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## Partnership : Beyond Consultation

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traditional one shot, two or three times a year, staff development days are a mockery compared with the work required for the re-direction of teachers and administrators responsibilities that serious restructuring requires. (p.5)

### Teachers as Learners:

Most teachers in today's classrooms can describe a lifetime of reforms, one stacked on the other, few, if any, appearing to have any consequence for their professional lives. In more recent times, a multiplicity of reforms has been generated from outside the school, steeped in managerialism, bereft of structures which allow teacher discourse, and only distantly related to the purposes of schools - teaching and learning. The attitude of the profession to change has been shaped by the sheer, cumulative impact of multiple, complex and non-negotiable innovations, demanding teachers time, their energy, their motivation, their opportunity to reflect and even their very capacity to cope (Hargreaves, 1992).

One simple reason why teachers have been subjected to this form of 'restructuring' is that we are unclear about a viable alternative. Education systems are managed this way because central authorities know no other way. Even benign school system administration, determined to remove obstacles to 'best practice' fall short of the mark. As Bamburg and Medina (1992) observe:

*Many reform policies focus on removing or buffering constraints to effective practice, that is, inadequate materials, lack of appropriate teacher preparation, or insufficient teacher voice in curriculum decisions. However, an important lesson of the past decade is that removing constraints or obstacles does not by itself ensure more effective practice. Other and often different factors are required to enable practice. In addition the factors that enable practice - productive collegial relations, organisational structures that promote open communication and feedback and leadership that 'manages' opportunities for professional growth and nurtures norms of individual development, for example - are not amenable to direct policy fixes because they do not operate singly or consistently across settings. (p.4)*

What is required is a change in the culture of our profession. We know that change will be a constant in the wider world but also in our professional lives. When we close our classroom doors on the world outside we are stating, in effect, that we as professionals can segment ourselves from the rest of society. For a while, perhaps we can, but the pressure will mount until outsiders demand another burst of restructuring.

Holt High School, and the many schools in the National Schools Project, have decided to be proactive, and take control rather than wait for 'school improvement by central formula'. To follow this route requires teachers to assume responsibility for their own learning. Schools must become sites for such learning, places where current orthodoxies are questioned, intelligent modifications to work organisation and pedagogy are trialled, and the net benefit of these modifications assessed by the people who initiated them and who must live with the consequences. For this to happen research and development must become an essential work practice for teachers.

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## PARTNERSHIP : BEYOND CONSULTATION

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### Introduction

What is it that makes a relationship a partnership? It would seem that the first and foremost characteristics are those of shared responsibility, ownership and, importantly, shared risk in the creation of an enterprise of one kind or another. Consider the artistry of a Gobelin tapestry. It requires the designers and weavers, the spinners and dyers to engage in a set of relations which transcend the notion of hierarchy. Each contributes his or her skills and abilities, each is respected. If one fails to integrate with the others the result will be flawed.

Such a relationship stands in stark contrast to more traditional notions of consultancy, in which one party provides input of some expert kind for the benefit of the other. Implicit in this arrangement is the perception of a 'giver' and a 'receiver'. Knowledge, and the change which it produces, is dispensed as a commodity, rather than constructed as an outcome of an arrangement marked by reciprocity and mutuality.

In recent years, in Australia, there has been an increasing acknowledgment that work practices need to be developed around the concept of partnership with less intrusive and coercive management regimes. All participants are recognised as agents of the productive process, albeit on different scales and at different rates. Partnership does not preclude an understanding that some will be more advanced in their skills and understandings than others, that some will be in need of greater assistance than others. What is distinctive is that involvement in development will be collaborative, rather than coercive; cooperative, rather than competitive; enabling rather than disabling, oriented to means as well as ends.

The emergence of better understandings of partnership in the conduct of various enterprises in Australia has not come about by chance. In the last decade there has evolved a specific socio-political context which has made the restructuring of work relations imperative. Lepani (1992) has argued that Australia has to find a new place in a greatly changed global economic order and be poised to innovate in the knowledge that

our most flexible resource is human rather than material (Boomer, 1988).

It is in this context that the National Project on the Quality of Teaching and Learning (NPQTL) was formed. Three major working parties were formed: Work Organisation and related Pedagogical Issues; National Professional Issues (registration, accreditation, qualification); and, Teachers' Professional Preparation and Career Development (pre-service and in-service education). The National Schools Project has been a vital component of the Work Organisation working party. In the NPQTL we have a partnership which brings together the employing authorities, both government and non-government, and the teachers' unions in a climate of mutual respect and regard. As a result of the initiating partnership for the NPQTL the National Schools Project developed the concept further through a process of involvement with school staff and academic friends, the latter having formed a loose knit reference group for the project.

The National Schools Project rests upon the belief that educational professional in the schools have the capacity and will to critically enquire into their work practices in order to identify both those things which best facilitate student learning, and those features which act as impediments. As a consequence of such an enquiry, the practitioners would restructure the management of the school and its curriculum. The focus is always upon improved, ethically derived, learning outcomes for the school's students. Furthermore the Project is intended to provide information and ideas from those within and around classrooms to those in a position to determine policy (Wilkinson, 1992, p.6). There is a commitment to restructuring by a process of enquiry and action founded upon a working consensus. Principals, faculty heads, experienced and novice teachers all may contribute to the decision-making. In some schools it has been possible for students and parents to play a significant role also.

This paper explores some of the possibilities arising from such partnerships for the reform and restructuring of schooling as a form of collegial professional development and will focus

specifically upon the National Schools Project as it has been evolving in New South Wales. The partnership features can be seen to fall into three coalescences: the relationship between employers and unions; the relationship between the National Schools Project, the schools and the academic reference group; and, the relationships between members of the school community.

### Requirements for Soundly Based Educational Partnerships

Before turning to current reforms in professional development it is worth considering further the nature of educational partnerships which are truly educative in their function. What do they require? First and foremost is the matter of reciprocity.

Reciprocity is a metaphor, derived from mathematics, which relates the parts to the whole. In spite of a recognition of the divisibility of the whole there is also a converse understanding that the elements, when combined, make for a unity. So that a partnership, which may involve several players, can only be reciprocal if the endeavours of each partner interact to produce an enterprise which is itself seamless (West, Idol & Cannon, 1989). The National Schools Project, which is founded upon reciprocal partnership arrangements, has been a shared and purposeful endeavour. Just as the weavers and designers worked towards the production of the tapestry, so too have the partners had a common goal in restructuring teachers' work which is designed to produce conditions that will make learning better for the consequential stakeholders in all of this, the students in our schools.

It must be stressed that unity of purpose and reciprocal relationships do not in themselves mean that there needs at all times to be consensus and closure. Indeed there may be a prospect to celebrate dissent as the players seek to struggle with ambiguity, which must and should exist in human affairs. A truly reciprocal partnership permits its members to interrupt, to reopen debate, and to admit perplexity. It allows them to transcend those limits which lead inevitably to codification and recital. As McDonald (1988) reminds us:

*The technocratic image will not do. Teaching requires wilder images: it is riding herd on secondary effects, channelling a fast and fluid stream of largely unpredictable events, struggling to detect productive changes through a great gauze of uncertainty, fraternising with three of our own culture's 'villains': ambiguity, ambivalence, and instability. (p.483).*

[<sup>1</sup> Villains has been italicised by us to indicate that this is the manner in which ambiguity, ambivalence and instability are perceived. We prefer to characterise these features as challenges, rather than as constraints.]

The progress of the National Schools Project has been noteworthy for the difficulty experienced by *all of the participants* as they discover how hard it is to work outside the certitude of institutional paradigms, which clearly instruct their members on how they should act under specific conditions. Teachers, accustomed to hierarchical models of school management have had to reconsider their roles and responsibilities; unionists have had to progress outside the norms of their culture with its focus on adversarial industrial negotiation; and academics have needed to re-examine the ways in which they theorised practice, in that existing school management theories were inadequate to the purposes of the Project.

Indeed, the very writing of this paper represents the many tensions and struggles underlying authentic reciprocal relations. Written by three academics, at three Universities, it has required not only negotiation of the text, as it was collaboratively produced, but also discussion and debate with other players in the National Project. Some believed it too academic, others that it was not sufficiently theoretical. We played with metaphors: were we looking for directions inexorably set down like railway tracks or were we ready to explore, as in songlines? Whose intellectual property was it? What were the institutional norms under which it had been produced? And yet at this point we cannot say that this person contributed this sentence and that person modified a given paragraph. The effect is seamless, the result of that special synergy which reciprocal relations construct.

For partnership to progress beyond consultation and advice and to become genuinely reciprocal it is essential that the following features are recognised:

- a recognition of interdependence and the unique contribution the various parties bring to the relationship;
- constructive and imaginative problem solving;
- a will to work to not only change but to improve;
- a working relationship which permits risk taking;

- a tolerance for ambiguity, uncertainty and dilemmas;
- joint responsibility for the planning, implementation and evaluation of outcomes;
- joint benefits of a commensurable kind;
- organisational structures which will facilitate the enactment of decisions;
- appropriate resourcing; and
- intercultural understanding.

To work effectively as partners takes both time and commitment. Institutional culture is a powerful agent in keeping elements apart (Groundwater-Smith, 1992). For example, the focus of employers and employees' unions have, at times, been quite different. This does not necessarily mean that a partnership between each is not possible but rather recognises that each will need to more fully understand the cultural constraints of the other and find ways of not only communicating about these but also raising serious questions regarding the possibility for change as has been the case in the National Schools Project. In this case the parties have had to identify the operational impediments to effective communication both within and across the sectors and examine the ways in which these factors impact on change possibilities.

It has been argued that the National Schools Project is a professional development project as it induces the key players to rethink schooling processes. As such it is clearly a significant innovation within today's context of educational reforms.

### Current Reforms in Professional Development

In the current climate of educational reform and restructuring the nature of professional development is itself being re-examined. It is increasingly being acknowledged that the key to school improvement lies in a critical reconstruction of schooling practices, both within the classroom and the school itself (Joyce, Murphy, Showers & Murphy, 1989; Stallings, 1989; Fullan & Hargreaves, 1992). It is perceived that the prospect of transforming educational institutions and their practices is more likely to come about when strongly framed, focused and explicit programmes of professional development, grounded in identified needs, are designed and implemented preferably through partnership arrangements between employers of teachers and administrators, teachers' own professional

associations, such as unions, and higher education institutions (Goodlad, 1988; Rudduck, 1992; Watson & Fullan, 1992).

Two important and related themes in this context have been the notion of the teacher as learner and researcher (Moore Johnson, 1991) and the integral role of higher education providers in a longitudinal view of professional development. The suggestion that teachers need career long training (in the most liberal meaning of the word) casts a new light on what has perhaps traditionally been a piecemeal approach. Barth (1986) has argued strongly that support for ongoing teacher learning has concomitant positive effects for students:

*Only a school that is hospitable to adult learning can be a good place for students to learn. The notion of a community of learners implies that school is a context for lifelong growth, not only for growth among students. Adult learning is not only a means towards the end of school learning, but also an important objective in its own right.*

Higher education institutions have an important contribution to make here. However, this role should go beyond the unilateral act of service deliverer, in which concerns from the 'coal face' of the classroom are secondary. In a recent and stimulating work, Connell (1992) tackled this subject, pointing out, for example, that much, if not all of the content of academic journals is a vast distance from the real and perplexing problems and concerns that teachers experience every day, not to mention the ways in which academics may capture teachers' work to their own career benefit as they research and publish irrespective of the impact upon school life.

In recent years, various joint arrangements between employers and higher education institutions have emerged in the Australian states and territories. The most coherent and structured arrangements for jointly offered and managed professional development courses in New South Wales, for example, are those gathered within the Joint Masters Leadership Development Programme. The programme is characterised as a collaborative initiative of the NSW Department of School Education who has negotiated agreements with a number of universities. Its aim is to "develop further the leadership skills of teachers and educational administrators, within the Department in either the field of educational administration or curriculum leadership" (DSE, 1992). The program offers participants opportunities to complete a one-semester unit of study which is developed, taught and assessed by members of the Department, in collaboration with

university personnel. It is usually offered in the second semester of the university year and commences with a two day symposium, held in the Sydney metropolitan region. Here, senior officers of the Department deliver lectures on leadership issues relevant to Departmental policies and directions and university co-ordinators hold tutorials which emphasise critical discussion of the papers presented.

Such courses have their merits. However, they are significantly instrumental in their purpose in that they are designed to assist in the smooth implementation of the employing authority's goals and purposes. While they are jointly managed by the employing authorities and the award granting, higher education institutions they cannot be said to constitute a partnership in the fully reciprocal sense of the phrase (Groundwater-Smith, 1992).

#### Partnerships in Professional Development in the National Schools Project

It has already been indicated that The National Schools Project has been first and foremost a project which will enhance the professional development of *all staff within the school* with the outcomes being directed to the improvement of educational practices for the benefit of students. Clearly there is no point in changing school work organisations if the change is not one which will ultimately improve students' opportunities for achievement. Professional development, in this sense, goes well beyond in-service training. It is the opportunity for schools staffs to collegially and purposefully improve their practices in the management of the school's work. Too often in-service training is focused on individuals (who may or may not benefit) rather than overall school improvement. This may result in isolation and division (Moore Johnson, 1991).

Furthermore, professional development which rests upon an understanding of practice which places the technical within the broader framework of reflective inquiry requires a process which will not only map the educational world, but also galvanise people to act in it in principled and enlightened ways (Kemmis, 1992). Currently there is some concern that not only are many in-service courses of a technical and decontextualised kind, but that they are also increasingly being offered as a commercial enterprise.

*One cannot help but be struck by the extent to which public investment in teacher development has taken the form of 'service delivery' fed by a nearly*

*inexhaustible market place of packaged programs and sophisticated presenters. (Little, 1992, p.175).*

Little (1992) goes on to caution us regarding the oversimplification and standardisation of content in such courses. She argues that they are delivered in a mode which is unreflective and dependent upon surface features such as glossy materials and workshop exercises which can be undertaken and completed in a matter of days. Such courses are seen to have considerable initial appeal for teachers in that they provide a simulated professionalism. The packaging, the well designed pro-formas, the accessible language suggest processes which will be readily implementable in schools irrespective of their context and the diverse needs and experiences of those who participate in them.

As a form of professional development, The National Schools Project has redefined the notion of 'course'. The course is effectively the overall school program of reform. It may be likened to a journey, an unfolding adventure. Such an undertaking is continuous, it is owned by the school community and develops in response to the perceived needs of that community. It requires ongoing systematic inquiry by those engaged with it, and has developed forms of professional accountability which are based upon ethical rather than managerial principles. There is the prospect to go beyond immediate functional strategies and to develop proactive educational practices which are authentically owned by all participants.

The potential for partnerships with parents, likewise, is an important, indeed crucial element in this project in that changes in school arrangements such as staffing and timetabling will impact directly upon the community. Regardless of whether the relationship with parents operates at the individual class or school level (Cronin, Slade, Bechtel & Anderson, 1992), or on the systems level, it is becoming increasingly clear that each plays a critical part in the education of young people. The current developments in devolution of school administration and policy development serve as a backdrop to the increasing influence and role of parents in schools. Such a process of opening up the school to its legitimate stakeholders must continue if educational services are to be responsive and needs driven.

As well, the National Schools Project has moved towards partnership arrangements which are particularly creative and enterprising. As a project occurring under the auspices of the National Project on the Quality of Teaching and Learning there are acknowledged partners in terms of the employing authorities and the unions. But here we

also have the constituent parts, for example the schools, working in relation to each other and engaged in discussions with members of an academic reference group who are not trammelled by the constraints which come about in the granting of academic awards.

The academic reference group works in two ways. Firstly, it acts as an advisory group to the state co-ordinators and the State Steering Committee of the Project and has facilitated the development of the research framework, the evaluation strategy and processes for re-theorising teachers' work. Secondly, its individual members provide support to schools where the staff are collaboratively constructing research and development activities. They provide an outsider's view which may at times challenge the insiders' taken for granted beliefs regarding practice. However, such a challenge is seen as part of the reflective process rather than as a threat or an expression of a status relationship. In this way the members of the academic reference group are working alongside the Project's managers and school staff as change agents.

Change in entrenched practices is difficult when conducted in isolation or in atomistic ways. As Reynolds (1992) notes, much of the school effectiveness literature focuses upon listing factors which are said to cause schools to be effective. Typically, the literature recommends that schools develop processes which will facilitate these factors within the existing range of school practices, rather than looking at what might be effective within a differently structured system. In order to achieve the latter it would seem that there needs to be a critical mass of change agents who are committed to a democratic change process.

The school needs to be supported both internally and externally. In effect it needs the national context for change provided by the National Schools Project.

The academic reference group, then, cannot be constituted as consultants to the Project; rather they are partners within the Project along with the other key players. Relations are developed on the basis of collegiality rather than power. The Project does not employ the academics and therefore does not have that implicit coercive power which comes about through the old maxim "She who pays the piper calls the tune!" The academics do not have a particular authority over the school practitioners which comes about when teachers engage in school reform activities as a part of an award bearing course. Each player is respected for what he or she brings to the project.

**Conclusion:** The National Schools Project is conceptually difficult. It provides a framework for reform but does not advocate particular reforms. It recommends a process of inquiry but does not specify steps and procedures. It is predicated upon partnership but does not mandate what each partner will do. As the project matures it will simultaneously meet existing challenges and develop new ones. Glickman (1990) writes of the excitement of pushing school reform to the edge, of experiencing the anxiety of teetering on the brink. He argues that the great benefit derives from the sense of being professionally alive and alert. The National Schools Project has this vitality and is particularly timely in a world characterised by change and uncertainty.

It will be important in the future of the Project to document its life and its rhythms, the ways in which it maintains its health and the manner in which it confronts those unexpected accidents which any lively organism meets. The story will be both biography and autobiography, with blemishes and achievements acknowledged and celebrated. It is certainly the hope of the current partners that they will all take part in this struggle for understanding.

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## CREATING A COLLABORATIVE CULTURE IN A NATIONAL SCHOOLS PROJECT PILOT SCHOOL

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### WHY JOIN THE NATIONAL SCHOOLS PROJECT

The school's desire to be a part of the National Schools Project arose from its local circumstances. Situated in the northern suburbs of Adelaide, Salisbury North Primary School caters to a highly disadvantaged community. Over 80 per cent of students are from households whose income is low enough to qualify for government assistance. This figure has been steadily rising over the last few years. The student population is also remarkable diverse. Of an enrolment of 280 children in year levels 3-7, thirty percent are of non-English speaking background, twenty five percent are part of a new arrivals program, and over 10 percent are Aboriginal.

Recent tests, carried out as part of a research project by the University of South Australia, suggest that many of these children are more than two years below average in attainment. The behaviour of a small but significant percentage of students is highly disruptive. These factors led to questions being asked by members of the staff about how the school organisation could be improved so as to ensure that the learning potential of these students was realised. Participation in the National Schools Project seemed to offer an opportunity to critically examine current practice. The Project also provided a mandate to consider radical options which might help the staff and community achieve their objectives.

The initial proposal to join the National Schools Project focused on a number of areas for possible development. One was the improvement of transition processes from year seven to high school. Another was improved methods of monitoring student learning outcomes at the classroom level. A third was the establishment of teams of teachers sharing the task of teaching groups of children. Of these three original themes, two have survived in recognisable form. Transition to high school was taken up by primary staff at a cluster level. The intention to develop improved monitoring of learning outcomes later became subsumed into the school's work on National Profiles. It was the third area which

became the central focus of the National Schools Project commitment. The notion of 'team teaching' was broadened to include the work of school services officers (support staff who are not qualified teachers) as the result of the inclusion of a school services officer in the original think tank.

It is tempting to see the process of change as a linear progression through four stages - design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of agreed policy outcomes. What actually happened is that all these stages occurred simultaneously. The formation of teaching teams had been canvassed by a number of staff during 1991. At the beginning of 1992, two women staff formed an upper primary team, and during the year, three teachers formally combined their classes. On one occasion, two school services officers independently restructured their administration workload in order to increase the number of contact hours in the classroom. A variety of approaches to team teaching were trialled with minimal reference to the official 'think tank'. One team had developed a plan for exchanging all teaching time provided to the class by specialist teachers for an additional staff member, not without some anxiety on the part of the specialist teachers. These developments occurred in tandem with a more structured and planned approach as individuals and groups recognised opportunities to work in a new ways.

### THE CONCEPT OF THE SELF-MANAGEMENT UNIT

A key idea that emerged in think tank discussions was the concept of the self-managing unit. The concept seemed to be a logical extension of the increasing amount of team teaching which was occurring. This concept became the major conceptual vehicle for the reorganisation. A self-managing unit was defined as a group of children, teachers and ancillary staff who plan the curriculum delivery for 60-120 children of various year levels and work together as a group for more than one year. Staff specialise in various learning areas and share a physical space. The members of the self-managing unit engage in peer support and peer appraisal as well as cross-age tutoring. They