people then want another job.

In both UK and Australia, there are universities and colleges which are offering labour studies courses to unionists. What is your view on this?
It is rare in Sweden to find universities or colleges offering these sorts of courses. Many years ago the Labour Party organised the People's High Schools, and they offer general labour education programs today. But I don't think you should turn away from the universities or colleges. They have resources which can be utilised. I think these courses should be encouraged because there is still the need to bring together the practical experience on the shop floor with more theoretical knowledge. This integration is one of the key problems for the labour movement. Alone, neither sort of knowledge is useful.

Formal courses are one sort of trade union or worker education. Another is participatory research, especially in the area of alternative plans. What is your view of this aspect of worker education?
Most of the examples of workers' plans are drawn from industries which suddenly find themselves facing a crisis of some sort, where people face the risk of losing their jobs. The good work is done where trade unions, workers and others join together to pool their experience, to cooperate and work out an educational program or a research program. This is normally very difficult. To be successful in alternative production you need the support of the establishment, and the company owner. The Lucas workers did a good job of developing new and socially useful products which would have a market. But they did not have the support of the management, of the marketing section nor the research section. The Lucas project is dead within Lucas. The company killed it. There are similar experiences in Sweden. In a complex industrial society, this sort of spontaneous development of alternatives is very difficult indeed.

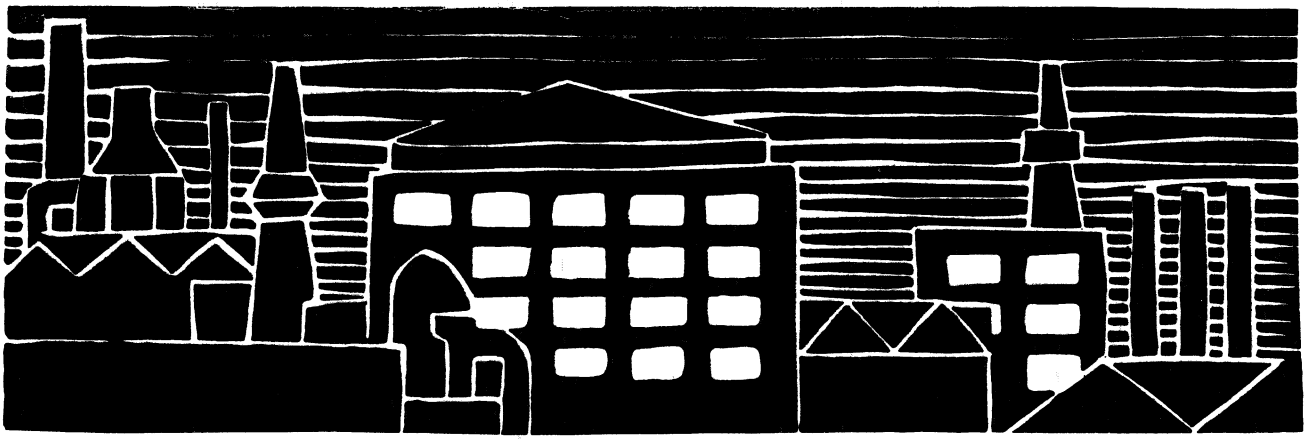
Now for the airport question. What are your initial impressions of trade union education in Australia?
There is a different tradition here. In Australia, craft unions and industrial action dominate. There is no tradition of trade union education. So far, it has mainly been directed to shop stewards and union officials, whereas we are equally concerned with rank and file members. One of the problems, it seems to me, is the large number of unions. Many of their resources are directed at fighting with each other. It's a real waste. Demarcations are one example. Such resources are much more productive if directed at worker education.

In *RED 16*, Sam Altman suggested ways of introducing Transed courses, and presented details of a pilot course he was developing at a Sydney inner city high school. In New South Wales TE For Schools funds have been used mainly for "Alternative Programs" devised by the schools. The overwhelming majority of these have been separate TE classes in Years 9, 10 and 11. In this interview with Scott Poynting, Sam examines some consequences of this.

In 1983, TE funds were for the first time available for projects for girls and Aboriginal students; and the possibilities that this opens up are also discussed.

Transforming Transed

Sam Altman



Many areas of public education are currently suffering cutbacks. Has the Transed area faced similar funding problems?

Transed funding was a cynical exercise from the start. In New South Wales, the Department of Education used federal Transed funds to provide supplementary programs for Year 10 students identified as "at risk" of unemployment. (The term "at risk" has now been abandoned. "The target group" is the current jargon for the same kids.) What this meant in practice was that the majority of kids who were in "GA" classes in Years 7, 8 and 9 were often channelled into Transed classes in Year 10 when the GA supplement cut out. So the system was using transed funds to cope with the problem of "GA" kids staying on at school – kids who would previously have left after Year 9.

It should be emphasised, too, that no new jobs are being created for young people, so as far as finding work goes, even the best of Transed (TE) programs can only reshuffle unemployment. They do, however, have the effect of the Government and the Department being seen as "doing something" about unemployment, and this is the reason, of course, that they continue to attract funding from governments.

So cutbacks are unlikely while ever youth unemployment is so high – it would be political suicide.

Sam Altman is coordinator of Transition Education at a Sydney high school.

Given that Transed can't really help solve youth unemployment problems (except in individual instances), and in fact serves the ideological function of masking these; what positive contributions can Transed make?

All children need school-to-work (SWT) transition education. Unfortunately, only a minority are specially funded for it.

Transed can provide out-of-school experiences which widen the students' awareness of the "real" world: everything from getting to work by public transport to the work experiece (WE) itself. They can learn about the local community: local history, struggles within the community, and so on. They can have practice in decision making, through student run excursions, student initiated work placements, etc.

These experiences can then become the basis for classroom discussion, research, and expression. More general themes about work and society can be raised against this background of student experience. In this way I've been able to teach about structural economic change as it affects the local area (South Sydney is moving from being a mainly manufacturing area to a largely freight warehousing one). We've been able to make comparisons with other areas such as Port Kembla and Mount Druitt, through contacts with working class schools in these places on excursions. (See photos.) The immense topic of technological change can be approached through the way it affects local work places. The role of community and government agencies can be discussed:

their functions, organisation and the services they offer. Useful first hand contact can be established with workers in these organisations.

How can you organise all these activities within the school curriculum?

That's just the point – with a Transed course you can break down the traditional academic curriculum that turns off so many working class kids. One way to do this is by having a completely separate class timetabled for the Transed students. I've always had reservations about having a separate Transed class – as I said before, **all** kids need SWT – but at least this way you can maximise out-of-school experiences within the requirements of the school's timetable (that Holy of Holies). School administrations are likely to approve, because of the extra funds attracted. But the progressive teacher can use these extra funds for the sort of alternative activities I've outlined. Also, just because it's seen by school executives as a solution to the "Year 10 GA problem"; you have the flexibility which has always been there for teachers of GAs: as long as you don't make too much noise, nobody really minds what you do with them.

Isn't there a problem with this separate "stream", as it were, of the Transed kids, being labelled as "dumbies" by the other kids? I mean, I know of one school where the kids in the Transed classes are called "brain failures" by the others.

Yes, that's a very real danger. But I'd guess that the case you're talking about is a **terminating** course, isn't it? It's most important that kids in Transed courses know they can **continue** at school if they want to. Not because going on to Year 11 is the best thing in the world for them, but just so there's no stigma attached to them. And they must get their School Certificate, just like the other kids. Then they can't so easily be characterised by their peers or indeed some staff as being somehow second rate – getting a second rate education. This labelling happens with non terminating TE courses as well, but not to the same extent.

There has always been a problem selecting kids for special Transed classes. The problem is endemic to **any** selection process – so much so that I feel we need to rethink about whether it's a good idea to have **special** TE classes at all.

Shane and Jesus wanted their photo taken with the to girls in front of Them But everyone jumped in The Teacher with the shorts got the kids to pose for the photo.

You've criticised separate TE classes; what other ways can TE funds be used?

This year for the first time there have been separate programs, with separate money, for girls and Aboriginal students. This is at least a recognition that sex and ethnicity are major determinants of job prospects. There is a need for some of the funds now being made available for Transed to be used for detailed research into how these factors operate. One crucial factor is language. If, for example, you have a career night held in an ethnic language, it could have a number of advantages. Firstly, the community networks that operate all the time are given recognition, and access to them is widened. Secondly, career information is made available to the parents, possibly for the first time. (Some of them have little idea how Australian schools operate in general.) In the long term, these sorts of activities will encourage parent participation from these groups.

The other crucial factor I mentioned, apart from ethnicity, is being female. Examples of Transed funded projects which try to come to terms with this are: non traditional work experience for girls; recognition of women in Maths and Science; investigation of girls-only Maths, Science and Technics classes; a girls-only Science and Technology club giving girls well organised access to the school's computers; curriculum development – for example, new courses geared to female students, also, school program coordination, eg "Women in Science" could be an integrated unit in History and Science. (In Science classes, students study the scientific contribution of women; in History classes they learn about the social setting of these women, especially the difficulty of getting recognition for their work.)

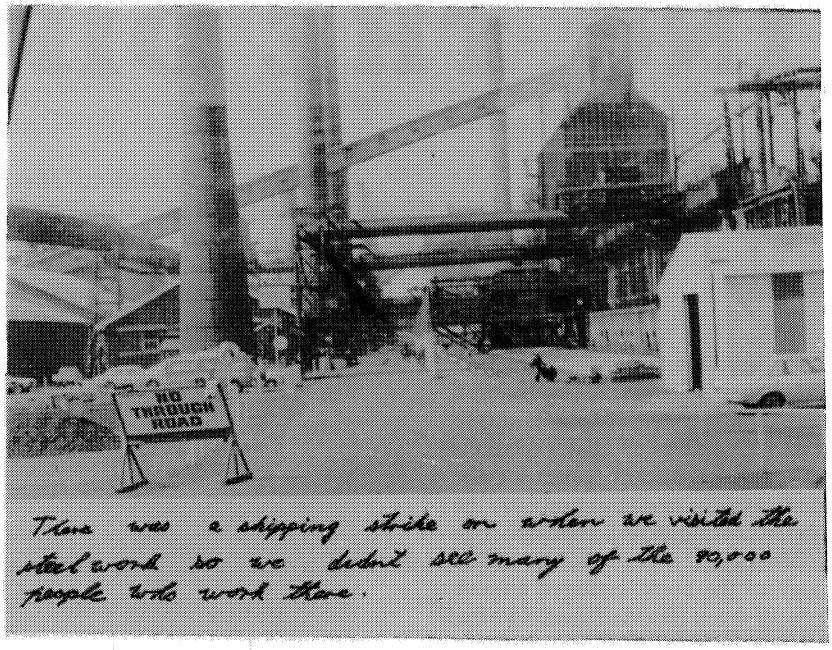
How would you answer the charge that some leftists might make, that such courses deny working class kids the necessary rigour involved in the disciplines of the more traditional curriculum?

Look, the disciplines of history, geography, economics, etc, are not banished from our Transed course: they're just not seen as separate subjects. Further, local history and geography as well as economic processes and instances make up the subject matter. Also, remember, the Transed class does do English, Maths and Science, just like all the other kids: they have to, for the School Certificate.

But by and large the traditional curriculum is inappropriate for these kids. Just on half the kids in Waterloo, before the merge with Clevo, were classified as "GAs". Now in my experience – and I've always taught "GA" kids (I prefer to) – these are mostly **not** kids with identifiable learning difficulties. Their learning difficulty at school is a **social** difficulty, not a cognitive or mental one. They don't learn well in the context of the traditional curriculum. It's not that kids fail at this curriculum – the curriculum is failing the kids.

The idea of the comprehensive school providing equal education never worked. There have always been academic streams and non academic streams. In New South Wales, this has been entrenched by a system where "GAs"get 1.5 times as many teachers provided as other streams (which aren't necessarily allocated to these kids). So many teachers have accepted this streaming because of the extra resources it attracts. Now some schools have done some very good things with GA streams: smaller class sizes, more individual attention, and so on (which **all** kids should have). But when these

THIS IS THE PHOTO OF THE COACH THAT WE WENT TO PORT KEMBLA IN. JUST AFTER MR ALTMEN TOOK THIS PHOTO THE SECURITY GARDS TRYED TO TAKE THE CAMERA AWAY FROM HIM BECAUSE THEY THOUGHT HE WANTED TO TAKE A PHOTO OF THE INJURED MEN.



There was a shipping strike on when we visited the steel work so we didn't see many of the 20,000 people who work there.

students from Year 9 began to stay on because of unemployment, and wanted to go into Year 10, there were lots of problems: discipline problems with kids used to smaller classes, and so forth. That's when the Department jumped at the federal Transed funds for "at risk" students. There never were "at risk" students during the Long Boom; they've only appeared since the depression.

Is there a danger that Transed schemes in general will degenerate into a sort of employment bureau function, channelling education funds into serving the employers?

Oh yes, they already have; that's quite clear. I try to look at it on two levels. Of course, if I can find a kid a job through a WE placement, then I will. If you hear about a job and you know they're looking for a job, well you put them together. And of course the kids come to me, and to other teachers as well, when they're looking for jobs. They know when I'm out and about I hear of jobs and that I can put them in touch with them – so you do.

But on another level, what I try to do is use WE placements to allow kids to be "participant observers". Sure, they use the program to get work contacts, references and so on, but on top of all that they are there to study the workplace. They learn about the hierarchy of work, the way the workplace is organised, and so on. I remember one kid – without any prompting from me – asking a boss if it wouldn't be better if all the work at his workshop was shared around, with everybody taking part in the planning and control as well as the dirty work. The boss had to explain that he didn't think it was a very good idea at all!

It's not easy, though, trying to get kids to be "participant observers". I mean, some kids have big problems just becoming a **participant**. And then they have to pick up the workplace culture, of course; but when they're immersed in this culture they're not in a position to observe objectively. But they're only on the job once a week so I can counter this effect to some extent in our time back at school.

Most WE programs, though, are totally work related: job skills, work discipline and that's all. They've got no educational value whatever.

As a sort of mediator between the employers and the kids, you must find yourself in a fairly contradictory position at times?

Well, sometimes you just have to be two faced. For example, I remember having to bawl a kid out in front of an employer for standing up to the boss. Of course I didn't mean it, but, as I explained to the kid, if it had been a real job and not a WE placement he would have been fired. Unemployed workers have very little to fight with, don't they? What I try and teach is: how to get a job, how to keep a job, and how to organise in the job. Yes, it's teaching subservience, but it's **critical** subservience. Compromises have to be made, certainly, but as socialist teachers we all have to compromise to some extent to continue to work in the system.

In your experience, what position are the more progressive teachers adopting towards Transed?

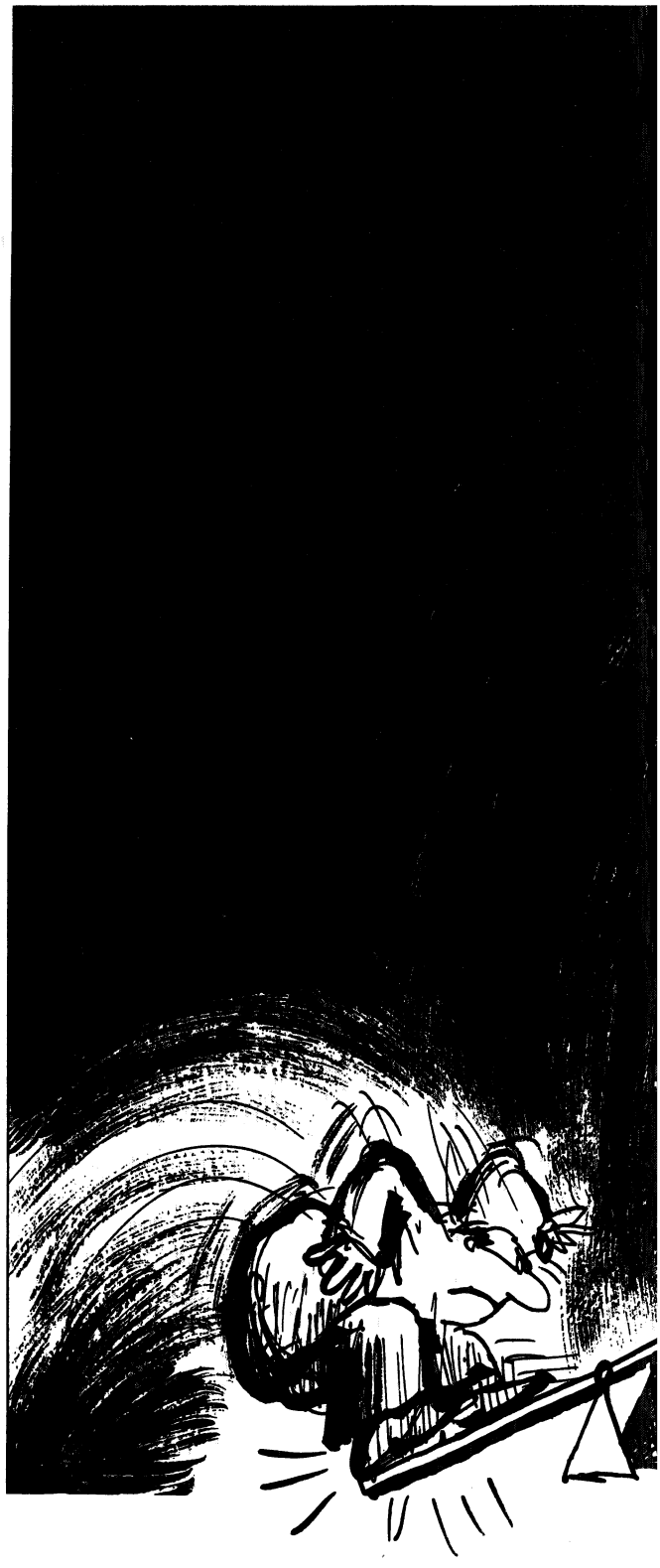
At first, partly because of the bureaucrats' cynical use of Transed funds that I talked about before, most progressive teachers thought pretty poorly of SWT and didn't want anything to do with it.

Also, a lot of them saw it as an attack on comprehensive education. But comprehensive education is an ideal which has never existed in reality. There's just no way that all kids get the same education up to Year 10: there **always was** "advanced", "Ordinary" and "modified", even if it's not called that. There is some truth in saying that Transed is a step backward from comprehensivisation, and there's lots of dangers in it, I admit. But you do get an extra teacher and $2,000 and there's not a real lot of strings attached as far as the government is concerned. Teachers can use these resources in some very progressive ways. But at the moment there's one hundred and eighty odd Transed funded alternative programs in this state, and only a few of them are progressive ones. Hopefully, it's still not too late.

MAKING THE DIFFERE

review essay

The book *Making The Difference* grew out of an e working since 1978. It is a major contribution to issue *RED* presents a review essay of this important



Making The Difference can be discussed at a variety of levels. The book is structured around a basically Marxist conception of class, but makes a serious and largely successful attempt to integrate some of the new understandings of gender relations within that framework. Another significant aspect of the book's theoretical argument is its consideration of the relationship between the details of individual lives and large scale social processes.

The research methodology of the book, centered around extended interviews with ninety-seven fourteen year old boys and girls in Sydney and Adelaide, divided evenly between "ruling class" independent schools and state comprehensives, is also of considerable interest. In addition to talking to the students, their parents, teachers and the principals of the schools were also interviewed at length. Such a thorough research strategy is unusual, and reflects the advantages of having substantial funding and a small but cohesive group of investigators working on a project of this kind over a period of time.

Those of us who, like myself, have carried out school research as a single individual, can only envy the rich and detailed material which the authors of this study have gathered together. The style of the book, with its illuminating interplay between narrative about individual students and consideration of the wider social processes reflected by the individuals, would hardly be possible without a body of data like that assembled here, rich both in extent, diversity and depth.

The joint authorship of the book by a group of four people, two of whom are academics and two school teachers, and who describe themselves as a "collective", is itself a significant attempt at combining theoretical and practical insight into a situation. It can be compared with the "worker intervention" strategies of groups like the Trans-National Cooperative, and with *RED*'s own orientation towards bringing together teachers, trainee teachers, parents and academics in a common forum. Despite this, and for all of its readable and colloquial style, *Making The Difference*, as its authors admit (p 11), is an "academic product". It has already become essential reading for any academic discussion of Australian education.

For readers of *RED*, however, the most significant aspect of the book will be what it has to say about possible strategies to reduce social inequalities (whether of class or gender) through the education process. The book is explicitly aimed at a wide audience:

> "We hope, rash as the thought may be, that the material in this book is of interest to several groups: teachers concerned with the causes of the problems they face; parents and parent organisations concerned with educational reform;

ICE:

ıded research project on which the authors have been
understanding of education in Australia, and in this
k.

Making The Difference: Schools, Families And Social Division, **R W Connell, D J Ashenden, S Kessler, G W Dowsett, 1982. George Allen and Unwin, Sydney. RRP $6.95.**

Linley Samuel.

> academics and students interested in the sociology of education; teacher unions and other people concerned with educational policy. We have tried to write the book in a way that will be accessible (for the most part) to all of these groups. (p 12)

The book's suggestions should be taken seriously. But first we need to look at the subject matter and argument of the book as a whole.

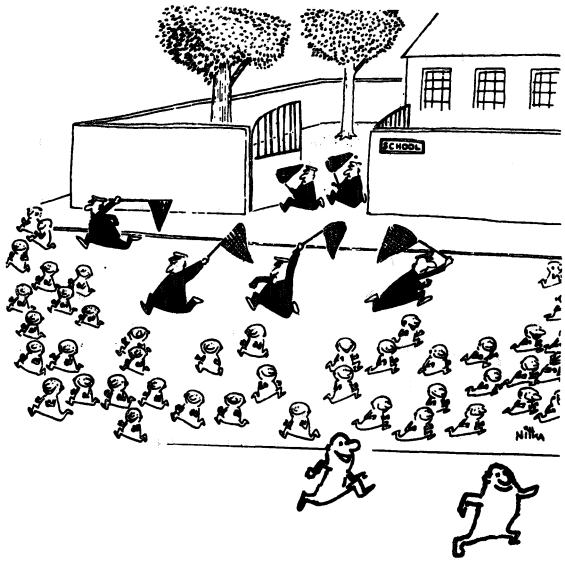
Ruling Class Schools And Working Class Schools

The central contrast is between what the authors refer to as "ruling class schools" and "working class schools". Perhaps the book's most impressive achievement lies in its detailed demonstration of just **how** much difference there is between the way education takes place in an elite private school and in a typical working class comprehensive. This difference exists on a whole series of dimensions which are carefully teased out in their argument.

Thus one important set of distinctions can be described in what the authors refer to as the **market situation** within which "ruling class" schools function. Private schools need to attract students to survive; they are selling a commodity, and they need to be attractive to their customers, who are, of course, the students' parents. At the same time, the average parent of a student at an elite school is at least the social equal, and often in a superior social position, to most of the school staff. Ruling class parents, as the book demonstrates, regard teachers as effectively their employees. They rarely hesitate to tell the principal what they think is best for their children, and they have of course the ultimate sanctions of withdrawing the students and damaging the school's reputation among their friends and acquaintances.

This could hardly be more different from the situation of an average working class family in relation to a state comprehensive school. Here the status relationship is the other way round, and many working class parents feel intimidated by the school and by the academic and social qualifications of the teachers. Only a few particularly self assured parents will be prepared to face up to the principal of their local comprehensive, and, even if they do so, the principal is in a much stronger position than they are, and is in no way dependent on their approval.

In studying a school much like those in the book's working class sample, I have seen plenty of evidence of the school's hierarchical relationship to parents. At the same time one can hardly blame teachers in such schools too much; they are likely to perceive their own situation as one of struggling to survive, of only being able to maintain a minimal degree of classroom control, and of being asked to teach uncooperative and hostile students.



The role of the school in reproducing class relations has been a familiar theme in the radical sociology of education since the work of Bowles and Gintis, to whom the authors of *Making The Difference* pay due acknowledgement. At the same time they seek to go beyond the "reproduction theory" approach originated by Bowles and Gintis, by showing how this generation of class relationships is grounded in the attitudes and behaviours of individual teachers, parents and students. The teachers at an elite school are certainly involved in reproducing class relationships, but we would be wrong to see this exclusively in terms of ruling class conspiracy. The situation is both more complex and more interesting.

We can even say that it is not so much a question of "the ruling class" reproducing itself as of individual parents attempting to preserve their own relatively privileged situation for their children. The ruling class school provides access to a network of social linkages which will stand its ex-students in good stead in later life, and, as the book demonstrates, parents are well aware of this. It is part of the commodity they are buying.

Of course, in buying privilege for their own children, the parents who send their sons and daughters to an elite school are indirectly depriving other children of the same thing. It is difficult to blame parents in such a situation for doing their best for their children. What such an analysis does make clear, however, is the gross unfairness of extensive government subsidies to elite private schools at the expense of state schools. This is not to say that government funding of private schools is automatically immoral, since there are certainly private schools, as with some of the parochial Catholic schools, that are neither elite nor well financed. Much of these funds however clearly do no more than increase an already existing disparity between the educational opportunities and future life chances of independent and state school students.

Parents And Children

The book demonstrates well that working class parents and children feel powerless in relation to the educational system. Here is an extract from an interview. This is the first time Mrs Arlott, a working class parent, has approached the school. She is concerned about her daughter's poor report, after her daughter had said she thought she was doing well at school.

> "So I rang the high school up, I rang the principal; and he said that she must have been a liar. And I said, "Do you know the child?" And he said, "No". I said, "Well how do you know she's a liar?" He said, "I'll talk to the girl". And he never rang me back, he never done anything. So, I just didn't bother after that. He called Heather in and asked her why she thought she was doing so well; and that was it. He just dropped it, he never rang back to say . . . he'd spoke to her, and she is a liar or she's not, or anything. So I haven't got much faith in him." (p 129)

Parents and children are realistic about the limited possibilities available for advancement through schooling, but they do wish to utilise the educational opportunities which they are offered. My own research bears this out. **The problem is not that working class children reject education, but that they are never really offered it.**

The authors see gender as a dimension parallel to but independent of class. Neither is reducible to the other. At the same time, the way in which gender affects individual children has a great deal to do with their class situation, and particularly the kind of school they are attending. Ruling class schools offer a greater range of possible alternatives for the construction of an adult personality, while the almost monolithic nature of working class sex roles comes through strongly in working class schools despite the efforts of some well intentioned feminist teachers. Both ruling class and working class children are exposed to commercial youth culture with its deeply ingrained sexism, but ruling class children are far more likely to have alternative cultural resources upon which to draw. This has its most obvious and oppressive effects for girls. As the authors note:

> "In the endless stream of quasi erotic advertising and advice directed to teenagers, there is hardly a suggestion that there is any way of being a girl other than by being acceptable to boys. (p 165)

Theory And Practice

The above has given some idea of the central arguments of the book. One criticism that some commentators have made is that the central contrast between working class and ruling class schools is too crudely drawn. A superficial reading may give this impression, but this is I think to misread what the book is demonstrating. The schools were certainly selected to represent the two extremes of the Australian educational system, and there is no attempt to examine intermediate cases ("good" state schools, non elite private schools) or other dimensions relevant to Australian education (such as the position of rural, ethnic or Aboriginal students). The authors, however, are entirely clear about what they are doing. The extremes are considered here, not because it is supposed that they represent the only cases, but because they were expected to be particularly revealing about under-

lying structural dimensions of the whole system. And in this expectation the authors have surely shown that they were fully justified.

As the terms "ruling class" and "working class" indicate, the authors are considering class in a Marxist sense, not the denatured blend of statistical indicators of socio economic status to which it is too often reduced in modern sociology. Class in *Making The Difference* is constituted by a **relationship**. What is really at issue here is the degree of control individuals have over their lives, and if this is most obviously visible at the extreme ends of the spectrum that is not to sa say it is any less relevant elsewhere. What the authors have done is to take the old Marxist concept of relationship to the means of production and demonstrated what its contemporary equivalents are, and how they work, in a crucial sector of modern capitalist society. It is clear that carrying out this project will involve considering the cultural as well as the material aspects of class position. In this respect, the book has carried further and given a thorough factual grounding to the insights of such writers as Basil Bernstein in England, and the French sociologist of education, Pierre Bourdieu.

Of course the book does not and cannot give us a final and definitive understanding of these complex processes. At the theoretical level, as I have noted elsewhere, there is still a problem about how precisely one links the structural dimensions of class and patriarchy to the more psychological language within which the individual families are described. The problem of reconciling (or transcending) these two kinds of concept is a central one in contemporary social science, and will no doubt remain so for some time to come. Attempts to deal with these issues in the specific field of the sociology of education will certainly be assisted and stimulated by the work in this book.

A minor query concerns the question of the market situation of elite schools. The situation today seems to be that parental perceptions of deterioration in the state school system (at least in New South Wales) has led to greatly increased demand for private schooling. As a result, the better private schools have no difficulty in attracting students, and they may as a consequence be under less obligation to respond to parental pressure. If this is so, it may be that *Making The Difference* reflects a single historical moment in its discussion of this point rather than a more permanent situation.

What Is To Be Done?

It is in the area of the book's conclusions and recommendations that many readers will be most interested, and where perhaps constructive debate can most usefully be focused. The authors of *Making The Difference* come down, warily, on one side of a major ongoing debate in contemporary radical education circles. Does one seek primarily to supply working class children with the tools of elite culture in the form of the standard academic curriculum, the "hegemonic curriculum", or does one attempt to create a new curriculum which is "organic" to the working class and responsive to its special needs?

The two poles of this debate can be labelled for the sake of argument with the names of Antonio Gramsci and Paolo Freire, although neither would perhaps wish to be associated with them in this simplistic form. The problem nevertheless remains a real one. The position taken in this book is that we **should** try to work towards an organic curriculum for the working class. For them the dangers of the "hegemonic curriculum" and of cultural elitism appear to outweigh the advantages of access to the body of elite culture. The working class schools should seek to be "organic" to their class in the same way that the ruling class schools have come (as a result in their case of their market situation for the most part) to be "organic" to their class.

This conclusion is presented in a tentative enough way, and there can be no doubt that the kind of questioning and relativising of what schooling is about in working class schools suggested here could only be a positive development. At the same time it is important to remember that working class parents and children have their own requirements of the school system, and for them the conventional academic curriculum has high priority, because they are aware how important success in terms of that curriculum is for the job market.

A related question is how far the problem at issue is one of the content of the curriculum and how far it is rather a question of the structure of working class schools. The book brings out clearly the authority relations between school, parents and children, and the relative powerlessness of parents and children in relation to the school. A real transformation of working class education would involve more than a new curriculum; it would also require a new structural context for the educational process.

The authors are hardly unaware of this problem, and it should be noted that their conclusions are, again rightly phrased very much in terms of "what would be possible, in the short term, given the basic structure within which we are working?". To all of us who are interested in the answers to that question, *Making The Difference* will be essential reading for many years to come.

Last year we produced RED 17 which examined the problem of school discipline. That particular issue aroused a lot of interest and we are pleased to follow it up with an article by Jim Walker and Patricia Moran which looks at some of the theoretical and practical difficulties of researching in this area. Both the authors are at Sydney University and are researching into discipline and school resistence. Research of this kind, they argue, raises important questions about the relationship of theory and practice.

Theory, Practice and Discipline Problems and Solutions

Jim Walker & Patricia Moran

Teachers and other involved in the practical world of education are often understandably sceptical of, and impatient with, academic analyses – and radical critiques – of schooling which seem long on theory and objections to what is being done, but short on ideas for workable changes and improvements – short on solutions to the real problems faced by people on the job.

We believe strongly in academic analysis of schooling; and we think the solution of educational problems depends upon the production of better educational theory. But we also think that, given the actual history of educational theory and research, the criticism of "practical" people is substantially justified.

However, there is no need for the academic study of education to be at all removed from the practical problems of schooling. Indeed, theory and research concerning education should be geared to solutions to practical problems.

"Relevance"

These views, of course, are far from new. Many people have urged that theory should be relevant to practice. The trouble is, though, that it is not always clear how to make research and theorising relevant; and often a conflict develops between "theorists" and "practitioners" such that theorists resist being told that they should restrict their academic work to whatever will satsify the demands of others, such as teachers. Not only does this offend the ideals of (the theorists') academic freedom; it is said that it could compromise the objectivity of academic work and prevent important discoveries.

Thus in response to the relevance argument it is replied that you can't legislate, in advance, for relevance; and that if you try you may prevent the discovery of plenty that could turn out to be of great relevance. When you are involved in **research**, which by definition is trying to find out something that is as yet unknown, legislating in advance for relevance is like trying to have your cake and eat it.

While we agree about the importance of objectivity and the impossibility of knowing that something will be relevant before you know what the something is, we think that there is a kind of relevance which should be legislated for. We think that when it comes to finding out about the unknown you both **can and must** have your cake and eat it.

The only kind of research likely to find out how schooling works is research which explains the practical problems of those working in schools. This can be achieved, sometimes, accidentally, or as a relatively minor objective. Obviously it would be better, if we are correct, to make it methodologically explicit and central. We are claiming that in order to be effective **as research**, research must **deal with** the practical problems of people involved in education, In this sense, it must be **relevant**.

On the other hand, focussing on practical problems does not **guarantee** that the findings of the research will help **solve** the problems; it does, however, make solutions more likely than if research did not take into explicit account the practical problems. Nor does a focus on practical problems mean deferring to all the demands of practitioners; though it would, we think, mean being of more help, overall, than theorists and researchers are at present.

An example: "Discipline"

In the current debate about "discipline", there have been many attempts to explain the breakdowns in relations between pupils and teachers that lead to the "discipline problem", or that lead teachers and others to describe certain pupils as "discipline problems".[1]

One set of explanations looks at characteristics of certain **individual pupils or types of pupil** – psychological adjustment, family background, cultural or subcultural characteristics, etc. – in order to discover factors which cause the pupil's behaviour to be a problem to others who are trying to

control him or her, either to get the pupil to learn something or simply to conquer "troublemakers". With such individualistic explanations, the solution to the problem of "discipline" is to **change the individual** by some appropriate form of treatment (punishment, counselling, "special education", etc.) **or to improve the background of the individual** by political, social or economic intervention.

Another set of explanations assumes that we should not "blame the individual", but should look at "**structures**" – the social structures of the school itself, and the hierarchical political and economic structures of the wider society, and the patriarchal structure of the family. Such explanations, often put forward by radicals, tend to claim that certain inequalities and forms of oppression cause "discipline problems" in schools. In the case of structuralist explanations, the solution to the "discipline problem" is to **change the structures**, e.g. by making schools more democratic.[2]

A prominent contemporary approach to these issues **combines individualism and structuralism.** It looks at groups of individuals with supposedly special **cultural** characteristics centring on their "resistance" to institutions and dominant ideologies. What others call a breakdown in discipline, is here called "resistance". This Resistance Theory as developed by the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies at the University of Birmingham[3] suggests that these culturally defined types, "resisters", are pitted against the sociopolitical and ideological "structures". Although the "discipline problem" is redescribed as "resistance", such "resistance" is not always regarded as a problem; sometimes, as for example in the "resistance" of young women to traditional "feminine" roles, it is regarded as a solution, or at least part of a solution.[4] Where it is regarded as a problem, or as partially a problem, this mixed individualist/structuralist approach recommends **a mixture of solutions** – both changing the individual and their culture, and changing the structures.[5]

Theory and Practice: The "Applied" Method

Although the individualistic, structuralist and mixed kinds of explanation differ in important ways, they **all** imply **the same model of the relationship between theory and practice.**

The theorist/researcher studies the characteristics of the relevant phenomena (individuals and/or structures) and then attempts to work out ways of applying the theory (including research findings) to practice. Not surprisingly, there is not always a close match or fit between such theory and the practice with which the practitioners are daily involved. This is because the ways in which the practitioners see, or theorise, their practice are couched in different conceptual schemes from those of the "theorists".

Hence the practitioners often reject "theory" in favour of "commonsense" or "practical measures" – which, we suggest, are still theory, just not theory worked out by professional theorists. What counts, socially and according to the prevailing ideologies, as theory is determined, **not by the nature of theory or the nature of practice**, but **by the division of labour** between "theorists" (or academics or comitted political radicals) and "practitioners".

This model reflects the **divorce**, not of theory and practice, but **of the social capacities for the production of powerful theory and for effective practice.** (We think this also reflects class and bureaucratic divisions.)

Thus the prevailing model of the relationship between theory and practice in education, as illustrated in the main approaches to the "discipline problem", leads to mismatches and missing links in the business of applying what is **officially** termed "theory", and leads to reinforcement of the divisions between those **officially** termed "theorists" ("academics" etc.) and those **officially** termed "practitioners". And, let us admit, these divisions are often surrounded by varying degrees of arrogance, smugness and condescension on the one hand and resentment and antagonism on the other; they line up with a tendency to intellectualist elitism on the one hand and anti-intellectual "practicalism" on the other.

Everybody suffers to some degree because of this. Theorists are prevented from making important discoveries and furthering the growth of knowledge; practitioners continue to face the hard slog of teaching and learning without much assistance from those whose job is supposed to be related (somehow or other!) to the provision of practically useful knowledge; and worse, but most importantly, kids suffer because the quality of their education is not what it could be.

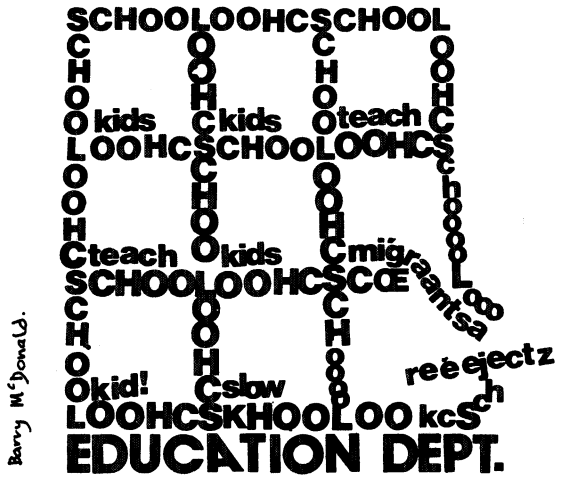
The institutional pressures on teachers often make it hard for them to simply hold the line in the struggle for educational quality; this, and the desperate need for educational improvements (most of which are beyond teachers' direct control) obviously has something to do with the production of "discipline problems".

Problems and Solutions: The "Coherence" Model

How, then, could we approach the "discipline problem", or any other problem, in a way which does not treat it as a

Research into practical problems:

In the Sydney University research project several studies are being conducted – ethnographic studies of adolescents, male and female, as well as more general theoretical work. Each study addresses itself to specific practical problems – eg of teachers, pupils and families. They hope to publish soon a critique of the "Resistance Theory", titled *Romanticising Resistance: A critique of contemporary cultural studies*, and a smaller book exploring the practical implications of this analysis for teachers, titled *Discipline or Perish? Teachers' survival today.* They hope these publications will form the beginning of a series exploring the nature of problems, the ideology surrounding them, and the political and educational implications of a problems/solutions analysis.



problem to which we should simply **bring** knowledge of a psychological, sociological, etc. nature and **apply** it to "the problem"?

We are currently engaged in a research project at Sydney University which is not based on the "theory to be applied to practice" model, but on an alternative approach which we might call a "coherence" model. This approach has five steps:

1 The research commences by trying to find out what the relevant people – eg in schools, teachers and students– regard as their problems, either explicitly through their own words or implicitly by their responses to situations and by their more settled practices.
2 Given their understanding of what the problems are, how do they see their options for dealing with them? Can we find out what they think are the available solutions to their problems.
3 We need to analyse these accounts of the problems and solutions, to discover how coherent the various problems/solutions frameworks are. Are there contradictions in the views and practices of the people concerned? (Our assumption is that contradictory frameworks lead to less effective capacities for producing solutions.)
4 How do the perceived problems and solutions of one individual or group match up with the perceived problems and solutions of other individuals and groups? (Actually, we could drop out any mention of individuals and groups and simply speak of the problems/solutions frameworks themselves.) Is there any overlap? Is there conflict? If so, how much of each, and how significant, practically speaking, are they?
5 Given our answers to the preceding questions, how realistic and how effective are the problems/solutions frameworks being used by the various people involved in the overall "problem situation"? What would have to be changed for the people involved to change their problems/solutions frameworks, in order to change the overall problem situation?

If we come to the conclusion that **nothing** can be changed in the problem/solutions framework, of course, the only alternative left is out-and-out conflict, where either one individual or group imposes their problems/solutions framework on others, or else there are various degrees of chaos. In either case, in our example of the "school discipline" problem, the problem remains in its present form: i.e. if you are a teacher it is how can teachers impose their ways of seeing things on unwilling kids, and if you are a pupil, how can you avoid having the imposition made upon you or, even better, how can you impose your way of seeing things on teachers? So far as the "discipline problem" is concerned, we are back where we started; and we are back there **because we cannot render coherent** the problems/solutions frameworks, either individually (make them internally coherent) or taken together, collectively.

Some "radical" perspectives, of course, assume before the event that we cannot render the frameworks collectively coherent, so we might as well fight it out from the start: conflict is from the outset the required strategy. There may be problem situations where such a militant outlook is justified; but we hope that the relationship between teachers and kids is not one of them, that the "discipline problem" does not reduce simply to winners and losers.

The Coherence of Theory and Practice

Of course, if we cannot achieve greater coherence, we are left without any new solutions **to the problem in practice.** But we should stress, also, that until we have thoroughly asked and answered our five questions, we have not adequately **researched or theorised** the process of schooling and discovered **why** it produces the outcomes that it does: that is, we have not advanced our pursuit of theoretical knowledge, or contributed much to the solution **of problems in theory.** Unless we achieve coherence between the ways theorists and researchers on the one hand, and practitioners on the other, see the problems and solutions, the same situation will obtain as between teachers and pupils when their frameworks conflict, but with the important additional consequence that the theorists will not have done their task of pursuing knowledge in the most effective manner.

In the case of research into social phenomena, like education, the central analytic strategy must be to discover the problems/solutions frameworks, explicit in words, or implicit in practice, on which the social agents are operating. We should not focus, abstractly, on psychological processes or on social structural processes until we have worked out the problems/solutions story, and perhaps not even then. Our hunch in our own research is that by the time we get to the end of the problems/solutions story, we shall have answered any significant questions about psychological processes and social structures.

Note that we are not saying that psychological processes and social structures don't exist (although we would question the sharp distinction between the psychological and the social, and **any** distinctions between individuals and "structures"). We are saying that the most effective (not the only) way of studying them is through inquiry into problems/solutions frameworks. We are hypothesising that problems/solutions frameworks are at the heart of any causal explanation of psychological and social structures.

Nor are we suggesting that the problems caused by the

present invidious division of labour be solved by practitioners' eschewing the activities now controlled by "theorists", or that without capturing the resources controlled by "theorists" practitioners can by themselves effectively take over the production of powerful theory, any more than pupils could adequately take over their own education by dismissing all teachers and spurning the resources those teachers represent and control. The solution to the present social divisions will, we think, involve the **merging** of the currently socially distinct roles through the large scale co-operation of a massive majority of those presently involved in each role, except, possibly in the case of the most privileged, the "academics" or "theorists" – in their case a significant minority might have to do.

Notes & References:

1 See the coverage in *RED 17*, Autumn 1982.
2 e.g. Gary Dowsett, Sandra Kessler, Dean Ashenden and Bob Connell, "Effortless Good Order? How a Study of Private Schools Throws Light on the Nature of Discipline", *RED 17*, pp. 9-12 and (by the same authors) *Making the Difference: Schools families and social division*, Sydney, George Allen and Unwin, 1982: there is an abstract endorsement of democracy but little or no attempt to link democracy in practical ways to the problems faced by teachers and kids – there is some **description** of such problems, but no problem-solving analysis showing how democracy fits in with solutions. Similarly Gay Hawkins, *Resistances to School*, Sydney, Inner City Education Centre, 1982, displays an abstract preoccupation with democracy.
3 Stuart Hall and Tony Jefferson (eds.) *Resistance Through Rituals: Youth subcultures in post-war Britain*, London, Hutchinson, 1976, and Paul Willis, *Learning to Labour: How working class kids get working class jobs*, Farnborough, Saxon House, 1977.
4 e.g. Angela McRobbie and Jenny Garber, "Girls and Subcultures: An exploration", in Hall and Jefferson, *op. cit.*, and Angela Mc Robbie and Trisha McCabe (eds.) *Feminism for Girls: An adventure story*, London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1981.
5 Just such a mixture is evident in the last chapter of Willis, *op. cit.*, ("Monday Morning and the Millenium").

Questioning Consensus

Rob White

The allocation of state financial and administrative resources (and the subsequent effects on school organisation, personnel and curriculum) cannot be separated from political strategies designed to manage the crisis. Under Fraser, for example, cutbacks in the social wage, and the implementation of wage "freeze" policies, directly affected the economic position and labour of teachers in the educational institution just as it put enormous pressure on all Australian workers to maintain what they have fought for over so many years. Recognising this, it is crucial at the present time that we evaluate the direction of the Labor Party's policies as it settles into its parliamentary leadership role.

To date, the burden of the contemporary crisis has been placed squarely on the backs of workers. For teachers in particular, reductions in needed educational spending on state schools have resulted in the lack of sufficient relief from face-to-face teaching, numerous classes that are too big, inadequate maintenance of physical conditions in the schools, etc (see the ATF national survey of teacher working conditions[1]). In addition, salaries have declined in real and comparative value, promotional opportunities have been severely restricted (and even then biased against women), governments have attempted to tighten bureaucratic controls in the name of "accountability" (take the SA situation as a prime example of this), and the list goes on and on.

Such was the case. But now we have a Labor Government in power, a government which has pledged to "bring Australia together" in a collective effort to pull the nation out of the depths of depression. Before raising our hopes, however, I

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think that we had better take a closer look at the ALP's policies of "reconciliation" and "reconstruction".

Labor's Social Contract

To set the context for the policies which were "agreed" upon at the National Economic Summit Conference in Canberra, it is essential to consider the general orientation of the ALP's economic thinking. In order to institute its program of economic reform and recovery, the ALP had indicated during the election that it would call for "equality of sacrifice" as a means to encourage economic growth.

In practical terms, however, we have to recognise that Labor's economic strategy, like that of its predecessor, is basically geared to bolstering capitalist profit margins in a period characterised by a crisis of over production and falling rates of profit. This does not mean that there has been a decline in the real **need** for certain goods and services (eg steel, housing, food), rather, that the corporate sector simply cannot obtain the prices and volumes of sales required to make a profit. One way to redress this situation is for the rate of profit to be increased through making labourers work harder for less money.

This is where the Labor Party's policies become important. By preaching a form of consensus politics which glosses over the fundamental contradiction between capital and labour, it is in fact playing a major ideological and political role in enhancing the conditions necessary for greater corporate profit.

The underlying rationale for the ALP prices and incomes policy is that wage restraint will lead to economic growth and more jobs. Accordingly, the social agreement between the ALP and the unions attempts to make Labor's wages package as palatable as possible for workers through reference to price controls, tax restructuring, etc.

We can briefly consider some of the reasons why it is workers who would be forced to carry the burden of "sacrifice" if the ALP policy is successfully implemented.

First of all, there is absolutely no way in which a Labor Government could realistically and effectively control prices. We might recall that the Prices Justification Tribunal of the Whitlam Government, for all its legalistic trappings, was extremely limited in what it was able to do. Current attempts at price control will be equally ineffective, not only because "Moral persuasion" is far from being enough, but also because the international character of trade is a major stumbling block to such control.

Furthermore, recent trends and decisions by the ALP (eg the devaluation of the dollar) lend little optimism that the rate of inflation can be controlled simply by government fiat. Without a genuine price index (which would include items such as petrol rises and interest rates), all workers are faced with a systematic deterioration of the buying power of their wages.

Nevertheless, under the ALP policy industrial wages will not be fully indexed to the rate of inflation. The maintenance of real wages is not guaranteed by the Labor Party policy, especially in the event of the economy further declining!

In a similar vein, even limited increases in social wage spending would not necessarily mean that those in need (both workers and consumers) would be the greatest beneficiaries. For example, the allocation of education spending often serves the children of the well off (eg private schools) to a greater degree than workers' children (who face deteriorating conditions in the state schools). In addition, workers would be paying for their own social wage increase in that most government revenue comes from direct and indirect taxes on working people. Note here that at its July national conference in 1982, the ALP decided to reject introducing any form of real capital gains tax.

Clearly it is workers who are being forced to take on what Bob Hawke calls the "common burden for the common national purpose". The onus for "restraint" is on workers, and this is further justified by arguments suggesting that "one person's wage rise is another person's job".

Somewhat ironically, one forseeable result of such a policy is that employers would be provided with cheap labour until even more cost saving technology had been introduced and jobs lost as a result (one **can** conceive of computers replacing teachers in the schools). In effect, then, the ALP policy offers very little in the way of ending unemployment, and continues to place the burden of the crisis on the backs of workers.

State Workers And Austerity Measures

In the event of the workers' "consensus" on the policy breaking down, the ALP would have a ready scapegoat for the economic ills of the country. And it would enable the Labor Government to "legitimately" use economic coercion on the unions to bring them into line. As with all workers, this has grave implications with respect to the economic situation of teachers.

We can foreshadow the events that potentially will occur by considering the following factors. The Hawke Government has already indicated that it will not increase the budget deficit beyond "reasonable" limits. One may well wonder, then, where it is going to get the money to pay for its program of economic recovery. The same problem of course confronts state governments.

With respect to this, it can be noted that in a period of economic crisis members of the public service are especially well suited to government efforts to carry out austerity programs. Firstly, there are inherent difficulties in the taking of industrial action where the employer is the state and the type of labour provided is a service. Unlike workers in private sector manufacturing or industry, teachers cannot bring to bear upon the employer debilitating economic action. Teachers do not "pay their way" through direct production of profitable goods and services, nor is the state in a position to crumble financially by virtue of strike action by teachers. Secondly, teachers can be directly controlled by government legislation, with little regard for the fact that the state is also the employer.

The result of this situation is that government policies such as the Liberal Party's scheme of a "wages pause" are inevitably aimed in the first instance at public servants, although part of the aim is to eventually reduce wages by like means in the productive sectors of the economy as well. The administrative/legislative mechanisms are there to be used by governments, and the disunity of public service unions and the lack of real economic power on the part of these workers,

ensures that public servants are a ready target for restraint measures. The utilisation of the Commonwealth Employees (Employment Provisions) Act by the Fraser Government to stand down striking ACT teachers last March (1982), for example, can be seen as a concrete expression of repressive state power.

The shift in parliamentary political leadership to that of the ALP has done little to change the policy of wage "freezes"; the names may have changed, but the effect is the same. Nor is a change likely in the basic relationship between public servants and their employer. The arbitrary control that the state has over its employees means that public servants in general will be in the frontline for new forms of cost cutting measures devised as a means to overcome problems relating to the fiscal crisis of the state. As well, it can be expected that economic sanctions applied to public servants will be used as models for managing workers and increasing profit levels in the private sector.

Teacher Responses

Endorsing the ALP in the 1983 election was only the beginning for teachers; the real work of changing ALP policy remains to be done.

Specifically, teachers need to resolutely oppose any form of attack on their hard won industrial gains by every means possible, eg, militant action campaigns coordinated across the public service unions (as in the case of the Tasmanian Teachers Federation), and to oppose any attempts by governments (regardless of political stripe) to retrench colleagues (as with casual teachers in New South Wales). Teachers must also reject any form of negotiation or trade off of increases in the social wage (?), price control (?) or tax cuts (?) for a "restraint" on direct industrial wages and "no strike" agreements. They must concretely show the Labor Party that they refuse to accept a policy which seeks to neutralise the only real weapon (ie, industrial and strike action) workers have in their fight against the crisis tactics of private sector and public sector employers. Efforts must also be continued and stepped up in the joint campaigns with parents and students against the privatisation of education, especially in light of the Hawke Government's stance on the state aid debate.

The most important feature of teacher responses to the crisis, however, is that teachers must not simply view and fight for their specific interests in isolation from the broader context of government policies based upon a "blame the worker" syndrome. With respect to this, it is essential to recognise the practical necessity of supporting all those workers who are at present engaging in militant action campaigns in the struggle for jobs, wages and social reform. Real alternatives to the present socio-economic system can only be achieved through the unified and collective effort of **all** members of the trade union movement (ie, not just through the activities of ACTU officers). And teachers have an important role to play in this process, both through direct involvement, and by fostering popular support at a grass roots level and in the classroom for the move toward a social system which puts people's needs ahead of corporate profit.

Only by engaging in "political activity" can teachers really become effective in changing the course of events for the sake of their own livelihoods, and the future of those children who at present have no real future.

References

1 Marginson, S, (1982), *1982 National Survey Of Conditions In Schools: Highlights Report*, ACT: The Australian Teachers' Federation.

READER'S NOTE:

For those interested in articles related to the interview with Mats Jonsson on page 10, the following in previous *REDS* have been identified:

- A general discussion of Australian experience can be found in Max Ogden's article in *RED 14.*
- The experience of an Australian trade union (the AMWSU) is discussed by Bob Richardson (also in *RED 14*).
- Other overseas experiences in formal worker education programs have been discussed by Bill Hannan (Italy) and Ray Broomhill (England) in *RED 16*.
- Articles by Josefa Sobski (*RED 14*), Tim Rowse (*RED 15*) and Grace Machin (*RED 14*) look at adult education in general in Australia and the WEA.
- Experiences of women in adult education are discussed by Josefa Sobski (*RED 14*), Mary Owen (*RED 14*) and Lesley Podesta (*RED 14*).
- Workers' research and the Lucas Aerospace experience are discussed by Ken McLeod (*RED 16*) while Heather Saville looks at women's refuges as another case of learning through experience (also in *RED 16*).

A view from the other side.....

Neryl Jeanneret

In *RED 17*, our "Discipline" issue, we carried an article by Linley Samuel who is doing research about adolescent girls in a working class school near Newcastle. This is a response by Neryl Jeannerete, who teaches in a state high school in a wealthy middle class suburb on Sydney's North Shore.

The purpose of this article is to point out just a few differences between a working class school, as exemplified in a recent article by Linley Samuel[1], and the school in which I teach.

This is a very middleclass school with a high proportion of professional parents and although many of the mothers are classed as 'housewives', quite a few have tertiary education or interests outside the home. Obviously, not all the parents are of professional status, but many of those who aren't are self-employed and quite successful. The majority of the students go on to Years 11 and 12 as there is a high parent expectation, and the students themselves are highly success oriented. There are several private schools in the area and quite a few of the Year 10s go on to these schools, presumably for the prestige and supposed better Higher School Certificate results – although the school's average aggregate in 1981 was around 281, exactly what the Department of Education considered "good".

There are relatively few **major** discipline problems in the school. The general staff attitude seems to be one of concern. There is no general discipline code and due to inconsistencies in the upper hierarchy, the staff tend to cope with problems within individual staff departments. For the few major discipline problems, a fairly positive attitude is adopted. The counsellor and local community services are involved and an appropriate plan of behaviour modification worked out. I feel the staff are very much aware of the fact that major problems are the combined result of school, home and other circumstances outside the school, and that they are ill-equipped to deal with these problems. The plan worked out is always positive and involves constant reinforcement of acceptable behaviour.

Linley Samuel states that "working class kids leave their quite different schools with a working class future often an inevitability" and the same seems to apply to these middleclass kids. In discussing girls in particular she says ". . . my girls could not see any real future for themselves outside the traditional feminine career (marriage and family)". Although the girls at my school do not sneer at the idea of 'marriage and family', many of them regard it as incidental to a career. They are as career conscious as the boys and display a confidence in their future apparently not evident in their working class counterparts. One Year 12 girl, when asked what she thought about love and marriage and how it fitted into the future, replied, "If I fall in love and get married, all well and good but it won't stop me doing what I want to do". Her sentiments are echoed again and again by other girls.

I found that any form of blatant sexism is almost non-existent in the school. When several Year 12 girls were asked to reflect over their six year high school career and to consider whether they had encountered any sexism, the response was a sea of blank faces. Obviously, sexism exists, despite their lack of perception, but they were unaware of **blatent** incidents. The prospect of their sex being used as a criterion for exclusion or ridicule seemed to them to be totally absurd. One girl noted that her male physics teacher made comments like "not bad for a girl" when she repeatedly came top or near the top of the class. She dismissed his comments with – "He's only stirring. Besides, he's only a rugger-bugger who can't see beyond his sport and beer anyway". The girls also saw it as ridiculous that their sex would cause any problems in their future studies and careers. "Why?" was the question.

So why does this attitude exist in this school whereas many working class girls can't see beyond marriage as a career? It surely comes from the fact that feminism comes from educated, middle class females and that many of the mothers in this school are educated and share a similar professional status with their husbands. The girls also have the advantage of contact with family friends who present a variety of careers and jobs for women, whereas in a working class school, many of the girls only see female teachers as an alternative to the factory or shop. It is interesting to note that some students in this middleclass school reflect their parents' attitude that teaching is the absolute bottom of the professional ladder. It is not unusual for seniors to make comments such as, "I wouldn't be a teacher because I wouldn't put up with the shit you put up with".

But what of the actual classroom situation? There is one major discipline problem in Year 8. Many of the students react to this girl in the same way as the staff does. They resent her disruptive behaviour inside and outside the classroom. (Note the success orientation of the school and the fact that the students basically believe that they are there to work and achieve.) The other members of her class resent the fact that the teacher is constantly diverted by her behaviour and there is a constant feeling of frustration. This girl is certainly not seen as the rebel/

heroine type. This sort of attitude is present in other classes where the students will often suggest that the disruptive student be thrown out so that they can get on with their work.

Variation in uniform is a problem only in the eyes of the headmaster, who sees the school as being in competition with the local private schools. Many parents have **chosen** to send their children to a state school and are very aware that the uniform is not compulsory and that the Department will not back schools on uniform issues. The staff is also conscious of this and although instructed to keep a uniform check in the classroom, very few complied. For those students who conform and work well, the variation in uniform is seen as an expression of their individuality. Why jump on a 'good' kid because of the ridiculous issue of uniform?

The knowledge the parents and students have of students' rights and the teachers' handbook is also worth noting. After repeated warnings, an art teacher slapped the hand of a Year 8 girl who was constantly fooling with the hot wax used in Batik. As a result, all hell broke loose with the student screaming assault to her parents. The matter was sorted out but with the staff being no less aware of the types of students and parents they are dealing with. In comparison, the incident of the teacher who openly assaulted a Year 8 girl for a non-existent misdemeanour went unchecked in the school studied by Linley Samuel.

The point is that in this school there is little in the way of discipline problems and when a student is incensed about an issue, he/she is articulate and respected enough for the teachers often to see justification in their complaint, or at least to listen to them. Without being too cynical, it's in their best interests.

Note

1 Samuel, Linley 'The Making Of A School-Resister: A Case Study Of Australian Working Class Secondary Schoolgirls' in R K Browne and L Foster (eds), *Sociology Of Education: Australian And New Zealand Studies* in Press, Sydney, Macmillan.

MCKINNON FUTURE DIRECTIONS OF SECONDARY EDUCATION CORE CURRICULUM MCGOWAN REPORT CHOICE AND DIVERSITY OF SWAN

EDUCATION: WHITHER THE LEFT?

The R.E.D. Collective is planning a one-day CONFERENCE on FUTURE DIRECTIONS IN EDUCATION early in 3rd term, 1983

Are you interested in participating in debate around the urgently needed socialist reassessment referred to in the editorial (p.3)? If you are, please let us know, by phoning Noeline Hall (02) 889075 (wk) Ken Johnston (02) 889646 (wk) or Scott Poynting (02) 5698987 (a.h.) or by writing to the collective at P.O. Box 197, Glebe, 2037 Anyone foolish enough to feel like helping with organization, in any way, please ring us soon.

E.C.W.A.: Care vs Profit

The Early Childhood Workers Association (ECWA) held its second national conference in Brisbane during May. ECWA comprises unions across Australia whose membership are workers in early childhood services.

One of the main resolutions of the conference was a condemnation of commercial child care centres, as profit-making motives were seen as incompatible with quality child care and education.

Also planned at the conference was the establishment of a branch structure for ECWA in each state. Representatives of any early childhood services unions who may be interested in affiliation or obtaining further information, contact the secretary, Jillian Poynting-Gorn, on (02) 601-3924 or Christine Baxter on (02) 241 1377.

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Peace Studies at Macquarie

In September 1982, more than 500 students at Macquarie University signed a petition calling upon the University to establish a course in peace studies. In response to that initiative, a dozen interested members of staff from a range of disciplines met in October, 1982, to discuss the matter further. From this core group grew the present Peace Studies Planning Committee, consisting of about two dozen staff and students. It was suggested, and eventually approved by the authorities, that a course in peace studies be offered in 1984 as a general education course, co-ordinated by the School of Education. The course is to include: debate about the arms race and arms control/disarmament; the study of conflict; the mobilisation of opinion; analysis of the peace movement; the nuclear question; issues in peace education.

□ □ □

Previous Experience Required

One member of our collective, who will remain unnamed, has soon to be interviewed for a part-time teaching job at a suburban technical college.

The irony is, she's already been working in the job for eight weeks. She's quite confident about the interview, however, they've given her an excellent reference!

Royal Choice

During the recent "royal visit", an outback pupil had the opportunity, by radio, to ask Prince Charles the question: "Could you please tell me what kind of school Prince William will go to?" The royal reply: "... We haven't really thought in detail about that just yet... I think it's very important to find out what sort of character he is before deciding on those sorts of things."

It's a pretty safe bet, though, that when His Highness's "individual differences" are catered to, the "freedom of choice" extends a few degrees of freedom beyond that of most of his "subjects".

RED NOTES.

Education Centre for Sydney's West

The Metropolitan West Education Centre has just appointed its first fulltime co-ordinator. The (encumbent) person, who will be largely responsible for the incorporation of the group and the acquisition of premises is Graham Drew, who has held several positions as a social welfare worker, a youth worker, a builders' labourer and an unemployed person in the region.

The Interim Management Committee invites anyone with experience of, or interest in the "wild, wild westies" to contact it through the Project Officer at P.O. Box E61, Emerton, 2770, or ring (02) 628-6665, or (02) 628 6907, as it wishes to establish the priority of educational needs in this region.

Stop the Drop

The cost of building one tank for the army is equivalent to the cost of building 520 classrooms for schools.

This telling fact was broadcast on commercial television last month. No, not on a documentary, but in a video of a superb rock concert. Called "Stop the Drop", the concert was held on February 13 by People for Nuclear Disarmament. Some 14,000 people were there are the Myer Music Bowl, where the plea for world peace was supported by rock groups including the well-known Midnight Oil and Goanna, as well as by prominent actors and other personalities. Obviously, the message went to even more people when simulcast on TV and FM radio. But it would doubtless have gone still further had the TV program guides (which usually hype simulcasts) deigned to advertise the broadcast as more than just ... "Rock Music".

□ □ □

PE Protest

On June 15th, about 400 students gathered on the lawn of Sydney Uni and voiced their protest against the threatened amalgamation of the first year Political Economy course with the orthodox Economics course. This latest threat to PE (a first step towards phasing it out altogether) was put in context by Bill Waters, who spoke of fifteen years of struggle; first to introduce, then to defend, the Political Economy course, a radical alternative to bourgeois economics. Since its hard-won inception in 1975, the PE course has had to be defended against a series of conservative attacks, aimed at incorporation or abolition.

In a recent referendum, 83% of Economics students at the university voted for retention or extension of separate PE studies.

As Waters pointed out, it is ironic that proponents of a doctrine preaching about "market forces" and "consumer sovereignty" (as applicable even to education), these champions of "freedom of choice", should show so little regard for the **choice** of the students in the Department of Economics.

RED REVIEWS

What are good teachers up to?

English 7–10, a draft, **edited by Bill Hannan and David McRae, Melbourne, Australasian Educa Press, 1982, 71 pages.**

English 7–10, a draft is a resource book for teachers, written by teachers. Its starting point is the belief that there is a great deal of good English teaching going on in Australian high schools. The purpose of the book is to offer ideas based on what good teachers are already doing.

The "draft" part of the title means that readers are invited to participate in revising the present edition in order to create a new book which will reflect the needs and ideas of even more teachers than the sixty-odd (mostly from schools in Brunswick, Victoria) who contributed to this one. Each chapter begins with a section called "Work on this" which gives a framework of questions for this audience participation revision process. The "draft" part of the title also means that the book is very brief, with some sections more like outlines than finished chapters.

Well then, what is this good teaching that is happening all around us, and probably even in our own classrooms? It should come as no surprise that the main activities are reading, writing and discussion.

The authors are among the ranks of teachers who give top priority to writing rather than reading as the central activity in English and Humanities courses. They argue that there is little opportunity outside of school to practice writing, but that lack of writing experience is a hindrance not only to progress at school, but also at work and in public life.

The conditions which are seen as necessary for students to make gains and keep to the task of writing are:

1 that writing is set up as a constant routine, which includes drafting and editing;
2 that the emphasis is kept on the content of what is written;

and

3 that the student's writing is seen to be valued, eg through "publication" for audiences other than the teacher.

The chapter on writing goes on to offer concrete suggestions for ways to organise a writing routine, and how to develop topics for writing. There is a valuable discussion, using samples of student work, of the importance of sufficient preparation and external material for good results with argumentative writing.

The reading chapter starts with a very clear, brief rundown of reading theory, and gives helpful suggestions for working with poor readers. There is a survey of methods for teaching class novels and a discussion of what people can gain from reading novels and stories. This discussion, like many of the more theoretical parts of the book, serves the important purpose of sorting out and making explicit some of the seldom articulated assumptions and vague hunches that teachers have about what they do in the classroom.

An annotated bibliography of books for classroom use includes sections on Greek, Italian and Turkish literature in translation.

There is an interesting chapter on oral history work, which suggests as an English activity, the recording and transcription by students of student-conducted interviews with people in the community. Fascinating examples are included, although these are not by students.

More sketchily dealt with are drama, language study and poetry. Perhaps these areas bear expanding in the revised edition.

The book ends with a proposal for a scheme for integrated English and History teaching. The purpose of such a scheme is partly to provide topics for factual and interpretive writing, and partly to provide an improved framework for the study of History.

English 7–10, a draft is about mainstream English teaching – the kind of English teaching that is discussed by English Teachers' Association members and in ETA publications; the kind of English teaching that is chronicled in lesson registers across the country. So why should a book like this be reviewed in a radical education magazine?

Firstly, the book makes a contribution to the current debate about working class curriculum which has surfaced in discussion of school to work programs, proposed changes to the school certificate, and other innovations. Crudely speaking, this debate has divided progressive teachers into the "relevance" camp – which emphasises the importance of students' stated and perceived interests; and the "academic" camp – which asserts the necessity of intellectual rigour for working class students, no less than for middle class students. *English 7–10, a draft* shows clearly that good teachers can and do use the existing curriculum to teach content which has "significance" – a term which is contrasted in the introduction to the more limiting and shallow idea of "relevance". These teachers begin with students' interests and knowledge but extend beyond them into the enduring questions and problems of human experience. Also, by setting students to those familiar tasks: "Give evidence for . . ."; "Substantiate . . ."; "Give reasons for your opinion . . ."; "Why does . . .?", English teachers help students to develop rigorous habits of mind which may not help them find a job, but which may have other and greater virtues.

Secondly, the book reveals an apparent paradox: mainstream English teaching is a subversive activity. The introduction begins with a quotation from John Fowles' *The Aristos*, in part:

> "There should be four main aims in a good education. The first is the one that pre-empts all present systems: the training of the pupil for an economic role in society. The second is teaching the nature of society and the human polity. The third is teaching the richness of existence. And the fourth is the establishment of that sense of recompense which man, in contrast to the other orders of animate life, has so long lost . . .
>
> ". . . . From the point of view of the state [the first and the latter three of these aims] are to a certain extent hostile. The economy does not want too much attention paid by its workers to social purpose, self-enjoyment and the ultimate nature of existence; it needs intelligent and obedient cogs, not intelligent and independent individuals. And since the state always has a very large say in the nature of the educational system, we can expect little desire for change from politicians and administrators."

Good English teaching incorporates the latter three aims as well as the so-called "basics" required by the first.

Finally, while the approaches included in *English 7–10, a draft* are now part of the mainstream of English teaching, their place there is far from secure. Apart from the poor teaching which goes on out of laziness, tradition, lack of time and resources, or ignorance (and most of us are guilty of such teaching now and then!), there is the reactionary "back to basics" movement which has made inroads in some schools, and which threatens to erase the past ten years of progress in English teaching. The political motives of this movement are served by a general ignorance about English teaching in the community and in other high school departments which sees any uncorrected spelling mistake in a child's book as an indictment of modern English teaching methods. The theoretical section of *English 7–10, a draft* may help teachers to resist the attacks.

Perhaps in 1970 it was helpful to read that children were failing and that schools and teachers were to blame, as in 1976 it was an important revelation that schools mainly just reproduced the next generation of workers and bosses, no matter how loving and progressive their teachers were. In 1982, however, when public education is growing steadily leaner, and is threatened with starvation by government cutbacks, it is good to read a book like this one. It is important for hardworking and beleagured teachers to consolidate the curriculum advances they have made in the last ten years. English teachers can and should feel pride in the difficult job they do fairly well.

English 7–10, a draft is a practical resource, not only for the new English teacher, but also to the experienced teacher who is seeking some new ideas, plus a confirmation of present practice.

If the new edition is expanded, which seems to be the intention, it is likely to become the "Bible" for high school English teaching in the 1980s.

Janet Kossy

Note

Copies can be obtained from the Inner City Education Centre, 37 Cavendish Street, Stanmore NSW 2048.

ABOUT RED

RADICAL EDUCATION DOSSIER is produced and published three times a year by Radical Education Publications.

RADICAL EDUCATION DOSSIER examines the conflicts within schooling and education. It identifies the opposing interests involved in the struggle and works to develop strategies and tactics for change.

Our long term aim is to work towards further development of a socialist theory of education. Our immediate aim is to analyse the current process of education and to examine and explore the role of education in society.

The task is large and is open to all. We invite teachers at every level, students, parents and others interested in education to join the debate. Contributions should be concise, jargon-free and comprehensible to the non-specialist. **RADICAL EDUCATION DOSSIER** has a policy of using non-sexist language and requests that all contributors submit with this in mind.

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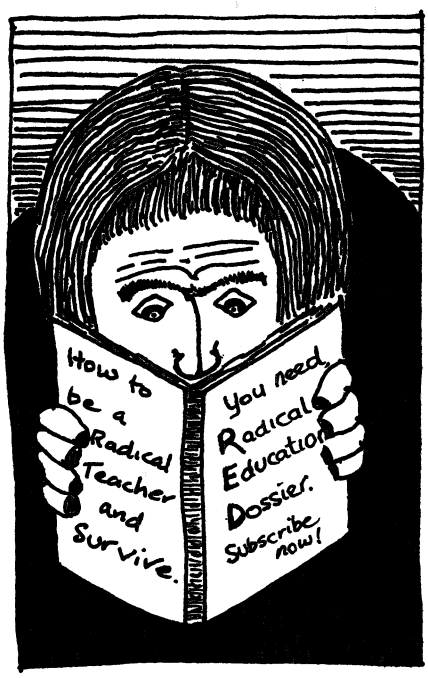

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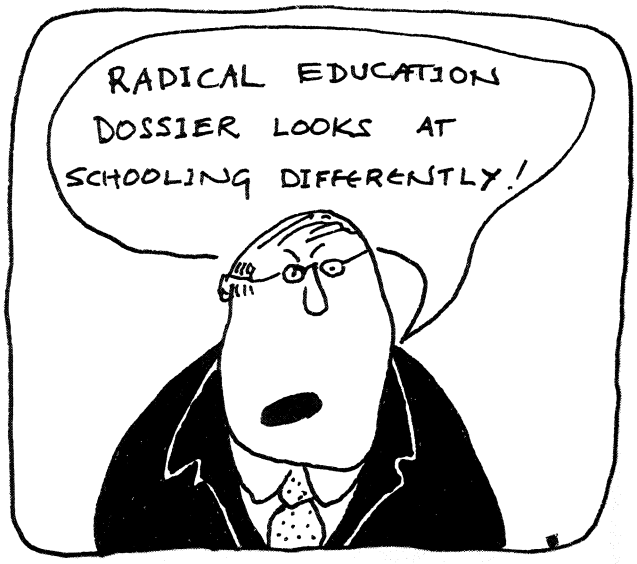

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