

Robertson and Chadbourne

The Ashenden Plan

THE ASHENDEN PLAN AS A MODEL FOR RESTRUCTURING TEACHERS' WORK:
Problems and Possibilities

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by

Susan Robertson and Rod Chadbourne

International Institute for Policy and Administrative Studies
Edith Cowan University
Pearson Street
Churchlands 6018
Perth Western Australia
phone: (09) 3838497 fax (09) 387 7095

INTRODUCTION: TEACHERS AND THE RESTRUCTURING AGENDA

Since the middle of the 1980's, teachers in Australia have been bullied into centre stage in an unprecedented round of public and bureaucratic scrutiny. A "critical chorus", as Seddon (1991: 1) has so aptly noted, has taken as its verse the adequacy of teachers. It has been a verse arising from the new right agenda, heavily embellished by the slogan systems of corporate management - quality, outcomes, and flexibility. As a result, more fundamental issues concerning the conditions and organization of teachers' work, and the pressures facing teachers as a result of structurally and culturally determined changes to contemporary schooling have become obscured by the whipping boy mentality of this chorus of national and international vested interests. We note that in a survey of

teacher resignations in 1983-4 in Western Australia, teachers cited discipline problems, the acute lack of administrative support, limited promotional opportunities, and adequate assessment procedures as reasons for their early departure from the profession (Bruce and Cacioppe, 1989).

There is little argument amongst seasoned educators that the structure and organization of schooling in Australia has been badly in need of reform. Since the late 1960's, critics such as Postman and Weingartner (1969), Goodman, (1971) and Illich (1973), have argued the case for a more open attitude toward schooling directed toward community networks, skill exchanges, community ownership of schools, and an integrated approach to knowledge. Some educators, notes Chadbourne (1993), went the next step and put an alternative form of schooling into practice, before withering on the vine in the face of public conservatism and overt hostility (Aronowitz and Giroux, 1985; Shor, 1986).

The first round of significant change to the organization of state schooling in Australia came as a result of initiatives funded by the Federal Whitlam administration in 1972. Despite a massive injection of both funds and socially progressive ideology into the schooling system challenging the uniformity of schooling provision and lack of teacher autonomy, the long-term outcome of this pressure for diversity has been to pave the way for more unequal schooling. The upshot was that while it gave teachers an increased measure of professional autonomy, they now operated in an environment of increased uncertainty (Seddon, 1991: 3). The consequence of this shift toward diversity, however, was that some teachers

collective action, others renewed demands for a more structured 'professionalism'. These contradictory pressures increased

demands on schooling and on teachers. It made universality of public provision more difficult to sustain in both practice and policy, and meant that schooling became a particularly ambiguous context for teachers' work.

This increasingly ambiguous and unstable environment for teachers was compounded in the late 1980's by the restructuring of schools, following the collapse of the post-war political and economic settlement. In the shift toward an 'efficient state', school governance, structures, curriculum, assessment and teacher awards were all on the drawing-board. However in the search in Western societies for causes of economic decline, the critical chorus pointed, not to the political economy of global capitalism, but to a more identifiable and concrete form of 'villain' - teachers (Cohn and Kottkamp, 1993: xv). The result was a campaign of vilification and rhetoric against teachers, with teachers expected to

developed. They have been treated more like uninformed hired hands than professionals to whom we trust our most precious asset. They have been the last to be consulted when we consider what is broken and how to fix it. Their voices have not and still do not inform the actions taken to rectify what reformers believe to be the matter with education...(Cohn and Kottkamp, 1993: xv).

According to ACTU advocate Laurie Carmichael (Bluer and Carmichael, 1992), restructuring the organization of teachers' work and the nature of their award is central to reforming schooling. It is an analysis situated within and framed by an extensive review of the generic concept of award restructuring as it is applied across the whole of the Australian workforce. Thus, teachers would only receive an improvement in wages and conditions in return for skills formation efforts, and accepting a reorganisation of the workplace and the production process

(Knight, Porter and Lingard (1992: 239) .

According to Ashenden (1992: 3) he first began thinking about new forms of work organization in response to the rise in industrial conflict in the late 1980's within various state education systems (Riley, 1992).

Teachers wanted, and deserved pay increases, but governments did not have or were not willing to part with the money to make a real difference in pay to very large numbers of employees (Ashenden, 1992: 3) My suggestion was to have relatively fewer, more highly skilled and highly paid teachers and relatively more education workers of other kinds. The more I thought about this, the more it seemed likely to solve professional as well as industrial problems.

In 1990, Dean Ashenden published his proposal to raise what he called the 'productivity of learning' in the 'education industry'. He did so within the framework of a nation-wide attempt to bring about educational reform through the use of productivity-based industrial awards and agreements. His proposal relies upon a particular analysis of the problems besetting teachers in schools.

ASHENDEN'S PROPOSAL

The problem

According to Ashenden, education in Australia faces the following problem. Deep discontent has developed within the teaching profession because of poor wages and working conditions, badly designed work and unsatisfactory relationships with students. Teachers are required to do too many things that are not really teaching and much of their time is frittered away on low-level routine tasks that can be done by less qualified people. Ashenden argues that teaching is the last of the cottage industries, with only one type of "educational worker". Within the "cottage" teachers are forced to work with students who both resist learning and create discipline problems. Such a situation has produced discontented teachers at the same time as impeding attempts to teach students important thinking, communicating and problem solving skills. The upshot is that students are not encouraged to take responsibility for their own learning.

The solution

Having defined the problem in this way, Ashenden goes on to outline his solution. It entails reducing the total number of teachers and employing other types of adult education workers to carry out routine, low level teaching tasks in the classroom. The idea is to free up teachers so they can spend more time teaching students thinking skills, stimulating creativity, and coaching rather than lecturing. The increase in teacher/pupil ratios can then be offset by new and better use of learning groups, technology and new pedagogical approaches (for example, work-based assessment, a negotiated curriculum). Ashenden's proposal also supports reorganising schools on the basis of programs rather than subjects, decentralising administrative responsibilities, and setting up a collegial system of school governance using the Advanced Skills Teacher as an alternative to the traditional Heads of Departments.

An emerging context for change

Recent developments at the national level with regard to the National Schools Project have heightened the significance of Ashenden's proposal. Employers and unions have indicated their

willingness to set aside preconceived positions on what is best for some 70 National Project schools to allow them to design

their own form of organization and teaching. In addition, proposals to reform teacher education provision by moving toward site-based practice and internships for student teachers in schools (Ebbeck, 1990) offers schools greater staffing flexibility.

Teacher's Voices: Where are they?

Despite these developments, there has been very little public debate of Ashenden's proposals. In fact when our study was carried out in 1991, the only published responses seemed to have come from a few teachers, union officials and several academics. Apparently no-one has systematically researched and published what classroom teachers think.

We would argue that to be effective, educational reforms must come from the bottom up pressure as much as from top down policy determined by representatives of peak councils. This absence of teachers from the dialogue and decision-making on reform has been a serious omission. It has "yielded faulty definitions of the problem, solutions that compound rather than confront the problem, and a demeaned and demoralised teaching force" (Cohn and Kottkamp: 1993). We believe strongly that the voice of classroom teachers should be heard. This applies particularly to structuring the parameters and possibilities for change prior to their adoption.

METHODOLOGY

Ashenden outlined his proposal with reference to a suburban high school. The purpose of our study was to find out from the staff whether there are any characteristics of junior primary schools and the nature of teachers' work in them that would make these schools particularly suitable or inappropriate settings for implementing the Ashenden proposal. We also wanted to find out from teachers what they considered the costs and benefits of adopting Ashenden's proposal would be. Under what conditions would it work? What difference would it make to the productivity of learning?

To find answers to these questions we conducted extensive interviews with all of the staff at Kewdale Junior Primary School in Perth during October 1991. Prior to interviews we attended a staff meeting at the school and spent an hour outlining and clarifying Ashenden's proposal. After the

interviews we sent staff the transcripts and invited them to add, delete or modify anything they said. A first draft of the report was written, circulated to the staff for comment, and discussed with them at a one hour meeting. Any inaccuracies were corrected and the report endorsed as a fair representation of their views. Before presenting the findings of our study, a thumbnail sketch of the school is necessary. The school was built over 20 years ago based upon a flexible-area design so open classrooms could be arranged by removing partitions. A principal, seven teachers, two teacher aides and a clerical assistant make up the staff of the school. The school is in a working class area, and it has around 20 per cent of the children with an ESL background. The school has a school decision-making group, consisting of all of the staff and equal numbers of parents, it meets twice a term, and has input into determining the school's purpose, performance indicators, priorities and budget.

ARE TEACHERS UNPRODUCTIVE?

Real and not real teaching

Ashenden argues that teachers are unproductive and unhappy. To compound the problem, these two characteristics reinforce each other. Teachers are unproductive because they are unhappy, and they are unhappy because they are unproductive. Given that employers are not likely to spend more money on schools, Ashenden argues that teachers must learn to work smarter not harder. This requires revolutionary changes to teachers' definition of work, the labour process of schooling, and the division of labour.

According to Ashenden, a major factor inhibiting productivity is that teachers are asked to do too many things that aren't really teaching but rather the work of clerical staff, managers, administrators, parents and other professionals. 'Real teaching' is complex work which requires the high level skills of a trained teacher. Work that can be performed without these high levels skills, says Ashenden, is 'not real teaching' and therefore not the sort of work we can afford to pay fully-trained teachers to do.

The staff at Kewdale agree that there is a difference between real teaching and work that is not. 'Real teaching' is giving children ways of solving problems, experimenting, questioning and providing opportunities for knowledge transfer. So what stands in their way? According to teachers at Kewdale, the answer is time. This teacher observes:

I would dearly like to do more activity-based learning and more individualised learning but there's just not enough time in the

day and there's just not enough time to organize those things constantly.

According to these teachers, administration and other low level tasks are 'not real teaching'! These can be organized into five categories:

- supervision, for example lunch duty, taking children to swimming lessons.
- administration/clerical work, for example, collecting money, giving out notices, photocopying, lunch orders.
- preparation, for example of equipment for lessons, organization of classroom furniture.
- routine, mechanical, low-level teaching such as reading a story, drilling, hear children read.
- attending to children's problems.

According to Ashenden, the way in which schools are organized as a mass production cottage industry, results in a lot of non-teaching clutter. There is very little division of labour, scarcely any technology, and the teacher is the sole "education worker". This gets in the way of teachers actively coaching students, teaching thinking skills, stimulating creativity, working with students on rewriting papers, helping students to learn to read, argue, persuade and develop the skills of problem-solving. 'Real teaching' is, according to Ashenden, not simply producing good citizens and workers, readers and writers. It is teaching students to think, to be "creative, critical, reflective, autonomous learners" (1990: 15).

The staff at the school agree with Ashenden. They do not do enough of what they see as 'real teaching' and would like to do more. They either state or suggest that the culture and organization of the traditional school stifles opportunities to do so. In line with Ashenden, some staff say that creative thinking and problem-solving are taught inadequately because of large mixed-ability classes. The sheer size and complexity of the teachers' role seriously hinders real teaching, particularly for the bright children. These two teachers observe:

I think that the groups are too big to teach thinking, creativity and problem-solving. So you are teaching to the middle of the road ability. To get problem-solving going, you really need to have smaller groups for children to understand and for you to know what they are on about.

to explain things to them. Meanwhile your brighter ones are sitting around probably getting bored because they know it all and they want to get onto something else...it is a massive

organisational exercise having to cope with the different ranges, the different abilities.

Apart from the constraints in working with large, mixed-ability classes, teachers cited other factors that interfere with attempts to teach the skills of thinking, creativity and problem-solving. These included the (i) stage and age of the children (pre-primary emphasis upon social and personnel rather than intellectual development), (ii) physical factors such as space constraints, and (iii) the teacher's own levels of skill, their limited understanding, and the lack of experience.

While the staff at the school accept the distinction between work that is 'real teaching' and work that is not, and that having to do too many things reduces the productivity of learning in their classroom, the school do not agree with Ashenden as to the cause. For Ashenden, it is the structure of the cottage that limits the effectiveness of teaching. For the teachers in our study, the problem lies more with large mixed-ability classes, insufficient help, and the physical space in which to move.

ARE TEACHERS UNHAPPY?

We found that regardless of what might be the case across the profession as a whole, morale at the school was very high. In fact, the staff were unanimous and emphatic in saying so. They offered a range of reasons in explanation of their position, but the following factors stand out. Supportive leadership, a culture of collegiality, and a planned approach to school development. One teacher commented:

I think basically the morale is high because I feel that we're all aiming in the same direction and that communication is so good; fortunately being a small staff makes it easier for us to communicate.

This is not to suggest that the teachers did not face ongoing stresses. In fact teachers pointed to increased pressures because of extra responsibilities staff were expected to take on following the shift to school-level management. This led to over-commitment, tiredness, and a need to be alone. In other words, any lowered morale in the school was a consequence of the volume of work generated outside the classroom rather than the nature of work within the classroom. Not that staff wished to disengage themselves from such situations. They accepted responsibility for solving their own morale problems and were confident of their capacity to pull through.

Getting out of teaching

To uphold his claim that teaching is an unhappy profession,

Ashenden cites anecdotal evidence that teaching is an unhappy profession. While there is corroborating evidence to support these claims (for example the Ministry of Education's report on the Conditions and Status of Teaching in Western Australia published in 1990), most teachers in our study had no desire to quit. While several said they periodically found teaching heavy

going and would like "a breather now and again", it did not represent a deep-rooted dissatisfaction with the nature of their work.

Two teachers remembered particular incidents and periods in the past at other schools when they thought of resigning. In both cases the reasons for wanting to leave arose from the dissatisfaction with the Ministry bureaucracy as much as from problems within the classroom:

In my third year I had a very difficult class. I had two secure years in (...), and I moved to (...) and I was given a split one-two. Obviously I was last in the school and I got the class that was fairly difficult - mainly because the Principal gave me very little support. I applied for leave and don't ask me what happened about that. They accepted it but sent it somewhere else. The Principals wouldn't allow me to ring the Ministry because the Superintendent had told him not to ring the Ministry about transfers. They had approved it and lost it. Eventually I applied for a transfer and that was lost!

This is consistent with Bruce and Cacioppe's findings (1990) on teachers' reasons for resignation.

Public view of the teaching profession

Low regard for the work of teachers, says Ashenden, makes teachers feel misunderstood and undervalued and it contributes to discontent within the profession. When questioned on this matter, the staff at Kewdale distinguished between members of the general public who hold a negative stereotype of teachers, and particular members of the public whom they mix with who have a more positive view of teachers. They nonetheless clearly understood the public view:

The public perception is that you're only there from 9 to 3 and you do absolutely nothing else and you don't deserve your money and all they do is downgrade you.

On the other hand, these perceptions made almost no impact on the morale of the teachers at Kewdale. Furthermore, they considered such judgements ill-informed:

No I don't feel angry about it. I think probably most of the people I associate with either know or understand teachers. So I think about it on a personal level and don't think too much about it on a large public point of view.

They don't know any better, so they are speaking about something they don't know of. If they work in a school environment they speak differently. Maybe the people who are saying these things are the people who have had a bad experience with teachers and they have just put the teacher in that bracket - the whole lot of them. You get one bad apple and everybody is classed in the same way.

In contrast to their perceptions about how teachers are regarded by the general public, the staff at Kewdale find the attitude of the local community, particularly parents, to be quite reassuring and morale boosting.

Wages and conditions

Industrial conflict in school systems throughout Australia constitutes another indication of how deeply unhappy the teaching profession is according to Ashenden. He points out that much of the battle has been fought on the ground of teachers' wages and conditions. In short, suggests Ashenden, pay rises need

to be cost neutral. Within his proposal that means larger teacher/pupil ratios.

In relation to these issues, we asked the staff at the school whether if they were offered a 20 per cent salary increase (about \$6000) for taking 20 per cent more pupils (about 6) they would take the money or stay with their present size of class. Two thirds said no, for educational, personal, and industrial reasons. From an educational viewpoint, most teachers considered that larger classes would deny students learning opportunities and place a burden on students within the class.

I don't like that idea at all. I find it very difficult to pinpoint anything that I could do that you could do as effectively with a bigger group - even story time, when you read a story. So I would go for no payrise

Not worth it, for the children. Five extra children in your classroom is a burden to them. If you don't have to have it, there's a lot more opportunity for others to learn.

The teachers personal reasons for ranking small classes above a salary increase centred on stress and the volume of work. These reasons prevailed, even where the need for money was acute.

20%. Mmmm. I think I'd rather have smaller classes, even though I'm so desperate for money - I'm in the red. I think I'd go for the smaller class size.

The stress involved having those extra children and the amount you would achieve just by having an extra six children wouldn't be worth the \$6000, half of which would go in tax anyway.

Finally, from an industrial point of view, one staff member observed that because classroom teachers affiliated with the Union had worked so hard over the years for smaller classes, more money would not be sufficient incentive to turn the policy around.

While most teachers at the school were prepared to forgo the money, a third said they would be willing to trade class sizes for a salary increase. For them, a 20 % salary increase would not be that much different to classes they had experienced in the past, and there was a sense in which it was from "manageable" to "do-able". However, there was an upper limit.

I'm handling 27 quite effectively and 6 more wouldn't make any difference and so I'd take the 20%. If I didn't have to do much more work. 10, that's 37. I've taught 37 and 38 once before, so I'd take another 20% but I would not double the class for double the salary. Forget it!

Ashenden acknowledges that attempts to remove discontent within the teaching profession must address teachers' wages and conditions. However, he criticises teacher organisations and employers for restricting the battle to that territory. In his view two things matter more than wages and conditions: the scope and control of teachers' work, and teachers relationships with students.

The staff at the school agree with Ashenden. We asked them: "What, for you, is more important: a salary increase, having children who want to learn, or having more control and choice over the type of work you do in the classroom?" Most of them echoed the words of one teacher in saying "Kids who want to learn - first and foremost." A salary increase received the lowest rating.

Teachers relationships with students

Ashenden claims that while the best of times for teachers occur in the classroom, so do the worst of times. In his view, teachers are victims of student resistance - behavioural and academic. They face "defiance, insolence, subversion of authority, even physical assault " (1990: 12). A less spectacular but more

widespread problem is the "steady dull pressure on teachers to make their students learn." Teachers continually have to drag unwilling students to the water and then force them to drink. In the process, they miss the "deeper human excitement, the joy of getting a young being to catch on, to understand, to learn." (1990" 12)

Teachers in this study supported Ashenden's claim that teachers experience their best moments in the classroom. They said the high points come from making a breakthrough, from helping struggling children learn something worthwhile, and that job satisfaction comes from a sense of progress, achievement, and 'making a difference'.

They're magical moments, when you can see their little minds ticking over and they really understand what you've said and they've remembered what you've taught them

Further, these moments come from working with children who engage in active and successful learning, not children who are obedient but passive.

Half of the teachers at Kewdale did not support Ashenden's claim that their worst moments come from the classroom. These teachers point to pressure from colleagues rather than the classroom, arising from feelings of inadequacy in staffroom situations, and with colleagues in the classroom. The other half agreed with Ashenden, citing discipline and social problems amongst low achieving groups:

I would think the most frustrating or pressured moments are in the classroom again, because of the time constraints and things you feel you haven't done. Or through discipline problems. Maybe you've got one child who just completely disrupts the whole group and that's frustrating and sometimes can make you quite angry within yourself...that one child can have such an influence on the whole group of children.

I think probably, the social problems that we're having to deal with and the fact that in this kind of a school where the children are so young, you know, seeing children left, seeing children coming in without breakfast and that sort of thing. You can't get away from getting attached to the children and the social part bugging you. And I think probably seeing the consistency that you do try to develop in terms of discipline and behaviour not always being encouraged in the home situation.

For several reasons, the problem behaviour of children at the school does not seem to justify a radical reorganisation of the school. First, it does not seem as widespread at the primary level as Ashenden suggests for schools in general. Second, the staff see it as the product of the student's home, not the

school. In other words, while Ashenden bases his proposal upon a 'school deficit' model which places the blame squarely on the system, the staff at the school make sense of difficult pupil behaviour in terms in terms of a 'cultural deficit' or victim blaming perspective. This teacher observes:

A lot of the children are from broken marriages, or Mum is too busy to spend time with the children....Well if you went on an excursion, you would have to keep your finger on them the whole time, but they still play up. A lot of them have learning

difficulties....They don't want to learn so they disrupt. It is not so much the hitting. Again it is the parents. One of them I am thinking of, his Mum just doesn't think he does anything wrong. "My boy wouldn't do that!" A lot of it is the background. A lot of the parents don't care. There is no discipline at home. That is one of the big breakdowns.

A more widespread and insistent form of pressures that lowers teachers' morale, says Ashenden, come from having to make unwilling students learn. Teachers expend huge amounts of emotional energy pleading, cajoling, encouraging, threatening and bribing reluctant learners to take lessons seriously. The staff at Kewdale fell into three categories in their response to the pressure from unwilling students: those who say they do not experience it; those who experience it occasionally; and those who experience it often and intensely. Some of the reason for the minimised resistance, teachers at Kewdale offer, lies in the fact there is a difference between primary and high schools. Nonetheless, these teachers could identify up to half dozen reluctant learners in their classes who were unmotivated, distracted easily, and typically caused trouble in the classroom.

RESTRUCTURING TEACHERS' WORK

In order to deal with teachers' unhappiness and lack of productivity, Ashenden turns his attention to the structure and organization of their work. He points out that the division of labour in the metals industry developed into 364 separate occupations characterised by narrow and rigid demarcation, restrictive work practices, and deskilling of workers. Restructuring that industry has required the broad-banding of jobs and multi-skilling workers to perform them. However, according to Ashenden, education faces the reverse situation. The range of tasks given to teachers is too broad, and the range of education workers in schools is too narrow. Instead of being

multi-skilled to take on a wider range of jobs, teachers need to be deep skilled to concentrate on higher level educational work. On these grounds, and within existing levels of resourcing, Ashenden proposes a different division of labour. It involves employing proportionately fewer teachers and more of two kinds of other workers, namely a variety of education workers such as interns, paid parents and trained teacher-aides to do the lower level, less complex teaching tasks, and non-teaching workers to do clerical/secretarial tasks to support the teaching and learning process. With the assistance of these two types of workers, teachers could concentrate exclusively on high-level sophisticated teaching, curriculum development, and supervising other education workers. In Ashenden's view, the introduction of this tiered system would remove the flat structure that typifies the organization of teaching, allowing teachers to shed some of the clutter, and thereby raise the productivity of student learning.

We were interested to find out how much parents and teacher aides already did within the school, rather than assume that only one type of education worker operated in the school. We also wanted to find out what level of involvement teachers would like to see from such workers, the tasks they would undertake, and what limitations they believed Ashenden might take account of.

Involvement of other types of education workers

At present, parents participate in classroom activities such as

supervising small reading and maths groups, assisting with art and sports, and helping in the library. The extent of this varies with the teacher and the year level. The staff felt that the junior primary was able to attract parental participation in the school in a way impossible in the upper levels of primary and secondary. Parental participation was viewed in positive terms and as having an affect on student outcomes.

At a more general level, parents, other adults, and in some cases other students, participate in school activities for various reasons, including research, work experience and community sharing. These inputs added to the diversity of the schooling experience for students but do little to change the work role of the teacher. Rather, they require considerable amounts of co-ordination and structuring in order to maximise opportunities.

Several teacher aides worked part-time within the school. However the net effect for some teachers was support for no more than two hours per week. In short, it was inadequate. Several teachers expressed a preference for a full-time aide. Almost all staff agree that they would like more adult workers in the school

because:

There'd be so much more you could do. And the expectations for these kids and the individual differences could be catered for.

The support for more education workers was, nonetheless, qualified. Teachers argued that planning, skill areas of the curriculum, direct teaching, managing student behaviour, assessment, recording, documentation, and the basis of the program had to be closely controlled by the teacher. Although the staff viewed some of these tasks as mechanical, they felt the issue at stake was their intimate knowledge of the child's progress. They considered that an increased supervisory role would separate them from their students and potentially undermine the often fragile sensibility teachers have of the child's progress and dilemmas.

An ideology of teachers' work

The more we interviewed the staff at the school, the more one paradoxical point became clear. While the staff endorsed Ashenden's proposal for a different division of labour, they did not want to abandon the classroom cottage. They wanted more para-professional and paid parent help, but only within the cottage. Ashenden would see this as a case of reform by additional resourcing rather than reform within existing levels of resourcing - perhaps a case of more of the same, rather than working differently to achieve better results.

In analysing the staff responses to questions surrounding this issue, it also became clear that in the final analysis they were arguing basically for the status quo - albeit a better resourced status quo. If forced between having an extra adult education worker, and keeping their own classroom, they would opt for the cottage. Not all staff cited the reasons outlined below, however, the list does constitute the makings of an ideology for the traditional organization of teachers' work in the primary school which incorporates the cottage industry approach to schooling.

One, as part of their whole school approach and philosophy of education, the staff believe that raising the 'productivity of learning' requires more than just 'real teaching'. It depends upon a broader condition - creating the right environment for learning. This entails establishing positive interpersonal relations with pupils, providing pastoral care, and building good relations with the community. It also involves teachers taking part in the life of the school and getting to know all children, not just the ones they teach.

Two, some staff felt multi-skilled to the point where it was quicker to do their own clerical work than hand it over to a

secretary. In essence it was an efficiency and effectiveness issue. Others saw the preparation of lesson materials, even those requiring low level skills, as an effective medium through which they could equip themselves for high level skill tasks. Three, the staff saw that a broader role within the cottage provided an opportunity for teachers to maximise autonomy and flexibility, thereby enabling them to be responsive to the changing moods and interests of children.

Four, that a broader rather than narrower job focus suited the nature of primary teaching. While they suggested that a more specialised role could be appropriate for upper primary, they remained adamant that it was not appropriate for the lower grades.

Five, the teachers' role in a primary and junior primary was viewed as necessarily a "cottage type". This they saw as fundamental to their own construction of a competent and caring teacher. Six, teachers at Kewdale argue that a broad curriculum, as in primary, generated a broad role and even if unpalatable, teachers have no option but to accept that situation.

Seven, collegiality and belonging to a team often meant that teachers and teacher aides shared the skilled and the less skilled work. A more sharply stratified work environment would limit this and undermine opportunities for a genuine collegiality. Further, these teachers argued little could be delegated of substance, for they much of it (even the apparently trivial) as central work of teachers (if not providing opportunities for a variety of learning experiences if used judiciously).

Eight, the prospect of losing power and control over the whole of the teaching process made Ashenden's proposal unattractive to some teachers. This feeling was compounded by a sense of incompetence at working with other adults in a new division of labour. Many teachers had not worked in a team. Further, some did not view themselves as team-oriented and worried that they might lose sight of their own teaching. Such changes appeared to threaten the teacher's sense of professional satisfaction and security.

Finally, the touchy issue of who would be responsible for the supervision of other workers and the legal implications of the duty of care emerged as central should other education workers assume more tasks within the school.

The organization of learning groups

Ashenden's proposal to experiment with different ways of undertaking educational work in schools has implications for the organisation of learning groups and the use of technology. Changes in these areas are necessary, he says, because employing less teachers and more adult education workers will increase teacher/student ratios. They are also necessary to reassure teachers that schools can operate without traditional classroom

cottages.

With respect to the organization of learning groups, Ashenden advocates greater use of team teaching, peer tutoring, individualised learning contracts, and cross age tutorial sessions. So what currently happens in a normal school, and how much would need to change to accommodate Ashenden's proposals. At present at Kewdale , formal peer tutoring takes place in some classrooms while in others it occurs incidentally. The staff noted that isolated instances of individual learning and cross age tutoring occur , however, they occupy a minor place compared with traditional whole class teaching.

According to the Principal, the staff had seriously considered how best to group the children for better learning. They decided that looking developmentally at children the best form of

organization would be to group them across the grades. However, the shortage of rooms tended to meant that thinking along those lines led pretty much to a dead end. On our return to the school however, we found that the staff had received news of an extra demountable. The result was that the school decided to merge four classes into three to free one teacher for professional development. Teachers also began discussing how they might work in teams. It would appear to us then that given the right sort of environment, teachers are interested in experimenting particularly when they can be convinced of it benefiting the children.

Clearly then the staff are not opposed to team teaching, peer tutoring, individualised learning contracts and cross-age tutorial groups. In practice they do use some of these strategies within and across the cottages, particularly in the case of mathematics, language, arts and crafts. But the extent of their use is limited. In singling out the major constraining factor, the staff identified, not the nature of the junior primary cottage or the nature of the alternative strategies. Instead they nominated the nature of the children (as needing more guidance, high levels of ability, and independence).

Future possibilities in the Ashenden model

Despite the staff at Kewdale's perceptions of junior primary children and past experiences with alternative organisational strategies, they had not dismissed Ashenden's proposal out of hand. Rather, they saw considerable potential in the strategies he proposed and they remained open to persuasion.

It would be an organisational nightmare, but I think once you got the organisation going, probably the bigger class sizes with more help would be really good - you could really do a lot of activity work, a lot of things together.

You do tend to get very isolated in your own classroom. With team teaching you can see different ways of teaching - different methods and different kinds of activities. You just have so many more ideas and methods to combine. I think everybody would benefit - the children, you, the whole thing would benefit.

A further element of Ashenden's proposal for enabling teachers to work 'smarter, not harder' entails greater use of technology - computers, distance education materials and self-paced learning packages. Basically he argues for student-self-managed production processes. We describe these forms of technology as visible or invisible, manual or on-line. Using this typification, we would suggest that computers are visible and automated forms of technology, whereas self-paced learning packages such as the SA boxes found in many schools are invisible and manual. In the latter case, student's learning experiences and outcomes are structured by the ideological controls within the form and the content of the box.

Although the staff at Kewdale make limited use of self-managed learning technologies in the classroom, they have tried to move with the times, particularly with regard to computers. Most staff were prepared to examine how greater use could be made of computers in the classroom and to undertake further skill training. However, despite the staff's willingness to 'give computers a go', they do not regard computers as an alternative to whole class teaching. Their reservations are based not just on the lack of adequate software, but also upon what they regard as the excessive influence of non-creative screen time in children's lives.

Few staff had thought through the possibilities of using distance education materials and self-paced learning packages. As with computers, they were not opposed to them in principle. They just

considered the value of the packages limited to those few children who could not be serviced adequately within the normal whole class teaching approach.

Organisation of the school

Ashenden argues for the school, not the teacher, as the unit of change. He wants reform to be based on a broad industry rather than a narrow (teacher) award restructuring perspective. This means a shift away from an individual and own classroom outlook to a wider corporate one. It means adopting an organisational structure based upon the broad functions that have to be carried out for a school, rather than an organisational structure built on the established interests of individual departments or units within the school. At the secondary level it means replacing heads of subject departments with managers of programs, thereby cutting across the traditional boundaries of the school.

The staff of the school readily agree with Ashenden on these matters and claim that a program approach already prevails within each classroom and to some extent across classrooms. At Kewdale, children are grouped for learning by age, not subject, and subject learning occurs largely within an integrated or thematic structure. Key teachers operate in areas of computing, language, maths, equity and library. These Coordinators encourage staff to take a corporate role within the school, and to assist in developing a school profile for activities within these specific areas. They also assist with student assessment in their priority areas and take a leadership role in programming, resource management, and informing parents. The overall organization of the school was managed by a whole school approach making it more participative than the Ashenden proposal which favoured cabinet style decision making.

THE POTENTIAL OF THE ASHENDEN MODEL: TEACHERS VIEWS

At the conclusion of the interviews, we asked the staff at Kewdale for their overall reaction to Ashenden's proposal. Generally, they felt it held considerable promise, as the following comments indicate:

My first response was "Thank goodness somebody's thinking differently". I feel we are very restrained.

I though it was very interesting. It was, as a concept, quite exciting, especially if it were workable. But I guess the reservation is in the teacher having to take the role of becoming a supervisor. I think you've got to be very selective in the other people who would be working with that teacher.

There would be more models, more parent contact, and I suppose all the time you're increasing the adult/child ratio because I really think that increases the children's learning effectiveness. So if you have your teacher training students coming in, parents, more teacher-aide time, and an opportunity for a specialist to come in on a subject that I'm not good at, then obviously the children's learning time is much more effective and much more enjoyable.

Despite such warm sentiments, the staff at the school held equally strong, if not stronger reservations about the Ashenden model. The staff do not feel reassured by Ashenden's suggestions that alternative ways to organize learning groups and use educational technology made it safe to abandon the cottage. In their final comments they re-emphasised the following concerns. First, the Ashenden model relies to a large extent upon employing student (intern) and paid parent help. Student teachers would

need to be carefully monitored and supported. Several staff members doubted the capacity of young interns to organize others in their bid to survive in the classroom. Also, procedures would have to be developed scrutinising parents, training them, and ensuring ethical practices were observed.

Second, Ashenden's model carries within it the danger that teachers will be drawn out of the classroom and into the management of education workers. In fact we observe that Ashenden himself labels these new breed of teachers learning managers. Children would be left in the educational care of semi-professionals. At the thought of this, the response by one teacher was:

Fear! fear that children were not going to be educated by a professional person. It is so important that children get the best education possible. This is what all parents are trying to do.

Other staff voiced concern that by making teachers more remote from the traditional teaching process, the Ashenden model could well limit opportunities for rapport to be built with students as well as remove a diversity of opportunities to observe and evaluate the progress of the student. For the teachers, without adequate involvement in the classroom it is neither possible to gain an understanding of the development of the child nor as a result teach effectively.

Third, Ashenden's radical model of restructuring teachers' work was seen to overlook how conservative educational communities are, a fact bought home by some of the schools in the National Schools Project (Chadbourne, 1992). In the view of some staff at the school, doing things differently and reducing the number of fully qualified teachers would raise the ire of both the Union, the Ministry of Education and parents.

CONCLUDING COMMENTS

A central theme explored in our study of teachers' work and restructuring in a junior primary school is Ashenden's claim that teachers are currently caught in an apparently seamless web of low productivity and unhappiness.

One way we have explored this question has been to ask teachers to give their considered opinions on the problems and possibilities in the Ashenden model. The second has been to ask what a junior primary school might actually look like if restructured using the general principles embodied in Ashenden's model and worked out in an example of a suburban high school.

If the staffing profile was restructured, would Ashenden's four claims (better salary, more support for staff, different work for teachers, and higher teacher/student ratio's) still hold.

Finally, are there tensions and contradictions between Ashenden's claims in terms of the model of the restructured school itself and the perspective of the staff at the school?

In looking more closely at the detail in the Ashenden example, up to 70 per cent of a typical schools staffing allocation goes on professionally trained staff. By reducing the number of professionally trained staff by one third, this would have the immediate effect of significantly reducing the amount paid to professionally trained staff, allowing a dispersion of funds to increased salary payments for the remaining teachers and the Principal, on outside consultants and professional development, teacher aides, and parent assistance.

In a school like Kewdale, decreasing the professional staff by one third (from the current eight and a half) would allow an additional one and a half equivalent full-timers to be employed.

The catch, however, is that this addition is paid for through a depletion of the available professional competence within the school. Further, the new staff may well be minimally trained and require considerable support and monitoring by the remaining professional staff. While the new teacher managers are likely to be Advanced Skills Teachers (AST), we would also argue that the current procedures for appointing AST's may not necessarily guarantee teachers who are competent at undertaking this new role. Advanced.

With respect to the claim about big increases in the support available to teachers, we suggest that the increases are both marginal and illusory. While a restructured Kewdale might gain an additional one and a half staff members overall, it is at the expense of a significant pool of professional teacher talent.

Ashenden's third claim refers to a major change in the work teachers would be expected to do. If Kewdale were restructured using the Ashenden framework, the remaining professionally trained teaching staff would be responsible for some or all of the training and supervision of interns, parents and teacher aides. For that, teachers would be able to shed some of their mundane administrative work to other education workers. However, given that there would be only a slight increase in the overall number of educational workers within the school, such a shedding would again give marginal benefits. Of course the remaining professionally trained staff would be involved in more complex teaching work, given their expertise within the school. But the shedding of preparation and follow-up work along with student counselling would undermine what teachers at Kewdale regard as fundamental components of teaching: planning, preparation, teaching, and evaluation. For them these components are

integral to building teaching-learning relationships with students, and central to their own construction of a competent and caring junior primary school teacher. Several teachers claimed that having to write detailed instructions and explanations for others was quite inefficient. A preferred option was to involve children themselves in some of the more routine administrative tasks in cases where this provided useful learning opportunities.

Ashenden's final claim is that there would have to be fewer teachers and an increase in staff/student ratios, thus encouraging teachers to look at other ways of combining students. With the current average class size of around 25, it is clear that under a restructured model the junior primary student would spend a great deal of time in other than small group work. Increased class sizes would increase the range of abilities in any one group, an issue which surfaced as a major problem facing many of the teachers at Kewdale. That problem would become compounded if a significant minority of the children were to have major learning difficulties (not an unusual occurrence in the move to mainstream special educational students but without additional supports to the classroom). In those circumstances, teachers state it would be far better to have smaller classes rather than a salary increase.

If students were spending more time in larger classes, on computers and in peer tutoring, how might students manage their own behaviour? In a school such as Kewdale, behaviour problems in the school are minimal, but they do occur. Would larger classes exacerbate this? Given that teachers are less able to "keep an educational eye on students" because of the increased class sizes and the changed nature of their role, it might be fair to suggest that students would experience greater feelings of both frustration and alienation in school, two significant factors in student misbehaviour.

Ashenden conveys the impression that student behaviour problems are determined predominantly by the organization of the school. We are inclined to agree with him, however also agree with the

teachers at Kewdale that some of these problems also emanate from the wider social environment. There is no doubt that social dislocation, alienation and the effects of economic and cultural impoverishment are also significant determinants of school discipline problems.

Finally, Ashenden proposes that in order to accommodate the loss of professionally trained teaching staff and the creation of larger classes, teachers think through new ways of combining students and teachers. One solution Ashenden proposes is to teach more classes, a suggestion that would appear to have limited application in a primary school like Kewdale unless teachers were to lose their DOTT (duties other than teaching)

time. We would further add that Ashenden's own model of teachers teaching a four period day is a far cry from the reality here in Western Australia.

Another solution is to look at changes in using more technology. We note, however, that these new technologies carry within them new dangers including the distinct possibility of producing passive and docile learners. Some analysts have recently suggested that rather than produce critical literacy, such technologies have the potential to undermine the development of critical reflective and autonomous students as well as exaggerate class and gender differences (Bigum and Green, 1992).

Two final comments are in order. The first relates to whether the Ashenden model assumes a level of independence that is simply not there in junior primary students. Granted Ashenden's example of the model relates to a secondary school, however his proposal for change is directed to all schools. According to some teachers in our study, many junior primary students require considerable support to negotiate their way through the school curriculum. A case in point is that much of the computer software requires a grasp of language that young children do not have. The difficulty will be compounded by students with varied learning needs, such as with ESL or special education students.

The second comment relates to whether the Ashenden model is likely to produce more creative, autonomous, critical and reflective students - the reason for Ashenden looking for solutions. With fewer professionally trained staff available within the school, teachers would have fewer opportunities to develop more intimate relationships with students. In such circumstances students may well find their lives increasingly managed rather than challenged. On the other hand, a more diverse array of teachers within the school would, no doubt, provide enhances opportunities for more diverse relationships within the school.

There clearly is a need for experimentation within schools to create greater flexibility in how we approach the complex task of both teaching and learning. We need also to challenge the didactic approaches which have pervaded the cottage approach to teaching and learning. Models and examples must be put forward and scrutinised so that a clearer sense of what is critical to competent teaching and effective learning is made apparent. The teachers in our study highlighted for us how complex good teaching really is. Good teachers have adapted to the limitations of the cottage, squeezing out every opportunity to develop a decent, caring mutually satisfying learning relationship with children and colleagues. They could also see the limitations of the cottage, limitations on them as teachers. The trick for teachers and policymakers is to not throw the baby out with the bath water. Rather, teachers as both intellectuals and political agents with schools, must look for pedagogically informed rather management oriented solutions to

the important issue of restructuring schools for learning.

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