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SOCIAL EDUCATION IN THE SECONDARY SCHOOL:
AN ILLUMINATIVE EVALUATION

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment
of the requirements for the degree of
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ABSTRACT

This study examines whether a social education programme such as Button's Developmental Group Work can provide a transformative curriculum in schools. The data are drawn from an evaluation conducted in three Wellington secondary schools in 1983.

The reasons why social education curricula have not been fully implemented are basically political, and, compared with 'high-status' subjects, the area has lacked a centralized curriculum rationale, as well as teacher-training. The political relationship between school ideology and curriculum content is explained from a Marxist or neo-Marxist framework. The concept of 'hegemony' is examined to demonstrate the complex ways in which schools maintain social control through the 'official', the 'hidden' and the 'null' curricula. Technical control over curriculum form is seen to be part of the reproductive function.

Developmental Group Work is shown to follow the 'teacher-as-researcher' process model of curriculum development. A thorough description and critique of the programme is provided, and the ideological, political and social implications for curriculum transformation examined.

Illuminative evaluation methodology provided a more flexible, comprehensive and sensitive approach to a programme where important criteria of effectiveness may emerge in process.

The data from the evaluation focus upon: 1) the development of student autonomy; 2) the professional development of teachers and their role as change agents; and 3) the programme's influence upon school organisation. Any counter-potential, to reinforce the reproductive role of schools, is also examined.

Significant and embryonic changes were discovered in the focal areas, but were constrained by the minimal amount of teacher education and training available. Positive changes were in the influence upon curriculum form, pedagogical style and classroom control; student and teacher relationships; participants' self-esteem and increased group-support; in classroom techniques and the ability to work 'in process'; in teachers' increased awareness of students, and of the school organisation, and consequent changes in values and attitudes; and in the influence all of these began to have upon the schools.

Evidence of the programme's counter-potential lay in the tendency for students to conform rather than becoming more questioning and assertive.

The conditions necessary for the programme's effective implementation were concluded to be: 1) full school commitment; 2) improved teacher education and training; 3) student education to understand school organisation and their part in the programme's transformative potential; and 4) the use of qualitative evaluation methodology for programmes in the affective area.

The implications of the study underline the need to examine the ethos of the new Health Syllabus, with which the programme has been closely associated, and which is more embedded in social reproduction than cultural renewal. Political and ideological constraints on social education curricula have led to both the pessimistic 'reproductive' image of schooling, and the use of programmes such as Developmental Group Work to restore social control and conformism. Political ways of acting upon schools must overcome the ensuing cynicism and sense of futility, and employ conflict in the curriculum and the phenomenological experiences of teachers and students

to accomplish change. An image of schooling which sees individuals as relatively autonomous, and schools as having the capacity to transform themselves and work for cultural renewal, is vital.

PREFACE

The thesis presented here emerged as a result of an interest in social education programmes in schools, particularly in the area of human relationships, developed over many years in schools as an English teacher and as a Guidance Counsellor.

While studying for the Diploma in Guidance and Counselling at Massey University in 1978, I met Dr Leslie Button and attended one of his workshops. It was Button's programme of 'Developmental Group Work' which became the basis for the Wellington pilot programme which I evaluated in 1983, the results of which provide the central focus of this thesis.

Button's work also provided the basis for the 'group work' and 'human relations' programmes which I have initiated, taught and trained other teachers for since 1979, and represents, therefore, a pedagogy and framework with which I am thoroughly familiar.

In 1982, while holding the position of Senior Fellow in Education at Massey University, I conducted a survey of 'health-related' programmes in almost two hundred New Zealand secondary schools in order to discover what schools, lacking a central policy on social education, were providing. The survey covered social education programmes in the broadest sense, and also sought information on the amount and type of in-service training in the area that teachers had received; the provisions for parent education; co-ordination of the programmes offered, and resources used.

One discovery was that Button's texts proved to be the most commonly quoted resources possessed by the schools. This, in itself, was not surprising : most of the schools had Guidance Counsellors, and many of these would have

come across Button's work in their training, on Button's visits to New Zealand, or through their professional contacts. When his programme appeared in New Zealand, it provided the first systematic, developmental curriculum in inter-personal relationships teaching which incorporated teacher-training as an essential part of its methods. Its wide-ranging objectives also make it a suitable vehicle for other curriculum areas, such as health and careers education, so that schools readily perceived that it filled an important gap in social education provisions.

Whilst conducting the survey, I also liaised with the Education Officer responsible for preparing the draft of the new Health Education Syllabus. The immense care with which the new syllabus, and my own survey, had to be introduced highlighted the political climate which generated a need for sensitivity and a low profile where implementations in human relationships curricula were concerned. The aftermath of the Johnson Report had delineated the area as one where it was safest to do little, if anything. I was encouraged to word the survey as neutrally as possible, so that the original title referring to 'Human Relationships Programmes' was changed to the more innocuous 'Health-related Programmes'.

The history and place of social education in the New Zealand curriculum, as well as the wider areas of curriculum design and evaluation, came to be of increasing interest to me. In 1983, when the opportunity arose to evaluate the pilot programme of Developmental Group Work in Wellington, a forum was discovered for examining, not only the programme, but certain aspects of curriculum innovation, as well as a situation where teachers were able, to some extent, to follow Stenhouse's (1975) 'teacher-as-researcher' model of professional development. It was also an ideal opportunity to examine work in schools by using an illuminative model of evaluation. The Depart-

ment of Education further supported the project with the granting of a research contract, and the ensuing report: 'Evaluation of a Pastoral Role Training Programme: Developmental Group Work' was published in April 1985.

I had also developed a growing interest in the 'political' aspects of curriculum and of schools, particularly in the position that the school, through curriculum transformation and teacher awareness and professional development, may become an agency of cultural change, rather than an agency of reproduction.

The thesis, then, sets out to explore and demonstrate the extent to which the evaluation of the programme of Developmental Group Work in Wellington in 1983 discovered a vehicle for curriculum transformation, and for change in schools. It also considers what, in the nature of schools, will encourage, inhibit, or subvert the programme's potential for change, and examines a situation where teachers worked together as curriculum innovators and researchers.

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