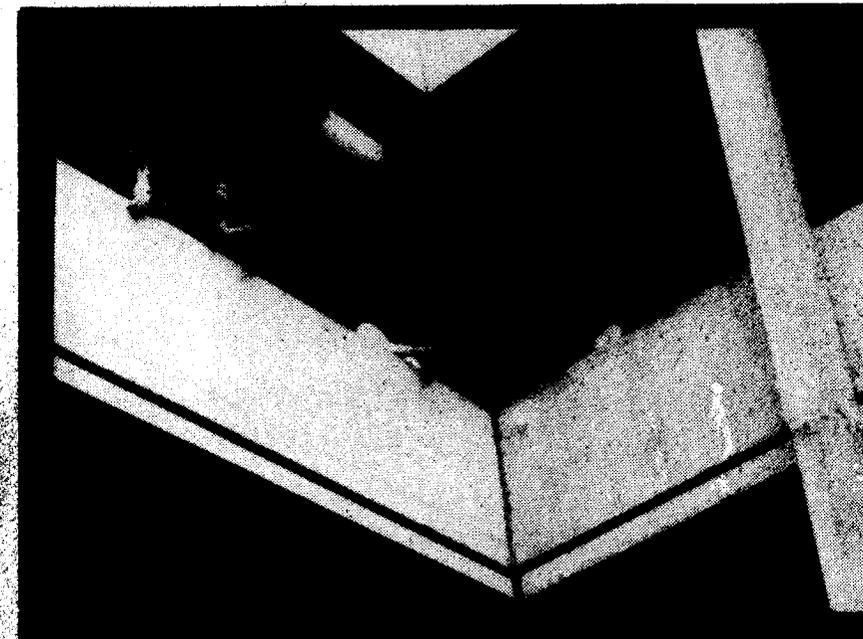
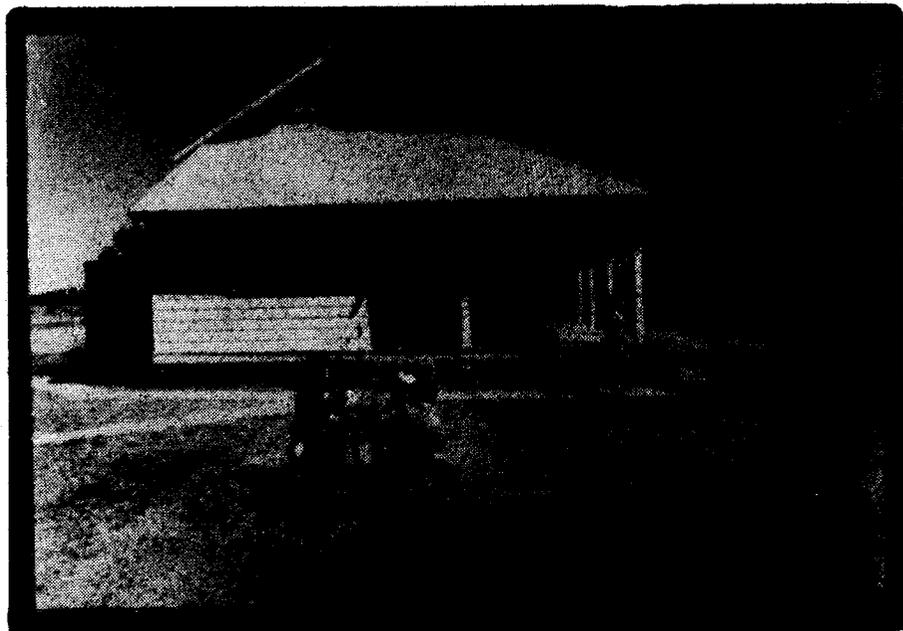


Mr Pugh

THE DISADVANTAGED SCHOOL PROGRAM



ORGANISATIONAL CHANGE THE SECONDARY SCHOOL

Frank Usher

 SCHOOLS
COMMISSION

Number 3

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THE SECONDARY SCHOOL

A DISCUSSION PAPER PREPARED FOR THE
DISADVANTAGED SCHOOLS PROGRAM BY

FRANK USHER

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Frank Usher

This paper describes the attempts of a large secondary school to come to grips with the problems faced by students in disadvantaged schools. It is of necessity sketchy, but detailed information is available from Hamilton Senior High School, Purvis Street, Hamilton Hill, Western Australia, 6163.

The school, which is nine kilometres south-east of Fremantle, is coeducational and offers courses to 1,100 students in Years 8 to 12. Although over half of them were born outside Australia all the students speak English. This is not necessarily the case with their parents.

There are about eighty on the teaching staff and a number of others including a curriculum coordinator, a student counsellor, a youth education officer, a registrar, four aides, three library staff, two home economics maids, a caretaker, six clerical staff, two gardeners, and ten cleaners.

BACKGROUND

At the outset it is only fair to state some of my beliefs which are fundamental to the operation. Although they are my personal views they are widely shared by other staff.

It seems to me that students in secondary schools are generally treated more as learning units than people. It also appears that schools are preoccupied with subjects rather than students and that the teacher dominated classroom, which appears to be the norm, is less efficient in terms of learning than the truly interactive situation. Secondary schools tend to be 'closed' in important ways (e.g. to parents) and

they are unnatural in that, although they are often large agglomerations of humanity, they consist of a very narrow range of people by type and age.

The subject tradition in schools is well handled and understood but the human side of school life has only recently begun to attract notice. I suggest that the great weakness in schools is in the area of human affairs, that is to say in the attention given to the relationships between the many members of the school community.

The most important relationships affecting children are, of course, those in the home. Professor Ian Lewis (1) states than children need to be wanted, loved, nurtured and prepared. Although the home is clearly more important in the first three areas, the school could make a more positive contribution than it normally does. Students may well have low educational expectations or a background which militates against success in school and therefore after a time they can be expected to have low self-esteem with a strong possibility of associated adjustment problems. But these are human problems and we must seek human solutions to them.

All this refers to the very important but often neglected emotional side of life. Relationships at home are of paramount importance and for this reason the relationships between home and school should be strong. Home and school should learn from each other, reinforce each other, and be perceived by students in the same positive light.

But relationships at school are also of extreme importance. This was recognised by the members of the 1975 Bullock Committee. After exhaustive enquiry into the most effective method of teaching reading they concluded:

(1) Professor of Child Health, University of Tasmania, writing in the March/June 1977 issue of Concern.

Most teachers are eclectic in their teaching of reading, making use of both look-and-say and phonic methods. The difference in effectiveness lies not in their allegiance to any one method but in -

- (a) the quality of their relationships with children;*
- (b) their degree of expert knowledge; and*
- (c) their sensitivity in matching their teaching with each child's current learning needs. (2)*

The stated aims of the Disadvantaged Schools Program : to improve learning; to provide more meaningful and enjoyable schooling; and to create closer community relations (3), endorse these findings of the Bullock Report but when they are applied to the secondary school the schools are generally found to be wanting.

I suggest that the main difference between primary teaching, as referred to in the Bullock Report, and secondary teaching is that the qualities discussed are harder to integrate at secondary level.

Furthermore, as the Cadman Report of 1976 pointed out, the higher a student goes in school the harder it becomes to effect changes:

Unless a child's needs are identified and the child helped by an adequately trained teacher early in his school career, his future prospects are bleak. The chances of the child getting the help he needs decrease with each higher grade he moves into. (4)

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- (2) *A Language for Life* (The Bullock Report), HMSO, London, 1975 p. 523.
 - (3) *Schools Commission Report for the Triennium 1979-81*, AGPS, Canberra, 1978 p. 85.
 - (4) *Learning Difficulties in Children and Adults: Report of the House of Representatives Select Committee on Specific Learning Disabilities*, AGPS, Canberra, 1976, p. 41.

In speaking of secondary schools in general the Report went on to say:

The evidence given by departments of education indicates that reform is easier to bring about in the primary than in the secondary schools. In secondary schools teachers are more highly specialised in subject areas. They tend not to know the students so well personally as they see them only in relation to their subject.

Nor is there generally the same assumption that each teacher in the secondary school should take responsibility for the basic education of students. A common failure in secondary education is that within the secondary school there is often not a particular teacher who can be held accountable for a child's general progress and more particularly for his pastoral care. There is no class teacher in the same sense as in the primary school where teachers are generally responsible for pupils. (p. 55)

It need not be as it is here described. The traditional pattern of graded and streamed students proceeding around the school to receive forty-minute 'shots' of each faculty's offering is continued mainly because it is traditional. The specialisation practised by secondary teachers, which means that individuals often teach upwards of two hundred students per week, need not occur. The pattern is reversible, although the task of creating a climate where emotional growth may occur and in which self-awareness and self-esteem are heightened is not easy. Building valued relationships and making teachers sensitive to the needs of individual students is a big task in a traditional structure, but it has been shown to be a practical aim. However one thing we can be certain of is that these things will not be put right by teaching 'human relationships' or 'pastoral care' as subjects. We are looking for a way of living rather than an occasional concession.

Another matter which does not help is the bureaucratic structure of schools. Unless challenged, such structures tend towards conformity rather than diversity and the chance to capitalise on the creativity of individual teachers will not present itself.

When examined in the light of the philosophy that school should be an enjoyable experience, we found Hamilton Senior High to be wanting and we resolved to do something about it.

THE PLAN

Much thought was given to the problem in 1971 and with the aid of a supportive Education Department a scheme was planned during 1972 and launched in 1973. (The same arrangement could now be managed by a school using funds from the Disadvantaged Schools Program.)

The idea was to implement a mini school, sub-school or schools-within-a-school system. There are several options : to split vertically; split horizontally; have a mixture of both or to split by programs or courses. We opted initially for a horizontal split as a forerunner to a vertical split in lower school, and (necessarily) a horizontal upper school. (See diagram later.) Before the implementation stage, however, there were three necessary and major steps.

Firstly, the idea had to be 'sold' to staff and since there was much planning and work to be done, leaders had to be identified. These were by no means always people in promotional positions. They were contacted informally and brought into the planning process. They in turn promulgated ideas, mainly by social interaction.

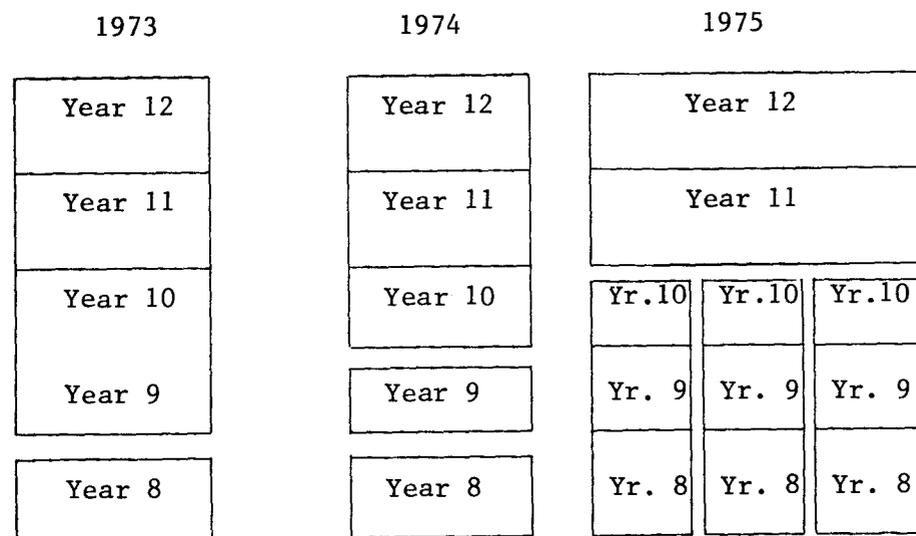
Secondly, teachers had to learn to see themselves as decision makers, making professional decisions, acting on them and taking responsibility for them. To this end a series of committees was set up, notably a Finance Committee, a Staff Council and a Curriculum Committee, all elected by staff. An important characteristic of the committees was that they were not required to have senior staff representation. Even though he is obliged vigorously to support the decisions of committees, the principal is a member of the Curriculum Committee only. It is important for teachers to see that they are making real decisions and not engaging in tokenism.

The third concern is to start people thinking about changed roles and relationships. These should be explored in depth and agreement reached on as many points as possible. I now believe this is best done by setting up 'brainstorming' sessions, 'think-tanks', search conferences or any structure which brings the concerned people together for a frank exchange of views and ultimately consensus. The agreed role descriptions should be recorded and promulgated. The sensitive area will be the respective roles of subject senior masters and sub-school heads. Questions will arise such as who oversees the learning program? For example, can a particular sub-school decide to alter the class structure or its learning strategies by consent of the group or does the subject senior master have a power of veto? Who is responsible for the conduct of teachers in rooms? What part do subject senior masters play in the discipline process? All these matters and others have to be decided, preferably in advance. They can evolve, but in that case unnecessary tensions may be generated. These situations need continuous monitoring, evaluation and feedback and follow-up conferences will almost certainly be necessary.

At Hamilton Senior High we met the first two prerequisites rather better than the third but nevertheless we felt ready to engage in an organisational change designed to humanise the school, to make students rather than subjects the central interest, to release some latent teacher power, to experiment with shared decision-making and hopefully to cast a net that would include our whole community - the hardest objective of all.

THE ORGANISATIONAL STRUCTURE

Starting in 1973 with Year 8 intake we divided the school horizontally and then vertically until it reached the form in the diagram below. The initial division is simple from an administrative point of view but causes 'fractures' at the end of each year as groups are split up and reconstituted. The present form allows for continuous contact between students and teachers for three years and a wider range of social contacts generally for students.



Each sub-school contains about three hundred students (too many - more schools are needed but because of numbers and the capacities of teachers it is not possible for us to have schools of Years 8 to 12) and the leaders campaign and are elected by all staff for a two-year term. They are then paid as senior masters by the Education Department.

Each sub-school team is a mixture of all subjects and thus the faculty organisation is diminished. (It can be demolished or it can remain strong. To us it must be minor.) Each team makes its own decisions, being coordinated only where interaction is absolutely necessary.

Putting teachers and students together for three years means that sensitivity to individuals can occur, especially as many teachers have opted to teach more than one subject to fewer students.

Heterogeneous class groupings are easy to arrange although heterogeneous teaching is not, but the teacher development program is helping in this area. Such a program is a must since secondary teachers generally acknowledge that they know little about teaching the basic subjects.

Strategies that may be employed include workshops, seminars, meetings and interaction with the Curriculum Coordinator and others. We have found it necessary to involve experts and have used the universities and colleges of advanced education for 'injections' of expertise. As well as this, recognised authorities in the community, especially in reading, have been brought in to conduct workshops. An acting senior English master organised meetings of interested teachers who planned a program on U.S.S.R. (Uninterrupted Sustained Silent Reading Program) for the whole school. The school guidance officer runs workshops for teachers on interpersonal relationships and we have made attempts, so far unsuccessful, to develop sensitivity training.

There is a wealth of expertise available and usually people in tertiary institutions are quite willing to become involved, since they also benefit. Teachers are encouraged to attend inservice courses and are encouraged and assisted to visit other schools. Some colleges of advanced education offer useful external courses such as one called Precision Teaching which addresses the problems of heterogeneously organised classes. At one stage, a reading and discussion circle was set up. It met during lunch breaks and people read, then discussed, articles reproduced from professional literature or other relevant sources.

As well as the specific strategies outlined above, the whole thrust of the school in its conduct and organisational structure is towards teachers seeing themselves as decision-makers who accept their share of effort and responsibility in the school. As well as being deeply involved in their sub-schools through the weekly meeting, they have a chance

to serve on committees, occupy leadership roles and to be upwardly mobile by aspiring to the elective position of sub-school head.

Sub-school and committee meetings are frequent. Since the former are held concurrently, members of the school's administration do not attend, except in unusual circumstances. Comprehensive minutes are kept, and these are made available so that everyone may know what is happening.

All these practices assist in triggering creative schemes by teachers and in releasing enormous quantities of otherwise latent power.

SOME OBSERVATIONS

The committee system has been a success that quite exceeded expectations. The Finance Committee has implemented a new system for the management of school finances which will readily accommodate large scale school-based funding if or when it occurs. It has raised thousands of dollars assisting in improving the school at an unprecedented rate.

The Staff Council, at first constituted as something of an industrial pressure group, soon ran out of negative motivation and forged a positive role for itself in which it has performed very valuable work. One of its functions is to convey the concerns of staff, including the clerical and paraprofessionals who are represented on the committee, to the administration which is not. Another is to research, plan or launch schemes for the betterment of the school, whether they be behavioural, academic, physical (grounds and buildings) or industrial, that is on matters peculiar to this school which have potential solutions within this school. It does not replace the Union Branch. The Staff Council also conducts all elections from the calling of nominations to the declaration of the polls. This can be a very effective group since it is the teachers' own and its operations are activated by teachers. Naturally it has frequent, regular meetings. It is represented at Senior Staff meetings or others as it sees fit.

The Curriculum Committee concluded that no worthwhile gains could be made without extensive support. As an 'add on' operation to the day's work it was simply a 'patch and paint' job. Because of this a Curriculum Coordinator was appointed under the Disadvantaged Schools Program and his effort is clearly having an important effect both within and outside the school. He has been an unqualified success. The right person in this position can provide sufficient resources, expertise and encouragement to enable teachers to perceive a much broader than usual role for themselves. As well as this he has conducted a needs survey into community expectations and he has been deeply involved with teacher development, program development, diagnosis and evaluation.

The attempt to get parents and the community deeply involved (that is, beyond getting a 'committee' or 'council' set up) has met with indifferent success. Numbers of parents visit the school for parent evenings and planned activities, but this is not very meaningful participation as we see it.

In 1979 for the first time we are admitting mature age students to our daily classes. This is starting modestly with about twenty people, mostly part-time, mostly upper school, but it is expected to grow. Non-threatening adults, and even families, are expected to have various beneficial effects. Apart from providing valuable feedback to the school we expect such people to contribute to the emotional growth of students and assist in values formation in a subtle but valuable way.

The reduction of tensions, essential for humanising, was brought about by virtually abolishing rules (except that the behaviour should be civilised, proper and considerate of others) and by throwing responsibility on to students themselves. In Upper School a system of flex-time makes attendance at one third of classes effectively optional. Dress is informal, delightful and varied. Violence, especially the legalised violence of corporal punishment, is taboo and this is generally respected. Enjoyment of school is enhanced by the fact that learning takes place in a non-threatening, low tension situation of human interaction in which there is ample opportunity for students to be heard, although we expect to go

much further in this regard. Various away-from-school activities are also indulged in, such as camps, trips, visits and a range of attractive leisure pursuits including water sports, horse riding, skating and, for two seasons, stock car racing.

Apart from that, positive reinforcement (as policy) and various attempts to improve teaching strategies and learning outcomes have all contributed to a general improvement in climate.

Five years into the scheme it is still in its infancy. An external evaluation was attempted in 1975 and 1976, but to make meaningful statements about either the learning program or life as students perceive it would require considerably more resources than we were able to provide. That remains as another interesting challenge for the future. In the meantime we will be extending our present pattern and I am pleased to report that no one is advocating a return to traditional practices in any area.