

THE SCHOOL AS A CUBBYHOUSE: KOORI STUDENTS, THEIR TEACHERS AND THE CURRICULUM IN AN INNER CITY PRIMARY SCHOOL

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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses influences on school curriculum and classroom practices in an inner city primary school with a majority of Koori (Aboriginal) students. In particular it describes how, within the specific school context, Koori students' oppositional behaviour at a whole school and classroom level, and teachers' responses to this oppositional behaviour, result in a curriculum implicated in the continuing educational disadvantage of the Koori students. This nature of this curriculum, illustrated by the metaphor of a "cubbyhouse" is discussed in the paper. The research on which this paper is based draws on the work of Paul Willis and resistance theory. However, it offers a different perspective by focussing on the perspectives of teachers, as well as students, and closely examining the nature of the school curriculum.

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Teachers in Australian schools serving communities in poverty continue to experience classroom difficulties. Most of these difficulties centre on how to deal with the issues of a constant low academic standard among the majority of students, and frequent classroom and playground discipline problems (see, for example, Nicklin Dent and Hatton, 1996, and Hatton, Munns and Nicklin Dent, 1996). There is considerable evidence to show that high correlations between social background and limited school success remain, and this is implicated in the disaffection and alienation displayed by many students who live in poverty (see, for example, Connell, 1993). In schools where poor students come from cultural backgrounds different from that of the majority Anglo-Australian group, another dimension is added which may heighten these educational difficulties.

This paper reports on research focussing on a school located in a poor inner city area characterised by both very poor educational outcomes and strong student opposition, particularly among its majority group (53.9%) of Koori (Aboriginal people from most areas in NSW) students. In this setting, being indigenous and living in relative poverty are significant community factors which interact with the school. The research explores the extent to which the school's curriculum and the teachers' pedagogical practices contribute to the educational advantage or disadvantage of the Koori students. Throughout the study the classroom curriculum is seen to be a relationship between teachers and students produced within the constraints of the specific school context.

THEORETICAL ORIENTATION AND METHODOLOGY

An understanding of the nature of students' responses to education draws on Willis's (1977, 1981, 1983) theory of resistance and cultural production. Central to the theory was the relationship between structure, culture and agency. Resistance to school was seen to be a cultural response to schooling. Students responded to their school situation using cultural resources available to them within their specific local contexts. Willis argues that these responses to school were both free and creative, yet constrained by external factors imposed on the students' lives. Significant also in resistance theory was the relationship between educational inequality, social reproduction and student oppositional behaviour. It was argued that when students responded with oppositional behaviour to their perception that the local school was not able to deliver promised educational success to the majority of their group, then indeed, that behaviour constituted a rational response. When it is accepted that school oppositional behaviour among certain groups of students may be rational, the search for changes in that behaviour is refocussed

towards the circumstances at school and in the local and wider community which are implicated in the way students act at school.

For this reason, the study did not confine itself to exploring the standpoint of the students alone. It also considered the position of teachers working within a school ethos and wider educational movements. Whereas educators have seen possibilities within resistance theory to challenge the reproductive function of schools (see, for example, Giroux, 1981, 1982, 1983, McLaren, 1985, McFadden, 1995), there are inherent limitations in continuing to focus on students who have a clear rationale for rejecting school. Not only is it difficult to bring these students back, but it is an "end of the line" position which does not fully consider all conditions leading to the rejection throughout all the school years (Furlong, 1991). Thus, the research also considered factors shaping the way teachers approached classroom practices. This linking of the themes of students' and teachers' responses to their context highlights the research focus on the interaction between teachers and students in classrooms. Such a focus supports McFadden (1995:297) who says that "what resistance theory fails to capture is the variation in the responses to schooling which arise from the intersection of student and teacher perspectives, perceptions and expectations."

Conditions of Resistance

The fundamental research inquiry therefore shifted from whether students were resisters, to whether there were conditions within the milieu of the school which might bring about resistance. Within the wider focus of this research a framework is proposed that demonstrates the use of the term "resistance to school" can be applied under certain converging conditions. These are intended to be pointers through which it might be determined whether the oppositional behaviour by the students constituted in reality or potentially a resistance position.

The framework is well justified for two main reasons. First, this process and shift in focus forces an acceptance that resistance is an issue which involves all areas of education. The main concentration in research has been on disaffected high school students, particularly those who are belligerent and disorderly (see, for example, Willis, 1977, Corrigan, 1979, Walker, 1988). By contrast, there is a strong link between primary and secondary schooling in this framework. Conditions of resistance not satisfactorily addressed in the primary school produce effects along the whole continuum of the schooling experience and beyond. This resistance position demands an interrogation of all aspects of education - in primary and high schools, curriculum and social practices at local and systemic levels and the dialectic between these. The second and related reason, is that this change in focus, away from the student as an individual and in a group, to the exchanges on all sides (students and teachers) within the

school curriculum, provides the potential to address a continuing problem at its source. As Willis (1977), Furlong (1991) and subsequent researchers in the resistance/cultural production tradition have shown (see, for example, Jones, 1989), the moment of final rejection of the school with its underlying cultural support, is very much an irretrievable position - there is little turning back from a full-blown resistance position.

The theoretical framework utilises Willis's (1981, 1983) definitions of culture and cultural production. Willis highlights features of the everyday milieu which are important for an understanding of the concept of cultural production. These are the awareness of social divisions, the relatively rational collective responses to current dilemmas and possibilities and the dynamic incorporation of unconscious and conscious cultural meanings which could direct action and constitute subjectivity. It is these responses which are integral to the process of cultural production. Willis's concept of cultural production points to key features: a consciousness of social position bringing forward creative, culturally produced responses which are generated from the local milieu but reflect wider relationships in society. The position then adopted by this research is that for the term resistance to school to be applied, there must be the following general conditions in the relationship between the students, the school and society.

1. Inequality in the cultural relationship. Resistance to school is generated among groups who historically are socially disadvantaged. Their relationship to other groups is characterised by a continuation of their generalised subordinate position in an unequal society. The intersection of class, gender and ethnicity interacts with structures in society to limit future possibilities¹.
2. Consciousness of their position. Resistance to school relies on various degrees of understanding about where the oppressed group stands in an unequal society. Cultural responses to this consciousness are articulated in ways which are historically and regionally specific.
3. Inequality at the heart of the educational paradigm. Resistance to school occurs among groups who continue to be educationally disadvantaged. That is, resistance is a rational response to the reproductive nature of education - its continuing failure to challenge the reality of social inequality. The first and third conditions are obviously interdependent.
4. Resistance is rejection of an unequal education system. Although resistance may interplay with other contributing factors, its basis is rejection of schooling at a wider level. The point of convergence of this rejection is almost always in the local school, but it is the articulation of the school's curriculum with wider educational issues which is the focus of resistance.
5. Cultural support. Resistance to school is culturally supported and strengthened within the everyday milieu of the resisters. There is a cultural resonance in the resistant responses to schooling, support in the lived experiences which reflects an underlying fear of educational

failure and resignation to the seeming inevitability of the situation.

Given this theoretical framework, this paper utilises the terms "opposition" and "oppositional behaviour" when referring to student responses which appeared to work against the school, teachers or the classroom. "Resistance" is used to signify a conscious choice by students to widely reject education.

The research employed an ethnographic methodology in which data was gathered through participant observation, interviews with teachers and community members and investigation of school curriculum documents. The data was primarily collected in a year when I was Principal of the school.

THE RESEARCH SETTING

The research is focussed on Greytown, an inner city primary school at which I worked for nine years, first as Assistant Principal, and subsequently as Principal. Greytown lies close to the central business district of a very large Australian city. In many ways it is typical of inner city working class suburbs. There is a lot of public housing, much of that in towering high rise flats which were being built in the 1950s and 1960s. The majority of people who live in this area and make up the school community are what Australians term "battlers". There are many single parent families, and, in a high proportion of these, the sole parent is the mother. The majority of people work in low status, low income jobs, or rely on social welfare.

However Greytown is different from most inner city suburbs in Australia because of its ethnic mix. Much of its reputation as a very tough suburb centres on a square of four streets which are owned by the Aboriginal Housing Company. People who know the area call this "The Centre". The Centre is a very poor area: the housing appears to be substandard; the physical conditions are devastating when first experienced; broken glass and garbage lie all over the streets and there are abandoned cars; there is heroin addiction and alcoholism, crime and an air of despondency.

The students come to the school from The Centre or The Towers (public housing flats) or the small terrace houses built at the end of the last century for workers. Greytown is not a suburb which is being gentrified as quickly, or to the same extent as other inner city suburbs. Its reputation seems to scare off many of the kinds of people (often middle class Anglo-Australians) who have been attracted to other inner city suburbs. The large areas of public housing is also a significant factor in this slow gentrification process: there are fewer properties available that can be restored and/or renovated; and with those that are available, there seems to be a reluctance among people to spend money on housing in an area which has predominantly public housing.

Greytown School serves a multicultural population, and has a significant (more than 50%) Koori student group. The school has approximately 200 pupils. The Koori student population has increased steadily over the last decade. There are also quite a few other ethnic groups. These include Anglo-Australians, Vietnamese, Chinese, Indonesians, Greeks, Lebanese, Turks and small numbers of children from Pacific Island countries.

The school is characterised by two features. First, there is the students' opposition to the school, to its curriculum and to their teachers. This occurs on many levels and in many ways. Many pupils are disruptive, aggressive and/or disinterested. Second, there is a low academic level of achievement for many of the students. Interviews with all classroom teachers at Greytown showed that student opposition, particularly by Koori students, was perceived as a very real factor in all classrooms, and it occurred regardless of the teaching style or the disciplinary prowess of the teacher. The research indicated that twenty nine percent of students in the school were categorised by their teachers as offering strong classroom opposition. It was further shown that there was a correlation between high opposition and low academic standard. Of the 55 students who were said to be most opposed to the curriculum, 38, or 69%, were also assessed as being of low academic standard. Thus these figures show that, according to their teachers, 20% of students in the school were both low achieving, highly oppositional students. In this group, the overwhelming majority (92%) were Koori students. These figures are shown in Table 1.

Table 1 High Opposition/Low Academic Standard

Most Opposn	High Opposn/Low Acad Std	High Opposn/Low Acad Std Koories
55(29%schl)	38(20%schl,69%category)	35(18.5%schl, 92%prev category)

These low achieving, highly oppositional students who occupy most of the teachers' time and energy are the main research focus. The data presented a very clear picture of a school in which opposition by a large number of predominantly low achieving Koori students was a major classroom concern. What follows is a discussion of their significant, but not exclusive part, in a culturally produced classroom curriculum throughout the school.

INFLUENCES ON THE CURRICULUM AT GREYTOWN SCHOOL

It is argued in this study that the classroom curriculum at Greytown School was actively constructed in a relationship between the community, the school, its students and their teachers. Three major influences combined and impacted on this active construction: the ethos and traditions of the school, the nature of the Koori students'

responses to their classroom, and the adjustments that their teachers made to their teaching context in the face of the students' responses. Each is now discussed in turn.

(1) GREYTOWN TRADITIONS

Teachers at Greytown School worked within a strong tradition which had evolved over a ten year period. A watershed period in the early 1980s was identified in which the school made changes in an attempt to overcome student opposition and improve educational standards. The Koori students were the main focus for a series of subsequent changes. The development of programs and curriculum with the support of external funding over this time earned the school a reputation for enterprise in

addressing equity issues. Staff involvement in initiatives in Aboriginal Studies and the Disadvantaged Schools Program moved teachers to consider an educational philosophy which rejected deficit ideology. Teachers, for the most part, wrestled with their difficult classroom situation without explicitly blaming the students or their families. Their focus was on the relationship forged in the face of student opposition and the subsequent changes they needed to make. The central focus of the dynamic classroom relationship was the development of close bonds between teachers and pupils, particularly with the dominant Koori group, together with a culturally relevant curriculum. This became the cornerstone of the school's ethos and written policies, attempting to making the school a more humane place for the Koori students, in particular, to attend. At the same time there was a strong commitment to developing positive relationships with the community. Again, a key aspect of this commitment was a specific focus on forging close links with the Koori community.

(2) KOORI STUDENTS' RESPONSES TO THE CURRICULUM

The Koori Community - Issues in Society and School

The research indicated that there were a number of culturally produced themes in the local Koori community which penetrated to the school and influenced student responses to the curriculum.

The most significant of these themes was the clear belief that Aborigines were the most oppressed group in Australian society. Koori people felt that they were in a daily battle against the rest of Australian society. Continuous fights against institutions, particularly the Police, the Justice System and Welfare, had shown them that they had to struggle constantly to survive. There was a strong perception that they were fighting against the system, the combined forces of mainstream Australia.

Feelings of despair and the endless battles were inextricably bound up

with what was happening at school. As part of the wider system, school was another agent of oppression, impossible to be separated from the world outside. For Koori students attending schools in Greytown, results have mirrored the general situation for Aborigines in Australia, with few getting through to the end of High School, let alone achieving academic success comparable with other groups in the area. In an area serving such an educationally disadvantaged group of students, with fewer achieving success than is normal, this especially highlights the educational plight of the Koories.

Education was seen as a false promise, and there were associated feelings of the pointlessness of sending the children to school. There was a very real outlook that the daily trip to school was going to another world, a risky journey which would subject children to further dangers. This was explained by a community member:

The biggest thing for a Koori parent to go through [is] that letting go of having your child with you from the very moment that they're born. There's always a group around Aboriginal people ... a very happy environment, everyone's getting on well together and things are going really well. You come through the gates of the school and it's gone. You're going to a place that you do not basically trust.

With the strong community expectations that Koori students would not succeed, there was an indication that access to school was a major achievement. Indeed, given the long history of exclusion from school, they were undoubtedly correct. However these views often became manifested in a concern that students being happy at school was the

most important issue, even above learning. This indicated the extent to which the parents internalised the messages of the school system which has rejected the majority of their group.

Many students find school a discouraging and difficult place. Few would feel, like the Aborigines, the sheer weight of a seemingly unwinnable contest that extends from society, through the neighbourhood to the school yard. A mother from the community summed this up:

Aboriginal kids still have that battle every time they walk through the gates at 9.00 am in the morning.

And can the kids feel that it is a battle?

When they get old enough to realise. When you're five and six you don't understand what is happening around you. You know that you have a fight on your hands on a daily basis but you don't understand the wider implications of that, but as the kids get older they certainly realise that it is very much a part of their lives.

And then school becomes harder and harder as they realise?

It becomes more of a battle, it is like swimming against the current.

The only way they can stay afloat is to grab on to something or to grab a branch as they are going down with the current.

The research indicated that these community themes extended into the school and profoundly influenced student responses to their classroom.

The Nature of the Koori Students' Opposition

It is crucial to understand that the oppositional stances of the Koori students were not light-hearted exchanges aimed at escaping the tedium of the daily lessons, games between the artful students and their long suffering teachers. All teachers at the school, regardless of years of service and previous ability to discipline students, experienced a very difficult classroom situation. There were a number of prevailing, recurring themes among students across all classrooms.

The Koori students were highly politicised, with a strong sense of understanding their position in society. When it came to the crunch, relationships were polarised on the Black fella White fella continuum. There was a very strong feeling of us versus them which permeated the relationships between staff and students. This is notwithstanding the fact that the long term Aboriginal studies programs at the school had greatly helped in reducing the cultural gap between school and community. Despite the quality of these programs, and the individual acceptance that many teachers had gained, at the point of curriculum as the arbiter of future educational success, school was still seen as the domain of the Whitefella, continuing to deny, for most Koori students, access to all education had to offer.

The most striking common feature of all Greytown classrooms was the unwillingness of the Koori students to take an educational risk and a fear of being wrong in the classroom. This appears to be closely related to the Aboriginal concept of shame. However, as a group, the students were not reluctant to take risks elsewhere in their lives. Rather the classroom seemed to be the site of their greatest danger. Across all classrooms teachers found students who would not willingly take the kinds of educational risks which are thought to be an important element for progressing in learning from the known to the unknown.

The prevalent fear of being wrong when taking an educational risk was a cultural response which is "heightened, even exaggerated, in schooling" (Hatton, Munns, Nicklin Dent, 1994:15). Aboriginal staff and community

members discussed the concept of shame, a significant element of Koori culture which had gathered force as a determinant of behaviour in educational settings:

It's an Anglo thing to have a go - bad luck, good try, it's all right. It's not too much shame for them, the Anglos. That's a big part of it I think. Because they've [Koories] been put down for so long by society

in general.

So do you think the shame is like a defence?

It is, yep. I would never ever answer questions at school.

As a defence mechanism against being seen to be wrong, avoiding shame could often be manifested and/or interpreted as classroom misbehaviour. Being in trouble was invariably felt to be better than not being able to handle the work.

In a school like Greytown with classroom behaviour dominated by a rejection of the curriculum, the conclusion could be easily drawn that the students, and by extension, their community, did not value education. Rather, it is arguably the case, that avoiding educational risks and adopting strategies to lessen the likelihood of being shamed, indicated that Aboriginal people did not believe that success would follow for the majority of them, despite the importance that they placed on education. Koori people interviewed suggested that education, per se, was seen to be vital for their children and their community, but not the kind of education which historically had denied them access to the rewards of wider society.

Students reacted in a number of ways to their feelings of not being able to cope in the classroom. Often they ran from their classes, or deliberately got into trouble so they would be sent outside. As well, reluctance to engage in work was often accompanied by constant demands for help. These demands clearly showed that the students wanted to complete their work and understood the importance of succeeding. Unfortunately, getting help was often seen as getting and/or "being given the correct answer rather than understanding the process by which the answer was derived" (Hatton, Munns, Nicklin Dent, 1994:16). Obviously the help demanded, and usually given by teachers who felt they had little other choice, was unproductive as far as long term educational goals were concerned, though it might often solve short term discipline problems.

The other common, and mostly related response, was a refusal to do work. Consequently, the major problems facing the teaching staff were: trying to fulfil the needs of many students in the classroom desperately seeking attention, recognition and reinforcement when risk taking work was being undertaken; coping with large numbers of students who absolutely refused to attempt work. In all interviews teachers described this "down tools" approach as being something they had not previously encountered, and one which contributed to their enormous daily pressure. The following comment by a teacher was typical:

They would just down tools and chuck it in, that's it. It was often the natural response when things got too difficult.

The critical point about these student responses to their classroom is that they were directly related to the curriculum. The fear, the

reluctance to take risks, the work avoidance and refusal were tied to those aspects of the curriculum which would appear to be the most vital for future educational success. In particular, areas related to literacy and language were strongly feared and consequently opposed. Written work was cast aside, as were lessons where the students had to

think and extend themselves. The patterns of opposing crucial components of the curriculum emerged early and continued throughout the school.

There were parts of the curriculum which the students would readily attempt. These aspects were low risk lessons, generally with no written language nor challenging component. Such was the strength of the student opposition to the curriculum, that teachers invariably moved to these easier lessons in an attempt to alleviate the problems of classrooms where nothing was being attempted or achieved, or to improve discipline. This culturally produced classroom practice, a joint and dynamic construction, either became part of the teacher's school pedagogy, allowed for in the planning process, or became a pragmatic strategy which teachers shifted to as the need arose. The research shows that this occurred across all classrooms in varying degrees, regardless of who was teaching the class.

Moreover, and very importantly, the undeniable strength of opposition was dependent on the nature of the Koori students. Teachers facing a Greytown classroom for the first time inevitably confronted a group of students who were experienced in the battle against school and wider hostile forces. Malin (1990) showed how, in the urban area she studied, Aboriginal parents brought up their children to be resilient in the face of anticipated racially induced hardships both at school and outside. This was consistent with what the Greytown Koories said in interviews. Consider the following statement from a Greytown woman:

Maybe I'm wrong I've taught my kids to never take a backward step. If any body said the wrong thing they either have to put up or shut up. I've always found that the best defence was attack. Walk out. Say: "Fuck you Jack!"

And a lot of Aboriginal people are giving the same message that the kids have to be tougher?

They have to be tough to fight the system.

Coupled with this element of their upbringing, was the harsh experience of living in a neighbourhood like Greytown. For Koori children this had the double effect of contending with attendant conditions of living in poverty (Connell et al., 1991:37), as well as fighting the daily battles associated with being Aboriginal in Australia. Greytown School every year was considered to be serving the most disadvantaged area in the region. This was based on statistical evidence through Commonwealth Census and through school surveys.

The effect of a Koori student population whose cultural responses to schooling were characterised by avoiding crucial components of their school work brought about classrooms where there were constant skirmishes and negotiations over the curriculum. Student responses were spread over a wide range, from the passive doing nothing, to the defiant and the violent and total withdrawal from the school and education. The crucial point which emerges from this research is that the oppositional behaviour of the students was directed at the curriculum, despite the variances in intensity as it interplayed with other elements. It did not, in essence, distinguish between teachers, people, educational theory, Blacks and Whites. It worried at the heart of the curriculum and its offer of educational success, an offer which could not be trusted or accepted. An Aboriginal teacher discussed this:

They say things like: I'm not going to; I can't do it; I don't want to do it; I'm not going to do it; you can't make me. And I don't. You can try to coax them around but until they are willing to open up and let you help them, you're beating your head against a brick wall. Whether

that's coming from me, a Koori to another Koori kid, or whether it's coming from the teacher to somebody else, they just resist.

Do you get the same thing as the White teacher, do you get the same resistance?

I get the same resistance.

The oppositional behaviour of the students contributed to the production of conditions in the school and classroom which placed the majority at an educational risk. These are now discussed.

Student Effects

At Greytown School there was a large group of Koori students who were working at a low standard. Low academic standard was directly related to low literacy levels. Scores in the Basic Skills Testing Program (a statewide testing system introduced by the New South Wales Government in 1989) have continually highlighted this low performance, as have standardised tests given as part of the school's regular evaluation of student progress.

Among the students there was invariably a cumulative effect heightened by the culturally produced classroom curriculum. By the time they reached mid to upper primary the academic range was extensive. This added to the pressure of the teachers in trying to cope with demands from different students.

The wide academic range was also felt by the students, affecting both

those falling behind and those who were more able. Those who were struggling in their work seemed to become increasingly aware of their position, and this brought about more shame, anger and opposition. Conversely, the Koori students who were coping better with their school work seemed to find that their apparent success was a betrayal of their group. This seemed to be a cultural characteristic. Often they opposed work they were capable of, choosing solidarity above individual advancement.

One of the collective ways the Koori students coped was to develop survival strategies. These were short term tactics which helped them get through the day without necessarily bringing forward positive academic results. These responses were typically combinations of: faking work, memorising by rote, doing whatever you wanted as long as you were busy, copying and sharing work and helping others get through the task at hand.

The other typical response to school was rejection. There was a delicate balance between the process of surviving the situation and getting out of it completely. Rejection could be: spontaneous and immediate, running from the classroom or the school; or the more permanent resistant stance of rejection of schooling itself. These acts of rejection were closely aligned with us versus them feelings. Despite Greytown's long term continued efforts to have the students embrace the school and its classrooms, rejection seemed to be an obvious choice for many of the Koori students who were struggling academically. There seemed to be no shame associated with quitting school, but absolute shame in not being able to read in the classroom. This particularly applied to the older students who were being influenced by outside factors. Koori people commented that dropping out of school was culturally supported, not because the community wanted it to happen, but because it was expected and seen to be better than battling a system which was not going to get you through. An Aboriginal teacher

talked about this, explaining that when "[you're] being tough out in the community, you've got your self esteem out there, you're somebody." She said the parents then

take the attitude of well, "Me kid can't read, he can't add up, so it's the teacher's fault, so I'm not going to send him to school. Let him run around The Centre if he wants to. Let them be king pin out there all on their own in the streets." There's not as much shame in that, different from a Whitefella not turning up at school. (Vicki Hills)

In summary, when all the effects of the student responses came together, the school population at Greytown contained many Koori pupils who were educationally at risk, both in terms of future academic success if they continued at school, or by opting out completely. The tragedy of the situation at the school was that a lot of Koori students

in their first years at school were seen to be already at a point of no future educational hope. This is captured in the following words from a Greytown teacher:

Did you get the feeling that some had given up, even at an early age, at first class?

Some had given up, totally. Kindergarten - given up.

So it was almost all over for them?

There are some kids even at a very, very early age, who come to school, and they're gone, yeah.

For all intents and purposes educationally they're gone?

Or yeah, they're gone. But you've got to, as a teacher, realise that's part of teaching at Greytown. It's not satisfactory and no one's happy about it, but you've got to sort of steel your heart a little bit maybe - "Gees I hope I don't lose any more."

That this was felt by both student and teacher was a significant determinant of classroom practice at the school. Teachers responses to their conditions, and the features of the culturally produced curriculum are now discussed.

TEACHER RESPONSES

Whole School Influences on the Curriculum

It was previously mentioned that teachers at Greytown School worked within a strong tradition which had evolved over a ten year period. Both the demanding classroom environment, characterised by the all pervasive oppositional behaviour described in the previous section, and a school tradition which emphasised the importance of teachers winning over their pupils, created conditions which influenced classroom curriculum across the whole school. As well, there were whole school influences on the curriculum which interplayed with the student opposition and affected classroom work.

Added to the daily intensity of each classroom was a history of serious incidents with which the school had to contend. These incidents shook the teachers' collective and individual resolve. During these times the feeling among staff was one of not being on top of the situation at all. These crises brought significant effects to the school and classroom. First, when things were particularly difficult on a large scale across the whole school, team work and endurance were required just to survive the emergency. As a teacher pointed out: "I think that there were days when we definitely just had to get through it. We were running from crisis to crisis at times and that was part of the school year." Crucially as well, there was always the feeling that the school was either in, or in between crises. When there was quiet it seemed

vital to maintain that state. Keeping students happy and calm then

became the focus of attention.

Relationships with the Koori community similarly affected school practices. The belief that they held, that as Aborigines, they were fighting the wider system with the school as a key battleground ensured that productive school-community relations could not be taken for granted. The ongoing commitment to positive community relationships was previously described as a critical aspect of the school's undertakings. However, despite the success of initiatives undertaken in this area, undercurrents of tension based on black-white divisions were always present. Often teachers bore the brunt of parents' anger. However a Koori mother put that into the wider perspective of the larger battle, with teachers feeling the initial onslaught:

Some times when the anger comes in from the community it's felt personally but it is directed widely?

It shouldn't (always) be felt personally. There was times when it should be when you have done something individually that's wrong and that anger's directed at you but I mean when you're looking at it ... (long sigh) there is a big picture and a lot of us forget that big picture all the time - when teachers were there and they're the ones that that anger is being directed at. But the individual teacher is the one that feels the venom from that attack.

Attacks from the community added considerably to the pressure that the teachers already felt because of the nature of their classroom work. It precipitated, together with previously mentioned influences, a notion that student contentment was an overriding priority of the curriculum. Tradition, classroom experience and external pressure combined to convince teachers that quiet, happy students were the hallmarks of successful Greytown teaching.

Community pressure was also strongly focused on discipline matters with suspension a constant divisive issue at Greytown. It was used as a last resort tactic, despite being a contradictory "solution" to the school's ethos and discipline policy. The kinds of classroom behaviour described earlier often quickly escalated to an offence which would seem to warrant suspension. Students, for their part, had chosen disruptive and aggressive behaviour as a classroom defence mechanism to avoid shame. Ironically, suspension was then used with students who did not want to be at school. These students were precisely those who the school had attempted to include in its curriculum and programs. Compounding this predicament were the positions of the teachers on the one hand, and the community on the other. Teachers needed all the support they could get to make it through the day and suspension of their most difficult students usually offered a respite for them. Yet they were under strong obligations because of Greytown traditions not to bring about situations where suspension was needed. Again, the result of this was a movements toward a supportive, protective classroom environment in which students were happy. Moreover, keeping students happy satisfied

the majority of parents. For Aboriginal people suspension from school had been a constant historical threat used against them in mainstream education.

The Culturally Produced Classroom Curriculum - School As A Cubbyhouse

Teachers in this study all indicated that they went through an initiation period during which they had to adjust to the demands of teaching in this distinct context. This was an exhausting and exhaustive time of trial and error while they searched for a curriculum which would "work" with the students. "Work" meant avoiding classroom

practices which the students would oppose, and consequently either refuse to do or act out against as an evasive action.

Teachers also found that flexibility, that is, the ability to adapt and change in a very unpredictable environment was a key to "successful" practice. Regrettably, flexibility usually meant that the teachers did not achieve what they had planned to achieve. Indeed, after a while, planning became increasingly focussed on improving classroom discipline. Teacher strategies were to anticipate problems and avoid creating conditions which would aggravate the problems, or be prepared to change lessons which were not working.

In order to have a classroom where the students cooperated, teachers' preparation had to be strongly focused on the attitudes of the students to classroom practices. Thus, planning for the day involved selecting activities which the students would accept. Not doing this would regularly result in lessons which failed and/or had to be abandoned.

An integral part of the planning process and the on the spot flexibility which the teachers had to adopt was the need to cope with the eventuality that lessons had to be changed or abandoned. Teachers planned carefully to reduce oppositional behaviour, and this could lead to a compromised curriculum as far as academic outcomes were concerned. However, it would be misleading to suggest that teachers did not continue to try to work within Departmental syllabuses and guidelines. They did. However, the nature of the student opposition described earlier repeatedly meant that lessons presented which aimed at advanced outcomes were met with the strongest opposition. No matter how well intentioned and well planned the lessons were, teachers had to be prepared to give up and try something else. So regularly did this occur that within the interviews the terms bail out and bail out lessons were frequently mentioned. It turned out there was either a repertoire of lessons that teachers would bail out to, or more significantly, they would enter the room with more than one lesson prepared: one they wanted to give and one to fall back on. Predictively, the bail out activities would move the lessons away from the high risk academic areas which were most strongly opposed by the students. Consider the

following comments by a teacher:

Sometimes you felt as though you had to bail out of lessons?

Yeah.

What would you use as a bail out?

I don't know (long pause). If I lost them behaviour wise ... let them succeed, working on their own, and working well, it's good for their self esteem, good for everything.

Does that mean that very often we have to give them work without risks?

Yes.

The curriculum which was produced at Greytown School was one of compromise and survival. It was a curriculum characterised by pragmatism and limited success on both teaching and learning sides of the paradigm. Teachers at the school moved their curriculum, and had their curriculum moved, in directions which would continue to contribute to the educational disadvantage of their students. A Koori worker at the school referred to it as a cubbyhouse, suggesting it was a place where you do what you want and no real work is accomplished:

Well it's a cubbyhouse down in Greytown, to me it is a cubbyhouse.

What do you mean by cubbyhouse?

Do what you want to do. It would be like a cubbyhouse. You actually go into this room where you do what you want to do.

And it doesn't matter if you don't do the work?

That is right because that is like when you're at home and you were little and were playing in a cubbyhouse. You would come out and have your lunch and then go back into your cubbyhouse and do whatever you wanted to do in there.

The essential features of this curriculum occurred across all classrooms irrespective of the teacher. In the face of student opposition, lessons were moved away from those which seemed to be most threatening to the students. Challenging reading and language activities were the first to go in this process. Standards were dropped as lessons were offered (for example, handwriting, simple maths processes which all students could do, language work involving minimum reading; copying from the board, non-academic subjects such as art and Physical Education). Teachers found small group activities were particularly difficult, so consequently relied on whole group work, pitched at one level. Thus all students received a compromised curriculum, regardless of academic level or potential, or whether individually they were offering opposition.

It is clear from the research that across all classes at the school there was a reliance on work which would achieve little more than keeping the students quiet. That the students seemed to accept these lessons, which the teachers acknowledged were boring, emphasised the

strength of their reluctance to engage in high risk academic work. These students did not oppose the curriculum out of boredom, but rather accepted mundane repetitive work which would not put them into a situation where they could be shamed. This curriculum was produced across all classes regardless of the teachers' experience.

The movement towards a safe, non-risk curriculum was closely tied to the belief that social aspects were crucial to the work of the school. There was a general conception that many students were academically at risk, and threatened when asked to engage in challenging learning activities. Teachers alleviated this threat by fostering a protective school environment. Students were not pushed too hard in the classroom, academically or in challenging their oppositional behaviour. This was summed up by a teacher:

If you went too far you lost it. It's sort of like a bang when you're puffing up a balloon. I'm not just talking about in discipline, in every aspect.

Teachers had learnt from experience that too strong an insistence on compliance in school work or behaviour would be met with increased hostility. School traditions had long emphasised the need to involve students in positive school relationships. Aboriginal community members, used to fighting an education system for access above everything else, also believed that seeing their children happy and wanting to be at school was the first priority. A curriculum which was more social than academic reflected feelings of inevitability in the school and classroom. These mirrored low educational expectations held in the community. If, at Greytown School, deficit logic was eschewed publicly, there was a contradiction in classroom practices which were imbued with implicit, yet subtle deficit logic (Hatton, Munns, Nicklin Dent:1994).

Another essential element of the social emphasis in the curriculum was in the orientation of goals to the short term, with the dominant concern being getting through a period of time. Long term curriculum planning for future academic goals, a key component in the evolution of the school's major curricular undertakings, was abandoned in classroom practice. There was a crucial distinction between these major policies

and the actual curriculum produced in each classroom. As a teacher explained: "When I first came there, it wasn't even day to day, it was a session. Let's get through this one."

Notwithstanding the curriculum adjustments described above, Greytown School often had to abandon and leave behind many of its most oppositional students. This happened on a whole school basis and within each individual classroom. In my role as Principal I was often forced to suspend students on short or long term bases. There came a point

where the few had to be sacrificed for the majority, even though the majority were on shaky educational ground. This was never easy, as I noted at the time: "And me, another Whitefella throwing black kids out of school."

Similarly, teachers found that they had to make decisions to forget about some of their students so they could continue to try to teach the rest of the class. These decisions were not taken lightly, but like much of Greytown's classroom work, were about doing what had to be done to get through the period of time. This was seen by other teachers to be part of their daily tactics, and accepted in the structure of the school:

The kids who are resisting get a lot of the attention, sometimes I have to give up on them. Sometimes they just sit there and not do anything. But if I interfere or intervene, whether it's a behavioural thing, they don't want to work, whatever mood they're in. I just can't let anything worry me, I'll just get on with the job
Sometimes you just let them sit?
Yeah, exactly, not make waves so I can get some teaching done.

The Greytown Teacher

Teachers at Greytown School, no matter their experience and previous expertise, had to withstand enormous and constant pressure throughout their whole time at the school. A large part of the pressure for the teachers was the realisation that their work, in the end, was a failure. Despite a belief that they were doing their best, given the difficulty of the situation, there was a strong perception that there was little future hope for their students. In particular, success at High School was thought to be beyond many of them. This was linked with the way the students were nurtured in their Primary School. The Greytown teachers worried about what was happening over which they felt they had little control. There was an inescapable irony in the core of their pedagogy. Consider these comments by a teacher:

Yes but the longer I teach here the more I start to believe, the stronger I'm able to realise that you can't really teach them everything, all of the skills that they're going to need in life. We can only do a little bit. I suppose I've got a bit of a perfectionist streak in me in that I want everything to work out really well, I want them to learn and know all this by the end of the year, and I see myself now more as just another step in the way, in the process of things. And I know, for my own sanity, I have to accept that I'm doing the best that I can with what I've got and with what the system allows us to do.

For our own professional survival we have to accept the fact that we're

not going to get everybody through?

You don't like to accept that, but I suppose you do have to.

Yet much of what the teachers were doing at Greytown could be considered good practice. To generalise across the staff, they were committed, gave up enormous amounts of their own time, were well prepared, flexible, responsive to students' immediate needs and to the many different situations which were part of Greytown life. They were the qualities which they had learned in practice and within the traditions at Greytown. As a teacher commented:

What are the qualities of a good teacher at Greytown School?

Sense of humour, not to be too sensitive, not to take things too personally, be willing to support other members of staff when you're knowing they're having problems, get in and do it without making a fuss of it. Everyone supporting each other. Wanting to know the children and they know when you're genuine and they know when you're not.

These qualities are more contained in relationships than an absolute knowledge of how to teach, or curriculum?

I think yes, because if you haven't got that you're in big trouble. You might be a fang dangled teacher and you know, done your PhD or whatever, and you might know your curriculum. If you haven't got some sort of rapport with them it's all wasted.

In summary, they were the qualities which Koori people had always hoped for in the teachers of their children, as a Koori mother argued:

I wondered if I was a good teacher in the end.

Oh, bullshit. You understood kids. See a teacher needs to have that before they have got anything else, you have to understand where kids are coming from.

See a problem and worry about it?

Care, that is what makes a good teacher as far as the Koori is concerned, not that they know the ABC or how to do an italic on it. You know all these things. If you care about the kids and you show that concern, number one, Koori parents are going to have a great deal of faith in you.

They would need more than that.

(Exasperated) Well what you are trying to teach our kids?

Finding exactly what the students needed, and the best way to teach it, was the challenge which Greytown School and its teachers wrestled with over a long period. However, success in providing students with a supportive school and classroom environment was not translated into improved educational outcomes. The research found that, at a whole school level, that there had been a long struggle to find a curriculum which would enhance outcomes for students. There was some attempt to privilege the least advantaged group, the Koori students. Thus, in

intent, the whole school curriculum embraced the principles of educational social justice. At the level of classroom practice, the data showed a curriculum which was constructed as a dynamic exchange between students and teachers. It was a curriculum which was continually under extreme pressure from the opposition of the Koori students, and this pressure forced teachers to change the way they taught. These changes brought about a compromised, pragmatic curriculum which enabled students and teachers alike merely to get through lessons. Immediate survival seemed to be the realistic aim on both sides of the exchange.

THE CUBBYHOUSE - SUCCESS AND FAILURE

The cubbyhouse metaphor for Greytown School was incisive. It was the image of a place where children sit around and do nothing, a sanctuary removed from the real world which in the end offers no real protection

from the world. Greytown's failure points to the complexities of attempting to bring social justice to socially and culturally diverse educational contexts. However, there is much to learn from their efforts, some of which were arguably shaped in productive directions.

To reflect on the school's successes and failures we first revisit the conditions of resistance established earlier in this paper in the light of research data. Key features of these conditions were a consciousness of social position, which brought forward creative culturally produced responses generated from the local milieu, but, which reflected wider relationships in society. Within the context of Greytown School it seems the case that there were conditions which were likely to result in Koori students making a final rejection of education. The crucial condition was the continuation of educational inequality within the school. There is a strong case for proposing that the persistence of the other four conditions depended on an educational paradigm which was implicated in the reproduction of an oppressed position in society. The likelihood of students adopting a resistant position and choosing to reject education depends on the strength of the five conditions. There is evidence in the data, that at Greytown School, all of the conditions were in place at extreme levels. These included the disadvantaged position of the Koori community, the deep consciousness among the students of fighting, but being defeated by, the system, being involved in a schooling system that continued to condemn Koori students to the lowest academic levels, students' oppositional behaviour which was targeted at aspects of schooling which were vital for future success, and finally, withdrawal of student allegiance from school and from education which received wide community understanding and support.

Having established that there were conditions at Greytown School which promoted resistance to school as a likely future option among its Koori students, these conditions of resistance are now contextualised in a

practical framework which allows further understanding of the data and presents a means through which schools and teachers may work towards non reproductive education. The framework (Figure 1) shows the point where it is proposed that resistance to school occurs in the relationship between students and their school.

Figure 1 - School and Educational Relationships

At the centre of the figure is the school in which there are two relationships. The first is termed the school relationship which is important to all students, but, as will be argued below, crucial to those who are educationally disadvantaged. The school relationship is what is immediately encountered by all students at their school and

encompasses the whole range and interplay of social, cultural and academic experiences. This is the daily, active connection with an institution and a group of people. There are personal relationships with other students and school staff which, in a context like Greytown, invariably involve negotiations over social and cultural differences, academic work, extra-curricular activities and the continual exchanges within all aspects of the school's curriculum. The school relationship is very important in determining the attitudes and feelings held by students about their own school. In short, it is the feelings associated with walking through the gate of the school and taking a place in classroom, assembly and playground - the everyday milieu of life at school. The diagram shows that the school relationship is directly linked with the world of the local neighbourhood through the process of cultural production as everyday resources are creatively engaged as students respond to what they experience at school. At Greytown School developing positive school relationships had been central to its philosophy. The school made significant gains in this regard. Teachers went out of their way to forge good relationships.

Links were made with the community at a personal level, and at a curriculum level through the introduction and development of Aboriginal Studies. Students were cared for and "protected" in a social curriculum aimed at not getting them offside. A teacher summed this up: "We really nurture them, it's like a family and they feel very comfortable."

While the school relationship may influence student success at school because of the importance of positive feelings, such as security, happiness and a sense of belonging, its real importance is in its interplay with the educational relationship. The educational relationship is a wider relationship which signifies the educational probabilities (as opposed to possibilities) which students inherit by virtue of the intersection of their ethnicity, social position and gender. As students move through their schooling the educational relationship is extended or reduced. That is, what happens at school largely determines future academic potential. This determination of potential relies on the interplay of the school and educational relationships as the school and its teachers attempt to articulate the immediate and long term needs of their students. Since curriculum and classroom practice are produced within this interplay of relationships, they are critically important for future academic success. They are also the crucial site of resistance when success is denied. Resistance to school is largely a student response to the failure of the local school to articulate the educational curriculum in such a way that it brings about enhanced educational outcomes. The situation at Greytown School points to some salient features of resistance and the school and educational relationships. It was evident from the data that the school had achieved a degree of success in making many Koori students feel good about their school. Many were able to have a positive school relationship. However, feeling good about their school did not necessarily translate into expectations for future educational success. Educational relationships were characterised by negative feelings. And this tension between the two relationships seemed to be highly implicated in promoting resistance. The elements of this tension are next discussed and illustrated in the light of research data.

The interplay of the two relationships is dependent on responses by teachers and students within the school context. Figure 2 shows influences on these responses.

Figure 2 - Interplay of School and Educational Relationships

The diagram shows classroom practice constructed as teachers and students respond to their context. In the students' case it shows how responses are influenced by community themes in the everyday milieu which penetrate to the school and classroom. There seemed to be significant and apparently insurmountable barriers in the way of achievement in school work. Fear of failure was certainly seen to be the major obstacle to progress. Once the pattern of averting this fear was set early in their schooling, survival became more important for many of the Koori students than learning. Low standards of literacy among the Koori students were key components of poor educational outcomes. Indeed, as this research progressed it became increasingly evident that literacy was a vital issue. It was seen to be the specific focus of the student opposition and also the point at which educational futures were largely determined. Without educational tools Koori students were disempowered, regardless of how clearly they were able to understand the terms of their oppression.

Meeting these educational needs was a difficult task for Greytown School and its teachers. Influences on teachers' responses to their context are also illustrated in Figure 2 which recognises that teachers come to a school with a pedagogy which has already been shaped by a number of factors. Previous experiences in society, as Hatton (1994a) suggests, strongly influence teaching theory and practice. At Greytown School the teachers were drawn from a wide variety of backgrounds (two who were interviewed were Aboriginal). It is argued in research (cited by Hatton, 1994a) that conservative forms of teaching are likely when teachers come from White middle class backgrounds which may limit their understanding of social and cultural diversity and social inequality. This cannot be dismissed as a contributing factor at Greytown. Certainly the data agrees with Hatton's (1994a) assertion that teachers' backgrounds may make it easier for them to accept the hegemonic processes, though in the case of the Greytown teachers they appeared to do this with an uneasy reluctance. However, it is important to consider that even the Koori staff, although naturally well aware of the pressures felt by the students, and understanding their responses,

also had their curriculum moved in a conservative direction. As well, the research suggests that working within the traditions of Greytown School, and being involved in development of programs associated with DSP and Aboriginal Education, forced teachers to confront notions of social justice in the curriculum, and challenged a deficit view of students. Teaching at Greytown also brought daily contact with Koories, either in the school or in the streets. This continually encouraged

teachers to consider the plight of Koories. Again, school traditions had emphasised the acceptance of community and an understanding of their oppression. Staff members expressed care for their Koori students: "at Greytown, staffroom culture is characterised by a clear, overt political commitment to the students and the community" (Hatton, Munns, Nicklin Dent, 1996). It would be reasonable to conclude, then, that teachers at Greytown were moved away from ethnocentric positions towards well intentioned, socially just ideas about their work. However a socially just intent does not guarantee social justice in practical outcomes.

It would seem that at Greytown the strongest force in the construction of classroom practice was the daily experience of trying to find ways of teaching and a curriculum content which the students would accept. At Greytown the feeling was of a combined struggle in which no one seemed to have the answers. Thus teaching invariably contradicted the school's wider search for a socially just curriculum. It also signified the inability of the school and its teachers to translate positive school relationships into an extension of the educational relationship through enhanced educational outcomes. A crucial part of this failure was associated with the teachers' apparent inadequacy to overcome the ubiquitous fear of failure among the Koori students.

Attempts to evaluate success and failure draws attention to the distinction between Greytown's public image and private work. Consider the way in which its work in Aboriginal Studies and Education was considered seminal. This led to official acknowledgment in 1991 when the school was named a Centre of Excellence in Aboriginal Studies. Likewise its DSP programs gained the school a reputation for leadership in terms of shifts in DSP ethos and practice (Hatton, Munns, Nicklin Dent, 1996). Greytown's public work, therefore, was widely praised. Yet privately, all teachers in all classrooms faced enormous and apparently insurmountable difficulties translating the school's commitment to social justice into classroom practices designed to bring about improved educational outcomes for the majority of its students. This failure, of course, impacted most severely on the Koori students. Consequently, despite years of seemingly valuable work at the school, classroom practice continued to be socially reproductive.

The changes brought at Greytown School were primarily aimed at improving the school relationships of the Koori pupils. This was

arguably a very sound educational decision. In the definition of school relationship which was previously offered, it was stated that the school relationship was crucial for educationally disadvantaged students. It is at this point that many of these students are denied access to education because they find school a place of intimidation and cultural estrangement. Yet Greytown School attempted to make Koori students feel good when they walked through the gates of the school. Vital changes aimed to reduce the cultural distance between Blacks and Whites brought a degree of acceptance by students and the community and recognition to the school. However the data indicated that gains in school relationships would not, in themselves, guarantee improved educational outcomes for the students.

The real difficulty lay in this process of attempting to transform the positive school relationship into a productive educational relationship. Essential elements of the school relationship had reached into classroom practice. Among these, keeping students happy and comfortable within a friendly, culturally sympathetic environment were valuable aspects of Greytown's wider curriculum. Yet it seemed that when this aim (admittedly in the face of student opposition) became paramount in classrooms, access to knowledge and skills needed for

future success at school was denied.

The data indicates that at Greytown School the positive school relationship became seen to be an end in itself, and in the process the educational relationship was restricted for the majority of its students. This again stresses the distinction between the school's successful public and failing private work. "Indeed it is fair to say that Greytown's failure is often masked by its successes" (Hatton, Munns, Nicklin Dent, 1994:18). Nowhere was this more evident than on Aboriginal Day, a glorious celebration and a community highlight which earned kudos and publicity for the school but which deflected attention away from statistics showing most of its Koori students were failing in the classroom. At the point where the school relationship interplayed with the educational relationship, a restricted and compromised classroom curriculum offered illusionary success. Thus, Greytown did not enable its Koories to overcome cultural barriers in educational terms. It did, as a Koori parent observed, offer a form of refuge not always available to Koori students in their hazardous educational journey. "It is like swimming against the current. The only way they can stay afloat is to grab on to something or to grab a branch as they are going down with the current." Yet protecting students in the school relationship nurtured, deflected and delayed resistance. Resistance becomes an option when there is a consciousness that the local school will not be able to deliver the wider educational promise of success for all. Teachers and parents were well aware that high school was going to be a problem for most of the students because no longer would they be protected from confronting their educational relationship.

Outside the cubbyhouse was a threatening educational reality. As a Koori staff member put it: "It is a big shock, a terrible big shock. No, they're not prepared."

CHANGES TO THE CUBBYHOUSE

In fairness, suggestions for change at Greytown School must acknowledge gains achieved in a challenging context. The school's achievement in developing a humane, caring environment for its students is noted. The caring environment was accomplished by accepting and valuing the students and their parents, and thereby explicitly rejecting individual and community pathology as explanations for student opposition. The development of positive school relationships was one of the achievements of the school. Many educationally disadvantaged students are excluded from schooling at this point. This is particularly the case with Aboriginal students (see, for example, Malin, 1990). However, it needs to be recognised that although deficit logic was rejected in the school's official ethos, there was a subtle and implicit deficit logic underpinning classroom practices which lowered curriculum expectations for students. (See also, Hatton, Munns, and Nicklin Dent, 1994, 1996.) It is reasonable, then, to suggest that changes at Greytown School should maintain, albeit with some changes, the positive school relationships which encouraged the students to attend school. However, positive school relationships should be seen as a means through which educational outcomes might be enhanced for all students. Thus, the aim would be clearly focussed on extending educational relationships.

The crucial site of resistance was seen to be in the interplay of the school and educational relationships (see Figure 2). It was proposed that there were a number of influences on responses by students and teachers which affected the production of classroom practices. There were four main components identified in this interplay, namely, the community, the students, the teachers and the school. There are

inherent practical and theoretical difficulties in looking for change solely from within the community and student position. It is more productive to consider how teachers and the school may work at moving beyond their point of failure. Both of these are now considered.

The first step in this process would be in the specific awareness by teachers of the point of failure. The data identified that a pattern was set early in the school lives of the Koori students and that curriculum compromise in the first years at school produced effects throughout primary school and into high school. From an awareness that the nature of the curriculum was failing the students, teachers would need to shift from the general feelings of inevitability and the uneasy belief that nothing else could be done. The hegemonic processes would

have to be challenged, rather than be accepted by the staff. It was revealed in the data that key factors influencing Koori students' responses to their classrooms were the fear of the curriculum, the need to avoid shame, and subsequent feelings that surviving or rejecting school were the main options. These factors needed to be considered when planning curriculum. When teachers acknowledged that in the earliest school years they had to develop a curriculum for the Koori students clearly aimed at encouraging risk taking, their focus would be more keenly directed at a solution to the students' oppositional behaviour. This provides a positive direction for pedagogical change. Importantly also, the responsibility must be accepted by the teachers to develop a curriculum which is not underpinned with a subtle deficit logic. In particular, the key issue of risk taking in areas of literacy and language would need special attention. Specifically, it would seem that teachers could profit from looking very closely at their own practices in the checking of, and assessment of students' classroom work. Assessment is seen to have a major bearing on social justice. In a systemic context, it is argued that assessment "functions to maintain the social power and prestige of dominant groups" (Connell, 1993:75). At the level of classroom interaction, the research data highlighted the threat of assessment practices to Koori students. Changes to the pedagogical relationships in the classrooms would need to accommodate assessment procedures which do not threaten the learners in the process. It also became apparent during this study that literacy was a key issue in the relationship that Koori students had with the school curriculum. The whole domain of early literacy and risk taking among Koori students seems a vital area for future research. This is particularly so when it is clear, in this context at least, that many Koori students are lost from their very earliest years at school. The interrelated factors of reluctance and inability to read significantly contribute to this loss. A final consideration for Greytown teachers would be the nature of their relationships with the students. The development of close relationships between teachers and students was a cornerstone of the school's discipline policy, and was seen by the school to play a major role in the way the students felt towards their school. However, it was obvious from the data that there became a point at which the relationships interfered with the curriculum. Insistence that students engage with the curriculum appeared to compromise the buddy-like relationship, since "At Greytown, the relationship with students became an end in itself rather than a means to an end" (Hatton, Munns, and Nicklin Dent, 1996). Teachers at Greytown needed to find ways through student opposition while keeping in place a curriculum which offers educational success. Decisions would then have to be made about how the school's friendly ethos could be maintained, without condemning its most needy students.

Directions for whole school change would similarly require an initial appreciation of the tension between the public and private domains of the work at Greytown. Curriculum decisions could then continue to focus

on the Koori students while more specifically focussing on the successful articulation of school and educational relationships. Thus there would need to be a reappraisal of the school's philosophy which would challenge the status of the school relationship as an end in itself. Again, the school would need to see the early years of schooling as a major priority, focussing its institutional energy on eliminating conditions which place young Koori students at an educational risk from which few are able to recover. No longer should it be acceptable for Greytown School to continue to promote a "cubbyhouse" mentality, appearing to protect and nurture students and then sending them unprepared to High School, set up to adopt a resistance stance.

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1 This position has been challenged in the literature. McFadden (1995) cites research evidence from Britain and the USA which claims resistance to school is not always class based. In Australia Connell et al. (1982) argue that ruling class students may resist school. It is acknowledged in this thesis that student opposition occurs in all school settings to varying degrees. However, the theoretical links between resistance and social reproduction are clearly drawn. In accepting the arguments developed by CCCS theorists and Willis (1977), resistance must be seen as a response to the part played by education in the continuation of an unequal society. Ruling class students have no real need to challenge school authority along class lines because of the advantage which education continually offers them. Willis (1977:123) is unequivocal on this point:

The working class does not have to believe the dominant ideology. The very existence and consciousness of the middle class is deeply integrated into that structure which gives it dominance. What kind of bourgeoisie is it that does not in some way believe its own legitimations? That would be a denial of themselves. It would be the solution of a problem which they were the main puzzle (emphasis in

original).