

**The Power of the Provisional:
The Curriculum Development Unit -
A Case Study in Innovation
in Modern Irish Education**

by

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ABSTRACT

The general theme is the experience of the Curriculum Development Unit as a case study in innovation in modern Irish education. The main time span is 1972-1987. The approach is broadly historical. The story of the Curriculum Development Unit is told in the context of what was happening in the Irish educational system during the period in question and, more broadly, in the context of the political and social development of contemporary Ireland. Against this background the Unit's experience is assessed - as an illustration of the influence of certain national events and also for the light that the development of the Unit itself can throw on these events.

Two main research questions are addressed in the dissertation:

- What is the story underlying the Unit's efforts to institutionalise itself?
- How may this story be told by one of the principal actors involved?

The focus of the research is on the efforts to institutionalise the innovative activities of the Unit. The main thesis is that this effort has largely failed mainly because of the strong centralising tendencies in the Irish system and the improbable nature of the Unit's sponsorship - a partnership between the local education authority, a university and a Government ministry. This is not to belittle the Unit's achievements; these perhaps have been all the more significant given the failure to institutionalise the Unit. The Unit may yet prove to be an interesting example of a phenomenon that is in keeping with the late twentieth century - an *ad hoc* body with no guarantee of survival, which manages to exist and even prosper in situations where more stable organisations are falling by the wayside.

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PROLOGUE

The Story

This is the story of a small organisation called the Curriculum Development Unit, which came into being twenty years ago, when hopes were high in Ireland that a new educational dawn was breaking. The Unit was established under the auspices of three sponsors - the City of Dublin Vocational Education Committee (CDVEC), Trinity College, Dublin and the Government Department of Education - and its purpose was to develop curriculum projects and assessment procedures oriented to the needs of urban and mainly working class students. The story of the Unit is one of survival, how a frail and for the most part unprotected barque managed to hold its course amidst conditions that threatened more than once to submerge it. It is primarily a political story, not an account of the various curriculum projects the Unit took on board throughout its troubled history. Some of these projects are mentioned from time to time, especially the earlier ones, but this is incidental to the overall narrative. The one exception is Chapter 7, which treats of a European Community network in environmental education, but even here the emphasis is more on institutional politics than curriculum analysis. The full story of the Unit's projects has yet to be written and may well form an important chapter in the history of modern Irish education. What follows in these pages is an attempt to set the scene for the writing of such a chapter by attempting to unravel some of the tangled threads that surrounded the main events of the Unit's life.

The first chapter looks at the origins of the Unit in the context of the introduction of comprehensive education into Ireland in the 1960s. This is another story which has yet to be fully told and what is related in Chapter 1 is only the background to the events which led to the birth of the Unit. The events themselves are described in Chapter 2 which also gives a picture of the Unit's innovative style, which we call "networking". The third chapter is called "The Politics of Evaluation"

and as the title suggests it recounts the difficulties of the Unit's early years and the crucial role that evaluation played in its survival.

Chapter 4 is a central chapter. It takes up the story four years into the Unit's life and examines the various attempts to give it some security by putting it on an institutional basis. The quest for institutionalisation was at the time part of the Unit's perception of what the change process was about: every successful innovation should first of all try to find a permanent home in the system into which it is being introduced. By the end of Chapter 4, we shall see how far the Unit had travelled down this road and whether institutionalisation still seemed a realisable goal.

The next three chapters describe specific aspects of the Unit's work. Chapter 5 looks at the vocational dimension, Chapter 6 at the Unit's concern for the educationally deprived and Chapter 7 at its involvement in a European Community network in environmental education. All three chapters deal broadly with the period from the end of the '70s to the mid '80s - a period we can now look back on as the Unit's golden years. This was a time of expansion and confidence in the future, when the Unit spread its wings and became better known throughout the educational world - something which is epitomised in the title of Chapter 7, "The Wider Stage".

Chapter 8 has a different kind of title - "The Closing Circle". This strikes an ominous note, like the sound of fate knocking at the door. The events described in this chapter were dramatic in their impact and traumatic in their consequences; they all but closed the Unit down and banished for ever the hope of long-term security and the aspiration towards institutionalisation.

The Epilogue is the final word of the storyteller to his audience. The story has formally ended with Chapter 8 but we are left in some suspense. The Unit, we know, is alive but will it survive much longer? Chapter 8 has taken us as far as 1986, but what of the intervening years between then and now? The Epilogue lifts the veil a little on these

questions and even permits itself to wander into the realm of speculation. After all it is the storyteller's privilege to comfort his listeners by sometimes indulging in a little prophecy.

The Genesis of the Research Questions

The main task of the Prologue is to describe the methodology of the dissertation. Central to this methodology are the research questions raised and how the writer went about answering them. The following is a personal account of what went on in the writer's mind between 1984 and 1992 - the eight years it took to write the dissertation, from the conception of the basic theme to the final draft of the text. The writer would like to be able to claim that from the very first he had a clear idea of what he intended to write about but in reality this was not the case. The underlying pattern of the dissertation only emerged after much soul-searching and the fundamental questions which the dissertation attempts to answer were for a long time more implicit than explicit.

In autumn 1984, the writer enrolled as a Ph.D. student in the London University Institute of Education. He had taken a term's sabbatical leave from his work in the Unit and his chosen theme of study was leadership in education - a theme which he intended to illustrate with examples from his own experience. At the end of the term he wrote a document for his supervisor outlining the major sections of his proposed dissertation as follows:

What were the issues in the period under study in which leadership was exercised - or failed to be exercised as the case may be? Seven issues are identified, each the subject of a separate chapter. The first issue is based on the relationship between education and democracy and relates to the working out of the comprehensive education ideal first enunciated in 1963. This issue also touches on the community school movement and on the meaning of participation in education. The second issue deals with factors affecting control of the curriculum, especially developments within the public examination structure. The third outlines the recent attempt to restore emphasis

on vocational education, while the fourth concerns the need to reaffirm an acceptable image of Irish cultural identity. Care for the disadvantaged and religious and moral leadership comprise the fifth and sixth issues respectively, while the seventh and final issue treats of the influence that the European Community and other international organisations had on the Irish system of education.¹

The writer was encouraged by his supervisor to continue with this line of research but was advised to give a sharper focus to his work by reducing the number of issues. Throughout the next two years he tried to follow this advice but found himself instead wandering from theme to theme unable to convince himself that he had found one sufficiently worthwhile to command his respect and commitment. What he lacked most of all was purpose. Why, he asked himself, should he bother to do a Ph.D. when it was more important and appropriate for him to concentrate on publishing an account of his work? Thus, at the end of two years of apparent aimlessness he felt he was near the point of abandoning his Ph.D. aspirations.

Then, in summer 1987 something happened which changed the writer's perspective and galvanised him into an intense period of research and writing that lasted for over four years. In June of that year he learnt that the Unit he had helped to found and had directed for fifteen years was in danger of imminent closure. Down through the years the survival of the Unit had been his major preoccupation and on several occasions he had had to face major threats to the Unit of one kind or another. Now it seemed as if fate had finally caught up and the Unit was doomed to disappear.

This at least was the writer's perception of the events of that fateful summer of '87. In the months that followed, the Unit fought for its existence, as it had done many times in the past, and by the autumn of the same year it had even managed to put together a programme of sorts. But the writer felt that the Unit's cause was lost and that it had failed in its

fundamental mission of trying to institutionalise itself as an innovative agency in Irish education. He was determined, however, to leave behind some account of its unsuccessful fight for institutional survival and so he began to write freely and without inhibitions. He had no thought at this stage of his Ph.D. dissertation; he was more concerned to put on record the Unit's story as he saw it and the part he himself had played in it.

By November 1987 he had completed four draft chapters and these he decided to send to his supervisor to see if they had any bearing on a possible Ph.D. dissertation. Privately he felt very doubtful about this because he considered his writing to be too personal to have any academic acceptability. However, he was also aware that his work, although admittedly written from a personal point of view, was not necessarily lacking in objectivity. He had based it on a close examination of documents in the Unit's files and was struck by the fact that in handling these documents he found himself working in the historical tradition in which he had been trained several years before, first as an undergraduate and later as post-graduate student. He noticed that the task he had set himself was recognisably that of a historian - to produce what he called "the book of evidence" - namely an attempt to put into coherent form the major events in the Unit's development.

The writer was greatly heartened by his supervisor's reaction to the chapters he had written. Not only did the supervisor encourage him to use these chapters as a basis for his dissertation but also pointed out that the methodology which was evolving might yet prove interesting in its own right. "Every thesis", the supervisor wrote, "has to be self-conscious about methodology these days but I would suggest that yours is raising questions of particular interest. You could, if you want, make it a feature. So far what seems most significant is the series of respects in which you are modifying conventional (is there such a thing?) historical methodology by virtue of its being contemporary history - dramatic, personal issues still very much with you".²

It was in this manner that the dissertation took shape and the basic research questions began to emerge. The starting point for the writer was the question the French historian, Marc Bloch, had asked himself nearly a half century earlier in the dark days of his country's defeat: "Are we to believe that history has betrayed us?" (Bloch, 1954, p.6). The Unit, in the writer's view, had failed and this implied a kind of betrayal. His first and fundamental task, therefore, was to uncover the reasons for this failure and to come to terms with defeat and betrayal. What had gone wrong in the Unit's story and where had the mistakes been made?

As the writing progressed it became clear to the writer that every notion of failure is tied to a corresponding notion of success. What then, he asked himself, was his criterion for the Unit's success? In his mind all the answers to this question seemed to lead in the same direction - the attempt to institutionalise the Unit. It was now becoming obvious that this was one of the major issues which the dissertation was raising and the writer's account was largely an attempt to come to terms with it. The story of the Unit's attempt to institutionalise itself was for the writer the story of the Unit. This story contains a number of related issues which can be stated as follows:

- Why was the process of institutionalisation so important for the Unit?
- What factors hindered this process?
- Is institutionalisation the most important criterion in judging the success of an innovative venture like the Unit?
- Are there other criteria for judging this success?
- Was the Unit's notion of institutionalisation the most appropriate one for the circumstances in which it found itself?

All these questions only came to light gradually - through the long and sometimes painful process of scrutinising contemporary Unit documents and writing and rewriting the chapters of the Unit's story. The work of

rewriting was more than routine revision; it entailed a revisiting of past episodes in the Unit's history in the light of the emerging story of the Unit as a whole. This process is worth saying something more about; it was the anvil on which were forged not only the research questions themselves but also the tentative answers to these questions which are given in the Epilogue.

The process was first of all something which became for the writer a necessary discipline - a means of controlling his disappointed feelings over the Unit's apparent failure. This he did through a painstaking and often tedious cataloguing, comparing and interpreting of documents. Once started, the process generated its own dynamic and momentum. It also brought its own particular problems. Sometimes there were gaps in the documents and at other times what appeared to be inconsistencies or even contradictions. For the working historian such problems come as no surprise and there are techniques for dealing with them which are part of his professional stock-in-trade. For the writer of this dissertation, however, the process demanded the ability to make a clear distinction between two aspects of himself - the self as actor and the self as critical observer. The implications of this distinction are examined later in the Prologue but what we would like to mention here is the inherent difficulty of the process and the degree of introspection it calls for.

Introspection as a tool of research has a long and respectable pedigree that can be traced back to the writings of Thomas Aquinas and before him Aristotle. It is, however, a difficult tool to use with any degree of accuracy and consistency and it constantly runs the risk of degenerating into a morbid self-preoccupation. Furthermore the introspectionist is never sure of the objectivity of his own observations, and for anybody working in the historiographical tradition this is a particularly acute dilemma. A historian by virtue of his training will always tend to look for a vantage point that is detached and removed from his subject matter.

For the writer of this dissertation, doubts about the validity and intrinsic worth of what he was doing arose several times during the course of his

work. Although he became aware that his attempt to write the story of the Unit was not without benefit to himself personally and also to his work as Unit director, he was less sure that it could be justified in terms of academic endeavour or that it would add anything significant to the body of historical or educational scholarship. It was only near the end of his research that he realised that these doubts were closely connected with the basic research issue which he was addressing and could in fact be formulated as the second fundamental research question which the dissertation was trying to answer: how could the story of the Unit's efforts to institutionalise itself be told by someone who was one of the principal actors involved?

To sum up then, the two fundamental research questions which the dissertation has attempted to answer are as follows:

- What is the story underlying the Unit's efforts to institutionalise itself?
- How may this story be told by one of the principal actors involved?

As the answers to these questions have shaped the methodology of the dissertation, the rest of the Prologue will be dedicated to a consideration of this methodology. But before leaving this section a brief word should be said about the sources used; a fuller treatment is given in the "Note on the Unpublished Sources", towards the end of the dissertation. Most of the documents examined by the writer are contained in the Unit's archives but some were also found in other collections, notably those of the CDVEC. A twofold system of referencing has been adopted; references to unpublished documents are given numerically at the end of each chapter, while references to published sources are given in the text with the name of the author, the date of publication and where relevant, the pagination. More complete descriptions of the publications are given in the bibliography.

In Chapter 1 the documentary evidence is supplemented by interviews and wherever this occurs, a note to that effect is made in the references.

The procedure followed in the interviews was first to talk to the person in question, using note-taking as the sole recording device. Afterwards the interview was written up and then sent to the person interviewed for comment and correction.

The Telling of the Story

History, Hannah Arendt once observed, is older than the written word, older than Herodotus, older even than Homer. The beginning of history lies in the moment when Odysseus, a stranger at the Court of the King of the Phaeacians, listened to the story of his own life and recognised that it was something outside himself, something which had now become the subject of the storyteller's art (Arendt, 1977 p.45). Odysseus, we are told, was so moved by the story of his own deeds and sufferings that he was forced "to lift his purple mantle with his sturdy hands and draw it down over his head to hide his comely face, for he was ashamed to be caught weeping by the Phaeacians" (Homer, Penguin Classic, 1987, p.124).

This poignant account from Homer illustrates the elemental force and deep significance which is contained within the story as a form of comprehending human experience. It is also the form which underlies the basic structure of this dissertation, where the writer finds himself like Odysseus a part of the tale that is being told. The entire dissertation, it could be said, is shaped as a story and the art of telling this story is the primary methodology involved. In saying this one is aware of the risk of being accused of adopting a non-scientific and even simplistic approach: the art of storytelling may be fine for a Homeric audience but hardly the kind of discourse suitable for a doctoral dissertation.

This, however, would be to underestimate the complexity and significance of the story, both as a literary form and as a mode of experiencing reality. "We might be disposed to take stories much more seriously", Harold Rosen observes, "if we perceived them first and foremost as a product of the predisposition of the human mind to

narratize experience and to transform it into findings, which as social beings we may share and compare with those of others” (Rosen, n.d., p.12). Nor should the story be considered as something which is separate from non-narrative forms of discourse such as analysis and generalisation. Inside every non-narrative discourse, Rosen reminds us, there stalk the ghosts of narrative, while inside every narrative there stalk the ghosts of non-narrative discourse. “There are always stories crying to be let out and meanings crying to be let in” (Ibid., p.12).

According to Barbara Hardy, the narrative form is much more than an aesthetic invention to control and order experience; it should be seen rather as “a primary act of mind transferred to art from life” (Ibid., p.13). We dream in stories and we remember, hope, despair, learn, love and hate through stories. Narrative in fact is our primary means of making sense of what would otherwise be a chaotic series of happenings. If we are to comprehend reality at all, we have to place it between the covers of a story which must have a beginning and an end. To quote Rosen again:

The story is always out there but the important step has still to be taken. The unremitting flow of events must first be selectively attended to, interpreted as holding relationships, causes, motives, feelings, consequences - in a word, meanings. To give an order to this otherwise unmanageable flux we must take another step and invent, yes invent beginnings and ends, for out there are no such things. Even so final an ending as death is only an ending when we have made a story out of life (Ibid.).

Alasdair McIntyre goes further than Rosen; he asserts that not only is man a storytelling animal but reality itself has an underlying historical pattern. “It is because we all live out narratives in our lives”, he writes, “and because we understand our own lives in terms of the narratives that we live out, that the form of narrative is appropriate for understanding the actions of others. Stories are lived before they are told - except in the case of fiction” (MacIntyre, 1981, p.197). Furthermore, the story that we live is a narrative quest and it is this that gives unity to our lives. The

quest may be abandoned and our lives may fail but “the only criteria for success or failure in a human life as a whole are the criteria of success or failure in a narrated or to-be-narrated quest” (Ibid., p.203).

A storyteller is never alone in his art; he is always aware of being part of a tradition. The writer of this dissertation is conscious of the long-established tradition of the Irish storyteller or “scéalaí”, which dates from immemorial antiquity. The tradition of Irish storytelling is now a peasant one but it was not always so. The stories were once part of an aristocratic culture and were recited by poets who were members of a privileged order and acted as official historians and genealogists. When in the early Middle Ages these stories were committed to manuscript, they formed what the celebrated Celtic scholar, Kuno Meyer, once described as “the earliest voice from the dawn of West European civilization” (Delargy, 1945, p.178).

This tradition of storytelling has continued to influence Irish people down through the ages, even into modern times. We like a good story and we respect the art which can transfer the raw realities of life into a rounded narrative form. We also relish that touch of self-irony in the storyteller which makes him regard his stories with a certain scepticism. This is illustrated in the recording of one of the most famous of the Irish sagas, “The Cattle Raid of Cooley”. The monk who wrote the story down evidently had difficulty in reconciling his Christian learning with his love of ancient lore, for having finished writing the tale, he felt constrained to add a reservation in Latin:

But I who have written this history, or rather story, do not give faith to many of the things in this history or story. For some things therein are delusions of the demons, some things are poetic figments, some are like the truth and some are not, and some are for the amusement of fools (Rees and Rees, 1961, p.24).

The Historical Approach

The story of the Unit is a historical one and the account in this dissertation follows what could be broadly described as the historical method. This method is first of all a scientific process. "History", J.B. Bury once remarked, "is a science; no less no more" - an aphorism which prompted R.G. Collingwood to respond: "Perhaps it is no less: that depends on what you mean by science" (Collingwood, 1961, p.249). The definition of science by the scholastic philosophers is still apposite: "scientia rerum per causas" - an ordered body of knowledge which is built up by asking questions and trying to answer them. In this sense history can be said to be a science in so far as it is a critical enquiry into the deeds of human beings in the past. This is the original sense in which the Greeks used the term "history", and this is where we begin our analysis of methodology - in Greece in the 5th Century B.C. with the father figures of history writing, Herodotus and Thucydides.

Herodotus in his account of the Persian Wars tells us that he was concerned "that the great deeds of men may not be forgotten... whether Greeks or foreigners" (Herodotus, Penguin Classic, 1972, p.7). His declared purpose was to save human deeds from the futility of oblivion and this is still a worthy motive for any historian to have. The Greeks, however, had other and less heroic reasons for writing history and these had to do with its moral and self-revelatory value. History was cultivated for the sake of self-knowledge, and for the Greeks, seeking to know oneself was a supremely important business. Collingwood was so impressed by this ideal that he accepted it as the major purpose behind all history writing: "Knowing yourself means knowing what you can do; and since nobody knows what he can do until he tries, the only clue to what man can do is what man has done. The value of history then is that it teaches us what man has done and thus what man is" (Collingwood, 1961, p.10).

A deeper understanding of mankind, therefore, was one of the Greek expectations from the study of history and for a historian like

Thucydides, this was to be found primarily in contemporary history - the story of events still fresh in a people's memory. From the stand-point of the modern historian this may seem like a limitation but for Thucydides history was based on the testimony of contemporary witnesses whose evidence he subjected to the kind of critical appraisal that was customary in the Athenian law courts (Ibid., p.25). "I have made it a principle", he tells us, "not to write down the first story that came my way and not even to be guided by my own general impressions; either I was present myself at the events which I have described or else I heard of them from eye-witnesses, whose reports I have checked with as much thoroughness as possible" (Thucydides, Penguin Classic, 1972, p.48).

This dissertation is written in the same historical tradition. It seeks to throw some light on the problems of contemporary Irish society through a study of a piece of recent history - the birth and development of a curriculum development unit over a period of fifteen years. In writing the dissertation, however, the author was also conscious of working in another tradition, that of modern Irish historiography, which began a little over fifty years ago with the Irish counterparts of Herodotus and Thucydides - R.D. Edwards and T.W. Moody. In 1938 Edwards and Moody founded *Irish Historical Studies*, a journal that heralded something akin to a Copernican revolution in Irish historiography. Scholars were now prepared to challenge long-established myths, and history, which had previously been the handmaiden of nationalism, gave way to history as an independent discipline. "In a country that has come of age", wrote Roy Foster, a modern Irish historian, "history need no longer be a matter of guarding sacred mysteries" (Foster, 1986, p.5).

The new approach to Irish history started by Edwards and Moody had, however, a serious limitation: it refused to include any reference to Irish affairs after 1900. We must recognise that there were understandable reasons at the time for taking this line. The recent past was a raw and divisive subject, both north and south of the Irish border, and it is important to remember that Edwards and Moody were seeking to create an all-Ireland fellowship in the study and writing of history. They

eventually succeeded in this, so much so indeed that by the end of the 1970s the original embargo on twentieth century material was relaxed to coincide with the thirty-year rule operated in the case of Government archives. Nonetheless, the overall effect of the embargo was unfortunate, for as J. J. Lee, another modern Irish historian, notes, “it probably helped discourage the development of systematic historical thinking about the twentieth century, thus in effect abandoning the contemporary terrain to thinkers versed in other disciplines or in no discipline at all” (Lee, 1989, p.589).

At this point an objection may be raised. Is not the contemporary historian likely to be more partisan than his colleagues working on earlier and more remote periods? Do not his very commitment and personal involvement leave him open to the charge of bias and partiality? Perhaps it is wiser to take Lord Acton’s advice in not looking for historical objectivity this side of the grave: “The living”, Acton says, “do not give up their secrets with the candour of the dead; one key is always excepted and a generation passes before we can ensure accuracy” (Acton, 1902, p.2).

This objection has some force but the major point at issue here is the meaning of historical objectivity. At the time when Acton was writing many of the proponents of objectivity wanted to put history on the same footing as the natural sciences where, it was alleged, objectivity existed to an absolute degree. This of course was fundamentally a nineteenth century stand-point and has long since given way to a view of the natural sciences which allows for a considerable degree of unpredictability and even admits that the subjective element can never be ruled out. Now, as we enter the last decade of the twentieth century, the old quarrel between the subjectivity of history and the objectivity of the natural sciences has lost much of its relevance.

Much more relevant to the historian of today is the idea of impartiality, which casts him in the role of a just judge or a critical commentator. The Irish expression for fair play, “cothrom na féinne” comes to mind here -

which refers to the custom of the ancient heroic warrior band, the “Fianna”, of giving equal treatment to both parties in a dispute. The ancient Greeks, another heroic society, had the same idea, for Homer tells us he decided to sing the deeds of the Trojans no less than the Achaeans, and to praise the glory of Hector as well as the greatness of Achilles. This Homeric impartiality was echoed first by Herodotus, who wished to preserve the memory of both Greeks and barbarians from oblivion, and later by Thucydides, who took pains to articulate the different stand-points among the warring Athenians and Spartans.

In modern Irish historiography, the idea of impartiality has been vigorously put into practice, especially with regard to Ireland’s ancient quarrel with her larger and more powerful neighbour. So vigorously indeed has the new approach been applied to the writing - or some would say the rewriting - of Irish history that a controversy has arisen between the “revisionist” and “anti-revisionist” schools. The most notable example of revisionism is to be found in the writings of F.S.L. Lyons, perhaps the most outstanding modern Irish historian. In his last years, Lyons was saddened by the spectacle of increasing violence in Northern Ireland and felt that historians had a duty to educate the public to a saner and more realistic interpretation of Irish history: “In the present situation with the dire past still overhanging the dire present ... the time is ripe to break with the great enchantment which for too long has made myths so much more congenial than reality” (Lyons, 1973b, p.223).

Not everyone, however, agrees with Lyons. Desmond Fennell, who has written extensively on Irish nationalism, strenuously opposes the revisionist school of thought. Every nation, says Fennell, needs a historiography which sustains, energises and bonds it together. This, the revisionist historian fails to provide, for his is a history which tends to cripple, disintegrate and paralyse the nation. In other words the revisionist, according to Fennell, is guilty of what the Romans would have called impiety - he betrays the sacred trust of nourishing the people’s faith in themselves and in their own traditions (Fennell, 1988 and 1989).

The difference between revisionists and anti-revisionists may be more easily understood if it is placed in the context of the wider question - what is the relevance of history? E. H. Carr, in his book *What is History*, follows Collingwood's lead in asserting that we can only achieve our understanding of the past through the eyes of the present, and since the historian belongs not to the past but to the present, one of the chief objectives of his study should be to enable him to understand the interaction between the two (Carr, 1964, pp.24-26). Marc Bloch made the same point when he said: "Misunderstanding of the present is the inevitable consequence of ignorance of the past. But a man may wear himself out just as fruitlessly in seeking to understand the past, if he is totally ignorant of the present ... The faculty of understanding the living is, in very truth, the master quality of the historian" (Bloch, 1954, p.43).

This view of history, however, can be distorted. An example of such distortion is what Herbert Butterfield, the celebrated Cambridge historian, called the Whig interpretation of history - the tendency "to praise revolutions provided they have been successful, to emphasise certain principles of progress in the past and to produce a story which is the ratification if not the glorification of the present" (Butterfield, 1931, p.9). Following this line of argument, Butterfield was led to the stern conclusion that "the study of the past with one eye so to speak on the present is the source of all sins and sophistries in history" (Ibid., p.31). We would do well to heed Butterfield's warning and although we may not go so far as to agree with one of his Cambridge successors, G. R. Elton, who proclaimed that the writing of history "involves above all the deliberate abandonment of the present" (Elton, 1969, p.66), we should nonetheless be on our guard against reading too much of our present into our past.

The methodology of this dissertation tries to follow a middle path between the two schools of thought in modern Irish historiography - revisionism and anti-revisionism. It is revisionist in so far as it accepts that all history is provisional and has to be continuously rewritten as historical judgements are revised. It is anti-revisionist in that it accepts

that the historian can never ignore his loyalties and indeed his obligations to his own tradition and culture. He is a child of his own time and race and creed and his deepest insights come from being true to his roots. He has a two-fold task; he must not only seek to understand the past but also try to profit from this understanding. In the study of history, as the great Roman historian, Livy, once pointed out, “you have a record of the infinite variety of human experience, plainly set out for all to see; and in that record you can find for yourself and your country both examples and warnings; fine things to take as models, base things, rotten through and through, to avoid” (Livy, Penguin Classic, 1971, p.34).

Progress in History

“When eras are on the decline”, Goethe once said, “all tendencies are subjective; but on the other hand when matters are ripening for a new epoch all tendencies are objective” (Carr, 1964, p.124). The Curriculum Development Unit was founded in what Goethe would have called an objective era. The glorious promise of the 1960s had not yet faded. The mood of the '60s - now wistfully referred to as the Lemass era (so called after Sean Lemass, de Valera's pragmatic and modernising successor) - was described by F.S.L. Lyons as “one of impatience and of criticism but also of excitement” - a mood which was everywhere in evidence in “this pushing and restless society” (Lyons, 1973a, p.692). The optimism and outward-looking spirit which had characterised those years carried over into the early '70s and Irish people still cherished the hope that matters were ripening for a new epoch.

This was the spirit which prompted the foundation of the Unit. It was a mood which favoured a belief in the possibility and desirability of progress in all areas of society, especially education. Theories of innovation were much in vogue and education was no longer regarded solely as an agent for conserving the traditional values of society but also as an instrument for changing and even subverting those values. In 1973 the Centre for Educational Research and Innovation of OECD published a four volume study of how educational change could be brought about.

In the introduction to the final volume, the author, Per Dalin, summed up the prevalent mood of optimism that permeated educational thinking at the time:

Over the past 30, 40, or 50 years, change has become part of our everyday life. Our expectations have changed accordingly. The last 20 years in particular have seen remarkable innovations in nearly all aspects of human activity; and the basic attitude which has been the driving force in all our advances in the economic, scientific and technological fields, has been an attitude of optimism, a belief that improvement is possible. Social institutions, education included, have also undergone change. We have seen a drive towards a better quality in our institutions, an attempt to close the gap of social and educational equality, major investments to extend educational opportunity, and large scale pedagogical reforms to improve the quality of instruction (Dalin, 1973, p.23).

Two decades later, the situation had changed. Economic recession had left its mark throughout the western world and confidence in the power of education to change society for the better had considerably weakened. From the late '70s onwards the mood in Ireland has been particularly depressing. High unemployment, a crippling national debt and the recurring haemorrhage of emigration all combined to undermine the national spirit of self-confidence which had abounded twenty years earlier. In the '60s and early '70s the popular catch-phrase had been "the rising tide which raised all boats" but the mood of the late '80s was summed up in the more sombre metaphor of "the ebbing tide and the lonely shore". Raymond Crotty, the author of *Ireland in Crisis*, was probably not alone in his despondent appraisal of the situation facing the country when he wrote:

The crisis that confronts Ireland in the 1980s is no ordinary crisis such as confronts every society occasionally and such as has confronted Ireland from time to time in the past. It is not, as repeatedly suggested by politicians and others, the result of some recent and

transient maladjustment of the public finances, to be set right by appropriate fiscal adjustment. Nor can it plausibly be attributed to a general, world-wide recession. The disarray of the public finances and particularly the critical dependence on foreign borrowing, which have only recently come under public scrutiny as matters of serious concern, are in fact the inevitable and predictable outcome of policies that have been followed consistently in Ireland for 40 years (Crotty, 1986, p.11).

Thus we can see in the two decades of the Unit's existence a remarkable swing in the national mood from optimism to pessimism. This change in mood had inevitable implications for educational thinking. As expectations of a new dawn began to fade, people were no longer sure that educational innovation was such an important factor in society. The very idea of innovation - which can be defined as planned change for the better - depends on a belief that progress in history is possible but the mood in Ireland in the late '80s was far from conducive to this outlook. Hope in a better future was being replaced by apathy and cynicism and the national spirit, in Goethe's words, was turning to subjectivity and decline.

This change in the national mood has important implications for the methodology of this dissertation, which we have described as broadly historical. Every historian, either consciously or unconsciously, must make up his mind as to whether or not progress in history is possible. For the writer of this dissertation, this is a crucial question. The Unit was founded at a time when progress through educational innovation was an accepted principle but twenty years later this view no longer looks as convincing. Where then does the writer stand? Can he identify with an approach which looks for progress in history, or should he opt instead for the cynical and far from unpopular view that history has no meaning other than that which we choose to give it?

The approach adopted in this dissertation is cautiously optimistic: a belief in the idea of historical progress but a progress that is not without

its set-backs and disappointments. To justify this point of view we shall briefly survey the development of the notion of historical progress over the centuries. Our survey can only be an outline but it is nonetheless important to try to show how thinking on this subject has been conditioned by the march of historical events themselves.

It can be argued that the idea of progress in history is fundamentally a Christian concept. In Greek and Roman historiography the meaning of events was found either in the individual context of each event as it occurred or else in recurring cyclical patterns (Arendt, 1977, pp. 41-43). For the Christian Church, however, human beings have a beginning and an end and they live in a world which has been created in time and will ultimately perish. Following the Hebrew tradition, the Christian view of history is rectilinear and teleological within a framework of divine providence and a plan of salvation. It is not surprising, therefore, to find the first deliberate attempt to fashion a philosophical world view of history in the greatest of early Christian thinkers - Augustine of Hippo (Ibid., pp. 65-67).

When Augustine looked for a purpose in history, he was constrained to place it outside the course of human events. History for him was not to be counted among human institutions, and as long as Christianity remained the dominant world-view in Europe this attitude prevailed (Ibid.). However, once the secular began to assert itself against the sacred - as happened in the Enlightenment in the 18th Century - it was inevitable that new ideas about the nature of history would emerge. The notion of supernatural grace now gave way to the idea of man's unaided rationality and the concept of divine providence was replaced by a belief in the power and inevitability of progress. Edward Gibbon, one of the most celebrated of the Enlightenment historians, finished his monumental *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* with "the pleasing conclusion that every age of the world has increased, and still increases the real wealth, the happiness, the knowledge and perhaps the virtue of the human race" (Gibbon, 1899, vol.3, pp.609-610).

Throughout the 19th century the idea of progress in history was elevated almost to the status of a law. This came about largely because attitudes to history were greatly influenced by the prevailing thinking about the natural sciences. In 1859 Darwin's *The Origin of Species* popularised ideas on evolutionary theory and this lent added weight to the view that a similar pattern could be looked for in history. By the end of the century, especially in Victorian Britain, the notion of progress, bolstered by the pervading spirit of positivism and utilitarianism, had become the equivalent of an article of faith. As Collingwood ironically put it: "The progress of humanity from the nineteenth-century point of view, meant getting richer and richer and having a better and better time" (Collingwood, 1961, p.144).

When we come to the twentieth century we find that historians have become more cautious in their attitude to progress. Two world wars within forty years of each other considerably sobered people's estimates of where the development of humanity might be leading. In Britain, the break-down of the Victorian confidence in the inevitability of progress is mirrored in H.A.L. Fisher's *A History of Europe*. Writing in the depressed years of the early 1930s, Fisher betrayed his despondency at the shattering of the liberal dream of a better world around the corner:

I can see only one emergency following upon another as wave follows upon wave, only one great fact with respect to which, since it is unique, there can be no generalizations, only one safe rule for the historian: that he should recognise in the development of human destinies the play of the contingent and the unforeseen (Fisher, 1962, vol.1, p.v).

In Ireland, F.S.L. Lyons expressed a similar disenchantment with the idea of progress in history. Three months before he died he told a colleague that he found it hard to be both a conscientious historian and an optimist and that this pessimism was tolerable to him only because he did not believe in progress (Fanning, 1986 p.141). Lyons's disenchantment

sprang not from two world wars but from the spectacle of anarchy in his native country:

It was rather an anarchy in the mind and in the heart, an anarchy which forbade not just unity of territories but also “unity of being”, an anarchy that sprang from the collision within a small and intimate island of seemingly irreconcilable cultures, unable to live together or to live apart, caught inextricably in the web of their tragic history (Lyons, 1979, p.177).

It is difficult, then, for anybody pursuing a historical methodology in the late twentieth century to justify the belief that progress in history is inevitable. It is equally difficult, however, if one is writing as an educationalist involved in innovation, to abandon completely such a belief. The very definition of innovation, as we have already noted, would seem to indicate some kind of faith in progress, however tenuous or piece-meal. From our brief survey then can we say anything useful about the idea of progress - anything which will help to incorporate the idea into our methodology? Three points can be made which may give some hope in this regard.

First, the idea of progress must be distinguished from that of change. About the latter there can be no disagreement - no previous age has equalled ours in the quantity and pace of its change - but whether this change can always be counted as progress is a different matter. To help us make up our minds on this matter Collingwood has made an important distinction. Progress, he argues, is not the replacement of the bad by the good but of the good by the better. For this reason much of the historical changes in a society's way of life cannot be conceived as progress because they are made in response to a blind impulse to destroy what is considered to be bad without ever fully understanding it. In order to conceive change as progress, the person who makes the change must have a proper appreciation of the good aspects of what he is trying to replace - in other words he must know the past before trying to shape the future. “The revolutionary”, says Collingwood, “can only regard his

revolution as progress in so far as he is also a historian, genuinely re-enacting in his own historical thought the life he nevertheless rejects” (Collingwood, 1961, p.326).

Secondly, progress in history does not proceed in an unbroken straight line; there are always set-backs and deviations. As Fisher pointed out, progress is not a law of nature: “The ground gained by one generation may be lost by the next. The thoughts of men may flow into the channels which lead to disaster and barbarism” (Fisher, 1960 vol.1, p.v). Neither is the notion of progress viewed by everybody in the same way, for it may well happen that what appears to one group as a period of decline may seem to another like a new awakening.

Thirdly, although the idea of progress may be a legitimate concept for a historian to hold, it can never be proved decisively from the events of history itself. It is something which has to be sought outside these events. For historians like Elton, this search is the private business of the historian himself. “Progress in history”, he observes “is in great part a matter of value judgment, a personal matter, and although every competent historian can discover a measure of necessity in events, none can prove that they are truly determined” (Elton, 1969, p.63). For others, like Butterfield, to look for an underlying pattern in history is a worthy cause - one indeed which the Christian faith encourages us to undertake - but it is also something which lies beyond the scope of the secular historian. “The cry for an interpretation of the human drama”, Butterfield warns, “is a cry not for technical history but for something more like ‘prophecy’” (Butterfield, 1949, p.24).

It is interesting, nonetheless, to see how secular historians find it necessary to return repeatedly to the search for an ultimate meaning in history. Terms like “prophecy” and “providence” may have disappeared from their vocabulary but only to be replaced by others which often imply a vague belief in an utopian future. E.H. Carr would have us believe that “the absolute in history is something still incomplete and in the process of becoming - something in the future towards which we

move, which begins to take shape only as we move towards it and in the light of which, as we move forward, we gradually shape our interpretation of the past" (Carr, 1964, p.121). Rather than engage in such mystical futurism it might be more honest to use the religious metaphors which are sometimes associated with a more simple-minded era. After all, the great Bismarck, whom nobody could accuse of being simple-minded, was once heard to say that "the statesman must try and reach for the hem when he hears the garment of God rustling through events" (Butterfield, 1931, p.100).

For the writer of this dissertation the idea of progress, especially as found in the writings on educational innovation in the '60s and early '70s, has been moderated in the light of the harsher realities of the following two decades. Yet it is difficult to abandon the idea completely or to renounce the vibrant hope for the future which it is capable of engendering. It is an idea which has a particular resonance for anyone who looks for a Christian interpretation of history. In the Christian view of things, a human being cannot live without a vision and some hope that it can be fulfilled. Christianity also offers us its own theory of innovation but it prefers to use instead the term "renewal". The Spirit of the Lord, the Book of Wisdom tells us, fills the whole world, holding all things together (Wisdom 1:7), and according to the Psalmist, it is the same Spirit which renews all things, even the very face of the earth (Ps.104:29-30).

Educational renewal then rather than educational innovation is an idea which better fits the events which will be described in this dissertation. We can if we wish retain the simple definition of innovation we have already given - planned change for the better - provided we realise that the planning is not always in our own control, and the touchstone of what is to be regarded as "better" should never be determined in a doctrinaire fashion. As Butterfield warns us, it is a mistake to think we can plan everything, for there is a history that is going on over our heads, with or without our knowledge. "The hardest strokes of heaven", he writes, "fall in history upon those who imagine that they can control things in a

sovereign manner” (Butterfield, 1949, p.104). In other words whether we like it or not we are often constrained to adopt a policy of “muddling through”.

“Muddling through”, however, is not always the worst alternative, provided it means remaining alert and paying attention to the message of the passing moment - or to express the same thought in religious symbolism, watching for the movement of the Spirit over the deep. Even if our preference is to keep God out of the picture, we do well nonetheless to postulate a providential order - in Butterfield’s words, “to think of history as though an intelligence were moving over the story, taking its bearings afresh after everything men do and making its decisions as it goes along, decisions sometimes unpredictable and carrying our purposes further than we wanted them to go” (Ibid., p.109).

Autobiography as History

How many different stories can you tell about a person’s past? In Brian Friel’s play *Making History*, Peter Lombard, the 16th Century Archbishop of Armagh, tells the vanquished Irish chieftain, Hugh O’Neill, whose life he has undertaken to write, that there are many ways in which he can write his story but only one that would be suitable. This implied a political judgement on Lombard’s part; he was going to write the kind of biography he felt would be most appropriate to the temper of the time - the kind of story that people wanted to hear. Gaelic Ireland was broken and so he was offering the people a heroic narrative with which they could identify. “This isn’t the time”, he reminds O’Neill, “for a critical assessment of your ‘ploys’ and your ‘disgraces’ and your ‘betrayal’ - that’s the stuff of another history for another time” (Friel, 1989, p.67).

When it comes to writing one’s own story does a similar choice exist? Can the writer choose from a number of different accounts, depending on the particular interpretation he wishes to give? He may feel a need, for instance, to defend his views and actions, and hence his inclination may

be to write something on the lines of Newman's *Apologia Pro Vita Sua*. On the other hand the writer may wish to portray his life as an illustration of the times he has lived through, like Peadar O Laoghaire's *Mo Scéal Féin* [My own Story], which was written against the background of the social and political events of Ireland in the second half of the 19th century. Or the writer may choose to write his story using the poetic licence and the creative insights of the artistic mode - as James Joyce did in his *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*.

There are many ways, then, of writing one's own story but the approach in this dissertation is to keep as close as possible to what we have earlier described as the historical method. Here, however, we have a difficulty which must be faced. It would seem that there is a contradiction between the autobiographical and historical approaches, for in writing one's own story the subject and object become the same person. How can one tell the objective truth about oneself and make valid judgements about one's own motives for acting? In this context the old saying "nemo iudex in causa sua" - no one can be a judge in his own case - would seem to hold good.

This brings us to the nub of the problem of autobiography as a valid historical methodology. If in writing his own story, the autobiographer wishes to claim any kind of historical objectivity, he must be able to make a distinction between two selves - the self as an actor in the story and the self as a critical observer. He must be prepared, so to speak, to put himself in the witness box, to question himself on his past actions and never to assume that the truth will easily emerge. Like every historian he must be prepared to search for the truth beneath the surface of things and in doing so to make allowances in himself for ignorance, error, folly, pretence and prejudice. He must also, of course, be prepared to meet the opposite qualities and to accept in himself the possibility that he can grow in knowledge, wisdom and tolerance. In short, the autobiographer, in trying to understand his own story, must be prepared to find within himself the normal range of human strengths and weaknesses. It is only

in this way that he will eventually meet himself in the integrity of his being.

This is not an easy task but one nonetheless that is well worth the attempt. Augustine, who may be regarded as the father of autobiography, remarked in his *Confessions* that “men go out and gaze in astonishment at high mountains, the huge waves of the sea, the broad reaches of rivers, the ocean that encircles the world, or the stars in their courses but they pay no attention to themselves” (St. Augustine, Penguin Classic 1961, p.216). To write of one’s own life demands courage because it is not always easy or comfortable to meet the person that one is writing about. Furthermore, good autobiography is not necessarily the recounting of colourful or extraordinary episodes. It is more the ability to see oneself as a human being “in all the truth of nature” - a human being who is aware, no matter how dimly, that he has a right to be alive and that his contribution to existence is in some sense unique.

Roy Pascal in his book *Design and Truth in Autobiography* has noted that many of the great autobiographies of the past were written by people who believed that their main purpose in life was to fulfil the law of their innermost being by finding their place in a design that lay outside themselves. Such people, Pascal writes, had “a devoted but detached concern for their intimate selves, a partial yet impartial unravelling of their uniqueness, a kind of wonder and awe with regard to themselves; and at the same time an appreciation that this uniqueness is also the uniqueness of the circumstances in which they lived, hence their attention to the concrete reality of their experiences” (Pascal, 1960, p.60).

We have to ask the question, nonetheless, whether the autobiographer can ever be objective about himself - can he be at once an actor and a critical observer with regard to the drama of his own life? One of the earliest historians, Thucydides, was inclined to think so and in his account of the Peloponnesian War he did not consider that his own involvement as a combatant invalidated his claim to be the principal historian of the war. “I lived through the whole of it”, he tells us, not

without some pride, “being of an age to understand what was happening, and I put my mind to the subject so as to get an accurate view of it” (Thucydides, Penguin Classic, 1972, p.364). In more recent times R.G. Collingwood was also of the opinion that autobiography and historiography can be combined:

Nor is it necessary that the historian should be one person and the subject of his inquiry another. It is only by historical thinking that I can discover what I thought ten years ago by reading what I then wrote ... If I want to know that I am as good a man as I hope or as bad as I fear, I must examine the acts that I have done and understand what they really were: or else go and do some fresh acts and then examine those. All these inquiries are historical. They proceed by studying accomplished facts, ideas that I have thought out and expressed, acts that I have done (Collingwood, 1961, p.219).

It should be noted that Collingwood was not the first to take this line - that it is the homogeneity of subject and object that makes historical knowledge possible. Before him, the German historian and philosopher Wilhelm Dilthey had argued that “the first condition for a possibility of a science of history is that I myself am a historical being, that the man who is studying history is the man who is making history” (Gadamer, 1975, p.196). Collingwood developed this idea very persuasively in his book, *The Idea of History*, where he argued that the historian should be able to understand the “inside” as well as the “outside” of past events. In other words he should not only know the external framework of events but should also penetrate into their inner significance - to the thoughts and motivations that lie behind a person’s actions (Collingwood, 1961, pp.213-214). It is in this context that Collingwood made his daring assertion that fundamentally all history is the history of thought and in writing history the historian himself “stands at the bar of judgment and there reveals his own mind in its strength and weakness, its virtues and its vices” (Ibid., p.219).

At this point it may be important to add some qualifications. What we have been describing up to now is the ideal form of autobiography; the approach in this dissertation is altogether less lofty and ambitious. For one thing the autobiographical stance which is taken in the dissertation is largely institutional in context. The “self” in the narrative is often more institutional than personal, and in many cases the viewpoint expressed by this “self” is one shared by a group of people. The protagonist in most of the narrative, the director of the Unit, is not alone in the things he says or in the stance he takes. His views very often mirror those of his colleagues on the Unit staff, and in practically all instances - especially in the events related from Chapter 4 onwards - his position on policy issues would have been shared by the deputy director. Indeed the close relationship between the two men amounted to what could be described as a joint partnership and was one of the great strengths of the Unit. This is not to say that there were no disagreements within the Unit. Such a state of affairs would be rare in any human institution, and the Unit in this regard was very human indeed. But it was also a very coherent entity and the director’s public position always tried to reflect this.

Another way in which the methodology of this dissertation differs from the normal autobiographical method is its use of documents. As far as possible contemporary documents, rather than unaided memories, have been the primary source materials. Memory, of course, can never be excluded but memory is recognised for what it is - a powerful but unpredictable instrument of the mind. “When I use my memory”, the author of the *Confessions* tells us, “I ask it to produce whatever it is that I wish to remember. Some things it produces immediately; some are forthcoming only after a delay, as though they were being brought out from some inner hiding place; others come spilling from the memory, thrusting themselves upon us, when what we want is something quite different, as much as to say “perhaps we are what you want to remember?”” (St. Augustine, Penguin Classic 1961, p.214). This dissertation tries to protect itself from the vagaries of such memories by grounding itself on a critical examination of contemporary documents as

its chief source of evidence and in this approach it is more in the tradition of hermeneutics than that of autobiography.

In general terms hermeneutics can be described as the art of textual interpretation which has developed in intimate connection with theology and jurisprudence (McCarthy, 1984, p.169). In more recent times a hermeneutics of language has emerged, especially in the writings of Martin Heidegger and Hans Georg Gadamer. The latter's *Truth and Method* in particular provides us with several valuable insights for the writing of this dissertation. For Gadamer, the key to understanding any human situation is to be able to interpret the text which portrays it. A successful interpretation results from a fusion of two horizons - the horizon of the text which is being studied and the horizon of the interpreter. It is in this regard that Gadamer makes his remarkable claim that the meaning of a historical text depends as much on the interpreter who studies it as it does on the original author of the text or on the actors involved in the situation it portrays:

The real meaning of a text, as it speaks to the interpreter, does not depend on the contingencies of the author and whom he originally wrote for. It certainly is not identical with them, for it is always partly determined also by the historical situation of the interpreter and hence by the totality of the objective course of history... hence the interpreter can, and must, often understand more than he [the author of the text]. But this is of fundamental importance. Not occasionally only, but always, the meaning of a text goes beyond its author. That is why understanding is not merely reproductive but always a productive attitude as well (Gadamer, 1975, pp.263-264).

It follows then that the successful interpretation of a historical text has a very important condition - the interpreter must be able to relate the text to his own situation. In this sense the process of interpretation is also a process of self-understanding, for in the act of interpretation we can never separate ourselves entirely from our past or from our own beliefs and prejudices. It is by entering into creative dialogue with these beliefs

and prejudices, be they good or bad, that we learn to understand the text that we study and the historical situation it portrays.

Gadamer's view of hermeneutics gives encouraging support to one of the major methodological principles underlying in this dissertation. We have already argued that from the historiographical viewpoint it is legitimate to distinguish the self as critical observer from the self as historical actor. On Gadamer's authority it is also legitimate to envisage a context in which the two selves can be rejoined - the fusion of horizons between the self as author and the self as interpreter. But a successful fusion of horizons between the two selves presupposes that there is a separation between them to begin with - which is something that is borne out by the experience of writing this dissertation. The writer discovered that in some ways the self as interpreter seems to be a different entity from the self as actor and that it is not always easy for the former to understand or even sympathise with the latter's actions. For this to happen it is necessary that there be a certain passage of time between the two selves, which permits a person to reflect in a meaningful way on his own experience. In this manner one discovers that the movement of history and one's own changing situation can bring new aspects of meaning and cast former events in a new light.

The Healing of Memories

The act of writing history is also an act of remembrance, either group or individual. Evoking memories of the past can sometimes be a difficult and indeed dangerous task, for memory is the vessel which carries within it our sense of our own identity. A person who loses his memory is a person who no longer knows who he is or whence he came. If, then, for any reason the calling up of memories brings with it a threat to our own sense of identity, the result will be painful if not traumatic. We will tend to respond by either rejecting the memory altogether or else by accepting it in a spirit of anger or despair. Neither response is appropriate to our well-being or to our growth of self-awareness, for hurtful memories must first be healed if we are to live with them and profit by them. If they are

not healed, they will hold us prisoner to our past in a way that limits our understanding and appreciation of our human condition.

In Ireland today, in the very important process of reconciliation between North and South, we are becoming increasingly aware of the need for the healing of memories. We are faced with what often seems like an insuperable problem in the current conflict in Northern Ireland, where people seem trapped in mutually antagonistic and unforgiving attitudes. These attitudes in turn are fed by bitter memories, both individual and group, of a turbulent and violent past. Yet we are often reminded of and sometimes heartened by the fact that a long history of strife is not unique to Ireland; other peoples have experienced similar turmoil, but have been able to effect a measure of reconciliation. When such reconciliation happens, it is usually because of the courage to face the past together and to accept responsibility for both the guilt and the hurt inherent in the memories that are called up. In this context reconciliation is often experienced as a liberating force which confirms the truth of the old Hassidic saying: "Forgetting prolongs captivity; remembering is the secret of reconciliation".

The ultimate reason for writing this dissertation is to effect a reconciliation. This work of reconciliation has two levels - intra-personal and inter-personal. The first relates to the writer's own need to come to terms with himself through an examination of the past in which he was an actor. The second concerns the attempt to bring about a deeper understanding and appreciation of the roles played by other actors in the story. Both exercises are fraught with a certain degree of risk - for the writer himself and for the others involved - and it is important therefore that an effort be made to clarify what the writer's intentions have been.

André Gorz in a striking critique of his own life felt so alienated from himself that he referred to himself as a "traitor". The act of writing his autobiography, however, seems to have had a healing and integrating effect, for in the last pages the reader senses a certain harmony emerging between the protagonist and the narrator. By the end of the book, Gorz,

who up to then had usually referred to himself in the third person, was able not only to say “This is I”, but also to use the first person plural in identifying himself with other actors in his own story - “not to bow humbly beneath their verdict, not to make myself their instrument but to play according to the rules that we have in common and in the determination of which it must be possible for a dialogue to get under way - while waiting for something better” (Gorz. 1960, p.304).

It is in this sense that the writing of this dissertation is an act of reconciliation; it is the writer’s attempt to come to terms with his own past by examining it critically, taking responsibility for the dark as well as the bright sides and looking for the points of continuity between past and present - a historical and psychological continuity that will allow a going forward into the future.

A word should be said about the way in which the dissertation deals with the other actors in the story. The story is basically that of a curriculum unit often marked with controversy. Many of the people involved often strongly disagreed with the writer’s position and it would be no service to them or to the truth to try to hide this fact or to gloss over it in a bland manner. The account given in these pages, like every historical account, is a particular interpretation of what happened. Other versions are also possible and this dissertation will have been worthwhile if it succeeds in eliciting some of these. To achieve this the writer sent copies of relevant sections and chapters of the dissertation to 29 people who were involved as actors in the story. Of these, 24 responded either orally or in writing (see Appendix 1). The entire process took six months and in some cases there were lengthy meetings between the writer and individual respondents. In each case the following rule was applied. Where the respondent registered a fundamental disagreement with an item of substance and where the writer accepted this, a corresponding change was incorporated into the text. Where the writer did not agree with the respondent’s point of view, this fact was recorded either as a note to the text or as an appendix.

Finally, the writer would like to acknowledge the great debt he owes to those who for one reason or another have disagreed with him. T.S. Eliot once remarked that a person could count himself happy if at the right time in his life he met the right kind of enemy to challenge his ideas and confirm him in his purpose (Eliot, 1962, p.59). This process, however, can be painful and the act of recalling it equally so. It is important, therefore, to be able to remember without bitterness, either towards oneself or others. In this context the writer would like to make his own the words R. G. Collingwood wrote in the preface to his autobiography:

I have written candidly, at times disapprovingly, about men whom I admire and love. If any of these should resent what I have written, I wish him to know that my rule in writing books is never to name a man except "honoris causa", and that naming anyone personally known to me is my way of thanking him for what I owe to his friendship or his teaching or his example, or all three (Collingwood, 1939, p.vii).

PROLOGUE

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CHAPTER 1

THE ORIGINS OF THE CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT UNIT AND THE COMPREHENSIVE IDEAL

Cherishing all the Children of the Nation

The historical context of the Curriculum Development Unit goes back over seventy years to the time when the Irish State was founded. In Ireland, curiously enough, we do not have an independence day; we never celebrate the event for which so many generations of our people eagerly strove. It would seem that for us national independence is a strangely unsatisfactory affair which could almost be described as a case of unfinished business. Some Irish people would even question the validity of independence - whether it was worth the effort of winning or whether indeed it was ever achieved in reality, given our dependence on Britain and in recent years the European Community. But to adopt such an attitude is to fly in the face of the facts; whether we like it or not we are an independent nation of seventy years standing and we have our own destiny in our hands, and that includes the education of our young.

The Irish State has had two written constitutions to guide it on its way and the present one, which dates from 1937, has important things to say about education. Some people would argue, however, that the real foundation stone of the State is not the constitution at all but rather the Proclamation of the 1916 Rising, a short emotive document which was drawn up by the rebel leaders and proclaimed for the first time from the steps of the General Post Office in Dublin, the headquarters of the rebellion. The 1916 Proclamation had little enough to say about education but in that little space it made a very important statement:

The Republic guarantees religious and civil liberty, equal rights and equal opportunities to all its citizens, and declares its resolve to pursue the happiness and prosperity of the whole nation and of all its parts, cherishing all the children of the nation equally... (Edwards, 1977, p. 281).

Thus was equality of educational opportunity enshrined in the ideals of the founding fathers of the Irish State. Three years later the Democratic Programme adopted by Dáil Eireann, the newly elected national parliament, reaffirmed this commitment:

It shall be the first duty of the Government of the Republic to make provision for the physical, mental and spiritual well-being of the children, to secure that no child shall suffer hunger or cold from lack of food, clothing or shelter, but that all shall be provided with the means and facilities requisite for their proper education and training as citizens of a free and Gaelic Ireland (Lyons, 1971, p. 402).

The achievement of equality of educational opportunity in the new State, however, was disappointingly slow. Despite the assurance of Eoin MacNeill, the first Minister for Education, that there would be “an educational highway” for all pupils, the educational system during the four decades following independence remained basically elitist (Ó Buachalla, 1988, pp. 356-364). Only a fraction of the age cohort received post-primary education while higher education remained the preserve of a minority. “For ninety per cent of the people”, de Valera had to admit in 1940, “the primary school is the only education” (Ibid., p. 358). A cautious Government combined with a conservative Church made for minimal intervention not only in educational matters but in the entire social sphere. The new State, now that it had achieved political independence, seemed content with the *status quo*. The social revolution implied in the ideals of the founding fathers was forgotten in the preoccupation with stability and continuity. In the Ireland after independence, as Professor Patrick Lynch observed, “there was little use for idealism and less scope for utopianism” (Lynch, 1966, p.53).

Equality of educational opportunity, in so far as it existed at all, was put into practice in the new State through an educational system that leant heavily on structures which had been laid down well before the achieving

of independence. The country possessed a national system of primary schools which had been founded in the first half of the nineteenth century, and a denominational system of private secondary schools which on the Catholic side had largely been developed by religious congregations of men and women founded in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries to educate mainly the Irish poor. In the early years of the new State, the majority of Irish people were still poor and largely dependent on the land. The people had a traditional regard for education and saw it as a means of bettering their lot, the door that opened the way to respectable white-collar jobs, such as the civil service, the banks and the teaching profession.

The system in general had a pronounced academic bias and this was only partially corrected by the establishment of a vocational sector in 1930. Even today, some sixty years after building the first vocational schools, two-thirds of Irish second level students attend the academically oriented secondary grammar schools. Within its own limitations, however, the system was generally reckoned to be meritocratic. It guaranteed a straight-forward no-nonsense type of education, which enabled every boy or girl no matter what their background to advance in the world - provided of course they were reasonably clever and prepared to work hard.

Up to the beginning of the 1960s the Irish educational system looked as if it would last for ever. It had been likened by one of its ministers to a plumbing system in which the minister himself was “a kind of dungaree man”, the plumber who “will take the knock out of the pipes and will link up everything” (O’Connor, 1986, p.1). In 1962 the Council of Education, a high-powered body of people from every quarter of Irish educational life, drew up a comprehensive report on the Irish system (Department of Education, 1962). Such a body, one would have thought, should have foreseen whatever changes and adjustments the system needed, and it should also have been capable of charting the way forward and recommending new forms of policy and action. The Council in fact did nothing of the kind. It reviewed the *status quo* with unconcealed

satisfaction and foresaw no need for major change. Yet, within a year of the Council's reporting the Minister for Education, Dr P. J. Hillery, announced a package of educational reforms that were to herald the arrival of one of the most exciting periods of change in the educational history of the State (Hillery, 1963, pp. 119-126).

Looking back today over a period of nearly thirty years, one is inclined to wonder why it was that the Hillery reforms took the Irish educational world by surprise. Perhaps it is that educationalists are the last people to notice when the winds of change begin to blow, and in the 1960s, as we clearly see now, a strong wind of change was blowing. At the time it was easier to see evidence of this in areas such as trade, tourism, television and even religion than in the conservative world of education (Whyte, 1980, pp. 352-361). In the late 1950s the Government had adopted the First Programme for Economic Expansion, which laid the basis for a resurgence in economic activity in the years that followed. Irish people were leaving the land and moving into the towns and cities to take up jobs in the growing industrial and service areas. Irish values were changing because of factors like the impact of television, newly established in 1963, the relaxation of book and film censorship and increased contact with the outside world in trade and tourism. Traditional religious attitudes were being shaken by the events of the Second Vatican Council (1963-65) and Irish Catholicism, celebrated for its orthodoxy, began to discover that religion could be contingent as well as absolute.

The underlying rationale of the Hillery reforms was more pragmatic than ideological and as such was inspired by the practical leadership of Sean Lemass, who had succeeded de Valera as prime minister in 1959. Lemass is now generally credited with spear-heading the economic revival of the '60s and is usually portrayed as a hard-headed realist - the man who led the country into the modern world. "The historic task of this generation", he once remarked, "is to secure the economic foundation of independence" (Lee, 1979, p. 22). He was the first prime minister to see the vital connection between education and social and

economic advance and this led him to appoint some of his ablest ministers to the Department of Education. Lemass believed in giving his ministers freedom and scope and so encouraged them to take initiatives that fitted with his own overall aspiration - "the building of a modern state based on the principles of social justice and with a system of equitable taxation to finance social and economic advances" (Craft, 1973, p. 72).

In May 1963, Patrick Hillery, Lemass's first Minister for Education, launched the new era of Government educational planning. It was significant that he did this at a press conference and not in the Dáil, where his predecessors usually made important pronouncements. In the typically direct style cultivated by Lemass, the minister chose to give his message straight to the people, not bothering to consult beforehand with the various interest groups involved. "I am launching the plan now," he said, "and the talking I am sure will come afterwards" (Randles, 1975, p. 119).

Much has been written about the Hillery reforms, and not all of the comment has been complimentary. Nobody, however, has ever questioned the significance of the measures for the future development of Irish education. The basis of the proposals was essentially two-fold: some form of post-primary education would be made available to all pupils and the curriculum they followed would be comprehensive in character. The first of these propositions was in fact already being put into practice and in this regard the minister was able to announce that participation rates at post-primary level had increased to the level of two-thirds of the age cohort. He was concerned, however, at the plight of the remaining third - "today's Third Estate whose voice, amid the babble of competing claims from the more privileged, has hitherto been scarcely heard" (Hillery, 1963, p. 122). To provide for the needs of these pupils, who lived mostly in areas which had neither a secondary or vocational school, he proposed building a new type of institution in Ireland - a comprehensive school. These schools were to be state schools - which in itself was a considerable innovation - and although few in number they

were to be the pathfinders of a new approach - a wide curriculum for all pupils with equal emphasis on the practical as well as the academic (Ibid., pp. 122-124).

The latter proposition - the provision of a comprehensive curriculum for all the nation's children - was probably the most significant aspect of the Hillery plan. This was certainly his own view of the matter, as he later revealed in one of his Dáil speeches (Randles, 1975, p. 169). Hillery was strongly critical of the existing dual system of secondary and vocational schools which, he said, were "being conducted as separate and distinct entities with no connecting link whatsoever between them" (Hillery, 1963, p. 122). He could have added what was commonly accepted by the public at large, that not only were the two systems operating in water-tight compartments but that one of them - the vocational sector - was regarded as socially and academically inferior. Evidence for this, if evidence were needed, came to light two years later with the publication of the celebrated OECD report, *Investment in Education*, which illustrated convincingly the nature and extent of the inequality between the two systems (Department of Education, 1965). This was why Hillery now proposed to close the gap between the two systems by reforming the existing curricular and examination structure at junior cycle so that all pupils, irrespective of the kind of school they attended, could follow a common curriculum leading to a common examination at about fifteen years.

George Colley, Hillery's successor as Minister for Education, reiterated the Government's allegiance to the comprehensive ideal. Colley's stance if anything was even more committed than Hillery's. He was passionately interested in education and from the time of his first election to the Dáil had made no secret of his ambition to become Minister for Education (O'Connor, 1986, p. 135). He wanted to raise the public consciousness of education so that it became a common talking point in people's lives. "More than anything else", he said, "I want parents - all parents - to take an active interest in the education of their children. I want education to be a live and important topic, not just on the rare

occasions when clerical and political figures clash, or when a minister for education comes to give an address but in the daily communications and intercourse of society”.¹

Colley's interest in the comprehensive ideal was evident from the many occasions he was prepared to talk about it in public. He was also the first minister to define it: “a system of post-primary education combining academic and technical subjects in a wide curriculum and offering to each pupil an education structured to his needs and interests, and providing specialist guidance and advice on the pupil's abilities and attitudes” (Colley, 1966a). Colley's great ambition was to inaugurate such a system in Ireland by persuading the secondary and vocational sectors to cooperate on a local basis in order to make available “a curriculum broad enough to serve the individual needs of all their students and thereby to provide the basis of a comprehensive system in each locality” (Colley, 1966b, p. 129). To accomplish this, he wrote directly to the individual school authorities throughout the country, asking them to come together to find common areas of cooperation.

Colley's request was in general well received. The timing of the appeal was propitious - the beginning of 1966, the year when the country was preparing to celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of the 1916 Rising. Cherishing all the nation's children equally was at last, it seemed, becoming a realisable aspiration. Colley regarded his own effort to bring about an integrated second level curriculum as the concrete realisation of Pearse's dream that in a free Ireland an Irish Minister for Education would succeed in uniting the warring elements of the system into a homogenous whole (Colley, 1966c).

Despite the universal good will, however, there were many obstacles in the way of implementing Colley's plan. There were barriers not only between the secondary and vocational schools but in many instances between the secondary schools themselves, even though these latter were largely in the hands of religious congregations. The barriers, nonetheless, might well have come down because the mid '60s were



pre-eminently the years of dialogue and ecumenism (Randles, 1975, pp. 195-196). However, the minister who had initiated the dialogue did not remain long enough in office to pursue it effectively. In July 1966, after only a year and three months as Minister for Education, Colley was transferred to another department.

Colley was succeeded by Donogh O'Malley, a man who has become something of a folk hero in Irish education. A senior official in the Department of Education at the time of O'Malley's arrival has left us the following engaging description of the new minister:

He had a reputation as a "hell-raiser", as being impetuous and as having little respect for convention, which blinded many to his ability and his deep concern and sympathy for the underdog. Senior civil servants are generally apprehensive when ministerial changes are announced. They know the outgoing Minister's policies and priorities and have adjusted to his pace; the new man may not have the same interests as his predecessor. From O'Malley we expected fast and furious action (O'Connor, 1986, p. 139).

O'Malley's advisers in the Department of Education had expected him to pursue Colley's policies on comprehensive reorganisation according to a plan of action which would culminate with the raising of the statutory school leaving age in 1970 - by which time a measure of free post-primary education for all would be introduced. O'Malley, however, opted to go his own way and although only a few months in office, announced to a startled and largely delighted public that from 1967 onwards free post-primary education would be available for all, accompanied by a scheme for free transport and free books (O'Connor, 1986, pp. 141-145).

O'Malley's free education scheme precipitated a sharp debate between the Department and the secondary schools but despite the accusation of one unfriendly critic that the minister had gone on "an egalitarian spree", most of the schools eventually opted to join the scheme (Randles, 1975,

pp. 275-276). O'Malley saw the scheme as the culminating point of the efforts of his two predecessors to secure equality of educational opportunity and he reiterated his loyalty to Colley's plan for the "dovetailing of the activities of the secondary and vocational school systems" (Ibid., p.243). However, he was not as patient as Colley in trying to woo the support of the religious authorities. He sometimes let his exasperation get the better of his judgement and on one occasion in the Senate he hit out at his critics with reckless abandon:

I know I am up against opposition and serious organised opposition, but they are not going to defeat me on this. I shall tell you further that I shall expose them and I shall expose their tactics on every available occasion whoever they are... Maybe some day I shall tell the tale and there is no better man to tell it. I shall pull no punches. Christian charity how are you (Ibid., p.262).

Personalities apart, there was another and perhaps more fundamental aspect to the clash between the minister and the Irish educational establishment. This was the issue of control: who was really in charge of the system? Up to the end of the '50s, as we have seen, the minister had been content to take a back-seat but from the '60s onwards this situation had begun to change as he and his Department had sought to take major initiatives. This had entailed the exercise of central power and an assertion of ministerial supremacy. As early as March 1964, Hillery had given a clear signal about this: "It is of course the function and duty of a Minister for Education to be captain of the ship and so have the vessel in good trim and see that all hands are at work" (O'Connor, 1986, p. 80).

It was in the context, then, of growing central control that the comprehensive idea was introduced into Ireland and although the actual number of state comprehensive schools was never intended to be large, it was assumed that in a centralised system their influence would rapidly spread. Similarly, the Department's desire to bring about a comprehensive curriculum through a unified secondary and vocational system seemed a feasible proposition in a system where central financial

control was increasingly in the minister's hands. Later events, however, were to test this proposition.

The CDVEC Comprehensive Initiative

The Irish system of education is not completely centralised. Its most significant concession to local involvement lies in the structure of vocational education committees (VECs) which under an act of parliament of 1930 are given authority to organise vocational and technical education for areas within the remit of the local county councils and county boroughs. It must be admitted, however, that the power of the VECs is largely curtailed because every major decision they take is subject to ministerial approval. They have, nonetheless, a measure of freedom in which to manoeuvre and this freedom can be exercised in a significant manner by a VEC that feels itself sufficiently strong and confident to go its own way. In the 1960s the most notable example of an independent-minded local authority in Irish education was the City of Dublin VEC (CDVEC), which was the largest in the country. The CDVEC, moreover, possessed a proud tradition of its own that went back well before the 1930 Act to the last quarter of the nineteenth century, and as befitting the dignity of a local educational authority in a capital city, it felt it had a right to be in the van of educational thinking, even if this sometimes led to sharp differences of opinion with the central authority, the Department of Education.

Throughout the 1960s the leadership of the CDVEC was in the hands of one of the most notable of its chief executive officers - Martin Gleeson, who had held the office since the 1940s and was now at the height of his career. Gleeson was a forceful, Churchillian personality who had powerful connections in both Church and State; he was reputed to be on friendly terms not only with Lemass but also with the Catholic Archbishop of Dublin, John Charles McQuaid, who was one of the most influential members of the Irish Hierarchy.² He had travelled widely and greatly admired some of his counterparts on the English educational scene at the time - CEOs like William Houghton in London, Alec Clegg

in Yorkshire and John Newsom in Hertfordshire. He was determined to show that a similar lead could be given by the CEO of Dublin City and in this he was highly successful. Under his direction the CDVEC's remit expanded to include some twenty second level schools, five colleges of technology, a youth and adult education service, and a school psychological and guidance service - the first of its kind in the country.

In 1966, the year the Department of Education opened its first comprehensive schools, the CDVEC launched its own initiative in comprehensive education. Whether the permission of the Department was ever obtained for the venture is open to some doubt. At best there may have been a gentleman's agreement between the two parties but at any rate the CDVEC seemed determined to show that it was not going to be outdone in its own commitment to the idea of comprehensive education. Two places were chosen as experimental areas - Ballyfermot and Clogher Road, Crumlin, both working class suburbs on the west side of the City - and in each area a new vocational school was designated as a pilot comprehensive school. The term "comprehensive school", however, was never officially used, probably in deference to the Department of Education, which reserved the title for its own three newly built comprehensive schools at Shannon, in the south-west, Carraroe, in the west, and Coote Hill in the north-west of the country. The Dublin comprehensive schools were known instead as "major regional schools".³

The term "major regional school" was itself significant. In comparison with the other Dublin vocational schools of the time or indeed with Irish post-primary schools in general, the new schools were intended to be large. It was expected that they would have an annual intake of 240 pupils with a total junior cycle enrolment of about 720 and their senior cycle enrolment, it was hoped, would increase this figure to something around a thousand - a big number by Irish standards.⁴ The question of school size was later to become something of a national controversy when the Department of Education promulgated its own views on the minimum number of pupils that any viable post-primary school should

have.

Although the CDVEC was committed to the idea of a large school, it also took the trouble to spell out the elements of a pastoral care system which would be needed to cope with large numbers. The large school should be broken down into smaller units, each under the control of an experienced teacher. The nomenclature of these units - whether they were to be called “houses” or “clans” - was unimportant. What mattered was the nature of the responsibility exercised by the teacher in charge which was akin to that of a headmaster in a smaller school:

The social behaviour and the general welfare of the members of the group are in his hands. It is his responsibility to build up a comprehensive record system of personal profiles for each student in his care and to interview as the occasion demands both parent and pupil. He is further charged with supervising and fostering various club and out-of-class activities. It should be noted in passing that these activities should be looked upon as an important part of the child’s education, not merely as diversions on the fringe of the school day. They form an exercise in personal initiative and in social development and provide an excellent opportunity for staff and students to get to know each other away from the more formal surroundings of the classroom. The success of these activities, particularly in areas where recreative facilities for young people are scanty, could be one of the finest achievements of the major regional school.⁵

The most important thing about the CDVEC’s comprehensive education initiative in Ballyfermot and Clogher Road was the curriculum the two schools offered. Up to this time the traditional curriculum in Irish vocational schools had been quite narrow with a strong emphasis on the practical subjects. The usual goal of the schools was to place their students in apprenticeships and in service and secretarial jobs. The students, however, could never aspire to entering the universities or the professions. The Hillery Reforms, as we have seen, changed all this and

in the second half of the 1960s the vocational schools for the first time in their history were preparing students for the public examinations hitherto reserved for the secondary academic schools. The CDVEC comprehensive schools went further. They offered a wide choice from a curriculum which included up to seventeen subjects. They were able to do this because of the size and variety of their teaching staffs, their generous teacher/pupil ratio and their wide range of facilities and equipment. The two schools were indeed the pride of the CDVEC and were launched like flagships to lead the rest of the metropolitan schools into the exciting years that appeared to lie ahead.⁶

There was one area, however, in which both Ballyfermot and Clogher Road fell short of what purists would have regarded as the full comprehensive ideal: each was a boys' school only. Attitudes to co-education in Ireland had been greatly influenced by the teaching of the Catholic Church on the subject, as exemplified especially in the papal encyclical of Pius XI, *The Christian Education of Youth*, where the practice had been roundly condemned as "a confusion of mind which cannot distinguish between a legitimate association of human beings and a promiscuous herding together of males and females on a completely equal footing" (Pius XI, 1929, p. 32). Co-education was tolerated in Ireland only where the smallness of a particular catchment area made it difficult to build separate schools for boys and girls. It was for this reason that the building of a number of co-educational vocational schools in rural areas in the 1930s had drawn a sharp clerical reproof from the *Irish Ecclesiastical Record*: "But no economic reason could justify the close association of boys and girls in schools during the period of adolescence. It is a form of naturalism that is not tolerated even in Nazi Germany" (Brenan, 1941, p. 127).

By the 1960s, however, some of the opposition to co-education had abated somewhat and the Department of Education had succeeded, albeit with some difficulty, in persuading the Catholic Hierarchy to support the building of the State's comprehensive schools which were also intended to be co-educational (O'Connor, 1986, pp. 95-96). Dublin, however, was

different, where Archbishop McQuaid's strong line on the matter had given the practice of single sex education the force of an unwritten law. In 1946 the CDVEC had prudently resolved to adopt a policy of building separate schools for boys and girls - a resolution which had been rewarded by a strong measure of episcopal approval. "I do not praise that resolution merely for reasons of moral discipline", the Archbishop told the CDVEC, "I consider it a marked advance in your educational practice and I feel sure that the years will amply justify the wisdom of respecting the differentiation that is grounded in the diverse but complementary natures of the boy and the girl" (McQuaid, 1946).

The Ballyfermot and Clogher Road schools interpreted their comprehensive brief primarily in terms of developing the concept of the neighbourhood school. Both neighbourhoods were depressed and lacked many of the facilities found in middle class areas in other parts of the city. The two schools tried to compensate for this by offering as many extra curricular activities as possible - dance, drama, music, hobbies, debates and even study facilities in the evening. This placed a considerable burden on the teaching staffs but during the first year of the experiment the staffs of both schools were enthusiastic and fired almost with a missionary zeal. This missionary spirit is evident in a brochure produced by one of the schools at the time:

To make the comprehensive idea a success calls for a spirit of adventure and a willingness to work, sometimes far beyond the normal call of duty. There is no room in an enterprise of this kind for the cynic or the sceptic. What is needed is the pioneering spirit - the person who is ready to give of his best; to try and go on trying until success crowns his efforts. Success when it does come cannot be claimed for one individual more than another. All the staff are involved. All must work together as a team⁷ and stay as a team through success and failure alike.

The second year of the CDVEC comprehensive experiment was to bring a different story. By this time unfavourable comparisons regarding

salary and status were being made by the staffs of Ballyfermot and Clogher Road with the teachers in the Department's three official comprehensive schools. The fact that the two Dublin schools were denied official recognition by the Department was a cause of rancour; what rankled even more was the payment of a special allowance to teachers in the state comprehensive schools. Matters came to a head when the Dublin teachers began a "work-to-rule" - which meant in effect that all extra-curricular activities ceased. It also meant, as often happens in situations of "work-to-rule", that less work was in fact done than would be expected in normal circumstances in the traditional vocational school. Morale in both schools rapidly deteriorated, so much so indeed that the CDVEC experiment in comprehensive education showed every sign of disintegrating within less than two years of being inaugurated.⁸

Throughout the school year 1967/68, both Ballyfermot and Clogher Road were in a state of crisis. The main reason for this crisis was afterwards stated by the two principals to have been largely a difficulty in communication:

As events turned out the problems exceeded the progress but this was probably due to the fact that the basic concept underlying the function of the two schools - the idea of their being experimental and pilot ventures - was not sufficiently spelt out. Consequently the two Principals concerned often found themselves in equivocal situations vis-a-vis their own staffs and even sometimes vis-a-vis Departmental officials. The question was often asked and not always answered - what is a major regional school and what is so special about it to make it different from other regional schools?⁹

This view was probably an oversimplification. It was not just a question of spelling out the underlying concept of the CDVEC's comprehensive experiment; there was also a fundamental ambivalence in the nature of the experiment itself. Were Ballyfermot and Clogher Road really comprehensive schools, comparable to those officially launched by the Department of Education? According to the CDVEC the answer was

“yes” but the Department, because it chose to ignore the very existence of the experiment, seemed to take the opposite point of view.

The school year 1968/69, the third year of the experiment, was to prove crucial. The principals of Ballyfermot and Clogher Road now decided on a policy of retrenchment. All overt allusions to implementing a comprehensive plan were abandoned and instead a policy of “normalisation” was followed; henceforth the two schools were to be regarded as no different from any other vocational school in Dublin city. No special privileges were sought and the schools were to work out their salvation as ordinary run-of-the-mill vocational schools trying to serve the needs of their respective areas. From now on also there was in practice less contact between the two schools. Originally they had been launched as a joint experiment with a brief to maintain close liaison with one another. In future, however, each school was to travel its own road.

Ballyfermot Vocational School

In Ballyfermot, the school year 1969/70 marked a fresh beginning. The principal by now realised that the CDVEC initiative in comprehensive education was heading for failure. The major difficulty was that the experiment lacked official status; it compared unfavourably with the prestige currently enjoyed by the state comprehensive schools. He resolved therefore that his school should not rely on any external designation, official or otherwise. It would generate instead its own ethos and rationale, based on its own assessment of the needs it should serve and the role it should play.

The principal had in his own mind a broad aim for his school - an aim which he borrowed from the Second Vatican Council's *Declaration on Christian Education* (Abbot, 1966, p.643). The aim of a school, according to this view, should be to cultivate the intellect with unremitting attention; to ripen the capacity for right judgement; to provide an introduction into the cultural heritage won by past generations; to promote a sense of values; to prepare for working life; to

create friendly contacts between students of diverse temperament and background, and so foster among them a willingness to understand one another; and finally to be a centre of activity which would engage the joint participation of families and teachers, and also the various cultural, civic and religious groups of society.¹⁰

In order to put this aim into practice, the principal set about attracting to his staff teachers who were talented, imaginative and ready to experiment. In his staffing policy he was helped by two factors. Firstly, the school was rapidly expanding and this provided the opportunity to recruit new staff. The second factor was crucial. The authorities of the CDVEC fully endorsed the principal's staffing policy by allowing him wide scope in recruiting teachers of his own choice and by permitting a generous teacher-pupil ratio. Ballyfermot very quickly acquired the reputation of being a liberal, progressive school and this in turn attracted innovative teachers, several of whom came from abroad.

The staff mix in Ballyfermot was unusual and indeed sometimes explosive. However, it produced remarkable results, especially in the short period from 1969 to 1973. The school pioneered adventure education in Ireland. It had a purpose-built educational drama unit with a teacher who wanted to explore the possibilities of drama to a point unheard of in Irish schools. The school also had remedial and enrichment groups and a pastoral care system long before these things became the practice in Ireland. The physical education department was one of the largest and most comprehensive in the country and catered not only for games, athletics and gymnastics but also for music and movement. Creative work in art and craft flourished, and language teaching in English, French and German was fresh and imaginative.

The management structure in the school was unusual. The principal at the time of his appointment was only thirty-two years old and had never before held a senior administrative post in a school. His youth and inexperience were to some extent compensated by the fact that his deputy principal, Jim Shortall, was an older man and more versed in the

complexities of educational administration. The two were to become close friends and succeeded in forming a partnership in which they complemented each other. Thus the school became a place where ideas flourished within a strong framework of good order and traditional discipline.

Ballyfermot was notable for the on-going debate on education it fostered among the staff. Each new school session began with an entire week devoted to inservice planning and discussion and this process continued throughout the year. In this way a consensus view began to emerge about what the school stood for and this view in turn influenced both students and parents.¹¹ By the early '70s Ballyfermot was in a position to promulgate a clear and simple statement of its policy:

The educational policy of the school may be summed up thus: it is comprehensive in organisation and community in orientation. When we say we are a comprehensive school we mean: (a) we do not select our intake (b) we provide a wide variety of subjects on the curriculum (c) we maintain a balance between the academic and the practical (d) we do not stream the students. By streaming we mean the grouping of students into permanent classes according to general ability. A policy of non-streaming forces us to experiment with other methods of grouping such as mixed ability or setting by subjects.

The school is community oriented in the following ways: (a) a conscious policy is being followed to extend the school's formal education classes into more generalised community education activities (b) deliberate links are being forged with the local community association (c) a deliberate policy is being followed of making the school curriculum more relevant to the community background.¹²

The school primarily considered itself to be a caring community and not merely a place of instruction. This was an idealistic stance to take and one moreover that put a heavy burden on the teachers. The principal was

well aware of this but was nonetheless uncompromising in defining the implications of the caring approach:

It implies the recognition of a basic fact that a child's schooling can be meaningless unless the school takes into account all the factors in the child's environment. And if there are factors in the child's environment which militate against his education the school must clearly seek to redress the balance - for instance there is little point in a teacher setting traditional homework where a child has neither the capacity to study on his own nor the facilities to do it even if he wished. The caring school must then undertake to teach the child how to study and then it must provide him with a room in which to do this. A caring school because of its concerns for the child as a person inevitably becomes involved in problems that reach deep into the life of the family - and if the family is under stress, then the school will seek in every way possible to create within itself an atmosphere where the child will feel secure and respected as a person.¹³

The ethos of the school was characterised by a fundamental respect for persons. This was the perception of at least one of the students, John Hammond, who afterwards went on to become a teacher himself.¹⁴ This ethos was also enshrined in the "Guide to Staff", a handbook written by the principal and distributed to all the teachers - from which the following extract is taken:

Our school should be above all else characterised by mutual respect for one another - student for teacher, teacher for student, student for student and teacher for teacher (not forgetting the other members of the school community, the administrative staff and the maintenance staff). If every member of the school community is accorded the basic respect which is due to him as a human being and which is consonant with his role in the school then the school will face the tensions of change with equilibrium and harmony. It will be a school characterised by order, without which learning is impossible, but an order achieved with dignity and

consideration. There will be no need for a multiplicity of rules. If the members of the school community are not agreed about their aims and objectives and if there is no mutual respect, then no amount of rules and regulations will mend the cracks in the edifice.¹⁵

No account of the Ballyfermot experience would be complete without mentioning the great interest the school took in student grouping procedures. This interest dated from 1966 when, as part of the school's comprehensive brief, streaming by ability - the usual way of grouping students in Irish post-primary schools - was replaced by subject setting. This was an arrangement whereby all the first year students were timetabled in units of three simultaneous classes for as many subjects as possible on the curriculum. After an initial period of observation, the students were then to be placed in new groups or "sets" for each subject. In theory this allowed for a more flexible grouping arrangement than was possible in the traditional streamed classes. For instance in a setting arrangement it was possible for the same student to be in an A-group for maths, a B-group for English and a C-group for science.¹⁶

In practice the setting arrangement in Ballyfermot was a failure. Despite the skill and ingenuity exercised in drawing up a setting timetable the teachers were not inclined to put it into effect. In hindsight it would be unfair to blame them. To have operated a setting arrangement would have required far more experience in joint planning and consultation than was the case in the '60s. It would also have entailed a well thought-out teacher support programme and this was unheard of at the time.

During the school year 1969/70, the school changed its grouping policy to that known as "rough grained streaming" or "banding". The first year intake was divided into three broad bands - above average, average and below average - and within these bands the students were grouped into mixed ability classes. This system worked reasonably well. Its chief merit was that it sorted the students into three manageable groups with regard to examination expectations. It had, however, a serious

draw-back: it was a system that owed its *raison d'etre* more to teacher convenience than to any inherent need of the students themselves. Some staff members - including the principal - were of the opinion that a fairer and more appropriate grouping system would be to arrange all the first year pupils into classes of mixed ability and to maintain that arrangement for a complete year. The first year would then become a genuine foundation and observation year and no long-term decisions about the pupil's academic future would be made until the end of the year. This policy would also fit better with the idea of comprehensive education which was advocated in the Hillery reforms of 1963.

The underlying rationale of the proposed new arrangement for first years, like much of the school's general policy, was stated in idealistic terms:

The great challenge before us in Ballyfermot is to create a learning situation which will cater more fully for the needs of our students. Everybody knows that the students are working well below their potential, that the drop out rate is high, and that motivation is low. Everybody is familiar with the environmental factors which militate against the educational progress of our students. But to say all this in no way excuses us from the obligation of finding new approaches, new solutions to the problems which face us. And the answer to our problems does not lie in school organization as such, or even in curriculum change as such. We must be prepared to face something much more fundamental - a reappraisal of the learning situation itself. We must be prepared to examine traditional aims and methods and to change them radically if necessary. This is a formidable task and should be undertaken first in a controlled situation by a team of teachers working closely in concert with one another. Considerable flexibility and room to experiment would be essential to such an undertaking. Essential also would be the need for continuous dialogue among the teachers taking part. Conditions most favourable to such an educational venture now exist in the first year programme.¹⁷

At the beginning of the school year 1970/71 the new first year plan was put into practice in Ballyfermot. In order to demonstrate publicly that the basis of the grouping arrangements was genuine mixed ability and not a camouflaged streaming process the pupils were put into classes according to alphabetical order. Strictly speaking this was not a mixed ability arrangement at all but more akin to random grouping. The principal decided on the arrangement, however, because he was aware of the powerful influence of teacher expectations:

Children tend to live up to the expectations of their teachers. We cannot afford to have many assumptions about the capabilities and talents of the young students who are coming to us for the first time. Attempts, however well intentioned, to sort them into pre-arranged categories often have sad and lasting effects on their morale and self respect. And what of the categories we use? Whatever labels are given them they always amount to the same four-fold distinctions: students who will pass their external exams, those who will not, those who probably will and those who probably will not. If we make the touchstone of a student's success in our school coincide with his examination prospects, small wonder that many of our students get discouraged quite early in their courses and eventually drop out altogether. Many of our students have poor examination prospects from the outset; to categorise them accordingly is the equivalent of branding them publicly as failures.¹⁸

Besides the grouping arrangement, there were two other factors which distinguished the new first year plan in Ballyfermot. All the first year students were housed separately from the rest of the school - this was possible because the school was built on two sites separated by a main road. Secondly, and more significantly, the first year classes for the most part were taught by teachers whose sole commitment was to the first year programme. For practical purposes the first year students now had their own school, their own staff and an assistant principal, Noel Halpin,

charged with their special care.

The first year plan lasted for three years, from 1970 to 1973. It has to be said that there were many things about it which made for tension and even dissension in the overall running of the school, its most obvious fault being that it tended to polarise the staff. On the one hand there were the first year teachers, all of whom had volunteered for the assignment and were in favour of a liberal child-centred approach in line with the new primary school curriculum which had recently been adopted nationally. On the other hand there were the teachers in the main part of the school who wanted a more institutional, examination-oriented and, in their view, realistic approach. Tension between both groups was inevitable and sometimes acute.

The plan had other aspects to it, however, which were more positive and rewarding. It made for an atmosphere in which all the pupils entering the school for the first time were accepted for what they were and not for their potential in terms of examination success.¹⁹ It created a climate of freedom and experiment where teachers were not afraid to try new approaches and afterwards to discuss frankly among themselves the reasons for success or failure as the case might be. It generated, too, an exciting momentum for innovation: on occasion the normal timetable was suspended entirely and a project week was inaugurated instead, when the pupils went to special interest groups such as toy-making for a local children's hospital, publishing a school bulletin, or making a radio programme for live transmission.

The testing point for the plan came at the end of the first year of its existence when the teachers were torn between repeating the programme with a new intake or remaining with their pupils throughout the ensuing second and third years. They opted eventually for the former but the choice was a painful one - a testimony to the close bonds that had grown up between teachers and pupils. In the principal's mind the first year plan would have eventually culminated in a three tier arrangement - a junior, middle and senior school, each in a separate building and each

developing its own ethos. As things turned out, however, the senior school was not built until a decade later and by that time the circumstances of the school had changed and the principal had departed.

Ballyfermot and the Community School Idea

The aspect of the school which probably attracted most attention was its involvement with the local community and an account of this even found its way into an OECD report, where the school was described as “a centre for community renewal and resurgence” (OECD, 1980, p. 34). As we have seen earlier in its statement of policy, there were three dimensions to the school’s community involvement - the extension of formal adult classes into more generalised community education activities, the forging of links with the local community association and the development of a community oriented curriculum.

Evening classes for adults have always been provided by vocational schools in Ireland but in the first three years of its existence Ballyfermot was prevented from holding any because of a dispute over payment between one of the teacher unions and the Department of Education. From 1969 onwards, however, enrolments in adult classes rapidly increased so that by 1972 the total number - both formal and informal - had reached the thousand mark.²⁰ But the most notable feature of the school’s adult provision was not the number involved but the variety of the groups it catered for. The traditional notion of adult education gave way to a wider concept which tried to embrace as many aspects of community living as possible and coupled with this an attempt was made to attract adults into the school by trying to create a relaxed and informal atmosphere. Various social activities such as visits to art exhibitions, concerts and week-end hikes were organised in an effort to help the different groups to meet each other. Classes were also encouraged to hold end-of-term parties. Thus the French classes held “an onion-soup evening”, the German classes went into town to enjoy German beer and music while the maths and Spanish classes combined for a flamenco session - this particular combination being explained by the fact that the

Spanish class was entirely female and the maths class largely male.²¹

Besides the formal classes, quite a lot of informal learning also took place through clubs and discussion groups. For instance the primary aim of the Stella Maris Ladies Club, which met in the school once a week, was recreational - a break from housework. As well as the usual chat and cup of tea the group often organised a more structured activity such as a crochet demonstration or a film and discussion on alcoholism or drugs. Another example of an informal group, this time with a very different aim, was a mixed group of teenagers following the Schools Council Humanities Project with a teacher who had undergone special training in the methodology of the project in England.²²

The school was also committed to assisting youth activities and a number of local youth groups such as St. Monica's Girls Club, the Chardinians Youth Group and the Panthers (Ballyfermot's version of Hells Angels) were given meeting facilities. The school possessed two gymnasiums and both were in constant use up to 10.00pm in providing training facilities for various sports. When it was found that the time from 5.30pm to 7.00pm was very often a slack period, an arrangement was made with some of the local street committees whereby children in the 10-14 year age group who were not receiving any physical education in their primary schools could come to a gymnasium.²³

To cater for the unattached youth in the area, an arts workshop was launched which met in the school four nights a week under the guidance of the drama teacher and eight voluntary helpers. The workshop provided facilities for self-expression through dance, drama, art and music for 30 children and was later extended into a young adults drama group and a film society. The workshop eventually acquired premises outside the school and went on to become a very successful community organisation.²⁴

The second dimension to the school's community policy was its involvement with the politics of local community development.

Community politics are often volatile and dramatic and during this period Ballyfermot was certainly no exception. Stimulated by a number of medical and social workers in the area, the local tenants' group had adopted a higher profile and renamed itself the Ballyfermot Community Association (BCA). Very soon the BCA found itself in conflict with the officers of Dublin Corporation over a series of issues that related to public planning in the area. The BCA was making a bid to be treated as a unit of local government in its own right and made astute use of the mass media to gain public sympathy for its cause.²⁵

The principal of the school decided to align himself closely with the BCA; he became a member of the council of the Association which now met regularly in his school. Potentially his situation was a difficult one: he was the principal of a local authority school while at the same time he sometimes found himself supporting a group which openly opposed the representatives of the same local authority. His dilemma was eased when he succeeded in appointing a member of his staff as community education organiser. This enabled him to distance himself somewhat from the politics of community development, while at the same time being fully informed and supportive of what was going on.

The third aspect of the school's community policy - the development of a community oriented curriculum - was perhaps the most difficult of the three to achieve in practice. The ideal was expressed by Liam Healy, the community education organiser on the school staff:

Here we have a paradox; by venturing out into the community and making contact with youth work, adult education and industry, the school is eventually forced to look at itself, its objectives and its curriculum. Close integration with the community generally leads on to a realisation that the very hub of school activity, the curriculum, should become community oriented. By this is meant, a curriculum relevant to the needs of the child in his local environment. The idea is that the students and the school should study the local area in greater and greater depth, see its problems and attempt to formulate solutions - the student perhaps through social work as part

of the school curriculum, the school through greater commitment to community development. Thus closer school-community relations lead to the school becoming a resource centre for the community while the local neighbourhood is increasingly being regarded as part of the educational facilities of the school.²⁶

Healy was prepared to put his theories to the test by developing a social and environmental studies course for first-year students, entitled “Dublin Today and Tomorrow”. The underlying theme of the course was “change” and this was reflected in the introduction to the course:

Look out the classroom window. Ballyfermot is changing. We can see a new road being built, new factories and an extension to a school. Look towards town. We can see new skyscraper blocks. Dublin is changing. We are caught up in the change. It affects us; can we also affect it? We shall study three areas of particular - importance of (a) where men live, (b) where they work, (c) where they take their leisure.²⁷

The course was activity-based with opportunities for the students to go out into their neighbourhood and into the nearby city to look at things, to meet people and to ask significant questions. Why were municipal housing estates being built in one part of the city rather than another? Why not move Dublin airport to let the city expand to the north? Why were 80% of the students’ parents working in town rather than in the local area? The enquiries conducted by the students were disciplined, their contacts with public officials were positive and friendly, and the comparisons they drew between their own and other areas, both neighbouring and distant, made them keenly aware of the amenities they themselves possessed or lacked. They became aware, too, of what could and could not be changed and most significantly of all they acquired some inkling of the part they themselves could play in bringing about change.²⁸

Healy's ideas have been given some prominence because he was a key figure in articulating the idea of a community-oriented curriculum. However, as John Hammond points out, practically all the teachers on the staff had a hand in the development of the concept in so far as they all tried to understand the background of their students and to reflect this understanding in the way they taught their respective subjects.²⁹

It is interesting to note that the school's commitment to community education was well ahead of official thinking at that time. The Department of Education's policy on the subject was first revealed in a document released in October 1970 - a document which also marked the latest stage in the Department's effort to create a unified post-primary school system. The Department now proposed to build community schools, which were seen "as resulting from the amalgamation of existing secondary and vocational schools or in city areas from the development of individual single schools instead of the traditional development of separate secondary and vocational schools" (Department of Education, 1970). These schools were in fact very similar to the comprehensive schools opened four years earlier; both were directly controlled by the state and both were of the same size and had the same comprehensive curriculum. It seems ironic, therefore, that a fresh title, "community schools", had to be found for the newcomers. In a sense the title itself was a distraction because as the editor of one of the national newspapers perceptively pointed out, the real issues involved had little enough to do with any of the basic ideas underlying community education:

Before discussion on the Department of Education's latest document gets under way it might be wise to remind ourselves that there are other issues in Irish education besides that of the control and ownership of schools...For a country which sets so much store by education, in fact we have done surprisingly little to work out a coherent philosophy of the subject (*Irish Times*, 12 November, 1970).

The Department's document on community schools was to plunge the Irish educational world into a bitter controversy. One of the historians of the period, Eileen Randles, saw in the document the emergence of a new pattern - a state system of community/comprehensive schools aimed at eventually replacing the existing secondary and vocational schools (Randles, 1975, p. 303). But this is probably arguing too much for the extent of the Department's ambitions. A more recent study by Noel Barber described the document as "a modest proposal" because the policy of amalgamation which it proposed was only intended to apply to schools with an enrolment of less than 400. Where schools had a higher enrolment they were deemed to be able to offer a comprehensive curriculum and so could remain as they were, either secondary or vocational (Barber, 1989, p. 60).

Whatever the Department's real mind on the issue may have been, there was no mistaking the strength of the reaction to their perceived intention. The prestigious Jesuit periodical, *Studies*, in a long critique of the community schools document, expressed the feeling of anger and hurt felt by most of the Catholic educational authorities who, no matter what assurances to the contrary the Department might give, were not going to believe in the Department's good intentions:

It is proposed now... to take away their schools from the teaching religious bodies which built up and developed the secondary school system of the country with but meagre, if latterly increasing, government assistance. This is the proposal, *pace* the Minister. (Troddyn, 1970, p. 339).

As the '70s progressed the positions taken on the community schools proposal became more entrenched and the original ideal of a unified comprehensive curriculum was lost in the institutional conflict which arose over the control of the new schools. There were other factors which also served to weaken the impact of the comprehensive initiative. In 1973 the Fianna Fáil Government, which had held office for sixteen years, fell from power and was replaced by an inter-party coalition. The new Minister for Education, Richard Burke, was decidedly less

enthusiastic about the comprehensive ideal than were his immediate predecessors and within the Department of Education itself support for comprehensive education began to weaken, especially when Sean O'Connor, who was one of its chief advocates, retired from the office of secretary in 1975.³⁰ The universities also were unsympathetic to the idea while among the religious and clerical authorities "there was little enthusiasm and much hostility" (Barber, 1989, p. 101).

We have to conclude, therefore, that the Department of Education's policy on comprehensive education produced very limited results. By 1987 there were only 59 comprehensive and community schools in the entire country with 11.6% of the total school-going population (Department of Education, 1988). In the early '60s the Department had initiated its comprehensive policy by trying to unify a dual system of schools but by the mid '80s this system had become even more divided. The country now possessed three kinds of post-primary school with a clear hierarchical order between them - first, the privately owned secondary schools, second, the publicly owned comprehensive/community schools and last, the vocational schools (Barber, 1989, p. 86).

The CDVEC's comprehensive experiment cannot be said to have been any more successful than that of the Department of Education. Started in virtual isolation from the Department's scheme, it went its own way and was confined to the efforts of only two schools. Like the Department's scheme, lack of continuity and follow-up made progress very difficult. The '70s were to see the departure from the CDVEC of key figures associated with the introduction of the idea; Gleeson retired from the CEO's post and Tom McCarthy, one of his chief advisers and generally believed to have been the architect of the comprehensive plan, left the service. Furthermore, the preoccupation of the CDVEC throughout the '70s centred more and more on the successful implementation of the courses leading to the Intermediate and Leaving Certificate examinations - the two public examinations which had been introduced in the '60s to give the VEC system parity of esteem with the secondary schools. In

these circumstances the intentions and expectations surrounding the comprehensive initiative were largely forgotten.

In Ballyfermot, the principal of the vocational school tried for a while to pursue the idea advocated by Colley in 1966 - of securing voluntary cooperation among all the post-primary schools in the area. To this end he established an *ad hoc* committee of the local head teachers but in practice nothing concrete was ever achieved. By 1972, his main interest had begun to focus on the possibility of curricular reform through the efforts of a consortium of like-minded schools working in conjunction with a university department of education. He had now come to realize that there were limits to what any one school could achieve on its own - no matter how progressive its policy or talented its staff. The need for a support structure for innovative teachers was one of the chief lessons he had learnt from the experience of his own school.

By 1972 too, the principal had become aware of the curriculum development movement in countries like the United States, Sweden and Britain and he was actively seeking a basis for launching a curriculum development project in Dublin - a project which would build on the Ballyfermot experience and involve a network of other interested schools. Such a widely based project, he felt, would serve a dual purpose. It would create a necessary support structure for teachers willing to innovate; it would also act as a base from which the centrally controlled examination system could be challenged. This was the genesis of what eventually became the Curriculum Development Unit and we shall look at its establishment in more detail in the following chapter.

CHAPTER 1

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CHAPTER 2

THE FOUNDING OF THE UNIT AND THE IDEA OF NETWORKING

A Challenge to the Central Control of the Curriculum

“Precisely the same textbooks are being read tonight in every secondary school and college in Ireland”. These words were written by Patrick Pearse in 1912, referring to the stranglehold of a rigid curriculum and examination system which obtained in the Ireland of his time (Pearse, 1912, p.353). Pearse had hard words to say about this system, which he described as a murder machine:

It is cold and mechanical, like the ruthlessness of an immensely powerful engine. A machine vast, complicated, with a multitude of far-reaching arms, with many ponderous presses, carrying out mysterious and long-drawn processes of shaping and moulding, is the true image of the Irish education system. It grinds night and day; it obeys immutable and predetermined laws; it is as devoid of understanding, of sympathy, of imagination, as is any other piece of machinery that performs an appointed task (Pearse, 1913, pp. 356-357).

Half a century later some of Pearse’s strictures could still be applied to the Irish educational system. In the early years of the State the newly established Department of Education had made a valiant effort to open up the curriculum by discontinuing set texts, but this practice had to be abandoned by 1940. Prescribed syllabi and predictable examinations were to dominate the Irish system for the next thirty years. In 1954 the Report of the Council of Education stated that in a democratic country examinations were absolutely essential and in 1966 T. J. McElligott, in his study of education in Ireland, concluded that, “the triumph of examinations would seem to be complete” (McElligott, 1966, pp. 69-74).

In September 1970, however, an event took place which showed that the examination system, if not beginning to crack, was at least showing signs of strain. A committee was established by Pádraig Faulkner, the Minister for Education, "to evaluate the present form and function of the Intermediate Certificate Examination and to advise on new types of public examinations" (ICE Committee, 1975, p.2). This committee was a prestigious one; it contained representatives from the major powers in Irish education and was chaired by an Assistant Secretary from the Department of Education, Sean O'Connor, who was fast making a name for himself as an unconventional and charismatic civil servant. (The chairmanship was later taken by Fr. Paul Andrews, a notable Jesuit educationalist.) The committee's terms of reference were wide: the aims, the role and the effects of the public examinations at the end of the junior cycle - the Intermediate and Group Certificate - were to be scrutinised (Ibid.). Clearly the traditional system was about to undergo a thorough review.

The setting up of the Intermediate Certificate Examination Committee - or the ICE Committee as it came to be called - was noted with interest by many educational bodies in the country and one of these was the Board of Studies of the CDVEC. The Board, which had been established as far back as February 1932 with a brief to give expert educational advice to the CDVEC, comprised the principals of the Dublin vocational schools and colleges and senior members of the CDVEC's administrative and advisory services. The Intermediate and Group Certificate were of fundamental interest to the members of the Board because for most of the students in the Dublin vocational schools, these examinations marked the terminal point of their formal educational careers. Any change in the examinations would bring corresponding changes in the curriculum and could not therefore be viewed lightly by the practically-minded principals of the Dublin schools. Furthermore, the Intermediate Certificate Examination itself was a comparative novelty in the vocational schools and the practice of allowing vocational school pupils to enter for it was a bare four years old. It would not have been surprising then had the principals

reacted cautiously to the possibility of changing the examination structure. For many of them, the Intermediate Certificate had long been a coveted prestige symbol, hitherto reserved for secondary schools alone; now that parity of esteem had been achieved it would seem wise not to tamper with the examination mechanism.

The Board of Studies, however, did a surprising thing. In November 1970 it appointed a sub-committee of six principals to look at the operation of the Intermediate and Group Certificate Examinations in vocational schools in Dublin City.¹ Appointing a sub-committee was not surprising; that was the usual way the Board came to grips with most of the problems that confronted it. What was surprising was the radical nature of the conclusions presented by this particular sub-committee. More surprising still was the fact that these conclusions were accepted by the Board, when they were presented to it the following May.²

In the opening sentences of its report, the subcommittee nailed its colours to the mast by declaring that a radical change in the Irish examination system was needed:

Any consideration of the Group Certificate or Intermediate Certificate examination cannot be divorced from a consideration of the curriculum which these examinations purport to assess. The influence of Group and Intermediate on the junior cycle curriculum of our schools is preponderant. Indeed, before any significant curricular change can be brought about, the present mode of examining would have to be altered.³

This did not mean that the sub-committee members were hostile to the idea of public examinations. They recognised that examinations had their uses provided they were kept firmly in their place. They could be powerful allies in the battle to improve the curriculum but they should never be allowed to dominate it. The curriculum came first and the examinations second and if the curriculum needed changing it should

not be beyond the bounds of ingenuity to devise a mode of examination appropriate to that change.⁴

The subcommittee next asked the question: why attempt to change the curriculum in the first place? This question was seen as largely academic since there were forces for change already at work - such as the knowledge explosion and the mass media. As the subcommittee pointed out:

We are no longer in a position to define the limits of any body of human knowledge. Still less are we in a position to impose upon our students with any degree of sureness the task of acquiring any specific body of subject matter. The disturbing thing is that much of what children learn in school today will be irrelevant before they reach adulthood.⁵

Curriculum change, then, was not an option but a necessity and it would happen whether educationalists wanted it or not. More learning was in fact taking place outside the classroom than inside it and consequently schools could no longer claim to be the sole providers of education. This presented an enormous challenge to educators and in this context the subcommittee quoted the words of Marshall McLuhan: "This challenge has destroyed the monopoly of the books as a teaching aid and cracked the very walls of the classroom so suddenly, we're confused, baffled" (McLuhan, 1968, p. 137).

In terms of curricular rhetoric there was nothing noteworthy about any of these statements. They were arguments which had been rehearsed many times by curriculum reformers in other countries and it is obvious that the subcommittee used them in its report to set the scene for a more pointed attack on certain aspects of the curriculum in Irish post-primary schools. "The present junior cycle curriculum", the subcommittee claimed, "has a deceptive and naive uniformity. It does not follow that because all children study the same things for the same

examinations that all in fact enjoy equality of educational opportunity".⁶ This, in the subcommittee's view, was the nub of the matter: the curriculum contained built-in biases which favoured some children at the expense of others. It also placed an undue emphasis on cognitive and literary skills as if these were the only means through which children could be educated.⁷

These were strong words and were written particularly with a view to the needs of the pupils who attended the Dublin City vocational schools, the majority of whom came from working class backgrounds. Many of these pupils were put at a disadvantage by the traditional curriculum because of its undue emphasis on literary skills. The subcommittee was at pains not to devalue the merit of such skills but it argued that they had been over-emphasised to the point of being accepted as the only valid pattern of education in Irish schools. There was a need to explore other media in education, such as music, drama, mime, dance, art, craft, film-making, photography and tape recording.⁸

In putting forward this argument, the subcommittee was conscious of two problems in particular which were manifesting themselves in the Dublin vocational schools - the remedial problem and the drop-out problem. Many pupils, in the subcommittee's view, were judged to be remedial because from the primary school upwards they had never enjoyed a curriculum suited to their needs. For the same reason many left school at the first available opportunity.⁹

When it came to making recommendations, the sub-committee was conscious of the need to loosen the inhibitions which the existing examinations placed on the curriculum. These inhibitions were four-fold:

- there was an undue emphasis on written at the expense of oral work;
- not enough credit was given to practical achievement such as

individual and group project work;

- the examinations themselves provided an unbalanced assessment, three years' work being assessed within a space of two to three hours;
- the examination syllabuses were sometimes unduly restrictive and not related to the needs of the students.¹⁰

In recommending a new approach to the curriculum and examinations, the subcommittee was plainly influenced by the work of the Schools Council in England and Wales and by the development of flexible modes of examining in the Certificate of Secondary Education (CSE) which had been introduced there. The subcommittee was impressed by the underlying principle of the Schools Council: that each school should have the fullest possible measure of responsibility for its own work, with its own curriculum and teaching methods, based on the needs of its own students and evolved by its own staff (Ministry of Education, 1964, p. 12). The subcommittee welcomed the approach of Mode 3 of the CSE which allowed a school under external moderation to devise and assess its own curriculum. A similar mode of examination could be developed in Ireland if the Department of Education supported the process.¹¹

The major recommendation of the subcommittee was that the CDVEC should take the initiative in establishing a curriculum planning group. Such a planning group would comprise not only the representatives of the Dublin vocational schools but would also have members from the universities, the Department of Education and even industry and commerce. The function of the group would be to initiate curriculum development projects at different levels and over varying lengths of time. The planning group would facilitate, coordinate and evaluate these projects, and in doing so would also relate them to the structure of the external examination system.¹²

We have given prominence to the report of the subcommittee because it had far-reaching results. The report was duly endorsed by the Board of Studies but like many similar reports it could have languished on a dusty shelf in some official's office and then been quietly forgotten. This, however, was not its fate. It started a train of events which more than a year later culminated in the establishment of a curriculum development unit, committed to implement the general recommendations which it had outlined.

The Unit's Sponsors

Three major educational institutions assisted at the birth of the Curriculum Development Unit - the CDVEC, Trinity College, Dublin and the Department of Education. These three institutions were very different from each other and had correspondingly different expectations of what a curriculum development unit should be. It is worthwhile examining these expectations a little further because they were to have important implications for the subsequent development of the Unit's work.

The curriculum concerns of the CDVEC, the Unit's principal sponsor, derived from the nature of the education it was obliged to provide under the terms of the 1930 Vocational Education Act. The Act places on every VEC the duty of providing two kinds of education - continuation and technical. Continuation education is defined by the Act as that which continues and supplements primary education and includes general and practical training for employment. Technical education is defined as education pertaining to various types of employment and includes science, art, music, physical training and agriculture (Vocational Education Act, 1930, p.19). The specific basis for a VEC's involvement in curriculum development is contained in Section 30 of the Act which calls for the establishment and maintenance of a suitable system of continuation education in each VEC area and for the progressive development of such a system. Furthermore, every VEC may from time to time prepare a scheme

setting forth its general policy in relation to continuation education and showing how it proposes to carry out this policy (Ibid., p.47). In other words every VEC is empowered under the Act to draw up a curriculum action plan with guidelines as to how it should be carried out.

The hallmark of the VEC system has always been a practical approach to learning which is never far removed from the realities of the workplace. Twelve years after the passing of the 1930 Act, the Department of Education issued an explanatory memorandum on the organisation of whole-time continuation courses in borough, urban and county areas. “The immediate purpose of continuation education”, according to this memorandum, “is the preparation of boys and girls who have to start work early in life for the occupations which are open to them” (Department of Education, 1942, p.3). Side by side with this emphasis on preparing for work, vocational schools have traditionally cultivated an active methodology which stresses initiative, autonomy and maturity. The Report of the Commission on Technical Education, which laid the basis for the 1930 Act, envisaged the future vocational school as “a school, not for vocational training, as the name would seem to imply, but as a secondary school with a very strong practical bias” (Commission on Technical Education, 1927, p.48). The Report was indeed quite specific about the kind of climate which should obtain in a typical vocational school:

The school atmosphere should be quite different from that of the primary school. The teaching should be on lines suited to adults rather than school children, the pupils being made conscious that it is in their interest to avail themselves of the services of the teacher and the responsibility for doing so rests on them rather than on him. They should feel that they are passing into a new educational environment where they are invited to begin to study afresh, with the idea of fitting themselves to earn their livelihood. The main object of the teacher should be to encourage observation, initiative and self-reliance rather than to impart information and to enforce rules (Ibid., p.46).

As well as this emphasis on a practical approach to learning, the vocational education sector has also tried to enshrine in its curriculum the traditional values of liberal education. In a letter to the chairman of the Commission on Technical Education, the Minister for Education at the time, John Marcus O'Sullivan, laid down a fundamental guiding principle for the future development of vocational education in Ireland:

In dealing with these and other problems of Technical Instruction, I feel confident that your Commission will handle them on the fundamental principle that Technical Instruction can have and should have as profound an educational and civic value as other forms of education, and that no matter how effective a system of Technical Education may be in the narrower vocational sense of the word, it will fail in one of its chief purposes if it does not uplift every man not merely as a member of his trade, but as a member of the community and as a member of the state (Ibid., p. xi).

The Unit's second sponsor, Trinity College, Dublin, presents a very different kind of image from that of the CDVEC. Established by royal charter in 1592, Trinity was to remain Ireland's only university until the mid- nineteenth century. Throughout most of its history, Trinity was strongly identified with English rule in Ireland and became a symbol of Protestant domination and foreign presence in the country. This image persisted even many years after the founding of the new Irish State. The custom of singing "God save the King" at high table in Trinity remained down to 1939, while the practice of drinking the King's health was only discontinued in 1945 (Donoghue, 1986 p.170).

It is scarcely surprising, then, that Trinity's position in the new Ireland was for many years an ambivalent one. As one unfriendly critic remarked: "Trinity was widely disliked: many people coming into their own in the new State saw the College as an alien institution, making much of its Elizabethan charter, its silver plate, and its

Protestant tradition” (Ibid., p.171). To add to Trinity’s discomfort, the Catholic bishops were reluctant to allow any of their flock to attend a university which they regarded as unsympathetic to the Catholic ethos. This view was articulated in unambiguous terms when John Charles McQuaid became Archbishop of Dublin: “Trinity College Dublin, as a non-Catholic University”, he declared, “has never been acceptable and is not now acceptable to Catholics” (Ó Buachalla, 1988 p.217).

Trinity, however, learned to accommodate itself to the realities of the new State, if for no other reason than the economics of survival. Ironically, it was de Valera, the standard bearer of republican separatism, who came to Trinity’s assistance after the College’s plea for money had been brusquely dismissed by the first Coalition Government (McDowell and Webb, 1982, pp. 478-80). By 1970 the attitude of the Catholic bishops had softened to the point of rescinding the ban on Catholic students attending the university. This change of heart, however, owed more to the pressure of events than any consideration of principle, for as one historian of the period points out “during the sixties, as access to higher education grew, many urban Catholics were unwilling to forego the convenience of a centre city campus. It was probably their rebellion rather than any actual or contemplated change in Trinity College which prompted the removal of the ban” (Ó Buachalla, 1988, p.218). One could almost say that it was not so much a question of Trinity going native as the natives coming to Trinity.

The Unit’s third sponsor was the Department of Education, the central authority for education in the country. The Department dates from June 1924 when it was established under the provisions of the Ministers and Secretaries Act of the new State - an arrangement which brought the hitherto separate sections of primary, secondary and technical education under the control of a single minister. Apart from this effort at administrative co-ordination, however, little else in the nature of radical educational reform was attempted. The new Government was largely contented with the structures it had inherited,

so much so indeed that according to one observer, “next to our pillar boxes, probably the most distinctive monument recalling English rule in Ireland is the system of education” (McElligott, 1955, p.27).

Perhaps the most significant characteristic of the Department of Education is the degree of control it exercises over the educational system. The basis for this was laid down in the early years of the State when the chief preoccupation was survival; the new State had first to negotiate a transfer of government from Britain and then to withstand the trauma of a civil war. In these circumstances it is not surprising that Government ministers relied very heavily on their senior civil servants, most of whom had been retained from the imperial regime. These civil servants were critical to the process of continuity, and in this regard the Department of Education was fortunate in the stability of tenure of its departmental heads - the first two served thirty years in office between them (O’Buachalla 1988, p.251). This emphasis on stability, however, leant itself very readily to a policy of conservatism, especially when the new Government found it necessary in the interests of survival to ally itself closely with the Catholic hierarchy - a body which was equally disposed towards maintaining the *status quo* (Akenson, 1975, p.28).

The basic conservatism of the Department of Education is underwritten by the terms of its own founding charter - the Ministers and Secretaries Act. Under this Act, the Minister is responsible to the Dáil for all the actions of his civil servants - a factor which considerably inhibits the amount of initiative or risk that individual officials may want to take upon themselves. John Harris, who served as special advisor to three ministers in the 1980s, has painted the following picture of the decision-making process in the Department:

It can often happen that a complex and problematic issue may emerge at a relatively low level in the chain of command. The normal procedure is to refer that issue to a higher level for decision. In fact, if the issue is particularly sensitive or difficult, or has political implications, it is likely to pass up the hierarchical

ladder, perhaps as far as the Minister's desk. There is a danger that, somewhere along the line, creative thinking about the issue may become stifled, fears may be voiced about creating a precedent, or anxiety expressed about being accused of taking risks or making mistakes. This may result in the soft or safe option being taken, regardless of the merits of the case for the alternative. One hopes that, when files come finally to rest on desks where decisions are actually taken, the decision makers will not be unduly confused by the fog which may have been created around the issue on the way up (Harris, 1989, p.11).

Such then is a brief description of the three institutions which agreed to sponsor the Unit. That three such different bodies should have come together at all to launch an educational innovation may be considered something in the nature of a minor miracle. However, it is easy to fall into the trap of regarding an institution solely as an impersonal entity; it also has a human face, and within it there are always some people who are prepared to take risks and initiatives. The initiative which led to the founding of the Unit was taken by a group of five people - two from the CDVEC and three from Trinity College. The two people from the CDVEC were the CEO, Jeremiah Sheehan and the principal of Ballyfermot, Anton Trant. The original idea of establishing the Unit was mainly the latter's. In Chapter 1 we examined some of the background which influenced his thinking and in this chapter we have seen how the report of the Board of Studies subcommittee had helped set the scene. It was Sheehan, however, who took the first steps in making the dream a reality because for practical purposes the key decisions lay in his hands.

In 1971 Sheehan had succeeded Gleeson as CEO of the CDVEC. His former post had been that of inspector in the Department of Education where he had played a prominent part in the Government's initiative to establish a number of regional technical colleges throughout the country. He had the reputation of being an able and energetic

administrator but for some people in the CDVEC his appointment had come as somewhat of a shock. The fact that the new CEO had been a former official of the Department raised some doubts as to his willingness to take an independent line in the tradition that Gleeson had established.

Sheehan, however, was to show that in many ways he was his own man. Since much of the impetus for physical expansion in the CDVEC had finished with Gleeson, the new CEO had to be prepared to invest some of his considerable energies into the development of ideas. Thus, when he was presented with the plan for a curriculum unit in Dublin City, he responded immediately with enthusiasm. His previous experience as inspector had brought him into contact with the OECD curricular initiatives and he was happy to see something similar take root under his own aegis in Dublin.

Trinity's part in founding the Unit was shared by three people - Professor J. V. Rice, director of the University's School of Education, Bryan Powell, registrar of the School of Education and Tony Crooks, a post-graduate student in curriculum studies. The first mentioned of the three, Val Rice, had been appointed to the Chair of Education while still in his early thirties and was the first Catholic to have occupied the post in Trinity's history. The appointment can indeed be taken as a visible sign of the College's changing ethos: a Catholic and an outsider was now being admitted to the sensitive position of professor of education. Rice, moreover had impressive qualifications, among which he counted a master's and doctor's degree from Harvard. His appointment seemed a daring and imaginative stroke on the part of the Trinity authorities and promised to open up an exciting era in education in Dublin, if not nationally.

On 28th March 1969, within three years of his appointment, Rice addressed the Board of Studies of the CDVEC. He spoke of his desire for closer contacts between Trinity and the CDVEC schools and said he thought it was wrong that university departments of education in

Ireland were more involved with secondary than with vocational schools.¹³ It was clear from the reaction to his remarks that Rice had made a very favourable impression on the CDVEC principals, although as a philosopher by training he might not have fully agreed with the wording of the vote of thanks which complimented him on “the replacing of the accent on the technology of education rather than on its philosophy”.¹⁴

In the following year, Rice and Trant became acquainted. Rice was interested in the latter’s idea of launching a curriculum project and encouraged him to consider basing it in the Trinity School of Education. With this end in view he introduced Trant to a key member of his staff, Bryan Powell, who as well as being registrar of the School was also lecturer in curriculum theory and science methodology. Powell was a dynamic and personable Welshman who had achieved a reputation throughout the country for his inservice work with teachers of biology. In 1969 he had spent a year as a curriculum consultant in the West Indies where he had directed an international team in introducing a new integrated science curriculum into the schools. Powell’s previous experience in curriculum, therefore, made him something of an authority in the area in Ireland - a factor which he was not slow to exploit on occasion.

The third member of the University group was a Ph.D. student in the School of Education, Tony Crooks. Crooks was a Trinity graduate who had recently returned to Dublin after four years teaching in Ontario. While in Canada, he had taken a post-graduate degree in curriculum studies with the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education. This had given him a thorough grasp of the theory of the subject which he now wished to apply in a practical situation in Ireland as the basis of his Ph. D. research. When Rice, who was his professor, suggested that he work with the principal of Ballyfermot in the curriculum project which the latter was preparing to launch, Crooks readily agreed. Both men met each other for the first time in 1971 and forthwith began to work together in a partnership that was to last for

twenty years.

The role of the Department of Education in the founding of the Unit was more restricted than that of the CDVEC or Trinity College and nobody from the Department was involved to the same degree as the five founder members from the other two institutions. Yet in all the Unit's early documents which refer to this subject, the Department is always credited with being one of the Unit's sponsors and as this designation was never contradicted by the Department itself we shall accept its validity. The Department's principal contribution as a sponsor can be expressed more easily in negative than in positive terms: it did not prove any major obstacle to the Unit's foundation. While the initiative for the Unit came in the first instance from the CDVEC and Trinity, the final word lay with the Department. It alone, as the ultimate authority in a highly centralised system, had the power to give or withhold final permission for any proposed educational innovation. In the case of the Unit, the Department elected to be generous but, as we shall see, not without some reservations.

The Birth of the Unit

The Irish theologian, Enda Lyons, has argued that for any community to come into being three things are necessary. The first of these is interest, without which there can never be a human community of any kind. The second is association: people who have a strong interest in something naturally and spontaneously seek out and associate with others who are of the same mind. The third is organisation. "When people who share a common interest associate with one another for the purpose of sharing and pursuing their interest, they automatically set up, or avail of, whatever structures or institutions they think will help them to pursue their interest" (Lyons, 1987, p.7). We have already described how two of these factors - interest and association - apply to the foundation of the Unit; we shall now describe how the Unit's organisation came into being.

On the 11th January 1972, the principal of Ballyfermot wrote to his CEO, enclosing a document entitled “Memorandum on Curriculum Development in the City of Dublin VEC”. Trant had intended the memorandum as a working document for a meeting the following day between Sheehan and himself and Bryan Powell of Trinity. The purpose of the document was to prepare the ground for a further meeting some weeks later with the Department of Education when the case for initiating a curriculum project in the CDVEC would be put. Sheehan and Powell declared themselves happy with the text of the memorandum and so it was decided to send it virtually unchanged to the Department.

The memorandum built on the arguments already put forward in the report of the Board of Studies subcommittee, especially regarding the problems of student backwardness and drop-out which were rife in the Dublin vocational schools at the time. A new note of urgency, however, was added, particularly in the context of the Government’s recently announced plan to raise the school leaving age to fifteen years:

If existing conditions and existing curricular patterns do not change large numbers of students (in some schools the drop-out rate has been over 25%) will be compelled to stay on against their will to follow courses for which they show neither aptitude nor interest. Unless this problem is tackled - unless there is a radical reappraisal of curricular patterns in our vocational schools - considerable strain will fall on the teachers and violent and anti-social behaviour will undoubtedly increase.¹⁵

The central argument in the memorandum was that a curriculum unit should be established under the joint auspices of the CDVEC and the Trinity School of Education, with the approval of the Department of Education. On 4th February 1972, the Department responded by calling a meeting chaired by Sean O’Connor who was at the time the assistant secretary responsible for post primary education. Two other

officials were also present - Torlach O'Connor, an educational psychologist and William Hyland, a statistician. Both were close advisors of the assistant secretary and the former was later to play an important role in the Unit's development. The meeting was also attended by Sheehan and Trant from the CDVEC, Powell from Trinity, and Diarmaid O'Donovan, the principal of Shannon Comprehensive School, who was trying to initiate a similar curriculum project based on a number of schools in the southwest of the country. This meeting had a historic significance for curriculum innovation in Ireland. O'Connor signified his willingness to allow the two projects to proceed with the laconic comment that the worst that could happen was that they might fail.

The meeting, however, was unofficial and so its conclusions, no matter how favourable, could not be taken as a basis for action. To remedy this Sheehan immediately started to put the wheels of official machinery into motion. His first task was to secure the permission of his local education authority, the CDVEC - which was successfully negotiated by the end of February 1972.¹⁶ Following normal procedure, the recommendation of the CDVEC was then sent to the Department of Education for sanction. But the Department was not to be rushed in such matters and two months later Sheehan had to remind O'Connor that no official word had yet come back from Marlborough Street.¹⁷ Departmental delay of this kind, however, was nothing unusual and so Sheehan would have had no cause for feeling unduly worried.

In the meantime negotiations between the CDVEC and the Trinity School of Education were proceeding apace and the agreement reached by the two bodies was formalised in a document drawn up by Sheehan on 7th April, entitled "Proposal for Joint Curriculum Development Project for Junior Cycle Post- Primary Courses". The document contained six major points:

- A steering committee was to be appointed, comprising Sheehan, as

chairman, Rice, Trant, Powell and a representative from the Department of Education.

- Trant was to be seconded from his post as principal of Ballyfermot to be the first director of the project.
- Powell was to be given half-time release from the School of Education to work on the project.
- Crooks was to be engaged on the project on a majority time basis.
- The project was to be based in premises owned by Trinity in Westland Row, on the periphery of the main College campus.
- Finally, the CDVEC would meet the costs of the project over a period of four years - from 1972 to 1976.¹⁸

On 7th April 1972 the Unit's Steering Committee held its first meeting and formally adopted the provisions of Sheehan's document.¹⁹ The following month, when it held its second meeting, Rice was able to report that both the Board and Council of Trinity had approved the project.²⁰ The Department of Education, however, had not yet replied to Sheehan's letter of the previous February requesting sanction for the project, nor had a representative from the Department come to any of the Steering Committee meetings. In September 1972, with the beginning of the new school year, the project began to operate with a group of seven pilot schools but still there was no official word from the Department of Education. Sheehan, not surprisingly, was now becoming concerned, as is evident from another reminder he sent O'Connor on 25th September.²¹ By this time the project had made substantial commitments in staffing and accommodation and, more importantly, in terms of what it was promising to deliver to teachers, pupils and parents. It was vital, therefore, that the Department give its official approval.

Eventually, on 13th December, came O'Connor's belated response:

The Department's agreement in principle to the project was on your undertaking to finance it from the Committee's resources and the only direct finance agreed by the Department was that Mr. A. Trant would be released to act as Director of the project and that his salary would be paid by the Department. It was made clear to you that no money would be available for the project from the Department's research funds. This is still the position.²²

O'Connor's response was enigmatic. The most that Sheehan had ever hoped for was that the CDVEC would be allowed to finance the project from its own resources, nor had he or Trant any recollection of the Department's agreeing to pay the latter from its research account. But Sheehan was not the kind to look a gift horse in the mouth and so he was quick to interpret the letter as a written approval for the project. On 24th January 1973 he wrote to O'Connor telling him as much, and offering to relieve the Department of the burden of paying Trant's salary. "I feel", he said, "that because of the relatively longterm nature of the project it is not desirable to tie up Department research allocations even to the extent of Mr. Trant's salary but rather that all Project costs be made from one source, i.e. the VEC budget".²³

In Sheehan's view, this would be the more sensible arrangement and would moreover fit in better with the role the CDVEC intended to play in the new project. He was also careful to give the Department full credit for allowing the project to proceed:

I regard it as a very welcome and significant development, that your Department has authorised a research budget within a local authority financial scheme. Given the size of my Committee's budget, it is certainly reasonable, indeed necessary, that curriculum research should be undertaken. The modest outlay involved should yield excellent results in cost/benefit terms. I take this opportunity to thank you for the personal backing you have given our proposals for this

Project”.²⁴

Six weeks later O’Connor replied, protesting that Sheehan had misinterpreted him by saying that he had authorised a research account for the CDVEC:

What I said at our earlier discussion was that there was no money in the Department’s research fund for the project but that we would agree to the secondment of Mr. Trant. My memory is that you said that you would find the other costs from your general allocation. I could not accept therefore that what was a loose arrangement between us should be subsequently formalised into Departmental authority for a research budget.²⁵

At this remove it is possible to detect a hint of good humoured point-scoring in the exchanges between the two men. This is not surprising since both had been colleagues in the Department before Sheehan took up the post as CEO of Dublin and both were sufficiently friendly to be able to write to each other on first name terms. This friendship was undoubtedly helpful in securing a basis for the Unit’s existence and Sheehan was well placed to decode the messages which O’Connor was sending. The Department was not going to give a formal, explicit authorisation for the Unit; it was prepared, however, to allow “a loose arrangement” which would permit the CDVEC to finance the Unit from its own general allocation. This was vague enough but in Sheehan’s mind it was the best deal he could get. He was content therefore to let the matter rest and it was on this ambiguous understanding that the Unit came into being.

The Aims of the Unit

The ambiguity surrounding the Unit’s birth is reflected in two important aspects of its early organisation - its title and the statement of its aims. The title “Curriculum Development Unit” was never

formally adopted by the Unit but came into use some time after November 1972, when the premises at Westland Row became available and when the title was incorporated in the Unit's new letter head. It is interesting to note, however, that up to spring 1973 we find the Unit's Steering Committee using the older and more cumbersome title, "Joint Curriculum Development Project of the City of Dublin Vocational Education Committee in association with the School of Education, Trinity College, University of Dublin". Not surprisingly this title was shortened to "the Project" but this in turn proved to be ambiguous when the Unit acquired separate projects of its own and so was abandoned.

The first explicit statement of the Unit's aims appeared in its Annual Report for 1973/4, two years after its foundation. It is possible, however, to infer the presence of these aims in earlier documents, particularly in Trant's memorandum of January 1972. In the Unit's Annual Report of 1973/74, the aims were stated as follows:

- to provide a direct link with the new primary school curriculum;
- to produce curricula geared to the needs of students and based on their own community;
- to develop new forms of assessment consonant with the aims of the new curricula.²⁶

In the years that followed, these aims were constantly used in the Unit's public statements about itself - at least up to the mid 1980s - and so it is important that we examine their significance. We shall devote the remainder of this chapter to the first and second aims and we shall consider the third aim later on, in Chapter 4.

The Unit's first aim was to help create links between two levels of the Irish educational system - the primary and the post primary. This implied that there was a noticeable gap between the curricula at the

two levels and that the Unit now saw an opportunity to attempt to build a bridge between the two. The time indeed was opportune, for only two years before the Unit's birth a new curriculum had been introduced into Irish primary schools - a curriculum which offered many exciting prospects for liaison with the post primary sector. But first let us go back some years to recapitulate briefly the history of primary education in the new Ireland.

In the years that followed Independence and right up to the '60s one of the major aims of the primary curriculum in Irish schools was to help implement the Government's policy on the restoration of the Irish language. It is understandable that the new State should be concerned with ensuring that its ideals were mirrored in the educational system and indeed we find this view expressed by Eoin MacNeill, the first Minister for Education: "The chief function of Irish educational policy is to conserve and develop Irish nationality. Education, then, is either nationality in its making or its undoing" (Akenson, 1975, p.39). What is more difficult for us to accept, however, is the equating of nationality with the Government's language policy and the burdening of the schools with the political ideal of the restoration of Irish. "Education and language became inextricable threads in the fabric of Irish society", noted one historian, commenting on the fact that scarcely any minister of state or public figure ever mentioned education except in relation to the revival of Irish (McCartney, 1969, p.80). It was not surprising, therefore, that resulting from this emphasis on language restoration, the primary curriculum became narrow in focus and restricted in its range of interests.

This state of affairs was not without its critics, especially the teachers themselves who expressed their concerns through their union, the Irish National Teachers' Organisation (INTO), on two notable occasions - in 1941 about teaching through the medium of Irish and in 1947 about the need for a more child-centred approach and a wider range of subjects (Coolahan, 1981, p.44). These criticisms, however, went unheeded, the Government preferring instead to maintain a policy of

concentrating on the three R's backed by a compulsory test at the end of sixth standard, known as the Primary Certificate Examination. Arguing in favour of this approach, de Valera declared in the Dáil: "I do not care that teachers are offended by it ... I am less interested in the teachers' method of teaching than I am in the results they achieve, and the test I would apply would be the test of an examination" (Ibid., p.43).

The 1960s, however, which as we have already seen were to prove such dramatic years for Irish society in general, brought a new approach to primary schooling and, as was the case with other aspects of life in the country, much of the impetus for change came from outside - in this case from the report of the Plowden Committee in England. The Teachers' Study Group of the INTO organised an evaluation of the report and went to the trouble of bringing Lady Plowden to Dublin to participate in an evaluation seminar (Hurley, 1977, p.16). Shortly afterwards, in 1967, the Primary Certificate Examination was replaced by a personal record card system (Coolahan, 1981, p.170). But the greatest change of all in primary education came in 1971 when the Department of Education introduced a completely new curriculum, attractively presented in two teacher handbooks and launched amidst general approval. The new curriculum was based on a child-centred ideology which was considerably influenced by the developmental psychology of Jean Piaget (Griffin, 1978, p.14). Its declared aim was "to enable the child to live a full life as a child and to equip him to avail of further education so that he may go on to live a full and useful life as an adult in society" (Department of Education, 1971, Part I, p. 12).

In line with its child-centred ideology the new curriculum advocated an integration of subject matter. The argument for this was put in persuasive terms: "As the child is one, however complex his nature, so also must his education be one, however complex its nature" (Ibid., p.19). It followed then that fragmentation of knowledge into separate compartments was to be avoided and instead of the traditional

subjects, seven broad curricular areas were recommended - religion, language, mathematics, social and environmental studies, art and craft, music and physical education. Furthermore, these areas themselves were to be integrated with each other as far as possible (Ibid., p.20).

The new primary curriculum had important implications for the post-primary sector. If the latter remained unresponsive to the new approach in the primary schools, then the gap between first and second levels would be widened and the transfer of pupils from primary to secondary would be made more difficult. If the post primary schools ignored the new child-centred methodology and integrated approach, considerable friction could arise between what could in effect become two different systems of education. It seemed reasonable then to expect that change in the primary schools should be followed by a complementary change in the post-primary curriculum.

The significance of the new primary curriculum was not lost on the founding members of the Unit. In his memorandum of January 1972, Trant argued that one of the principal justifications for the Unit was to provide a basis for liaison between the first and second levels in education. To realise this ideal in practical terms the memorandum proposed launching a project in social and environmental studies - one of the seven major areas in the primary curriculum. The new project was to have a two-fold approach - science and environmental studies on the one hand and humanities and social studies on the other. This of course was a very ambitious plan - too ambitious as it later turned out - in that it was proposed to integrate no fewer than eight different subjects.²⁷ In its original format the plan was probably unworkable and it is hardly surprising that in September 1972, when the Unit began to function, the plan had been considerably modified. The single all-embracing integrated project had now in practice become two separate projects - one in science and the other in humanities.

The science project, which was named the Integrated Science Curriculum Innovation Project (ISCIP), attempted to integrate the

three separate sections of the existing science examination syllabus - physics, chemistry and biology - into a more coherent unity. The humanities project, which was later entitled the City of Dublin Humanities Curriculum, was more radical in its efforts at integration: it welded together two separate examination subjects, English and history/geography, using a completely new syllabus content.

A year later, the Unit added a third project to its repertoire - the City of Dublin Outdoor Education Project - and the emphasis on curriculum integration was given an added impetus. The new project was in the area of adventure skills and field studies and like ISCIIP and Humanities seemed well placed to link with the activity-based approach of the primary curriculum. Thus it is fair to say that within the first two years of its existence, the Unit had identified a major aim - subject integration as a means of linking the primary with the post primary curriculum - which was both meaningful and important in the context of the Irish educational system.

The Idea of Networking

The Unit's second aim - to develop curricula geared to the needs of students and based on their own community - may seem like a statement of the obvious - an aspiration that every official agency in education would probably claim to implement. For the Unit, however, the statement had a particular importance and it represents a point of view which surfaced very early in the Unit's life. In the first Annual Report we read the following description of the underlying rationale of the Unit's work:

In the Curriculum Development Unit we start with the assumption that our work is geared to the needs of young people who live in the Greater Dublin area. Their needs and problems are linked with the challenge and opportunity of a fast-growing capital city. Hence, the work of the Curriculum Development Unit has a

definite City of Dublin orientation. Secondly, we try in the programmes we are developing to help schools to become more conscious of and more sensitive to their immediate environment. This means making the local area a laboratory for learning and progressing from there in ever widening circles to the greater environments of Dublin, Ireland, Europe, the earth, and the cosmos. Schools are encouraged to use the resources of the environment - and of all resources available the most important are people. Thirdly, a community oriented curriculum will find itself at odds with conformity. If the school curriculum is to relate meaningfully to the needs of its students, then there will have to be differences between one school and another. But we are talking about differences of approach not necessarily differences in standards. We are all anxious to uphold standards but not at the cost of a grey uniformity or as Patrick Pearse once said by having all the students of Ireland read the same textbooks each night.²⁸

To implement this approach the Unit adopted a particular strategy - the formation of a school-based curriculum development network. The idea of a group of pilot schools working together to implement a curriculum project was one which was well known in the educational world at the time and had been extensively used by the Schools Council in England and Wales. The Unit, however, was to give its own particular interpretation to the idea and its development of the concept of networking is worth examining in some detail.

The idea of networking is not new. Some of the most striking examples can be read in the annals of history; for instance the spread of Christianity and the development of the early Church in the first two centuries after Christ constitutes a remarkable picture of a network in action. It is only in recent years, however, that the idea of networking as a way of organising human interaction has been subjected to detailed analysis. One commentator has described the

network as “the institution of our time, an open system, a dissipative structure, so richly coherent that it is in constant flux, poised for re-ordering, capable of endless transformation” (Ferguson, 1987, p.213).

Networks are formed when people commit themselves to a process of social transformation, often in the face of apathy or opposition. Networks are usually egalitarian and decentralised and they eschew the traditional pyramid form of organisation. They are informally structured around a multitude of cells and small units - which makes them look more like a badly knotted fishing net than a high-powered machine (Lipnack and Stamps, 1982, pp 1-17). It would be a mistake, however, to regard networks as inefficient. Some observers see them as an antidote to the wasteful and frustrating bureaucracy that increasingly engulfs our lives. A network can promote a new, refreshing and dynamic style of organising human affairs, or as one network theorist put it, the values of a network “will be rooted in informality and equality; its communication style will be lateral, diagonal and bottom up; and its structure will be cross-disciplinary” (Naisbitt, 1984, p.198).

The essential characteristics of a network have been given their classic formulation by two American anthropologists, Luther Gerlach and Virginia Hine. Networks in their view are segmentary, polycephalous and reticulate - that is they are made up of a number of autonomous, overlapping and interconnected parts. Their members may differ in background and outlook but all are bound together by a shared ideology, which is utopian and future-oriented. Networks often demand a considerable commitment from their members - a commitment which is tested and strengthened by the opposition and hostility of outsiders. Finally, a network usually has an active policy for finding new recruits through face-to-face contact and personal and social relationships. People do not primarily join a network as a result of the efforts of the mass media or charismatic leaders but rather through the influence of someone they know and trust (Gerlach and

Hine, 1973, pp. 163-190).

The Unit's strategy of networking was based first of all on an identifiable group of schools - those of the CDVEC. The CDVEC was always to remain the Unit's primary point of reference - its base camp in times of expansion and its last line of defence in moments of crisis. As the Unit's first Annual Report put it:

The work of the Curriculum Development Unit is built around the regional framework of the City of Dublin VEC. Without such a framework it could not exist. Other schools within the Greater Dublin area have asked to join the venture and they have been admitted because it was understood that the Department of Education was in favour of such a policy. The total number of schools, however, that can adequately work together as a team may have to have an upper limit of perhaps thirty or forty.²⁹

In the above quotation we are given a hint of a problem which was beginning to emerge in relation to networking and about which the Unit was as yet unsure - the question of size. How many schools should form the ideal network? In reality there probably can never be such a thing as an ideal network - one which follows a preconceived plan with meticulous exactitude. Every network is a unique entity, whose growth is governed by a set of unrepeatable historical circumstances, and in this the Unit was no exception. It started life with three projects, each based on a small group of about half a dozen schools and all for the most part in the greater Dublin area. The primary target group was the CDVEC system of city vocational schools but other schools in the Dublin area, especially schools in the public sector, were not refused admission when they applied. In these circumstances the original network was bound to expand and so we are not surprised to learn that at the end of the school year 1973/74 the ISCIP schools had increased to 13, the Humanities schools to 10, and those in the Outdoor Education Project, which was just getting under way at the time, had risen to six.³⁰

During the years that followed, as the Unit's sphere of influence steadily widened, these numbers increased. In the school year 1974/75 we learn that the Unit had established an "outer ring" of 28 schools from all parts of the country which were interested in keeping in contact with its work.³¹ A year later the outer ring had almost doubled in size while the original network of inner ring schools, which had enlisted in one or more of the Unit's three projects, now numbered 24.³² Evidently, the Unit's interpretation of networking implied a policy of expansion - a policy which sooner or later was bound to lead to conflict with the controlling powers of the educational world.

The Unit, however, never squarely addressed this thorny question of the optimum size of a network, preferring instead to let events take their natural course. There were probably good reasons for this attitude and two in particular spring to mind. Firstly, the Unit did not have the self-confidence or the official standing to embark on a policy of open recruitment, and secondly, even if it had, the wisest approach in a networking situation seemed to indicate that keeping a low profile paid the highest dividend.

In January 1975, with the publication of the ICE Report, the Unit appeared to have been given important support for its networking policy. The report advocated a radical overhaul of the Irish examination structure in the junior cycle and recommended the establishment of an on-going service of school-based assessment, supported by external moderation and nationally normed objective tests (ICE Committee, 1975, p.87). Central to this scheme of things was the recommendation to set up a system of school consortia - each consortium comprising seven schools and catering for roughly three thousand pupils in all. The consortia in turn would be further grouped into regional units of seven, each region under the care of a specially appointed field officer with central administrative back-up (Ibid., p. 63). In effect the ICE Report was recommending a networking arrangement. This recommendation, however, was to prove too radical for the Irish educational establishment and so was never

implemented. The Unit's stance on networking, therefore, remained at odds with the orthodox centralised approach in Irish education and as such was destined to remain highly vulnerable and sometimes severely threatened.

Besides the question of size, a second and equally serious problem confronted the Unit's idea of networking and this was the question of time. When does a network come to an end? A dedicated networker would probably answer that a network finishes when there is no longer any need for it. This kind of reply, however, would hardly serve to satisfy the demands of the Unit's sponsors. The Department of Education, for instance, had a legitimate concern over the use of resources and the creation of expectations within the educational system. The University, for its part, was interested in maintaining standards of orthodox research procedures while the CDVEC was anxious that the Unit's activities relate to its own needs. Of the three sponsors, the CDVEC was the first to perceive that the essential value of the Unit lay in its ongoing contribution towards teacher development through a networking approach. The other two sponsors took the view that every curriculum project - and by implication the Unit itself - should have a beginning and an end and that it should proceed according to the classical paradigms of research, development, evaluation and dissemination.

The argument that a network needs an extended and even indefinite time span is even in the best of times difficult to make but in the climate of Irish education in the 1970s it was next to impossible to sustain. The Unit, therefore, was constrained to make continued pleas for extensions to its original time-span of four years so that it could continue what it had begun. Between 1976 and 1978 we find the Unit director writing three successive memoranda all with the purpose of trying to persuade the Department of Education to keep the Unit alive. In the last of these he made a brave effort to put a respectable academic face on the argument for an extended time-span in keeping with a networking approach:

Recent research studies have underlined a number of factors that make for successful curriculum innovation. Firstly, it is a longer process than was envisaged in the '60s. Ten years would now seem to be a more realistic time-span for any worthwhile project. It takes time for educational innovation to take root in the system at large. Moreover, educational innovation is disseminated, not by people reading reports of pilot projects but by a process of sustained teacher development, backed by appropriate changes in the educational structure, particularly in the examination system and in the pattern of internal school organisation. It also takes time for educational innovation to penetrate the general consciousness of the educational system and to be understood and supported by the various interest groups within the system.

Secondly, successful educational innovation is dynamic and ongoing. As recent OECD studies have shown, it is no longer possible to take the simplistic view that first one undertakes a programme of research and development and then one implements it through the system at large. Social situations, policies and institutions are changing too rapidly. The dilemma of the curriculum developer is that he is engaged in changing something that is only one aspect of a greater change in society itself. Consequently he must look for points of continuity and connection in what he is engaged in.

The great temptation of the curriculum developer is to discard one project in favour of another in answer to the prevalent fashion. Worthwhile projects, once embarked on, should be pursued with perseverance and responsibility and not abandoned if they become unfashionable. Only in this way will any worthwhile lessons be learned. This does not mean that projects should not change in themselves. Far from it. If they are successful it is precisely because they have in fact changed in answer to new pressures and more clearly understood needs. The important thing is to pursue a

policy of continuity where old projects merge into new ones, and where the insights, expertise and enthusiasm which have been gained in the innovation process are maintained and strengthened.³³

It is doubtful, however, if this argument was ever treated seriously by anybody in the Department of Education. The Department's officials were not likely to be impressed by a plea to support an ongoing process of development with no immediate end in sight. Yet the Department continued to allow the Unit to exist, albeit on an *ad hoc* and hand-to-mouth basis. There were many reasons for this and subsequent chapters will seek to analyse the politics of what was often a very complicated situation. The principal reason behind the Department's reluctance to terminate the Unit, however, was probably the fact that despite its misgivings - which were many and serious - the Department realised that something worthwhile was going on. This realisation was undoubtedly reinforced by reports from the Department's inspectors who were in many instances in close touch with the Unit's staff and the pilot teachers and had therefore a good idea of what the networking idea meant in practice.

What then, we may ask, was the essence of the Unit's understanding of networking? In simple terms there were two principles which summed up the Unit's approach - the primacy of the teacher in the curriculum process and the grouping of a number of schools into a voluntary association to support one another in the task of curriculum change. These two principles were stated very clearly in Trant's memorandum of January 1972:

Curriculum development, if it is to succeed at all, must be firmly based on the realities of classroom practice. This means that from the very outset the teachers themselves must be involved. In a sense curriculum development is really about teachers - helping them to formulate their objectives more clearly, helping them to evaluate their own practices, helping them to learn from one another and to organise themselves into

corporate planning groups, helping them to produce relevant curricular materials, helping them to organise in-service training courses where the principles of good teaching practice can be identified, improved, consolidated and diffused. In a word, the teachers are the principal agents of curriculum development.³⁴

It is above all in the Unit's relationship with its pilot schools that these principles can be seen most clearly. Respect for the school's autonomy and freedom of choice was always the starting point. The decision to join one or other of the Unit's projects was a voluntary one on the part of the school and the Unit never tried to influence which teachers or classes should participate. This was completely the business of the school. But once the decision to join was taken, each school was expected to commit itself to the idea of innovation and to be prepared to work with other schools in bringing this about. In other words each school was asked to join a network of innovative schools and so had to be prepared to accept the discipline of a consensus approach. In such a network there had to be give and take; each school had to be prepared to contribute as well as to profit.

To make such a network a reality there had to be genuine participation and consultation. This began first of all at school level, among the project teachers themselves, where a pattern of meetings was developed to foster and consolidate the dynamic process of joint planning and review. This pattern was widened to allow regular meetings of the representatives of all the schools participating in a particular project. These representative meetings, which usually took place in the Unit, became a forum where all important issues affecting the project were debated. There were other levels of decision-making too which were included in the networking process. Account had to be taken of the opinions of the heads of the pilot schools and so special summit meetings were convened from time to time. As the network developed similar meetings took place with other important interest groups, such as inspectors from the Department of Education and

representatives from the teacher unions.

These various levels of meetings could be termed the formal aspect of the network. But even more important, perhaps, was its informal side. For the network to be meaningful it was necessary that a range of informal contacts between the Unit and the pilot schools was maintained at all times. This was usually done by phone or by visit and was always a two-way process. It was through the building of such a system of communication that the Unit became sensitive to the needs of its pilot schools and conscious of what would work in them and what would not.

The networking approach to curriculum development was to become the cornerstone of the Unit's philosophy. It was not based on any ingenious theorising but was rather a pragmatic piece of common sense which from the Unit's point of view seemed to fit the tough realities which the pilot schools had to cope with. It was essentially a support service for teachers - an attempt to link their own aspirations for change with the power points of the educational system. The network idea also provided the context in which the professionalism of teachers could develop and flourish. It sought to replace rigid control from the centre with a process of negotiation, partnership and consensus. The networking approach acknowledged the reality that change in the system does not come easily or swiftly but nonetheless can be achieved through a responsible and structured process of collective endeavour. This approach went far beyond what any individual school, no matter how innovative or creative, could achieve on its own and was perhaps to become the most significant contribution which the Unit made to modern educational development in Ireland.

CHAPTER 2

REFERENCES AND NOTES

- 1 The school principals of the Sub-Committee were as follows: S. Ganley (North Strand), chairman, M. O’Gorman (Finglas Girls), M. O’Carroll (Crumlin Road), B. Conway (Sundrive Road), J. McKay (Coolock) and A. Trant (Ballyfermot), secretary.
- 2 “Report of the Sub-Committee of the Board of Studies on the Intermediate and Group Certificate”, May, 1971, Steering Committee Papers, Curriculum Development Unit (CDU), Dublin.
- 3 Ibid., p.1.
- 4 Ibid.
- 5 Ibid.
- 6 Report of Sub-Committee of Board of Studies, p.2.
- 7 Ibid.
- 8 Ibid., p.3.
- 9 Ibid., pp. 3-4.
- 10 Ibid., p.4.
- 11 Ibid., pp. 5-6.
- 12 Ibid., p.5.
- 13 Minutes of Meeting of CDVEC Board of Studies, 28 March 1969, CDVEC Head Office, Dublin.
- 14 Ibid.

- 15 A. Trant, "Memorandum on Curriculum Development in the City of Dublin VEC", January 1972, p.2, Steering Committee Papers.
- 16 During this period the functions of the local authority were being exercised by a City Commissioner, Mr John Garvin.
- 17 J. P. Sheehan to S. O'Connor, 20 April 1972, CDU Papers, CDVEC Head Office, Dublin.
- 18 J. P. Sheehan, "Proposal for Joint Curriculum Development Project for Junior Cycle Post Primary Courses", April 1972, pp. 2-3, CDU Papers.
- 19 Minutes of Steering Committee Meeting, 2 April 1972, Steering Committee Papers, CDU.
- 20 Minutes of Steering Committee Meeting, 24 May 1972.
- 21 J. P. Sheehan to S. O'Connor, 25 September 1972, CDU Papers.
- 22 S. O'Connor to J. P. Sheehan, 13 December 1972.
- 23 J. P. Sheehan to S. O'Connor, 24 January 1973.
- 24 Ibid.
- 25 S. O'Connor to J. P. Sheehan, 6 March 1973.
- 26 CDU Annual Report, 1974, CDU Resource Centre.
- 27 The proposed plan of integration was as follows: a) science and environmental studies, embracing biology, chemistry, physics and geography, and linking eventually with mathematics and technology; b) humanities and social studies embracing history, English, civics, and religious instruction, and linking eventually with art/craft, Irish and continental languages.
- 28 CDU Annual Report, 1972/73, pp. 2-3.
- 29 Ibid., p.3.

- 30 CDU Annual Report, 1973/74, pp. 5-16.
- 31 CDU Annual Report, 1974/75, p.27.
- 32 CDU Annual Report, 1975/76, pp. 23-25.
- 33 A. Trant, "The Future of the Curriculum Development Unit", September, 1978, pp. 4-5, Steering Committee Papers.
- 34 A. Trant, "Memorandum on Curriculum Development in the City of Dublin VEC", pp. 2-3.

CHAPTER 3

THE POLITICS OF EVALUATION

The Business of Survival

During the first years of its life, the Curriculum Development Unit had one major preoccupation - to survive. Despite the fact that it was sponsored by three powerful bodies, it was the child of none of them and its intentions were liable to be misunderstood by all of them. The Unit was not a permanent institution, firmly established by statute and protected by precedent and tradition. On the contrary, it was an *ad hoc* body with nothing to guide it except its inherent will to surmount the various crises that continually confronted it.

On reflection it is not strange that this state of affairs - one of continual crisis - should have been the norm. The Unit had embarked on a bold programme of innovation and development. In the beginning this was seen by the Unit staff as an exciting challenge, almost an educational crusade. But the banner-waving that accompanies the start of every crusade must soon give way to the rigours of the real campaign - the long, weary frustration of waiting alternating with the sharp fear of coming under fire. Furthermore, if the Unit was destined to make any progress at all towards its goals, it was bound to attract hostility. It was taking upon itself the task of changing the established order of things. It was setting out to disturb what had long been hallowed by tradition. It was challenging opinions and assumptions that for many people had become sacred. Its mandate, however, was far from clear. The more the Unit succeeded, therefore, and the stronger it grew, the more problems it brought upon itself. It was working on the fringes of powerful institutions and exploring the no-man's land between entrenched positions. It was scarcely surprising that it came under attack.

Survival, then, became a major preoccupation for the Unit and coloured its outlook on the entire curriculum process in which it was engaged. Faced with the grim choice of growth or death, it was no wonder that the Unit's philosophy of curriculum development translated itself into a pragmatic and client-oriented approach. Its primary clients were its pilot schools and if it proved irrelevant to them, it would be ignored and would eventually die. On the other hand, if it satisfied their needs, then the schools themselves would demand that it continue and expand. The Unit, therefore, regarded the schools as the chief evaluators of its work and their evaluative judgements were expressed in a simple but very telling manner - they either remained within the Unit's networks or else they left.

This approach to evaluation was of course fairly primitive, yet it must be recognised that it contained much common sense. It was also a highly political approach - which was not surprising in an organisation that continually had to sharpen its political skills in its effort to survive. It is interesting to see how the Unit was discovery for itself what one well-known evaluator was proclaiming around this time - that evaluation itself is an inherently political process and its varying styles and methods all express different attitudes to the distribution of power in the educational system (MacDonald, 1976, p.124).

The question of formal evaluation arose very early in the Unit's life and not surprisingly it was the Department of Education which insisted on raising the matter. In February 1972, when the idea of starting the Unit was first discussed with the Department, one of the Department's officers, Torlach O'Connor, had criticised the proposal on the grounds that it made little or no provision for evaluation of the work that was to be undertaken. This criticism was answered by the CDVEC representatives by asserting that plans for evaluation were already in hand. It was intended that the Humanities project would be evaluated by the CDVEC's Schools' Psychological Service under the leadership of Brede Foy, the Chief Psychologist, and that ISCIP would be evaluated by Elizabeth Oldham, a post-graduate student who was at

the time studying in the Trinity School of Education under the supervision of the director of ISCIP, Bryan Powell. Thus, for the time being at least, the criticism was parried but it was evident that the Department was not satisfied and that the question of evaluation would be raised again.

In retrospect it can be said that the Department had a good case and that it was reasonable to ask for some independent evaluation of what the Unit was about. The Unit director, however, was sensitive about the kind of evaluation that would be appropriate and he was particularly suspicious of any evaluation that would emanate from the Department. He saw in the Department's interest in evaluation the underlying motive of trying to control what the Unit was doing - and this he was prepared to resist. Hence the evaluation arrangements for the Unit's first two projects, Humanities and ISCIP, were put into safe and sympathetic hands. The director was on good terms personally with Brede Foy, the leader of the Humanities evaluation team, while it was most unlikely that the ISCIP evaluator would raise any controversial issues that would embarrass her own research supervisor. (These of course were assumptions on the director's part and we shall examine their validity presently).

A year and a half later the Department of Education returned to the attack. In early December 1973 the director was summoned to a meeting, chaired by Sean O'Connor, the assistant secretary who had earlier given his sanction for the Unit's establishment. The atmosphere during the meeting was far from friendly. It was made clear to the director that the Department was displeased with the Unit and that its continued existence was in doubt. In particular, the Department was displeased with the way the Unit's finances were being managed and it was also unsure of the worth of what the Unit was doing.¹ The basic reason for the Department's displeasure was the fact that it had discovered that the Unit was increasing its range of activities and the number of its pilot schools. In such circumstances it was no wonder that it came under suspicion.

This suspicion had been aroused the previous September when at a meeting of the Unit's Steering Committee the Department's representative, Torlach O'Connor, had asked for a detailed break-down of the Unit's expenditure, only to be met with a point blank refusal by Sheehan, who was in the chair.² The meeting ended in acrimony and matters were not helped when a month later Sheehan appealed directly to the Minister for "reasonable freedom of action at local level to what is essentially (so far at least) a local research project under a local authority in cooperation with a university department of education".³ The ensuing tension between Sheehan and his erstwhile colleagues in the Department had in fact reached the point where the Unit's continued existence seemed in jeopardy. Matters, however, were eased and the situation to some extent was saved when in November Sheehan departed on leave of absence to take up a temporary post with the European Commission in Brussels.

This was the background, then, to the director's meeting in the Department in December 1973. During the meeting he was bluntly told that the Department had decided to initiate a thorough evaluation of the Unit's activities, both financial and educational. On the financial side, the Department intended sending one of its own accountants to examine all the Unit's expenditure. On the educational side it proposed to ask an outside expert of international standing to assess the worth of the Unit's work, and in this connection a name was mentioned - that of Professor Malcolm Skilbeck, director of the Education Centre of the New University of Ulster at Coleraine.

The news that the Department was contemplating an external evaluation of the Unit by Professor Skilbeck was particularly welcome to the Unit's director. He knew Skilbeck personally and was glad at the possibility of having the Unit evaluated by an educationalist of his stature. There was also another reason for welcoming the evaluation - it offered an opportunity for enhancing North/South co-operation in

Ireland. The previous summer the director had been invited to participate in an OECD conference on school-based curriculum development organised by Skilbeck at Coleraine. The conference was an international one but Skilbeck was keen to use the occasion to bring educationalists from both sides of the Irish border more closely together. During the conference he called an informal meeting which resulted in a small North/South working party - of which the director was a member - to arrange future contacts and cooperation. Hence, when the Department mooted the idea that Skilbeck should evaluate the Unit, the director was conscious of the potential significance of the operation within the whole framework of North/South educational cooperation.

Fearing, however, that the Department would either change its mind or else lack the resolution to carry the idea through, the director decided to take the initiative himself by making an informal approach to Coleraine to see if Skilbeck was interested in carrying out the evaluation. On learning that he was in fact very interested, the director then arranged a meeting on 13 February 1974 between Skilbeck and two of the Department's officers, Torlach O'Connor and William Hyland, with the objective of discussing a draft evaluation proposal which Skilbeck had drawn up.⁴ The outcome of the meeting, from the director's point of view, was highly satisfactory. The proposal was favourably received by the Department's officers and so the first obstacle in the way of launching the evaluation was cleared.

The next step was to sound out the reactions of the CDVEC. By this time the senior administration in the CDVEC had changed. During Sheehan's period of absence in Brussels the position of acting CEO was filled by Hugh Healy, an experienced CDVEC administrator who was nearing retirement. Healy, who had known the director from his Ballyfermot days and was sympathetic to his ideas, had no objection to the proposed evaluation. A similar reaction came from the director's colleagues in the Unit when he consulted them about the proposal.⁵ The way was now clear to put the proposal formally to the Unit's

Steering Committee.

The Coleraine evaluation proposal was a carefully prepared document. Skilbeck's original version had been modified as a result of a two day preliminary visit to Dublin by two members of the evaluation team, Don Batts and Harry McMahon.⁶ During their visit they had interviewed four members of the Unit staff and one of the Department's officers, and following their return to Coleraine a revised version of the proposal was prepared and sent to the Unit on 20 June 1974 - just in time for a meeting of the Steering Committee four days later. According to the proposal it was intended that a team of four people from Coleraine led by Skilbeck would carry out the evaluation, with a fifth member from the Paris office of OECD acting as adviser. The proposed methodology of the evaluation was described as "one of consultancy which is informed by the theoretical framework of illuminative evaluation".⁷ This approach, which had only recently gained a foothold in the world of educational research, owed more to the methods of social anthropology, psychiatry and sociology than to the more orthodox norms derived from the experimental and mental testing traditions of psychology (Parlett and Hamilton, 1976, p.85).

The scope of the proposed evaluation was ambitious, as can be seen from the following list of its objectives:

1. To examine the policy objectives of the CDU.
2. To examine the process of decision-making and the organisation of the CDU's programme of work.
3. To examine the separate projects currently under way in the CDU.
4. To examine the strategies and techniques of evaluation of project processes and outcomes.

5. To consider the relationship of the work of the CDU to other major initiatives in curriculum development and examination reform being undertaken in or proposed for the Republic of Ireland.
6. To consider the inservice education role of the projects and of the CDU.
7. To consider the CDU as a focus of inter-institutional co-operation.
8. To prepare a report which will include recommendations for the future policy, role and work programme of the CDU.⁸

Such a wide scope was typical of Skilbeck's general outlook on curriculum development, which he saw as an integral part of the larger process of cultural formation (Reynolds and Skilbeck, 1976). It is not surprising, therefore, to find that having agreed to accept the request to evaluate the Unit, he had successfully negotiated a much wider brief for his study. He was now proposing what was in effect an evaluation of a major part of the entire Irish educational system, and this would inevitably include important aspects of the role of the Department of Education.

The Coleraine Evaluation

One of the most significant things about the Coleraine evaluation proposal was the emphasis it placed on the Unit itself as distinct from its projects. The Unit was now two years old but many people in the sponsoring organisations - the Department, the University and even the CDVEC - did not regard it as an entity in its own right but rather as the locus of three projects, Humanities, ISCIP and Outdoor Education. Skilbeck and his team, however, focused attention firmly on the Unit as an institution. Of the eight major objectives of the evaluation study, five were expressly devoted to the policy, decision-making process, organisation, external relations and arrangements for inter-institutional cooperation within the Unit. Only two objectives related to the

individual projects, while one objective related to teacher inservice, which encompassed both the Unit and its projects.

Skilbeck's team presented a detailed work sequence comprising twenty-five stages in all. The basic strategy was to ensure a constant flow of information from the Unit to the evaluation team - with periodic feedback to the Unit staff. All the Unit's files were to be made available and extensive use was to be made of written questionnaires backed up by informal discussion and interviews. People from outside with a close interest in the Unit were to be interviewed and it was also proposed to visit some of the pilot schools.⁹

It was intended that the high point of the evaluation would occur about three-quarters of the way through the process when a two day series of meetings would take place between the evaluation team, the Unit staff, the Steering Committee and senior officers of the Department.¹⁰ This strategy was obviously based on a model developed by OECD, with which Skilbeck was familiar. In OECD parlance the culminating meeting of all the parties involved was called a "confrontation", a term which should be taken more in its French than its English usage and which very aptly catches the dramatic nature of what was intended - a coming together of all the actors in the story. The confrontation would be the climax of a series of evaluation events - meetings, interviews, questionnaires - and would greatly contribute towards a heightening of interest in the subject of the evaluation - the Unit itself. As a result of this process the Unit was to assume a higher profile than ever before in its history.

The Steering Committee met on 14th March 1974 and the principal item on the agenda was the Skilbeck evaluation proposal. The director informed the Committee of the background to the proposal, which he had already taken pains to explain to the individual members in private. The reactions of the Committee, however, were unexpected. O'Connor, the Department's representative, pointed out that the

Skilbeck study would not adequately cover the evaluation of the individual projects. He was concerned in particular that there be a suitable evaluation of the Humanities project and stated that the Department would make money available for this purpose. He was not in principle against the Skilbeck proposal but felt that it should be supplemented by internal evaluation.¹¹ Professor Rice, the University representative, was anxious that another evaluator be associated with the Skilbeck study - namely his colleague Professor John Heywood, who had recently taken charge of a research project on the public examinations in Ireland and who was based in Rice's department.¹²

Rice's interest in having Heywood associated with the Skilbeck evaluation stemmed from his perception of the role of the Unit within the University School of Education. In his submission to the University Council in Spring 1972, where he advocated that the Unit be based in the University, Rice had coupled the Unit's work very closely with that of Heywood's project - the Public Examinations Evaluation Project (PEEP). Both were to be housed in the same building and both were to be related closely to each other within the same University department under Rice's leadership.¹³ This expectation, however, never materialised - as subsequent events were to show. Each venture went its own way with practically no interchange of ideas and experiences between them. PEEP became fully integrated into the University School of Education with two of its three staff eventually becoming full-time members of the School. The Unit on the other hand was to pursue its own destiny, becoming in practice an autonomous entity within the University.

On 24th June 1974 the Steering Committee finally approved the Coleraine evaluation proposal but the suggestion of linking Heywood closely with the evaluation was dropped. The only condition that the Committee stipulated was that a preliminary as well as a final report be presented by the evaluation team.¹⁴ From then on events moved smoothly and according to plan. The confrontation meeting took place in January 1975, the preliminary report was presented in April, and the

final report the following September, one month ahead of the schedule in the original proposal.

There can be little doubt about the overall verdict which Skilbeck and his team reached on the Unit's work. The Unit had elected to pursue a policy of support and stimulation in relation to school based curriculum development and in this it was found to be successful. "Its approach", the evaluation report noted, "is defensible in the light of the brief given by the sponsoring bodies, especially the VEC, is appropriate to widely accepted needs of schools, and is in line with international thinking and foreign practice. In fact, the Unit's proclaimed policy is in the vanguard of curriculum thinking".¹⁵

This was praise indeed and greatly contributed towards raising the self-esteem of the Unit staff. An external evaluation team after a searching enquiry had concluded that the Unit's work was valuable and worthy to be put on a par with the best in the international field. The report, however, did not stop at praising the Unit for its achievements; it also looked to the future and in its concluding section recommended that the Unit become a permanent organisation. It should continue to be situated within the University and should "see itself and be seen as a regional curriculum development and innovation centre, with some clearly defined national and local responsibilities".¹⁶ Furthermore, not only should the Unit become a permanent body, it should also expand. The existing staff was considered to be too small to sustain the present and envisaged scale of operation, and either this scale should be reduced or the staff enlarged. The evaluation team opted for the latter on the grounds that "the Unit has raised expectations in the system and disclosed real needs which it has the capacity to fulfil and satisfy provided it can be better supported".¹⁷

One of the major recommendations of the evaluation was that a national conference of interested parties be called to examine the work of the Unit and to consider plans for its future in the context of the

report's recommendations. This conference could include some foreign experts, possibly recruited through OECD. To achieve the best results from such a conference, which should take place after about a year, the Steering Committee and the staff should prepare a major policy document on the future structure and programme of the Unit.¹⁸

The idea of a post-evaluation conference was very much in line with Skilbeck's own convictions about the basic meaning of the evaluation study. He saw this as a process which should not end with the presentation of the final report but remain an on-going opportunity for continuing contacts between Coleraine and Dublin. He made this point to the director in a letter which accompanied the final report: "An evaluation of the evaluation would indicate the long-term significance of these contacts and the desirability of continuing and indeed intensifying them".¹⁹ The post-evaluation conference would also help to consolidate the Unit's position in its efforts to institutionalise itself and in this process the Unit could use all the help it could get. "It could be a very powerful lever", Skilbeck observed, "and this I suspect you are going to need".²⁰

The conference, however, never took place. The main reason was that shortly after the presentation of the final report, Skilbeck left Coleraine to take up a post on the other side of the world as director of the Curriculum Development Centre in Canberra, Australia. His departure was a great loss to the Unit, which was now emerging as a curriculum force on the Irish scene and was counting on Skilbeck's continuing support. Certainly, he had shown every sign of a deep interest in the Unit's progress and, before deciding to go to Australia, had even mooted the idea of presenting the Unit as a case study for the Open University's course on curriculum studies. This idea, however, had to be abandoned with his departure from Ireland.

Skilbeck's sympathy for the Unit was probably due in large part to his warm espousal of school-based curriculum development - an area in which he considered the Unit to be very successful. He was deeply

convinced of the importance of the school as a curriculum agent and was later to express himself on this point in a manner which clearly indicated his sympathies:

The school is a social institution comprising people in active relationships with one another: it is a living organism which needs to organize and manage its affairs in such a way that its primary purpose, the education of children and youth, can be achieved in the best possible way... We cannot expect a school to be a vital centre of education if it is denied a role of self-determination and self-direction: the curriculum is the central structural component of schooling upon whose reasonable control the educational vigour of the school and the success of its educational mission depend (Skilbeck, 1984b, pp. 13-14).

How do we classify Skilbeck as an evaluator? Barry McDonald once divided evaluators into three kinds - bureaucratic, autocratic, and democratic - and although Skilbeck in many respects defies categorisation he more easily fits into the second category than the other two (McDonald, 1976, p.126). "Autocratic", however, is probably not the best word to describe Skilbeck's approach and if we substitute instead the term "authoritative" we are better enabled to catch the distinctive flavour of his evaluative style. He had considerable authority in the Irish educational scene and this he was prepared to use in focusing attention on what he considered to be important aspects of the Unit's work. He was well versed in the political niceties of the situation he was evaluating but he was also conscious of the danger of becoming too preoccupied with the politics of evaluation. He preferred instead to see evaluation as only one ingredient in a complex whole, where the important thing was to be conscious of qualitative issues such as values, aims and criteria. "It is helpful to keep in mind", he was later to point out, "the dependence of evaluation on other aspects of the educational process, including everyday institutional practice in schools, colleges and education offices. Curriculum evaluation would make a good servant but a bad

master” (Skilbeck, 1984a, p.5).

The real significance of the Coleraine evaluation was more in the process it initiated than in the report it eventually produced and in this regard we are reminded of the words of the American evaluator, Lee Cronbach:

The cumulative and indirect contributions of an evaluation can be as important as the effects on the program studied... A program evaluation that gets attention, whether or not it affects the immediate fate of the program it studies, is likely to modify the prevailing view of social purposes, of attainable goals, and of appropriate means of action (Cronbach, 1980, p.156).

The events that accompanied the Coleraine evaluation had the overall result of instilling into the Unit staff a sense of self- confidence and a greater appreciation of the significance of what they were doing. They were enabled to stand back a little from the minutiae of their everyday preoccupations to take a broader view of their work and give a better justification of it to interested outsiders. Above all the evaluation oriented the Unit towards the future and made it consciously think of itself as an institution that could continue after the period of its initial four years had come to a close.

This note of confidence and orientation towards the future can be detected in the Unit’s Steering Committee when it met on 26th January 1976 to consider the final report of the Skilbeck evaluation. The Committee agreed in principle that the Unit should continue in existence after 31st December 1976, the terminal point of its initial four year phase, and authorised the director to prepare a document containing detailed proposals about the future. In preparing this document he was given a number of guidelines, the most significant of which was as follows:

The necessity for the Unit to consolidate its present activities and the possibility of extending the Unit's future activities in two directions: a) vertically into the senior cycle curriculum; b) horizontally into other areas of the junior curriculum.²¹

The director was also requested to bear in mind the need to devise a more satisfactory career and salary structure for members of the staff.²² Clearly, here was a Unit, full of confidence about its own future, preparing to expand the scope of its activities and ready to undertake the task of devising institutional structures that would underpin its continuity.

These optimistic aspirations concerning the Unit's future, however, did not materialise. Within a year of the Steering Committee's meeting the Unit was shaken by two crises - the first precipitated by its chief sponsor, the CDVEC, the second by one of the teacher unions. Far from entering a phase of stability with an assured status in the world of education, the Unit was plunged into a period of uncertainty which lasted for over two years and culminated with a debate on its future in the chamber of the Irish parliament.

Why then, it could be asked, was the Unit not better prepared by the Coleraine evaluation for the difficulties in store? This would probably have been to expect too much from the evaluation team; they were not prophets and could not be held responsible for the complex interplay of relationships which were to affect the Unit's destiny. In hindsight, however, it can be seen now that the Skilbeck evaluation had a blind spot: in stressing the Unit's potential as a permanent centre within the University, with national as well as regional functions, it raised hopes and expectations that could not be fulfilled. The alluring prospect which the report put forward was never feasible in the context of the political realities with which the Unit had to contend. Skilbeck had strongly advocated that the Unit anchor itself within the University

School of Education and that it take on a national role with the support of the Department of Education. In theory he was right: there was much to be said in favour of a centrally supported Unit working closely with a teacher training institution. In practice, however, the arrangement was unworkable, as later events were to show. There was no place for the Unit within the School of Education and the Department of Education remained fundamentally suspicious of and at times openly hostile to the Unit's continued existence.

The irony of the Coleraine report was that it underplayed the significance of the CDVEC - the most committed and supportive of the Unit's three sponsors. There were probably two main reasons for this. First, throughout the entire evaluation period, Sheehan, the CEO of the CDVEC, as we have already noted, was on leave of absence with the Commission of the European Communities in Brussels. Secondly, the ruling body of the CDVEC, the Vocational Education Committee, had been suspended since 1969, when the entire Dublin City Council had been disbanded by the Government and replaced by a special Commissioner. This state of affairs was to last until 1974 when the newly elected Coalition Government reinstated the City Council and a new Vocational Education Committee was appointed. At the time when Skilbeck and his colleagues were evaluating the Unit, the CDVEC was preoccupied with adjusting to a new regime and so was not unduly concerned about what was happening in the Unit.

Nonetheless, the importance of the Coleraine evaluation should never be lost sight of. It had a pronounced effect on the morale of the Unit - more than any other evaluation in the Unit's history. Skilbeck himself, although removed from the Irish scene after 1975, still remained in contact with the director and for many years continued to exercise an influence on the Unit's destiny. He had intended the evaluation process to be the beginning of a fruitful and exciting link between the Unit and the Education Centre at Coleraine and although unfortunately this hope faded with his departure from Ireland, the Unit always kept alive its interest in the educational scene north of the Irish border.

The Evaluation of ISCIP and Humanities - Product versus Process

Skilbeck and his colleagues did not concern themselves with the Unit's projects as such, beyond identifying a "healthy inter-project dialectic" between ISCIP and Humanities. The former, they noted, had become with the passing of time less structured and directive, the latter more so. This they found to be "a consequence less of the emergence of inherent structural tendencies than of the, at time, warm debates that took place within the Unit and initiatives taken at school level as teachers became more confident".²³

There was, however, a fundamental difference in design between the two projects and this emerged more clearly in various individual project evaluations. As we noted earlier, ISCIP was evaluated by Elizabeth Oldham, a research student working under the guidance of the ISCIP director Bryan Powell, and her findings were contained in two reports - her research thesis, which was based on the project activities of 1972/73, and an interim evaluation report, which was based on the following two years. A final evaluation report, however, was never completed "owing to the prevailing shortage of money and the preoccupation with developing the ISCIP modes for the public examinations".²⁴

Oldham saw her evaluation role as fitting in with the development of a curriculum project in the classical mode. The project she noted had been set up in the "approved manner". Aims and objectives had been specified and content and methods had been devised to implement them. A small group of science teachers - known as the writing team - had been chosen to produce the materials, which were mainly student work cards. These materials were then given to the teachers in the pilot schools, modified as a result of feed-back and then reissued. The overall direction of the project was in the hands of an inner cabinet -

the director, assistant director, evaluator and the writing team.²⁵

Although the ethos of ISCIP was brisk and business-like, its general philosophy was not lacking in idealism. The overall aim was to teach science as science should be taught, that is with an emphasis on “enquiry and experimentation, on understanding and constructive thinking rather than the mere accumulation of facts which could be regurgitated to satisfy examination requirements”.²⁶ The project tried to make the student aware of those aspects of science which played an important part in his everyday world and also to give him a genuine experience of the scientific method: “He will be introduced to and use some of the apparatus that scientists use, he will experiment and have the opportunity to communicate his observations and conclusions”.²⁷

Oldham planned her evaluation to fit in with the basic structure of ISCIP - the design of curriculum through the specification of learning outcomes, or what is sometimes called the product or output model. In this model aims and objectives are of paramount importance and the evaluator’s chief concern is to find out whether in fact these are being fulfilled. The classical way of doing this is to design a series of tests which can be given to the students before, during and after the experimental period to measure the various gains and losses brought about by the project. The method takes on an added refinement if the evaluator succeeds in comparing the experimental group with what is called a control group - a group as similar in composition as human conditions will allow but outside the scope of the experiment.

It should be noted that this approach to evaluation is part of a highly respectable tradition that goes back as far as Ralph Tyler’s pioneering “Eight Year Study” in America in the 1930s (Smith and Tyler, 1942). Although several aspects of this study have since been questioned, it remained a pattern which was advocated in texts on curriculum development and evaluation well into the 1960s. The advantages of the model were succinctly summed up by Wynne Harlen, a British evaluator who admired but did not always agree with Tyler’s

approach:

It provided a neat picture of curriculum development in which evaluation had a well-defined function. It indicated how students' achievements could be used in modifying and developing materials. It provided for setting up criteria - the objectives - against which the value of curriculum materials could be assessed. It became, in fact, the "classical" evaluation strategy (Harlen, 1976, pp. 43-44).

The Tyler model of curriculum development and evaluation was considerably enhanced with the publication in 1956 of Benjamin Bloom's celebrated *Taxonomy of Educational Objectives* (Bloom et al., 1956). The design of curriculum through the specification of outcomes was now given an intellectual framework which won international acceptance and so by the time ISCIP arrived on the scene the output model was well-established if not supreme in the curriculum world.

Oldham's evaluation work on ISCIP was basically to design, administer and process student cognitive and attitude tests. In the second year of her study she succeeded in establishing control groups in three schools which were not participants in the experiment and although by her own admission the usefulness of this strategy was very limited it provided nonetheless a kind of regulative check on the project as a whole:

If ISCIP children do better than control group children on the cognitive tests, this may well be due to their greater familiarity with ISCIP type materials; it cannot automatically be taken as a measure of the Project's success. However, if ISCIP students do significantly worse than those in the control group, there is cause for worry. For example, a relatively poor performance by ISCIP students on "recall" items might suggest that they are not learning enough facts through ISCIP classes. Some schools or teachers might then decide to leave the Project, or at least to use the materials rather

differently.²⁸

In the event there was little difference in learning outcomes between the experimental and control groups but at the end of the three years evaluation this conclusion did not seem to matter. This was because half way through the period the project's major preoccupation changed, as it became more and more focussed on the development of alternative modes of assessment for the public examination system. In this context the evaluator's work in designing and processing tests took on a new significance, especially with regard to familiarising the teachers with new kinds of student assessment procedures. The evaluation therefore could be said to have had a fruitful outcome and there was scarcely any need for a final report.²⁹

The evaluation of Humanities was a different story. For one thing there were several evaluations of Humanities and unlike ISCIP not all of them were within the control of the project team. One of the most substantial of these was conducted by the CDVEC Schools' Psychological Service and was nearing completion at the time when the Coleraine study was just getting under way. As we noted earlier in the Chapter, this evaluation had originally been requested by the director of the Unit in an effort to keep the Department of Education at bay. The evaluation had been put into the sympathetic hands of Brede Foy, the CDVEC Chief Educational Psychologist, with whom the director was on friendly terms and who could be expected to deliver a verdict that would not seriously embarrass the Unit.

Foy took her task seriously. She put together an evaluation team under her leadership comprising three of her colleagues in the Psychological Service, supported by two outside consultants - a statistician and a

computer programmer. A pilot evaluative study of 120 students was undertaken in the school year 1972/73 and this was succeeded the following year by a major study embracing all the Humanities pilot schools. In May 1975 the final report was completed and given in confidence to the director.³⁰

Foy introduced her report as “a presentation of some findings from a preliminary examination of data collected in the early stages of an Evaluation Study”.³¹ Despite this modest description, the report was a formidable document of one hundred and seventy-five pages. It was a study in the classical tradition, with pre- and post-tests of experimental and control groups interspersed with comments from principals, teachers and students, and as such it was not a model which easily fitted in with the design of the project. The overall conclusion, however, was not unfavourable to Humanities:

The evaluators feel that what has emerged from the total exercise is that the Humanities curriculum has introduced a stimulation into the lives of the students, teachers and schools into which it has been introduced; that it has brought students to a realisation that school can be an enjoyable experience rather than a bore; that it is possible even in a short time to begin to change students' attitudes to school and to retain students in schools (i.e. because of decrease in dropout), when curricula have an explicit relevance to their lives and experiences; that students whose lives have been short of enriching experiences can come alive and develop self-reliance, when given the stimulus and method to do so.³²

Notwithstanding this commendation, the response of the Unit to the Foy evaluation was less than enthusiastic. The Humanities team in particular was disenchanted with the report, pointing out that the findings were already out of date. The evaluation had taken place in the first two years of the project's life, 1972-74, at a time when Humanities was only beginning to take shape. By June 1975, when

the report was finished, the project had changed considerably and many of the report's findings were no longer relevant. From the Unit's point of view it would have been more helpful if Foy and her colleagues had been less ambitious in their evaluation design and instead of undertaking a large-scale testing programme had given the Humanities team a more informal and continuous feed-back on progress.

Another factor which militated against the effectiveness of the evaluation was lack of money. As was clear from the title of the report, Foy had intended the study as the first stage in a long-term evaluative process. This would have required additional resources and staff, as the Psychological Service could not have been expected to maintain its commitment of four fulltime staff members without any extra remuneration. In the event no money was made available but it has to be said that the Unit made little effort to obtain it - which in itself is a comment on its attitude to the evaluation.

In practice, the Unit responded to the Foy evaluation largely by ignoring it - a reaction which was not calculated to enhance the relationship between the two institutions concerned. This was an unfortunate outcome because both institutions formed part of the support structure of the CDVEC and it was in their mutual interest to find ways of co-operating with each other. It was also unfortunate that the potential contribution of the Psychological Service to the project's development was never realised, and although the evaluation design could be faulted, Foy and her colleagues could have brought many important insights into the factors which affected the project's learning outcomes. As educational psychologists of many years, standing in the CDVEC schools they had a wealth of experience concerning the students and the teachers. As Foy herself put it:

The kind of questions raised by "evaluation" have all been raised at one time or another by the team members in their ordinary day-to-day work with students, teachers, classes, schools, principals, and the Committee's councils. The evaluation study therefore

essentially consisted of isolating from among these varied questions those which were most practical and most useful to the different interests and working intensively on them.³³

The kind of questions that Foy had in mind related to broad issues such as the effect of Humanities on the thinking skills, attitudes and judgements of the students and the project's influence on different methods of student grouping (including team teaching) and on class cohesiveness and morale.³⁴ That these questions were never raised with the project team was probably due to the emphasis which the evaluation placed on the measurement of student change over a large number of variables through pre- and post- testing of comparative groups. Foy herself appears to have had some misgivings about this method but decided nonetheless to proceed with it:

We were conscious of the fact that some other researchers had discarded measurement using objective tests, as irrelevant in curriculum evaluation. Yet we have not discarded this method on logical as well as on experiential grounds, although we are conscious of the fact that the method involves many unresolved methodological problems and that only limited inferences can be drawn from results.³⁵

It was ironic that the section of the report which dealt with the literature on evaluation should have considered Lee Cronbach's opposition to the use of control groups only to reject his approach. Cronbach had warned against the very thing that happened to Foy and her colleagues: the results of using such a method would prove inconclusive and would not justify the effort and time invested (Cronbach, 1963). A similar conclusion was reached by a post-graduate research student, Mary Caffrey, who had observed the project in action in one of the pilot schools throughout 1973/74:

Boys in the control group often asked why they were following a different course from the other first year boys. Some of the staff thought the boys were placed in an unfair position. From experience the teachers have learned that the design of an evaluation programme must follow from the design of the curriculum as a whole. A curriculum development project with general aims and no pre-specified objectives (e.g. The City of Dublin Humanities Curriculum) needs an evaluation design which centres on the learning milieu and detailed case histories of participating students and teachers.³⁶

We have to conclude, therefore, that the Foy evaluation was largely a missed opportunity for the Unit. The blame for this has to be shared by the Unit director who was aware of the evaluation design from the outset but obviously gave little thought to its implications. As we have already noted, the director's main concern was to ward off the possibility of the appointment of an evaluator to the project by the Department of Education, but it would seem that he neglected to think through the outcomes of what Foy and her colleagues were undertaking. This was entirely consistent with his preoccupation with the politics of the Unit's survival and from his point of view it seemed a justifiable stance to take. The irony of his position, however, was that he did not realise that every evaluation, no matter how friendly its intent, is basically political in nature and will eventually have outcomes that affect the overall political structure of the enterprise being evaluated.³⁷

Besides the evaluations referred to, two members of the Humanities team, Nora Godwin and Tony Crooks, submitted research theses which could be ranked as evaluative studies of the project. Godwin's work, which was based on the project's feasibility year, 1972/73, concentrated on the use of non-book resources and in particular on the necessity for a resource centre within the Unit itself.³⁸ Godwin was fortunate in the timing of her thesis as it coincided with and possibly

influenced the Unit's plans to provide such a centre. She was afterwards to become the first co-ordinator of the centre and played a vital role in its development and indeed in Humanities as a whole.

Crooks's thesis, which was a doctoral dissertation for Trinity, described the development of Humanities throughout its formative period, 1972/76, and since Crooks himself was largely the architect of the project as well as being a co-founder and afterwards deputy director of the Unit, his description may be taken as authoritative.³⁹

He conceived Humanities as a response to the general pressure for change in the Irish second level curriculum and within this context he saw a need to build a programme with the following seven dimensions:

- it would link with the new primary school curriculum in ways appropriate to second level education;
- it would be flexible and adaptable to the needs of students of different abilities;
- it would not be dominated by a public examination, but would use a variety of assessment techniques to widen the objectives of the programme;
- it would use integrated studies as one way of dealing with the explosion of knowledge and with the problems of identity in larger schools;
- it would emphasise the development of character;
- it would start from the expressed needs of the local community;
- it would respond to the influence of television and to the increasing pluralism in Irish life.⁴⁰

In practice this approach entailed the design of a three year programme based on the integration of English, history and geography, which would lead to the public examinations at Intermediate and Group

Certificate level, but with new modes of assessment. In the Irish situation, this was a revolutionary approach to take and in Chapter 4 we shall look in greater detail at its implications for the centralised examination system. For the purpose of this chapter we shall confine ourselves to commenting on the project's content and methodology.

Crooks designed Humanities within the existing framework of objectives for the national syllabi for English, history and geography, but with a completely new curriculum content. He approached this task by first of all asking a group of teachers from four CDVEC schools to undertake a feasibility programme with the general aim that it should "provide the student with opportunities to increase his understanding and awareness of both himself and his own environment".⁴¹ The teachers also agreed to study and to adapt where possible three other curriculum projects which had already been developed in the general area of humanities/social studies - the Nuffield Foundation/Schools Council Humanities Curriculum Project, the Schools Council Integrated Studies Project, and an American project developed by Jerome Bruner, "Man: A Course of Study".⁴² Towards the end of the feasibility year all the teachers came together for a seminar and agreed the broad outline of a three-year programme, with the first year devoted to an exploration of man in his own environment, the second to man in a contrasting environment and the third to the making of modern man or a study of contemporary issues.⁴³

Two basic assumptions underlay the new programme. The first related to the teaching methodology, which embodied a respect for each student as a person. The methodology in general was seen as a continuation of that of the new primary curriculum, with an emphasis on enquiry, discussion, project work and the use of the local environment as a laboratory for learning. The second assumption related to content. Irish culture was to form the main body of the

programme and in this sense culture was interpreted as the total way of life of a people viewed in the context of its international setting.⁴⁴

Perhaps the most outstanding characteristic of Humanities, as Crooks conceived it, was the importance it attached to the role of the teacher. In taking this stance, Crooks was probably influenced by Lawrence Stenhouse, who had attended the teachers' seminar at the end of the feasibility year and had played an important part in the discussions that led to the formation of the Humanities programme. Stenhouse had emphasised in his own work the need to treat the teacher as a full professional with "a capacity for autonomous professional self-development through systematic self-study, through the study of the work of other teachers and through the testing of ideas by classroom procedures" (Stenhouse, 1975, p.144). Every teacher, according to Stenhouse, should be a researcher but Crooks was to go further in asserting that the teacher should be an evaluator as well. He was prepared to allow a place for summative evaluation in Humanities but saw no necessity for a special role for formative evaluation, which he felt should be a shared responsibility that included all the teachers.⁴⁵

Crooks also followed Stenhouse in rejecting the output model of curriculum development as being unsuitable for Humanities and although this was an unfashionable view to take at the time, experience was to prove that the approach was justified. Jim Callan, who taught first year Humanities in 1973/74 and afterwards wrote a research thesis on his work, described how he was converted to the Humanities methodology. "I was disappointed initially", he wrote, "with the structure of the project. Having read Taba, Tyler, Hirst, Wheeler and Bloom, I felt that the approach should have been the 'objectives' model".⁴⁶ However after a year teaching Humanities, he changed his mind and became an advocate of the "input model" implicit in the project's methodology:

The advantage of this approach is that the teaching strategy does embody the values implied in the aims. It also allows for many possible outcomes, and the

teacher can accept a range of objectives rather than one. It also allows for students themselves having their own objectives. Since Humanities is essentially about people, it follows that the role of the teacher is essentially a person-oriented role, and the Humanities curriculum is something which is erected on the structures of reciprocal personal relations. From my brief experience as a Humanities teacher, the input model is a better experimental design for curriculum planning in this area than the objectives model.⁴⁷

We have been describing the various evaluations of ISCIP and Humanities in the context of the different designs of each project - an outcomes or product model in the case of ISCIP and a process model in the case of Humanities. It would be wrong, however, to give the impression that there was a fundamental incompatibility between the two projects. Both emanated from the same curriculum unit and, as the Coleraine evaluation pointed out, each project interacted creatively with the other. Furthermore, both shared the Unit's networking philosophy and in many cases the two projects could be found side by side in the same pilot schools. It should have been important then for the Unit to have considered the overall impact of both projects on the pilot schools and to have commissioned some evaluative case studies in this regard. One such study was in fact carried out and although quite limited in scope and duration, contained nonetheless some interesting insights into the Unit's effects on a single pilot school.

The school in question was a girls' vocational school in Finglas and the study was carried out in 1974 by John Mulhern, an American educationalist who was spending a sabbatical year in Trinity at the time. Mulhern set about evaluating the effects of ISCIP and Humanities on the school through a series of structured interviews with the principal, project teachers, non-project teachers and participating students. Although his overall conclusion was favourable - "in general the results seem to uphold the value of the projects as a means to bring about curriculum reforms" - he nonetheless sounded

some warnings that deserved more attention from the project teams than they in fact got: “There was a general reference by all groups to the absence of real accomplishment. This was especially so among students as well. Discipline and behaviour standards were cited by all of the groups as an area in need of reform”.⁴⁸

That the Unit never followed up these criticisms or sought to have further case studies made on the impact of its work on the schools is perhaps a significant comment on its general attitude to evaluation. It might be too strong to say that it regarded evaluation as a necessary evil, to be tolerated and used to advantage where there was no other means of escape. It must be stated, however, that the Unit, at least in its early years, remained somewhat suspicious of evaluation and never went out of its way to invite evaluators within its doors.

The Social Interaction Model

The third of the Unit’s early projects, Outdoor Education, was very different from both ISCIP and Humanities. In a sense it was not a curriculum development project at all but an attempt to disseminate and consolidate an innovation that had already been successfully developed in Ballyfermot Vocational School in the late ’60s and early ’70s. In this regard Outdoor Education can be seen as an example of what R. G. Havelock called the social interaction model of innovating. This model takes the innovation for granted; the problem is how to disseminate it. Hence the attention is focused on the potential adopters of the innovation - the target audience. The problem of disseminating the innovation is seen primarily as a problem of communication and persuasion - or in crude terms, salesmanship. The important thing here is to understand that the potential user belongs to a social system, or more correctly a network of social systems, and that within these systems there are key people who, if they adopt the innovation, will influence many others to follow suit. The techniques which are favoured by this model are those of communication and persuasion and what could be called the personal approach. One must identify

potential allies within the system and at the same time be aware of the people who will predictably resist the innovation. Alliances must be made and consolidated and resistances broken down or suitably circumvented (Havelock, 1970).

The Outdoor Education Project had its origins in the enthusiasm and euphoria that surrounded the launching of Ballyfermot Vocational School in the mid '60s. Years later the principal of the school recalled these circumstances:

The school was not yet a term old when we launched into adventure education. We called it “outward bound” at the time, this being a more resonant and expressive label. We profited from a donation of £150 from Taylor Keith, a mineral water company, to buy a set of anoraks, shorts, boots and rucksacks and away we went into the great outdoors under the leadership of a keen, bright-eyed young teacher, named Peter Heery. We did not realise it at the time, but we were making history. We thought we were simply doing a normal, natural thing, taking students into the out-of-doors as part of their weekly time-tabled activity. But we are now credited with being the first school to introduce adventure education into the country.⁴⁹

The philosophy of Outdoor Education owes much to the inspiration of Kurt Hahn, the founder of Gordonstoun School and father of what has become the outward bound movement in modern education. Hahn can be described as a charismatic, larger than life figure and one of the great educators of our time. As a young man he spent a year in a darkened room recovering from sun-stroke and there he formulated his celebrated maxim: “your disability is your opportunity”. Hahn believed that young people had great potential for altruism, noble deeds and service to others if only they were given the right kind of challenge for adventure opportunities and service. In his own forceful words, young people should be “impelled into experiences”. These experiences were to be obtained by confronting the rugged outdoors

through camping, canoeing, mountaineering and sailing (Hogan, 1968, pp. 9-29).

The spread of Hahn's ideas took place during the years of World War II in Britain when concern was being expressed that many young shipwrecked sailors were losing their lives because it was felt they were not tough enough nor sufficiently able to rely on their own resources. Month-long courses with an emphasis on challenge and endurance were then devised to prepare these young people for the rigours that lay ahead. When the war ended the idea was still considered valid and continued to develop through the Outward Bound Trust and the foundation of outward bound schools. Ironically, however, it was industry more than education that provided the candidates. In 1958 the Duke of Edinburgh Award was started - a kind of do-it-yourself version of outward bound - and this scheme combined in a highly successful manner many of Hahn's ideas, such as adventure, service, physical recreation and practical skills (Skidelsky, 1969, pp.211-228).

In the early '70s, Ballyfermot Vocational School developed a thriving outdoor education programme which had been helped considerably by the establishment in 1969 of the Association for Adventure Sports in Ireland (AFAS) with a training centre at Tiglin in the Wicklow mountains. All first year students took at least one introductory one-day course in the mountains, while second and third years went on a three-day residential course to Tiglin. Senior students undertook a week-long venture hike combined with trips on the national sail training vessel, "Asgard".⁵⁰ Such a programme was no mean undertaking when one considers that the school population at the time was close to 1,000. By 1973 the CDVEC was sufficiently happy with the programme to agree to extend it to five more city vocational schools - Coolock, Cabra, Denmark Street, the Liberties and Mount Street. Peter Heery from Ballyfermot became the co-ordinator of the programme with the Unit director keeping an overall watching brief.

In July 1974, the director decided to incorporate Outdoor Education as a project within the structure of the Unit and so made a proposal to this effect to the Steering Committee and to the CDVEC.⁵¹ In the director's view the basic reason for the project was a social one:

As well as providing a dimension of experience which many young people today seem to want, the outdoor pursuits movement also represents an effort, however small, to make the school itself a more human institution. Teachers in schools today, especially in working class areas, will testify to the amount of tension that is growing within them. Problems in inter-personal relationships are becoming the major preoccupation in many schools. Many of these problems undoubtedly reflect conditions in the family and in society at large; they are nonetheless often exacerbated by the closed institutional setting of the school. Getting students and teachers out of school into a completely different surrounding where they can relate to each other more like human beings and less like prisoners and jailers, would seem to many hard-pressed head teachers a consummation devoutly to be wished for. Outdoor pursuits afford such an opportunity; they comprise a kind of deschooling programme which makes it possible for human relationships to develop and for real learning to take place.⁵²

The Steering Committee and the CDVEC agreed to the director's proposal and Outdoor Education under Heery's leadership became the Unit's third project with eleven pilot schools and an annual budget of £7,250.⁵³ The Department of Education, however, kept aloof from the project and refused to give it the same degree of recognition it accorded to ISCIP and Humanities. Indeed for many years Outdoor Education was treated as the Unit's unofficial project, something that was considered to have merit but hardly worthy of being located in a university based research and development institute.

It was perhaps with this consideration in mind that the director arranged in 1976 to have the project evaluated. A low-status project, he felt, would benefit from the attention which would be given to it by an evaluation. There was a need, moreover, to demonstrate that the project was doing worthwhile things; people associated with the project were aware of its worth but wanted to see this substantiated in respectable academic terms.

The evaluation of Outdoor Education was carried out by a full-time member of the Unit's staff, Bernard O'Flaherty. O'Flaherty had joined the Unit in January 1975 as a result of the suggestion made by Torlach O'Connor, the Department's representative on the Steering Committee, that an internal evaluator be appointed to Humanities. However, the director succeeded in having this suggestion considerably modified so that by the time O'Flaherty was appointed, his official brief was to develop new modes of assessment in the public examinations for both ISCIP and Humanities.⁵⁴ It is a comment on the internal politics of both projects to note that within a year of his appointment O'Flaherty was asked by the director to work instead on Outdoor Education.

In his evaluation report on Outdoor Education, O'Flaherty tried to capture the essential flavour of the project through a historical account of its development and an analysis of some of its key achievements.⁵⁵ In the evaluation literature at the time there was little available which might have been helpful or relevant to him. Two evaluations of the outward bound movement in Britain had recently been published but both contained contradictory messages. Basil Fletcher in 1971 had claimed that outward bound courses produced marked benefits on participants - in the physical, aesthetic, moral and social spheres (Fletcher, 1971, p.55). Three years later a team of four sociologists from the University of Liverpool published a counter claim, referring with heavy irony to the outward bound movement and similar schemes as "the character-training industry" (Roberts et al., 1974, pp. 11-32).

In his report, O'Flaherty did not question the basic assumptions of the project with regard to student outcomes but concentrated instead on highlighting some of the organisational and managerial problems that had resulted from the rapid increase in the number of participants. Here he made some practical recommendations for the future streamlining of the project, especially with regard to the schools being required to send in advance, to the Unit, plans and route-cards of proposed courses and expeditions.⁵⁶

Perhaps the most interesting part of the report described the efforts of the project to reconcile what some people believed to be two mutually exclusive objectives - on the one hand the cultivation of adventure sports, such as mountaineering, sailing, canoeing and orienteering, and on the other the carrying out of carefully structured field trips. Commenting on this question, Harold Drasdo, the celebrated mountaineer and poet, had declared in his book *Education in Wild Country* that "it is no more possible to cover both at the highest level simultaneously than to make careful observations on the migration of birds whilst playing a game of football".⁵⁷ The Outdoor Education project team, however, took the view that the two things need not necessarily be mutually exclusive and indeed could sometimes depend on each other. For instance, a good geographer or biologist operating on rugged elevations needs mountaineering skills to work safely and effectively. There should never be conflict in practice between adventure training and field studies, and it is interesting to note that this view was also shared by a Department of Education working party which reported around the same time:

The working party feels that at second level where narrow specialisations are uncommon, field studies and outdoor pursuits can frequently support and strengthen one another. Enjoyment, adventure, aesthetic value, observation, investigation, appreciation of resource and environment and a cultivation of the necessary physical, scientific and perceptive skills for the foregoing are all elements in sound educational formation and go hand in hand.⁵⁸

In his evaluation report O'Flaherty recounted how the Outdoor Education Project sought to resolve the adventure sports/field studies dichotomy by launching an experiment of its own in the school year 1975/76. Five city vocational schools - Clogher Road, Crumlin Road, Whitehall, Finglas and Denmark Street - agreed to carry out projects in the Glencree Valley in County Wicklow on the following themes: sheep farming, forestation, land use and formation, folk life, and social history.⁵⁹ The work was greatly facilitated by the production of a background manual on Glencree, which was written and researched by one of the teachers, Fergus McGlynn.⁶⁰ The results of the experiment showed that it was possible indeed to combine adventure activities with field studies provided the teachers and students were highly motivated and thoroughly prepared.⁶¹ With the rapid expansion of outdoor education in the CDVEC schools, however, it was not always possible to ensure that these two conditions were satisfactorily met.

Financial Evaluation

Before concluding this chapter it is appropriate to make a brief comment on the financial evaluation of the Unit. It will be recalled that one of the principal reasons why the Department of Education wanted to evaluate the Unit in the first place was its dissatisfaction with the Unit's financial arrangements. It was on this account that a financial enquiry into the Unit's affairs was initiated and this enquiry was put into the hands of one of the Department's officers, John Kenny, an accountant by profession. Kenny conducted his investigations early in 1974 and by the end of February he had made his report.

The general tone of Kenny's report was friendly to the Unit. He was pleased at the cooperation he had received and was particularly impressed by the open approach of the director, who, he said, had "insisted that I should be informed on all aspects of his work in order that it be shown that he had not concealed anything from the

Department”.⁶² Kenny’s job, however, was to report objectively on the financial implications of the Unit’s work and so he felt obliged to emphasise the hidden costs incurred in the projects, especially through time-tabling the teachers for planning meetings. In the case of Humanities this was a particularly expensive item, which in Kenny’s calculations raised the overall cost per student per annum to £11. The corresponding ISCIP figure was only 80p, a discrepancy which was explained by the fact that ISCIP did not follow the same pattern of teacher planning meetings as Humanities.⁶³

Kenny was right in drawing attention to the important matter of teacher planning time. It was something the Unit had completely forgotten or else omitted to mention in its original costings and it has to be said that the director’s attempt to excuse the omission looks somewhat weak: “Mr Trant stated that the original estimates of the Unit costs supplied to the Department were genuine under-estimates”, Kenny reported. “It had been impossible to forecast how the projects would develop, since this depended on the attitude of each school participating in the experiment”.⁶⁴

The director’s argument that project costs would decrease over time was also weak. According to Kenny, he had maintained that the growth of local networks would obviate the necessity for certain recurring costs:

Mr. Trant envisages that in the future perhaps three adjoining schools will form their own networks together in a local network centre and cease travelling to the Unit for network meetings. In the case of a very large school the new curriculum might be operated by the school having its own resources centre and by confining teachers’ meetings to within the school itself.⁶⁵

This aspect of local networking never became a reality and it would have been wiser for the director to have based his defence of the

project costs on the necessity for teacher development and teacher inservice training. In fairness, however, it has to be said that such thinking would not have carried much weight in the early '70s, and it was only in later years that the Unit capitalised on the inservice argument.

Kenny's report, notwithstanding its favourable tone, did not appear to make much difference with regard to the Unit's future. The Department never officially released the report, nor is there any evidence to suggest that much attention was ever paid to it. In any event, by the time it was presented the political situation surrounding the Unit had changed. The CEO of the CDVEC had left the scene, for the time being at least, and the Department seemed reasonably satisfied with the degree of control it was now exercising of the Unit's affairs.

CHAPTER 3

REFERENCES AND NOTES

- 1 There is no official record of this meeting in the Unit's files. The account in the text is based principally on the writer's recollection corroborated by an outline which he subsequently gave to the Steering Committee on 14 March 1974.
- 2 The Steering Committee met on 13 September 1973 but the minutes were never written. This is significant because it shows the degree of confusion and uncertainty over the Unit's future which followed in the aftermath of the meeting.
- 3 J. P. Sheehan to R. Burke, T.D., Minister for Education, 25 October 1973, CDU Papers, CDVEC Head Office.
- 4 Minutes of Steering Committee, 14 March 1974.
- 5 Ibid.
- 6 "Report to the N.U.U. Staff Team on the Explanatory Visit to the Curriculum Development Unit by D. Batts and H. McMahon on 8th and 9th April, 1974", Coleraine Evaluation Papers, CDU.
- 7 Ibid., p.1.
- 8 "Proposal for an Enquiry by a New University of Ulster Consultancy Team into the Work of the Dublin Vocational Education Committee's Curriculum Development Unit", June 1974, pp.2-3. Coleraine Evaluation Papers.
- 9 Ibid., pp.3-5.
- 10 Ibid., p.4.
- 11 Minutes of Steering Committee Meeting, 14 March 1974.
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- 13 J. V. Rice, "Proposed Research Projects in the School of Education", 5 May 1972, Steering Committee Papers, CDU.
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- 15 "Curriculum Development Unit: Report by the Evaluation Team", August 1975, p.3, Coleraine Evaluation Papers.
- 16 Ibid., p.14.
- 17 Ibid.
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- 19 M. Skilbeck to A. Trant, 8 September 1975, Coleraine Evaluation Papers.
- 20 Ibid.
- 21 Minutes of the Steering Committee Meeting, 26 January 1976.
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- 24 E. Oldham, "Integrated Science Curriculum Innovation Project: Formal Evaluation 1973-75 - An Interim Report", ISCIP Papers, CDU.
- 25 E. Oldham "Integrated Science Curriculum Innovation Project. Some Aspects of the Evaluation", M.Ed. dissertation submitted to the School of Education, Trinity College Dublin, March 1974, p.24.
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- 27 Ibid.
- 28 E. Oldham, ISCIP Evaluation, pp.5-6.

- 29 Elizabeth Oldham's later reflections on her role as ISICIP evaluator are contained in Appendix 2.
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- 31 Ibid., p.1.
- 32 Ibid., p.103.
- 33 Ibid., p.8.
- 34 Ibid.
- 35 Ibid., p.2.
- 36 M. Caffrey, "Some Theoretical and Practical Aspects of Curriculum Development in Secondary Schools", M.A. dissertation submitted to the Education Department, St Patrick's College, Maynooth, June 1974, pp.146-147.
- 37 For an account of Brede Foy's perception of her role as evaluator of Humanities, see Appendix 2.
- 38 N. Godwin, "A Study of the Use of Non-Book Materials in the Feasibility Year of the City of Dublin Humanities Curriculum Project", M.Ed. dissertation submitted to the School of Education, Trinity College Dublin, August 1973.
- 39 J. A. Crooks, "A Participant Observation Study of the Factors Which Influenced the Development of the City of Dublin Humanities Curriculum 1972/76", Ph.D. dissertation submitted to the School of Education, Trinity College, Dublin, July 1978.
- 40 Ibid., p.311.
- 41 Ibid., p.246.
- 42 Ibid., p.240.

- 43 Ibid., pp.328-331.
- 44 Annual Report of CDU, 1972/73, p.1.
- 45 J. A. Crooks, Humanities Curriculum 1972/76, pp.43-44.
- 46 J. J. Callan, "Behavioural Objectives and Curriculum Planning", M.Ed. dissertation submitted to Education Department, St Patrick's College, Maynooth, 1974, quoted in Crooks, Humanities Curriculum 1972/76, p.331.
- 47 Ibid.
- 48 J. Mulhern, "A Report on the Impact of the Curriculum Development Unit, Trinity College, Dublin, on a Girls' Vocational School", Spring 1974, Humanities Papers, CDU.
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- 54 Minutes of Steering Committee Meeting, 13 November 1974.
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- 58 Report on Field Studies and Outdoor Pursuits, p.13.
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- 61 B. O’Flaherty, Evaluation Report, p.17.
- 62 J. Kenny, “Report on Cost of Curriculum Development Unit Projects”, n.d., p.4., Steering Committee Papers, CDU.
- 63 Ibid., p.2.
It should be noted, however, that ISCIP subsequently changed its approach to teacher planning meetings and adapted the Humanities pattern.
- 64 Ibid., p.3.
- 65 Ibid.

CHAPTER 4

THE STRUGGLE TO INSTITUTIONALISE THE UNIT

The Context

This chapter is of central importance to our understanding of the story of the Unit. In the following pages we shall try to unravel the complicated events that surrounded the Unit's attempt to institutionalise itself after its initial four year period was over. These events took place in the years between 1976 and 1982 - a time of uncertainty and turmoil, afterwards euphemistically described by the director as "the bridging years".

To put the story in context we must refer again to the Coleraine evaluation report. One of the most important aspects of this report was the encouragement it gave the Unit to institutionalise itself and in this context it will be recalled that the Steering Committee in considering the report had requested the director to draw up a document on the Unit's long-term future. By April 1976 this document was ready and the director duly presented it to the Committee.

The document, entitled "Memorandum on the Future of the Curriculum Development Unit", envisaged a four year programme, from 1 January 1977 to 31 December 1980. Existing projects in the junior cycle, such as ISCIP, Humanities and Outdoor Education, were to be continued and consolidated and new activities were to be initiated in the senior cycle. The justification for the new activities was argued in the following manner: they arose from the nature of the vocational education tradition within which the Unit was now firmly placing itself. Vocational education, the memorandum asserted, was often negatively defined as being non-academic instead of being more positively described as practical and creative, with a strong work and community bias.¹

The memorandum suggested four curricular areas within the vocational tradition where the Unit could initiate projects during its second phase. First, there was the area of craft and design which encompassed metalwork, woodwork, technical drawing and art. This area provided scope for experimentation with modern materials, an integrated methodology in the first years of junior cycle and a linked approach with science and technology in senior cycle. Secondly, there was the area of home economics which could be broadened to include many aspects of home-making and health education. Home economics could also be linked with other curricular areas, like science, crafts and commerce, to develop new courses in applied science and craft-work in the home. Thirdly, the existing ISCIIP project could be widened considerably; at junior cycle it could be linked with mathematics and craft to create a more practical approach to science, while in senior cycle it could be linked with technology and environmental studies. Finally, the existing Humanities project could help orient the curriculum more towards the local area by developing into community and urban studies.²

The memorandum restated the Unit's philosophy of teacher development and went on to give four examples of how this could be realised in practice. The first was to develop new organisational patterns for teaching and learning rather than always to adhere to the usual pattern dictated by the conventional timetable. There was a need to experiment with different student grouping procedures, flexible timetabling arrangements, team planning and team teaching and new approaches to the format of the school day.³

The second example was the use of new teaching methodologies. Working with students in small groups, for instance, demanded skills different from those of teaching the class as a unit. Similarly, the use of drama and simulation in the classroom called for yet another set of distinctive skills. Further examples of teaching situations which demanded special techniques and different teaching styles were class discussion, using television and film, conducting field work and

directing individualised learning through work cards.⁴

The third example was the development of resource management. Teachers had at their disposal a wide variety of aids and resources and their role required them to be managers of learning resources. They had to know something, therefore, about the techniques of using these resources and had to be discerning in their judgement as to when any particular resource should be used.⁵ The fourth example was the development of assessment procedures. Assessment should be an integral part of all teaching and learning situations and since these differed widely, there was a corresponding need for different assessment techniques. Teachers would need to master the skills of continuous assessment, objective testing, project marking, as well as the various forms of written examinations.⁶

The memorandum was notable for the emphasis it placed on the key role of the CDVEC in the Unit's future and for the analysis it made of the needs of the CDVEC schools. The Unit had been set up in the first instance to respond to curricular problems within the CDVEC. Many of these problems were related to the socio-economic background of the students who mainly came from urban working-class homes. These problems were accentuated by the open access policy which the CDVEC operated; the City vocational schools were pledged to cater for all students who came to them, irrespective of ability, class or creed. Furthermore, the CDVEC, as a branch of the public education service, had endeavoured to implement the policy outlined by successive Ministers for Education for developing a comprehensive curriculum with meaningful community involvement. It could even be said that within the previous ten years the CDVEC had been in the vanguard of progressive thinking and action in the country in its efforts to implement such a policy.⁷

A price, however, had to be paid. The traditional structures and objectives of the VEC system had undergone serious modification in the effort to meet new needs and challenges. From a past which had

been relatively simple and sure, the CDVEC was now moving towards a future which was complex and uncertain and it was within this context that the meaning and justification of innovation had to be seen. Innovation for the CDVEC was not an educational luxury; it was a question of survival.⁸

The memorandum was endorsed by the CDVEC in April 1976 and duly forwarded to the Department of Education for approval.⁹ The Steering Committee met the following month and we would have expected that the memorandum would have been high on its agenda. This, however, did not turn out to be the case. Another issue had arisen which was to plunge the Unit unexpectedly into crisis - the first of a series of crises which were to overtake it during the following two years and which tested the relationship with each of its three sponsors in turn. The issue that arose first was about publication and the crisis that ensued was between the Unit and its parent sponsor, the CDVEC.

The Publication Crisis

The members of the CDVEC are nominated by the Dublin City Council, but during the period 1969 to 1974 the Council was suspended by the Government for failing to strike the rate required by the responsible Government Minister. This action resulted in the dissolution of the Council along with all its related committees, the CDVEC included. When the Council was reinstated by a new Government in 1974 the CDVEC was convened once more. There was now, however, a gap in the continuity of the CDVEC with many of the Committee members new to their office and consequently with little sense of the VEC tradition.

Soon after its reinstatement, the Committee directed its attention to the Unit. The Unit, it was noted, had no representative from the CDVEC on its Steering Committee - a situation which was speedily rectified by appointing two CDVEC members, Councillor Patrick Carroll and Alderman Kevin Byrne.¹⁰ This brought the membership of the

Steering Committee to eleven, and Byrne, the latest to arrive, was soon to make his presence felt.¹¹

The clash between the Unit and the CDVEC began at a meeting of the Steering Committee on 20 May 1976. The director proposed to the meeting that the materials arising from the ISCIP and Humanities projects be published by O'Brien Educational - a new educational publishing house which had just been formed.¹² The publishers were eager to establish themselves and from the Unit's point of view the publication terms seemed attractive; the prices were keen and the publishing time remarkably short. The Unit's materials would in fact be the publishers' first venture into the educational world and so they were naturally prepared to concentrate all their energies in producing a good result.

The director's proposal, therefore, did not seem unreasonable and was accepted by all the members of the Steering Committee - with one exception. The exception was Alderman Byrne. Byrne argued that there was no need for the Unit to contract at all with a publishing house because it could easily do its own publishing. The Unit, he maintained, was already operating an offset lithograph machine and this facility could be expanded to cater not only for its own publishing needs but also for those of the CDVEC system in general.¹³

Byrne's argument, although forcefully made, was rejected by his colleagues on the Steering Committee and the director was authorised to proceed with O'Brien Educational. Normally this would have been the end of the affair. The Steering Committee had decided by a clear majority and Byrne had been given a fair hearing. He was determined, however, not to let the matter lie and gave notice that he would oppose the Steering Committee's recommendation on publication when it appeared before the CDVEC at its monthly meeting the following week.

Byrne was as good as his word. The CDVEC met on 27 May and by five votes to four refused to ratify the Steering Committee's recommendation. The wording of the CDVEC decision was couched in diplomatic language: publication was to be deferred until further information and quotations from other publishers were made available.¹⁴ There was no mistaking, however, the gravity of what the CDVEC had done. A legitimate decision of the Unit's Steering Committee, which included representatives not only from the CDVEC itself but also from the University of Dublin and the Department of Education, had been overthrown. The issue could be viewed as a sensitive one, especially for a curriculum unit based in a university - the right to publish in the tradition of academic freedom. This issue, moreover, had now become subsumed into the wider question of the authority of the Unit's Steering Committee vis-a-vis its own sponsors. One of the sponsors - from the Unit's point of view the most important one - had chosen to exercise a veto on a decision of the Unit's governing body. Consequently, the status and authority of that body was now in doubt.

The Steering Committee met again on 15 June. It recognised the gravity of the situation and in order to resolve matters asked for an immediate meeting with the CDVEC itself.¹⁵ The Chairman of the CDVEC, Patrick Donegan, agreed to this request and a meeting was arranged for the afternoon of the 24 June - immediately before the CDVEC was due to hold its own regular monthly meeting. In preparation for this encounter Sheehan, the CEO, had prepared a memorandum setting out the arguments to publish as previously agreed by the Steering Committee. The CDVEC, in exercising its veto on the Unit had stated that under the regulations governing local authority purchases the seeking of at least three competitive tenders was obligatory. Sheehan now refuted this argument by showing clearly that a publishing agreement by its very nature precluded the seeking of such tenders:

The CDU have been advised that tenders for such work are contrary to practice in the publishing business,

particularly because of the risk involved for one publisher in carrying out the work at a prearranged price and in the knowledge that other publishers have studied the same copy and may use it in other ways before any copyright or other necessary protection can be established.¹⁶

Sheehan maintained furthermore that if the Unit were forced to do its own publishing the situation would result in a misdirection of valuable resources and would “impede wider adherence by schools to the programmes already developed for reasons both of physical limitation in the materials available for distribution and of psychological disincentives of various kinds”.¹⁷

Sheehan’s most convincing argument, however, was an allusion to the fact that the Unit’s director and deputy director had consulted the CDVEC law agent, Barry O’Reilly, who had corroborated the view that the publishing agreement did not require competitive tenders. “I have considered the Vocational Education (Contracts Amendment) Regulations 1964”, O’Reilly wrote afterwards to Sheehan, “and it is my opinion that such an agreement would not require the Committee to go to tender, having regard to the provisions of the regulations, as it does not involve the Committee in entering into a contract for the payment by them of a sum of money”.¹⁸ The law agent had earlier expressed his opinion orally and more pithily to the director and deputy director - “publish and be damned”.

The meeting between the Steering Committee and the CDVEC turned out to be a low-key and friendly affair, with only three CDVEC members attending. Afterwards, when the CDVEC held its own meeting it reversed its earlier decision on publication by five votes to two.¹⁹ The way was now open for the Unit to proceed with its publishing plans and by the following December the first two publications, *The Celtic Way of Life* and *Heroic Tales from the Ulster Cycle*, were launched. Over the ensuing years these were followed by

many similar publications - about thirty in all - which helped to establish the Unit's position as an ongoing institution in Irish education.

The Experimental Examination Modes

The publication crisis was short-lived and speedily resolved. Its implications, however, were far-reaching in that it brought to light the precarious nature of the Unit's management structure which required a sensitive balance among three powerful sponsors. This was apparent when the Steering Committee met after the summer recess on 30 September 1976. Professor Rice had tabled a motion requesting a clarification of the relationship between the Unit and its three sponsors, particularly as this regarded the Unit's future.²⁰ The view of the Department of Education on this issue was already known. In a letter to the CEO the previous June the Department had given its response to the "Memorandum on the Future of the Curriculum Development Unit" by indicating that the Unit could continue for a further year, up to the end of August 1977. During this period, in which no further expansion was to take place, the Department's officials proposed "to undertake a comprehensive review" of the Unit's activities.²¹ Then, presumably when the review was completed, the Department would pronounce on the Unit's future.

The Steering Committee duly debated the issue of the relationship of the Unit to its sponsors and came to the following conclusions:

It was agreed that... representatives of each sponsoring body first of all would work out their own perceptions of and aspirations for the function of the Curriculum Development Unit and the status of its Steering Committee. When this clarifying process had taken place, it was agreed that all members of the Steering Committee should meet and should state their views on the relationship they felt should exist between the Unit and each of its sponsoring bodies. It was hoped that in this way an agreed basis could be reached on how the Unit should function throughout a second term.²²

The Committee decided to reconvene in early December 1976, thus giving its members two months to clarify their minds. Various arrangements to help them do this were put in train. Professor Winder, the Dean of Graduate Studies in Trinity, asked that copies of the director's memorandum on the Unit's future and the Coleraine evaluation report be circulated to the University Council. Professor Rice requested copies of the same report for a Deans' Meeting, while the CDVEC representatives decided to hold a special meeting on the Unit the following November.²³ All these arrangements, however, came to nothing. The relationship between the Unit and two of the teacher unions, which had been strained for some time, suddenly worsened and the Unit found itself facing another serious crisis. In the face of this new danger the Steering Committee closed ranks and the debate about the Unit's future was postponed - at least for the time being.

The crisis between the Unit and the teacher unions was principally concerned with the nature of the experimental examination modes in the Intermediate and Group Certificate Examinations, which the Unit had successfully negotiated with the Department of Education two years previously. The negotiating of the new modes had been a long and arduous process and had brought the Unit into a close relationship with the Department's Inspectorate. The outcome was of such fundamental importance to the subsequent history of the Unit that it is worth digressing a little in order to tell the story more fully.

The Intermediate Certificate Examination dates from June 1924 when the Intermediate Education (Amendment) Act put an end to the previous system of financing of schools, partly on the basis of their public examination results (ICE Report, p.9). The new system in contrast was intended to liberate the schools from the tyranny of examinations by giving them more time and flexibility to prepare their courses. In 1947, a second public examination for 15/16 year old students was instituted, the Day Vocational Group Certificate

Examination, commonly known as the Group Certificate, which was aimed at catering for the needs of the vocational schools (Coolahan, p.99). This dual system remained in force until the 1960s when, as we saw in Chapter 2, the Government made an effort to liberalise it by introducing new and broader subject syllabuses. The examination format itself, however, remained largely unchanged - terminal written examinations which were devised centrally and applied nationally. It was this system which the Unit was now challenging.

The first indication that the Department of Education might be prepared to let go some of its control over the examination system came from no less a person than the Department Secretary, Sean O'Connor. On 22 February 1973, shortly after he had been appointed Secretary, O'Connor met the Unit director and deputy director, who told him they were anxious to open discussions on the possibility of alternative examination modes for ISCIP and Humanities. The meeting was informal and O'Connor was in a generous mood. He was not unsympathetic, he said, to the Unit's request and advised the director and deputy director to contact Richard Foley, the Chief Inspector of the Department.²⁴ Two weeks later, O'Connor went further and put in writing his readiness to recognise ISCIP and Humanities as alternative courses within the Department's official programme. In a letter to Sheehan, he wrote as follows:

Regarding the question of recognising an alternative curriculum, no information has yet been furnished to the Department about such curriculum and it would be necessary to have this before the question of its recognition could be considered. I am to say, however, that there is no objection in principle to the acceptance of alternative syllabuses for the purposes of recognition of approved courses and of qualification as recognised pupils in secondary schools.²⁵

Sheehan interpreted this as an invitation to make a case to the Department for ISCIP and Humanities and so he asked the director to write the necessary submission.²⁶ In the meantime the director met

the Chief Inspector on March 8th and although Foley was not in favour of tampering with the established examination structures, he nonetheless agreed that the Unit could make its case to individual members of the Inspectorate.²⁷

Throughout the following three months, the Unit staff lobbied the Inspectorate assiduously. It seems that their efforts to interest the inspectors in the possibility of alternative examination modes were well received, for eventually on 10 May 1973 a one-day seminar on the subject was organised in Hawkins House, the head-quarters of the Inspectorate. As an input paper for the seminar, the Unit staff had prepared a document which argued the case for a change in the examination system:

In Ireland, changing the curriculum must necessarily entail changing the public examination system. Exams are the most powerful determinants of the post-primary curriculum and it would be wise never to ignore this. In fact, there is no reason why the exams themselves cannot be used as creative agents for change. To do this we must be prepared to experiment and to support those schools and teachers who are willing to try out new ideas. The important point here is that whenever a new curricular experiment is launched in a responsible way, there must be equal commitment from the officials in charge of the examination system to experiment in new modes of examining (such as the CSE modes in England) to fit the new curricular projects. If this does not happen the new curricular projects will not be taken seriously by either teachers, students or parents.²⁸

Immediately following the seminar, a working party comprising five inspectors and five representatives from the Unit was established to devise a framework for new examination modes. Within two weeks the working party had completed its task and reached the following conclusions:

1. The Inspectorate would moderate the experiment. In practice this would mean five inspectors (designated by name to ensure continuity) from the following areas: science (1), English (1), Irish (1), and history/geography/civics (2). The inspectors concerned would meet the members of the CDU one day per month (excepting the months June/July/August). This arrangement would entail 45 inspector days in all. The purpose of the meetings would be threefold:
 - (a) the inspectorate would plan and review with the members of the CDU the entire experiment;
 - (b) inspectors from the various disciplines involved would review in detail with specialists from the CDU the progress of the experiment in their respective specialised areas;
 - (c) the inspectorate would have the opportunity of meeting key teachers from the pilot schools who would be present in the CDU during the day.
2. The Inspectorate would regularly review the experimental courses and syllabi.
3. The Inspectorate would visit the pilot schools as often as their duties allowed them.²⁹

These conclusions, which are taken verbatim from the report which the working party drew up on 23 May 1973, show a remarkable commitment from the inspectors in the task of bringing the new modes into existence. Events over the ensuing months were to witness if anything an increase in this commitment especially on the part of one of the senior inspectors involved, Cathal O'Doherty. On 7 June 1973, the director again met Foley who said that he had changed his mind

the director again met Foley who said that he had changed his mind and was now in favour of the modes.³⁰ The working party had by this time divided into two subcommittees, one for ISCIP and the other for Humanities, with the purpose of formulating detailed proposals on the operation of the modes. Both subcommittees worked quickly and succeeded in completing their task before the end of the year.³¹

The story now took an interesting turn. Not all the members of the Inspectorate had been involved in the negotiations over the modes; an important section - that devoted to vocational schools - had been absent. This may seem a strange omission but it was something over which the Unit had no control. In theory, there existed a unitary Inspectorate for the entire educational system but in practice there were three separate branches - primary, secondary and vocational. It is an ironic comment on communications within the Inspectorate to note that up to this time the vocational branch had played no part in the negotiation concerning the new examination modes.

This anomaly, however, was soon remedied. On 27 January 1974 one of the vocational inspectors, Micheál Ó Suilleabháin, met the director and reproached him for neglecting to contact the vocational branch.³² A month later the director was invited to meet the assembled body of vocational inspectors at their headquarters in Apollo House and to explain to them what was being proposed in the new modes. The senior inspector, Tomás Grennan, however, was absent through illness but two months later, when he had recovered, he met the director and declared himself satisfied with the modes.³³

The scene was finally set and all the relevant members of the Inspectorate, secondary and vocational, had been won over. The director now decided it would be opportune to make a second approach to O'Connor, if only to remind him of the progress that had been made since their original meeting in February 1973. The second meeting took place on 11 June 1974 and the director was accompanied on this occasion by Hugh Healy, now the acting CEO of the CDVEC.

O'Connor was again sympathetic and promised that a decision would be made in the immediate future.³⁴ He was as good as his word, for ten days later, on 21st June 1974, the director was officially notified that the Department had approved the modes.³⁵

It might seem like an exaggeration to describe the modes as revolutionary but, in view of the highly centralised and rigorously controlled examination system that was in existence, this description is not unjustified. The modes themselves, however, were simply constructed. The ISCIP mode comprised continuous assessment, which accounted for a quarter of the total available marks, and a special paper set from a question bank supplied by the teachers, which accounted for an additional third of the marks. The rest of the marks were given to a written paper which was also taken nationally, thus linking ISCIP securely to the general examination system.³⁶ Humanities, on the other hand, had a more innovative mode. Like ISCIP, it contained a measure of teacher assessment which accounted for 30% of the total marks but unlike ISCIP, it made no concessions to the national system, with the bulk of the marks (60%) being divided between student portfolios of work and a special Humanities paper devised and marked by the teachers themselves.³⁷

With the granting of permission by the Department to operate new examination modes, the Unit was given what amounted to a stake in the national system of examinations. The Minister for Education through his Department is responsible to the Oireachtas, the national parliament, for running the system. The Unit was now given a role in the operation of this system - a small role it is true, but one nevertheless that required a partnership of trust between the Unit personnel and the Inspectorate. This role, moreover, pointed towards the future, for although the Department's permission was for one year only, it would be difficult if not impossible to limit the application of the modes to such a short period. The pilot schools had already committed their first and second year classes to the new courses with a view to sitting the examinations at the end of the third year and they

would have protested vigorously if the modes were suddenly terminated. The Unit in practice was now assuming the responsibilities of an examination board and in doing so was following the advice of the Coleraine report to plan actively for its own continuance - in a word to institutionalise itself.

The Clash with the Teacher Unions

The attitude of the teacher unions to the new modes was in marked contrast to that of the Department's Inspectorate. There were two unions involved - the Association for Secondary Teachers Ireland (ASTI), most of whose members were in the secondary grammar schools, and the Teachers' Union of Ireland (TUI) which catered chiefly for the vocational schools. Both unions were opposed in principle to teachers participating in any form of assessment for the public examinations without receiving due remuneration. This had given rise to a long-standing dispute between the unions and the Department of Education and was therefore an obstacle in the way of any new initiative which would involve teachers in continuous assessment of their students.

The director was well aware of these sensitivities and so in December 1975 and again January 1976 we find him writing to the presidents of the two unions asking for their cooperation.³⁸ The national executive of the TUI reacted favourably and promised their cooperation for 1976 - the year the modes were due to come into operation.³⁹ The ASTI, however, was not prepared to allow its members to participate unless they were paid.⁴⁰ This presented the Unit with a problem but it was confined to ISCIP and involved only five teachers and three schools. The director sought to resolve the problem by negotiating with the schools for a reduction of one class period per week for the teachers involved, in recognition of the assessment duties they were undertaking. He then appealed to the President of the ASTI to allow the modes to proceed:

I would seriously urge you to consider the possibility of

allowing the five teachers concerned to continue with the assessment until June 1976. I stress the fact that the assessment is an experimental one, under controlled conditions and for a limited period of time. These conditions are clearly understood by all parties concerned and that includes the Department of Education. As I mentioned in my previous letter the outcome of the experiment may be of some interest in formulating your own future policies regarding the kinds of continuous assessment that are feasible in this country. It would be a great pity to have to abandon such an experiment, particularly in view of the fact that the teachers themselves have voluntarily and enthusiastically chosen to participate in it.⁴¹

If the director thought he had succeeded in mollifying the ASTI, he was mistaken. On 25th February 1976 Alf Sheehy, the ASTI President, rejected the offer of a reduction of one class period per week. The offer, Sheehy said, could not be recognised in lieu of payment and in any event "the Department of Education, with whom our dispute regarding payment for assessment really lies, would be in no way involved with this arrangement".⁴²

The Unit now found itself in a serious dilemma. It was caught in a dispute between two powerful institutions, the Department of Education and the ASTI, and the prospect of successfully operating the new assessment modes, at least on the ISCIP side, looked bleak. In March, however, a solution emerged which saved the situation. The Unit member of staff responsible for ISCIP, Brede Rosney, succeeded in devising a formula which was acceptable to all parties - the ASTI, the schools and the Department. It was agreed that Rosney herself would act as an independent assessor in the three schools involved in the dispute and that her assessment would be accepted instead of that of the teachers.⁴³

This arrangement for an independent assessment in ISCIP operated smoothly for the rest of the school year, so much so that the ASTI

agreed to operate it again the following year.⁴⁴ But having successfully pacified one of the unions, the Unit now had to reckon with the other - the TUI. The trouble here began with one of the local union branches, the Dublin City Post Primary branch, to which a great number of the ISCIP and Humanities teachers belonged. In June 1976, the branch secretary issued a directive instructing all members not to teach ISCIP or Humanities. The reason given was the absence of planning and meeting time for the teachers engaged in the projects.⁴⁵

The directive from the Dublin branch was issued without any warning to the Unit and on the face of it seemed a breach of the agreement reached earlier with the TUI national executive. The issue involved was the release of teachers for meetings in the Unit - a difficult question at the time in view of the fact that the Department of Education was endeavouring to reduce the teacher-pupil ratio in the vocational schools. It was also an issue with which the Unit was vitally concerned and in this regard had brought its influence successfully to bear on the the CDVEC in ensuring that a measure of planning time would be made available to ISCIP and Humanities teachers during the following school year.⁴⁶

When the new school year began, the Dublin City branch again took the offensive and on the 16 September 1976 confirmed its decision of the previous June not to allow its members to teach ISCIP or Humanities. Apart from the problem of teacher release, the branch now added a further reason for its action. A ruling from the TUI annual congress of the previous June was invoked that except in the case of official pilot projects continuous assessment should not be undertaken without appropriate payment. Neither ISCIP or Humanities, it was argued, were entitled to be recognised as pilot projects after 1976 and as proof of its determination in this matter, the branch proceeded to place a ban on any of its members attending meetings in the Unit's premises.⁴⁷

The ban had an immediate effect and the majority of the pilot teachers stopped coming to the Unit. The outlook was now alarming. For a body like the Unit, which was pledged to work with teachers to further their professional development, a ban of this sort was the equivalent of a death sentence. The director, believing that the treatment handed out to himself and his staff was unfair, decided to appeal to the national executive of the TUI and as a result a meeting took place on 11 October 1976 between the TUI President, William Webb, accompanied by three representatives of the Dublin branch, and the director and the ISCIP coordinator.⁴⁸

When the two sides met the director put forward the argument that the Unit was now operating a bridging year - an extra year granted by the Department of Education in which it planned to undertake a comprehensive review of what had been achieved by the Unit's projects during the previous four years. This bridging year, therefore, offered an opportunity to put forward proposals to the Department regarding the terms under which teachers should be engaged in curriculum development and assessment procedures. Furthermore, the bridging year had been officially permitted by the Department and therefore the Unit's projects should be accorded the status of pilot projects undertaken for a limited duration - the condition which the TUI had stipulated for participating in continuous assessment.⁴⁹

Webb was unmoved. He was bound, he said, by the terms of the TUI congress resolution of June 1976: there could be no continuous assessment without appropriate payment. He was also worried by reports that the reduction of the amount of project planning time available in the Dublin City vocational schools had led to teacher transfers by the CDVEC. Payment for assessment and a better teacher ratio, he argued, were the main requirements if the TUI was to entertain any thoughts of settlement.⁵⁰ In short, the TUI president was determined to take a tough line and, despite the director's plea that the Unit had no bargaining power in the matter of payment for assessment, he was disposed to follow the lead of the Dublin City branch by

making no concessions. On 19 October the Dublin City branch renewed its ban on the Unit and this decision was later endorsed by the national executive.⁵¹ The TUI ban on the Unit had now become fully official and the situation looked ominous.

It was against this background that the Steering Committee met on 1 December 1976. After listening to the director's account of the dispute the members agreed that "the action of the TUI presented a grave problem which must necessarily effect the future of the Curriculum Development Unit".⁵² Their support for the Unit was unwavering and they authorised the director to request immediate meetings between the Steering Committee and the national executives of both the ASTI and the TUI.⁵³

On 3 December 1976 the director set out in some detail, in a letter to Webb, the implications of the TUI ban which the Steering Committee wished to discuss. The Committee, he wrote, was concerned in particular about "the fact that students who have almost completed the experimental courses (especially in Humanities, where the course content is different from that of the traditional syllabus in English, History and Geography) would be at a serious disadvantage if they were not allowed to complete the course for the examination this year".⁵⁴ The letter, which was formally sent in the name of the ten members of the Steering Committee, concluded with another appeal for a settlement:

I would ask that your executive would consider the request of the members of the Steering Committee for a frank discussion on the issues mentioned above. The request is being made in an effort to maintain and strengthen the co-operation and understanding that has existed in the past between your Union and the Curriculum Development Unit. It would be a great pity if difficulties existing from your recent directive on assessment were to curtail your Union's interest in research and development programmes over the next four years.⁵⁵

Webb agreed to another meeting and the two sides came together again on 17 December. Three days later a solution was agreed and the dispute was over. The solution represented a compromise: the teachers would each be paid £15 for attendance at an inservice seminar on assessment.⁵⁶ For both sides in the dispute this was a face-saving exercise. The Unit could argue that the teachers were not being paid directly for taking part in continuous assessment procedures; to have yielded on this point would have risked incurring the wrath of the Department of Education, which was determined that no precedent be established on the issue. The TUI national executive on the other hand could justifiably claim credit with its members for ensuring that money would be paid, albeit indirectly, in recognition of the teachers' involvement. The national executive, moreover, was probably glad to be rid of a dispute which had been thrust on it by one of its local branches. The settlement was also welcomed by the ASTI, which although not in dispute with the Unit, was glad nonetheless to accept payment for its members and consequently no longer insisted on a separate independent assessment arrangement.⁵⁷

During the ensuing six months the Unit worked out with both unions a formula which allowed for the participation of teachers on an ongoing basis in experimental development and assessment procedures. The teachers undertook to give feed-back on new materials, to attend meetings and inservice courses organised by the Unit, provided these were within the normal working week, and to take part in experimental assessment procedures. In return they were promised a goodwill payment of £25.00 per annum and a time allowance of one teaching period per week for planning sessions. A further allowance of one teaching period per month was promised to a teacher representative from each pilot school for attending meetings in the Unit.⁵⁸

In the years that followed, this formula operated successfully and was

the basis for a long period of harmony between the Unit and the unions. The Steering Committee could claim a large share of the credit for this because it had established the contact which helped to break the deadlock and it fully supported the director and his staff in their negotiations with union officials. The efforts of the Committee, however, to ensure a second phase for the Unit and thus give it a firmer institutional base were less successful and to this train of events we must now turn our attention.

The Battle to Preserve the Modes

The debate on the Unit's future was resumed in January 1977 when the Steering Committee again met. Professor Rice now suggested that the Committee itself should be changed. It should be enlarged, as the Coleraine report had recommended, but should also have a smaller executive body which would meet more frequently and look after the day-to-day business of the Unit.⁵⁹ This was an important suggestion and seems to have sown a seed in the director's mind. Two months later, when the Steering Committee next met, the director put forward new proposals for the Unit's management structure. In preparation for the meeting he had revised his earlier memorandum on the Unit's future - which was now entitled "The Future of the Curriculum Development Unit: Proposals for a Second Phase". The new memorandum envisaged a five year span for the Unit's second phase, from September 1977 to August 1982, and recommended that its institutional basis be widened to allow for the participation of the other vocational education committees in the greater Dublin Area, namely County Dublin and the borough of Dun Laoghaire.⁶⁰

To put this new arrangement into effect, the memorandum recommended that the Unit be re-established under section 40 of the 1930 Vocational Education Act - a provision which enabled two or more VECs to cooperate on a joint educational venture related to their basic remit.⁶¹ This would have meant a significant change in the Unit's status and it is not apparent to us now how it could have been

reconciled with the Unit's tripartite sponsorship, which the memorandum envisaged as continuing in existence. Why, we may ask, was such a radical change being contemplated in the first place? The basic reason was probably the fact that the Unit now saw itself as catering for schools in the greater Dublin Area and that it wished to give official recognition to this situation. But there was possibly another reason as well - a reason related to the Unit's ambition to institutionalise itself in line with the conclusions of the Coleraine report. In seeking to be re-established under section 40 of the 1930 Act, the Unit was taking the first step towards becoming the kind of national curriculum centre which that report had envisaged.

Bringing this change about, however, was not an easy matter; agreement had to be reached at a number of different levels - the Steering Committee, the CDVEC, the other VECs concerned and finally the Department of Education. It is surprising, therefore, to find that the memorandum went through most of these stages and was in fact accepted by all the parties involved with the exception of the Department of Education. This was probably due in large measure to the influence of Sheehan, who had mooted the idea in the first place, and had succeeded in persuading the CDVEC to accept it on the 28 April 1977.⁶² The idea was also accepted in principle by County Dublin and Dun Laoghaire VECs around the same time.⁶³ The Department of Education, however, refused to comment one way or the other and despite several appeals from Sheehan maintained a pointed silence on the matter.

By the summer of 1977 the Unit was nearing the end of its bridging year and still had no official programme, nor indeed any indication of what its future status would be. Between May and August Sheehan tried to elicit a response from the Department by writing no fewer than three letters to the Secretary, Dominick O'Leary, but all to no avail.⁶⁴ He was equally unsuccessful when he tried to persuade the Minister, Peter Barry, to visit the Unit and see for himself the kind of work the Unit was doing.⁶⁵ By the end of August the director was forced to

inform a meeting of principals from the pilot schools that in the absence of any reaction from the Department the Unit had no option but to make preparations for a second bridging year.⁶⁶

The autumn of 1977 saw a change of Government and a new Minister for Education. On 14 December a delegation from the CDVEC met the Minister, John Wilson, and raised the issue of the Unit's future. Wilson appeared sympathetic and indicated his willingness to allow the Unit to continue and even to expand into the senior cycle.⁶⁷ This was encouraging news; it seemed as if the Unit's period in limbo was ending and that it could now officially embark on a second phase.

In February 1978 the director decided to convene another meeting of the Steering Committee. It was now almost a year since the Committee had last met and it seems extraordinary that during such a crucial period in the Unit's history it should have been so inactive and was being given no role to play in the negotiations over the Unit's future. In retrospect it has to be said that this may have been a mistake, especially when we bear in mind the vital part the Committee had played in helping to settle the dispute with the TUI.

As events turned out the meeting of the Steering Committee in February 1978 was to be its last. By the end of the year a completely new management structure had been put into place and the Committee in its existing form had been abolished. Yet when we read the minutes of the February meeting we cannot help noticing the irony of the situation. The Committee met in an atmosphere of optimism about the future. The director reported on the meeting of the CDVEC delegation with the Minister the previous December and on the understanding that the Minister was in principle in favour of a second phase for the Unit. In the belief that this phase was now beginning the director presented to the Committee a new programme which comprised a consolidation of the Unit's three earlier projects, ISCIP, Humanities and Outdoor Education, and a development into three new areas, pre-employment, environmental education and early school leavers.⁶⁸

The framework for the proposed programme was taken from the revised memorandum on the future of the Unit, which the Steering Committee had accepted a year earlier. This it will be remembered was also the document which had envisaged that the institutional basis of the Unit be widened under section 40 of the 1930 Act. To mark the formal beginning of a new phase in the Unit's life, the Steering Committee decided to confirm the director's status and he in turn promised to present a policy document on staffing by the following Easter.⁶⁹ The Unit at last seemed about to embark on its long delayed second phase.

This was a false hope, however, because the Department of Education had not yet officially pronounced on the Unit's future. Although the meeting between the CDVEC and the Minister appeared to be friendly and positive, it could not be considered as the equivalent of an official decision. Official decisions of the Minister are usually announced publicly, either by the Minister himself in the Dáil or else through a written communication from his Department, and neither of these things had happened in relation to the Unit's future. There had also been a certain ambivalence about the meeting, especially when we examine the role of the two principal actors involved - the Minister and the CEO. The Minister was new to his job and probably did not fully understand what the Unit was about. He could be forgiven to some extent for making a statement which afterwards his Department would in practice disown. Sheehan, on the other hand, was about to depart from the scene. He had recently accepted a permanent post with the Commission of the European Communities and in a few months would be gone. The Minister's agreement to the Unit's second phase, therefore, rested on assumptions which were far from being firm and clear. Events were soon to show how unfounded some of these assumptions really were.

On the 20 February 1978, the same day on which the Steering Committee met, the Department of Education broke its silence and wrote to Sheehan about the Unit's future. It was now a year and nine

months since the Department had dismissed the Unit's plea for a second phase and had ordered instead a bridging year during which the Unit's activities would be comprehensively reviewed. During the intervening period, however, there had been no evidence of any such review. Perhaps this fact may explain, at least in part, the Department's long silence. It had promised something it could not deliver and may have been embarrassed on this account. A less charitable explanation would be that the Department's dilatoriness should be taken as a matter of course - a practice hallowed by long tradition.

The Department's letter of 20 February contained good as well as bad news. The good news was that the Unit could continue for another three years - up to 31 August 1981. The bad news was that the three original projects, ISCIP, Humanities and Outdoor Education, were to be evaluated and phased out by June 1979. From now on the mainstay of the Unit's programme would be a new project for early school leavers, which would be sponsored by the Department itself in conjunction with the Commission of the European Communities. The case for enlarging the Unit's institutional base under the 1930 Vocational Education Act was rejected out of hand, as was also the suggestion of a two-tier management structure - a large consultative body for policy making and a smaller executive body for day-to-day management. The only concession the Department was prepared to make in this regard was the appointment of a second representative to the Steering Committee. The final paragraph in the letter contained a severe reprimand: the Unit was chided for incurring expenditure in excess of what the Department had decided to permit nearly two years previously.⁷⁰

The seriousness of the implications of the Department's letter is evidenced in the reaction of the CDVEC. On the 23 February 1978, the day after the letter was received, Sheehan reported on the situation at the monthly meeting of the CDVEC and was told to reply immediately, pointing out the discrepancy between the Department's

letter and the earlier agreement between the CDVEC delegation and the Minister.⁷¹ Sheehan acted at once. "It is not proposed", he wrote to the Department, "to discuss here in detail the divergence between the terms of your letter under reference above and those agreed at the deputation. My Committee, however, is at a loss to understand how the Curriculum Development Unit can continue to operate and 'consolidate its existing work', even up to August 31 1981, on the basis of the proposals you make".⁷² He concluded with a demand that "early discussions take place between representatives of your Department and of my Committee to clarify this whole matter and find an appropriate basis of operation for the future".⁷³

This was to be Sheehan's last blow in defence of the Unit he had helped to found. By the following April, he had left for Brussels and was replaced by an acting CEO, John McKay. There was no change, however, in the CDVEC's stance on the Unit and so we find McKay, soon after his appointment, pressing the Department for the meeting Sheehan had earlier requested.⁷⁴

At this stage we are tempted to ask whether the CDVEC was not over-reacting to the Department's letter of 20 February 1978. The Department, after all, had held out the prospect of another three years of life for the Unit and also a share in a new, prestigious project sponsored by Brussels. There was no doubt in the director's mind, however, as to what the Department's real intentions were. In a private memorandum to McKay he stated his opinion in gloomy terms: "What the Department's letter essentially represents is an effort to phase out the Unit as an ongoing centre and to substitute in its place one or perhaps two separate projects".⁷⁵ For this reason he urged McKay to resist any attempt by the Department to wind up the Unit's earlier projects. These projects were symbolic of what the Unit stood for; if they were now abolished a mortal blow would be struck at the

Unit itself. The Unit, the director argued, should stand by its earlier projects:

We do not think that ISCIP, Humanities and Outdoor Education should be phased out. We think instead that they should be continued and that they should merge with and indeed form the basis of our proposed new projects. Our stance is a simple and well tried one: to build new things on solid foundations.⁷⁶

The following May the battle over the Unit's future came sharply into focus when McKay and his assistant education officer, Patrick Ryan, together with the director, met six senior officers from the Department. The Department's principal argument now was that the Unit was basically a research project and like all research projects should have a terminal point. That point had now been reached. The Department recognised the worth of what the Unit was doing but it doubted whether this could be disseminated without placing too great a strain on the general educational system. The experimental examination modes were using up valuable resources which should in fairness be available for curricular innovations from other parts of the system. The Department, however, was not averse to the Unit doing other things, such as evaluating its own experience and developing a new project for early school leavers, which had been accepted as a national project under the aegis of the European Community.⁷⁷

Against this argument, the CDVEC deputation tried to point out that the Unit should not be seen as a short-term research and development project but something of a more durable and long-term nature. It was essentially an investment in teacher development, a process which was only now coming to fruition. If the experimental modes were abandoned, then six years' work would have gone for nothing and nobody would ever again pay much attention to what the Unit was doing. The Unit was not seeking an indefinite extension but a longer period of time to achieve its objectives, and in any case the amount of resources it was using was minimal in the context of the overall

expenditure on education.⁷⁸

The meeting ended in deadlock. The CDVEC representatives played their final card by challenging the monopoly of the central authority. The fundamental question which the Unit was raising for the Department was “whether there existed in the Irish system of education the right to develop alternative courses and alternative modes of examination which were relevant to the needs of students”.⁷⁹ The Department’s representatives, however, remained adamant. They saw no justification for the Unit continuing in its existing form, nor was there any scientific evidence on which the Unit could base its claim. The Coleraine evaluation on which the Unit had heavily relied was now out of date.⁸⁰

The battle lines were now openly drawn. At the end of May 1978 the CDVEC considered McKay’s report on the meeting and reiterated its concern at the divergence between the Department’s position and the earlier agreement with the Minister.⁸¹ It was not clear, however, what more the CDVEC could do. They had protested but it seemed as if their protest would be over-ruled by a central authority that was used to getting its own way in disputes of this nature.

For the director, there now remained a last resort - to make the issue a matter of public concern. At the end of May he called a meeting of all the principals of the pilot schools and put before them the problem the Unit was facing. The principals felt that the issue had now become one for which they themselves had to accept responsibility and consequently they resolved to take whatever action they felt appropriate. There was no mistaking their determination to make a stand and to bring whatever pressure they could to bear on the Minister for Education.

This pressure was exerted in two ways. News of the Department’s intention of abolishing the modes was given to the news media and in particular to the educational correspondent of the *Irish Times*, who

managed to keep the story alive during a vital seven day period in early June. The lead given by the *Irish Times* was followed by some of the other dailies and the story was then taken up by RTE, the national broadcasting agency.

The second way of bringing pressure to bear on the Minister was perhaps more telling. A number of the principals approached their parliamentary representatives and on 1 June 1978, the issue of the modes surfaced in Dáil Eireann. The occasion was the debate on the education estimates. When the Minister had given his opening address he was immediately followed by Deputy E. Collins, the education spokesperson of Fine Gael, the major opposition party. Collins referred to the intention to abolish the modes and attacked this decision in trenchant terms:

I firmly believe that the case is in fact one where the civil servants in Marlborough Street [the headquarters of the Department of Education] do not like to see the slightest bit of power passing out of their hands. The pilot scheme was something I welcomed. It was making excellent progress and the attitude of the Department now really makes me sick. I believe this is a backward step of monstrous proportions when one looks at the need to develop the curriculum. It is a shocking decision on the part of the Minister. I condemn it out of hand, and if and when we get back into Government, hopefully at the next election, I can assure the House that if I am ever Minister for Education I shall reverse that decision and ensure that the scheme and other schemes like it will get full support. (Collins, 1978).

Collins was followed by the Labour Party spokesman on education, Deputy J. Horgan, who renewed the attack on the decision to abolish the modes. Horgan deplored the decision because it was undermining a development that was “authentic, school based, real and important to children”. He agreed with Collins in laying the blame fairly and squarely on the excessive centralism of the Minister’s Department.

The innovation, he asserted, “is being knocked by the Department because it is not under their direct control. That is the beginning, the middle and the end of it”. (Horgan, 1978).

The attack on the Department’s decision was resumed three weeks later when parliamentary questions concerning both the Unit’s future and the fate of ISCIP and Humanities were asked by Deputies M. Keating and E. Collins. A parliamentary question is usually asked with an accompanying notice of three days, which gives the Government minister concerned time to receive a full briefing from his Department (O’Donnell, 1979, p.26). It is not surprising, therefore, to find that when the Minister for Education, John Wilson, rose to answer his questioners, he had at his disposal a prepared statement on the Unit’s work. He repeated the points made previously in the Department’s letter of 20 February - the Unit would continue until August 1981 and its main programme would comprise the early school leavers project sponsored by the European Community. When he referred to the experimental examination modes, however, we can detect a certain ambivalence. The Minister repeated the terms of the Department’s letter, that the modes would be continued until 1979 to enable an evaluation to be carried out, but significantly made no mention of terminating them. On being pressed by Keating on this point, he seemed prepared to concede some ground: “I am very flexible with regard to years. I want to look at the work which has been done with a view to putting it on a larger stage” (Wilson, 1978a).

Clearly Wilson was softening the line taken earlier by his Department. This became apparent a week later when two further parliamentary questions were asked on the future of the modes - this time by Deputies R. Ryan and F. O’Brien. Ryan, who represented a large Dublin constituency, probably put his finger on the point that caused the Minister the greatest worry, by alluding to “the considerable concern of parents, children and teachers in the Dublin area” (Ryan, 1978). Pressure from the public was mounting and Wilson knew this. He decided to make a concession. He told the Dáil he was prepared to

extend the assessment modes until 1980 - that is one year longer than had been decided by his Department (Wilson, 1978b).

The Unit had undoubtedly won a significant victory. The Minister for Education had publicly reversed a decision of his Department to phase out ISCIP and Humanities within a year. There was, however, an ambivalence about the nature of this victory. The Minister had made no firm promises; all that had been won amounted to a stay of execution and the Department of Education despite its defeat had time on its side. It might have lost an important battle but not necessarily the war. The crucial test would be when the Unit came to renew its request for permission to operate the modes after 1980.

Nonetheless, the confidence of the Unit in the strength of its own position can be seen in the months immediately following the Dáil debate. In August 1978, we find the Department of Education pressing the CDVEC to begin operations on the Brussels sponsored project on early school leavers.⁸² This was evidently a matter of concern to the Department because the project was one of three national projects submitted a year earlier as the Irish contribution to a network of European projects that was now getting under way. But the director was against the CDVEC complying with the Department's wishes - at least until there was a prospect of getting something in return. "Although the project is potentially interesting and worthwhile", he wrote to McKay, "I would nonetheless consider it inadvisable for the CDVEC to make any firm commitment to it until the Department of Education has given some indication of its support for the second phase of the Curriculum Development Unit programme".⁸³ McKay took this advice and the following day the CDVEC decided at its monthly meeting that "pending the resolution of the future structure of the Unit with the Department of Education, the Curriculum Development Unit should not proceed with the Drop-out [Early School Leavers] Project".⁸⁴

What followed next can be described as a kind of educational horse trading. McKay, it would appear, contacted Foley, now an Assistant Secretary in the Department, and reached an agreement that the Unit would operate the Early School Leavers Project in return for a concession on the experimental examination modes.⁸⁵ Certainly this was the implication contained in his report to the CDVEC the following October.⁸⁶ McKay also took the precaution of conveying indirectly to Brussels the news that an accommodation with the Department had been reached and there was now no obstacle in the way of the new project.⁸⁷

In December 1978 the future of the modes was again raised in the Dáil, when the Minister confirmed that an official evaluation of ISCIP, Humanities and Outdoor Education would be carried out by the newly formed Curriculum Unit of the Department of Education (Wilson, 1978c). This evaluation, like the Coleraine evaluation before it, was now seen by the Unit staff as a key opportunity in the politics of institutionalisation. If the evaluation turned out to be favourable, then in the Unit's view, ISCIP, Humanities and Outdoor Education should be allowed to continue; if on the other hand the evaluation found against the projects, the Unit had no further case. But no matter what the outcome, the evaluation had bought the Unit valuable time in which it could further consolidate its own structures.

The Crisis with the University

We must now return to our consideration of the Steering Committee because in the last analysis it represented the most important dimension of the Unit's effort to institutionalise itself. As we have seen, the Committee's efforts in February 1978 to launch a second phase programme for the Unit had been overtaken by the events precipitated by the Department's letter of the same month. We examined the crisis over the examination modes which developed over the following five months and we saw how this had ended in October in an uneasy settlement. We must now recount the story of a second

crisis which took place within the same period - a crisis which was again provoked by one of the Unit's sponsors, this time the University of Dublin.

In January 1978 the director submitted a memorandum on the role of the University in the Unit's programme to the Senior Lecturer, Professor Máirtín Ó Murchú, who was the member of the University staff with responsibility under the Provost for all aspects of academic affairs. The memorandum mentioned four areas in which the University might involve itself during the Unit's second phase - representation on the Steering Committee, University status for Unit members of staff, provision of accommodation and making available a full-time senior lectureship for the Unit's deputy director.⁸⁸

The first three areas were in no way contentious; they were merely a restatement of the arrangement which had existed between the Unit and the University from the outset. The fourth, however, was different. The post of deputy director of the Unit had been held since 1973 by J. A. Crooks, who had been given the position of research junior lecturer by the University in 1972 and was later promoted to research lecturer in 1975. A research lectureship in the University is usually funded by an outside sponsor and in Crooks's case the outside sponsor was the CDVEC. What the director was now proposing was that the University should make available from its own resources a full-time post for the Unit's deputy director. This would be a practical sign of the University's commitment to the Unit - something which the director felt had not been very apparent up to then.⁸⁹

Three months later, on 19 April 1978, the director revealed his thinking more clearly on the relationship between the Unit and the University. In a letter to Ó Murchú, he wrote as follows:

Up to now the University has not played a prominent role in the development of policy structures within the Unit. The time has arrived, however, when the University's interest and support could be crucial in enabling the Unit to develop such structures. If we

follow the pattern of similar innovative ventures in other countries, the Unit would now seem to be on the threshold of developing into a centre for applied research in education if it can find a suitable third level institution to support it. My hope is that this third level institution would be the University of Dublin.⁹⁰

On reading this letter today, we cannot escape noticing the influence of the Coleraine report on the director's thinking. Despite the fact that the Department of Education had only recently cast serious doubt on the entire future of the Unit, he remained sanguine about realising the major recommendation made by Skilbeck and his team - that the Unit should develop as a university based centre for curriculum research and development. There was, however, a notable omission in his letter; there was no reference to the Trinity School of Education. This omission is all the more striking when we remember that Professor Rice had been one of the Unit's founders and that the Coleraine report had in fact envisaged the Unit's future within his department.

It is scarcely surprising then to find that Rice reacted sharply to the director's plans for the development of the Unit within the University. Joined by his colleague Professor John Heywood of the Department of Teacher Education, he advocated to the University authorities that the link between the Unit and the University should be severed. Rice based his case on the nature of the Unit's work which, he maintained, was not characterised by the principles and methods of rigorous research as befitting a university based institution.⁹¹ Furthermore, the Unit was attracting large amounts of Government monies to itself and was therefore blocking possible avenues of research funding for the School of Education.⁹²

On the 24th May 1978 the director was asked by the Provost to appear before the University Council to justify the Unit's continuance within the University. In preparation for the occasion he wrote a short document for the Council members outlining the reasons for the Unit's

remaining within Trinity. The main argument he used was that the kind of research carried out by the Unit could properly be termed applied research and that examples of this could be found not only in the educational faculties of almost all British and American Universities but also within some departments of Trinity itself.⁹³ He also stressed the benefits of working in the Trinity setting, pointing out that “the University provides an independent academic forum for a research and development Unit”.⁹⁴

The Council listened to the director’s arguments and after he had left the meeting the two professors of education were invited to submit their case in turn. The entire occasion contained a certain element of drama which, however, is not mirrored in the low-key manner in which the Council’s decision was minuted:

The Council in the light of Mr. Trant’s elaboration of the document circulated, dated 19 May 1978, and of the comments submitted by the Professor of Higher Education and Research and the Professor of Education, agreed in principle to and welcomed the continuation of the Curriculum Development Unit’s association with Trinity College.⁹⁵

In order to satisfy any misgivings that had been raised about the Unit’s research record, the Council furthermore requested that the director meet the Provost “to discuss the future research intentions of the Unit”.⁹⁶

The crisis over the Unit’s future role in the University was primarily caused by the strained relationship between the Unit and the School of Education. It was a crisis, however, which was watched by the senior officers of both the University and the CDVEC with more than passing interest. Two years previously the two institutions had concluded an agreement whereby the University agreed to give degree status to a number of courses within the five CDVEC third level colleges. The closer relationship that had consequently come into existence between

the two institutions was given formal expression in the establishment of a liaison body - the CDVEC/University of Dublin Joint Liaison Council. This body was now thought to be the appropriate one to oversee the Unit's activities and a suggestion to this effect was made by the Provost to the director when they met in June 1978.⁹⁷ "It seems desirable", the Provost afterwards wrote to McKay, "that detailed provisions for the oversight of the Unit should be made as quickly as possible and I understand that it would not be unreasonable to suggest that for the future, the committee governing the activities of the Unit should be established as a subcommittee of the liaison council of the City of Dublin Vocational Education Committee and the University of Dublin".⁹⁸

This suggestion was acceptable to the CDVEC and to put it into effect the director began to draft yet another memorandum on the Unit's second phase - his third within two years.⁹⁹ The new memorandum, entitled "The Future of the Curriculum Development Unit", was completed by the end of summer and approved by the CDVEC on 29 September 1978.¹⁰⁰ This memorandum differed from its two predecessors in that it was mainly a historiographical document - a conscious attempt to write the history of the Unit and to show that despite the apparently haphazard nature of the events of the two bridging years, from 1976 to 1978, a pattern was nonetheless emerging. The historiographical approach lent weight to the argument which the director was now advancing - that the Unit was an organic entity which had matured over the years and not, as the Department of Education would have it, a research and development project which should terminate at a given point.¹⁰¹

The new memorandum envisaged a four year span for the Unit's second phase, from 1st September 1979 to 31st August 1983. The sections on philosophy and methodology were the same as in the earlier memoranda but a notable difference was the fact that there was hardly any mention of new projects. Instead, the distinction between old and new projects was consciously blurred:

Existing projects, if successful, should not be phased out. They should be consolidated and merged into new projects, making the innovative process a continuous and meaningful unity. The essential ingredient in this process is ongoing teacher development.¹⁰²

This was a bold claim to make and did not accord with the view of the Unit held by some important members of the Steering Committee. It is hardly likely for instance that the Department of Education would ever have agreed to the Unit's being established on such a basis, nor would Professor Rice have been as willing to accept it into the School of Education.

The new memorandum contained an important recommendation for a change in the Unit's management structure - in line with the Provost's earlier suggestion to the director and to McKay - that the Steering Committee be reconstituted as a subcommittee of the CDVEC/University of Dublin Joint Liaison Council. The new Steering Committee would have five representatives from the CDVEC, five from the University, two from the Department of Education, and one from each of the VECs associated with the Unit in the Greater Dublin Area - County Dublin and Dun Laoghaire. The Committee would also have a small administrative subcommittee which would meet at more frequent intervals and would advise the director on immediate issues.¹⁰³

This recommendation had been carefully worked out over the previous months by McKay and the director on behalf of the CDVEC and Ó Murchú and Sterling on behalf of the University. The most significant part of the recommendation was that which envisaged the establishment of the small administrative subcommittee. In theory this body was to be subordinate to the Steering Committee which was to retain the overall responsibility for the Unit. In practice, however, this did not turn out to be the case; the small administrative subcommittee was to become in reality the governing body of the Unit.

On the 9th October 1978, the Joint Liaison Council ratified the new management structures and another milestone on the Unit's road towards institutionalisation seemed to have been successfully passed.¹⁰⁴ On the face of it, events were now going the Unit's way. It had been re-established under the terms of the alliance between the CDVEC and Trinity, and although the effort to invoke section 40 of the 1930 Act had failed, the new management structures made it possible to include representation from the other VECs in the Greater Dublin area. The Unit, it seemed, was at last beginning to spread its wings and assume the kind of role envisaged for it in the Coleraine report. This sanguine hope for the future, however, did not reckon with the Unit's third sponsor, the Department of Education, and to this part of the story we shall now return.

The New Management Structures

On the 18th December 1978, the first part of the Unit's two tier management structure came into effect when the newly constituted Steering Committee met. It quickly emerged, however, that everything was far from well. At the beginning of the meeting Torlach O'Connor, one of the two representatives from the Department of Education, strongly protested over the fact that the Department had not been consulted about the new arrangements.¹⁰⁵ O'Connor had every reason to protest; not only had the Department been ignored but the intention apparently was to exclude it completely from membership of the administrative sub-committee.

It seems, however, that the director was not altogether happy with this for in February 1979 we find him advising McKay that there should be a change of policy about the Department's exclusion.¹⁰⁶ The director's anxiety to conciliate the Department stemmed from a private meeting he had had the previous December with Foley's successor as Chief Inspector, Dr. Finbar O'Callaghan. O'Callaghan had clearly signalled that the Department had serious misgivings about the Unit's position in the University. In the Department's view the

Trinity link had not lived up to its promise because it produced little or no effect on the University's training of teachers. It could even be argued that the link was a distraction for the Unit, whose chief care should be the problem of disadvantage in the CDVEC schools.¹⁰⁷

McKay, however, would not agree with this line of thinking and was inclined to take the opposite view - that the Unit should at all costs retain the University link. In a meeting with the director the following June, he emphasised the importance of the Unit's remaining within the University, even if this resulted in problems with the Department of Education. The Trinity link, he argued, kept the Unit in the limelight and helped to maintain its independence, not least its independence within the CDVEC. It was this independence which gave the Unit its flexibility and consequently its strength. Despite the director's anxiety, McKay was in no hurry to invite a Department representative to the administrative sub-committee, and although he was anxious to have this sub-committee established as soon as possible, he was reluctant to allow the Department easy access to the Unit's affairs - or as he put it, "to have the Department's hand on the tiller".¹⁰⁸

Three months later, realising perhaps the impossibility of indefinitely excluding the Department, McKay recommended to the CDVEC that a formal invitation be issued to the Department to send a representative.¹⁰⁹ The Department, however, ignored the invitation and appeared to boycott the sub-committee. McKay was now aware that the director was coming under increasing pressure from the Department to sever or at least weaken the University link in return for a guarantee of support for a new Unit programme. In a meeting with the director in December 1979, he expressed his opposition to such a move. If the Unit moved into the CDVEC, he said, it would lose its identity by becoming part of the general CDVEC support service and would ultimately become more vulnerable to the Department's control. Furthermore, if the Unit left the University, the CDVEC could not guarantee to give it accommodation; nor could the Department be

relied on to keep its side of the bargain by giving the promised support to a new programme.¹¹⁰

McKay's counsels prevailed and the Unit continued to remain in the University. The administrative sub-committee, which significantly assumed the title, "Management Committee", met for the first time in September 1979 and addressed itself to the business of running the Unit's affairs. At its inaugural meeting, it considered its relationship with the Steering Committee, which had been meeting since the previous December and had made decisions on administrative issues such as recruiting staff for the new project on early school leavers. Such decisions, it could be argued, were outside the competence of the Steering Committee which was supposed to confine itself to matters of policy but, because of the delay in establishing the Management Committee, had assumed a managerial function. The Management Committee, however, quickly began to make up lost ground and its first meeting took decisions on staffing and allowances and heard a progress report on the early school leavers project. It then proceeded to fix the date and the agenda of the next Steering Committee meeting. Henceforth, there would be no doubt as to where the administrative control of the Unit would lie.¹¹¹

It had been the original intention of the Joint Liaison Council that the membership of the Management Committee would be confined to five people - the acting CEO, a CDVEC member, the Dean of Arts (Humanities), the Assistant Secretary for Academic Affairs and the director of the Unit. This arrangement had excluded not only the Department of Education but also Professor Rice and indeed any representative from the School of Education. We noted already how the Department was affronted by this exclusion - as was evident in O'Connor's protest at the Steering Committee meeting in December 1978. We may also assume that Rice felt equally aggrieved and was not prepared to accept the new arrangement without protest. In the event his protest was not without effect. As early as November 1978 we find Sterling notifying McKay that the University Council had

decided to increase the University's representation on the Management Committee to three people.¹¹² The identity of the additional representative, however, was not revealed until the following September, shortly before the Management Committee met for the first time: the name was that of Professor Rice.

The CDVEC finalised its representation on the Management Committee on the 16 May 1979. Two CDVEC members, Councillor Carroll and Alderman Byrne, who had both previously served on the old Steering Committee, were re-nominated. The third representative, as expected, was McKay. The director had a place on the Committee in his own right but the CDVEC decided to nominate him as their fourth representative.¹¹³ By this action they were asserting that the Unit was primarily a CDVEC institution and the Management Committee should reflect this fact. This claim was further emphasised at the first meeting of the Committee when Alderman Byrne, without any debate on the issue, assumed the chair on behalf of the CDVEC.¹¹⁴ He was to hold that office unchallenged for the following three years.

On the 18 January 1980 the Management Committee met for the second time and made decisions on such items as staffing, educational visits, telephones and production of materials.¹¹⁵ The management of the Unit's affairs, it seemed, was settling into an organised pattern and to emphasise the fact the Committee decided to hold regular monthly meetings from then on. This routine was observed for one month only and then we find a gap until the following May. What, we may ask, caused this disruption? For an answer we shall have to digress yet again in order to examine the director's position and the problems which now arose in relation to his role.

The Director's Position

The director's position was an ambivalent one. In 1972 he had been seconded by the CDVEC from his post as principal of Ballyfermot

Vocational School to act as director of the Unit. In February 1973 the University of Dublin, in recognition of his new role, appointed him a research fellow.¹¹⁶ His position as director, however, was not a permanent one; originally it had been for a four year period from 1972 to 1976. After 1976, his period of secondment, which was also bound up with the Unit's future, entered a period of indefinite extension.

The ambivalence surrounding the director's position had implications not only for himself and the Unit but also for the school from which he had been seconded. From 1972 onwards the principalship of Ballyfermot had been left vacant and the vice-principal, James Shortall, had served as acting principal. Shortall's own position had in turn been filled by an acting vice-principal, Noel Halpin. This arrangement, which could hardly be called satisfactory, was further complicated in 1979 when Shortall reached retirement age. The CDVEC now decided to appoint him as acting principal of a new senior college which was being developed in the Ballyfermot area, while at the same time they made Halpin acting principal of Ballyfermot Vocational School.¹¹⁷ It was hardly surprising in the circumstances that the teaching staff of the school began to voice their discontent.

In June 1979 the director decided to consult the Chief Inspector of the Department of Education about his position. He told O'Callaghan that he was reluctant to carry on as director of the Unit, if the price of doing so would be the blocking of a permanent principalship in Ballyfermot. O'Callaghan agreed that the director's position in the Unit should not be at the expense of the school but the resolution of the problem, he said, was not impossible. He recommended that the CDVEC ask the Department that the director be made a supernumerary principal with responsibility for curriculum development. O'Callaghan added that he himself would look favourably on such a request but he advised haste. "It was a good time", he told the director, "to test the waters on both sides of the divide".¹¹⁸

The director took this advice and on 12 June 1979 he formally requested McKay that he be made a supernumerary principal for curriculum development. "It is important", he wrote, "that Ballyfermot Vocational School have a permanent headmaster. It is important also that the work of the Curriculum Development Unit be continued, especially with regard to new courses at senior cycle and the launching of the Early Leavers Project at junior cycle".¹¹⁹ The following September McKay replied that he had submitted the request to the Department of Education. He was not unduly worried, he added, about the situation in Ballyfermot and was content to await developments.¹²⁰

By the spring of 1980, however, the Department had not yet replied and the situation in the school had now considerably worsened. The previous October the CDVEC had decided, probably in response to pressure from the TUI, to advertise one of the vacant senior posts in the school - that of the vice-principal - and William A. Breen, who had been in the post in a temporary capacity since the previous March, had been appointed. Three months later Breen was elevated to the post of acting principal and Noel Halpin, who had held that position for the previous six months, now reverted to his previous post as acting vice-principal.¹²¹ It was now clear that the situation with regard to the senior posts in the school had reached a point bordering on the ridiculous and could hardly be allowed to continue.

On 3 March 1980 the teaching staff of the school decided that they had reached the limit of their patience and that they would not tolerate the situation any further. They issued a strongly worded statement which amounted to an ultimatum:

We have talked and talked until we see no point in talking anymore. We feel we must take action in order to make the Department of Education favourably resolve this unsatisfactory situation. At our Union meeting in February 1980 a resolution was passed requesting our National Executive to sanction a series of one-day strikes during March (the first to take place

on March 10th) and if this does not bring home to those in authority the urgency of the situation, more extensive action will be taken after the Easter holidays.¹²²

Although the teaching staff were supportive of the work of the Unit and had indeed recommended that the director's position be made permanent, they were nonetheless uncompromising on one point: "No matter what decision the Department make we are determined that Ballyfermot will no longer pay the price of keeping the Curriculum Development Unit in existence - eight years is long enough".¹²³

At this point the Department decided to intervene. On 14 March 1980 a letter was sent to McKay informing him how the Department proposed to resolve the problem:

In the light of the disquiet expressed by interested parties and of the industrial action threatened by the teaching staff, it is now apparent that the arrangements for the secondment of Mr. Trant in so far as they affect the vocational school are proving unsatisfactory. Accordingly the Department considers that in the interests of the school your Committee should arrange for the return of Mr. Trant to his post as Principal.¹²⁴

The Department's letter went on to reject the CDVEC's request of the previous summer to create a supernumerary principalship for curriculum development. The reason given was that the evaluation of ISCIP, Humanities and Outdoor Education had already commenced and the Department would have to await the outcome before making any long-term decisions on the Unit's future. As a parting shot, the Department reminded McKay that the CDVEC had overspent on the Unit's projects and an additional reprimand to that effect was on its way.¹²⁵

Within days, the Department's letter was in the hands of the press and the dispute over the director's position was now given national

coverage. The CDVEC decided to dig its heels in and refused to obey the Department's injunction. On 25th March 1980 the letter was discussed at the monthly CDVEC meeting and "it was agreed that the suggestion therein that Mr Trant should resume the post of principal by 1 June 1980 was not acceptable".¹²⁶ The CDVEC decided instead to refer the matter back to the Department and with this end in view to seek an immediate meeting with senior Department officials. The CDVEC was clearly incensed at the Department's action, as is evident from a resolution it passed on the Department's current evaluation of the Unit's work. The Committee pointed out that the Coleraine report had been highly favourable and that this should now be updated, presumably as a counter-balance to the Department's evaluation, in which the CDVEC apparently had little trust.¹²⁷

The battle-lines between the CDVEC and the Department were now drawn up once more. This time, however, it looked as if the Department's defeat two years previously would be reversed. The CDVEC had adopted a defiant attitude but it is difficult to see what room for manoeuvre it possessed and, despite the many resolutions of support that were now flowing in from the pilot schools, it seemed as if there was no other option but to send the director back to his school.

Early in April, however, a solution suddenly emerged. It happened that at this time the CDVEC was in the process of amalgamating two of its schools - Mount Street Vocational School and Ringsend Technical Institute. Mount Street, which was the smaller of the two, was due for closure and the teaching staff were preparing to transfer to Ringsend. This arrangement meant that the principal of Mount Street, Tomás Holt, would have to transfer as a supernumerary principal to the larger school. Seizing his opportunity, McKay immediately put arrangements in train to transfer Holt as a permanent principal to Ballyfermot and in his stead to send the director as a supernumerary principal to Ringsend - from where he would be seconded back to the Unit. Both the Department and the TUI agreed to this complicated arrangement and at a meeting of the CDVEC on 1 May 1980 a formal

recommendation sanctioning the transfer was passed.¹²⁸

For the director, however, the solution was only a temporary one. He had now become a supernumerary principal seconded to the Unit from Ringsend, a school which already had a permanent principal. However, the principal of Ringsend, Thomas Carney, was due to retire in two years, at which point the question of the director's precarious position could again become an issue. Nonetheless, the administrative coup engineered by McKay had bought the director two years' grace - not an inconsiderable amount of time in the circumstances in which the Unit was now learning to operate.

The solution to the Ballyfermot problem was McKay's parting gift to the Unit. Two months later he left the scene to take up a new post as CEO of County Cavan VEC. His association with the Unit had been a long one, going back as far as 1972, when he had been principal of Coolock Vocational School, one of the Unit's first pilot schools. During his period as acting CEO of the CDVEC, from 1978 to 1980, he had helped the Unit survive through some of its most difficult crises and the solution to the Ballyfermot problem was to guarantee it a further two years' lease of life.

The Department accepts the Management Structures

To return to our consideration of the Unit's new management structures, we have already noted how the Department of Education had taken offence over not being consulted by the other two sponsors, the CDVEC and Trinity. For nearly a year and a half after the establishment of the Management Committee the Department refused to send a representative to any of the meetings and during the same period it gave only grudging recognition to the Steering Committee. In accepting an invitation to the Steering Committee meeting of 30 June 1980, Torlach O'Connor, the Department's longest serving representative, was at pains to make his position clear: "While it is my intention to attend this meeting", he told the director, "I am to inform

you that my attendance does not imply the Department's assent to the enlargement of the Steering Committee or to the establishment of other structures within the Unit, or any change in the position stated in paragraph 3 of the Department's letter of 20/2/78".¹²⁹ Evidently the Department was still not prepared to recognise the change in the Unit's management structures and this is underlined by O'Connor's reference to the Department's letter, which two years previously had forbidden the enlargement of the institutional basis of the Unit to include other VECs. The fact that in practice the Unit was now operating under a new dispensation was beside the point; for the Department the old dispensation was still in force.

On 1 October 1980, the Management Committee held its first meeting of the new school year but still without any representative from the Department of Education.¹³⁰ Two new members, however, were present at the meeting: Kader Asmal, the recently elected Dean of Arts (Humanities) from Trinity and Liam Arundel, the newly appointed CEO of the CDVEC. Both men were to exert a considerable influence on the Unit's affairs in the following years - Asmal by his unequivocal and publicly expressed support for the Unit's position within the University, and Arundel by his efforts to bring the Unit more firmly into the administrative structure of the CDVEC.

From the outset Arundel advocated that the Unit pursue a more conciliatory policy towards the Department of Education or, as he put it to the director at their first meeting, he wanted the Unit "to do some spade work in building bridges with the Department".¹³¹ He had himself embarked on a bridge building exercise soon after taking up office when he met the Chief Inspector on 22 July 1980 and discussed the Unit's position.¹³² Five months later we find him exploring a way in which the Department could take its place on the Management Committee without loss of face to either side. He told the director that given the right formula "the Department would support the Unit and that the Unit could become a very powerful force nationally as well as

regionally”.¹³³

In January 1981, in line with Arundel’s conciliatory policy, the director drafted a private memorandum, suggesting modifications to the Unit’s management structure which would make it more acceptable to the Department. The two-tier structure would remain but the Steering Committee would be widened to include school principals and representatives from industry and the teacher unions. The chairmanship of the Steering Committee would rotate between the three sponsoring bodies with the Chief Inspector chairing one of its three annual meetings. The Management Committee, which would retain the effective control of the Unit, would comprise three representatives from each of the three sponsors and would be chaired by an outside chairperson acceptable to all parties.¹³⁴

With the exception of the provision of an outside chairperson, Arundel agreed to the terms of the memorandum and decided to invite O’Connor to attend the February meeting of the Management Committee.¹³⁵ O’Connor duly accepted and during the course of the meeting Arundel formally proposed that the Department nominate three permanent representatives.¹³⁶ A month later, on the 24 March 1981, the Chief Inspector formally wrote to Arundel informing him of the Department’s decision to nominate three people - Torlach O’Connor from the Psychological Service, Patrick Fox from the Inspectorate and Albert Kelly from the Curriculum Unit.¹³⁷ After nearly two years of waiting, the Department had finally come in from the cold.

Consolidating the Modes

Throughout the years 1976-82, the period under review in this chapter, the experimental examination modes in ISCIP and Humanities occupied a central place in the Unit’s life and in its efforts to institutionalise itself. We have recounted the story of the modes up to the end of 1978, at which point the Department of Education had

signalled their intention of scrutinising their operation in the context of the proposed evaluation of ISCIIP, Humanities and Outdoor Education. In the director's eyes the continued development of the modes was the Unit's priority issue and he emphasised this point to the newly constituted Steering Committee at its first meeting in December 1978.¹³⁸ A strategy paper for disseminating the modes had already been prepared by the Unit's staff and this was now put before the Steering Committee. The strategy was based on the Unit's three years' experience of operating the modes and the results of this experience, it was claimed, had justified the trust placed in the teachers to assume responsibility for assessing their own students. To support this argument, the strategy paper invoked the authority of the ICE Report which had stated "that the quality of education throughout the system will in the long run be commensurate with the responsibility in professional matters, especially in the devising and assessing of courses, carried by the classroom teacher".¹³⁹

The strategy paper envisaged a combination of end-of-course examinations set by the Department and teacher-based assessments in oral and practical work. An interesting feature in the strategy was that the students' examination scripts would be marked by their own teachers, subject to moderation by examiners appointed by the Department. The entire scheme was to be operated on a regional basis, with regular regional conferences to maintain acceptable standards and an advisory panel of teachers to recommend to the Department such modifications and improvements as were necessary from time to time. An important aspect of the scheme was the proposal to pay teachers a fee which would cover all aspects of the assessment process - marking scripts, participation in continuous assessment and cross-moderation procedures and assessment of projects and portfolios.¹⁴⁰ The arguments put forward in the strategy paper, despite the fact that they were based on the ICE Report, were not acceptable to the Department of Education. There is evidence to suggest that the Department was itself divided on the ICE Report and could not afford to make a decision in the Unit's favour which would

prejudice its own position.¹⁴¹ Another cause of concern to the Department was the question of paying teachers for operating the assessment procedures. This, in the Department's view, should be a normal part of the teacher's professional duties and it had no intention of conceding ground on the point. It was probably because of this more than any other issue that the Department's attitude to the dissemination of the modes remained ambivalent if not hostile.

This attitude became apparent in June 1979 when the Department announced that the modes could be extended for another year. On the face of it this appeared to be good news but there was no mistaking the Department's intention. The extension was granted "as an exceptional matter...to ensure an adequate evaluation of the projects in respect of those students who were enrolled at the commencement of the current school year, 1978/79, and who will complete the junior cycle in June 1981".¹⁴² In other words the modes were being tolerated for the time being to facilitate their evaluation; they were to be phased out within two years and "under no circumstances should any further students be enrolled".¹⁴³

This news was a big blow to the Unit. The battle for the modes, which had lasted for several years and had even been the subject of a debate in the Dáil, now seemed in danger of being lost. It is interesting at this remove to note the importance that the Unit still attached to the modes and the tenacity with which it fought for them. In a way they were symbolic of all the Unit stood for - the right of teachers to exercise their professional responsibility in the fullest way possible. This was the message of the ICE Report, to which the Unit had enthusiastically subscribed, and had also been the message of Patrick Pearse, one of the inspirational figures of the Irish State, whom the director on occasion was fond of quoting. For instance, in his memorandum on the future of the Unit written in September 1978, he had included Pearse's stirring appeal for freedom for the individual teacher "to impart something of his own personality to his work, to bring his own peculiar gifts to the service of his pupils, to be in short, a

teacher, a master, one having an intimate and permanent relationship with his pupils and not a mere part of the educational machine, a mere cog in the wheel” (Pearse, 1916, p.380). Pearse in his own day had inveighed against the excessive centralism of an educational system which he had likened to a murder machine. Over seventy years later, it must have seemed to the embattled director that this description was still an apt one.

By now it was evident that yet another battle for the modes was in the offing but on this occasion the director realised that a confrontation with the Department like that of 1978 was out of the question; neither the Dáil or the national media could be expected to interest themselves in the Unit’s cause to the same extent as before. A more indirect and gradualist strategy was planned instead; the modes would be kept alive at all costs, from year to year if necessary, using whatever argument presented itself.

The first priority was to persuade the Department to change its mind on a minor issue, or at least on what appeared to be one - the forbidding of the pilot schools to recruit first year students into ISCIP and Humanities. In June 1979, in a conciliatory letter to the Department, McKay on the director’s advice pleaded for the lifting of this restriction:

It would be regrettable, if a decision to ban first year students from participating in the projects during the coming year were made, particularly as the participation of first year students does not preclude their transfer to traditional courses at the end of the year. Indeed the principals of the pilot schools have already been advised of this eventuality. In any event the evaluation must suffer in these circumstances.¹⁴⁴

The allusion to the evaluation was a well-placed shot. The Minister in his statement in the Dáil a year earlier had set great store on this evaluation and it now behoved the Department to show that ISCIP and Humanities would get a fair trial. The banning of first year students, however, could be construed as a hostile judgement on the projects and consequently prejudicial to an impartial evaluation.

Within six weeks the Department replied to McKay's letter - an unprecedented alacrity which augured well - and without appearing to give too much away, indicated a willingness to accede to his request. Elements of the methodology of both projects could "continue to be used at first year level to the extent that such an arrangement is compatible with the transfer of students at the beginning of their second year to traditional programmes leading to Group/Intermediate examinations in the relevant subjects".¹⁴⁵ The phrasing was tortuous but the general intention was clear: the Department was prepared to make a concession, a small one it might appear, but not insignificant as time would tell.

It was now clear to the director that in the tactical game he was engaged in the evaluation card was the best one to play. By this time the evaluation was well under way and was likely to last for some time - certainly well after the summer of 1981, the terminal date for the modes indicated by the Department. It is not surprising, therefore, to find the director making a request for yet another extension to the modes, based on the argument that a fair evaluation demanded that they be kept alive. In April 1980, in a letter to Pádraig Ó Nualláin, the Chief Inspector, he pressed home his point:

If the modes are discontinued before the results of the evaluation are made known, then the perception in the pilot schools will be that the modes were discontinued in an arbitrary manner and that the evaluation was pointless from the start. This will naturally lead to a good deal of resentment and reluctance to be involved with any curriculum experiment for a considerable period in the future.¹⁴⁶

These were strong words and amounted to calling the Department's good faith into question if they terminated the modes. The Department was reminded once again of the Minister's public promise to give the modes a fair hearing, which implied that no decision should be made until the evaluation was complete. If for any reason, however, the evaluation was delayed, then it seemed reasonable to expect that the modes should be correspondingly extended. "Whatever their ultimate fate," the director reminded Ó Nualláin, "I think it is important that they should be seen to have received a fair trial and that everybody associated with them should be aware of the conclusions and recommendations which resulted from their evaluation".¹⁴⁷

The director's argument appeared to produce results. The following July the Department announced "that in order to ensure a satisfactory evaluation it has been found necessary to approve of the extension of the existing special provision for the Humanities and the Integrated Science Curriculum Innovation Projects for a further year i.e. to June 1982".¹⁴⁸ The Unit was not to understand by this, however, that there was any weakening on the Department's part; its position regarding the modes was still unbending. "The Department is not prepared to accept any arrangement that would require an extension of the special provision beyond 1982".¹⁴⁹ Nonetheless, the fact remained that the Department had conceded a little more ground and the modes were still alive.

July 1980 was an important month in the struggle to consolidate the modes; it marked the arrival on the scene of Liam Arundel, the new CEO of the CDVEC. Up to then the support of the CEO had been crucial to the survival of the modes and this support had always been generously given in the past. But what of the future? In a letter on the 18th July, the director made a bid to win Arundel to his own point of view. "The key issue, as I see it", he wrote, "is still the question of the experimental examination modes. We still hope for a fair evaluation

of these”.¹⁵⁰ The issue, however, was no longer whether the modes should be continued or terminated but rather how they could be modified to fit into the general educational system. Knowing that Arundel was about to meet the Chief Inspector, the director reminded him of the crucial importance of the Inspectorate in disseminating the modes: “In resolving this issue the Department’s inspectorate would play a key role - they themselves have already invested a lot of time and energy in the development of the modes”.¹⁵¹

Apart from the inspectorate, the most committed supporters of the modes were without doubt the teachers themselves and the director was at pains to emphasise this to Arundel. The passage in his letter where he made this point deserves quoting in full, as it contains a restatement of the Unit’s philosophy regarding the modes and helps us to understand why it was prepared to go to such lengths to retain them:

The teachers for their part have also invested much of themselves in the development of the modes. It is important to be aware of this especially as the climate of industrial relations in recent years between the Department and the teachers in general has not been too good. It is all the more remarkable, then, that teachers involved with the Unit’s work have shown a surprising amount of good will and eagerness to develop themselves as professionals. Despite the cautious and sometimes restrictive approach of their own unions, the teachers involved with us are more than ready to operate a “quid pro quo approach”. They are prepared to give of their talents and time, if it is seen that an effort is made to meet them halfway. I think that this point is crucial and will, I hope, be picked up by the Department’s evaluation team. We believe that one of the most significant results of our work is the evidence that many teachers, given the chance, are eager to develop their own sense of professionalism. The experimental examination modes are a living proof of this and the Department should be more concerned to keep them than to abolish them.¹⁵²

For all the director's efforts, the CEO refused to commit himself officially on the modes - at least not for the present. The new school year 1980/81 opened with a resolution from the principals of the pilot schools that the future of the modes be ensured by having ISCIP and Humanities officially incorporated into the national curriculum.¹⁵³ The Department, however, was not disposed to take such a resolution seriously. The school year had passed the half-way mark before the Department made its next pronouncement on the modes - one that brought little joy to the supporters of the Unit. In a letter issued in February 1981, all the pilot schools were reminded "that the last year for provision of examinations in the alternative syllabuses is to be 1982".¹⁵⁴

It was at this point that the Unit's Management Committee began to lend a hand. At its meeting on 28 April 1981, the modes were debated and a recommendation passed that ISCIP and Humanities should continue in existence "until such time as the evaluation had been concluded and its findings had been given due consideration".¹⁵⁵ This was an important recommendation, coming as it did from a body on which three Departmental officers were represented. Equally important was the fact that Arundel had now decided to show his hand. Following a resolution by the CDVEC at its April meeting, he wrote to the Department arguing strongly for a continuation of the modes until the evaluation was completed.¹⁵⁶

The school year 1980/81 ended and a new year began but still the Department refused to be drawn. By now the evaluation of ISCIP and Humanities was entering its third year but no conclusion was yet in sight. In November 1981, the Management Committee again discussed the problem and expressed concern "that the situation regarding the extension to the experimental examination modes had still not been resolved and that schools and pupils should not suffer".¹⁵⁷ In the circumstances, the Committee felt, the Department should be urgently requested to grant an extension until June 1983 and although Arundel conveyed this resolution directly to the Department,

his letter elicited no reply.¹⁵⁸

Early in 1982 the Management Committee renewed its pressure on the Department. In February and again in March the Committee requested an extension to the modes but still with no success.¹⁵⁹ The story now took a turn which at first sight is difficult to understand, particularly in view of the struggle for the modes which had lasted for the previous four years. Strange as it may seem to us now, the modes as an issue seemed to disappear from view. No mention of them can be found for the next ten months in key Unit documents such as the Management Committee minutes or the correspondence between the director and the CEO. It is not until 20 December 1982 that we again find a reference to them - in a letter from the Department which extended permission for the modes until the summer of 1983. This information, moreover, which up to now would have been regarded as of the utmost importance, was given in an untypically low-key manner. The news was conveyed, not as heretofore to the CEO in person, but to his assistant education officer.¹⁶⁰ Nor can we detect any excitement or sense of relief at the news. It was almost as if the permission had been expected and when word of it finally came, it seemed to be regarded almost as a formality.

We must infer from all this that from 1981 onwards the Department's hostility to the modes had begun to soften. Certainly in the years that followed 1981, the modes never again became the kind of issue that existed during the previous five years. The curious thing, however, is that no final decision about the future of the modes ever appears to have been made. The Department kept renewing permission for them on a year-to-year basis but it is clear that this was always presumed by the Unit and the pilot schools. In some cases the permission arrived so late in the year - in 1986 for instance, it arrived less than five months before the actual examination date - that we must conclude that the schools were reasonably sure that a *de facto* permission already existed.

It is difficult to be certain of the reasons for this change in the Department's attitude towards the modes. Perhaps the growing awareness of the need for diversification in the curriculum and the greater interest that was now being shown in curriculum development in general may have had some influence. Certainly a new interest in curricular matters was evident in a Government White Paper on education which was published in December 1980 and which advocated the establishment of a Curriculum Council, which would "view the totality of the curriculum" and "advise the Minister on questions of overall curricular balance" (Department of Education, 1980, p.47). This interest was heightened when a new Government came to power in June 1981 and promised to set up an independent curriculum and examinations board (Boland, 1981).

Another factor which may have had some influence in changing the Department's attitudes was the growing involvement of some of its senior officers in the curricular initiatives sponsored by the European Community around this time. Earlier in the chapter we mentioned the Irish participation in a European Community network of pilot projects oriented towards the general theme of transition from school to adult and working life. By 1981 this network was coming to an end but already a second wave of Brussels sponsored projects was on its way and was generating considerable interest. This is not the place to attempt to evaluate the impact of these projects but one thing, however, can be said with some degree of sureness. In the Irish context they helped to move curriculum development from the periphery of the system, where it had been languishing in obscurity, into the centre of the educational stage. The new projects represented Ireland's contribution to a European Community programme and to this extent the Department of Education had to accept a large measure of responsibility for them. In other words, the Department now found itself more and more in the field of curriculum development and had to rely on curricular agencies such as the Unit to implement its plans. In these circumstances it was inevitable that the relationship between the Department and the Unit would begin to change.

Ironically, what should have been one of the most significant events regarding the modes almost passed unnoticed. By autumn 1981 the Department's evaluation of ISCIP and Humanities was completed; the reports, however, were never made public. The long-awaited evaluation was now ready but nobody outside of the Department itself was allowed to read the conclusions. What did these jealously guarded evaluation reports contain? Although they were confidential documents, their contents were divulged to a small number of outsiders by a well-intentioned Department official.

The reports on ISCIP and Humanities make contrasting reading. The former was generally unfriendly and said more negative than positive things about ISCIP. The project's objectives were found to be vague and sometimes meaningless, its aspirations towards integration were dismissed as irrelevant and its claim to be an enquiry-based approach was found to be without much substance. However, notwithstanding its overall critical tone, the report managed to say a few genuinely complimentary things about the project. For instance in a section entitled, "ISCIP in the Classroom" it had this to say:

Again and yet again in discussion with science and senior teachers it was agreed that the essence of ISCIP was the teaching methodology. No one claimed that this methodology was in any way unique to ISCIP but that what all teachers found of value was the teacher training and teacher-teacher contact opportunities. ISCIP had facilitated the meeting of teachers and the discussion and exchange of ideas through the monthly meetings of one representative of each school and through the short inservice courses.¹⁶¹

The Humanities evaluation report was a much longer document, more carefully prepared and researched and much more favourably disposed towards its subject. The tone was warm and friendly and the report, although not entirely uncritical, came to the conclusion that Humanities was a good project and, provided some changes were made, should be disseminated into the system at large. Speaking

about the pilot teachers, the report was generous in its praise:

In order to understand their commitment to the programme it is necessary to see them teaching, to meet them, individually and in groups and talk to them and let them talk. They are concerned for the future of Humanities. For them, it has been a new departure and almost an exciting discovery that school for a huge number of middle to lower ability children need not be an exercise in frustration. It can be made interesting and it can give these children much-needed confidence. These teachers almost unanimously reject the traditional programme for these pupils and when they consider the possibility of the Humanities programme being discontinued they are at a loss for an alternative. Their commitment to the programme is its greatest strength and with the implementation of the recommendations of this report it is more than probable that they would turn a good course into a great course.¹⁶²

Perhaps the most telling criticism in the Humanities evaluation - and one that can be found to some extent in the ISCIP evaluation as well - is the accusation that the project had departed from its original concern for disadvantaged students. The Unit, the evaluators maintained, had not been able to resist the temptation of going up-market by seeking to cater for the more academically respectable students, and as proof of this they referred to the project publications. Although these were impressive to look at and had made the Unit more widely known, they contained many flaws when they were examined from the perspective of the classroom. This criticism is indeed ironic when we consider the battle that had been fought over the Unit's original decision to publish and Alderman Byrne, if he had seen the evaluation reports, would no doubt have felt vindicated in his original opposition to the Unit's publication policy.

A Future for the Curriculum Development Unit

In 1982 the Unit celebrated its tenth birthday and in many ways this was an important date in the history of its development. The Unit with good reason could now celebrate the fact that it had survived a decade of uncertainty. More significantly, 1982 was also to see the acceptance by the Unit's sponsors of a four year programme and for the first time the Unit could look forward to the future with some degree of confidence and assurance. The programme had only been agreed after a lengthy process of consultation and debate but never before in the Unit's history had the various levels of its management structure worked so effectively.

The process of consultation got off to an inauspicious start when in October 1981 a special meeting of the Management Committee debated the Unit's future. For the occasion the director had prepared a short document on three aspects of the Unit - management structures, function and programmes. Most of the debate, however, centred on the first of these and with predictable results. Old sores were again opened, especially over the issue of the balance of representation from the three sponsors, and the director's suggestions about a future programme were virtually ignored.¹⁶³

Two months later the Steering Committee took up where the Management Committee left off. For the meeting the director prepared another document on the Unit's future but on this occasion he carefully avoided any reference to management structures, which had proved such a divisive issue at the Management Committee. The second document concentrated instead on the Unit's future programme and here the thinking was much more developed than it had been two months earlier:

The Unit is now in its tenth year. It has gradually evolved from being a basis for individual curriculum projects to becoming a curriculum centre with involvement in curriculum development across the full spectrum. This was the role envisaged for the Unit in

the Skilbeck Report. The implications of this role are that broad functional areas of the Unit's work should be clarified and within these areas, specific projects both long and short-term should be delineated.¹⁶⁴

This line of reasoning was not new. In 1978 the director had tried to make a similar case by arguing that the Unit should evolve as a centre for innovation and research within the University but the consequences of his argument, it will be recalled, had proved unfortunate. Now, however, he was careful not to link the Unit's future too closely with the University and so was able to keep his options open. The proposed programme for the Unit was in line with similar proposals in the past. The broad functional areas referred to in the document basically amounted to a re-statement of the Unit's long-standing policy on teacher development with its three related components - teacher inservice, materials development and assessment procedures. Within this framework, the document proposed a series of nine projects which were grouped under three headings: long-term projects, dissemination projects and new projects.¹⁶⁵

The tone of the Steering Committee debate was cautious. The Department's side asked for detailed costings and so it was decided to refer the programme back to the Management Committee. The meeting ended with a strong plea from Alderman Byrne that the programme be supported by all the Unit's sponsors.¹⁶⁶ The outlook on the whole was not bright - if the fate of similar proposals in the past was anything to go by.

Early in 1982 the Management Committee addressed itself once more to the Unit's future and devoted two meetings to the topic, one on the 8th and the other on the 15th February. In preparation for these meetings the director and deputy director prepared yet another draft programme for the Unit's future - the third within a period of five months. This document was different from its predecessors - and different indeed from any of the previous memoranda on the Unit's

future - in that it contained a detailed costing. The programme, however, comprised substantially the same nine projects which the Steering Committee had discussed the previous December.¹⁶⁷

There is one point in particular about the document which deserves noting and this was contained in its opening sentence. The document was written, the authors claimed, in response to a recommendation of the Steering Committee “to produce a costed four year programme”.¹⁶⁸ This, however, was only partly true. The Steering Committee had indeed requested a costed programme but nowhere in the minutes of its deliberations can any reference be found to a specified length of time. Nor was this point allowed to go unchallenged. At the Management Committee meeting of the 15 February, Professor Rice asked “that a note be made in the minutes to the effect that any comment on the future programmes of the Unit did not commit the parent bodies in any way to a future phase of the Unit”.¹⁶⁹ Assistance for the director, however, came from a surprising source. Torlach O’Connor from the Department of Education defended the right of the meeting to discuss the future direction of the Unit - which, he maintained was “a legitimate exercise for the Management Committee” and did not compromise the Unit’s sponsors in any way.¹⁷⁰ By the end of the meeting, however, no firm decision on the Unit’s future programme had yet emerged. The director was asked once again to redraft the document and to take it back to the Steering Committee for a meeting scheduled the following month.

On 5th March 1982 the Steering Committee met to discuss the fourth version of the Unit’s future programme. During the ensuing debate it was clear that there were still differences between the three sponsors. The view of the CDVEC was that the Unit should pursue a broad-based approach over as wide a curricular range as possible. “Mainline curriculum development” was the expression used to describe the CDVEC’s expectation. From the University side, Rice repeated his assertion that the Unit was not sufficiently

research-oriented. The Department's interest, which was expressed by O'Connor, was in the Unit's potential for generalisation into the system at large.¹⁷¹

In the director's view, the process of consultation had gone on long enough and the important thing now was to make recommendations to the sponsors in the light of the points that had been made by both Management and Steering Committees. The CDVEC was due to meet towards the end of April and in preparation for this meeting the director and deputy director took a calculated risk in deciding to recast the document for the fifth time without consulting either Steering or Management Committees. The costing, staffing and general philosophy remained the same but what now emerged was not a series of nine projects but five broad inter-related programmes - senior cycle development, junior cycle development, curriculum support service, action research and projects with outside funding.¹⁷²

The risk was justified and at long last the right formula had apparently been found. The CDVEC had no difficulty in accepting the programme and later, when the Management Committee came to discuss the staffing implications, there was no dissenting voice about the changed format.¹⁷³ Over the following summer and early autumn the Management Committee agreed to a staffing policy which allowed the maximum continuity with the existing arrangements, while during the same period the implications of the new programme were explained to the Unit's staff members. Finally, the University Board and Council, through the good offices of Kader Asmal, declared their support for the programme.¹⁷⁴

For the Unit, it now looked as if a golden age had dawned and it was in this optimistic mood that it celebrated the tenth anniversary of its foundation. This event was publicly marked at a national dissemination seminar for the Early School Leavers Project which took place in Dublin on 30 June/1 July. Both the Chairman and the CEO of the CDVEC congratulated the Unit on the occasion of its tenth

birthday and wished it well for the future - a future that now looked very promising. One speaker, however, struck a different note - a note of warning. In his concluding address to the seminar, Malcolm Skilbeck, who had been invited to Dublin for the occasion, had this to say:

Development agencies in education are not stable even when they appear to be secure and have the support of the educational profession. It is a great tribute to the Curriculum Development Unit that they have been able to survive and to grow in this context and indeed to have the ambition to publish and gain the support of the relevant authorities for their programme plans for the next four years. By the same token, tribute must be paid to those authorities: the CDVEC, Trinity College Dublin and the Department of Education. But let us make no mistake about it: the enterprise is fundamentally unstable and the survival of programmes and the ability of institutions to carry out those programmes is contingent on many factors outside education itself. So we must not be complacent: even where success has been clearly established, it is necessary to go on sustaining the very basis of operations for innovative work such as the kinds of things we have been concerned with here during this seminar (Skilbeck, 1982, pp.70-71).

Skilbeck's words about the fundamental instability of the Unit's position were prophetic, but that was for the future to reveal. For the present the Unit was rejoicing in being able to sustain its innovative work for a full ten years and was now looking forward to entering its second decade with a more secure institutional basis. How it would fare in this enterprise will be the subject of our remaining chapters.

CHAPTER 4

REFERENCES AND NOTES

- 1 A. Trant, "Memorandum on the Future of the Curriculum Development Unit", April 1976, p.6, Management Papers, CDU.
- 2 Ibid.
- 3 Ibid., p.5.
- 4 Ibid.
- 5 Ibid.
- 6 Ibid.
- 7 Ibid., pp.5-6.
- 8 Ibid., p.6.
- 9 Minutes of CDVEC Meeting, 29 May 1976, CDVEC Head Office.
- 10 Councillor Carroll was appointed to the Steering Committee as a CDVEC representative on 27 February 1975 and Alderman Byrne on 24 April 1975.
- 11 The Steering Committee had grown over the years and now included, along with the original four founder members - Sheehan, Rice, Powell and Trant - Torlach O'Connor from the Department of Education, John Medlycott, CDVEC Education Officer, Professor F. Winder, Dean of Graduate Studies, TCD, Dr. A. Clarke, Registrar TCD and J. A. Crooks, Deputy Director of the CDU.
- 12 Minutes of Steering Committee Meeting, 20 May 1976, Steering Committee papers, CDU.

- 13 The minutes of the Steering Committee meeting do not mention the disagreement. The account in the text is based on the director's recollection of events.
- 14 Minutes of CDVEC Meeting, 27 May 1976. The record of the voting was given privately to the director by the CEO.
- 15 Minutes of Steering Committee Meeting, 15 June 1976.
- 16 J. P. Sheehan, "Approval by the Steering Committee, Curriculum Development Unit, of Proposal for Publication by O'Brien Educational of CDU Materials for the Humanities and Science Programmes: Notes and Commentary by the Chief Executive Officer, City of Dublin Vocational Education Committee", 21 June 1976, CDU Papers, CDVEC Head Office, Dublin.
- 17 Ibid.
- 18 B. O'Reilly to J. P. Sheehan, 18 June 1976, CDU Papers.
- 19 Minutes of CDVEC Meeting, 24 June 1976. The record of the voting, like that of the May meeting, was given privately to the director.
- 20 Minutes of Steering Committee meeting, 30 September 1976.
- 21 M. O'Riain, Department of Education, to J. P. Sheehan, 24 June 1976, CDU Papers.
- 22 Minutes of Steering Committee meeting, 30 September 1976.
- 23 Ibid.
- 24 There is no written record of this meeting but there is a reference to it in one of the Unit's later documents. (See Reference 31 below).
- 25 S. O'Connor to J. P. Sheehan, 6 March 1973, CDU Papers.

- 26 J. P. Sheehan to A. Trant, 8 March 1973, Director's Correspondence, 1972-86, CDU.
- 27 There is no written record of this meeting but the director referred to it in a document he wrote eight years afterwards (see Reference 31 below).
- 28 A. Trant, J. A. Crooks and B. Powell, "Curriculum Development and the Group and Intermediate Certificate Examinations", May 1973, p.1, Assessment Papers, CDU.
- 29 "Report of Working Party of Inspectors and CDU Staff on the Possibility of Developing Alternative Modes of Examination at Intermediate Level", pp.1-2, Assessment Papers.
- 30 There is no written record of this meeting but the director referred to it in a later document (see Reference 31 below).
- 31 A. Trant, "The Development of the Experimental Modes of Assessment in ISCIP and Humanities, 1972-1982", April 1981, p1, Assessment Papers. This document which was prepared for a meeting of the Management Committee, on 28 April 1981, gives a summary of the major events in the development of the modes.
- 32 Ibid., p.2.
- 33 Ibid.
- 34 Ibid.
- 35 L. MacUistín, Department of Education, to A. Trant 21 June 1974, Director's Correspondence.
- 36 A. Trant, J. A. Crooks, and B. Rosney, "The Development of the Alternative Modes of Assessment in the Intermediate and Group Certificate Examinations in Humanities and ISCIP", 1978, p.2, Assessment Papers.
- 37 Ibid.

- 38 A. Trant to W. Webb, President of TUI, 23 December 1975; A. Trant to A. Sheehy, President of ASTI, 2 January 1976; Director's Correspondence.
- 39 W. Webb to A. Trant, 3rd February 1976.
- 40 A. Sheehy to A. Trant, 9 January 1976.
- 41 A. Trant to A. Sheehy, 9 February 1976.
- 42 A. Sheehy to A. Trant, 25 February 1976.
- 43 B. Rosney, "The Operation of Independent Assessment in ISICIP", 1976, Assessment Papers.
- 44 M. MacDonagh, General Secretary of ASTI, to A. Trant, 27 April 1976.
- 45 B. Logan, Secretary of Dublin City Branch of TUI, Directive to Members, 4 June 1976, Assessment Papers.
- 46 This statement is based on the director's recollection of events. Although there is no written evidence available to substantiate the statement, it would have been normal practice for the Unit staff to have negotiated planning time with the CDVEC and other relevant school authorities.
- 47 B. Logan, Directive to Members of City Branch of TUI, 16 September 1976, Assessment Papers.
- 48 B. Rosney, Notes on meeting between the TUI and the CDU, 11 October 1976, Assessment Papers.
- 49 Ibid.
- 50 Ibid.
- 51 C. Devine, General Secretary of TUI, to B. Logan, 24 November 1976, Assessment Papers.
- 52 Minutes of Steering Committee Meeting, 1 December 1976.

- 53 Ibid.
- 54 A. Trant to W. Webb, 3 December 1976.
- 55 Ibid.
- 56 C. Devine, Directive to Secretaries of Dublin City Post Primary Branch and Dublin Community Schools Branch of TUI, 13 January 1977, Assessment Papers.
- 57 M. MacDonagh to A. Trant, 18 January 1977.
- 58 W. Webb to A. Trant, 23 June 1977.
- 59 Minutes of Steering Committee, 25 January 1977.
- 60 A. Trant, "The Curriculum Development Unit: A Proposal for a Second Phase", March 1977, Steering Committee Papers.
- 61 Ibid., p.8.
- 62 J. P. Sheehan to A. Trant, 6 May 1977.
- 63 J. P. Sheehan to P. Barry, Minister for Education, 6 May 1977, CDU Papers.
- 64 J. P. Sheehan to D. O'Leary, Secretary of Department of Education, 6 May, 28 June and 2 August 1977, CDU Papers.
- 65 J. P. Sheehan to P. Barry, 6 May 1977.
- 66 Minutes of Meeting of Pilot School Principals, 31 August 1977, Pilot School Papers, CDU.
- 67 J. P. Sheehan, "Deputation to the Minister for Education, Wednesday 14 December 1977", CDU Papers.
- 68 Minutes of Steering Committee, 20 February 1978.
- 69 Ibid.

- 70 B. Ó Míodhachain, Department of Education, to J. Sheehan, 20 February 1978, CDU Papers.
- 71 Minutes of CDVEC Meeting, 23 February 1978.
- 72 J. P. Sheehan to B. Ó Míodhachain, 27 February 1978.
- 73 Ibid.
- 74 J. McKay to Secretary of Department of Education, 6 April 1978, CDU Papers.
- 75 A. Trant to J. McKay, 14 April 1978, Director's Correspondence.
- 76 Ibid.
- 77 J. McKay, "Meeting between Representatives of the Department of Education and of the City of Dublin VEC, 2 May 1978", CDU Papers.
- 78 Ibid.
- 79 Ibid.
- 80 Ibid.
- 81 J. McKay to A. Trant, 29 May 1978.
- 82 M. Ní Chionnaith, Department of Education, to J. McKay, 1 August 1978, Director's Correspondence.
- 83 A. Trant to J. McKay, 27 September 1978.
- 84 Minutes of CDVEC Meeting, 28 September 1978.
- 85 A. Trant, Notes on Meeting with J. McKay, 17 October 1978, CEO Papers, CDU.
- 86 Minutes of CDVEC Meeting, 26 October 1978.

- 87 A. Trant, Notes on Meeting with J. McKay, 17 October 1978.
- 88 A. Trant, "Memorandum on the Role of Trinity College, Dublin in Phase II of the Curriculum Development Unit", January 1978, TCD Papers, CDU.
- 89 The University's position on this matter was afterwards explained by the Academic Secretary, Salters Sterling, in a letter to the director:
Elsewhere you refer to a permanent university post for Tony Crooks. Let me say what was at issue in that matter. Just before you made your request, the University had augmented the strength of the School of Education by five posts... There was no way that the University could further endow the School of Education at this stage.

Further, given the lack of security emerging about the Unit's future, neither could the University commit resources to a particular person already in post who might have to be absorbed into the School of Education should the Unit cease to exist. This also raised issues for the established personnel practices of the University.
(W.S. Sterling to A. Trant, 27 August 1992, Director's Correspondence).
- 90 A. Trant to M. Ó Murchú, 19 April 1978, TCD Papers.
- 91 The evidence for this is based on an oral account given to the director at the time by the Senior Lecturer and the Assistant Secretary for Academic Affairs.
- 92 The evidence for this is based on the director's recollection of a conversation with Professor Rice some months later. It must be pointed out, however, that Professor Rice does not share the same recollection.

- 93 A. Trant, "Memorandum to the Council of Dublin University on the Future of the Curriculum Development Unit", 19 May 1978, TCD Papers.
- 94 Ibid.
- 95 Minutes of Council of Dublin University, 24 May 1978, Senior Lecturer's Office, Trinity College, Dublin.
- 96 Ibid.
- 97 This is based on the director's recollection of the meeting.
- 98 F.S.L. Lyons to J. McKay, 9 June 1978, CDU Papers.
- 99 A. Trant, "The Future of the Curriculum Development Unit", September 1978, Steering Committee Papers.
- 100 Minutes of CDVEC Meeting, 29 September 1978.
- 101 A. Trant, "The Future of the Curriculum Development Unit", pp.1-5.
- 102 Ibid., p.12.
- 103 Ibid., pp.11-12.
- 104 Minutes of the CDVEC/University of Dublin Liaison Council, 9 October 1978, CDU Papers.
- 105 Minutes of Steering Committee Meeting, 18 December 1978.
- 106 A. Trant to J. McKay, 13 February 1979.
- 107 A. Trant, Notes on meeting with Dr. F. O'Callaghan, Department of Education, 12 December 1978, Department of Education Papers, CDU.
- 108 A. Trant, Notes on Meeting with J. McKay, 8 June 1979, CEO Papers, CDU.

- 109 J. McKay to A. Trant, 27 September 1979, CEO Papers.
- 110 A. Trant, Notes on Meeting with J. McKay, 4 December 1979, CEO Papers.
- 111 Minutes of Management Committee, 24 September 1979, Management Papers, CDU.
- 112 W. S. Sterling to J. McKay, 23 November 1978, CDU Papers.
- 113 Minutes of CDVEC Meeting, 16 May 1979.
- 114 Minutes of Management Committee Meeting, 24 September 1979.
- 115 Minutes of Management Committee Meeting, 18 January 1980.
- 116 G. H. H. Giltrap, Secretary of Trinity College, Dublin, to A. Trant, 6 February 1973, Director's Correspondence.
- 117 "Acting Principal in Ballyfermot Vocational School: Statement by the Teaching Staff", 3 March 1980, CEO Papers.
- 118 A. Trant, Notes on Meeting with Dr. F. O'Callaghan, Department of Education, 5 June 1979, Department of Education Papers.
- 119 A. Trant to J. McKay, 12 June 1979, CEO Papers.
- 120 A. Trant, Notes on Meeting with J. McKay, 6 September 1979, CEO Papers.
- 121 Information from W. A. Breen, Education Officer CDVEC.
- 122 "Statement by the Teaching Staff", p.3.
- 123 Ibid., p.4.
- 124 B. Ó Míodhacháin to J. McKay, 14 March 1980, CDU Papers.

- 125 Ibid.
- 126 Minutes of CDVEC Meeting, 25 March 1980.
- 127 Ibid.
- 128 Minutes of CDVEC Meeting, 1 May 1990.
- 129 T. O'Connor to A. Trant, 17 June 1980.
- 130 Minutes of Management Committee Meeting, 1 October 1980.
- 131 A. Trant, Notes on Meeting with W. J. Arundel, 24 October 1980, CEO Papers.
- 132 W. J. Arundel to A. Trant, 14 July 1980, CEO Papers.
- 133 A. Trant, Notes on Meeting with W. J. Arundel, 22 December 1980, CEO Papers.
- 134 A. Trant, "Memorandum to the Chief Executive Officer of the City of Dublin VEC on the Future of the Curriculum Development Unit", January 1981, CEO Papers.
- 135 A. Trant, Notes on Meeting with W. J. Arundel, 30 January 1981, CEO Papers.
- 136 Minutes of Management Committee Meeting, 25 February 1981.
- 137 L. Ó Maolchatha to W. J. Arundel, 24 March 1981, CEO Papers.
- 138 Minutes of Steering Committee meeting, 18 December 1978.
- 139 ICE Report, p.57.

- 140 A. Trant, J. A. Crooks and B. Rosney, "The Development of Alternative Modes of Assessment in the Intermediate and Group Certificate Examinations in Humanities and ISCIP", Assessment Papers, CDU.
- 141 This is the implication in the director's account of his meeting with the Chief Inspector in December 1978. (A. Trant, Notes on Meeting with Dr. F. O'Callaghan, 12 December 1978, Department of Education Papers).
- 142 C. Ó Domhnaill, Department of Education, to J. McKay, 13 June 1979, CEO Papers.
- 143 Ibid.
- 144 J. McKay to Secretary of Department of Education, 25 June 1979, CEO Papers.
- 145 D. Ormond, Department of Education, to J. McKay, 6 August 1979, CEO Papers.
- 146 A. Trant to P. Ó Nualláin, 29 April 1980, Director's Correspondence.
- 147 Ibid.
- 148 D. Ormond to CEO, City of Dublin VEC, 9 July 1980, CEO Papers.
- 149 Ibid.
- 150 A. Trant to W. J. Arundel, 18 July 1980, CEO Papers.
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- 156 W. J. Arundel to D. Ormond, 13 May 1981, CEO Papers.
- 157 Minutes of Management Committee Meeting, 30 November 1981.
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- 159 Minutes of Management Committee meeting, 8 February and 29 March, 1981.
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- 161 D. Nash, "Evaluation of Integrated Science Curriculum Innovation Project", An tAonad Curaclaim, Department of Education, 1981, p.36, Assessment Papers.
- 162 G. Ó Mairtín and A. Ó Ceallaigh, "An Evaluation of the Humanities Programme of the City of Dublin Vocational Education Committee", An tAonad Curaclaim, Department of Education, 1981, p.107, Assessment Papers.
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- 164 A. Trant, "Curriculum Development Unit: Current Activities with Recommendations for the Future", December 1981, pp.3-4, Steering Committee Papers.
- 165 Ibid., pp.5-6.
- 166 Minutes of Steering Committee Meeting, 18 December 1981.
- 167 A. Trant and J. A. Crooks, "Programme of the Curriculum Development Unit 1982-86", February 1982, Management Committee Papers.
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- 170 Ibid.
- 171 Minutes of Steering Committee Meeting, 5 March 1982.
- 172 A. Trant and J. A. Crooks, "Programme of the Curriculum Development Unit 1982-86", April 1982, Management Committee Papers.
- 173 Minutes of Management Committee Meeting, 26 April 1982.
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CHAPTER 5

THE VOCATIONAL DIMENSION

The Rediscovery of Vocational Education

Technical and vocational education arrived late on the Irish scene. “The establishment of a co-ordinated system of technical education in Ireland”, noted one educational historian, “is a twentieth-century story” (Coolahan, 1981, p.83). Nonetheless, it is possible to trace the origins of the story to the last quarter of the nineteenth century when several initiatives of a private philanthropic or municipal character mirrored the growing interest in linking education with business and industry. In this context, the Devonshire and Samuelson Commissions in England had been important milestones and had led to the Technical Instruction Act of 1889 (Ibid.). This Act was applicable to both countries but Ireland had to await another decade before technical education got really under way. When it did so, it owed much to the initiative of one man in particular - Horace Plunkett, the father of the agricultural cooperative movement in Ireland.

Plunkett had strong views on Irish education - “a system calculated in my opinion to turn our youth into a generation of second-rate clerks, with a distinct distaste for any industrial or productive occupation in which such qualities as initiative, self-reliance or judgement were called for” (Plunkett, 1905, p.129). He was convinced that there was little hope of any solution to this problem “unless and until those in direct contact with the specific industries of the country succeed in bringing to the notice of those engaged in the framing of our educational system the kind and degree of the defects in the industrial character of our people which debar them from successful competition with other people” (Ibid., p.130). In Plunkett’s view, the way forward lay in a coalition between the two forces of leadership in Irish life - “the force with political influence and that of proved industrial and commercial capacity” (Ibid., p.213).

Acting on his convictions, Plunkett issued an invitation to prominent businessmen and politicians to come together to work out a plan for the material betterment of the country through industrial enterprise linked with a practical system of education. The invitation, which was contained in a letter to the press dated 27 August 1895, was addressed to people on both sides of the political divide - nationalist and unionist. It should be recalled that at this time the country's political life was at a low ebb. Parnell was dead, the Irish Parliamentary Party was bitterly divided and Home Rule as a realistic aspiration had receded. Plunkett appealed to nationalists and unionists alike to put aside their political differences, at least for the moment, and to meet informally when Parliament was in recess.

Surprisingly the idea took hold. An informal committee, known as the Recess Committee, was established and made its report on 1 August 1896, less than a year after Plunkett's original invitation. The Government, anxious to conciliate nationalist feeling - or as the popular phrase put it, to kill Home Rule with kindness - was quick to respond. Two important Acts were quickly put through Parliament, the Local Government (Ireland) Act in 1898 and the Agriculture and Technical Instruction Act the following year. These two Acts were to be the basis of technical and vocational education in Ireland. The first Act established the machinery of local administration on which the new educational system was to be built; the second made provision for a new department of Government to co-ordinate the system - the Department of Agriculture and Technical Instruction.

In 1900 the Department came into being and Plunkett was made its responsible minister. A new spirit of optimism was beginning to manifest itself - a spirit which Plunkett described as being based upon constructive thought and expressing itself in a wide range of practical activities. This spirit Plunkett celebrated in a controversial book which he published around this time and which, looking forward to a more hopeful future, he entitled *Ireland in the New Century*.

Despite Plunkett's optimism, technical and vocational education in the new century was a slow growth. It was not until the coming of independence in the 1920s that the new Irish State, anxious to push ahead with industrial development, made it a priority. In 1926 the Government established a commission "to enquire into and advise upon the system of technical education in Saorstát Eireann in relation to the requirements of Trade and Industry" (Commission on Technical Education, 1928, p. vii). The Commission produced five volumes of evidence, taken from a wide range of interested parties, and succeeded in making its final report within a year of being set up. This report led to the framing of the 1930 Vocational Education Act, which laid the foundation of the modern system of vocational schools and technical colleges in Ireland.

The Vocational Education Act of 1930 is rightly considered to be one of the landmarks of Irish educational legislation. It is in fact the only major piece of legislation affecting schools which was enacted by the Irish Government since independence, and the system which it inaugurated can be said to be a truly native institution. This system, however, had some serious draw-backs and these were becoming painfully obvious as the country moved into the era of modernisation which began around 1960. For one thing the typical vocational school course was decidedly limited: it lasted only two years and the students could aspire to nothing higher than apprenticeships. Another draw-back was the low esteem accorded to the schools by the public in general, most parents preferring to send their children to the more prestigious secondary grammar schools which opened opportunities for professional and clerical employment and higher education. As a consequence the vocational schools tended to languish; they were regarded as the "Cinderella" of the Irish system and attracted more than their fair share of backward pupils.

In the 1960s, however, a change came about, as we have seen in Chapter 2. The Government of the day, fired with a new-found enthusiasm for equality of educational opportunity, resolved to

upgrade the status of the vocational schools. This was principally achieved through the establishment of a comprehensive curriculum for all post-primary schools. The new arrangement meant that the vocational schools now had access to the same examinations taken by the secondary schools - the Intermediate and Leaving Certificates. It also meant, although nobody foresaw it at the time, that the vocational schools would eventually lose something of their original character. In 1975 the ICE Committee commented on this with regret:

The continuation vocational courses designed at their initiation to suit pupils over fourteen years of age are now embarked upon by young people of 12 years lacking in maturity and basic education. A curriculum planned at first as pre-employment is now virtually pre-Intermediate. Examinations which were terminal and taken by students of 16-17 years of age are now taken *en passant* by pupils of 14 years plus. The short tail of general subjects which was originally attached to the requisite Group [Group Certificate Examination] has now grown to such an extent that it is assuming the greater significance (ICE Report, 1971, p.45).

The ICE Committee was in no doubt about the effect of this change on the character of the vocational schools. The attempt to broaden the curriculum had brought about a lessening of the time devoted to practical subjects with a consequent decrease in emphasis on the vocational aspect of the schools. The traditional vocational school examination, the Group Certificate, was altered radically and became devalued as a result of being subsumed into the more academic Intermediate Certificate. As the ICE Committee pointed out, the overall outcome was unfortunate: "Rigidity set in; there was little time or opportunity for innovation and the system tended to become in the main a second-year exercise in the path towards the more prestigious 'Inter'" (Ibid.).

By the mid '70s, the need for a more meaningful system of vocational education was again asserting itself on the Irish scene. The approach

which the 1930 Vocational Act had inaugurated - flexible and work-oriented - had been, in the words of the ICE Report, “shouldered out of vocational schools” by the demands of the Intermediate and Leaving Certificate examinations. Furthermore, there was no provision for those students who, having completed their junior cycle education, wished to continue at school for a further year to prepare themselves for employment. These students had little interest in the traditional two-year Leaving Certificate course. What they needed was something more directly linked to their employment interests - the kind of curriculum in fact which the vocational schools had been originally set up to develop.

The stimulus for change came from outside the country. On 13 December 1976 the Council of Ministers of the European Community passed a resolution “concerning measures to be taken to improve the preparation of young people for work and to facilitate their transition from education to working life”(Commission of the European Communities, 1976, p.1). This resolution, which was inspired by the increasing rate of youth unemployment throughout Europe, was a water-shed in the Community’s attitude to education. Education as such had not figured in the Community’s foundation charter, the Treaty of Rome; it was considered to be a highly sensitive area which was best left to the jealous care of each Member State. Vocational training, however, was a different matter. This was seen as something essentially connected with the world of trade and industry and therefore could be regarded as one of the Community’s legitimate concerns. The significance of the Resolution of December 1976 was that it brought the spheres of education and training more closely together, thus heralding a new awakening of interest in vocational education throughout the Community.

Ireland’s response to the Community’s initiative was to launch a new vocational programme at senior cycle called Pre-Employment Courses (PEC). A vital factor in the development of these courses was the financial assistance which the Irish Government was able to obtain

through the European Social Fund. This Fund had been originally set up to compensate workers in the European Coal and Steel Community for the difficulties caused by the economic changes resulting from the creation of a common market (Commission of the European Communities, 1984c, p.6). However by the mid-1970s the Fund had been considerably broadened and was now being used as a training fund for the unemployed. The fact that the Irish Government was successful in gaining access to the Fund for the development of vocational education was a sign of the new emphasis on social policy which was now becoming part of the Community's general programme.

According to the Department of Education, PEC was "intended for students who would ordinarily leave school to seek employment on attaining the school leaving age but who in failing to get employment would return to school to attend a course specifically aimed at assisting them in their efforts to secure a job" (Department of Education, 1978, p.6). This description was remarkably similar to the way the purpose of the vocational schools had been defined nearly forty years earlier - "to prepare boys and girls who have to start early in life for the occupations which are open to them" (Department of Education, 1942, p.3). In both instances, the primary consideration was to prepare students to take their place in a world where employment opportunities were scarce.

The stated aim of PEC was to bridge the gap between the values and experiences of the traditional educational system and those current in the world of work. The courses had three inter-related sections - personal development, technical studies and work experience. A novel feature was the way the course was to be assessed: each student, instead of taking a written examination, was to be given a folder which described his or her performance in the different parts of the course, including an assessment of work experience from the student's employer. PEC was introduced nationally in 1977, when about 1900 students from 80 schools participated. Five years later the number of

students had almost doubled and the number of schools had increased to 118 - most of which were vocational schools.¹

The take-up of PEC in the CDVEC schools was impressive - in 1982/83, over 800 students from 15 schools were participating.² Indeed the CDVEC could claim that it had originated the very idea of PEC. As far back as 1972, Ballyfermot Vocational School had experimented with a preparation for work courses and this idea was subsequently taken up by a number of other CDVEC schools, albeit in a somewhat haphazard manner. Four years later the Unit tried to become involved in this field, when the Steering Committee in the wake of the Skilbeck Report had asked for a new initiative in the senior cycle curriculum. The director responded by producing a discussion document in February 1976, in which he argued for the development of a new vocational course to counter-balance the Leaving Certificate course, which enjoyed a virtual monopoly at senior cycle.³ The document, however, produced little in the way of concrete results. A seminar attended by teachers from three Dublin vocational schools took place in the Unit in June 1976 and made preparations for a work related course for the following September.⁴ But the course never materialised and it was not until the Department of Education announced its own plans for PEC a year later that the Unit's involvement in the senior cycle curriculum became a reality.

The arrival of PEC presented a new opportunity for the Unit. The Department's initiative had stimulated a widespread response in Dublin and the Unit was seen as the obvious agency to meet the needs of the CDVEC. Quite quickly this role widened to include schools from other VECs in the greater Dublin area, and soon the Unit found itself playing the part of a regional centre for the development of PEC. This entailed organising inservice seminars for teachers in general and technical studies and it also meant a big increase in the Unit's work in materials production. Short brochures on various aspects of PEC, such as communications, commercial mathematics and motor-car engineering, were produced quickly and cheaply.

It was probably in the area of assessment and certification, however, that the Unit made its greatest impact. By this time it had acquired considerable expertise in assessment, largely through the work of its early projects, ISCIP and Humanities, and this expertise was now applied to the fast developing PEC. Under the leadership of Tony Crooks, the Unit's deputy director, assisted by Liam O'Dwyer, the PEC co-ordinator, the teachers were introduced to the intricacies of continuous assessment and project cross-moderation, and the results were incorporated into attractive portfolios which were validated by the CDVEC. These portfolios were presented to the students in a graduation ceremony which became the high point of the social life of the schools and did much to raise their profile in the local community.

Although it cannot be denied that PEC was a welcome innovation on the Irish educational scene, there were some aspects to the courses which were a cause of disappointment. Most of the students, for instance, were average or below average in ability, and many had difficulties in literacy and numeracy. Furthermore, the time-tabling arrangements often showed a somewhat haphazard approach. According to a survey carried out by the Department of Education in 1982, some PEC courses had fewer than ten pupils but as many as thirteen teachers. The survey also noted that only 38% of the participating teachers had actually volunteered to be assigned to the courses.⁵

Another survey of PEC - which the Unit itself carried out around the same time - was also critical of several aspects of the courses. The technical studies element was found to be too narrow and job specific; there was also a need to emphasise the educational context of the work experience and to look for new and imaginative ways of supplementing what appeared to be a diminishing pool of work placement opportunities.⁶ Both surveys agreed that the section of PEC which most needed reform was the general studies element. The Unit's survey clearly pointed out the underlying causes of the malaise:

Too often general studies have been conceived and operated within a subject-based curriculum. Rather than focusing on the personal and social skills required by young people to assume their adult roles, this approach looks towards the traditional subjects offered in schools and attempts to make them more relevant to the needs of school leavers. Unfortunately it has resulted in many piece-meal programmes which tend to be repetitive for some students and offer continued failure to others. The teaching methods most closely associated with this approach also seem inappropriate to the demands being placed on young people moving into adulthood.⁷

The solution to this problem, according to the Unit's survey, was to design "experiential situations" which would provide young people with the basic skills and personal resources to manage their adult lives. The organisation of these situations could be best achieved through a modular approach which would ensure flexibility in the preparation of learning units and would allow for coordination between the various parts of the entire course. The latter was seen as crucial because as the survey noted "the modules should be thoroughly integrated with the more specific vocational elements of courses and if they are seen merely as additives, even the best general studies programmes are unlikely to succeed".⁸

The Search for an Alternative to the Leaving Certificate

Despite the movement towards vocational education marked by the introduction of PEC, the traditional academic Leaving Certificate remained unchanged as the major public examination in the senior cycle of the Irish educational system. The Leaving Certificate, which had been introduced shortly after the founding of the new Irish State, was taken by students at about eighteen years. The examination marked a good standard in general education and was highly regarded. But it also had serious defects. A study carried out in 1969 pointed out

that the Leaving Certificate was not reliable; it also put too much emphasis on factual data and placed a heavy burden on students because it was used as a qualification for entry to many occupations (Coolahan, 1981 p.199). In the eyes of many people, however, its most significant negative feature was the fact that from 1968 onwards it was used as a selection device for entrance to the universities. Over the years this had put considerable pressure on the increasing number of students who were competing for university places, so much so that some educationalists maintained that the practice - known popularly as the points race - had distorted the aims of the entire second level curriculum.

The Leaving Certificate remained virtually unchanged until the Hillery Reforms of the 1960s, when the Government announced its intention to establish a Technical Leaving Certificate and thus inaugurate a dual system at senior cycle. This intention, however, was never fully realised. In 1969 a second attempt was made to modify the Leaving Certificate, when a new scheme of subject grouping was introduced. Under this arrangement, each student would have to choose three subjects from one of five subject groups - languages, commerce, science, technical studies and social studies. This would entail an element of specialisation at senior cycle but again the attempted change came to nothing.

In 1969, as part of the Government's plan to bring about parity of esteem between all the Irish second level schools, the Leaving Certificate was introduced for the first time into the vocational system. For many vocational teachers, this was a dazzling prize; the most prestigious second level examination was at last within their grasp. Some educationalists, however, had mixed feelings about the new development because they feared that the Leaving Certificate with its strong academic bias would exert a negative influence on the vocational curriculum in the junior as well as in the senior cycle.

The director of the Unit shared this view, as is clear from his discussion document for the Steering Committee in February 1976. "It is becoming obvious", he wrote, "that many schools will go to great lengths to gear their junior courses to the advantage of potential Leaving Certificate students, on whose eventual examination performance, it is felt, the reputation of the schools will ultimately be judged. For vocational schools this trend could become a tragedy; they will end up by doing much the same thing as a secondary school, and in most cases not doing it as well".⁹ The answer to the problem was to re-think and update the meaning of vocational education by developing new courses which would be in keeping with the best of the vocational tradition. In this manner, amends would be made for the neglect of one of the primary aims of vocational education - "to educate the whole person while at the same time never losing sight of the practical necessity of giving him requisite skills for taking up a job immediately he left school".¹⁰

Nearly three years were to elapse, however, before any initiative was taken to provide a serious alternative to the Leaving Certificate. The initiative came from an unexpected quarter - not from the Unit but from the CDVEC Schools' Psychological Service (usually referred to as "Winstead" after the name of the building in which the service was located). In November 1978, the Chief Psychologist, Brede Foy, wrote a report, advocating the development of a two year senior cycle course entitled the Career Foundation Course (CFC).¹¹ The course was intended to be of a higher academic standard than PEC and even aspired to equal the Leaving Certificate in status and esteem. But unlike the Leaving Certificate, CFC would be imbued with the work ethic and would provide "a near-guarantee of employment for students".¹² It would resemble the Leaving Certificate in one aspect only - in providing an avenue to third level education.

Foy's report appeared under the aegis of a working party of the CDVEC Board of Studies which had been established some months earlier to advise on criteria for the development of senior cycle courses

in the Dublin vocational schools. Although the director was a member of the working party, it would appear that he played little part in its proceedings. It is probable that he had other things on his mind at this time - as is clear from the events related in Chapter 4 - but the fact remains that he seems to have underestimated the significance of what the working party was trying to accomplish. The result was that he now found himself in danger of losing the initiative in what appeared to be a major curricular development on his own door-step - the CDVEC schools.

The purpose of CFC was to provide a greater degree of vocational specialisation than the Leaving Certificate. This specialisation would be achieved by orienting the course to a particular career cluster - such as engineering, building construction, electronics or marketing. All the elements of CFC would relate as far as possible to the working environment and the teaching methodology would be practical and project-based. There was no doubt about the scale of innovation which the new course was envisaging: it was intended as the equivalent of a Technical Leaving Certificate - something which had been mooted several times before in Irish education but never implemented.

Foy's report caused a stir in CDVEC circles; it was discussed by the Board of Studies, the Planning Sub-Committee and the CDVEC itself. Everywhere it excited interest and in general was well received. The report was then referred to the original working party for further refining. Five months later, in April 1979, the working party issued a second report and although nothing substantially new was added, there was, however, a significant change in authorship. The second report was written not by Foy but by the director who was now determined, it would seem, to play a more active role in the politics of CFC.¹³

By this time it was emerging that there was a difference of opinion between Winstead and the Unit about the development of CFC. The

second report recommended a CFC implementation strategy which would involve groups of teachers and industrialists working together to specify the various course modules. It was intended that this process would last over a year and would culminate in the identification of pilot schools in time for the first course to begin in September 1980.¹⁴ In the director's view, the strategy would also require a clear-cut decision on the part of the CDVEC about who was to coordinate the course - Winstead or the Unit. This decision, however, was not forthcoming and so the director held back from committing the Unit to any further involvement in the development of CFC until the CDVEC had made up its mind.

Winstead, however, had no such scruples; it seized the opportunity created by the Unit's inaction to take the initiative once again. By September 1979, Foy had persuaded one of the CDVEC schools, the North Strand Vocational School, to undertake the first pilot run of CFC and the following month the school presented its work plans at a seminar organised by Winstead and attended by teachers from other prospective pilot schools.¹⁵ The following December, the CDVEC eventually decided to take action; it established a special body - the Career Foundation Board - to be responsible for the development of the new course.¹⁶ This was the official reason for the Board's establishment but its unofficial purpose was clear to everyone involved - to try to compose the sharp differences that were arising between Winstead and the Unit regarding the coordination of CFC. Evidently the CDVEC was not going to be drawn in favour of one side or the other in the dispute. As McKay, the acting CEO, commented ironically to the director: "In a situation like this, everyone must be seen to win".¹⁷

On 11 February 1980, the Career Foundation Board held its inaugural meeting. The attendance was impressive. It included three CDVEC members, the acting CEO and his assistant education officer, the Chairman of the Board of Studies, the Chief Psychologist, the director of the Unit, the principal of the North Strand Vocational School, the

Head of the Engineering Department of Bolton Street College of Technology and one representative each from the CDVEC Academic Council and the Confederation of Irish Industry.¹⁸ From the very beginning of the meeting, the opinions of the members began to polarise around two opposing viewpoints - one held by the Unit, the other by Winstead. The Unit's view was that the new course should develop within national guidelines and should seek national certification. Winstead favoured a local initiative, arguing that the CDVEC should not be hampered by looking for national validation but should strike out on its own.¹⁹

The difference between the two camps became even more accentuated at the Board's second meeting a month later. For this meeting the director had been asked to prepare a document outlining the criteria for assessing proposals from schools interested in taking CFC. He seized the opportunity instead to further his own case by arguing for the national validation of CFC within the structure of the Leaving Certificate.²⁰ The reaction to his proposal effectively split the Career Foundation Board. The strongest support for the director's position came from Alderman Byrne, one of the CDVEC members, and from Con Power, the representative of the Confederation of Irish Industries. Both asked that the proposal be put to a vote but the Chairman of the Board, Alderman Patrick Carroll, refused, saying that he preferred to obtain a consensus. The meeting ended in stalemate and the director was asked to write another document which, it was hoped, would help to resolve the dilemma.²¹

Within a few days the director had complied. His latest document, which was short and conciliatory, tried to make the point that CFC should be seen in a wide context, as part of a general response to what was as yet a largely unarticulated need - the necessity to develop new vocational courses at senior cycle. A wide variety of approaches, therefore, should be encouraged, including those advocated by Winstead as well as those favoured by the Unit.²² The director,

evidently, was taking McKay's advice to heart - that everyone in the dispute should be seen to be a winner.

The director, however, did not confine himself to literary exertions but took the precaution of resorting to a more direct course of action. Between the 10th and 20th March, he undertook a round of meetings with seven CDVEC principals - thirteen meetings within a space of ten days.²³ He did this on McKay's advice - who now seemed to be taking his side in the dispute - with the purpose of winning support from potential pilot schools. As it turned out only two of the principals showed any interest in participating in CFC but the most important outcome of the talks was to bring home to the director the underlying concerns and anxieties which were now affecting the CDVEC schools. Enrolments had started to fall and the principals were finding themselves under pressure to put on new courses at senior cycle to offset this decline. Worst of all, in this situation competition and distrust were beginning to manifest themselves. For instance, if a principal felt he had an idea which might contribute towards a solution to his enrolment problems, he kept it to himself for fear that others might steal his thunder. This was hardly the most encouraging atmosphere in which to launch a major curricular initiative like CFC. Neither was it the most opportune time, the director felt, to plunge the CDVEC into internal warfare.

An end to the war, however, was at hand. Events between March and July 1980 moved the direction of the controversy strongly in the Unit's favour, so much so that by the following autumn it had virtually achieved the control of CFC - a position it had always sought. The end of the story, however, had an ironic twist and the Unit's victory proved in the end a Pyrrhic one.

In April 1980, the Career Foundation Board decided to appoint a small advisory group of experts to examine the course syllabus submitted by the North Strand, the first CFC pilot school. The group comprised two senior lecturers from the CDVEC colleges of technology, a principal

and an ex-principal from the CDVEC schools and the director of the Unit, who acted as chairperson. The group completed its task quickly but its report, when it appeared the following May, proved to be a major set-back to the aspirations of the North Strand to develop the first CFC pilot course. The school had intended offering two CFC courses, one in electronics and the other in building construction. The report rejected the first as unrealistic and only reluctantly agreed to the second, provided substantial modifications were made to it. To add insult to injury, the report concluded by advising the teachers of the North Strand to moderate their ambitions by working within the context of the existing Leaving Certificate framework.²⁴

The Principal of the North Strand, Sean Ganly, now found himself in a predicament. His proposal to become the first CFC pilot school had been discredited - despite the encouragement that it had received the previous year. He could claim with some justice that he had been made the victim of a dispute between two agencies - Winstead and the Unit - which were meant to be supportive, not disruptive, of school initiatives. The director, however, was now anxious to reach an accommodation with Ganly, so at a private meeting between the two a bargain was struck. The director promised to help the North Strand recast its proposal while he also undertook to smooth out difficulties over resources with the CDVEC central administration. The school agreed to accept the Unit as the coordinating agency of CFC and to abide by its advice.²⁵ The agreement held firm and during the following months a CFC brochure was printed and arrangements were made to advertise the course. By September 1980 the course was ready to start and as a gesture of good will Winstead was invited to assist in the selection of students.

The Career Foundation Course had at last become a reality but the final reckoning was costly. Everybody seemed to emerge as a winner but all in fact had lost. The Unit had won its battle over coordination but the eventual outcome hardly justified the effort involved. CFC never succeeded in attracting much interest from the schools and

although the Unit eventually succeeded in streamlining the course the take-up rate remained disappointing - the highest number of participating schools never exceeded three. In 1984 a working party of the Career Foundation Board examined this problem and concluded that "the perception seems to be that the advantages of being a pilot school do not substantially outweigh the constraints involved".²⁶ This was a polite way of saying that the traumatic experience of the North Strand as the CFC first pilot school had decidedly dampened the enthusiasm of other prospective participants. The working party mentioned another factor which also adversely affected participation, namely the issue of national versus local certification, and went on to hint that the former would have been better for CFC. It is significant that a Department of Education evaluation of CFC, which was conducted around the same time, reached a similar verdict.²⁷

It is impossible to escape the conclusion that the entire CFC saga represented a lost opportunity for the CDVEC. In December 1980 the Government published a White Paper on education, in which it promised to institute a two year career oriented course as an alternative to the Leaving Certificate, while at the same time giving consideration to up-grading the Group Certificate as a suitable senior cycle qualification. Although nothing came from these promises, we cannot help wondering nonetheless what would have happened if the CDVEC had been further ahead in its development of CFC and if after two years of debate it had something more tangible to show than a single pilot school.

The wounded memories of the CFC controversy are now receding into history and so at this remove we can ask the question: what was the real issue at stake? At one level, this appears to have been a question of control - a power struggle between two institutions within the CDVEC which were striving for the right to coordinate a new senior cycle development. The director was fully aware of this and indeed was quite open about it. The Unit, he felt, was the CDVEC's designated body to develop curriculum and it was unacceptable that

another institution should encroach on this territory. That is why he was prepared to fight so hard to gain the centre of the stage of action. The irony of his position, however, was that when he eventually won his point, it was at considerable cost and the eventual outcome scarcely justified the efforts he had to make.

At another and perhaps more significant level the issue at stake was an ideological conflict over whether it was better to proceed in a national or in a local context. The Unit favoured the former because the main pattern of its work up to then - namely in ISCIP and Humanities - had been within the national examination system. The director's view, which was also shared by McKay, was that the Irish system was so centralised that no curricular initiative could succeed unless it received the blessing of the official guardian of the system, the Department of Education. The opposite view - that the CDVEC was quite capable of developing and validating its own courses - was held by Brede Foy and Michael O'Donnell, the Head of the Engineering Department in Bolton Street College of Technology, and even by the Chairman of the CDVEC, Patrick Donegan. This view had an emotive appeal and was supported by reference to the CDVEC's successful record in course development and validation in its third level colleges. It did not, however, take into account the marked difference between second and third level education in the Irish system. The former was much more constrained by the Department and consequently few if any of the second level principals were willing to take risks with a new course that lacked the official imprimatur.

Whatever the merits of each side of the argument, one thing is certain: it was in nobody's interest to have engaged in the prolonged dispute that occurred over CFC. The CDVEC could ill afford such a division and the eventual outcome was the discrediting of the entire initiative. For this, the director has to accept his share of the blame. Although his own position was probably on balance the more prudent, he should have had sufficient foresight to have realised the merits of the opposing view. Foy and O'Donnell were not necessarily wrong in

believing that a local initiative, with the right degree of publicity and support, could have eventually succeeded in winning national recognition.²⁸ It would have entailed, on the director's part, however, a high degree of foresight to have been able to recognise this and a generosity of spirit to have acted accordingly.

A New Initiative: The Vocational Preparation and Training Programme

CFC never succeeded in effectively challenging the Leaving Certificate and so the only alternative senior cycle course in the Irish system remained the low-prestige PEC. Four years were to elapse before the advent of another major development in the history of vocational education in Ireland and again the stimulus was provided by the Commission of the European Communities.

In June 1984, the Department of Education sent a circular to all school authorities throughout the country, giving the aims, syllabus and assessment procedures of a new senior cycle course which was to be known as the Vocational Preparation and Training Programme (Department of Education, 1984c). The time-scale for launching the new programme was extremely short; it was to begin the following autumn - a bare two months after being announced. True, there had been hints beforehand that a new vocational initiative was in the offing, notably in the Government's *Programme for Action in Education*, which had been published the previous January (Department of Education, 1984a). The Department's haste, however, came as a surprise if not a shock to most Irish educators, who for years had grown accustomed to a more leisurely way of doing things.

The main reason for the unwonted hurry was related to events in the European Community, which was again exerting an influence on the Department's thinking. At the beginning of the 1980s a new and exciting concept was beginning to emerge in the Community - the idea that all young people should be protected from the prospects of

unemployment by guaranteeing them a period of vocational preparation and training after leaving school. This period, according to a resolution of the Council of Ministers in 1983, was to be at least six months (Ibid., p. 13). A later Community document, the celebrated Adonnino Report, "A People's Europe", took the idea a stage further by proposing that "the member states do their utmost within national policies and whenever possible in association with enterprises and social partners to ensure that all young people wishing to do so receive one year or if possible two years vocational training in addition to their compulsory education" (Commission of the European Communities, 1985, p.25). This idea, which became known as the youth or social guarantee, elicited responses in terms of educational and training provision from all the member states. In Ireland the response took the form of the Vocational Preparation and Training Programme (VPT), as announced by the Department of Education in its circular of June 1984.

There was also another reason for the Department's urgency in launching the new vocational initiative. VPT represented a belated attempt to recover some of the ground which had been lost to competing agencies outside the educational system. The 1930 Vocational Education Act had given considerable powers to the Irish educational system to develop vocational courses but by the 1960s these powers had been much diminished. The Industrial Training Act of 1967 saw the establishment of a new national training body, An Chomhairle Oiliúna (AnCO), which in many ways began to displace the VECs. After Ireland joined the European Community in 1973, AnCO proved to be highly successful in obtaining Community funding for new schemes, many of which related to the vocational preparation of young people.

In 1982 a second agency was established which also had a bearing on the vocational preparation of young people. The new body, known as the Youth Employment Agency (YEA), was a direct response to the growing problem of youth unemployment and was given the

comprehensive brief of establishing and operating schemes for training and employment of young persons, being principally persons between the ages of 15 and 25 years. To many people, the establishment of the YEA was evidence that the Government, in its anxiety to solve the crisis of youth unemployment, was showing little confidence in the potential of its own Department of Education - a view which was confirmed in March 1984 when the YEA was designated as the coordinating agency to implement the social guarantee for young people (Youth Employment Agency, 1984, p.5). In these circumstances, therefore, it is scarcely surprising that the Department of Education was in a hurry to make up lost ground.

The Department's circular of June 1984 was in many ways similar to the document which launched PEC seven years earlier. The basic structure remained the same: the curriculum was divided into three broad areas - general studies, vocational studies and work experience. The course organisation was also the same; a broad partnership was envisaged, encompassing teachers, parents, training and manpower agencies, employers, trade unions and health and social welfare personnel. The underlying rationale of VPT, like PEC before it, was the desire to prepare young people for employment - as the Department's circular made clear:

Traditionally vocational training programmes were built around the concept of specific "marketable" skills which it was believed were a prerequisite for employment. A number of recent studies both in this country and elsewhere have shown that employers value general competencies in the areas of literacy, numeracy, and manipulative skills as much as they do skills related to specific types of jobs. Mastery of basic core skills of this kind must, therefore, be at the heart of any vocational preparation programme... As employment in manufacturing industry declines, the nature of the skill demands of the employment will change and vocational re-training, as the nature of the job changes or on change of job, will become a

recurring experience for very many workers
(Department of Education, 1984c, pp. 3-4).

In other words, according to the circular the task of vocational education was to concentrate on generalisable skills, which together with adaptability, initiative and positive attitudes towards learning were the qualities most sought after by employers.

Although VPT was part of the same vocational initiative which had given rise to PEC some years earlier, there were nonetheless some important differences between the two programmes. VPT provided for two levels, each of a year's duration, while PEC lasted for one year only. Another important difference was the fact that VPT students were entitled, according to European Community regulations, to an allowance of £300 per annum. It should be pointed out that considerably larger allowances were already being paid to young people on AnCO training schemes and this practice was viewed by educationalists as an example of unfair competition between training and education for a share in the same market. Now, when it was proposed to make payments to young people while still at school, misgivings were voiced in several quarters. The authors of a report sponsored by the National Economic and Social Council (NESC) sounded a warning which probably echoed the thoughts of many teachers: "Admittedly, the size of the allowances involved in the Vocational Preparation Programmes is not particularly large but once this path has been taken it will be very difficult to turn back and we really do not know what kind of Pandora's Box is being opened by taking this highly significant step" (National Economic and Social Council, 1985, p.89).

The take-up of VPT was much more extensive than that of PEC. One reason for this was because the Department's regulations allowed a very flexible interpretation of what constituted a VPT course; in practice nearly all existing senior cycle courses other than the Leaving Certificate were able to qualify for inclusion. Another reason was the

fact that the secondary grammar schools (by far the most numerous in the Irish second level system) were allowed to participate in the programme along with the vocational, comprehensive and community schools. By the third year of VPT, 1986/87, when participation rates had begun to level out, nearly 20,000 students from 461 schools were taking part - that is a little over half the total number of second level schools in the country (Youth Employment Agency, 1987, p.18). The majority of the students (67%) were girls and the most popular course was commerce - which probably reflected the fact that VPT had absorbed the various secretarial courses which were a common feature of the Irish senior cycle curriculum (Ibid, pp. 19-20).

As well as the high student participation rates, the first results of VPT were also very encouraging. A survey conducted by the Economic and Social Research Institute on behalf of the Department of Education showed that of all the course participants in 1984/85, 63% secured jobs, 14% went on to further training, 6% returned to educational courses, while 17% were still seeking employment six months after the end of the programme (Department of Education, 1986, p.7).

The Unit's involvement in VPT was in large measure a continuation of its work with PEC. It became the VPT coordinating agency for the CDVEC schools and also for other schools in the public sector in Counties Dublin, Kildare, Louth, Meath and Wicklow. Under the leadership of Tony Crooks, Liam O'Dwyer and Liam Lee, the work largely comprised teacher inservice, developing learning materials and organising assessment and certification procedures. The Unit's role as an inservice provider was greatly enhanced, when in January and February 1985 it was contracted by the Department of Education to organise 15 one-day seminars for two hundred schools in the Leinster region.²⁹

The high point of the Unit's involvement in VPT came in May 1987, when it organised a week-long exhibition of work for the schools.

Two previous exhibitions had been organised in 1985 and 1986 but the 1987 affair was on a much grander scale.³⁰ A newly built conference centre was rented for the occasion and the attendance included the Minister for Education and the Minister for Labour - the latter was also Lord Mayor of Dublin at the time. Consequently, considerable public interest was generated by the exhibition, which comprised not only artefacts but also live displays of various skills. Indeed, for anybody concerned with the image and welfare of vocational education in Ireland, the exhibition must have been a great encouragement. The Unit planned to make it a permanent feature but unfortunately, as later events will show, this did not prove possible.

The coming of VPT was undoubtedly an important event in Irish education. It marked an effort to retain large numbers of young people within the educational system by providing practical courses oriented towards their needs. However, as the NESC report pointed out, it was only “a tentative step in the direction of attempting to structure vocational education at the post-compulsory stage” (National Economic and Social Council, 1985, p.85). Much still remains to be done and many things within VPT need improving. A report on the programme by the YEA in 1987 underlined this need and also urged the Department of Education to be more proactive in its approach:

Retaining young people within the education system is a generally accepted priority. However, from the results shown above, many problems remain to be resolved before this priority can be achieved. While recent trends show an increasing number of young people staying on at school and participating on VPT, nevertheless serious consideration will have to be given to the provision of suitable programmes to meet their needs. A proactive approach is required from the Department of Education to ensure a better spread of provision across areas and designations and to rectify imbalances in gender participation (Youth Employment Agency, 1987, p.20).

All in all, however, the Department of Education deserves credit for VPT, even if the manner of launching it was somewhat hurried. The two programmes, PEC and VPT, are proof that at least some people in the Department are concerned about the nature of vocational education and its relevance to the Irish system. In the remainder of the chapter we shall examine these issues more closely.

The Institutional Basis of Vocational Education

The concept of vocational education in Ireland can be defined from two different stand-points. The first, which is institutional, sees vocational education as something essentially non-denominational and situated in the public sector under local control. The second looks on vocational education from an orientation perspective - its aim is primarily seen as preparing young people for work. Both viewpoints are complementary and taken together give us a reasonably full picture of what vocational education means in Ireland today.

The institutional basis of vocational education is to be found principally in the 1930 Vocational Education Act. The Act gave vocational education a local dimension by establishing 38 VECs based on the existing framework of local government structures. This local dimension was not new; it was built on an existing network of local technical education committees which had been established by the Technical Instruction Act of 1899 (Coolahan, 1981, pp. 96-97). This arrangement was in fact parallel to the English system of LEAs, but unlike the English system it was confined to the technical and vocational sector only. An attempt by the British Government in 1920 to widen the element of local government control to the entire Irish system met with strong opposition from the Catholic bishops and had to be abandoned (Ibid., pp. 71-73). Ten years later, when the new vocational schools were established, the bishops only grudgingly gave their consent, on the understanding that the schools would not provide general education and so would not be in competition with the private

and largely Church-owned secondary grammar schools (Ó Buachalla, 1988, pp. 398 - 403).

The 1930 Act then marked the introduction of a binary post-primary system into Irish education. On the one hand there were the secondary schools, privately owned and denominational for the most part, while on the other there were the vocational schools, non-denominational and situated in the public sector under local control. The degree of local control, it should be pointed out, was severely limited; virtually every provision of the Act was subject to the sanction of the Minister for Education. Nonetheless, the Act had introduced an important principle: a significant part of Irish second level education, the vocational sector, would henceforth be under secular and local control.

The division of the Irish second level system into secondary and vocational schools remained virtually unchanged for over thirty years - until the Hillery reforms of 1963. One of the most significant things about these reforms, as we noted in Chapter 2, was that the State for the first time intervened directly in the provision of post-primary schooling. In 1966, the first three State comprehensive schools were opened and in 1972 the first two community schools - a modification of the comprehensive model but nonetheless under State control. Evidently, the Department of Education was anxious to play a more determined role in shaping the development of Irish education and felt it necessary therefore to launch schools which would implement its own thinking.

Significantly, however, the Department did not choose to use the existing schools in the public sector, the vocational schools, to implement this new thinking. There were probably two reasons for this. First, the vocational schools lacked prestige and therefore, it could be argued, would not enjoy full public support in spearheading the new approach. The second and more likely reason was that the vocational schools were not subject to full Departmental control and so could not be counted on to act as the Department's agents. The

consequence of this policy, however, was as we have seen to fragment Irish post-primary education - and this at a time when a marked expansion of the system was taking place. The overall result was that from the 1970s onwards four types of post-primary school - secondary, vocational, comprehensive and community - came into being, with a fifth type, the community college, added later. All offered a similar curriculum but each type was run on different management lines, with its own funding and accountability arrangements.

From the Department's point of view, therefore, a rationalisation of the system was highly desirable but the difficulty was how to proceed without offending one or more of the vested interests involved. In November 1985 such an opportunity presented itself. Three years previously, an energetic Minister for Education in the Coalition Government, Gemma Hussey, had embarked on a policy of educational reform and one of the coping stones of this reform was now about to be put in place - the introduction of a new regionalisation policy in Irish education. This policy, it was hoped, would have the effect of bringing reason and order into the multiplicity of administrative arrangements governing the different types of schools. The policy also had a major implication for the fundamental structure of the entire system: it would mean in effect the end of the VEC system.

The Minister's proposals, which were contained in a Government Green Paper beguilingly entitled "Partners in Education", evoked an immediate and heated debate. The document envisaged that the Country's 38 VECs would be replaced by 13 larger units, called local education councils (LECs). The ownership of the vocational schools would be transferred to the Minister but their individual management boards would remain and be given more autonomy in line with the existing management arrangement in the comprehensive and community schools. The privately owned secondary schools were only marginally affected by the new proposals, while the primary

schools remained almost entirely outside their scope (Department of Education, 1985).

Although it must be said that the Green Paper proposals offered some definite advantages - notably the hope of better co-ordination of the education service - very few people outside the Department of Education were found to defend them. Institutions and organisations not directly affected by the proposals maintained a watchful neutrality, preferring on balance to maintain the *status quo*. The vocational sector, understandably, was incensed. The following angry reaction from the Irish Vocational Education Association (IVEA), which represented the country's VECs, was not untypical: "The Green Paper proposals are so far removed from our policy position that we feel it unlikely that they can be amended in any acceptable way. 'Partners in Education' uses the same language used to close vocational schools in favour of community schools - ambiguous, erroneous and spurious" (IVEA, 1986, p.13).

The CDVEC response to the Green Paper was more temperate. It was published in March 1986 and was the culminating point of a number of seminars and discussion papers, which the CDVEC had sponsored (CDVEC, 1986). One of these papers had been written by the director of the Unit and had been incorporated practically unchanged into the CDVEC's document under the heading, "The Green Paper and Local Democracy". The director's main argument was that it was dishonest for the Minister to claim that the new proposals promoted greater participation in education, when in reality they would have the opposite effect. By abolishing the VECs, the only existing form of local democracy in Irish education would come to an end - and all for the sake of a rationalisation policy which increased the powers of central government (Ibid., pp. 9-14).

The degree of central control in the Irish system of government is something which has been criticised by many observers. In the late 1960s the Maud Committee on the Management of Local Government

in Britain made a study of local government in seven countries and came to the conclusion that in Ireland “central government is the most stringent of all” (Ibid., p.10). According to T. J. Barrington, the centralised nature of the Irish system was the underlying cause of the paralysis in the country’s overall development. Barrington attacked the Green Paper in trenchant terms as being “another example of the throes of a Governmental system in its determined march to decay and disillusion, incapable of discerning where it is going, bewildered by the forces that drive it along, incapable of either the thought or the resolution to take its problems in hand and blind to the successes of many of our European partners in this very matter of political development”.³¹

It was clear that the Green Paper had triggered a national debate, not unlike the “Great Debate” in Britain. The Government was originally motivated by considerations of rationalising and centralising the educational system but had instead opened the door to a discussion of fundamental issues which it possibly never contemplated. The CDVEC document was quick to sense this opportunity for widening the debate by reminding the Government that the exercise of true democracy demanded a process of consultation in keeping with the gravity of the issues at stake. It urged the Government to establish a commission, similar in scope and purpose to the commission of 1926 which had been the precursor of the 1930 Vocational Education Act. “Such a commission,” the CDVEC argued, “would be catholic in composition, embracing a wide spectrum of interests and views - political, religious, social, cultural and economic. In its establishment there could be no room for narrow or short-sighted considerations; the issues at stake are too important” (CDVEC, 1986, p.14). The work of the commission would be accompanied by a number of pilot studies on how existing local and regional organisations could cooperate in the provision of various educational services (Ibid.).

The public debate on the Green Paper, however, did not last for long; it was soon side-tracked by other issues which eventually replaced it in

the national news media. The Minister became embroiled in a bitter controversy over salaries with the teacher unions and this proved to be a far from ideal atmosphere in which to conduct a major educational debate. Then Gemma Hussey herself disappeared from the scene; in February 1986, a cabinet reshuffle saw the education portfolio given to a more conservative Minister, Patrick Cooney, who had little interest in raising the level of national consciousness on educational matters through public debate. By the end of the year, Garret FitzGerald's Coalition Government had broken up and with a general election in the offing the issues raised in the Green Paper were quickly put aside.

Whither Vocational Education?

The issues raised in the debate on the Green Paper were largely organisational; very little attention was paid to the fundamental nature of education itself. This brings us to the second aspect of vocational education which we proposed to examine - its orientation. Where is vocational education going and what is its particular contribution to the development of young people today? In other words, what is the essential characteristic of vocational education which marks it off from other forms of education and justifies it as a separate entity?

Earlier in this chapter we attempted to sketch the origins and growth of vocational education in Ireland. We noted that in the 1960s, when the Government introduced its comprehensive policy, the ethos of vocational education went into decline. We saw, however, how this ethos began to revive in the 1970s with the stimulus of European Community funding and how this funding led directly to the establishment of the Pre-Employment Courses and later to the Vocational Preparation and Training Programme. The influence of the European Community, however, went well beyond the realm of funding. In 1978 the European Commission initiated a major curricular programme, "Transition from School to Adult and Working Life", which was to last for eight years and include several pilot ventures from each Member State. The Unit's participation in this

programme will be discussed in detail in the following Chapter. For our purposes here we shall confine ourselves to an examination of the programme's general outcomes which, as we shall see, have important implications for the development of vocational education in Ireland.

The findings of the European Community's Transition Programme indicate that preparing young people for employment - the stated aim of vocational education in the 1930 Vocational Education Act - is a more complex process than originally envisaged. The combined effects of economic, technological and demographic change on the labour market have led to a shortage of jobs and consequently more competition for employment openings. Traditional career patterns are being transformed, with far-reaching effects for young job seekers. The qualities and personal skills now required to enter the workforce are in many respects unrelated to the aims and methods of traditional education and training. Moreover, experience of depressingly high levels of youth unemployment over more than a decade in all the Member States have altered the attitudes and aspirations of young people in the transition age group (Commission of the European Communities, 1987, p.7).

The transition to work has also become a longer process. Young people now tend to spend more time in formal education and training, whether voluntarily or not. In all the Member States the general tendency is towards delaying the age of entry to the labour market until 18 or even 19 years. Allied to this there has been a vast expansion of and diversification in vocational preparation and training, beginning after the first cycle of secondary education at about 15/16 years (Ibid., p.8).

It would seem then that the traditional model of transition from school to adult and working life is breaking down in the face of a new reality. No longer is it possible to promise young people that their education and training will assure them of a stable job. The patterns of work itself are changing. New forms of employment are becoming more

important - including part-time and contract work, self-employment, working in cooperatives, job sharing, temporary employment, and participation in job creation programmes or in voluntary work in the local community (Ibid., pp. 10-12).

All these changes are generating fresh challenges for the educational systems of the Community. Although the new vocational programmes are helping to reduce, or at least contain, the level of unemployment by offering young people an alternative to work, they are also bringing their own problems. The extension of the schooling and training process has accentuated the need for substantial, even radical, change in the curriculum, if it is to benefit all young people, especially those with a strong inclination to leave school at the earliest opportunity. Moreover, staying on longer in education and training does not of itself improve a young person's employability. In some Member States it has been found that the most difficult part of transition is no longer at the end of school but at the end of vocational training. Other Member States are experiencing the growing problem of "training programme careers" - young people moving from one training scheme to another without finding a job at the end (Ibid., pp. 8-9).

It is against this background of rapid social and technological change that a new meaning is being sought for vocational education; it is now seen as a dimension which should pervade all education, especially in the age bracket 15 to 20 years. In this context vocational education - or to give it its new title, vocational preparation and training - is seen first of all as something which demands a partnership in the way it is provided. Closer links should be cultivated between schools and training institutions to overcome the often counter-productive separation of general and vocational education. At the same time schools should be encouraged to be more outward-looking and responsive to the needs and possibilities of their local areas and to develop better relations with parents, employers, trade unions and community leaders (Ibid., pp.15-16).

Another important aspect of vocational preparation stems from young people's need to become more "entrepreneurial" in exploring the new opportunities that are opening up. The concept of "enterprise education" is gaining ground - a term that is used to describe a set of activities in education and training aimed at fostering young people's creativity and influencing their behaviour in such a way that they show more initiative and play a more active and independent role in determining or negotiating their own future. Enterprise education tries to change a passive expectation of employment into a more dynamic attitude, directed at finding or creating one's own job through an introduction to the world of business, self-employment and small firms (Ibid., p.22).

These, then, are the principal outcomes to emerge from the Transition Programme. Their relevance for the Irish system was explored in a paper which the Department of Education submitted to Brussels in September 1987 after the Transition Programme had finished. This paper, when we compare it to previous Departmental statements, had unusual breadth of vision and flexibility in outlook - possibly because it emanated from that section of the Department which dealt with European affairs and was therefore inclined to take a more liberal and broad-minded view than the orthodox and conservative "main-line" section.

The Department's paper agreed strongly with the Transition Programme's emphasis on the local dimension - on matching educational provision to local needs rather than seeing it in terms of national or global solutions to young people's problems. This local dimension, which should be in the context of a partnership between all the agencies involved, has two corollaries:

One, that school activities must be firmly rooted in and draw from their surrounding community - whether this be defined in geographical terms as "the local area" or in terms of the community of agencies and services that interest the school - and secondly that the goals of

provision for young people should be broadly the same across all the agencies servicing these young people.³²

We see emerging here a philosophy of community education more radical and exciting than anything that had yet appeared from the Department and which reminds us of the community movement in Ballyfermot in the early 1970s. Schools were urged to become open institutions by acting as resource centres for their communities and taking on a leadership role. "Opening schools to their communities", the paper argued, "should imply this element of service to the community in return for the benefit to the school of the community's support, and schools, probably alone of all the local partners, would have the buildings, facilities and most of all the personal resources to undertake leadership roles in partnership initiatives".³³ Such an approach, of course, implies a radical change in the role of the school; it means in fact a redefining of the school more in terms of the needs of young people than in terms of institutional arrangements. Schools, furthermore, should be free to "provide educational and training services in a variety of settings rather than be identified with one campus and one type of provision".³⁴

It would be easy to dismiss the recommendations of the Department's paper as fanciful and unrealistic, but this would be a mistake. Although the paper very likely represented a minority view in the Department itself, it was nonetheless conceived within the broad framework of European Community thinking on education, as articulated by the Transition Programme. In this context the paper should not be viewed as an isolated statement but as representing a point of view which is gaining ground throughout the European Community and which is based on the perception that there is a growing crisis in the transition of young people to adult and working life in the late twentieth century.

It seems clear from our analysis so far that vocational education in Ireland today faces a period of great uncertainty but also of great

opportunity. A note of warning, however, should be sounded. In any consideration of vocational education there is always a danger of over-emphasising its practical and work-oriented dimension at the expense of its inherent liberal potential. This is particularly true of the European Community's preoccupation with vocational preparation, and it should be noted that the Community's thinking on this subject has for the most part been expressed in training rather than in educational terms. This is largely because the Community officials are more at home with the former than the latter and indeed initially had difficulty in justifying their position on any issue that could be seen as strictly cultural or educational. Thus the training paradigm has become the dominant one and educational considerations are often disguised in training terms - with the result that the distinction between the two has become blurred. It may be unwise perhaps to make too much of this distinction but it would be equally unwise to ignore it.

For educationalists the most important thing about the new vocational movement should be an awareness of the liberal values that are inherent within it. Vocational preparation - if it is to be called education at all - should be an attempt to provide general education through a practical mode and should therefore be as liberalising and humanising as the traditional academic approach. In this sense there can be no educational basis for a hierarchical distinction between the academic and the vocational. "A technical or technological education, which is to have any chance of satisfying the practical needs of the nation", A. N. Whitehead once pointed out, "must be conceived in a liberal spirit, as a real intellectual enlightenment in regard to principles applied and services rendered. In such an education, geometry and poetry are as essential as turning laths" (Whitehead, 1950, p.70).

It is worth recalling that the liberalising potential of vocational education was recognised by one of the founders of the Irish vocational tradition, John Marcus O'Sullivan, the Minister responsible for the introduction of the 1930 Vocational Education Act. It should be admitted, however, that the uplifting or liberalising potential

of vocational education has never been fully realised in the Irish system. An unnecessarily rigid distinction is still made between what are considered to be the “arts” subjects and the technical and craft areas. Even as recently as 1985 we find an argument for such a distinction in a discussion paper from no less a body than the Curriculum and Examination Board (CEB, 1985). This distinction, we may feel, not only impoverishes the artistic dimension in vocational education but at a deeper level ignores the inherent links between art and craft which were such a fundamental part of classical civilisation and which nearer home, which resulted in the masterpieces of the golden age of Irish monastic culture.

CHAPTER 5

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CHAPTER 6

CARING FOR THE DEPRIVED

The Politics of Disadvantage

In this chapter we shall examine the Unit's role with regard to educational deprivation. The *Concise Oxford Dictionary* defines deprivation as the condition of being dispossessed and in this sense deprivation is a recurring theme in the history of the Irish people, so much so that it must surely form part of the collective consciousness of the race. Between the 17th and 19th centuries, the majority of the Irish were dispossessed of their lands, their laws, their language and almost their religion. But perhaps the most terrible deprivation of all, and certainly the most enduring in its effects, was the all-pervasive poverty to which the majority of the people were subjected. Visitors to the country in those years were aghast at what they witnessed. One 18th century traveller, the indefatigable Arthur Young, was clearly shocked by what he saw: "Speaking a language that is despised, professing a religion that is abhorred and being disarmed, the poor find themselves in many cases slaves" (Thomson, 1976, p.74).

The chronicle of deprivation and poverty in Ireland reached its culmination in the catastrophe we now know as the Great Famine (1846-48). This event, which left 800,000 dead and millions lost through emigration, has etched itself deeply into the race memory (Ó Tuathaigh, 1972, p.204). Less well known, however, is the fact that throughout the preceding three decades, one in every three years saw a famine with an accompanying fever in one part or other of the country (O'Neill, 1973, p.22). By the time the Great Famine arrived, poverty, hunger and disease had almost become a way of life (Ibid., pp.22-23). So too had unemployment. In 1836 the Report of the Commissioners on the Poor estimated that over half a million labourers were unemployed for over thirty weeks of each year, and as a consequence their dependants, who numbered nearly two million, were in distress

(Ó Tuathaigh, 1972, p.108).

Poverty and deprivation, then, are not new in Irish history and if we meet them again in present day Irish society, it should be with a recognition and compassion born of long endurance. A survey carried out by the Economic and Social Research Institute in 1986/87 showed that a third of the population was below the poverty line (Callan et al., 1988, p.11). The plight of poor families with children was particularly worrying and according to the report, the overall pattern of poverty was getting worse (Ibid.). Unemployment, especially among household providers, was seen as one of the principal causes of this poverty (Ibid.).

The Unit has always been concerned with the effects of deprivation and in Chapter 2 we saw how its foundation documents were at pains to justify curriculum reform in this context. The Unit's first projects, however, ISCIIP, Humanities and Outdoor Education, addressed the problem of deprivation more in an indirect than a direct manner. One of the principal reasons for this, as we have already noted, was because the Unit was anxious to work with the full range of abilities and aptitudes and did not wish to be identified solely with the needs of the deprived.

By the late '70s however, the balance in the Unit's work began to shift more towards meeting the needs of the disadvantaged. This trend continued throughout the '80s and was influenced by two factors - one national, the other European. At national level we can detect a growing consciousness in Government thinking that disadvantage was a serious problem and that something should be done about it. The *White Paper on Educational Development*, published in December 1980, identified educational disadvantage primarily in terms of school failure. It recognised however that the causes of such failure could be explained in several different ways - the inadequacy of the educational system to cater for certain children, the inability of the children themselves to avail of the system, or the possibility that factors

outside the system were to blame (Department of Education, 1980, p.31). On one thing, however, the *White Paper* was certain: “The problem of school failure is at its worst in areas characterised by a range of unfavourable social and economic conditions, such as poor housing, a high rate of adult unemployment and a rate of income below the national average” (Ibid.).

Three years later, another Government document, *Programme for Action in Education 1984-87*, placed even stronger emphasis on the importance of catering for educational disadvantage: “If we are to be a caring society, priority in the use of resources available for education must be given to removing barriers to equality of opportunity faced by the educationally, socially and economically deprived” (Department of Education, 1984b, p.3). The Programme went on to promise that funds for disadvantaged pupils would be made available through additional teaching posts, the development of curricular initiatives and inservice courses, special grants for books and equipment and the encouragement of home-school links (Ibid., p.6).

At European level, the major influence on the Unit’s concern for the needs of the disadvantaged came from the European Community’s Action Programme on the Transition from School to Work and Adult Life. This programme, as we saw in Chapter 5, had originated in proposals first made by the European Commission in 1976 concerning the increasing number of young people who, on leaving school, were failing to find work (Commission of the European Communities, 1976). The focus of the Transition Programme was on young people who were still at school but in danger of dropping out because the existing courses and teaching methods were unsuitable to their needs. By the time the Programme had finished, in 1983, the European Commission was in a better position to identify the approaches which worked best with these young people. One approach in particular seemed to stand out. Solving the educational problems of the disadvantaged was not a matter of trying to fit them into the existing school system; it was more a question of changing the philosophy,

values and style of the schools themselves so that they were less focused on the needs of the minority destined for higher education and more responsive to the needs of the majority who would take their places in the world of work (MacKenzie, 1987, p.89).

The Early School Leavers Project

As we saw in Chapter 5, the Unit's involvement in the European Community's First Transition Programme was through the Early School Leavers Project (ESLP). The coming of ESLP was significant: it was the first project which the Unit formally received from the hands of the Department of Education and in this sense it was the Unit's first official project. Its sponsors, however, included the Commission of the European Communities as well as the Department of Education because ESLP was in fact a European Project. Together with two other Irish projects, it formed part of a network of projects established by the European Commission throughout the Member States. ESLP, therefore, had a considerably higher profile than any of the Unit's earlier projects, and so a voice in the control of its destiny was essential to the Department of Education.

ESLP had a two-fold aim: to identify potential school drop-outs (the term "drop-out" was later considered to be pejorative and was replaced by the term "early school leaver") and to design, implement and evaluate a curriculum suitable to their needs. The issue of early leaving was to be addressed primarily in the CDVEC's schools, where it had been recognised as a serious problem since the late sixties. The original project proposal, which had been written by the director on behalf of the CDVEC in September 1977, defined early leavers as "those students who derive little or no benefit from their schooling, who leave school at the earliest opportunity, who are unfitted for the world of work and consequently who either drift from one job to another or remain more less permanently unemployed".¹

We have already noted in Chapter 4, how the introduction of ESLP into the Unit coincided with the controversy over the examination modes and as a result of this the project started late. It was spring 1979 before the four project staff members were recruited and it was not until the following September that the project itself began to operate. ESLP was to last for three years, until the summer of 1982, and in keeping with its European context it had a high profile. The overall development of all the Transition projects was coordinated by an agency designated for the purpose by the European Commission, the Institute for Social Sciences, Cologne (IFAPLAN), while in each Member State national evaluators were directly funded by the Commission to report independently on the outcomes (Department of Education, 1984, p. ix). The stage was therefore set for an exciting initiative in educational innovation on a scale never before attempted by the European Community.

Despite its prestigious origins, the progress of ESLP during its first year was low-key and seemingly uneventful. It was after all only one project out of a total of seven that the Unit was then operating and it did not appear to raise any unduly contentious issues. The project's second year, 1980/81, was also uneventful and the Unit's Management Committee had no reason to be concerned other than to consider some routine administrative items. In June 1981, however, the scene suddenly changed. The external evaluators, James Callan and his assistant Elizabeth Hilliard, wrote to each member of the Management Committee complaining that information vital to the evaluation process was being withheld by the project team and asking furthermore for an immediate meeting with the Management Committee itself.² On 20 July 1981 the Management Committee met to hear the evaluators' case against the project and the Unit.

The evaluation issue came to the attention of the Management Committee late in the life of the project, when two-thirds of its term were over, but it is clear now that there was a problem well before that. This first became evident in what was known as the Coolock

intervention. In February and March 1980 the project team organised a six week course for a selected group of twelve potential school leavers in Coolock Vocational School. The Coolock area was a large suburban district in North Dublin which had grown rapidly in the 1970s. The school itself was one of the biggest in the country and also one of the most innovative. Callan, on one of his visits, was impressed by its dynamic climate. "As an outsider", he wrote, "I experienced the school being a hive of activity; teachers held meetings during their lunch periods: class teachers meet band heads and year heads; the walls of the canteen were frequently covered with exhibitions of some pupils' work, or notices were up announcing some forthcoming event with some class. Truly a lively school".³

In retrospect it would now appear that it was not a wise move on the part of the project team to have undertaken such an intervention. For one thing, the time was not suitable; the school year was already more than half finished. For another, although the proposed course was heavily resourced with teachers from the school itself and also with team members and outside experts, it is difficult to escape the impression that it was in some ways a premature exercise which contained within itself the seeds of disaster. The project team was scarcely ready for such an initiative; they were still only in the first year of the project and had barely come to know each other. They were, besides, relative newcomers to curriculum development and now found themselves on their mettle in very difficult circumstances. Callan was perceptive enough to recognise this. "Coming into this school context", he wrote, "an outside project team [had to] face and did face a stiff challenge: and the team were aware of this. They were confronted with a school staff who have been creating, generating and trying out ideas and activities over a number of years".⁴

The outcome of the Coolock intervention was unfortunate for the project: a well-intentioned effort met with a very poor reward and the result was disillusionment on all sides. Such mistakes, however, can occur in the best run projects, and usually no great harm is done

provided the people involved can pick up the pieces quickly and learn from the situation about what to do next time round. For the school, this in fact was what happened and the following academic year the staff were able to plan and execute a much more meaningful and successful course for potential early leavers. For the project team, however, the outcome was different. The intervention was given prominent treatment by Callan, who wrote a sixty-three page report on the entire episode. The team's dirty linen, so to speak, was well and truly washed in public. Their alleged shortcomings were highlighted - weak leadership, inadequate preparation, poor organisation, absence of conceptual analysis and to crown it all a lack of confidence in their competence by the school authorities.⁵

Needless to say the evaluator's perception of the Coolock intervention was not shared by the project team, nor for that matter by the director and deputy director of the Unit. In their eyes the report was seen as a hostile act, which in turn deserved a hostile response. This undoubtedly soured the relationship between both parties and considerably lessened the effectiveness of the evaluation in the long run. In his first annual report on the project, published shortly after the report on the Coolock intervention, Callan raised several important issues. Was the project failing in one of its primary aims - to identify potential early leavers? Was it being unnecessarily constrained by the existing tradition of the Unit, by having to concentrate too much on programme construction rather than on a "scientific analysis of factors and forces which have to be identified or controlled?" Was the project spread over too broad a front, involving too wide a spectrum of students?⁶

All these questions raised serious and worthwhile issues, which were worthy of frank and honest dialogue between the evaluator and the project staff. However, given the strained relationship that existed between both sides, especially after the Coolock report, there was little basis of either trust or respect in which to debate such issues. This lack of trust by the ESLP team in the evaluation can be seen in a document

written by the project leader, Gary Granville, in January 1981. Commenting on the evaluator's claim that he placed a strong emphasis on negotiation in his evaluation style, Granville had this to say: "Negotiation is also based on the relationships between the individuals concerned in that negotiation. If it is to succeed, this relationship must be nurtured by mutual cooperation and growing trust".⁷

The evaluator's letter of July 1981 presented the Management Committee with its first major crisis since the reconstitution of the Unit's management structures three years earlier. We have already noted that the project had excited little comment among the members of the Committee during the first two years of its existence - despite the fact that considerable tensions had arisen between the project team and the evaluators. It appears that during this time neither the Coolock report or the annual evaluation report for 1979/80 was ever discussed by the Committee. The director, it would seem, was intent on guarding the Committee's deliberations from any unnecessary disturbance or controversy. He had not reckoned, however, on Callan's determination to obtain a hearing over what he considered to be a serious breach of the project team's obligation to give him access to all important sources of information.

It is a measure of Callan's frustration that he was driven to write individually to each member of the Committee, lodging what was in effect a serious complaint against the director and the deputy director. The immediate grievance which he mentioned in his letter concerned an effort on the part of ESLP to research the extent of the drop-out problem in a number of schools in the Ballyfermot area - a development, which he alleged, had not been previously disclosed to him.⁸ During the course of the Management Committee meeting, however, it soon became clear that the real problem lay at a deeper level. The attitude of the Unit to the evaluation in general, Callan maintained, had been negative from the start and it was this which had caused the withholding of vital information from the evaluation.⁹

This accusation was strongly denied by the director and deputy director, the latter in particular arguing that the evaluation had been trapped by its own methodology in that it failed to evaluate the activities of the project on their own terms as against the inflexible terms of a preconceived evaluation model.¹⁰ But whatever the rights or the wrongs of the situation, we are reminded of something which we already noted in Chapter 3 - that the Unit was always somewhat wary of evaluation and never went out of its way to invite evaluators within its doors. In this context, Callan may not have been exaggerating when he claimed that the Unit's attitude towards him had been unfriendly.

The Management Committee devoted two meetings to a discussion of the ESLP evaluation. Early in the debate, it became evident that the Department of Education had been unhappy with the framework of the evaluation from the start. The evaluation had been established independently of the Department - an unacceptable state of affairs in the Department's view - and the terms of reference were now apparently being changed by IFAPLAN. The Department, therefore, did not hold itself in any way responsible for the difficulties the evaluation was encountering. In an effort to make the best of the situation, the Department was now compiling a national dossier on all three Irish projects - a comprehensive report which would include accounts from both the project teams and the evaluators, and which would serve as an instrument of dissemination.¹¹

The University view was detached, if somewhat academic. Commenting on the Unit's role in the evaluation affair, Professor Heywood, who was deputising for Professor Rice, put forward two models to explain the nature of curriculum research and evaluation. An example of the first model was when a research unit submitted a project proposal, complete with external and internal evaluation arrangements. When the proposal was duly accepted and had begun to operate, the project director was given considerable freedom. Likewise, the external evaluator was given great freedom and could

express his views openly to the funding agency. This process however was not a continuing one; it terminated when the project came to an end after a given period of years.¹²

Heywood's second model, which he called the process approach, was different. Here the major preoccupation of the research unit was to survive and so projects were taken on and merged into one another. In this model the unit director saw his principal function as generating new ideas. He usually came to his funding agency with these ideas worked out and to some extent already in action and asked for permission to proceed. Evidently the second model - although Heywood never explicitly said as much - was meant to portray the Unit's position.¹³

The CDVEC view was the most pragmatic of the three. Arundel, the CEO, was principally concerned to find a strategy to ease the tension caused by the evaluation crisis and to this end he suggested that a small sub-committee of the Management Committee be formed to defuse the issue.¹⁴ This suggestion was adopted and as things turned out it proved to be a very effective strategy. The sub-committee was formed the following October and held several meetings during the course of the academic year, some of them with Callan present. This helped not only to lower the tension between the Unit and the evaluator but also influenced the direction of the evaluation itself. The sub-committee suggested possible approaches and areas of work and thereby managed to some extent to link with what the evaluator was doing. Its greatest achievement, perhaps, was the fact that it concluded its business in November 1982 in an atmosphere of cordial relations and good will between Callan and the project team.¹⁵

The evaluation crisis had at least one good effect: it helped to focus the attention of the Management Committee on ESLP - something which is very evident in the Committee's minutes throughout the final year of the project. On 27 July 1981, the Committee gave its undivided attention to a memorandum on the project, which was

drawn up by the director.¹⁶ Conscious of Callan's criticisms that ESLP was too diversified, the director was at pains to show that despite appearances to the contrary, the project had in fact a cogent underlying structure "In its history so far", he wrote, "the project has gone through two distinct phases - a feasibility phase, when various lines of development were explored and analysed and a consolidation phase, when different developments were brought together into a synthesis to form the basis of a school programme for early leavers. The project's third phase will now follow logically - the implementation of the programme in a group of pilot schools".¹⁷

In passing, it must be said that this was post-factum reasoning on the director's part, because the threefold structure he alluded to had never been envisaged in the original project proposal. The structure, nonetheless, proved to be a useful instrument, both in the analysis of the project's development and in planning its future. The entire memorandum was in fact a good example of the Unit's style of curricular research - described by the evaluator, perhaps unkindly, as being "intuitive and experiential as distinct from an analytical approach".¹⁸

The central issue which ESLP had to face was something which the evaluation never succeeded in highlighting - the difficulty in recruiting pilot schools. This difficulty had been pointed out in the director's memorandum to the Management Committee. "In September 1979", he wrote, "an attempt was made to find pilot schools which would be interested in working together in implementing an early school leavers project. No pilot schools, however, were forthcoming and it was therefore decided that the Project Team would undertake a series of separate interventions".¹⁹

The project's difficulty in its first attempts to recruit pilot schools is crucial to its understanding. The director's document mentions two reasons for this. First, the drop-out problem was a very sensitive one and any attempt to highlight it could be seen as damaging to a school's

reputation. Schools understandably were not prepared to admit in public to having such a problem and therefore could scarcely be blamed for a reluctance to enlist in a project that could attract unwelcome attention to the issue of early leavers.²⁰ The second reason is less obvious and was only obliquely mentioned in the director's document. ESLP was not the only initiative within the CDVEC directed at early leavers. Other people had laboured for many years in this field and were jealous of any encroachments on their territory. "Establishing links with these initiatives", the director noted tersely, "is a necessary but difficult process".²¹

The difficulty to which the director was alluding was the lack of co-operation between two of the CDVEC support services, namely the Unit itself and the Schools Psychological Service - ironically the two CDVEC agencies which should have been most preoccupied with discovering answers to the drop-out problem. The original ESLP proposal had envisaged that both support services would work together in the project under the direction of the CEO. Unfortunately, this co-operation never materialised, one of the main reasons being the continuing level of tension that existed between the two services - something we have examined already in Chapter 5.

The final evaluation report on ESLP, although on the whole friendly in tone, contained a very serious criticism. The project, it was alleged, "lacked a commitment to embarking on a process of systematic and reflective analysis of the issue of early school leavers".²² This is too harsh a judgement and it is not fair to say ESLP lacked such a commitment because the project did in fact engage in reflective analysis on the problem of early leavers and the results of this reflection were published in the project's final report (Department of Education 1984b, pp. 203-234). Where the project failed, however, was in explaining why the problem was not being tackled as fully as it might have been. It could be argued in defence of ESLP, on the other hand, that this was beyond the brief of the project team and it would moreover have been highly imprudent to expose institutional tensions

within the CDVEC without necessarily contributing anything towards their solution.

In fairness to ESLP, it has to be said that it made a number of very important contributions towards finding a solution to the issue of early leaving. Mention should be made in particular of the establishment of a work exploration centre - to which we shall return later in this chapter - the development of an early leavers programme with appropriate assessment and certification procedures, which has continued in existence up to the present, and a work release scheme, called Education for Youth and Employment, which permitted young women who had recently joined the work force to return to school for a day a week over a period of ten weeks.²³ The latter programme, which was developed by Hanna O'Brien, one of the Team members, was to form the basis of one of the Unit's later projects. Within the Unit itself, ESLP was instrumental in helping to focus attention on what some people in the Department of Education considered to be the Unit's forgotten priority - concern for the disadvantaged. This concern, it is true, had been evident in the Unit's foundation documents but it was not until the arrival of ESLP that it became a priority. It was to remain so in the years that followed.

One of the most important implications of ESLP was noted by an independent observer, Malcolm Skilbeck, who had been invited to a dissemination seminar organised by the project in summer 1982. For Skilbeck the fundamental paradox confronting the project team was the need "to focus on a particular group but equally to see that group as part of the whole, not as a sharply separated category" (Skilbeck, 1982, p.73). It was in this context, he felt, that the traditional perception of the early school leaver as an educational failure had to be questioned:

But if we use the language of failure we are bound to ask ourselves the question: who has failed - we the educators or they the drop-outs? Or is it perhaps the social and economic orders that are at fault? One of the points that has come through strongly in this seminar is

that educators now openly recognise that the system, whatever that may mean, has failed or has been unable to provide adequate resources for all whom it purports to serve (Ibid., p.72).

It is perhaps fitting to leave the final word on ESLP to the project leader. Before he joined the project, Granville had been a teacher in an inner city school and he always showed a teacher's partiality for a practical, school-based approach.²⁴ Commenting on the ability and commitment of the project's pilot schools to develop successful programmes for early leavers, he had this to say:

The growth of these programmes and certification procedures does indicate a conscious effort on the part of the schools to accept responsibility for the weakest of our young people in the hardest of times. Such programmes can help build the confidence, self-reliance and, most importantly, the self-esteem of young people, who are too often branded as failures or simply ignored. At a time when ignorance is turning to fear, when unemployment is seen as a pressure to civil disorder, it is a large responsibility for schools to take on. The disadvantaged have one great advantage over the rest of us: they have nothing to lose. Maybe it's time we gave them something (Granville 1982, pp. 27-28).

The Dublin Inner City Education Project

We have seen how ESLP was one of a number of pilot projects sponsored by the European Community's Transition Programme. This programme had an important bearing on educational disadvantage and one of its principal recommendations was that courses should be developed to increase young people's self-confidence, to widen their opportunities for social experience and to enable them to develop realistic vocational interests and aspirations. This implied three things. First of all a change was needed in existing

school courses, not only in their content but also in the manner in which they were delivered. Young people should be allowed to contract into the learning process, to negotiate their own time-table and even to assess their own performance. Secondly, contacts should be encouraged with adults other than teachers, through work experience and out-of-school activities, and a curriculum more relevant to the practical realities of the lives of young people should be offered. Finally, the traditional separation between the world of education and the world of training and employment should be avoided. Such a separation was deemed to be “deeply divisive, harmful to the interests of the majority and dangerous in some ways to the preservation of the very values which the educators saw themselves defending” (MacKenzie, 1987, p.89).

These recommendations were accepted without difficulty and the European Commission resolved that the best way to implement these was to embark on another round of pilot projects, which became known as the Second Transition Programme. Invitations to apply for projects were again issued to all the Member States and the Unit, sensing its opportunity to launch a major initiative in educational disadvantage, proceeded to submit another proposal to Brussels, targeted on the deprived areas of Dublin’s inner city.

Dublin is usually considered to be a Viking foundation, dating from the late 9th century, but its origins probably go back further into history. It was not until the mid 17th century, however, that the city began to expand in earnest, when it grew from a population of only 9,000 in 1659 to about 80,000 in 1700 (Butlin, 1965, pp.51-66). The city continued its rapid growth throughout the 18th century, when it acquired the elegance and splendour that made it after London the second city of the English speaking world (Maxwell, 1946). In 1801 came the Act of Union and with it the dissolution of Dublin’s parliament - an event which had a blighting effect on the city’s development. Dublin’s glorious reign was over. The population, nonetheless, continued to grow and by 1911 had reached the figure of

398,000 (National Economic and Social Council, 1981, p.42). In 1921, Dublin became the capital of the new Irish State and still it continued to expand. By 1926 the population of the city and the suburbs totalled 419,000, by 1961 it was 665,556 and by 1979 it had almost reached the million mark (Ibid., p.46).

The growth of Dublin over the last two centuries, however, was an uneven affair, so much so that it would be correct to refer to the existence of two cities, one for the rich and the other for the poor - the rich in their elegant Georgian homes and the poor in their tenements (Ibid., p.62). This contrast had been marked by Frederick Engels when he visited the city in the mid-nineteenth century. Engels was impressed by Dublin's aristocratic quarter, which he described as "laid out in a more tasteful manner than that of any other British town" (Ibid.). The poorer districts, however, he found to be ugly and revolting: "The filth, the dilapidation of the houses and the utterly neglected conditions of the suburbs beggar description and are beyond belief" (Ibid., p.63).

As we enter the 20th century, the contrast between rich and poor persisted and the poverty of the inner city slums had become a byword throughout the western world. Patrick Geddes in his evidence to the 1913 inquiry in "The Housing Conditions of the Working Classes in the City of Dublin", declared that the city had "a more numerous submerged class than anywhere else I know" (Ibid., p.65). This was the class so memorably depicted in Sean O Casey's plays and later in James Plunkett's novel, *Strumpet City*.

From the 1930s onwards, with the provision of local authority housing in the suburbs, the worst of Dublin's slums began to disappear. The clearances, however, were accompanied by a decline in the inner city population and a general decay in the inner city environment which has lasted to the present time (Ibid., pp.67-68). A report in 1981 described the inner city as "characterised by high levels of unemployment, poor housing, derelict sites and buildings, high

levels of vehicular traffic and vandalism of property” (Ibid., p.4).

It is not surprising then to find the level of deprivation in Dublin’s inner city reflected in the educational attainment of its children. One researcher noted the stark contrast that existed between the educational achievement of inner city children compared with that of the more affluent suburbs in the south of the city; 73.6% of the former had not proceeded beyond primary level, as against 24.4% of the latter (McGréil, 1974, p.29). Another researcher found large numbers of school drop-outs concentrated in inner city areas (Rudd, 1972).

Despite such difficult conditions for educational progress, or perhaps because of them, Dublin’s inner city has been the location of some very imaginative educational initiatives. In 1969, the Department of Education in co-operation with the Van Leer Foundation established a five-year experiment in pre-school education in Rutland Street in the north inner city. This project, which was one of the first of its kind in Europe, was followed by a number of initiatives in other disadvantaged parts of the city, which tried to disseminate the original project methodology (Holland, 1979, pp.88-95).

Ten years later the CDVEC established a subcommittee on education and training in the inner city - where there were five CDVEC schools at the time. The ensuing report called attention to the high numbers of remedial pupils in inner city schools and recognised the damage that this could cause to the public image of the schools concerned, unless all the educational interests involved came together to formulate a comprehensive policy for remedial education in the city. One of the major recommendations of the report, afterwards approved by the CDVEC, was that “a special educational intervention be made... in which curricula appropriate to the area might be used and in which the school day could be varied to suit the circumstances of the area”.²⁵ This intervention was furthermore envisaged in the context of a meaningful community education policy.²⁶

The CDVEC recommendation might well have gone unheeded were it not for a dramatic development in the political arena which brought the whole issue into the full glare of national publicity. In January 1982 Garret FitzGerald's Coalition Government fell and the consequent general election failed to give any of the contending parties an overall majority. When the 23rd Dáil met the following March, it found itself in the dilemma of a hung parliament. Charles Haughey, the leader of the Fianna Fáil party, eventually found he could form a minority Government but only with the support of a left-wing independent deputy, Tony Gregory, who represented Dublin's north inner city (Coogan, Dublin 1987, p.39). Gregory, who now found himself a virtual king-maker, was able to bargain for a substantial package of social and economic measures for the inner city in return for his vote. As part of this package, it was agreed to declare the north inner city an educational priority area and to build a new community school there (McDonald, 1982).

The "Gregory Deal", as it was popularly known, received wide media coverage and was debated at length in the Dáil. Some people regarded it as a cynical exercise to secure political power but others pointed out that, whatever the motivation behind the deal, it was all in a good cause and should be accepted at its face value. The CDVEC was particularly interested in the educational dimension of the deal, as it already had plans of its own to build a school in the north inner city. On 15th April 1982, Arundel, the CEO, met Gregory and persuaded him to merge his plan with that of the CDVEC; it was agreed that one school would now be built in the area - a community college under the auspices of the CDVEC.²⁷

The proposed community college was an exciting and imaginative concept and went well beyond the remit of a typical VEC school. The exciting elements in the plan came from one of Gregory's advisers, Fr. Michael Casey, the pastor of Our Lady of Lourdes parish in the north inner city and a graduate of the Ontario Institute of Studies in Education. Casey submitted a five-page document, which formed the

basis of the agreement reached by Gregory and the CDVEC. The new college would mark a radical departure from the traditional pattern of education, which in Casey's view was no longer adequate:

In the past, schools have failed the children and people in the north inner city. Being middle class institutions with middle class teachers who had to impart middle class knowledge in order to achieve middle class goals through a middle class medium, language and methodology, the schools were alien objects, as if from outer space. Massive illiteracy, a huge drop-out rate and consequent feelings of failure by both pupil and teacher have led to great wastage of human potential, energy and money. With contrary, ill-defined and often conflicting agendas the two (school and community) never matched and the larger entity, the environment, always inevitably won.²⁸

Casey wanted the new college first of all to have a clearly defined community philosophy. It should cater for both children and adults, be person and community-oriented, foster formal and informal learning and prepare people for employment and unemployment alike. In the following extract from Casey's document, it is interesting to note the unmistakable influence of the celebrated Brazilian social reformer and educator, Paulo Freire:

The education engaged in by the Community College will therefore be more than 4 x 2 schooling (what's learned between the four walls of school and the two covers of a book). It will draw strongly on people's innate interests, potential and skills, and will value life experience (experiential learning). It will foster academic, manual and social skills in the context of the educative community, where all staff, pupils, and adults are co-teachers and co-learners for the good of all. The education will be for the liberation and development of the human person and the building of structures conducive to this. In keeping with the theory of education enunciated above, the Community College will develop in the pupils the ability to discriminate and

to analyse their life situation, and endeavour to develop their skills and human potential so as to enable them to take control over their own lives or “name their world”.²⁹

It was inevitable that the plan to build such a community college would have important implications for the Unit, and the director, who ever since his years as principal in Ballyfermot had retained an interest in community education, was eager to steer the Unit’s energies in this direction. Within a few months of the plan being agreed by Gregory and the CDVEC, the director was requested to start preparing an inservice programme for the staff of the new college³⁰ and later, in the Unit’s work programme for the following year, we find a proposal to initiate an action research project on the development of a community-oriented curriculum.³¹

On 29 November 1982, the director reported to the Management Committee that he was writing a proposal to the CDVEC on an inner city project. The project, he said, would be concerned with the development of a community education centre in the north inner city and would act as a precursor to the community college which was now scheduled to open in 1985.³² What the director omitted to tell his Committee, however, was that the proposal would also be the CDVEC’s official application to Brussels for inclusion in the Second Transition Programme. It may be that the reason for this reluctance to give the Committee all the facts was the director’s desire to keep the matter confidential until the success of the application was assured. But whatever the reason for the secrecy, the outcome, as we shall shortly see, was far from what the director had hoped.

The proposal to Brussels for a community education centre was dated December 1982. It was a ten-page document and was arguably one of the best proposals the director ever wrote. In some ways the document is reminiscent of the Casey memorandum but in his articulation of the ideal of community education, the director portrays his own brand of

utopianism. Community education, he asserts, must always be relevant to the direct experience of children and adults before it can engage their attention and interest. The implication for schools in deprived areas is that they must consciously try to equip young people to meet the reality of the social environment in which they live and if possible to change it for the better. In curricular terms this entails the development of a variety of basic coping skills, the provision of a more enjoyable and satisfying educational experience and the fostering of a critical understanding of the local environment.³³

In writing his proposal the director was conscious of the need to be clear about the definition of a community college, for which the community education centre was to act as a precursor:

There are four important connotations in the idea of a community college. There is, first of all, the promotion of democracy within the college community itself - a greater sharing in decision-making between teachers and pupils alike. A second connotation involves greater participation in the affairs of the college by people from outside - parents, employers, local residents and people from all walks of life. In this context, the college should never be seen as an island but should be joined to the mainland of life by a causeway well trodden in both directions. A third connotation is the multi-purpose use of college buildings by adults and children alike. In this context the college could conceivably be part of a community centre - open every day and providing a wide range of educational and recreational facilities. Lastly, there is the connotation of a community-oriented curriculum where a major part of the college's work is organised around community themes, interests and needs. Of the four connotations, this is perhaps the most important and the most difficult to achieve.³⁴

The essence of a community-oriented curriculum, according to the proposal, was to make the local area a laboratory for learning, to

which all the conventional subjects would contribute in an integrated and dynamic manner. Many teachers accepted this idea in principle but there were difficulties about putting it into practice - such as the constraints of the school time-table, the demands of the syllabus and the threat of examinations. Teachers and pupils alike, therefore, had to be encouraged to make local studies an educational reality - to go out from their school and to explore the surrounding streets, public buildings and places of work. This would mean coming to grips with local realities - in the home, the street, at work or on the dole. It would also mean using the local people as a central learning resource - parents, children, young and old, employed and unemployed alike.³⁵

It should be evident from the above description of the proposal that many influences were at work in shaping the director's thinking. We recall Dewey's concept of using the local area as a laboratory for learning and we can recognise the lapidary phrase from the Newsom Report about the school being joined to the mainland of life by a causeway well trodden in both directions. It is also possible to detect the ideas of other notable community education protagonists, such as Plowden, Halsey, Midwinter, Poster and above all Hargreaves, from whom the director appears to have borrowed his fourfold classification of the connotations implicit in the definition of a community college (Hargreaves, 1982, pp. 114-117). In fairness, however, it should be said that the director's thinking on community education was not entirely derivative; his years in Ballyfermot, as we noted in Chapter 1, had seasoned his theories with practical experience of community action.

The influence of the Ballyfermot experience is particularly evident in the emphasis in the proposal on a community-oriented curriculum, something which the director believed was at the heart of community education. There can be a difficulty, however, in advocating this approach because, as Hargreaves has pointed out, it can contradict the other implications of the fourfold definition of a community college (Ibid., pp. 123-124). If, for instance, we allow the local community to

have a greater say in the running of the school, it is highly unlikely that they will opt for a curriculum radically different from what is currently on offer nationally. In other words, to implement a community oriented curriculum worthy of the name demands, on the part of the college authority, a degree of determination not easily reconcilable with the ideals of participation and shared decision making.

Hargreaves's answer to this dilemma is to ensure that all students no matter what their social background should follow a community oriented curriculum. Middle-class children, he argues, need such a curriculum as much as children in deprived areas: "Behind the oak doors of detached houses on fashionable housing estates, are hidden many personal and social problems which require solution: loneliness and distress and neglect do not belong uniquely to the working-class 'deprived', it is simply that the middle classes are more skilled at hiding their problems" (Ibid., pp. 129-130).

In any discussion of community education we are inevitably brought face to face with the crucial question of the role of the school as a change agent in society - and this was undoubtedly in the director's mind when he wrote his proposal. Teachers and pupils, he argued, should be encouraged "to embark on projects that touch on politically sensitive issues, such as participation in official planning and decision making, law and order and the distribution of wealth and resources".³⁶ They should also become involved in community development, which in the director's view had two dimensions:

Firstly, there is the concern over the deteriorating quality of the urban environment, especially in centre city areas. Secondly, there is the corresponding concern for urban renewal through ordinary people becoming involved in improving their own surroundings and living conditions. Community development usually finds its expression in the attempts of local groups to organise themselves and to achieve definite concrete goals which will improve their quality of life.³⁷

All these considerations, however interesting and important they were in themselves, turned out to be of academic interest only. The proposal, although addressed to the European Commission, had first of all to be submitted to the Department of Education, which according to European Community protocol was the official intermediary for such applications. On 7 February 1983 at a meeting called by the Chief Inspector, the document was attacked by two of the Department's officers, Albert Kelly and Torlach O'Connor, both of whom were also members of the Unit's Management Committee.³⁸ O'Connor in particular was quite severe in his criticism, alleging that the proposal did not conform to the six guidelines laid down by the Brussels authorities and in which, he maintained, there was no reference whatsoever to the urban environment - one of the main themes in the proposal.³⁹ On this point, O'Connor was technically right but the director was so taken aback by the attack that he suspected that the Department had already made up its mind to exclude the CDVEC from the Second Transition Programme.

The director's suspicions were harsh but understandable in the light of the long history of animosity between the Department and the Unit. His suspicions were fuelled by his belief that Ireland would only be allowed two projects under the Transition Programme and that these would be given to the curriculum centres in Shannon and Galway. In the event he was wrong. On the 15 February he heard from Hans Kairat, an official of the European Commission, that Ireland would receive three projects and that Brussels was quite interested in the Dublin proposal, provided it could be broadened to become an "action district proposal" involving several schools.⁴⁰ Kairat was also aware of the tension between the Unit and the Department and even offered to come to Dublin to help resolve the dispute.⁴¹

The need for such a reconciliatory meeting, however, did not arise. Tempers began to cool, once the director realised that there was no plot to exclude the Unit and when the Department for its part showed

that it was prepared to frame its criticism of the proposal in a positive and helpful manner. Probably, the most contentious issue at stake had been the linking of the proposal to the CDVEC plan to build a community college - which the Department maintained was too narrow a base on which to build a European project.

The Department was quite right in the view it adopted but this was only part of the story. More important was the fact that the political scene had again changed, with far-reaching implications for the general context in which the proposal has been framed. The Gregory Deal was now dead - something which should have been apparent from the previous November, when the short-lived Haughey Government collapsed after a period of internal party turmoil (Coogan, 1987, pp. 41-48). At this remove it seems surprising that the director did not realise the precarious basis on which his proposal rested, or at least that he was not warned by one of the CDVEC officers. But the CDVEC probably had every reason to keep their own counsel. Notwithstanding the changed political circumstances, it was important for them to keep pressing to have the college built - an aspiration, we may add, that at the time of writing has remained wholly unfulfilled.

From mid-February onwards, it was clear that the director was looking for ways of shifting his ground. The rhetoric of community development was now giving way to that of vocational preparation and training as he looked for a new context in which to frame his proposal. The aim of the project was now redefined as "the social and vocational preparation of young people with poor prospects of employment in order to enable them to acquire a degree of independence in a changing society".⁴² The project was envisaged as catering for three groups in particular - young people completing their schooling and with poor employment prospects, young people who had just left school and who were still unemployed, and finally girls and young women, also with poor employment prospects.⁴³ This meant that the proposal was now more closely linked with ESLP, the Unit's earlier project in the First Transition Programme, which had identified all

three target groups.

The influence of ESLP was also evident in the manner in which the new proposal emphasised the concept of work exploration:

It is important today, when employment opportunities are scarce, to give young people the experience of good work. They should know something of the discipline, concentration and effort which good work demands; they should learn the ability to cooperate with others and experience the sense of achievement that comes from a job well done. The hope is that if young people are taught how to work well, they will acquire a taste for work and a confidence in their own abilities to face new work situations. Exploring ways in which people can work should then become a normal part of education.⁴⁴

The most obvious change in the proposal was geographical; the project would no longer be confined to a single centre but would extend to the entire inner city. The emphasis now, however, began to shift towards the south inner city. In March 1983, the director was introduced by Terry Doyle, recently appointed as CDVEC Education Officer and formerly the principal of the Liberties School in the south inner city, to a community development activist, Fr. Michael Mernagh. Mernagh told the director about a community development plan for the south inner city, which had been presented the previous December to the Taoiseach and to several ministers in the new Coalition Government.⁴⁵ Mernagh also expressed a keen interest in having a link with the Unit's new project.⁴⁶ Two months later, on 11 May, Doyle and Mernagh brought the director to a meeting of the Liberties Community Development Group to discuss the possibility of finding a base for the project in the south inner city.⁴⁷

Simultaneously with his new found interest in the south inner city, the director's interest in the north inner city began to wane. On 18 May he was taken by Fr. Casey on a tour of community development projects

in the north city and although he was impressed by the number and variety of the projects he felt there was little evidence of overall co-ordination. He also learnt that funding for the projects was increasingly difficult to find - so much so that Casey asserted that the north inner city was being punished by the new Government for featuring so prominently in the Gregory Deal.⁴⁸

Throughout the summer of 1983 the search for a project base continued but by the end of July a decision was finally reached. Mernagh informed the director that a confrere of his, Fr Philip Kelly, the pastor of St Catherine's in the south inner city, was willing to house the project in his parish primary school in School Street, which at the time was only half occupied.⁴⁹ The Dublin Inner City Education Project, or DICE as it came to be known, had at last found a home for itself.

The story of DICE from this point on is relatively free from political complications. At a meeting on 9 June 1983 the project proposal was formally accepted by the Department of Education.⁵⁰ By the following August, the staff had been recruited and a co-ordinator, Gary Granville, who had also led the ESLP team, had been appointed. By the end of September the director was able to tell his Management Committee that the project was underway.⁵¹ It was to last for four years and had its own management subcommittee - an arrangement which greatly facilitated its progress.

While the activities of DICE were with school and out-of-school groups alike, the reputation of the project rested on its work with the latter, especially with the young people in School Street. The DICE outcentre in School Street became in fact one of the most celebrated locations of all the European Community's Transition projects (Stokes, 1988, p.18). Most of the young people who came to the centre had dropped out of school at fourteen years or even before, and some indeed had never transferred from primary school at all. Many had experienced the poverty, ill health and emotional troubles

associated with a severely disadvantaged background, and not a few had had brushes with crime, vandalism and substance abuse (Ibid.). The centre's attempt to counter these adverse influences was by any standards, therefore, an ambitious undertaking.

The starting point of the School Street programme was to take the young people seriously by trying to identify their needs and involve them in the process of seeking solutions to their problems (Ibid.). This was the task which the staff set before themselves under the leadership of Siobhan Lynam. They began by creating a friendly atmosphere - warm and positive, informal yet informative, open and responsive. The centre became a space where the young people could become self-aware and self-confident, where they could be themselves and could grow as individuals (Ibid.). The activities comprised social and personal education, craftwork, film-making, job searching, counselling and a variety of cultural and recreational pursuits. The high-point of the curriculum was the mid-day meal, which was planned, cooked and served by the young people themselves. The meal-times in fact became moments of community interaction and many distinguished visitors felt privileged to be invited as guests.

The other activities of DICE were understandably a little overshadowed by the fame of School Street but they represented nonetheless solid and worthwhile achievements in their own right. An in-school programme, which was essentially a continuation of the work of the ESLP, succeeded in consolidating an alternative junior cycle course for low-achieving pupils in some 30 post-primary schools in the greater Dublin area (Ibid., pp. 14-15). A programme for young women was located in an apartment in Fatima Mansions, one of the largest and most deprived of the flat complexes in the south inner city. This programme, which was led by Mary Owens, catered mainly for young mothers, married and unmarried, and comprised activities such as home budgeting, child care, family planning, home-crafts, literacy and numeracy, personal development, outdoor recreation, aerobics and body care. The programme, however, achieved much more than

informing the young women; it helped them to solve some of the issues which confronted them and to discover that they themselves had the resources to challenge and change their situation.⁵²

DICE also sponsored a work exploration centre, which like the in-school programme was also a direct inheritance from ESLP. Under the leadership of Colm Rock, this activity was expanded and found a new home in a splendid Georgian building in the north inner city, where it has since become a permanent centre run by the CDVEC.

DICE was undoubtedly one of the success stories of the Unit and by summer 1987, when the project ended, the Unit had come to be recognised as one of the leading educational agencies in the area of disadvantage. This fact was underlined in April 1987, when the Unit was commissioned by the Department of Education and the Youth Employment Agency to organise a conference on the theme, “Disadvantage, Learning and Young People”, which was attended by delegates from many parts of the European Community (Crooks and Stokes, 1987). The conference was opened by the Minister for Education, Mary O’Rourke, who paid tribute to the “excellent and inspiring work” of DICE and the other two Irish pilot projects in the European Transition Programme (Ibid., p.3).

Apart, however, from helping to raise the Unit’s profile, how are we to assess the overall worth of DICE? Tony Crooks, the Unit’s deputy director, who took on the overall responsibility for the project after Gary Granville left in summer 1985, had no doubts about the long-term importance of DICE.

When the project was established in 1983 it claimed that one of its anticipated outcomes was that it would set up a model for pre-vocational education and training that could be transferred to other areas. This model has three points of entry:

- in school for 12-15 year olds (Junior Cycle School Certificate Course);

- in school or out-of-school both as a continuation of the Junior Cycle course or as a second option for those who have dropped out of school (School Street/Youthreach);
- at 18+ at adult education level (particularly for young women).

In retrospect the Youthreach programme and the Adult Education Boards provide structures at national level for this pre-vocational model. There is still much work to be done at Junior Cycle level before the needs of potential early school leavers are met by the present provision of courses at national level. If one was to try to encapsulate the work of four years into one sentence, it would be as follows: in a caring society, offering young people a second chance should be a right not a privilege (Crooks, 1990, p.98).

This is fair comment, but it does not preclude us asking what the project ultimately tells us about the task of educating the disadvantaged. In attempting to answer this question we must admit that there appears to be a paradox at the heart of DICE. We recall how the director's first project proposal had been framed in the context of developing a community oriented curriculum and although it contained some radical aspects, it was nonetheless accepted by the Management Committee when it was explained to them by the director in January 1983.⁵³ Five months later, when he reported the changes he had been forced to make in the proposals, there were signs of unease among some members, who felt the project now belonged more properly to the field of social work than to education.⁵⁴ These misgivings point to a dilemma which confronted the project: to what extent can the problem of disadvantage be addressed within the school system?

The problem of disadvantage extends well beyond the traditional realm of the school. Does this mean then that the school can do very

little about the problem? There are two possible answers to this question. The first is for the school, while conscious of its restrictions, to try to extend its sphere of influence beyond its traditional practice. This was the approach adopted in the director's first proposal. The second approach is to work outside the school structures altogether and to seek solutions to the problem of disadvantage by setting up various *ad hoc* groups and temporary institutions which are not bound by custom or precedent. Many people who work with the disadvantaged feel that this is the only road to take because they are sceptical that school systems are capable of ever responding adequately to the needs of the deprived.

The director's second proposal was a compromise between the two approaches. However, although the proposal was couched in terms of linking out-centres eventually with schools, there was never in practice a satisfactory coming together between the two sides and at the end of the day DICE raised a serious query as to how a centre like School Street could ever be integrated into the school system. We must be sympathetic, therefore, with those members of the Management Committee who felt anxious at the direction the Unit was taking in its commitment to disadvantage. It was a misgiving that was accentuated in the course of another project which the Unit undertook around the same time, a rehabilitation project for long-term psychiatric patients - probably one of the most disadvantaged groups that the Unit ever worked with.

The Resocialisation Project

The profile of long-term psychiatric patients in Ireland up to the 1980s makes depressing reading. Many patients through long years in hospital had lost their sense of individuality and self worth. A large number had experienced learning difficulties in their school days and very few had enjoyed a satisfactory work experience. Many, too, had become isolated from their families and communities. Typically, they would have been admitted to a psychiatric hospital because of the

early onset of acute symptomatology or the inability of other care systems to cope with their needs. Later, their lack of vocational and life skills would have militated against their return to normal community life, and so they would have resigned themselves to institutional living in a system of total care.⁵⁵

It must be said, however, that the condition of psychiatric patients in general has greatly improved in modern times - especially when we compare it to what it was a hundred years ago. Throughout the nineteenth century, for instance, the chief concern was to ensure that every mentally ill person and certainly all those who were considered "dangerous lunatics" were safely guarded behind strong gates and high walls. A more enlightened approach began to prevail in the twentieth century, especially after the 1950s, when the advent of drug therapy and the application of more enlightened psychological and social theories reduced the amount of disturbed behaviour among the mentally ill. These improvements in turn led to a community-oriented approach in the psychiatric services. As the need to isolate and control patients lessened, the psychiatric hospitals began to open their doors and new community services for the care and treatment of the mentally ill were developed (Department of Health, 1984, pp.1-5).

In Ireland, an example of the changing approach to mental illness can be seen in the history of one of the country's largest psychiatric hospitals, St Brendan's in Dublin. When the hospital was originally founded in the early nineteenth century it was called the Richmond Lunatic Asylum. In 1921, it was renamed Grangegorman Mental Hospital and in 1958 the name was again changed to St Brendan's Hospital. In the 1960s the high walls surrounding the hospital were removed and under the charismatic leadership of the Chief Psychiatrist, Dr. Ivor Browne, St Brendan's began to deinstitutionalise its patients and to open its doors to the outside community.⁵⁶

Despite these improvements, however, the care of long-term psychiatric patients left much to be desired. A young doctor named

Michael Corry, who worked with these patients in the early 1980s, was greatly disturbed by what he saw:

I was stunned and changed by what I witnessed in the back wards of St Brendan's in 1981-82. The conditions were repulsive. The impact of seeing hundreds of unkempt human beings of all ages, lying, sitting, and walking in smelly, shabby hallways and corridors looking like inmates of a concentration camp was staggering. This human zoo was caused by diffusion of authority, lack of accountability, restrictive working practices, lack of interest, conceptual gaps, the culture of silence, the inappropriateness of the medical model, involuntary detention and pure staff laziness. This was the undeniable barometer, the true measurement of care, love, respect and civil liberties.⁵⁷

Corry was so moved by the condition of the patients that he resolved to improve their lot. The way forward, he felt, was to bring about a change of philosophy as well as a change in treatment - an approach which would concentrate on behavioural modification through the learning of new social and life skills rather than relying on traditional institutional methods to contain the problem. Such an approach, he realised, would need powerful backing if it was going to succeed in the medical world. He determined, therefore, to take his ideas to the European Commission in Brussels, where in March 1982 he put his case to Ivor Richard, the Commissioner for Employment and Social Affairs.⁵⁸

Corry had chosen a good time to approach Brussels. The previous year, 1981, had been designated International Year of Disabled Persons by the United Nations and to mark the occasion the European Commission had announced its intention of launching an action programme for the social integration of disabled people (Commission of the European Communities, 1981). The core of the new programme was to be "the setting up of a Community-wide network of locally-based development actions to serve as points of reference and

demonstration models for policy development elsewhere” (Ibid., p.16). Nor was this the first time that the European Community had shown an interest in the problem of the disabled. As far back as 1969, the Council of Ministers had asked the Commission to undertake a preliminary survey of the area and this had led eventually to the launching in 1976 of the Community’s first action programme for the disabled - the Programme for Vocational Rehabilitation of Handicapped Persons (Ibid., p.21).

It was not altogether surprising, therefore, that Corry’s mission to Brussels was successful. He was arguing for an idea whose time had come and the argument, it would seem, was made with some skill. Richard was so impressed by Corry’s ideas that he invited him to make a formal application for assistance to the European Social Fund. The Commissioner also asked that the project be named the “Demonstration Resocialisation Project of Europe” and proposed that it would be funded for a minimum of three years.⁵⁹ By the following September, a formal proposal had been made to the Commission for a grant of IR£280,000, which was to be matched by a similar amount from the hospital’s funding authority, the Eastern Health Board.⁶⁰ Clearly, a major project in the context of psychiatric care, both in Ireland and in Europe, was about to get under way.

The aim of the Resocialisation Project was boldly stated: “to develop and demonstrate techniques for reintegrating 20 long-stay patients every six months back into the community for an initial period of three years”.⁶¹ This was an ambitious target but then the entire project was conceived in ambitious terms. This was particularly evident in the size and scope of the project team, which was to comprise a psychiatrist, a psychologist, an occupational therapist, a research assistant, sixteen psychiatric nurses, a secretary, a beautician, a hairdresser and several teachers of literacy, domestic science, gymnastics, art, drama, music and dance.⁶²

Particular importance was attached to the building in which the project was to be housed. "It should become part of the total setting designed for the practice of social therapy", Corry wrote, "an environment consciously structured to produce a desired change in those who enter it".⁶³ As the building was intended to attract people into it, light was to play an important part in its design. "Direct sunlight is the most benign form of light and energy available to us", Corry noted, "Everybody reacts favourably to it; sunlight literally casts everything in a better light".⁶⁴

The central argument behind the project was simple and persuasive. For years the patients had lived in a context of dependency which had diminished their responsibility and reduced their will to face the problems of daily living. As a result they had little interest in the affairs of the outside world and had developed a contentment with hospital life to the exclusion of ever returning to the community at large.⁶⁵ It was essential, therefore, that they should break these habits which were caused by long-term institutionalisation. But to do this they would have to undergo a process of resocialisation:

The patient must give up dependency roles appropriate to "patient" status and become an "ordinary person". He must to some extent accept and adapt to the conditions and some of the motivations of the extra-mural subculture in which he will live i.e. its work ethic, its money grabbing, unpleasant manners, sex problems and difficult fellow workers.⁶⁶

In the process of resocialisation all kinds of personal and social skills would have to be learned or relearned - personal hygiene, good manners, formal social rituals, the art of conversation and in general the ability to take responsibility for one's own life. This social and educational dimension which was at the heart of the project's philosophy distinguished it from more traditional psychiatric therapies, which aimed primarily at the elimination of maladaptive behaviours, usually through the use of drugs. In this sense the project relied on a

social rather than a medical approach - a factor which was later to cause opposition from some members of the medical profession.

The Resocialisation Project appeared in many ways to be strongly influenced by the tenets of behavioural psychology. It was based apparently on the assumption that each individual usually does his best, given his physical limitations and unique learning history, to respond as effectively as possible to every situation that he meets. Thus, when an individual's behaviour is judged to be maladaptive, this indicates "the presence of a situation-specific skill deficit in the individual's repertoire".⁶⁷ The answer to this problem, according to Corry, was to resocialize the patient by making good the deficit. "Whatever the origins of the deficit (e.g. lack of experience, family learning, biological dysfunction) it often may be overcome or partially compensated for through appropriate training in more skilful response alternatives".⁶⁸

From the Unit's point of view the most attractive thing about the project was the emphasis it put on education. The reason for this emphasis was partly historical. From the late 1970s an educational service had been provided for the patients of St Brendan's by teachers from the CDVEC. This service had been initiated by the principal of Marino Vocational School and in 1980 it was put under the charge of the Liberties Vocational School, where it was further developed.⁶⁹ In May 1982 the Department of Education agreed to the appointment of a full-time coordinator and by 1983 the service comprised eight teachers who provided 84 hours of weekly instruction in English, social skills, cookery, physical education, relaxation, creative drama, horticulture and music.⁷⁰

The Resocialisation Project, therefore, was not breaking new ground when it declared itself in favour of an educational model; it was merely building on a foundation which already existed. It was because of this educational orientation that Corry decided to ask the Unit to participate in the project. The Unit's role was to provide the

educational dimension and to recruit the teaching staff, including the educational coordinator.⁷¹ At Corry's request the Unit's Management Committee agreed to give this latter post to Colin Pollard, who at the time was coordinator of the educational service in St Brendan's.⁷²

In November 1983 the Management Committee agreed to accept the project, although not all the members would necessarily have agreed with the Director's contention that "the oft-repeated maxim "Education for Living" takes on a new and urgent meaning in the context of what the project is trying to achieve".⁷³ On one point, indeed, the Committee had very decided reservations: it had no representation on the body which controlled the project, the Board of Directors. This body had been established by the Eastern Health Board and although the director had obtained an assurance that "a suitable means would be found of involving representation from the Management Committee", no such representation was ever conceded.⁷⁴ As subsequent events were to show, the misgivings of the Management Committee about lack of representation were to prove well-founded.

The project was established for an initial phase of three years but it was considered to have had a good chance of continuing to attract European Community support for a second phase.⁷⁵ Sadly, however, this hope was never fulfilled: on 31 October 1986, when the project had completed its three year term, the Board of Directors decided to terminate it. The project's first phase turned out to be its last and it ended amidst bitterness and recrimination.

This was an abrupt ending to a project which seemed to have had such promise. Within the short space of three years it had successfully demonstrated that a number of long-term psychiatric patients could be deinstitutionalised and settled into the outside community. The number of patients, it is true, was not as great as originally intended - 60 (in three groups of 20) as against the original estimate of 120. Nonetheless, of these 60 patients, 35 were enabled to make a

successful transition from the hospital to the outside world.⁷⁶ The project could claim, therefore, to have achieved its principal aim - something which should have been a source of pride and satisfaction to everyone who worked on it.

Such, however, was not the case. At the end of the three year term, Corry described his team as “a disillusioned and demoralised group of people with no faith in the credibility of institutional services”.⁷⁷ This unfortunate state of affairs, he alleged, had been brought about by senior administrators in the Eastern Health Board, whom he accused of “obstructing and frustrating the operation and further development of the Resocialisation Project”.⁷⁸ These are strong words, which betray a deep level of hurt and disappointment. They are all the more striking when we remember that they were written by the author of the project’s original philosophy, with its high ideals and great expectations. What went wrong, we have to ask, that such ideals came to nothing and that Corry and his staff became so embittered?

From the very beginning, it appears that the Resocialisation Project was beset with problems. In January 1987, after the project had been terminated, Corry wrote an eleven page letter to the executive officers of the Eastern Health Board - with copies to some thirty people with an interest in the project, including the Minister for Health. This letter contained a list of no fewer than forty-three problems which Corry asserted the project had encountered.⁷⁹ This number however can be reduced to three central issues - delay in starting, failure to build a training unit as planned and lack of autonomy in the operation of the project.

The delay in starting was symptomatic of the ambivalence and confusion that surrounded the project from its inception. It had been conceived and planned in 1981/82 and arrangements had been made for European Community assistance on the basis of a starting date in February 1983.⁸⁰ Yet, fifteen months were to elapse before the first group of patients was admitted on 1 April 1984. Corry was inclined to

blame the Health Board administration for this delay but it seems likely that the issue was more complex than this. Other bodies besides the Board were interested in the project and this interest was not always expressed in friendly terms. For instance, the project had the misfortune to incur the hostility of the psychiatric nurses' union, which felt threatened by some of the new practices which were being introduced. The project was also badly received by some of the psychiatrists in St Brendan's who probably resented the criticism of the medical model which the project implied.⁸¹ It is scarcely surprising then that the Health Board administrators treated the project with caution and refused to commit themselves fully to it, despite the fact that it had won the support of the European Social Fund.

It was not until November 1983, nearly a year after its planned starting date, that the project was eventually accepted by the Health Board. According to Colin Pollard, the project's educational coordinator, the crucial factor in the decision of the administrators to back the project was the involvement of the Curriculum Development Unit:

Given all this in retrospect, it is amazing that the project ever got started at all. The real turning point finally came with the involvement of the Curriculum Development Unit and the agreements reached at the end of November [1983] which culminated in my appointment. This was the first official appointment to the project. It also marked a turning point with regard to official Health Board recognition of a shift in emphasis from a medical to an educational model.⁸²

The second major difficulty which the project encountered was the failure of the Health Board to provide a purpose-built training unit. This failure had unfortunate consequences and was perceived by the project staff to have been caused, not by a lack of funds, but by an absence of commitment and good will on the part of the Board's administrators. The building had been an important part in the original project plan and its failure to materialise meant that the project had to make do as best it could with inadequate and uninspiring

accommodation. This was a great pity. In the original plan, the training unit was specially designed to give the project its own focus and ambience, and it was also intended that the building would be separate from the rest of the hospital, thus emphasising the distinctive atmosphere of freedom and relaxed relationships which the project was trying to foster.⁸³ The training unit was in effect intended to be a symbol of the project's autonomy, and this brings us to the third and perhaps greatest problem which the project had to face.

“Central to all the difficulties encountered by the project was the calculated refusal by Eastern Health Board officers to allow the project a necessary and sufficient degree of autonomy and control over its own operation with appropriate year-end accountability to its funding body”.⁸⁴ This was Corry's view and as events turned out he was probably not far from the truth. Originally it had been intended that the project would be set up as limited liability company with its own governing board, representative of a wide spectrum of interests, and with the Department of Health and the Eastern Health Board acting as legal guarantors.⁸⁵ Such an arrangement would have given the project the necessary degree of independence to carry out what was undoubtedly a radical programme. The Health Board, however, would not agree to this and established instead a Board of Directors, answerable to itself alone. This body never succeeded in winning the confidence of the project team; it remained remote from them and apparently was never really in command of the project.⁸⁶ The real power lay elsewhere - in the hands of the Health Board administrators.

It would be wrong, however, to accuse the Health Board administrators of callousness towards the project; even an outspoken critic like Corry was prepared to admit on occasion that “their hearts were in the right place”.⁸⁷ The administrators, however, were removed from the realities of the project and were preoccupied with other problems, such as coping with major cut-backs in hospital funding with consequent industrial action from the nurses' union. It was almost inevitable, therefore, that the project became entangled in the mesh of

arguments and disputes that were part of the interaction between management and unions in a large health service operating under difficult conditions. In such a situation autonomy was never a realistic possibility and the project had either to accommodate itself to the system in which it found itself or else suffer the consequences of rejection. Corry, although not the kind of person to settle for an accommodation with the system, seems nonetheless to have realised the utopian nature of what he was trying to achieve. This is evident from a comment he made in his last report to the Board of Directors: "We in the Resocialisation Project felt a responsibility, a heartfelt duty, to offer a vision for the future, even if the vision was only partially attainable".⁸⁸

The nearest the Resocialisation Project ever came to exercising autonomy was in that part of its work which came within the responsibility of the Curriculum Development Unit - the educational programme carried out by Pollard and his team of teachers. From the very beginning the Unit had been concerned about the autonomy of the teachers and had tried to ensure this by seeking representation on the Board of Directors. As we have seen, however, this request was refused. In September 1985, the Unit renewed the request, this time with greater determination. The occasion was the alarming state of teacher morale which had caused by a series of problems such as lack of classroom facilities and community accommodation for the patients, the announcement that the training centre would never be built and the rejection of proposals for follow-up and after-care.⁸⁹ In the director's view these constraints amounted to placing an intolerable burden on the project and consequently, on 17th September 1985, he felt obliged to issue an ultimatum to the Health Board authorities:

Representation by the Curriculum Development Unit on the Management Board of the Resocialisation Project was requested by me from the beginning of the Project in order to safeguard the Project's educational component, for which the Curriculum Development Unit is responsible. The need for such representation has now become imperative because the teachers on the

Project are experiencing difficulties which make their continued involvement impossible. It is therefore with regret that I have to inform you that if you cannot meet my request for representation on the Project's Management Board, I shall have to advise my own Management Committee to consider terminating our involvement with the Project.⁹⁰

The ultimatum produced an immediate effect and within a short space of time the Health Board had taken several steps to improve the situation. These were the provision of two new community houses with the promise of two more, the provision of three prefabricated classrooms, the promise of a day centre, an agreement to set up fortnightly meetings between key project staff and the Board of Directors and an undertaking to reconsider the Unit's request for representation on the Board.⁹¹ By any reckoning these were substantial concessions and for a while it almost seemed as if the project had found a new lease of life. In October 1985, a third group of patients was admitted and a new cycle of resocialisation was started.⁹² In November, the Unit and the Health Board reached an agreement which, although it did not meet the director's demand for a place on the Board of Directors, nonetheless made it possible for representatives from both sides to meet regularly.⁹³

The first of these meetings took place the following December. The Unit's Management Committee had established a special subcommittee for the purpose, while the Health Board was represented by its programme manager, Ted Keyes. Keyes envisaged a bright future for the project and went so far as to suggest a national seminar to disseminate its results. He was also confident, he said, that the project would attract the support of the European Community for a second three year phase.⁹⁴ Two further meetings took place, in February and April 1986, during which the Unit's representatives pursued the idea of the seminar and drew up a planning document for it. In their view the seminar would be of crucial importance to the

project's outcomes; it would be oriented towards policy makers from both education and health and explore all the issues raised by the project in a frank and responsible manner. It was intended that the seminar would be opened by the Minister for Health and closed by the Minister for Education, and that a European dimension would be included in the programme.⁹⁵

For a short while it looked as if the Board of Directors was willing to go along with the idea of exploring the issues raised by the project in a high profile seminar. The following May, however, saw a change of heart - or perhaps a failure of nerve. On 5th May, the Chairman of the Board wrote to the director informing him that the seminar had been cancelled. The reason given was that the project had been invited to make a presentation at a European Community Workshop the following October and in these circumstances, the Chairman felt, it would be better to wait "until the project had been completed before presenting our findings to our Irish colleagues".⁹⁶

By June 1986 it was clear to everybody concerned that the project's days were numbered. Some of the staff had read the signs of impending closure several months earlier and had already made arrangements to leave. Colin Pollard has left us a moving account of what it was like to work on a project that everybody knew was doomed:

In February 1986 the spirit of the Resocialisation Project died, not with a whimper let alone a bang; it simply ceased to exist. On the surface everything seemed to be normal. Classes were still taking place. We still had our weekly policy meetings, for what they were worth. Adare House [a project hostel] appeared to be developing along the right lines, and yet there was something missing. At first I thought that it was only myself who felt this way and that my heart was ruling my head and colouring my judgement; however, it soon became apparent that others were beginning to feel the same way, even if they couldn't quite put their finger on what was wrong. In fact the spirit had

slipped away so gently that it was only in retrospect, months later, that many people could actually pinpoint its demise.⁹⁷

It is tempting in retrospect to think of the Resocialisation Project as a story of heroic failure - a group of dedicated people battling against an unyielding and uncaring system. In some ways this was true, but the project has also to be seen as a story of lost opportunities. Its chief weakness, perhaps, was that it became too inward looking, too focused on itself, and consequently it neglected to join forces with other like-minded initiatives. This can be seen at two levels - first of all on the national scene and secondly in the wider context of the European Community.

In December 1984, about half-way through the life of the project, a major report on the future of the psychiatric services in Ireland was published (Department of Health, 1984). The report was drawn up by a study group appointed by the Minister for Health three years earlier and its recommendations were to form the basis of a national plan for the development of the country's psychiatric services, which was later adopted by the Government. There were several aspects of this report which had a close resemblance to the philosophy of the Resocialisation Project. The central idea of the report, for instance, is reminiscent of many of the things written by Corry:

The psychiatric needs of the community should be met by a comprehensive and integrated service made up of a number of treatment components and largely located in the community... In particular there must be a decided shift in the pattern of care from an institutional to a community setting with close links between psychiatry and other services (Ibid., p.viii).

The most striking resemblance, however, between the report and the project was in the approach which both adopted to the process of rehabilitation. For the authors of the report, rehabilitation was "a

central and integral part of care and treatment services”(Ibid., p.71). For the project, it was the key to “resocialising” the patients and thereby restoring them to normal community living. For both, the process of rehabilitation required a multidisciplinary approach and a strategy of co-operation between professionals from different backgrounds.

This brings us to the essence of what the Resocialisation Project was about - its inter-disciplinary nature. It is one thing, however, to assert the need for an inter-disciplinary approach but quite another matter to put it into operation. That the project’s efforts to achieve this ideal were not always successful is evident from the strains that arose from time to time, especially between the teachers and the nurses.⁹⁸ The project nonetheless was of fundamental importance because of its attempt to break old moulds and cross the boundaries of the different professions in an effort to meet the needs of the psychiatrically ill. In this context it could have been of immense significance in the implementation of the new national plan for the psychiatric services but the vital connection between the two was unfortunately never made. The possibility of such a connection had been very much in the minds of the Unit’s representatives when they suggested a high profile seminar to disseminate the results of the project. As we saw, however, the suggestion was rejected and the opportunity was lost.

At European level, the project also seems to have lost another golden opportunity. It had been conceived as a demonstration pilot project for the European Community and so we would expect the European dimension to have figured prominently. Such, however, was not the case and it leads us to wonder why the project remained apparently so isolated from its European context. This was either a deliberate policy - in which case those responsible must be faulted for adopting such a parochial attitude - or else, which seems more likely, the project was so engrossed in its own affairs that it neglected to play its European role to the full. The project’s failure in this regard must be reckoned as one of the most regrettable things that happened to it throughout its

troubled history. Not only did it lose the opportunity of renewed Community assistance but it also lost its place in what became an ongoing European network of rehabilitation initiatives.⁹⁹

At the end of the day, however, notwithstanding the problems that continually beset it, we cannot say that the Resocialisation Project was a complete failure. On the contrary, it should be credited with being very successful in its major aim of rehabilitating long-term psychiatric patients. Where it was less successful was in its attempt to gain acceptance for its methods among a wider professional audience and in society in general. This difficulty had been encountered by similar European projects which were attempting to integrate the disabled into society. These projects had discovered that a methodology of rehabilitation was not sufficient by itself; new structures had also to be put in place and community attitudes had to be changed, if the process of rehabilitation was to be successful:

Social integration according to this approach means a situation whereby the disabled person remains in the community, has his own place in the community (thanks especially to his work) and participates fully in community life. If such a situation does not exist, there is no way it can be created by rehabilitation alone, since this affects the disabled subject only and usually occurs in a separate environment. Social integration depends to a large extent on the attitude of the host environment, on the establishment of certain material conditions, and thus on society as a whole (Commission of the European Communities, 1981, p.28).

In other words, to ensure successful rehabilitation, a whole new approach to social thinking has to be brought about. This advice, however, was not heeded by the Resocialisation Project, perhaps because it never had the opportunity of hearing it. The real tragedy of the project was that it remained isolated and alone in an area where friends and allies were not just a comfort but a necessity for survival.

The Option for the Poor

We noted at the beginning of this chapter how the educational implications of poverty and deprivation influenced the foundation of the Unit and throughout the chapter we have been looking at the Unit's principal efforts in this field. We saw how this took the Unit on a difficult and to some minds a dangerous path - one that seemed a long way from the well-trod highway of traditional research and development. Can we say anything in justification of this endeavour or must we agree with those members of the Management Committee who felt that the Unit was straying beyond its brief?

The Unit was founded to help teachers cope with a changing curriculum and as such has always been concerned with their professional development. It may be that one of the most important issues facing teachers today is to find new meanings in their profession. The world is changing rapidly and the teaching profession must change with it. It is difficult, however, to be open to change and most people, whatever they may say to the contrary, prefer to close ranks and protect themselves in the face of the unknown. Teachers are no exception and yet the healthy development of their profession demands a readiness to move beyond the accepted wisdom and the conventional practice.

It is precisely here that we see the great advantage to teachers of working with the disadvantaged. Such work can challenge the teaching profession to go beyond its frontiers and to venture into the unknown. It can motivate teachers towards meaningful service of people in need - which after all is the basis of all true professionalism. It can also energise teachers in looking for new meanings in what they do and in seeking new forms of professionalism. This perhaps was the most important lesson of the Ballyfermot experiment in the 1960s which we outlined in Chapter 1 and which could be described as an effort to relate the educational enterprise to the concerns and aspirations of a disadvantaged community. The same idea emerged a

decade later in the Unit's projects for the disadvantaged, ESLP, DICE and the Resocialisation Project - a conscious extension of the teacher's professional role in the direction of a needs-related and community-oriented pedagogy. It is something which is still very much alive in Irish education, as we can see from a recent Government sponsored initiative for the long-term unemployed (PESP 1991). The teaching profession then would do well to pay close attention to this growing interest in the plight of the disadvantaged - or the option for the poor, as it is sometimes more expressively called.

A cynic might say that such a concern is not new and the poor will always be with us. Today, however, the poor have an added significance. They are a dispossessed and growing group at the margins of a fast changing society and may well exercise a radical influence on the direction of that change. The new poor are not as biddable as the poor of by-gone years, nor even of the recent past. Contrasting the situation today with the economic crisis of the 1950s, Liam Ryan, a notable Irish sociologist, wrote the following words of warning:

The crisis of the 1950s remained from start to finish an economic issue, it did not spill over into other domains of life, and it left the other major social institutions largely untouched. One cannot speak with confidence that the same will occur today. It is not at all impossible that the present economic crisis could trigger off a political crisis and a general social crisis; it is not at all unlikely that failure to find economic solutions will have major repercussions in politics, in religion, in education, in social and even cultural life generally. In the process the wheel of values and attitudes may turn significantly, the marginal may well become the central, and terrible beauties may again be born (Ryan, 1984, p.104).

Who then are the new poor? According to the theologian, Gustavo Gutierrez, the first challenge with regard to poverty is to renounce

whatever preconceptions we may have about it (Gutierrez, 1983). Poverty, we are reminded by another theologian, Denis Carroll, must be viewed in its totality - in its forms, causes and effects. It can be any form of under-development or deprivation of the necessary means to live decently. It can be hunger, homelessness, bad health or a lack of access to the goods and services which are the right of all. It can be voicelessness in the decisions that affect one's life or lack of participation in the social process. "Poverty", writes Carroll, "puts a question mark over easy talk about the common purpose of the goods of the earth. It rises up to mock the Genesis command about the stewardship of creation. What kind of stewarding can be exercised by those who are deprived even of the means to live?" (Carroll, 1987, p.186).

Although poverty is an evil which oppresses the human spirit, one of the great surprises of the modern world is the revival of religious thinking and practice in the face of poverty and oppression - as we see it expressed in the liberation theology movement of third world countries. God is again seen as meaningfully present among the poor and among those who serve them and this perception is lighting up the gospel for people everywhere. As Carroll points out, the option for the poor commits the Christian Church to understand and denounce the mechanisms which generate widespread deprivation. "It means challenging the prevalent structures in Western countries and the dominant international economic order. It is nothing less than a conversion from old alignments and narrow institutional concerns to much less comfortable solidarity with the victims of injustice" (Ibid., p.190).

Alastair MacIntyre once remarked that teachers were the forlorn hope of Western modernity (MacIntyre, 1987, p.16). Is it too much to hope that something similar to the liberation theology movement can happen in the world of education - that in serving the disadvantaged, teachers can rediscover the dignity, purpose and satisfaction of being true professionals? Could it be that the school, for all its difficulties

and doubts, is still one of the few credible human institutions, if only it is allowed to operate in a meaningful community context? These are questions which arise from what we have said in this chapter about the Unit's work with the disadvantaged and although the answers are neither certain or clear, we should at least feel that in raising the questions in the first instance the Unit deserves a modicum of credit.

CHAPTER 6

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In the competitive world of curriculum development, all projects are doomed to succeed. "Learning from failure" is empty rhetoric - there is no time, no room to fail. At best, you learn from other's failures, not your own.

ESLP had many failures, at many levels. I don't think we were ever able to learn from them as professionally as we should. This was largely due to what we felt was an intimidatory evaluation, squatting in our home, not allowing us any privacy, watching our failures and contributing to them. But it was also due to the educational culture we operated in, within the Unit and within the EC

network. The fear of failure, the denial of failure was built into our operations: it is the educational equivalent of the Irish entrepreneurial culture!

However, I think the success of the project was much greater than you indicate. Especially, the ESLP was very significant in:

- school programmes (in comparing work exploration etc).
- assessment/certification: issues introduced (profiles, criterion-referenced assessment etc) which were years ahead of their time (that time has still not arrived!).

Little reference to EC dimension, to IFAPLAN etc. I would say that if the Shannon and Dublin projects were removed, the IFAPLAN documents of the mid-80s would have been hugely reduced in substance. The EC serves as a satellite dish for dissemination of Irish projects in Ireland. The deserved Irish success of Shannon's mini-companies is a result of its European "adoption". Less spectacularly, I remember attending a meeting at which a Department Inspector proposed a system of pupil profiles, quoting from an authoritative European source. What he quoted was, verbatim, what I had written in an ESLP report, reproduced by IFAPLAN and coming back to Marlborough Street from Brussels. (G. Granville to A. Trant, 14 April 1992, ESLP Papers).

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 - iii. the co-ordinated provision of information and guidance about post-school opportunities for young people;
 - iv. the development of practical co-operation between educational authorities and employment and social agencies, in order to provide work

experience and the general use of the environment as a learning resource;

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CHAPTER 7

THE WIDER STAGE

The Environmental Crisis

In 1970 the International Union for the Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources (IUCN) called a conference on environmental education in Nevada, USA. At the time the term “environmental education” was new and one of the conference’s aims was to try to define it. This proved to be a difficult task and what emerged from the debate was not so much a concise definition as a broad description which afterwards received world-wide acceptance. Environmental education, according to the conference delegates, should be viewed not as a new discipline but rather as a process, in which values were clarified and concepts, skills and attitudes were developed in order to understand the complex pattern of relationships between man’s culture and his biophysical surroundings (IUCN, 1970).

It is not surprising that the IUCN conference found it difficult to be precise about environmental education. The term is based on two concepts which have always proved very difficult to define. What is education and what do we mean by the environment? There is nothing essentially new about these questions because throughout history men have always explored the meaning of education and have also wondered about the environment. To understand the meaning of environmental education, however, we must see it as an idea which has only recently emerged and which takes its essential connotations from the problems and preoccupations of contemporary society. The *raison d’être* of environmental education is to be found in a peculiarly modern phenomenon, often described in general terms as the environmental crisis.

Environmental problems of one kind or another have been with us for a long time. The Book of Genesis relates how the cattle herds of Lot and Abraham became so numerous that the land was not sufficient to accommodate them both. When a dispute broke out between them, the conflict was only resolved by Lot moving to the Jordan plain and Abraham to the hills of Canaan (Genesis 13: 1 - 12). In ancient Greece, Plato warned about the effects of the destruction of soils and mountain forests, while in thirteenth century England, coal-burning had made smog a health hazard in London (McCormick, 1985, p. 15).

In the 1960s, the environmental movement assumed an international dimension. There was now a growing awareness throughout the world that the environment was at risk and that something should be done to save it. Several factors contributed to this awareness, but first of all there was the influence of the written word, as certain books and reports caught the public imagination. In 1962, Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* graphically illustrated the effects of the misuse of synthetic pesticides and insecticides (Carson, 1965). Other environmental prophets quickly followed such as Paul Ehrlich, Ralph Nader and Barry Commoner (McCormick, 1985, p.32). In 1972 two influential reports appeared within months of each other: *Blueprint for Survival*, published by the *Ecologist* magazine and *Limits to Growth*, prepared by the prestigious Club of Rome (Goldsmith et al., 1972; Meadows et al., 1972).

A second factor which contributed to the growth of world-wide environmental consciousness was a succession of well-publicised environmental disasters. In 1966 a slag heap, poised above the Welsh mining village of Aberfan, collapsed and killed 144 people, 116 of them children in the local school (McCormick, 1985, p.31). In 1967 the oil tanker, *Torrey Canyon*, spilled 875,000 barrels of oil into the English channel - an event which was followed two years later by a 77,000 barrel blow-out off the California coast, at Santa Barbara (Ibid., p.31). There have been far greater disasters since then, but *Torrey Canyon* and Santa Barbara were the first in a long line of such

incidents and had, therefore, a pronounced effect on the public consciousness.

A third factor was the rise of popular pressure and protest groups. This movement began in the 1960s with the hippies spearheading a movement which rejected the obsession of older generations with success and security. Materialism, technology, power, profit and growth were seen as symbols of all that was bad and that posed the greatest threat to the environment. In 1970 this popular environmental movement received added impetus, when "Earth Day", April 22, attracted thousands of people to more than 11,500 gatherings across the United States. "Earth Day" left large numbers convinced of the need for change and one of its legacies was the growing support for pressure groups such as the Sierra Club, Friends of the Earth, and Greenpeace (Ibid., p.33).

A fourth factor was the influence of international organizations such as IUCN, the United Nations, OECD, the Council of Europe and the European Community. For many people in Europe, the first awakening to the necessity for environmental conservation probably dates from "European Conservation Year", inaugurated by the Council of Europe in 1970 (Council of Europe, 1970). Two years later the United Nations held a conference in Stockholm, which issued a memorable declaration alerting the whole world to an impending environmental crisis:

We see around us growing evidence of man-made harm in many regions of the earth; dangerous levels of pollution in water, air, earth and living things; major and undesirable disturbances to the ecological balance of the biosphere; destruction and depletion of irreplaceable resources; and gross deficiencies in the man-made environment of human settlement.¹

The United Nations Declaration has far-reaching if not frightening implications. An environmental crisis of such proportions is a

terrifying comment on the plight of mankind today. Human beings, in common with other living species, dwell in a narrow band of land, air and water on the surface of the third planet from the sun. Unlike any other species, however, we have developed technologies and social and economic systems, which consume vast amounts of resources, have brought about rapid and bewildering changes and have overloaded our environment with waste. We have, in fact, developed the potential to destroy ourselves. The message of the environmental movement is that the task of our generation is to pull back from the brink. We have to realise that by our decisions and actions we not only determine the quality of our own environment and therefore of our own lives but also that we have in our hands the fate of future generations.

The European Community's Environmental Policy

The basis for the European Community's Environmental Policy can be found in its *Action Programme for the Environment*, first adopted by the Council of Ministers in 1973 and later revised and extended in 1977 and 1983 (Commission of the European Communities, 1984a). Concern for the environment, however, is not something new in the European Community; it goes back as far as 1957, to the Treaty of Rome, and can be said to be an essential part of the fundamental philosophy which brought the Community into being. In the Treaty of Rome the Member States declared that economic growth was not their only objective; they were also concerned with "the constant improvement of the living and working conditions of their people" (Commission of the European Communities, 1984b, p.13).

Keeping the balance between economic expansion and the quality of life was emphasised again at the Paris Summit Conference in 1972 - a meeting which was to act as the forerunner to the Community's subsequent *Action Programme for the Environment*. In calling for such a programme the leaders of the Community declared: "It should result in the improvement of the quality of life as well as in standards

of living. As befits the genius of Europe, particular attention should be given to intangible values and to protecting the environment so that progress may be really put at the service of mankind” (Ibid., p.11).

It is possible to identify four major principles underlying the Community’s *Action Programme*. The first and most important is that the environment is everyone’s responsibility. This is the basic assumption on which the entire programme rests - the protection of the environment should be the concern of everyone in the Community and the public should therefore be educated to be more aware of this fact. This point was emphasised when the *Action Programme* was first drawn up in 1973: “At all levels continuous and detailed educational activity should take place so that every person in the Community becomes aware of the problem and fully assumes his responsibilities towards the generations to come” (Commission of the European Communities, 1973).

Secondly, all human action should be in harmony with the environment. Man’s relationship with his environment should be characterised by husbandry and good management rather than by unthinking exploitation. Since the environment is the basis on which we and everything we do depend, we ignore or abuse it at our peril. If we try to make our policies and practices compatible with the needs of the environment, we shall find that we are ensuring our own happiness and welfare. We must learn however, that there are limits however to what we can safely do with the environment and these limits must be respected (Commission of the European Communities, 1984a, p.98).

Thirdly, environmental problems recognise no frontiers. This is particularly true of the European Community where a recognition of common environmental problems is helping to create a sense of unity. In a very real way the Community’s environmental crisis is a shared one. This is clearly evident in two areas - water and air. Up to 80% of the rivers and lakes in the Community are shared by two or more Member States and the Community besides has a substantial length of

shared coastline on the Mediterranean, the North Sea and the Atlantic Ocean. The trans-frontier nature of European environmental problems is especially evident in air pollution, particularly in the phenomenon known as “acid rain”. This occurs when toxic sulphur dioxide gases are discharged into the atmosphere and carried by winds to fall elsewhere as rain - a rain which destroys forests and farm crops, poisons plants and fish life and even damages monuments and buildings (Ibid., p.34).

The fourth principle is that concern for the environment is the best basis for economic development. This point was emphasised in the 1983 edition of the *Action Programme* where a case was made for maintaining a long-term policy on environmental matters despite the great economic problems facing the Community. The programme argued that the Community’s environmental policy should contribute towards economic recovery by defining the parameters within which a healthy and balanced development could take place. There should in fact be an environmental dimension to all planning - whether in agriculture, energy, industry, transport or tourism. In other words ecology, or the science of the environment, can be seen as a form of longterm economics (Ibid., pp. 82-85).

The *Action Programme* goes on to remind us that there should not be any conflict between economic development and environmental conservation. The ultimate aim of development should be to increase human welfare through an improvement in living and working conditions. The ultimate aim of conservation is similar. Although environmentalists are often seen to be greatly concerned with reducing the negative effects of economic development, their principal goal should be to create the best conditions, in which individuals, families and whole societies can flourish (Ibid. pp. 77-81).

These then are the four principles which form the basis of the *Community’s Action Programme for the Environment*. In practical terms the programme has led to the promulgation of a series of

detailed directives, binding on the Member States, and underpinning all these directives is the Community's anxiety to raise the level of environmental consciousness of its citizens. It is at this point that the Community's interest in environmental education begins and its policy in this regard has been developed at both a general and a specific level. At a general level the policy comprises all those activities which help to inform public opinion and to heighten awareness of the environment - such as publications, congresses, seminars, conferences and symposia. At a specific level, the Community's efforts have been mainly concentrated in one area - the development of a network of pilot schools throughout the Member States. This network has had a chequered history and in the remainder of this Chapter we shall trace its rise and fall.

The European Community Environmental Education Network

In Chapter 3, we examined the idea of networking. It is an idea which lends itself very readily to the environmental movement, especially to those sectors of it which make a point of challenging the positions of powerful vested interests - be they governments or multi-national corporations. A demand for free access to the information on which important planning decisions are based and the liberty to protest against what are perceived to be environmentally dangerous actions are the hallmarks of modern environmental groups such as the Sierra Club, Friends of the Earth and Greenpeace. The latter organisation in particular brought environmental protest to world-wide attention when in the early '70s it sent its members into the American and French nuclear weapon zones "to interfere with, and provoke public protest against these test runs for Armageddon" (Lipnack and Stamps, 1986, p.51).

The idea of establishing a network for the promotion of environmental education throughout the European Community was first put forward in June 1974 by one of the European Commission officials in Brussels - Patrick Daunt.² Daunt, who before he joined the Brussels

bureaucracy had been the headmaster of a comprehensive school in England, designed a simple but very attractive network model at a series of meetings which were convened by the Commission's Environment and Consumer Protection Service in order to apply the Community's environmental recommendations to the field of education. He proposed that the Member States with the Commission's assistance should co-operate together to sponsor a network of pilot primary schools which were already actively engaged in environmental education.³ This network would have two fundamental aims. The first would be dynamic in that the pilot schools involved would advance the range and quality of the environmental education they provided by co-operating and learning from each other's experience. The second would be seminal in that the schools would become models of good practice in environmental education for all the other schools in the European Community.⁴

The pilot schools would be designated by the national ministries for education in collaboration with their local education authorities in a way appropriate to each national system and would be representative of a varied range of geographical and social situations in the Community. The age group would be that of the upper primary or lower secondary - that is approximately 9 - 12 years. To run the network's activities, a fulltime co-ordinating agency would be appointed and it was also planned to establish a steering committee comprising representatives from the national ministries and the Commission.⁵

This was the network idea as originally conceived by Daunt. It was simple and concrete and therefore intelligible and communicable to the diverse educational systems of the Member States. It represented a Community model to achieve a Community objective and as such stood a reasonable chance of being acceptable to the national ministries. The financial implications were clear-cut. Since the schools chosen would already be actively engaged in environmental education, it was not foreseen that there would be significant

development costs falling on the Member States. Finally, the educational implications of the idea were highly attractive. The network aimed to build on creative work already in progress in the schools. It sought, furthermore, to establish a permanent base for the development of teaching methods, the creation and testing of teaching materials of all kinds for a wide distribution and the initial and inservice training of teachers in environmental education.⁶

Daunt, having successfully mooted the idea of the network, decided that the time was ripe to test it and so his next step was to commission a feasibility study. The study was to have two principal elements. The first was to be largely descriptive in that examples of outstanding practice at upper primary and lower secondary levels would be selected from all the Member States and presented as case studies. The second element was concerned with the acceptability of the network idea itself and with this in mind a range of contacts were made with key people working in the field of environmental education in the Member States. The reactions of these people were to be sought and guidelines put forward for future network activities - such as establishing links between schools in different countries, animating exchange programmes and study visits for teachers and pupils and producing resource materials in environmental education, both for direct use by pupils and as background information for teachers. In this context the study was envisaged as a preparatory phase in the establishment of the network itself.⁷

By late 1974 Daunt had decided who would carry out the feasibility study. In December he contacted the director of the Curriculum Development Unit in Dublin and offered him the contract. The Unit at that time had only been two years in existence, so naturally the question arises as to why Dublin was chosen to carry out such an important task. In a letter to the director in November 1974, Daunt hinted that he had heard favourable reports of the Unit's school-based approach to curriculum development and probably as an ex-headmaster himself he was in sympathy with this approach.⁸

Besides, the location of the Unit within the campus of an old and established university had not gone unnoticed. “The TCD siège is good on the side of prestige”, Daunt later noted in a memorandum to his superior, Hywel Jones.⁹

Throughout 1975, the director of the Unit threw himself into the business of gathering data for the feasibility report. He first contacted various international organisations based in Europe with a view to finding information on current trends in environmental education. He then visited the headquarters of three of the most outstanding of these organisations - the Council of Europe in Strasbourg, IUCN in Morges and UNESCO in Paris. During the same period - June to October 1975 - he and two of his colleagues attended no fewer than five international seminars on various aspects of environmental education.¹⁰

The director next drew up a questionnaire, to establish contact with the various ministries of education in the Member States, which was duly sent out by the Commission. The purpose of the questionnaire was to find out in what ways the educational system of each Member State was concerned with environmental education and also to discover something about good practice in the 9 - 14 years age group. Between September and December 1975, the director followed up the questionnaire with a visit to each ministry.¹¹ He also supplemented the questionnaire by contacting over fifty individuals or institutions in Europe, which were prominent in environmental education. By December 1975 he had submitted an interim report to Brussels and by the following April a final report.

What did the director discover from his researches? He was at pains first of all to emphasise the complexity of his task. “The more one learns about the individual systems of education within the Member Countries of the European Community”, he cautiously noted, “the more one becomes aware of complex and rapidly changing factors which make it difficult enough to understand what is happening within

the confines of any one country, not to mention the problem of attempting to generalise about the trends in nine different countries".¹² Nevertheless, having sounded a warning about the dangers of generalisation, the director found it possible to report certain similarities in the efforts of the Member States to develop environmental education. Within the age group 9 - 14 years in particular, he identified a number of common concerns: a realisation that activity-based and child-centred learning was readily realisable through a study of the environment; a willingness to integrate different subjects along environmental themes; a tendency to link schools with environmental facilities, such as museums, zoos and botanical gardens; a growing number of research and development projects in environmental education; an emphasis on the role of urban studies as an essential element of environmental education; and a growing awareness of the importance of voluntary organisations, clubs and action groups, which offered young people an opportunity to involve themselves directly with their own environment.¹³

It was at primary level above all that similar ideas about environmental education in the European Community were most evident. It appeared to be generally accepted at this level that the study of the environment could be a natural extension to and an integrating principle for the entire curriculum. This emerged very clearly from an examination of the curricular guidelines for primary schools throughout the Community and in support of his argument the director gave examples from all the Member States.¹⁴ One, however, will suffice for our purposes here.

In Ireland, a new school curriculum had been introduced in 1971, the guiding principles of which were integrated instruction and child-centred activity. At the heart of the curriculum was a section called "Social and Environmental Studies", which sought to integrate history, civics, geography and elementary science. In this section the environment was seen in a wide context and as such was the starting point for all learning. Furthermore, the aim of the curriculum as a

whole was to stimulate and foster in the child an interest in the world around him and to answer in a natural way many of the questions he might ask about things which confronted him in everyday life. What is a rainbow? What makes our doorbell ring? Why had we to be vaccinated in school today? The essential basis for answering these questions was the child's own observation and therefore a wide range of opportunities was provided to engage in activity, exploration and discovery.¹⁵

One of the main purposes of the feasibility study, we shall recall, was to establish contact with interested officials in the education ministries of all the Member States. In this context, the director was able to report a positive response and in all cases there was agreement in principle to co-operate in the development of a network in environmental education for the age group 9 - 14 years.¹⁶ However, there was a wide variety of views in the ministries about the nature of the proposed network and the pace of its development. Some ministries were in favour of pressing ahead as quickly as possible and two in fact gave the names of pilot schools which they wished to nominate.¹⁷ Others were more cautious and felt that the idea should be implemented slowly; in the first phase of the network, schools should concentrate on getting to know each other by exchanging information and materials and only in the later phases should more ambitious activities be undertaken.¹⁸

The feasibility study had been envisaged by Brussels as the first step in activating the network. It was evident from the director's report that the scene was now set and that the national ministries were awaiting a Community initiative. Nearly a year, however, was to elapse before Brussels took the next step. The reason for the delay is to be found in the politics of the Brussels bureaucracy. The network idea had originally been supported by two sections of the Commission - the Directorate-General for Research, Science and Education (DG XII) and the Environment and Consumer Protection Service (ECPS). The idea itself, as we have seen, was the brainchild of one of the DG XII

officials, Patrick Daunt, but the justification for the Commission's interest in it was based on the Community's *Action Programme for the Environment*, which came within the province of the ECPS. By the end of 1975, it was felt that one or other section should take the responsibility for establishing the network. In December of that year, DG XII took the initiative and submitted to the European Parliament a general education resolution which was intended to embrace the network. The result, however, was a setback. Parliament refused to sanction funds on the grounds that there was no "décision de base" to justify them.¹⁹ The time apparently was not yet ripe for all the Member States to support a Community education programme. It became clear, therefore, that unless the network idea was sponsored by the ECPS within the framework of its own environmental policy the project would never begin.

By Summer 1976 the ECPS at last decided to move. The initiative had by now passed from Daunt to an ECPS official called Richard Geiser. Geiser was convinced that the Unit would be the best institution to co-ordinate the network, since on the evidence of the feasibility report the Unit had already established the necessary contacts in the Member States. In June 1976 he travelled to Dublin and asked the director if he would act as co-ordinator. The director agreed to accept the role.²⁰

Geiser next decided to hold an inaugural meeting of representatives of the national ministries - a body which would also act as the network's steering committee. The slow machinery of issuing and answering invitations according to Community protocol now began and it was spring of the following year before preparations were finally completed. Eventually, 28 February 1977, the representatives of the national ministries - or National Experts as they were officially called - assembled in Brussels and gave their blessing to the new venture.²¹ The European Community Environmental Education Network (ECEEN) had come into being.

The Members of the Network

ECEEN was to last for nearly ten years, from March 1977 to December 1986. It had two phases - the first devoted mainly to primary schools with an age range of 4 - 12 years approximately (1977-81), and the second to post-primary schools with an age range of 12 - 17 years approximately (1982-86). Each phase contained roughly 30 schools with a handful of environmental education centres. How did the network perform and what was its overall effect? These are difficult questions to answer because throughout the decade of its existence ECEEN generated a multitude of activities, materials, documents, discussions and indeed not a few controversies. However, to facilitate an analysis of its performance, let us begin by looking at the membership of the network.

We saw in Chapter 2 how theorists like Gerlach and Hine have postulated certain characteristics of genuine networks: they are said to be segmentary, polycephalous and reticulate (Gerlach and Hine, 1973, pp. 163- 190). How does this description apply to ECEEN? We can distinguish three levels of membership in ECEEN - the pilot schools, the National Experts and the Brussels officials. The linking agency between the three was the Dublin co-ordinating team, whose function in the words of Gerlach and Hine could be described as that of "travelling evangelists or spokesmen, who move across the network, contributing to its cohesion and ideological unity" (Ibid., p.166). We shall examine the interaction of these three levels with each other to see in what way ECEEN possessed the participatory and decentralised style characteristic of all true networks. At the end of our examination we shall have to face the question whether ECEEN was really a network at all, or whether it had within itself some fatal flaws which were to cause its own eventual downfall.

The pilot schools comprised the first, and in the eyes of the co-ordinating team the most important, level of membership of ECEEN. From the very outset the team tried to put the teachers first

and always consulted them on important decisions. In June 1977 representatives from all the participating schools met for the first time at a general seminar in Dublin and agreed to a broad agenda of activities for the following year. This democratic procedure was followed in the nine years of the Network's existence and the annual programme of activities was basically the same as that agreed in Dublin. This programme can be summarised as follows: teacher and pupil exchange visits, project work on agreed themes, teacher seminars, production of materials, publication of a newsletter and dissemination of the network's experience.²²

The second level of membership of ECEEN was that of the National Experts. The Experts were seasoned bureaucrats - ministry officials who were naturally suspicious of utopian schemes and radical philosophies. They were more accustomed to and happier with the traditional pyramid structure of authority than with the informal, lateral and participatory style that was proper to networking. They often tended to exaggerate the distinctiveness and separateness of their individual educational systems, of which they considered themselves to be the jealous guardians. In this regard they were in sharp contrast to the teachers, whom they regarded as occupying an important but lower place in the decision-making process of the network.²³

In retrospect we can now see that it would have been difficult, even under the most favourable circumstances, to have reconciled these two different dimensions of the network - the Experts and teachers. The Experts were the representatives of the national governments and tended to be cautious and conservative. The teachers on the other hand were filled with missionary zeal and were often impatient with official restraint and circumspection. The co-ordinating team tried to occupy the middle ground between the two camps, endeavouring to reconcile each side with the other, and on occasion, both sides with Brussels. This was not the happiest model for a free and creative networking experience.

The third level of membership was the Brussels bureaucracy. Bureaucracies are often described as “faceless” but in the case of the Brussels officials who dealt with the network nothing could be further from the truth. In this context, personalities were to prove as important as policies in determining the network’s development and ultimate fate. We have already seen the important roles played by Daunt and Geiser - the former in planning and the latter in launching ECEEN. We shall now briefly consider the parts played by a number of other key Brussels officials in the network’s story.

The initial impetus which launched ECEEN in 1977 kept it going for four years - until 1981, when it came up against its first major crisis. The crucial question was whether the network should have a second phase and, if so, what should happen to the schools of the first phase.²⁴ A second question that also arose - one that was of crucial importance to the co-ordinating team who would secure the contract for the new phase. These questions were debated with great interest in the network but the key decisions were mainly in the hands of a single individual - Claus Stuffmann in the European Commission in Brussels.

Like Daunt and Geiser before him, Stuffmann was a committed European and fully in accord with the ideology of the network. He was also a warm supporter of the co-ordinating team and well-disposed towards their claim for a renewed contract.²⁵ However, the continuance of ECEEN into a second phase was by no means a foregone conclusion because the network budget was by now becoming an increasing strain on the Commission’s funds.²⁶ Nor could the Dublin team expect that they would be automatically chosen for the next phase. By this time the Network was becoming more widely known and at least one other institution - Institut für die Pädagogik der Naturwissenschaften in Kiel (IPN) - was interested in bidding for the role of co-ordinator.²⁷

By summer 1981, however, Stuffmann had made up his mind. At the network general seminar in Paris of that year, he announced that there would be a new phase which would last for four years and would be devoted to post-primary schools, while at the same time the schools of the first phase were to be given a supplementary year to consolidate their work. Furthermore, to the great satisfaction of the Dublin team, the co-ordination of the network was to remain with the Unit.²⁸

In human affairs, however, nothing is constant. By the end of 1982 Stuffmann was no longer responsible for ECEEN and his place was taken by Arturo Monforte. Monforte had been associated with the network from the beginning but was never very enthusiastic about it. A lawyer by profession, his key role was to draw up the network's contracts and budgets, which according to the Commission's regulations had to be done on an annual basis. In these matters Monforte showed himself to be a hard-headed but on the whole even-handed official. He considered himself to be a cynical realist and once told the director that the only reason for the network's existence was an oversight on the part of the Commission. The network was included under a budgetary item called "Environmental Awareness" and it was Monforte's private view that this item had been accepted "only because somebody in the financial section had been nodding".²⁹

Despite his cynicism, Monforte was prepared to co-operate and play his part, once the network was an established item on his agenda. Thus, he was able to keep a tolerably good working relationship with the co-ordinating team right up to the end of the network's second phase, in December 1986. After that date, however, things began to change. Speculation was again rife in network circles as to whether there would be a third phase and who would be the co-ordinating agency. Despite the fact, however, that Anthony Fairclough, the director of the Commission's Environment Section, had declared himself in favour of another phase and of retaining the Dublin co-ordinating team, Monforte refused to commit himself. The cost of the network, he argued, had now reached such a level that according to

the Commission's rules a public call for tender had to be made before a new co-ordination contract could be given.³⁰

In November 1985 matters came to a head when Fairclough announced a major initiative for the whole of the European Community - European Year of the Environment (EYE), which was due to begin in March 1987.³¹ It now became clear that this initiative was going to absorb all the time, energy and money that Brussels had available and in the absence of an official who was prepared to champion the network's claims for support, the future of ECEEN seemed highly problematic. Throughout 1986 and for six months into 1987 the director tried to rally support - but all to no avail. In July 1987 he finally gave up hope and disbanded the co-ordinating team.³²

ECEEN's Understanding of Environmental Education

What did ECEEN discover about the nature of environmental education? It is noteworthy that from the beginning the network was never unduly concerned about definitions of environmental education, being content to accept instead whatever interpretation each Member State put forward. This was a wise position to adopt because it avoided for the most part the danger of becoming embroiled in endless semantic arguments between different cultural and national viewpoints. Besides, there was no shortage of international guidelines on environmental education, drawn up by such bodies as the Council of Europe and UNESCO. What was special about ECEEN, however, was the way it took these guidelines seriously and tried to translate them into practical school realities - in other words to test their curricular viability. As the director put it:

We must be able to describe the different sets of conditions which make successful teaching about the environment possible. We must set about discovering what works best in the classroom and why. We must be able to devise pilot projects if we are to get a clear idea of content and methodology. In a word, we need case studies of environmental education in action.³³

Providing case studies of environmental education in action, many of which were afterwards published, was one of the achievements of the network. These case-studies were largely accounts of various kinds of school projects, carried out under different conditions and over different lengths of time - varying from a week to an entire year. All the projects, however, followed the same general methodology and this we shall now endeavour to describe.

Environmental education for ECEEN began with a study of the local area. Such an approach has a long tradition in European education. It pre-dates by many years the modern movement of conservation and environmental education and was advocated by such writers as Froebel, Pestalozzi and Rousseau. The study of the local area is justified not merely because it provides a convenient stepping stone to conservation studies but because it is the natural extension of the school curriculum - the place where much of the child's learning can be defined by direct experience. This approach to local studies is evident in all the network's projects and was summarised by the director in the following words: The local environment

should be the natural extension of the school's curriculum. Only in so far as the school reflects this will it become a living and exciting community. Nor should we make the mistake of thinking that the local environment is too simple or unsophisticated to be worthy of the school's attention. The local environment, no matter what its type - be it a deprived centre city area or a remote village nestling in the mountains - contains within itself all the elements that make up our society and that mirror our age. It is a window into the affairs of humanity (Trant, 1986, p.18).

The most essential concept in local area studies is that of interrelationships; the pupils learn how various features in their environment interrelate with each other and so form a unified pattern.

Within this unified pattern, the pupils gain a clearer understanding of their own relationship with the animate and inanimate beings that surround them - in other words they form an overall picture of their environment, in which all their perceptions are integrated.

This integrated approach to learning can be seen to a greater or lesser extent in all the network projects. It was practised, however, with greater success in the primary schools, where the usual structure of a single teacher responsible for one class lent itself very readily to integration. All the primary school projects emphasised the importance of first-hand experience of the local area. Real-life situations were seen as motivators of children's learning, where the eye was trained to see, the hand to record and the mind to interpret. The immediate environment provided realistic problems for which the traditional school subjects had no cut-and-dried answers. There was also the stimulus and excitement of embarking on a study without being able to predict the results.

In the secondary schools of ECEEN, where subject teaching was the norm, the integrated approach was more difficult to achieve. Nonetheless, the network abounded with examples of interdisciplinary teaching - teams of teachers who, despite the constraints of a subject-oriented time-table, managed to co-operate together on a project basis. This was very difficult to achieve but in the director's mind there was no doubt about the radical nature of what was being attempted. "Perhaps no other feature or characteristic of environmental education", he wrote, "challenges the existing system of education as profoundly as this. If interdisciplinarity were to take hold in the curriculum, then a radical shift in the education power structure would inevitably follow".³⁴

The existing educational systems, in the director's view, were based on a model which assumed that the way to truth was through separate, independent and often unconnected disciplines. Each discipline had its own code, canons and traditions and also its own adherents. Each

discipline was in fact an institution and a power structure. This model, it had to be admitted, had much to recommend it. At its best and purest, each discipline was a community of fellow scholars - from the youngest child at school to the advanced researcher working at the frontiers of knowledge. Furthermore, the strength of the unidisciplinary approach was its ability to specialise and it was because of this that so many advances in knowledge and technology had been possible in modern times.³⁵

In the director's opinion, however, the disadvantages of the unidisciplinary model were obvious. Knowledge was increasing at an unprecedented rate and new disciplines were demanding to be included in the school curriculum. Consequently, it was becoming increasingly difficult to see a unity in the curriculum - a unity which would help to give a meaningful picture of life. Life for many people appeared to be fragmented and lacking in coherence and meaning - a state of affairs which was mirrored in the school curriculum.³⁶

The task of environmental education, therefore, was to seek to unify the curriculum through an interdisciplinary approach because the environment itself was a unified system of balanced and interlocking relationships. It was precisely because people had failed to perceive this unity that we now had an environmental problem. Hence, the whole thrust of environmental education should be to bring about a unified way of looking at reality so that people could appreciate the inter-relationships that should exist everywhere. Environmental education was in effect proposing a new curricular synthesis which could only happen through co-operation among the existing disciplines.³⁷

Besides the emphasis on interdisciplinarity, another noteworthy feature of ECEEN was its advocacy of the problem-solving approach. The problem-solving approach is not unique to environmental education but the network was to put its own particular stamp on this methodology:

Problem-solving means being active and activity means movement and bustle. One cannot imagine a problem-solving approach being kept within the confines of the school. In many ways, the school is an artificial world. Real life is waiting outside with its raw edges and its unsolved problems. The world outside invites the school, beckons it to examine its problems and contribute something, no matter how small, towards the solution. The nature of the problem will dictate the type of activity - a polluted river to be studied or an area of traffic to be measured. The problem itself will impose its own discipline and its own methodology.³⁸

The formation of right attitudes to the environment was also a preoccupation of ECEEN. By the end of the 1970s, attitudinal objectives had become a part of the stock-in-trade of the environmental movement and had been defined in the celebrated Tbilisi Declaration as “acquiring a set of values and feelings of concern for the environment so that individuals and social groups are motivated to participate actively in environmental improvement and protection” (UNESCO, 1978, p.27). Changing people’s attitudes, however, is a notoriously difficult process, and in this matter ECEEN was not prepared to follow Tbilisi the whole way. The final report on the network rightly pointed out that the results of trying to change people’s attitudes can be quite unexpected and often very different from what was intended in the first place. Education, therefore, should never be confused with propaganda. If it is used for propaganda purposes, even in a good cause, there is a danger that the real aims of education will be lost sight of or distorted. True education should be about the formation of human beings and its subject matter should always have a bearing on what makes a person more human.³⁹

This did not mean, however, that ECEEN was hostile to attitudinal objectives - quite the contrary. The environmental education movement in general has done a great service to the world of education by drawing attention to the importance of attitude formation.

Schooling today is perhaps over-intellectual; it has become too abstract and too cognitive in its emphasis on knowledge and the acquisition of skills. Although one should never underestimate the importance of these things - they are the mainstays of our modern technological civilisation - they are not, however, sufficient in themselves. Unless we cultivate attitudes worthy of our status as human beings, we may well end up by using our knowledge and skills in our own destruction. This indeed is the essence of the environmental message. We have to rediscover the importance of attitudes - the cultivation of a right way of thinking and acting.⁴⁰

The final characteristic worthy of note in the methodology of ECEEN was the development of awareness objectives - which Tbilisi defined as "acquiring a sensitivity to the total environment and its problems" (UNESCO, 1977, p 26). The development of awareness means appealing to the poetic, the mystical, the imaginative and the creative side of a human being and in the director's view this was often a forgotten aspect of environmental education:

Awareness objectives are sometimes neglected in environmental education which has tended to lean rather heavily on a scientific and phenomenological basis. Yet if we are to equip our students to cope with a world of uncertainty, complexity and unprecedented change, we must build their confidence by putting them in touch with their own powers of creativity and inspiration.⁴¹

The Outcomes of the Network

In assessing the outcomes of the network we should bear in mind the original aims which it inherited and tried to implement. The first of these was concerned with the quality of the network experience for the participating schools - the dynamic aim. The second had to do with the charge placed on the network to spread its message to other

schools in the European Community - the seminal aim. As it turned out, there was often a tension between the two and in some instances, it could be argued, a contradiction.

The implementation of ECEEN's first aim was never a difficulty and indeed in many respects was an acknowledged success. It was a task which the co-ordinating team understood very well and carried out with great commitment and enthusiasm. For them, the network was an application of the school-based approach to curriculum development with which they were already familiar in Ireland. This perception is evident in the following passage from the Final Report:

The network was primarily a school-based enterprise. This meant that all its activities were based on the concrete, realistic and sometimes imperfect experience of day-to-day school life. From one point of view this could be construed as a constraint. The network depended essentially on the good will and co-operation of practising teachers - people who were usually busy and often burdened with the myriad details of school life. From another point of view, the network's dependence on schools was a considerable asset - perhaps its greatest strength. It ensured that the network was always close to classroom realities and this saved it from becoming too much distracted by theoretical irrelevancies.⁴²

The implementation of ECEEN's second aim, however, was more problematic and in this regard the network was the target of some severe criticism. It had failed, or so it was alleged, to disseminate its activities. It had remained a closed circle - a good experience admittedly for those who were fortunate to belong to it, but more like a club than a genuine network.⁴³ How valid were those criticisms? Now that some of the dust has settled on the controversy that surrounded the network's ending some attempt should be made to answer its critics.

Dissemination was a topic which was frequently discussed in the network, both at the annual general seminars and at the meetings of National Experts in Brussels. It was generally felt that the task of dissemination belonged more properly to the Experts than to the schools; the former were after all better placed to spread the message of the network to the regional and national educational systems. This at any rate was the theory; the practice, as might be expected, was less clear-cut. In countries like Holland and Italy, the Experts had considerably exerted themselves and succeeded to some extent in linking the network with the national systems. In other countries like Denmark, Germany, Greece and Luxembourg, the teachers themselves took the initiative in the work of dissemination. In France and Belgium, the network's sphere of influence was strictly limited by the central authority, while in the United Kingdom and Ireland, its influence was confined to local or at best regional level.

Despite the uneven nature of its dissemination, it is fair to say nonetheless that the network did produce a pronounced overall effect. The effect, however, was the fruit of a slow growth rather than of a dramatic impact. This at any rate was the opinion of the director, when he looked back over the nine years of the network's existence:

Dissemination like truth is the daughter of time. Today with our great pre-occupation with change we tend to become impatient with any process that requires growth and maturation over a period of years. In education, particularly, where many of the basic metaphors used are taken from this same process of growth, it is important to realise that worthwhile results can never be achieved overnight. The term dissemination itself implies a period of sowing and careful tending while the first tender shoots appear. This takes time and many of the typical curricular projects of today are conceived as three or four year spans with an expectation that at the end of that period there will be worthwhile results to be disseminated. We shall have to accustom ourselves to thinking in

longer periods, of about ten years duration. This will have implications for the number of innovative projects that can be sustained, but the important thing is the will to sustain them (Trant, 1987, p.30).

This was a somewhat uncompromising attitude towards dissemination and the director must have been aware that not everyone would agree with him. He was prepared nonetheless to defend his argument on the basis of what he alleged ECEEN had achieved. The network's approach was to make the teachers themselves central to the process of dissemination and this strategy, he claimed, had been vindicated over time.

The network always put the teachers in the centre of the stage. In the early years there were certain misgivings about this among the network's sponsors. It was all very well to ensure that the network experience was exciting and beneficial for the participating teachers but what of other teachers and schools? It was only after about five years that the slow-growing pattern of the network's influence could be detected. Teachers from the pilot schools moved to other schools or were promoted to positions of wider influence. Local and regional networks began to appear, built around one or two pilot schools. Education officials at regional or national level began to see possibilities in the network which fitted in with their own preoccupations. Policy guidelines which used the network activities as examples began to appear and inservice seminars were organised. Finally, more attention was paid to the network at official level (Ibid. p.31).

The director gave detailed examples to back-up his argument. These were not dramatic or spectacular but what one would expect from an enterprise that based itself primarily on the concrete experience of normal school life. They were also the kind of things that flowed from the face-to-face contact between the teachers involved and this, we

may recall, is the kind of dissemination activity that networks are best at. Networks tend to increase their influence more through a pattern of person-to-person contact than through charismatic leadership or high-powered publicity (Gerlach and Hine, pp. 173/174).

It has to be stated, however, that the potential of ECEEN for dissemination was severely restricted by the limited expectations of some of its members. The majority of the National Experts, as we have seen, were unduly preoccupied with matters of control - with ensuring that the teachers and schools in their jurisdictions kept within the bounds of national norms and traditions.⁴⁴ This of course was only to be expected but it was not the best fitting context for the spread of new and radical ideas - and environmental education has a radical, if not to say, subversive dimension.

Neither can the co-ordinating team be exempted from censure. They sometimes failed to see the full potential for dissemination in ECEEN, especially its potential for spontaneous growth. The biggest mistake in this regard occurred half-way through the network's life - at the point of change from the first to the second phase. Instead of incorporating the primary section as an essential part of a new and extended network, the co-ordinating team acquiesced in the decision - albeit under strong pressure from Brussels - to start another network from scratch, thereby abandoning the primary schools with which they had worked for four years.⁴⁵ This mistake was compounded when the new network tried to emulate the achievement of the old, especially in trying to produce attractive publications, but not unfortunately with the same degree of success.

The greatest barrier of all to ECEEN's natural process of growth was the expectation of the Brussels bureaucracy that the network should achieve widespread recognition in a relatively short period of time. This expectation had been formally written into the network's second aim - that the pilot schools should become models of good practice in environmental education for all the other schools in the European

Community. But even allowing for the exaggerated rhetoric that is often used in such declarations, it has to be said that this was an extremely ambitious aim and one that could never be adequately realised. It was never taken too seriously by the schools themselves and the Experts and the co-ordinating team paid no more than lip service to it. For the Brussels officials however - whatever their private view might be - the aim expressed the Commission's main justification for giving financial support to the entire exercise. This support had considerably increased over the years - from £14,000 in 1977 to £180,000 in 1986 - and so the Commission officials could legitimately ask for evidence of a return for their money. The evidence in their view, however, was not forthcoming, because at the end of nine years the network was relatively unknown internationally.

The desire of the Brussels officials for rapid and widespread dissemination came more into prominence at the end of 1985 when plans for European Year of the Environment (EYE) were unveiled (CEC, 1986). What could be termed consciousness-raising activities on a monumental scale were now envisaged as part of EYE and in this context the network cut a very poor figure. Instant publicity and eye-catching events were now in vogue and needless to say the network could not compete with this kind of activity. Nor would it have been reasonable to have expected it to do so, for ECEEN was primarily an educational venture. But what the Commission was now interested in was closer to propaganda than education and in their view the network had outlived its usefulness.

Thus ECEEN ended, in T. S. Eliot's immortal line, not with a bang but with a whimper. It was in many ways an imperfect network - which would not match the classic description of the network theorists. But it did have its moments of glory and some of these happened in the most unexpected places. Ireland, for instance, a country where ECEEN made little impact during its lifetime, at the time of writing has a network of its own - as we shall see in the following section. There are similar examples in other Member Countries but they await

a detailed follow-up study to document them fully. Thus, the network continues to live on, often in unexpected ways. In this context we leave the final word to one of the National Experts, Charles Linsingh from Belgium, who wrote the following words of encouragement to the director:

I presume that like everyone else you must have moments of doubt about the future of environmental education. I myself have stood back a bit from events. I believe that one should not underestimate the long-term fall-out from the network's activity because change occurs in ways that are hidden, unofficial and invisible from the outside. Sometimes I find myself being pleasantly surprised.⁴⁶

The Irish Experience of ECEEN

Ireland's involvement in ECEEN was never strong. Although the pilot schools themselves - three in the primary and four in the secondary stage of the network - were committed and enthusiastic, the problem lay at the official level of the system where very little interest was ever evinced. In the last year of the network's life the co-ordinating team conducted a survey of all the pilot schools through questionnaire and interview, and the picture which emerged from Ireland was not encouraging. Progress in implementing environmental ideas was reported to have been slow and many teachers in the Irish pilot schools were conscious of the conservatism of their educational system. "Time-tables remain unaltered", the survey noted, "and in one case an environmental education project had to be carried out outside school hours".⁴⁷

The Irish experience of ECEEN, however, had positive as well as negative aspects and in one instance at least the network played a highly significant role. This was in the way it helped to forge a bond between the two parts of the country, North and South. When ECEEN began in 1977, the United Kingdom, as one of the Member States of

the European Community, signified its willingness to participate by nominating two pilot schools - one in Hertfordshire and the other in Aberdeen. The coordinating team, however, were keenly interested in having a school from Northern Ireland as well and with this in view the director raised the matter with Daunt in January 1979.⁴⁸ Daunt was willing to co-operate and undertook to convey the director's request to the Department of Education and Science (DES) in London. He was also shrewd enough to give the DES an acceptable reason - the need to widen the U.K.'s involvement in the network in order to make it more representative of its major regions. This of course, as Daunt fully realised, would result in the inclusion of a Welsh as well as a Northern Irish school but as the director was satisfied with the bargain the plan went ahead.⁴⁹

Daunt's plan evidently succeeded for in June 1979 the DES wrote to both the Welsh and Northern Irish education departments inviting each of them to nominate a pilot school.⁵⁰ The schools were to be given "associated" as opposed to full membership of the Network but in practice there was little difference between the two kinds of status. As far as the co-ordinating team was concerned the important thing was that henceforth the road was open for co-operating with their colleagues in the educational service across the Irish border.

The North/South dialogue that ensued was undoubtedly one of the success stories of the network, but for obvious reasons the entire process was conducted in a low-key manner and so was never given the media coverage so dear to the hearts of the Brussels bureaucrats. The co-operation between schools from two different jurisdictions in Ireland was an example of what the entire network was about, and there were of course several other instances where similar arrangements were made between schools in different Member States. The Irish experience, however, was unique; not only did it involve exchange visits between teachers and pupils on both sides of the border but it also led to the presentation of a North/South bilateral report at a major Network seminar, when all the other Member States

presented national reports. Needless to say the protocol of the European Community allowed for such bilateral arrangements and it was an encouraging sign of what joint membership of the Community could bring about between both parts of the island of Ireland.

The Irish experience of co-operation did not come to an end with the demise of ECEEN. In 1988, with the help of a small grant from Brussels and with the assistance of Co-operation North, a North/South network of schools was established to keep alive the ideals and practices established by ECEEN. The new network has been well received and is supported by the two Government departments of education, North and South. At the time of writing it comprises 28 schools, operating in seven groups, each group embodying two very important principles - cross-cultural co-operation on the Northern side and cross-border co-operation between North and South.

Before bringing this chapter to a close we shall briefly look at the relationship between the network and the Unit. Both had many important things in common. For a start they shared the same philosophy - the idea of innovating through networking. Although ECEEN did not borrow this idea from the Unit - the concept as we have already pointed out came from Daunt - it is nonetheless true to say that under the Unit's influence ECEEN became "network oriented". Another similarity was in the pattern of curricular organisation. ECEEN's primary phase, for instance, had the same threefold curricular structure as Humanities - a study of the local area followed by a study of contrasting environments and finally a consideration of topical issues.

ECEEN in turn had an influence on the Unit. The scope and variety of the schools involved in the network was far greater than anything encountered by any of the Unit's other projects and the success of the curricular structure borrowed from Humanities must have been a considerable boost to the Unit's self-confidence. What had been tried out in Ireland was now seen to be working throughout the European

Community. This was probably ECEEN's most important contribution to the Unit: the network provided a wider stage to test some of the Unit's ideas and also a bigger and in some ways a more appreciative audience than the Unit had ever found at home.

CHAPTER 7

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- 34 A. Trant, "The Secondary Network: An Overview", 1986, p.20, ECEEN Papers.
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- 43 In February 1987, at a prestigious environmental education conference organised by the University of Dortmund in conjunction with the Commission of the European Communities, the network was criticised by several speakers for being too closed in on itself (A. Trant, "Report on 1987, Dortmund Conference", ECEEN Papers).
- 44 The critique of the Experts' performance is based on a number of sources. The Experts gave what could be termed their formal or institutional positions at their regular meetings in Brussels. Occasionally individual Experts went further and expressed themselves at greater length in the network's newsletter, *Milieu*. However, for a more frank appraisal of the Experts' performance, it is necessary to consult the field reports of the co-ordinating team for the years 1977-86.
- 45 In fairness to the co-ordinating team it has to be said that they successfully put forward a recommendation to give the primary schools an extra or "after-care" year for 1981/82. This arrangement, however, came to very little in practice.
- 46 C. Linsingh to A. Trant, 22 May 1984 (translated from the original French by the writer), ECEEN Papers.
- 47 A. Trant, "The Secondary Network", p.41.
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CHAPTER 8

THE CLOSING CIRCLE

Planning for the Future

This is the last chapter in the story of the Unit. The title, “The Closing Circle”, is taken from a book by the American ecologist, Barry Commoner (Commoner, 1972). The expression connotes a sense of nemesis, the sound of fate knocking on the door, the feeling that the Unit, at least as the director knew it and had helped to shape it, had gone full circle. We take up the story on 7th October 1985 with a meeting of the Management Committee. During the meeting the director gave notice that he intended submitting a four year plan for '86 to '90 - a plan which would follow the successful four-year plan of '82 - '86. As an indication of the work that lay ahead, he also presented a schedule that showed how it was intended to draw up the plan. Nobody on the Committee had any difficulty with this and the schedule was accepted without comment.¹

A month later, the first draft of the plan was ready and it received an airing at the November meeting of the Management Committee. Again the discussion was without controversy. Professor Rice was complimentary, congratulating the director and deputy director on what he said was a very good document. The chairman at this period was Kader Asmal who, rightly considering that all the members had not yet digested the full implications of the plan, asked for a fuller discussion at the following month's meeting. He also drew attention to the fact that the plan made no mention of either staffing or budget - items that would have to be considered if it was going to be taken seriously.²

The new plan was basically the same as that drawn up in 1982. The original five broad areas of work - senior cycle, junior cycle, curriculum support service, research, and programmes with outside

funding - were all retained. A new category was added, namely youth and community education - an addition which probably reflected the influence of the highly acclaimed School Street experiment of the Dublin Inner City Education Project. The underlying rhetoric of the plan was also familiar: priority for the educationally disadvantaged, an emphasis on the links between school and community and a consciousness of educational trends elsewhere, especially in Northern Ireland and the Member States of the European Community.³

It was clear that the plan in general did not envisage any radical change of direction in the way the Unit was going. No such change appeared necessary for apparently things were going well for the Unit. On the home front it was making a name for itself in recent national initiatives, while in the area of external funding it seemed well placed to renew several of its contracts, notably the European Community Environmental Education Network, the Resocialisation Project and the European Community Transition Programme. Continuity was now of paramount importance and it is interesting to see how this was reflected in the way the plan dealt with two basic dimensions of the Unit's work - consolidation and innovation. The distinction between the two, it was argued, need never be an absolute one in practice. Consolidation should always involve innovation, usually within an existing and well-tried framework, while successful innovation should always build on existing foundations but should look for a new approach.⁴

This kind of reasoning looks somewhat strained today and there is little doubt that the balance between consolidation and innovation in the plan was clearly in favour of the former. The authors of the plan, the director and deputy director, had at least the honesty to admit as much. "The innovative element may well be comparatively small", they wrote, "but is no less important than the consolidation element. If it is truly innovative it will probably be controversial and difficult to support financially".⁵ In other words it did not pay to be too daring. The Unit had evidently learnt this the hard way and was not disposed

to take risks which would endanger the progress it now seemed to be making.

The Unit had indeed come a long way in the fourteen years of its existence and the introductory section of the plan rehearsed the story of its rise to fortune. When the Unit was first established in 1972, it was, we are told, “a small affair with two curriculum projects, a staff of four people and five pilot schools”.⁶ During its early years, its major preoccupation had been to survive, but later, as it gained strength and confidence, it began to grow, acquiring new projects, working with more pilot schools and publishing materials in an attractive format. By 1985, the Unit, by Irish standards at least, had become an organisation of impressive proportions, with a project staff of 17 full-time and 13 part-time members, an administrative staff of 8, and a full-time director and deputy director. It now worked with 900 teachers and 20,000 students in over 100 pilot schools, not only in Ireland but throughout the European Community. It had published nearly 30 books for schools and it operated four out-centres - a centre for unemployed young people in the south inner city, a learning centre for young women also in the south inner city, a work exploration centre in the north inner city and an outdoor education base in County Wicklow. Finally, the Unit acted as an examination board for the assessment and certification of new courses at regional and national level for nearly 3,000 students annually.⁷

It is a measure of the Unit's confidence in itself and its future that these facts were paraded openly, almost defiantly. The days of reticence and modest dismissal of its own achievements seem to have passed. Even finance - that most sensitive of issues for a struggling organisation that was perpetually short of money - was no longer a matter for secrecy. “The Unit”, we are told, “receives in addition to its major financial support from the City of Dublin VEC, substantial funding for research and development projects from the European Community and other outside agencies”.⁸ We are no longer dealing with a shy and self-effacing body but with a Unit which was proudly

proclaiming that it had survived persecution and was now emerging from the catacombs.

It is difficult today to understand how the director could have been so imprudent as to have based his case for a further four years' existence on what seems like a needless list of boasts. The most charitable interpretation of his argument is that he was hoping to convince his sponsors that the Unit was worthy of continuing support because of its impressive record - in scriptural parlance it was a question of "to him who already has more shall be given". This, however, was to misread the temper of the times and particularly the attitude of the Department of Education, which now found itself with incontestable evidence on the extent of the Unit's growth and future ambitions.

On 2nd December 1985, when the Management Committee resumed its discussion of the Unit's four year plan, Salters Sterling, one of the University representatives, pushed the debate in a new direction. The Unit, he said, had implications for the training of teachers, for the running and organisation of schools and for the concept of what a teacher's job was about. These implications, he pointed out, had a bearing on the Unit's relationship with each of its three sponsors - the CDVEC, the University and the Department of Education. The Unit was in fact raising questions for each of its sponsors to answer and these questions should be articulated in the planning document.⁹

Sterling's comments were taken a step further by Terry Doyle, one of the CDVEC representatives, who suggested that "the idea of the three sponsors reflecting on the implications of the Unit's work might be something that could be written into the plan as an ongoing activity for the future".¹⁰ Evidently, the plan was now taking on a wider significance - a point which was emphasised by Asmal, when he referred to the Unit's national role and the importance of consulting with a wide spectrum of interests, including the teacher unions.¹¹

Early in the new year the plan was re-drafted by the director and deputy director.¹² The original six programmes were reduced to five, with the research programme conveniently absorbed into the curriculum support service. An important addition now appeared - a description of the issues which the Unit was raising for each of its three sponsors. This was a bold piece of writing and very likely inspired by Sterling's remarks at the December meeting. The CDVEC was first addressed and here two major concerns were identified. The first was familiar - the need to cater for those students who, because of learning difficulties of one kind or another, were not suited for the traditional examination courses.¹³ We recall that it was to meet this need that the Unit had been established in the first instance and the thrust of much of its work still lay in this direction.

The second concern was of more recent origin but was just as pressing as the first. From the end of the '70s onwards the CDVEC schools had to face a new challenge - coping with the effects of growing youth unemployment. At one level this meant increased pressure to develop new courses as more and more young people stayed on at school. At another level, the schools found themselves trying to cope with what the authors of the plan called a crisis of relevance. "Young people who cannot see a connection between their schooling and their employment prospects are calling into question the meaning of the education they are receiving. This is the context in which the Unit's relevance to the CDVEC has to be sought".¹⁴

It is one thing, however, to define this problem but quite another to propose a workable solution and in this regard at least the plan could not be accused of shirking the issue. There were two ways, it asserted, in which the problem could be tackled. The first pertained to the structure of the CDVEC system itself, which in essence was community based. This important fact, however, was in danger of being forgotten because the CDVEC, like many similar institutions, had become preoccupied with system maintenance and with its own survival. It was now reminded bluntly of its chief task - "to discover

anew for itself the meaning of vocational education and its relevance to the community which it serves".¹⁵

This assertion was followed by another, equally trenchant and outspoken: the quality of leadership in the CDVEC schools should be improved. The plan was at pains to distinguish between leadership and management. Leadership was defined as "a moral quality which inspires people to take responsibility for the common welfare".¹⁶ A good leader was a person who could create the space for others to live more fully and more meaningfully - a quality which was applicable not only to principals and senior staff but to all teachers. "It is a quality that can be nourished and strengthened - although perhaps not created. More than anything else, it is a quality that will help to transform schools into living and vibrant communities, dynamic and outward-looking and responsive to the demands made on them".¹⁷

The plan next addressed itself to the Unit's other two sponsors, the University and the Department of Education - but principally to the former. The major issue here was the enhancement of the teacher's professional status, a theme very close to the heart of the Unit's work and in its own view the secret of its success:

Whatever success the Unit may be credited with is attributable to the opportunities that it has created for teachers to extend and in some cases reinterpret their professional role. This has resulted in an increased sense of commitment among the teachers, the assumption by them of new responsibilities and the consequent release of a great flow of energy and enthusiasm.¹⁸

There was, however, a dark side to this picture. The Unit, as the plan pointed out, had been originally established within the TCD School of Education because of the expectation that there would be a natural affinity between the two. This expectation had not been fulfilled. The plan, however, entertained the hope that each institution could still

make “contributions of enormous benefit towards each other.” The School of Education, with the Unit’s participation in its research and teaching programme, could exert “a crucial influence on the reshaping of the professional image of the teacher in this country”, while the Unit for its part could develop through the help of the School of Education “a new dimension of reflection and depth”.¹⁹

This then was the kind of planning document which the Management Committee had to consider at its meeting in January 1986 but again the discussion turned out to be uneventful. The Department of Education representatives asked for more time to discuss the document among themselves and this was agreed to. In the meantime it was decided to refer the plan to the Steering Committee, a body which had not met for three years but which was now to be resurrected in order to pronounce on the future direction of the Unit.²⁰

The Question of Research

The first shots of controversy were fired when the Steering Committee met on 17th February 1986. They came mainly from John Heywood, Professor of Teacher Education at Trinity College, and he took the trouble to amplify his remarks in a written submission which he afterwards sent to the Management Committee. Heywood’s principal criticism was that the activities covered by the plan lacked focus. “They seem to be undertaken,” he noted, “because of the dictates of survival rather than from the pursuit of distinct educational aims in which the response is illuminative rather than predetermined”.²¹ Asmal was quick to come to the Unit’s defence but his argument only went some of the way in countering Heywood’s criticism. The central focus of the Unit’s work in Asmal’s view was in its distinctive style of curriculum development. Several of its projects had far-reaching social implications and in many instances the Unit had become involved in these because there was no other agency which was prepared to respond.²²

Heywood's main line of attack, however, was not so much against the plan itself as against the Unit's organisational structure in general.

At the present time it would seem that the structures which exist for what has become an extremely large (finance and manpower) organisation may be inadequate. If this is so then the implications are for the VEC rather than necessarily for the University. For example, at the level of staffing, there would appear to be little planning either in respect of career development or future service to the VEC. A more systematised approach to staff development might produce individuals able to undertake command group training in schools. Some of the problems which I see arise from lack of organisational clarity and focus in a system desiring life yet insufficiently open.²³

As well as a lack of organisational clarity, Heywood pointed out another weakness - "the hidden conflict between the two roles which the Unit has been given, i.e. the provision of a service on the one hand and the conducting of research and development on the other".²⁴ These two roles could perhaps be reconciled but only if the Unit were organised differently - if each project were given its own steering committee with managerial rather than advisory functions. This of course would imply a radical change in the Unit's entire management structure and in this regard Heywood advised that a "matrix system of management would be invaluable".²⁵

It has to be said that Heywood's remarks contained several points of substance which merited consideration in an open and constructive debate. The Unit was in fact a very large organisation with a considerable outlay of funds. The Steering Committee had now before it a budget which estimated the Unit's four year plan at an annual cost of £630,000 for home-based and £311,000 for externally funded projects - a total which was just £60,000 short of the million mark.²⁶ This was big money by any standards but yet the entire structure of the Unit rested on nothing better than an *ad hoc* basis.

An open and constructive debate, however, did not take place and in a way this bears out the validity of Heywood's criticism concerning the Unit's organisational weakness. The Steering Committee, which should have been the primary forum for such a debate, was not functioning, or perhaps more accurately was not allowed to function, according to the brief it had been given in 1978. The fact that it had not met for three years was an indication of the lack of importance which the director attached to what was supposed to have been the Unit's policy-making body. Heywood himself put his finger on this problem when he referred to the less than friendly atmosphere in which the debate was conducted:

At the meeting it appeared that some controversy was generated by the fact that the Steering Committee last met in 1983. We did not review the minutes of that meeting and in consequence were faced with advising on a plan, largely hagiographical as such plans are, without sufficient evaluative information about the activities undertaken in the intervening period. In the absence of this information argument becomes generalised and sometimes acrimonious.²⁷

The acrimony that emerged was due to the reopening of an old wound - the strained relationship between the Unit and the School of Education. The plan had referred to this and had even held out the hope that the relationship could be mended. Now, during the Steering Committee debate, Professor Rice referred again to this issue. His original hope, he said, had been that the establishment of the Unit would represent an institutional connection between the Dublin City vocational schools and the University of Dublin - an institutional connection that would have been "fertilised by research". He was sorry to say, however, that his hope had been disappointed.²⁸

Rice's criticism of the Unit's lack of a research dimension was not new for he had consistently put forward this view in the past. On this

occasion, however, he was not allowed to go unchallenged. Asmal somewhat tartly pointed out that Rice's opinion was not the official view of Trinity College and that in any case the Unit's record in research had been vindicated by no less a person than Malcolm Skilbeck, who had "an established international reputation in the field of curriculum development".²⁹ This of course was an argument *ad hominem*, pure and simple, and was certainly not conducive to a calm and rational debate. Asmal concluded by inviting the School of Education to submit a document giving their own interpretation of the meaning of educational research. This was throwing the gauntlet at Rice's feet but in fairness to him it must be said that he took it up in style. Within three weeks he had submitted to the Management Committee an eleven-page paper entitled "The Question of Research", in which he defended his views.

Rice first recalled the essential reason for locating the Unit in the University - to engage actively in research and by so doing to profit from the association with the University School of Education. "Otherwise," he pointed out, "we might equally well associate with the College any number of other educational institutions in the city which might well be grateful for a university address".³⁰ The Unit, however, had not lived up to this expectation and although it had produced a considerable volume of development and service work, it had not achieved a corresponding body of rigorously established research.

Rice then went on to ask the question: what is educational research? In his view the answer lay in the nature of education itself, which he saw as a professional activity concerned with achieving the development of the human being in a complex world. In this sense education was analogous to medicine in that it drew on a range of discrete disciplines such as philosophy, psychology, sociology, economics, history and management. Like medicine, it was "a practical activity that involved the application in a concrete situation of a synthesis of scientifically established information".³¹ Like

medicine, too, it used tools - “cognitive tools such as statistical methods of data collection and physical tools such as computers and elements of audio-visual technology”.³² Consequently, the field of educational research was immensely varied and could be either pure or applied. In essence however it was a collaborative undertaking involving a diversity of contributions from a variety of workers.

For Rice the key term in relation to any kind of research worthy of the name was “rigour” - a word he was fond of using in every debate that arose on the topic. “What is essential, in spite of the difficulties”, he wrote, “is that educational research should be inspired by the same ideals of rigour and objectivity as characterise research elsewhere in the University. Even action research, which unfortunately can sometimes degenerate into a form of pseudo-research, can be conducted and reported with the same standards as the more traditional modes of enquiry”.³³

Rice’s principal criticism of the four-year plan was its lack of an appropriate research dimension and the Unit, he felt, was being unnecessarily defensive in arguing to the contrary. Furthermore, he did not consider it helpful to invoke, as Asmal had done, the past pronouncements of eminent educational authorities:

It is suggested that the Unit may be doing itself a disservice by not undertaking certain kinds of research. It does not seem fair to the Unit to have to appeal to an external evaluation conducted by Professor Malcolm Skilbeck eleven years ago to endorse its present activities. This should not remain as the sole and lasting testament to the quality of the work; the scale of the operation was much smaller at the time and it is necessary to allow for developments in the intervening period. In any case Professor Skilbeck is no enemy of educational research; neither is he the sole authority on curriculum development.³⁴

Rice concluded with a number of recommendations, most of which related to his major thesis that the Unit's research dimension was weak. He followed Heywood in advocating that each project should have its own consultative committee and here he was able to invoke precedent by citing the fact that such an arrangement had existed for the Early School Leavers Project. He finished his paper with a flourish. Referring to the lack of interaction between the Unit and the School of Education, he had this to say:

If there has been too little cross-fertilisation it may well be that it has been impeded by the present structures and by the manner in which they have operated. One may plagiarize an aphorism by suggesting that cooperation has not necessarily failed; it has merely not been tried.³⁵

Rice had made his points with clarity and not without elegance. Like Heywood before him he deserved to have been taken seriously and in this regard we would have expected an answering paper from the Unit. After all, the director and deputy director should have been well able to put forward an opposing thesis on the meaning of research especially as it pertained to curriculum development. The Humanities Project, which in many ways was the Unit's key project, had been built on a philosophy of teacher participation in research and development which had been ably expounded by writers like Lawrence Stenhouse. Stenhouse's ideas, indeed, had exercised a formative influence on the Unit's early development and both the director and deputy director had known him personally.

Besides Stenhouse, we could also point to another view of educational research, about which the Unit was well aware - that of Malcolm Skilbeck. In 1983, eight years after his evaluation of the Unit, Skilbeck had returned to Dublin to conduct a half-day seminar for the staffs of the Unit and the School of Education on the topic, "The Curriculum Project as Action Research". The idea of the visit had been Asmal's, who saw it as an opportunity to reconcile the two institutions, and

Skilbeck had entered into the spirit of the exercise by trying to show how the concept of “action research” could be used as a bridge-builder between academic researchers and curriculum developers. In his seminar paper he had emphasised this point:

It is not too much to say that action research could be a new paradigm through which we will overcome many of the apparently insoluble problems in the present paradigms e.g. the communication barrier between researchers and practitioners, the apparent unusability of most educational research and the peculiar difficulty of establishing definite relationships between educational theories and research studies.³⁶

During the following two years, Skilbeck had developed his ideas for an alternative paradigm in educational research (Skilbeck 1984b and 1985) - a paradigm, he argued, which was more amenable to the concerns of curriculum developers than the traditional research, development and diffusion model. The failure of the latter model, he asserted, was in some ways attributable to the development agencies themselves, which “by staking out large claims, seeking large-scale public funding and adopting highly visible strategies” had overreached themselves and created demands which they were unable to satisfy (Skilbeck 1985, p.259). Skilbeck favoured instead a model which he described as “Review, Evaluate and Develop” and which, he claimed, was the natural outgrowth of school-based curriculum development, action research and other curriculum initiatives of the '60s and '70s.

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research and embody research findings (Ibid., pp. 272-273).

The RED model fitted the Unit's purposes very well and could easily have been used to answer the criticisms of the two professors of education. If then the director and deputy director remained silent, it could not have been for want of compelling arguments. It should also be pointed out that the allegation that the Unit was weak on research was not new; it was a recurring objection and one, moreover, which the director regarded as having been conclusively refuted in the past. We can detect a hint of weariness in his comments on Rice's paper at a Management Committee meeting in April 1986. He recounted how, eight years previously, he had gone before the University Council to justify the Unit's research record in three areas - helping teachers to bring a research component into their teaching, encouraging a research element in the work of students, and ensuring a research output in the Unit's staff. Afterwards, he said, he had met the Provost, F. S. L. Lyons - no mean researcher himself - who had assured him that he was quite satisfied with the Unit's research record.³⁷

We are forced to wonder, therefore, whether the very persistence of Rice's criticisms of the Unit's research record does not point towards a deep-seated difficulty, which stemmed from the different viewpoints of the teacher educator on the one hand and the curriculum developer on the other. It is interesting to see how this difference was also noted by Lawrence Stenhouse in relation to his own work with the Schools Council in England. In the '60s and '70s, Stenhouse, whose background it must be remembered was in teacher education, had noticed that in the universities and colleges of education, the undifferentiated study of education had been losing ground for some time. In a search for greater rigour, university educationalists had come to identify themselves more and more with the constituent disciplines of education, such as philosophy, history, psychology, sociology and comparative education. The rise of the Schools Council, however, had brought a new perspective. Project teams were

established which tended to identify themselves more with curriculum problems than with problems related to individual disciplines. A major new field of research and development, which was closely allied with school practitioners and from which the discipline-based educationalists were excluded, now came into being. The message of this new movement was boldly proclaimed by Stenhouse himself:

The crucial problem for curriculum research and study is the development of a theory and methodology which is subservient to the needs of teachers and schools. This means that the theory has to be accessible and it means that the personnel who identify themselves with this field should not allow themselves - or be allowed - to use their knowledge and expertise to divide themselves from teachers. This is an ever-present danger. When it comes to proving oneself as a researcher, the school is often less attractive than the international conference. There is a place for the latter but not as a substitute for the former (Stenhouse, 1975, p. 207).

It seems clear that the Unit had taken Stenhouse's message very much to heart and had always gone out of its way to identify with teachers. In doing this, however, it risked being careless about the outlook of the University educationalists whom it did consider relevant to the problems with which it had to deal. In England, Stenhouse and his associates had tried to bridge the gap between the academic researcher and the practitioner by articulating a rationale for the curriculum development movement - as essentially one which tried to make research the basis of teaching. With hindsight it can now be said that the Unit should have done more towards articulating the same rationale in the Irish context. That it was never quite able to do this is a comment on the distractions and crises that continually occupied its energies - and this brings us to the second reason for the Unit's silence in the face of the criticism expressed by Rice and Heywood. The director and deputy director had more pressing things on their minds:

they were busy protecting the Unit on another front from a renewed attack by the Department of Education.

The Review of the Unit

The reaction of the Department of Education to the Unit's plan came late - in March 1986 - and the comments of the Department's four representatives on the Management Committee were on the whole hostile. The attack was led by A. Ó Gormáin, a senior psychologist, and C. Ó Conghaile, a member of the Inspectorate. Basically their criticisms were two-fold. First, there could be no question of giving the Unit another four-year term; one year was sufficient. Second, the plan contained a basic flaw: it devoted too many resources to consolidation and too few to innovation.³⁸

The Department's attack seems to have taken the director unawares. During the previous four years the Unit had enjoyed a period of comparative calm, which may have caused him to misread the Department's attitude. But now that the Department's representatives had given their reactions to the Unit's plan, the director, obviously resolving to make the best of a bad situation, welcomed their criticism, late though it was, and suggested that they produce a short document elaborating their views.³⁹ He may have hoped perhaps that by this ploy he would succeed in taking some of the sting out of their attack and the production of a document would allow time for the Unit to regroup its forces.

The director was mistaken. The Department's representatives had no intention of producing a paper which would expose their views to analysis and discussion. It was now emerging that their chief objective was to ensure that the four-year plan would be abandoned and that the Unit should proceed on a twelve month basis only, during which period a major review of its structures and programme would take place. Whether or not they were influenced in this approach by the two papers written by Heywood and Rice is difficult to say. It is

more likely that the tune was being called from within the Department itself where there may have been a serious misgiving about the size of the Unit's operation.

Throughout March and April, the director and deputy director did their best to save what was now becoming a deteriorating situation. They made a number of concessions to the Unit's critics, both from the Department and the University. The role of research would be recognised by establishing a special consultative committee for each of the Unit's projects and an equal balance between consolidation and innovation would be maintained throughout the Unit's work. To show how the latter could be accomplished the director and deputy director went to the length of quantifying in percentage figures the relative amounts of consolidation and innovation in every aspect of the Unit's programme - an exercise which resulted in a table of about 40 activities each with a consolidation and innovation percentage rating.⁴⁰

An equally ingenious treatment with equally improbable results was applied to the proposed budget in the plan. Although there was no escaping the fact that the Unit would cost the Exchequer nearly half a million pounds annually, it was argued that this should be balanced against a similar amount from outside sources. It was contested, furthermore, that the Unit would make a substantial contribution to the State through income tax, pay related social insurance and VAT contributions, with the break-down of these latter figures given as £309,000 annually.⁴¹

The director and deputy director were also at pains to point out that the major thrust of the Unit's work would be in the school curriculum - this was in answer to a charge by one of the Department's representatives that the Unit was now concentrating on out-of-school and community oriented projects. Furthermore the Unit's entire programme would be within the national framework for educational development, as set out in the guidelines of the official body

responsible for this area - the Curriculum and Examinations Board.⁴² In summary, the main strategy followed by the director and deputy director was to try to ensure the acceptance of the principle of a four-year term for the Unit, while making major concessions on content. To achieve this they proposed that the first year be considered a feasibility year which would facilitate the putting into place of new structures for the Unit. This recommendation was no doubt intended to meet the demand of the Department's representatives for a one-year review - which had now become the crucial issue at stake.

The debate continued unresolved into May. The case for a four-year term was pressed hard by Asmal, who used his chairman's prerogative to favour the Unit in every possible way. He was supported by Arundel, who asserted that the Unit's case had the full official backing of the CDVEC. On the University side, Sterling remained staunchly in support, while Rice, now that he had won most of his points about research, took a neutral stance. The Department's representatives maintained their opposition which was mainly articulated by Ó Gormáin.

By the end of the May meeting, the Unit seemed to be gaining ground and even appeared to have won an extra year for its proposed plan. The Management Committee decided to defer consideration of the plan itself and to undertake instead a year's review of the Unit but it also agreed that after the review had finished a four-year programme could be operated. At least this seemed to be the understanding which was reached at the end of the meeting and which was summarised by the chairman.⁴³ The day after the meeting, however, Ó Gormáin wrote to Asmal, indicating that he was unhappy with the outcome:

I noticed that towards the end of the last meeting of the Management Committee some references were made to a five year cycle and to some details of a new management structure which has been proposed recently. I consider that these matters have not been agreed, and that together with other issues, they should be the subjects for discussion during the coming year. I

did not wish to commence discussion on details at the end of our meeting but I hope it will be helpful and serve to save time if I clarify in this letter what I consider and what I have agreed with.⁴⁴

Asmal was incensed at what he considered to be a *volte face* on Ó Gormáin's part. "It is quite clear to me," he wrote in reply, "that what you said in your letter was not what we had agreed at the meeting of the Management Committee of the Curriculum Development Unit. I am sure that the actual agreement we had arrived at would be reflected in the minutes".⁴⁵ The minutes did in fact reflect Asmal's understanding of what had happened but they had not been written at the time when Ó Gormáin voiced his objection. Why Ó Gormáin should have protested is open to speculation but the circumstances surrounding his letter, which came in the immediate aftermath of what appeared to have been an agreed decision, lend credence to the view held in the Unit at the time (and also privately by Asmal) that a senior official in the Department was taking an active interest in what was going on.⁴⁶

In the dispute that was growing, the big guns lay on the Department's side and these were now unmasked. At the June management meeting, Asmal and Arundel made a last ditch stand to hold out for something better than a one year review only to be met with the ultimate weapon - an invocation of superior authority. It was the Department's official policy, Ó Gormáin announced, that there should not be a commitment to more than a one year review.⁴⁷ He also set the parameters of the review by proposing a list of eight basic issues which should be discussed. None of these issues, however, was new and several indeed had already been included in one way or another in the four-year plan. They were cited as the pretext for demanding the review but the real reason was now becoming obvious. The Department wished to delay the process of deciding on the Unit's future - an old refrain which should not have come as a surprise to anyone familiar with similar episodes in the past.

The review was scheduled to begin the following autumn but by then one of the principal actors, Kader Asmal, had departed from the scene. His term as Dean of the Faculty of Arts (Humanities) at the University had come to an end and so he had to vacate his position on the Unit's Management Committee. He had been a warm and forceful advocate of the Unit's policies, partly because he was disposed towards the Unit's point of view and partly because of his natural sympathy for anybody who seemed to be the underdog. A lawyer by profession and a formidable champion of crusades against injustice - such as the Irish Anti-Apartheid movement, of which he was a founder member - he threw his weight unhesitatingly on the Unit's side in the battles it had to wage during his period as Dean.

In the Unit's dealings with the University, Asmal's advocacy was an undoubted asset and his able and assertive style as chairman helped to bolster the Unit's position. With regard to the Department, however, he was less successful because ultimately here he exercised less control and it may even be that his strong and sometimes abrasive personality had negative effects. Asmal was not averse to ruffling a few Departmental feathers from time to time and this did not endear the Unit's cause to the educational establishment in Marlborough Street. It would perhaps be an exaggeration to say that he lost his last battle for the Unit, because at the time of his departure the battle was still in progress. It must be said, however, that the war was not going the Unit's way.

The review of the Unit got off to a bad start. When the Management Committee reconvened in September 1986, it agreed to establish a working party to carry out the review, with two members nominated from each of the Unit's sponsors.⁴⁸ The director, who acted as secretary to the working party, assumed that the chairing of the group would fall to the senior CDVEC representative - Seamus Puirseil. This was a reasonable assumption since the CDVEC and the University had agreed some years previously to share the chairing of the Management Committee on a basis of alternate years and it was

now the turn of the CDVEC to occupy the chair. However, when the working party met for the first time, on 31st October, the CDVEC chairmanship was immediately challenged by the two University representatives - Professor Rice and Dr Patrick Kelly, the newly appointed Dean, who had replaced Asmal on the Management Committee. Kelly maintained that it was not the usual practice in the University for the chairman of a parent committee to chair a sub-committee or working party. Rice argued that if a CDVEC representative were to take the chair the review body would lose its objectivity. At this point in the proceedings Puirseil, who had started the meeting on the assumption that he was the legitimate chairman, walked out and the meeting ended in confusion.⁴⁹

This incident, coming as it did at a such sensitive time, was sufficient to throw the Unit's entire management structure into disarray. The director, obviously angered by what had happened, wrote to Arundel advising him that the CDVEC should seriously consider severing the Unit's link with Trinity:

Two possible courses of action with regard to the University lie open to the CDVEC. The link between the Unit and the School of Education could be formally severed - to the extent that nobody from the School of Education serves on the Unit's management structures. The other course would be to withdraw most of our major programmes altogether from the present Management Committee and reconstitute them under a different aegis. Either course would need to be carefully thought out - giving consideration to the advantages and disadvantages of the University connection.⁵⁰

The depth of the director's feelings needs some explanation. Throughout the previous twelve months he had sought to have a new four-year plan accepted by the Management Committee only to have his hopes defeated. It is true that the blame for this did not rest primarily on Rice's shoulders but his attitude, at least in the director's

eyes, had been unhelpful. The incident over the chairing of the review body had now apparently stretched the director's patience to breaking point. His anger led him to see little future in a continuing association with the School of Education and even to wonder whether there was any significant advantage in the Unit's link with the University. It was in this fatalistic mood that he had advised Arundel about the future of the Unit.

The CEO, however, refrained from doing anything which would disturb the overall relationship between the University and the CDVEC. In Arundel's eyes, what the situation demanded was some diplomatic footwork - a hint to the senior university administrators that the new Dean had been too hasty but that it was in everyone's interest that fences should be mended as soon as possible. This course of action was adopted and its success is borne out by the minutes of the November meeting of the Management Committee, which noted briefly but significantly that the review body was to be reconvened and that Kelly had proposed Puirseil as chairman.⁵¹

The review of the Unit got under way in November 1986 and between then and the following June the working party met on eleven occasions. At the end of that time it produced a six page report with an additional 44 pages of appendices.⁵² The report made general recommendations in five areas - finance, curricular priorities, the balance between innovation and support in the Unit's work, evaluation, and management structures. Detailed recommendations were made on the conditions for accepting new projects and on the staffing of the Unit.⁵³ There was nothing radical or controversial about any of these recommendations; they were essentially practical and gave every indication of the general intention of the three sponsors to continue supporting the Unit.

The report, much of which was written by the director himself, attached great importance to the historical legitimation of the Unit's existence. In a major section entitled "The Aims and Purposes of the

Curriculum Development Unit” prominence was given to what could be called the foundation literature of the Unit - documents such as the 1971 Report of the CDVEC Board of Studies on the Intermediate and Group Certificate Examinations and the 1972 Memorandum to the Department of Education on the establishment of the Unit.⁵⁴ The same emphasis on historical authenticity is also evident in another section entitled “The Policy of the CDVEC in Relation to Curriculum Development”, in which the director tried to show how the picture of the CDVEC’s thinking on curriculum had evolved from the 1930 Vocational Education Act to the coming of the Unit over forty years later.⁵⁵

When it came to establishing the historical authenticity of the Unit’s position within the University the director found his argument more difficult to sustain, the main reason here being that one of the principal actors involved in the story, Professor Rice, was still around to challenge his account. In January 1987, when the review working party discussed the first draft of the director’s historical analysis, Rice protested that the document had not given sufficient emphasis to the role of the School of Education.⁵⁶ In an effort to settle the question, the chairman of the working party requested that both Rice and the director should meet “with a view to amending the document ... and to examine any other basis for cooperation”.⁵⁷

Between January and March a number of meetings took place between the two men but no written record survives in the Unit’s files. We can infer, however, that the meetings bore some fruit, at least to the point of reaching an agreement on the historical analysis of the Unit’s development. On 11 March the working party tabled a revised version of the document which was acceptable to both Rice and the director.⁵⁸ With regard, however, to finding a basis for co-operation between the Unit and the School of Education, the two men had less success. Both promised to produce individual documents, listing the areas where co-operation could but did not exist but in the event neither document ever materialised.

At this remove it is interesting to speculate about what would have happened if Rice and the director had succeeded in composing their differences and had produced a blueprint for co-operation. It would be a mistake, however, to underestimate the extent of these differences, some of which we have analysed earlier in the chapter. We have to conclude that almost from the very beginning there was a fundamental lack of understanding of each other's positions and this lack of understanding probably underlay many of the events which affected the relationship between the two men. For instance, shortly after the Unit was established, the director had gone over Rice's head by inviting other University officers such as the Registrar and the Dean of Graduate Studies to participate in the Unit's management structures - which was scarcely a fair way to treat the head of the department in which the Unit was situated. Rice for his part had been consistently critical of the Unit's research record and this had led him to seek the termination of the Unit's link with the University in 1978. The fact that he was prepared to go that far was something which evidently rankled in the director's mind long afterwards. As late as November 1986, we find the director describing the event to Arundel as "a determined effort to have the Unit expelled from the University".⁵⁹

Why then, we may ask, did the Unit continue to maintain its association with the School of Education? The same question, apparently, was uppermost in the director's mind at this time, as is evident from his memorandum to Arundel in November 1986. It seems, however, that he was not too sure about the answer, for although he had suggested the possibility of severing the University link, he also appears to have been ambivalent about the idea. It would, he realised, have been a very radical step to take and, as he pointed out to Arundel, one that would "need to be carefully thought out - giving consideration to the advantages and disadvantages of the University connection".⁶⁰ The fact of the matter, as the director knew full well, was that severing the University connection would have had serious consequences for the Unit - consequences that went well beyond the realm of the academic facilities which the Unit staff enjoyed in the

University. Far more important was its University status, often a decided advantage in attracting outside sponsorship, and the flexibility in expenditure afforded by the research accounts which the University held on behalf of the Unit.

All things considered then, the best option for the Unit was to stay where it was and since this necessarily entailed maintaining the association with the School of Education, the ambivalent relationship between Rice and the director had to continue. It is evident that by March 1987 the director had accepted this situation and despite his outburst of the previous November, he seemed prepared to come to terms with his position.

By May 1987, as the review wound to a conclusion, it seemed as if the danger from the Department of Education had receded. The Department's representatives had participated in the review process and had appeared to be reasonably happy with the outcome. The review report had even dared to broach the question of the Unit's future - although it prudently avoided any mention of the word "plan", preferring instead the more innocuous term "programme indicators".⁶¹ Nonetheless, there seems to have been a hint of anxiety in the director's mind. His own sense of the Unit's history probably warned him that all was not well. Certainly we are entitled to infer as much from something he wrote in the historical analysis of the Unit's development which was appended to the Review report. His examination of the previous fifteen years of the Unit's history had led him to identify four broad phases in the Unit's development - three phases of expansion and one of danger and uncertainty.⁶² This latter phase, which spanned the years 1976 - 1978, the director euphemistically described as "the bridging years". The wheel, he noted, had now come full circle and history could be about to repeat itself:

During the current year 1986/87 the Unit is experiencing yet another bridging phase with a consequent period of uncertainty. In this context the Unit can learn from some of the lessons of its own

history. In a similar period of uncertainty ten years ago the way forward was found through a process of negotiation and clarification. New fields of endeavour now await the Unit's attention. New resolve has to be found and new purposes formulated.⁶³

Is it stretching the evidence to imagine that the note of confidence in the director's remarks was somewhat forced? In a way it almost seems as if he were trying to convince himself. We can hardly blame him in this, however, because a curriculum developer must always live in the hope of a better future and his rhetoric will sometimes lead him to make exaggerated pronouncements. But for the director to describe the events of the previous twelve months as "a process of negotiation and clarification" - when the Unit's four-year plan had been summarily rejected and its academic respectability had been called into question - was surely to take an unwarranted liberty with the facts. We can only assume that he was trying to put a bold face on a bad situation and that he was publicly proclaiming what he privately knew to be a fairly forlorn hope.

Whatever the director's real feelings may have been, he was soon to be caught up in a train of events that unfolded with dramatic rapidity. On 4th June, eleven days before the review working party was due to present their report to the Management Committee, the Department of Education took matters into its own hands. It announced without warning that the Unit staff would be reduced to two people and that henceforth the Unit's programme would conform to the Department's wishes and would be carried out according to the Department's guidelines.⁶⁴ The Department, in fact, had stopped just short of closing the Unit down.

Aftermath

Throughout the summer of 1987, the Unit fought for its life. The immediate effect of the Department's edict, which came in the form of

a letter to the CEO, was the scattering of the Unit's staff. Twenty project staff and five secretaries left the Unit during the summer months. Some had their contracts terminated, while others, who had been long-term staff members, were allocated to schools throughout the CDVEC. The latter, although fortunate in the sense that they had jobs to go to, felt deeply humiliated because they were thrust without ceremony into schools that neither expected nor wanted them. All that remained in the Unit were the director and deputy director with a token administrative staff - a skeleton crew on an abandoned ship.

The reason given by the Department for its drastic scaling down of the Unit was a financial one.⁶⁵ There were two aspects to this - national and local. Regarding the national aspect, there could be no doubting the seriousness of the Department's case: the country's finances were at the time in serious disarray and the most alarming evidence for this was the extent of the national debt. By 1986 this was estimated at £21,000 million or 120% of GNP and of this debt 47% was in foreign borrowing (Coogan, p.8) Clearly the Government was spending beyond its means and was also making what any housekeeper would have identified as an elementary mistake - borrowing to finance current expenditure. T. K. Whitaker, widely regarded as one of the principal architects of the country's economic recovery in the '60s, commented on the situation in the following terms:

From 1980 to date the story continues of heavy deficits in current budgets and a rapid accumulation of foreign indebtedness. Every person now at work effectively owes £10,000 to foreign lenders. Individuals and groups who worry vociferously about our sovereignty rarely have a word to say about the insidious and real threat to economic independence posed by ever-increasing foreign indebtedness. Even senior politicians indulge in contemptuous references to "pre-occupation with book-keeping". If the debt were being incurred to raise national productivity or to create useful additions to national capital in the form, say, of better roads, it could be justified within reasonable

limits. But it is otherwise where everyday expenses take all or most of it (Whitaker, 1986, p.15).

The answer to the problem, in Whitaker's view, was a return to fiscal rectitude. Current expenditure, especially in the public sector, had to be curbed radically and capital expenditure that generated losses rather than gains had to be weeded out. This kind of strategy would require a sustained period of discipline during which results would be slow to appear - a course of action which would not endear itself to politicians, who were sensitive to frequent tests of public opinion. For Whitaker, however, there was no other alternative (Ibid., p.17).

By the summer of 1987, the Government led by Charles Haughey was prepared to grasp the financial nettle and so embarked on a series of radical cut-backs in public expenditure which affected all Government departments but particularly education and health. It was not altogether strange, therefore, that the Unit should appear on the black list of cut-back items, but what was surprising was that its name was so close to the top. It could be said indeed that the Unit was one of the first victims of the new policy of cut-backs.

The second reason given for scaling down the Unit was more local and related to a row that was going on at the time between the Department and the CDVEC. The Department had accused the CDVEC of an overrun in expenditure for schools during 1986 and since the Unit was largely financed from the CDVEC's school allocation, it was argued that the amount given to the Unit would have to be reduced.⁶⁶ The logic of the Department's case seems simple and inescapable but it begs a number of questions. Surely 1986 was not the first time such a situation had arisen? The CDVEC had had a long and, some would even say, an honourable tradition in risking the Department's displeasure by incurring overruns in expenditure. Why was the situation different in 1986 and why was the Unit being held responsible? The answers to these questions must remain, at least for the present, in the realm of speculation. We are as yet too close to the

event and there is no evidence in the Unit's files which could give any indication of where the truth lies. It does seem, however, that the Department was making a clear connection between the Unit's existence and the CDVEC's financial difficulties. Whether the basis for this information was the financial estimate in the Unit's four-year plan, or whether there was some other source which prompted the Department's action, we have no way of knowing.

The news of the financial cut-back was given to the Management Committee on 15 June 1987 - ironically at the same meeting which also discussed the report on the review of the Unit. The Committee was powerless to do anything to help, beyond expressing its sympathy and declaring its willingness to hold emergency sessions if necessary within the summer period.⁶⁷ The Department's representatives wisely kept a low profile and disappeared from view as quickly as possible. Although they do not emerge from the event in the best light, neither should they be blamed. They do not seem to have been privy to the decision which all but obliterated the Unit and therefore should not be regarded as the villains of the piece.

The University representatives also kept a low profile but neither can they be blamed for their inability to protect the Unit. It was not essentially their fight and they were not going to engage the Department on an issue which was removed from their main sphere of interest. So they too decided to hold their peace. There was one exception however - the redoubtable Kader Asmal, who, although removed from the scene, nonetheless felt that a protest should be made. In a long letter to the *Irish Times* he sought to fan the flames of controversy in the Unit's favour:

In this time of despondency and near despair when every day brings fresh news of cuts and closures, surely it is the duty of every educationalist to proclaim from the rooftops that our only way forward into the future is to invest in our children's education. If we cut off that hope, then are we indeed of all people most to be pitied. The Curriculum Development Unit represents

such an investment. It has consistently stood for creativity and renewal in the teaching profession and for fuller participation in the educational process by all students, no matter what their background. Recognition of the Unit's work has come from outside the country - especially from the Commission of the European Communities - and has taken a very tangible form in subsidies and projects with external funding. Last year outside funds covered almost half of the Unit's total expenditure. Is all this to be lost now because someone in the Department of Education, for some obscure reason, has put the Unit on a hit list of items to be cut? This is not political wisdom: it is the politics of folly.⁶⁸

There were stirring words but they were in vain because the editor refused to publish them, citing as his reason the inordinate length of Asmal's letter. The Unit was now reduced to its last line of defence - its principal sponsor, the CDVEC. On 24 June 1987, the CEO formally replied to the Department's letter. His first argument was an appeal for due process and it was as follows: the Department had agreed to a review of the Unit and had even participated in the review process. The review report was now available and was being considered by each of the Unit's sponsors. The report was a comprehensive one and dealt with the issues about which the Department had expressed misgivings. "In these circumstances," Arundel pointed out, "it is reasonable to await the outcome of the review process before making any long-term or irreversible decisions".⁶⁹

Arundel's second argument was more aggressive and could even be construed as a veiled threat. He reminded the Department that the Unit was responsible for the organisation of a part of the public examination system, insofar as the experimental assessment modes in two of the Unit's oldest projects, ISCIP and Humanities, were an integral part of the Intermediate and Group Certificate Examinations.

“One immediate effect of the implementation of the Department’s letter regarding staff”, he warned, “will be the end of the experimental modes in the Intermediate and Group Certificate Examinations in both Humanities and ISCIP and it would be only fair that the schools involved be notified immediately”.⁷⁰ This was the argument which had been used with considerable effect in the quarrel with the Department in 1978. Any threat to the good order and running of the public examination system would be sure to attract media attention and could even surface in a Dáil debate. This certainly had been the case in the 1978 dispute and the CEO, feeling perhaps that attack was the best form of defence, did not scruple to fire a warning shot across the Department’s bows. To show that this was no idle threat, he had the director write to all the pilot school principals advising them “that from next September there is a serious doubt whether the Unit will be able to service the courses and examinations in Humanities, ISCIP, Junior Cycle School Certificate, VPT I and VPT II, Career Foundation and Post Leaving Certificate”.⁷¹

Arundel had asked for a meeting between the two sides and the Department evidently took his request to heart, for on 21 July it invited the CDVEC representatives to meet no fewer than ten Departmental officers. The meeting was chaired by an Assistant Secretary, Padraig Ó Nuallaín, and included representatives from the Finance Section, the Inspectorate, the Colleges’ Section, the European Community Section, the Psychological Service, the Teachers Section, and the Department’s Curriculum Unit.⁷² The CDVEC delegation comprised only three people, the CEO and the Unit director and deputy director, and for them it must have been a source of satisfaction, despite the ominous circumstances, to witness how seriously the Department regarded the meeting.

The size of the Department’s team had another significance - one that was not lost on the CDVEC representatives. It was becoming apparent that within the Department itself there were different points of view about the Unit’s future - not that these were expressed in so many

words, for it was characteristic of the Department's style to present an outward show of sphinx-like immutability. It now emerged that not everybody on the Department's side wanted the Unit closed and there were signs of sympathy for its plight and even a willingness to negotiate new short-term contracts. It may have been more than a show of politeness on the part of the chairman of the meeting when he said in his opening remarks that "the aim of the Department is to retain the Unit, to keep it alive so that if and when times do improve, it can pick up some more momentum".⁷³

As the meeting progressed it became clear that there were two areas of work which the Department wanted the Unit to continue with. The first, which occupied the major part of the discussion, concerned ISCIP and Humanities, and support for the Unit's involvement here came from the Inspectorate.⁷⁴ The inspectors knew what would happen if the Unit's staff were suddenly withdrawn and were therefore in favour of some staff being retained to service the experimental examination modes in the two projects. The second area of work was educational disadvantage and in this regard two of the Department officers, Seamus O hUallachain and Torlach O'Connor, showed their willingness to help to reinstate the Unit by offering it a project with early school leavers. The money was small and the contract was for one year only but the principle involved was of immense importance to the Unit's survival - there were at least some people in the Department who believed in the Unit's future and were prepared to offer it a life-line.

The process of negotiating the Unit's future was considerably strengthened when, nine days after the meeting with the Department, the Teachers' Union of Ireland came out publicly on the Unit's side.⁷⁵ The story of the Unit's recovery, however, is a story for another place and another time. All we can say here is that the events of the summer of 1987 marked the end of an era for the Unit and also the beginning of something new. It was both a death and a rebirth but whether the new dispensation would be better than the old, only time would tell.

One thing, however, was becoming clear: there was no returning to the old dispensation. The events of the summer of 1987 had upset the balance between the Unit's three sponsors in a way that had never happened previously and this was bound to have serious repercussions on the Unit's constitutional structure. We can certainly infer as much from a memorandum the director wrote to Arundel the following September:

The events surrounding the Department of Education's letter of last June point in one direction: a new phase is opening up for the Curriculum Development Unit. From now on the activities which take place in the Unit will be under short-term contracts which will clearly define their scope and their source of financing. At the same time there will be a need for an ongoing support structure for other activities which the Unit has been associated with in the past - such, for instance, as work exploration and outdoor education activities - and which cannot now be coordinated from the Unit's university base. This argues for the development of something like a curriculum improvement and support service - on an *ad hoc* basis to begin with - and directly answerable to the CEO.⁷⁶

It seems clear from these remarks that in the director's mind the centre of power was shifting away from the Management Committee and moving towards the CDVEC administration. In future, he told Arundel, it would not be necessary for the Management Committee to meet as frequently and although the reason for this was not given, it can be easily inferred.⁷⁷ From now on the Management Committee would not be entrusted with the same kind of business as in the past. The Unit had barely escaped with its life and the Management Committee had proved powerless to help it. Henceforth the serious business of management would be done elsewhere.

The Unit had survived the crisis of the summer of '87 but the cost was considerable. The partnership between the three sponsors had been

dealt a serious blow and it seemed doubtful if a satisfactory working relationship between them could ever be restored. This is scarcely surprising when we consider what had happened. One sponsor, the Department of Education, had made what seemed like an attempt on the Unit's life. A second sponsor, the CDVEC, had come to the Unit's rescue, and with the help of a few well-disposed people within the Department had managed to keep the Unit alive. Meanwhile, the third sponsor, the University, because it was unable to help, had stood idly by. The result was ironic - a Unit more dependent than ever before on the Department, situated more securely than previously within the administration of the CDVEC and drifting away from the University, which was becoming less and less relevant to its concerns. Professor Rice's original idea of a project initiated by a local education authority and linked with a University school of education had come to nought. The Unit had tried to keep a foot in both camps but appeared to have lost out.

The important thing, however, when everything is said and done, was that the Unit had survived. Its plans and aspirations lay in ruins, its staff were scattered and demoralised, but its purpose and will to live were still intact. The story of the re-building of the Unit, as we have already said, is not within the scope of this dissertation. Our aim has been to trace the Unit's origins and development through a period of over twenty years of Irish educational history and at this point, we must bring our story to an end. There are, however, some things we can say about the story - observations, conclusions and recommendations for the future - and these we now turn to in the Epilogue.

CHAPTER 8

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EPILOGUE

We said in the Prologue that this dissertation would try to address two underlying research questions:

- What is the story behind the Unit's efforts to institutionalise itself?
- How may this story be told by one of the principal actors involved?

The body of the dissertation, from Chapters 1 to 8, has been an attempt to answer these questions. It now remains for us to examine the implications of the answers we have given and to draw some general conclusions. In doing so we shall touch on two further issues which arise from our consideration of the Unit's story - issues which are described under the bipolar headings of research versus action and liberal versus vocational. We shall also look at what the future may have in store for the Unit and in this context we are emboldened to make a number of general policy recommendations. Finally, we shall say a brief word on the inspiration that can sustain the Unit in the years ahead - what we term the Unit's vision.

The Power of the Provisional

A concern with institutionalisation was something which appeared early in the Unit's history and could even be said to have pre-dated its birth. In Chapter 1 we saw how the director in his Ballyfermot years was interested in how to institutionalise innovation, while in Chapter 2 we noted that institutionalisation itself became one of the Unit's major goals. In Chapter 3 we saw how this goal was encouraged by the recommendations of the Coleraine Report and in Chapter 4 how it was given a concrete expression in the Unit's four-year plan for 1982-86. Chapters 5, 6 and 7 describe the flowering of the Unit's aspiration, when institutionalisation seemed almost within its grasp. In Chapter 8 we saw how the failure to bring in a second four-year plan seriously undermined this aspiration and how the financial cut-backs of June

1987 blighted the Unit's remaining hopes of achieving permanent status.

The question, therefore, has to be asked whether the Unit failed to achieve one of its major goals. The events of summer 1987 would indicate that the answer is "yes", for despite its remarkable recovery, the Unit since that time has only succeeded in existing on a year-to-year arrangement. Contracts for staff have only been possible on an annual basis - sometimes, indeed, for shorter periods - and yearly programmes have been put together in the hope that they will be renewed when the twelve months are up. Nothing in the Unit is permanent anymore; everything is temporary and provisional. In short, if we are to judge the Unit's progress in terms of its institutionalised status, we can scarcely regard the present *ad hoc* and existential nature of its activities as constituting a success.

Must we say then that the Unit has largely failed? Success and failure are relative terms and must always be related to their context. In one sense the Unit has indeed failed in that it has not become a stable institution with an established programme and a permanent staff. But in another sense it can be argued that arising from this failure the Unit has gained its most important insight. Becoming a permanent institution may seem a desirable and attractive prospect but it can also bring its own problems and dangers.

The Unit, as we have seen throughout this dissertation, is delicately balanced between three sponsors and if it were ever to become institutionalised this balance would be upset. In effect the Unit can only become a permanent entity by moving into the institutional ambit of one or other of its sponsors. The result would be that this sponsor would eventually control the Unit and the others would lose interest in it. This would be a limiting factor on the quality of the Unit's work and the range of its activities. It would also be a constraint on its freedom of action. The Unit was established as a joint venture between all three sponsors and consequently has obligations to each of

them. But if it is to remain true to itself it should never be completely controlled by any one of them. It is for this reason that we must conclude that the Unit should never seek to become a permanent organisation.

It is not necessarily a disadvantage, however, for the Unit to remain a provisional and *ad hoc* body. This may be difficult to accept and live with but it is the real basis of the Unit's strength. The Unit should never seek to become institutionalised, for to do so would be to risk becoming bureaucratised and thus ultimately betraying its original purpose. Roger Schutz, the founder of the celebrated Taizé Community, saw the tendency towards institutionalisation as one of the great dangers confronting Christianity. The true Christian, he says, should discover the power that comes from accepting a provisional status in life:

The man who lives in the provisional sees his journey towards unity given a new impulse. The supreme threat would be for us to become self-sufficient, to close the lid on the newly discovered treasure and then to institute for centuries to come structures which, once outmoded, become factors of isolation and not of communication. All available strength would go into making the structure last. Do we not see in the history of Christians so many institutions which lost the provisional character with which they began in order to survive the passage of time? The Christian horizon of those who belong to these institutions is contracted. They survive only by withdrawing behind walls that offer them protection (Schutz, 1969 p.67).

Living with the provisional, although not the most comforting of prospects, is the Unit's vocation. It is not necessarily the worst road to travel in an age which sees traditional institutions of all kinds increasingly questioned. No institution today can expect to remain permanent, at least in the traditional manner of having a guaranteed existence no matter what its performance may be. This does not mean, however, that we no longer need institutions. On the contrary, we

shall always need them but they must become more open, flexible and existential - in a word more provisional.

Much is demanded of the people who work in a place like the Unit because their lives are inevitably affected by the provisional and changing character of their work milieu. They cannot be guaranteed permanent tenure and yet they are expected to apply themselves to their professional tasks with total commitment and loyalty. This is to demand much of any human being and as we saw in Chapter 9 it has been a particularly acute problem for the staff of the Unit. The answer is not easy to find and calls for a blending of a concern for persons with a recognition of institutional exigencies. We must not despair, however, of finding a solution and in the search for one we shall learn to define more clearly a role which is only emerging in the world of Irish education, that of the professional curriculum developer.

The challenge confronting the Unit is to widen its horizons continually by choosing to remain a provisional entity. The irony of its present position, however, is that following the crisis of summer 1987 the Unit has moved more towards institutionalisation than ever before in its history. A direct result of the crisis was to make the Unit more dependent on the CDVEC for its day to day existence and to push it more securely into the CDVEC's administrative structures. This has led to a change in balance between the Unit's sponsors and the most obvious casualty in this regard has been the University link. The Trinity connection has suffered and become even further weakened by the Unit's moving in summer 1990 from the University campus to a CDVEC location.

The undermining of the Unit's independence in the wake of the 1987 crisis has been compounded by another factor. By the end of 1986 several of the Unit's externally funded projects had come to an end and unfortunately were not renewed. Neither were they replaced by new projects which would have given the Unit a degree of independence and helped it to weather the storms that followed the

financial cut-backs. The lessons to be learnt from all this are clear. If the Unit is to retain its independence, it will not only have to reconcile itself to impermanence and to maintaining and developing its links with all three sponsors but it will also have to persuade outside agencies to put their confidence in its future by commissioning projects of various kinds.

The Autobiographical Stance

The second underlying research question in this dissertation was whether the story of the Unit should be told by someone who was deeply involved in it. The answer to this question is in the last analysis a personal one but a personal standpoint is not necessarily something to be apologised for. On the contrary, it can be a very appropriate form of discourse in dealing with educational matters. We live in an age when our thinking on education tends to be dominated by instrumental considerations. Such considerations often force us to view education as a way of conditioning young people to the harsh realities of the social, political and economic spheres and preparing them to be functionaries in whatever kind of adult society lies in wait for them. But such an instrumental approach can be the enemy of true education which should be concerned primarily not with the accumulation of facts and techniques but rather with the exploration and clarification of individual experience. Peter Abbs makes this point very well when he says:

If we are to achieve a genuinely human education, we must return again and again to the person before us, the child, the adolescent, the adult, the individual, who is ready, however dimly, and in need of however much support to adventure both further out into his experience and further into it, who is ready in some part of himself to risk himself in order to become more than he now is (Abbs 1974, p.5).

Adventuring further into one's experience is also the hallmark of good autobiographical writing and this has been the writer's aim throughout the dissertation. How far he has succeeded will be for the reader to decide. The task has involved more than just personal exploration

because good autobiography is not only the story of oneself but also the story of oneself in the world. It should present the self against the background of people and events with which this self is intertwined. Furthermore, it is never completely subjective because it deals with matters which can be cross-checked from other sources. This is the approach which has been adopted in this dissertation and it balances somewhat the necessarily selective and committed view-point of the writer himself.

In the last analysis, however, the writer has to accept the responsibility for his own version of his inner truth and his perception of how other people affected his life. This is the autobiographer's privilege and ultimately his special duty and it has been expressed in memorable words by Ray Pascal:

It is inspired by a reverence for the self, tender yet severe, that sees the self not as a property but a trust. It is not concerned just with the moral personality, like the Stoics, but with the self in its delicate uniqueness. Hence it seeks to trace its historical identity, in all its particularity. Informed with the consciousness that the self escapes definition - "individuum est ineffabile" - it reveals it not so much by contemplation and analysis, as through its encounters with the world (Pascal, 1960, p.181).

"Individuum est ineffabile" - the individual cannot be defined - that is the bottom line of every authentic autobiography. There is a core of darkness at the centre of the self - something which was well known to Augustine, the father of the autobiographical genre. "There is in me", he writes in his *Confessions*, "a lamentable darkness in which my latent possibilities are hidden from myself, so that my mind questioning itself upon its own powers feels it cannot rightly trust its own report" (Abbs, 1974, p.15). All that the autobiographer can really do is take up an honest stance in relation to the events that he tries to interpret and the story he tries to tell. It is the story of a voyage - a voyage of self-discovery - that gathers momentum in the telling, so much so that in the end it can almost take on a life of its own and has

within its own kind of truth. This was probably what Montaigne had in mind when he wrote in his own autobiography : “I have no more made my book than my book has made me” (Finney, 1985, p.12).

Research versus Action

Throughout its history, the Unit was sometimes the target of criticism because of an alleged lack of a research dimension in its work. This criticism, as we saw in Chapter 8, came mainly from the Trinity professors of education. The Unit, however, never took this criticism seriously, preferring to take its stance on the fact that it was a practically oriented enterprise, geared towards helping schools cope with severe problems. It could not afford, therefore, the luxury of engaging in speculative research. This pragmatic, down-to-earth approach was indeed the Unit’s strength and it was this which won for it the trust and esteem of teachers.

The Unit, however, probably over-stated the case for action and neglected to emphasise sufficiently the research and evaluative dimensions of its work. This is not to say that it never engaged in research nor produced evaluative reports. There is plenty of evidence to the contrary. But most of its resources and energies were spent on what was termed “development work”, that is to say the day to day running of its diverse projects, and although the Unit always claimed to keep an even balance between action and research, it is perhaps not surprising that the former should have triumphed over the latter.

We saw in Chapters 3 and 4 how Malcolm Skilbeck in the Coleraine Report, and later in a seminar he conducted for the joint staffs of the Unit and the Trinity School of Education, had tried to give the Unit a model which combined the demands of both action and research - the action-research approach. There are many attractions in this model but the director apparently was never convinced that it served the Unit’s purpose fully. In his mind, the kind of action the Unit was engaged in was akin to political action, especially when it was a question of

survival. The politics of survival were always his primary concern and so the model which in his view best described the Unit's activity was primarily political.

The urge to survive, however, should not be the only basis on which to build an appropriate model for action; one must also have a reason for surviving - a vision of what the future has in store. In the case of the Unit, this kind of vision was not lacking but it shone more brightly in the early years than later on. In many ways, perhaps, this was inevitable and is nothing unusual in human affairs; youth after all, is the noon time of high ideals. As the Unit grew older "shades of the prison house" began to close upon it and the "vision splendid" which once inspired it became somewhat obscured. The time may have come, however, when the renewal of its vision and the restatement of its mission should again become a central concern of the Unit and this is a point we shall return to in the last section of the Epilogue.

The director's preoccupation with the politics of survival was not without its dangers because continued involvement in action can become an addiction. We should always be clear about the reasons for action, otherwise we run the risk of engaging in it for its own sake. Hannah Arendt once pointed out that action of its nature is uncontrollable and has two characteristics which tend to combine to defeat man's best purposes - it is both unpredictable and irreversible. Action, Arendt maintains, "is in and by itself utterly futile; it never leaves an end product behind itself. If it has any consequences at all, they consist in principle of an endless new chain of happenings, whose eventual outcome the actor is utterly incapable of knowing or controlling beforehand. The most he may be able to do is force things into a certain direction and even of this he cannot be sure" (Arendt 1977, pp. 59-60). In expressing this somewhat uncompromising viewpoint Arendt was only reflecting the attitude of the ancient Greek philosophers who maintained that human action, if it is to be transformed into a worthwhile human value, should be reflected on

and grounded in a philosophy that can enlighten and guide our conduct.

Aristotle gives us the classical explanation of political action: the art of politics is directed towards achieving and maintaining an order of virtuous conduct among the citizens of the polis. Politics for Aristotle was a practical activity; it could never aspire to the status of *theoria*, or that of a rigorous science. It was always concerned with the contingent and the variable and so had to rest content with the establishing rules of a “more-or-less” and “in most cases” character. Politics consisted primarily in a prudent understanding of variable situations with a view to knowing what was best to be done. Politics was also a moral activity which was not essentially separate from ethics, the art of the good and just life (McCarthy, 1984, pp.2-3). It is also interesting to note that Aristotle saw education as an integral part of the political and ethical domains - which made it for him a normative and practical activity.

The modern view of politics is different and owes much to Machiavelli and Hobbes. The former distinguished between public and private morality and thus helped to move politics from being a *praxis* to that of a *techné* or skill. The latter tried to raise politics to the status of a science by grounding it on the universal laws of human nature and thus paved the way for the modern view which equates the social and natural sciences. In this view all science should share the same basic methodology - objective, value-neutral, generalisable, predictable, quantifiable and capable of being tested in controlled conditions (Habermas, 1973, pp.41-81).

Politics in modern times, as Jurgen Habermas has pointed out, has become “scientised” and although much has been lost in the change from the classical formulation, there can now be no going back. We are children of the scientific age and it is important that our political and social theories should be in the broad sweep of modern scientific thinking. But within that thinking - as Habermas tried to show - there

is scope to elaborate a political and social philosophy which includes a concern for values and the essentially historical context of all human action (Ibid.).

Such a philosophy is especially needed in the field of education which, despite the modern scientific disciplines that influence it, remains essentially a moral or, as Aristotle would say, a practical activity. It is precisely here that the Unit's opportunity lies - in its potential to contribute towards the formulation of a theory of political action in the field of education. This is a question, however, that deserves more space than we can give in this dissertation. It is something towards which the dissertation can only point as an area to be explored in greater detail at some future date. At this juncture we are simply recording the fact that the Unit does have a political message for the Irish educational system and this is evidenced in its concern for issues like educational disadvantage, community regeneration and the professional development of teachers. The message, moreover, deserves a better exposition and a wider audience than it has hitherto received.

In the course of its history so far the Unit has used three principal ways of making this message known - publishing, teaching and what could be called the testimony of its followers. The Unit's record in publishing, contrary to what some of its critics have maintained, is an honourable one, but most of its publications were either curricular materials or reports from various projects. Rarely did the Unit publish the insights arising from its own political activity because these were regarded as being too sensitive and too close to home to be revealed. The Unit was always conscious of the danger of embarrassing the schools with which it worked. Many of these schools had problems relating to student backwardness, disadvantage or drop-out, which they did not wish to see publicised. The Unit felt bound to respect these feelings and consequently was reluctant to publish explicit accounts of its work in this area. Ireland, it was felt, was a small

country where everybody knew everybody else; better to remain quiet and not make enemies or, what would be worse, hurt one's friends.

We would like to think that the Unit has now reached the point in its development where it can be more forthcoming about publishing the political insights arising from its own experience. For one thing the passage of time has dimmed the flame of controversy and made it more possible to differentiate between issues and personalities. For another, the Unit itself has matured; it is now less obsessed with its own survival and should therefore have the confidence to express its insights in a discourse that is both honest and prudent. Furthermore, it may well be that the action research model proposed by Skilbeck is more appropriate to its purposes than was originally thought possible.

Teaching was the second way open to the Unit to reflect on and universalise the insights arising from its own activity and this, we would have thought, should have been a normal activity for an organisation situated in a university department of education. In fairness to Professor Rice it has to be said that in the early days of the Unit's relationship with the School of Education he encouraged the participation of the Unit's staff in teaching activities. The only person, however, who kept up the practice was the deputy director, who consistently taught a curriculum studies module on the Master's Degree Course in Education. The director in contrast was diffident about committing himself to an on-going teaching role and this was probably both a personal loss to himself and an institutional loss to the Unit.

In the circumstances in which the Unit now finds itself, teaching may yet become an important feature of its work. The Unit, as we already mentioned, has lately left the University campus and found a new home for itself in a disused CDVEC school. The change in many ways represents a loss because the Trinity link has been weakened and the Unit is now removed from amenities such as access to the Trinity library and contact with the University staff. There are, however,

compensating factors, chief of which is the fact that the Unit now has room to expand. Increased space can allow it to concentrate on the provision of teacher inservice courses, both short and long-term - something it could only do imperfectly in its previous and more restricted accommodation.

The Unit's third way of publicising its message was through the testimony of its own followers. This is difficult to measure in precise terms but it may well have been the most important of the three factors we have been examining. The Unit has always been a teacher oriented organisation. It tries to cherish the teachers it works with, to make them feel important and to treat them as members of a worthwhile profession. Over the years this attitude has led to strong feelings of loyalty among the teachers themselves who in many instances have become the strongest advocates of the Unit's cause - an advocacy considerably enhanced in the case of those teachers who have progressed to positions of authority and influence in the Irish system of education.

Liberal versus Vocational

From the beginning, the Unit has always had a more liberal than vocational bias. At first glance this is surprising. The Unit was established to meet the needs of the Dublin vocational schools and it was not until the late '70s, as we saw in Chapter 5, that it became involved in vocationally oriented work. We should bear in mind, however, the circumstances in which the Unit was founded and the climate which surrounded the VECs at the time. The '60s saw the liberalising of the vocational curriculum and this movement, which was promoted nationally by the Department of Education, was embraced enthusiastically by the CDVEC. This was the context in which the Ballyfermot experiment was launched and which, as we saw in Chapters 1 and 2, eventually gave rise to the establishment of the Unit.

Another factor which inclined the Unit towards liberal education was the influence of its first staff members, none of whom were specialists in vocational or technical education. Thus it was that the Unit's first three projects, Humanities, Integrated Science and Outdoor Education, were more characteristic of a broad general outlook on education than a vocationally or technically oriented approach.

There is a sense, however, in which the Unit's entire philosophy can truly be called liberal. Liberal education has been described by Jacques Maritain as comprising "those intellectual disciplines which not only, as the ancients saw it, fit the condition of a free man in opposition to servile activities but which more profoundly equip a man to become actually free in his mind and judgment, as well as in his internal mastery of the pressures of his environment, of fate or misfortune, and of himself and his own deficiencies" (Maritain, 1976, pp. 84-85).

Equipping teachers and students to become free in mind and judgement is the Unit's ideal and the pressure of the environment which it seeks to master is the tyranny of the public examination system. This was why it fought tenaciously for the preservation of the experimental examination modes which it had so carefully developed. These modes symbolised the kind of curricular freedom the Unit wanted to bring about in the Irish system - a freedom in which teachers could develop as true professionals and students could pursue their studies in a meaningful way, related to their own background and experience. In other words the Unit strove to give teachers and students more power over their own lives and destiny. It is not surprising then that problems arising from this process of empowerment dominated much of the Unit's history and that many of the crises which beset it were power struggles related to the issue of who controlled the curriculum in Irish schools.

The Unit's liberal stance is evident in its foundation documents twenty years ago. When it was launched to challenge the dominance of

restrictive elements in the Irish system of education, it consciously adopted a liberal and even crusading approach. In the hard light of subsequent experience the Unit may have had to change its strategies and modify its thinking but we cannot say yet that its work is finished or that the system today no longer needs challenging. On the contrary, never perhaps since the founding of the State are we more in need of being liberated in our thinking and judgement. Our schools are dominated by a points system geared towards university entrance and our teachers are tied to a curriculum which is excessively theoretical and formalised. Fear haunts the system - fear of failure in examinations and fear of not getting a job when school is finished. In this atmosphere the traditional values of liberal education are under constant threat; so too is the basic concept of vocational education because students are hindered from making a real choice about their vocation in life.

There is a need then for an organisation like the Unit to take an independent, courageous and, if necessary, unpopular stance in the face of the prevailing trends. The message of liberal education is as relevant today as ever before because every person, as Maritain once remarked, is continually called to the conquest of freedom:

In each of us, personality and freedom of independence increase together. For man is a being in movement. If he does not augment, he has nothing and he loses what he had; he must fight for his being. The entire history of his fortunes and misfortunes is the history of his effort to win, together with his own personality, freedom of independence. He is called to the conquest of freedom (Maritain, 1976, p.165).

We saw in Chapter 5 the crucial importance of being able to reconcile the sometimes opposing tendencies of liberal and vocational education. We noted that on the one hand all general education, especially from sixteen years onwards, should have a vocational element while on the other hand all vocational education should be capable of finding a liberal expression. There is an important principle at stake here and the Unit can play a role in helping to make it more

understandable and acceptable. The principle can be stated as follows: as far as possible harmful dichotomies, such as liberal versus vocational, theoretical versus practical and education versus training, should be avoided. This is not to say that these ideas should be blurred to the point of being confused with one another. On the contrary it is essential to be able to distinguish their fundamental differences but this should be done in a spirit of complementarity and reconciliation rather than in an adversarial or hostile manner.

The Unit is well placed to engage in this process of integrating and reconciling potentially conflicting ideas as long as it is not too closely identified with the institutional position of any particular vested interest in Irish education. This independence, however, is something which does not happen easily or automatically; it is a pearl of great price which has to be guarded jealously and used prudently.

The Future - the Unit and Its Sponsors

Before we finish we would like to take a prophetic as well as a historical view of the Unit's development. By prophecy we mean the ability to read the signs of the times in the light of what has gone before and of what may yet happen and in this sense the prophet and the historian are not too far apart from each other. What can we prophesy about the Unit? The most we can say is that its future like its past is inextricably bound up with the attitudes and interplay of its three sponsors and it is in this context that we now essay a few final remarks.

First let us look at the University's role. The events of the summer of '87 have greatly weakened the Trinity link and, as we already noted, relationships between the Unit and the University have been further attenuated by the Unit's removal from the Trinity campus. Nonetheless, weak though it may be, the link remains in existence and the Trinity representatives are still members of the Unit's Management Committee, with the Dean of Arts (Humanities) acting as

joint-chairperson. University officers, however, come and go and their minds are not normally on the welfare of a small external body such as the Unit, unless their attention is deliberately drawn in that direction. This can only happen if the Unit director makes it his business to interest the University in what the Unit is doing. The director would do well, therefore, to consider this course of action seriously for otherwise the University link will wither to the point of insignificance.

The reasons for preserving the University link should be clear from the pages of this dissertation for despite the ups and downs of the Unit's relationship with the Trinity School of Education there are aspects to the link which are still of considerable importance. It confers status especially in the eyes of people outside the country and in some instances in the past was an important factor in influencing prospective sponsors. This for example was the case in the mid '70s when, as we saw in Chapter 7, the Unit first attracted the attention of the European Commission. Sponsorship is now a vital issue for the Unit and so it can ill afford to cut itself off from what a senior Brussels official once described as "the TCD siège [which] is good on the side of prestige".¹

Apart from the question of status, however, there is something else in the Trinity link which is fundamental to the Unit's existence - the perception of independence that comes from being based in a university. This was vital in the early days when the Unit had to negotiate with parties opposed to each other like the Department of Education and the teacher unions. The same perception of independence will be no less vital in the future, if the Unit is still to be engaged in issues that are serious and worthwhile. Proof of this can be seen in its involvement over the last four years in sensitive projects which span the Irish border and in which the Unit has won the trust of both sides, North and South.

Trinity College, however, is not the only university in the Dublin area, and the Unit would do well to consider the possibility of links with

other third level institutions, especially with regard to the validation and certification of teacher inservice courses.

What can we say about the Unit's relationship with the Department of Education? It is true that in the past there have been conflicts and harsh words but it is probably fair to say that this has been at an institutional rather than a personal level. Nonetheless, the Unit, remembering its own history, should always be wary in its dealings with the Department. It would be wrong to be otherwise because the Unit, if it is to remain true to itself, must be prepared on occasion to challenge the Department's position. The events of summer '87 are now, however, fading into history and it is unlikely that anybody in the Department harbours the notion of closing down the Unit. Curriculum development and its related activities are now a more normal and acceptable part of the national scene and there is consequently less prejudice and misunderstanding among Departmental officials concerning the Unit's activities.

The task of the Unit should be to capture the interest of the Department and to convince the Department's officials of the worth of its programme. In this context the Unit would do well to study the Department's official policies and to fit in with them wherever possible. The Department also has its ideals and aspirations, prominent among which is its concern for the disadvantaged. It was this which prompted the Department to allow the Unit to be established in the first place and it was the same concern which led the Department to support the Unit's applications for two Brussels sponsored projects in the '70s and '80s - the Early School Leavers Project and the Dublin Inner City Education Project. In January 1991 the Department's concern for the disadvantaged was formally written into a national agreement drawn up by all the social partners - Government, employers and trade unions - and it was later confirmed in a Green Paper on education which appeared as recently as June 1992.

It is also important to remember that the Department no longer plays such a dominant role on the Irish curriculum stage, unlike when the Unit was founded early in the '70s. In 1983 the Coalition Government set up the Curriculum and Examinations Board, a body which was later reconstituted under a Fianna Fáil Government as the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA). Although the NCCA has not been given the degree of autonomy that was originally hoped for, it nonetheless represents a dispersal of power in national curriculum politics and is now a body which the Unit must seriously reckon with. So too is the most recent arrival on the curriculum scene, the National Council for Vocational Awards, which seems likely to play an important part in the future development of the vocational courses described in Chapter 5.

Finally, we turn to the role of the CDVEC, the Unit's principal sponsor. As we saw in Chapters 1 and 5, the VECs comprise the only part of the Irish educational system which can be said to be based on the country's structure of local government. This is at once their strength and their weakness and some of their critics have not been slow to emphasise the latter. It is said, for instance, that the VECs are prone to political influence in sensitive areas like teacher appointments and that the number of VECs in the country, 36 in all, is probably too large and too unevenly distributed. These criticisms are not without foundation but they should not blind us to the inherent possibilities of the VEC structure in general. The VECs represent a genuine effort to link the educational system to the framework of local democracy and despite the fact that many Irish people are not overly enthusiastic about their local representatives, the political and social health of the nation depends on the quality of its local government.

One of the refreshing and sometimes disconcerting things about any genuine democracy is the fact that the political climate can suddenly change in response to the will of the electorate. Local democracy in Dublin City is no exception, and within the two decades of the Unit's existence there have been dramatic changes in the Dublin political

scene, all of which have had important repercussions for the Unit. The Unit was born at a time when severe tensions between the local and central authorities led to the abolition of the Dublin City Council and all its subsidiary committees. In 1974, when local democracy was restored to Dublin, the CDVEC came under the influence of new, radical members who cared little about the traditional approach of their predecessors. Alderman Byrne was in this mould and we saw in Chapter 4 the extent of his influence on the Unit's policies. In 1985, the scene changed again when the local government elections brought about a Fianna Fail majority in most of the country's VECs, including Dublin City.

Six years later the scene changed once more when the local elections of June 1991 saw a reversal of Fianna Fáil's fortunes with the result that Dublin City Council is now ruled by a "rainbow coalition" of what were once the opposition parties. The CDVEC has correspondingly changed and of its original fourteen members only five remain. Clearly this change presents a new challenge to the Unit and if it is to learn from its own history it will have to make a new beginning, or at least turn over a new chapter in the story of its development.

What should the Unit's message be to the new CDVEC? In similar situations in the past the Unit was chiefly concerned to make a good impression on the new Committee, to explain itself and justify its activities with a view to winning support in its battle for survival. These things are still important but the Unit should now be more self-confident and more aware of its advisory function. It is, after all, the CDVEC's agency for curriculum development and should therefore help the Committee formulate a curricular policy. The Unit can begin this process by boldly making an analysis of the needs and opportunities that face the system and by helping to initiate dialogue between the CDVEC administration and the various schools and centres. The Unit should animate and guide this dialogue so that any ensuing action will be based on a communal understanding of the

issues involved and a mutual consensus about the best way of approaching them.

This may seem like an ambitious programme and so perhaps it is. It is all the more important for the Unit, therefore, to have clear ideas about what the general direction of the CDVEC's curricular policy should be. If we consult the Unit's past experience, we can identify four guiding principles. The first has to do with the declining enrolments in the CDVEC. In 1981/82 the total number of CDVEC junior cycle students was 5,429 if we contrast this with the corresponding figure for 1991/92, which was 2,568, we have some idea of the gravity of the problem facing the schools.² A struggle for survival - something the Unit itself should be deeply sympathetic towards - now dominates the thinking of many of the CDVEC principals, as falling rolls and an aging teacher force make for a lowering of morale.

At the same time, however, a ray of sunshine is penetrating the gloom. There has been a compensatory increase in the enrolment numbers at senior cycle (16-19 years) mainly because of the development of new kinds of vocational and pre-professional courses. In 1991/92 the enrolments on these courses exceeded 5,000 with the majority in the upper age bracket (18-19 years) where over 170 various Post-Leaving Certificate Courses (PLCs) are currently in operation.³ These courses are at the interface of second and third level education and are akin to the further education sector in the United Kingdom. The courses for the most part, however, have been developed in a haphazard manner, with the schools desperately seeking to keep their enrolments up and their doors open.

This situation presents a clear challenge to the Unit. Up to now the Unit's role with regard to the PLCs has been that of a validating agency: it has tried to co-ordinate the various arrangements that are involved in monitoring, assessing and certifying the courses. In practice this has amounted to the provision of an administrative clearing house for the processing of examination results and although

this is an important service in its own right it is not primarily what the Unit should be doing. The Unit should rather be engaged in working out a coherent curricular pattern in the existing chaotic structure of the PLCs and should support this process through the application of the three-fold approach which it has found so successful in the past - teacher inservice, materials production and assessment modes.

The second principle underlying the formulation of a curricular policy for the CDVEC is the need to foster leadership at all levels. This point has already been touched on in Chapter 8 where it was stated that leadership is a moral quality which can help transform schools into living and vibrant communities. It is a quality that is badly needed in a local education authority like the CDVEC, which today is facing many uncertainties, including a doubt about the future shape of its own existence. In this context the Unit can play a vital role in co-operation with the other CDVEC support services by helping to create a forum where the principals and key staff can learn to articulate their needs more clearly and search for answers to their problems in a climate of mutual support and trust.

The third principle is the need to re-emphasise a concern for the educationally disadvantaged. As we related in Chapter 2, this concern was prominent at the Unit's foundation and, as we later saw in Chapter 6, was the inspiration for two of its major projects - ESLP and DICE. We noted how the latter project in particular highlighted the importance of out-centres like School Street where deprived young people could be educated in a caring and supportive environment. The School Street experience in turn had a strong influence on a national programme called "Youthreach" which was launched in 1988 for the education and training of young people for whom the traditional school system had largely failed. The CDVEC, as we would expect, has been in the forefront of Youthreach and is currently operating 8 centres which cater for 350 young people. Here again is another opportunity for the Unit; it can act as a curricular agency and as an inservice training centre for the Youthreach staff.

The fourth principle which the Unit should bear in mind is the importance of developing a community oriented curriculum - something indeed which is at the heart of the CDVEC system itself. As we pointed out in Chapter 5, the 1930 Vocational Education Act clearly envisages that each VEC scheme should be community oriented. Over the years the VECs have tried to live up to this ideal by offering a variety of educational services to the communities they serve. The CDVEC in particular, as we saw in Chapter 1, has built up an impressive array of these support services, each with its own separate administrative and professional staff. This pattern is not unusual and can be found in other local education authorities, such as the Education and Library Boards in Northern Ireland and the LEAs in Britain. The system has a weakness, however, in that it can sometimes tend to become bureaucratic and centralised, thereby failing to offer a genuine community-oriented service. As we saw in Chapter 1, the challenge in operating such a service is to let the local community have a real say in meeting its own needs and solving its own problems.

It would be wrong, nonetheless, to be too simplistic about the concept of community-oriented education; due regard should always be paid to the realities of the modern centralised state. Nor should we try to establish community-based educational structures which are too far ahead of current political and social thinking. We must learn to be patient because, as we have already noted, the Irish attitude to local democracy leaves much to be desired. But a beginning has to be made somewhere and the VEC system, as the Ballyfermot experience showed in the 1960s, is as good a starting point as any.

The Unit's Vision

On 30 November 1989, a team of three OECD examiners who were conducting a review of Ireland's national policy for education met an Irish delegation, led by the Minister for Education, Mary O'Rourke. The occasion was the culminating point of the review, the "confrontation" meeting between the examiners and the Irish officials,

and was reminiscent of a similar meeting nearly a generation previously, when Ireland had been the subject of the very first OECD review of national educational policies (OECD 1969). The earlier review had identified as a major issue the ability of the system to cope with growing numbers and the increasing demand for education. The second OECD review, however, was more concerned with the teaching profession itself and how it would be affected by falling rolls. In this context the examiners were convinced that Irish teachers were “faced with unprecedented conditions that are likely to lead to soul searching throughout the profession and hard times in the classroom for some teachers” (OECD, 1991, p.78). These conditions, they listed as follows:

- uncertainty about future employment for young teachers;
- the ineluctable ageing of the teaching force;
- financial cut-backs that have led to higher pupil/teacher ratios and a reduction of support services;
- fear of salaries declining in real money terms;
- competition to keep posts alive while developing;
- co-operation among schools;
- more heterogeneous classes at the secondary level;
- the stress of having to adapt to a new curriculum;
- emerging signs of indiscipline in some schools and more ebullient and challenging pupils in all schools. (Ibid., pp.78-79).

It is not surprising then to find the OECD examiners in their recommendations to the Irish authorities stressing the importance of a properly structured teacher inservice programme, including leadership training for head teachers, and a more flexible and imaginative approach to school organisation. They were far from pleased, however, with existing inservice models, as is clear from the following extract from their report:

In relation to in-service education we must point up the limitations of a school day model which in general totally ignores the professional development needs of the teachers themselves. As a consequence in-service education is normally viewed as something extra that has to be provided over and above the normal teaching day, week or year. On this basis it will always be to a degree marginal for many teachers and those participating in in-service programmes will do so very often at the inconvenience or with the forbearance of their colleagues. It is a corollary of accepting the necessity of lifelong teacher education that the very model of schooling and its organisation needs to be reconstituted (OECD,1991, pp.102-103).

These comments from such a prestigious body should be seen as an encouragement to the general thrust of the Unit's work over the years. Teacher development has always been a major element in the Unit's programme and should remain so in the future. The Unit, however, should sharpen its focus on the nature of this development in the light of where it considers the teaching profession itself should be going. Views about teaching sometimes tend to polarise between two points - teaching as a science and teaching as an art. The former sees the teacher as a highly competent technician operating within a professional structure which ideally should be controlled by the members of the profession itself. This is the view championed by the American group, the Carnegie Task Force on Teaching as a Profession, which is concerned with "making our schools once again the engines of progress, productivity and prosperity" (Carnegie Task Force on Teaching as a Profession, 1986, p.2). A different view - the idea of the teacher as an artist - was expressed by Lawrence Stenhouse in his writings on curriculum. For Stenhouse "the purpose

of any curriculum change, any curriculum research, any curriculum development is the enhancement of the art of teaching, of understanding expressed as performance” (Rudduck and Hopkins, 1985, p.110).

These two views, however, as Malcolm Skilbeck has pointed out, need not be incompatible, provided we regard educational science as something which is “hypothetical, speculative, variable and constantly changing” rather than “a body of self consistent and comprehensive knowledge” (Skilbeck 1986, pp. 20-21). This has always been the position of the Unit. It has consistently sought opportunities for teachers to learn new technical skills in areas as diverse as assessment of student portfolios or conducting field studies, while at the same time it has also tried to support teachers in their efforts to enhance their creativity and professional autonomy.

The Unit has a great belief in the potential of teachers to become autonomous professionals but this potential, it would argue, could be more fully realised than is presently the case. Earlier in this dissertation we quoted Alasdair MacIntyre’s remark that teachers are the forlorn hope of the culture of western modernity. Teachers, according to MacIntyre, are engaged in an enterprise on whose success we have to depend but which in fact is bound to fail (MacIntyre, 1987, p.16). This is a paradox and perhaps MacIntyre intended it to be so. But surely part of the solution lies in the belief that the teaching profession can begin to change and so become better equipped for the important mission in which it is engaged. This is the Unit’s belief and ultimately its vision.

EPILOGUE

REFERENCES AND NOTES

- 1 P. Daunt, "Environmental Education", Internal Memorandum to H. Jones, Commission of the European Communities, Brussels, 4 December 1975, ECEEN Papers.
- 2 Information from Tony Breen, CDVEC Education Officer, 14 July 1992.
- 3 Ibid.

APPENDIX 1

RESPONDENTS TO THE DISSERTATION

Liam Arundel, CEO, CDVEC and a member of Unit's Management Committee.

Mícheál Breathnach, CEO, Co Wicklow VEC and formerly Irish National Expert for ECEEN.

Tony Breen, Education Officer, CDVEC and formerly a teacher in Ballyfermot Vocational School.

Jim Callan, Lecturer, Department of Education, St Patrick's College Maynooth, and evaluator of the Early School Leavers Project.

Tony Crooks, Deputy Director of the Curriculum Development Unit.

Terry Doyle, Education Officer, CDVEC, member of the Unit's Management Committee and formerly a teacher in Ballyfermot Vocational School.

Danielle Durney, teacher and formerly a Unit staff member.

Brede Foy, Chief Psychologist, CDVEC.

Gary Granville, Assistant Chief Executive, National Council for Curriculum and Assessment and formerly a member of the Unit's staff.

John Hammond, Member of the Unit's staff and formerly a student in Ballyfermot Vocational School.

Peter Heery, Member of the Unit's staff.

Bill Hyland, Senior Statistician (retired), Department of Education.

Tom McCarthy, Chief Psychologist (retired), CDVEC.

John McKay, CEO, Co Cavan VEC and formerly acting CEO, CDVEC.

Hanna O'Brien, Member of the Unit's staff.

Torlach O'Connor, Senior Psychologist, Department of Education and formerly a member of the Unit's Management Committee.

Elizabeth Oldham, Lecturer in the School of Education, Trinity College, Dublin and evaluator of ISCIP.

Colin Pollard, Counselling Information Service, Buckinghamshire Local Education Authority and formerly a Unit staff member.

Séamus Puirseil, teacher and formerly a member of Unit's Management Committee.

Val Rice, Director of the School of Education, Trinity College, Dublin and member of the Unit's Management Committee.

Séamus Rossiter, Principal (retired), Clogher Road Vocational School.

John Slattery, CEO Tipperary South Riding VEC and formerly a teacher in Ballyfermot Vocational School.

Salters Sterling, Academic Secretary, Trinity College, Dublin and a member of the Unit's Management Committee.

Shaun Trant, Assistant Secretary (retired), Department of Health.

APPENDIX 2

Excerpts from Correspondence with Respondents to the Dissertation.
References to page numbers are from the original drafts and so do not
correspond with the final text.

Tipperary S.R. Vocational Education Committee

Administrative Offices : The Mall,
Clonmel,
Co. Tipperary.

Tel. : (052) 21067/23067

Our ref. JTS/AMQ

24th June, 1992.

Mr Anton Trant,
Curriculum Development Unit,
Sundrive Road,
Dublin 12.

Dear Anton,

Thanks for sending me the chapter on your Ballyfermot years. I have enjoyed reading it very much, as it was such a formative experience for me. I always thought that Ballyfermot was a school for teachers as much as it was for students; as you recall on page 14, where else in Irish education was there such an opportunity to reflect on practice!

Responding to your invitation for comments, I've made a few notes on points which stand out immediately for me:

Page One: "Cherishing all the children of the Nation". This says it all, the irony, the pride of what was achieved in a deprived area, BCA, etc.

Page Five: I like the portrait of Colley, his passionate interest. It brings these dates to life.

Page Eight and Nine: First time I understood the background (mea culpa).

Page Thirteen and ff: You did attract many talented teachers, but in contrast to principals of comprehensive and community schools, presumably some teachers not of your choosing came in from other CDVEC schools. There was always a small but influential conservative minority who set up a counter rhetoric. You are right to acknowledge the staff tensions and after the first year experiment the logic of the situation was indeed a three-tier arrangement. Some of us in the "more institutional examination oriented group" were caught in the middle. The times - and exams - were out of joint.

Ballyfermot was characterised by contrasts and tensions rather than shared presuppositions, prejudices. Yet perhaps paradoxically there was strong agreement on aims, memorably set

CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER : JOHN T. SLATTERY, M.A.

Coiste Oideachais Ghairme Beatha Thiobrad Árann (Theas)

out by you on many occasions, and it is good to see the quotes on pp 15, 16 and 17.

The experimental atmosphere of the school gave great opportunities for growth - it mirrored the late 60's as remembered by many: a young staff and a young community, a questioning air and a strong sense of mission, well-nigh total mobility.

Page Fifteen: I appreciate your comment about the need for a teacher support programme, cf recent experience in examination reform.

Page Eighteen and ff : I agree that "the school's commitment to community education was well ahead of official thinking at that time." It should have been seen as a major contribution, cf the following from the CMRS recently:

"We note, with regret, the total absence in the Introduction to the Green Paper of any reference to Community Education. A commitment to community education is particularly important in relation to attempts to create greater equity. It is now generally recognised that projects aimed at developing communities are essential to eliminating economic and social disadvantage.

We also regret the fact that there is no reference to how schools can contribute to and benefit from community education. On the one hand schools can contribute to the development of communities by providing a curriculum which promotes communal values and is responsive to community needs. Schools can also contribute by making premises available as an educational resource for the community. On the other hand there is a growing evidence for the belief in the proposition that the school can be more effective in fulfilling its own role when it acts in partnership with the community which it serves."

As a footnote: The school's pre-employment experiment in 1972 was an approach to the business and training sectors of the community, and broke new ground. You remember that we ran part of the course in the FAS Training Centre, as well as in *auto* different local industries.

I have deliberately restricted my comments, one could write at great length on the '68 to '73 period. I am sure someone will do that one day, but in the meantime this chapter was very evocative of a significant accomplishment.

I look forward to our meeting, and thank you once again for agreeing to write for "Decision Maker".

Yours sincerely,


Chief Executive Officer.

20 July 1992

Dr Jim Callan
Department of Education
St Patrick's College
Maynooth
CO KILDARE

Dear Jim

I wish to thank you very sincerely for taking the trouble to respond to the extracts from my thesis which I sent you. I am looking forward to meeting you at 3.00 pm on Wednesday next to discuss your reactions. Without in any way anticipating our discussion, I think the things I would like to emphasise are as follows:

The first and principal point is that it is no part of my plan to cause hurt or win arguments. I did not write the thesis to vindicate my position in the past but to try to understand it. In relation to the Early School Leavers Project, there are several things that I would do differently if I had the chance of doing them again. The chief point I am trying to make in a study which treats of the politics of the CDU's development is that the ESLP evaluation caused a severe political problem for our Management Committee. The reasons for this are worth exploring: perhaps it was due to the kind of evaluation style you adopted, perhaps it was because you knew so little of the background politics of the Unit.

The second point is that my treatment of ESLP is incidental to the story of the Unit as a whole. It is not the story of the project, still less that of the project's evaluation. I know this is not satisfactory to those people who have engaged in the project - and this has been pointed out to me by some of them. But there it is. I have written a rather long thesis on the Unit's political development and ESLP is only one episode in it. Regarding the methodology I adopted, I enclose the full text of the Prologue which tries to explain this.

I have given various extracts from the thesis to various actors in the story and have received so far various kinds of responses. That is only natural I suppose. But I want to be clear about what I am trying to do - which for me goes beyond submitting a PhD dissertation (that is a discipline which I have imposed upon myself). I do not wish to engage in a process of negotiating an agreed version of the past. I wish rather to explore why there were disagreements and in doing so to take responsibility for my own role, including whatever mistakes I may have made. I have found that where this works well new perceptions and insights emerge. But it entails a fundamental attitude of good will on my part and on the part of the people I talk to. After all I would like all of them - and that includes your good self - to be able to be present at my funeral!

Very sincerely

Anton Trant

The National University of Ireland

Roinn an Oideachais,
Coláiste Phádraig,
Má Nuad,
Co. Chill Dara.



Department of Education,
St. Patrick's College,
Maynooth,
Co. Kildare.
Tel. (01) 6285222
Fax. (01) 6289063

20th August 1992.

Dear Anton.

Thank you for forwarding your revised version of the section of your dissertation dealing with ESLP.

I can empathise and identify more readily with this version than the previous one. I think it gives a better balance and a more just representation of the people (person!) involved. You have managed to show the tensions which were present and the frustrations which they lead to. These I see as part and partial of any social/human undertaking. While there are a few areas in which I would differ with you overall I do not have any major problems with the piece.

There are one or two areas which I would wish to comment on very briefly: on page 6. you comment

"This accusation was strongly denied by the director and deputy director, the latter in particular arguing that the evaluation had been trapped by its own methodology in that it failed to evaluate the activities of the project on their own terms as against the inflexible terms of a preconceived evaluation model."

I think this presents a too mechanistic view of the evaluation model used. The qualitative/illuminative model of evaluation used was sensitive to project context. I think this observation hides a little too much behind the statement "... the activities of the project *on their own terms*..." .

The observation on the two models (a la Haywood, p.7) escapes me, but this may be my fault!

on p. 8.: re. sub-committee and the evaluator:

"This helped not only to lower the tension between the Unit and the evaluator but also influenced the direction of the evaluation itself. The sub-committee suggested possible approaches and areas of work and thereby managed to some extent to link with what the evaluator was doing."

This seems to me to be giving a directive role to this sub-committee vis-a-vis the external evaluation. From my perspective the working relationship which was established between this sub-committee and the evaluator enabled a joint sharing of ideas for topics which the evaluation would focus on having consideration for the legitimate information needs of the Unit's Management Committee. Moreover, I think it may be too much to state that this sub-committee suggested "possible approaches": I would agree that they did indicate "areas of work"

on p.9. re the important contributions of ESLP.

I would share your observations here. However, some of these developments referred to (p.9) took place at a later stage and after the 3 years official E.C. duration of the project and the cessation of the evaluation. I think it also fair to acknowledge that the final external evaluation did acknowledge positive aspects and features of the ESLP project, while not, I agree, highlighting the difficulties faced by the project in recruiting schools.

Many of the observations which I made in my previous letter to you have now in one way or another been addressed by you in this revised draft. I do not see any necessity for its inclusion in your work. You might however wish to give the above comments some further consideration and accomodate them within your final text.

I respect your revisions and I appreciate that we will not see everything in the same light. I am happy that we mutually respect this point of view. I too was very pleased with our discussion and I look forward to exchanging ideas on our similar endeavours. in the future.

I wish your work well.

Best wishes,

Yours sincerely,

Jim Callan.
Jim Callan.



CITY OF DUBLIN VOCATIONAL EDUCATION COMMITTEE

Chief Executive Officer: W.J. ARUNDEL, B.Comm., H.Dip.Ed.

Schools Psychological Service

"WINSTEAD", 25 TEMPLE ROAD, DARTRY, DUBLIN 6.

Chief Educational Psychologist:
Brede Foy

PHONE
971442
979569

8 July, 1992.

Mr. Anton Trant,
Curriculum Development Unit,
Sundrive Road,
Dublin, 12.

Dear Anton,

I enclose my comments on your draft chapters. As you requested I have attempted to be frank. Hopefully in that frankness I have been objective, honest, and as delicate as possible.

I have included a little statement at the top of my document pointing to the integrated nature of my responses. Therefore if you include excerpts from it in the main body of your thesis I would require that my document as a whole would be included in your appendix.

Perhaps it is a pity that this exercise was not conducted many years ago.

Best of luck with your thesis.

I am,

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read 'Brede Foy'.

BREDE FOY
Chief Educational Psychologist

Encl. 1.

Response by the Chief Educational Psychologist B.Foy to the Prologue, Chapter III and the section headed - "The search for an alternative to the Leaving Certificate" forwarded to her for comment on 21st May 1992 by the Director of the C.D.U. This is an integrated set of perceptions therefore the author requires that it should be reported in full or not at all. If commented upon in the text she requires that her full document be included in the appendix.

Introduction

A careful reading of all three sections as a single unit seems to portray fundamental differences between the approaches of two support units within the organisation - CDVEC - and a sense of conflict and lack of trust between both units i.e., C.D.U. and the Schools Psychological Service.

Conflict seems to relate to the way in which inter-unit boundaries are maintained or violated: in the perceived respect or lack of it for each other's work; in the ways in which the quite different aims of each unit are expressed.

This writer's response is an effort at understanding from her perspective the debacles described in these chapters relating to the Evaluation of the Humanities Curriculum and to the development of the Career Foundation Course - an alternative to the Leaving Certificate.

She perceives the Evaluation debacle as ensuing from

- (a) A difference between the aims of both unit heads.
- (b) A difference in the modes of thinking of both unit heads.

She perceives the Career Foundation debacle as also related to differences in unit aims, boundary breaching and lack of trust.

She also attempts to tease out the way in which the language of vulnerability/threat which is so evident in the document relates to her unit and if so why - language such as "hostility", "the right enemy", "survival", "no mandate or our mandate".

Finally she attempts to determine the source of the implied lack of trust between the units.

A. Aims of Career Foundation Course: (Alternative to the Leaving Certificate)

In the opinion of this writer boundaries are incorporated in the policies of units such as ours - in their briefs, aims, methodology and in the sensitivities of unit heads and teams, ensuring that neither unit boundaries are breached but most especially that unit/school boundaries are respected and maintained.

- The conflicting aims of both units would seem to contribute to the difficulties between them and in the inter-unit boundary breaching.

- The writer of the chapters/head of the C.D.U. describes his aims as:

- "innovation and development"
- "changing the established order of things"
- "setting out to disturb"
- "challenging opinions and assumptions".

- The aims of the Schools Psychological Service are described in its policy document which has been agreed to by CDVEC and sanctioned by the Department of Education.

These aims are described as follows:

- (1) "to respond to student needs as they become evident through research, personal counselling, parental and staff feedback
 - in line with international psycho-educational research and development and in parallel with educational developments within the Committee's schools and colleges. It is essentially student-centred.
- (2) "to develop the professionalism of its members and school staff".
- (3) "the acceptance of this service in schools by the development of professional trust and by demonstrating its value in practical rather than in theoretical terms".

It would appear that both sets of aims differ fundamentally as follows, i.e.,

- (a) The aims of the C.D.U. seem to be "challenging"; assertive; controlling. The aims of the Psychological Service are "responding"; proactive.
- (b) The aims of the C.D.U. are "innovative", changing the established order of things, i.e., external ideas applied. The aims of the Schools Psychological Service are "student centred": "to respond to students' needs".

Re Career Foundation Course

The record

The initiative taken by the Schools Psychological Service on Career Foundation Courses arose out of findings about attitudes, motivations, difficulties of a large proportion of CDVEC's students to its academic Leaving Certificate. There was a massive drop-out of these students from the course. These students had described their interests in terms of "real work", "apprenticeships", "engineering", "building", "business".

The head of the Schools Psychological Service reported these findings to the Working Party described in the Chapter on the Alternative to the Leaving Certificate. It was however not the head of the Schools Psychological Service who formulated the structure for the Career Foundation Course but rather the then Head of Engineering and now Principal of Bolton Street College of Technology. This writer's contribution to the structure was the idea of the "Career Clusters".

Both she and the Principal of Bolton Street also liaised with industry. She visited some institutions in London on the recommendation of the Working Party of which she was Secretary. The Working Party saw an immediacy about the need for the development of such a course if many hundred more students were to be saved from further dropping out.

They felt that CDVEC was capable of developing such a course and giving it certification.

Another member of the Working Party, the Principal of the North Strand described a similar initiative which he and his staff had begun to develop. He therefore wished to pilot the course.

It was at this point that the director of the C.D.U. became involved. The outcome is described in the chapter on an alternative to the Leaving Certificate.

However this writer was unaware until she read his chapters about his background negotiations, although she was aware of their effects. They make interesting reading!

Comment

In keeping with the aims of the Schools Psychological Service the Chief Educational Psychologist was - on this issue - responding to the students' needs. It would seem that the Director of C.D.U. was acting in keeping with his stated aims of controlling/ challenging, i.e., the unit's need to take control of curriculum - in this case the Career Foundation Course.

B. Modes of thinking and Evaluation of Humanities.

This writer was interested in the degree to which the different modes of thinking of the heads of both units differ and influenced their attitudes to evaluation.

C.D.U.'s Director comes from an academic background in the humanities. The Chief Educational Psychologist's academic background is in the sciences - Physics and Chemistry to post-graduate level. Her Psychological studies were subsequent to those.

These differences seem to this writer to have resulted in the subjectivity in the approach of the Director of C.D.U. to evaluation and an objectivity in the approach of the Chief Educational Psychologist and her team.

The pattern of his descriptions of the different researchers seems to imply that if you have "friendly" researchers, "the right people" to evaluate them you will receive friendly evaluations. Mulhern (p.20-21) stated that "There was a general reference by all groups to the absence of real accomplishment. This was especially so among students as well. Discipline and behaviour standards were cited by all groups as an area in need of reform." These were major elements covered by the Schools Psychological Service's evaluation and recommendations.

The Record

The Director of the C.D.U. in Chapter III once more dismisses the Schools Psychological Service's evaluation - this time as "a study in the classical mental testing tradition..."

This writer wishes to put the record straight.

The evaluation study conducted by four Psychologists on a part-time basis was correct academically in its approach - backed by a full review of the then literature on evaluation of curricula. The literature described formative and summative approaches. The Skilbeck approach is a formative one "an ongoing process involving close co-operation and inter-play between the evaluator and the developer." [Wisemann and Pigeon].

The evaluation conducted by the Psychological Service was a summative one in which "the evaluator must be independent... committed only to the production of a dispassionate analysis of success and failure." [do.]

As to the importance of conducting such a summative evaluation Scriven is quoted as follows -

"We are interested in Curricula because they may prove to be better than what we now have in some important way... When we come to evaluate the curriculum as opposed to merely describing its performance then we inevitably confront the question of its superiority or inferiority to the competition".

The tests chosen for the objective evaluation reflected the aims of the Humanities curriculum, i.e., students' understanding of self; students' tolerance of others; students' understanding of and ability to cope with his environment and were not merely a selection of "mental tests". The subjective evaluation included the recorded impressions/attitudes/feelings of the Principals, staff and students to the operation of a Humanities curriculum in their schools. A case study of one large school was conducted. A formative evaluation was also included whose aim was to provide detailed information to individual teachers and pupils concerning attainment of their objectives.

Given the academic respectability of this study and the fact that many of its scientific findings favoured Humanities over traditional curricula it is difficult to understand C.D.U.'s reaction to it, i.e., to "ignore it". This writer in a similar situation would have viewed it as a strong objective base from which to argue the merits of Humanities with uncommitted school Principals and staff, with CDVEC and with the Department of Education and Trinity College.

C. Vulnerability and the Units Origins

The language used throughout the chapters reveals a sense of vulnerability/threat, e.g., "the enemy"; "hostility"; "survival"; "growth or death"; "no mandate or our mandate"; "not a permanent institution protected by precedent and tradition".

Since this writer and her unit may be perceived as "the right kind of enemy" it seems important to address this sense of vulnerability/threat, which appears in the chapters as a kind of sibling rivalry.

In this writer's perception the vulnerability may be due to the origins of both units.

The Schools Psychological Service's Origins

The service was established formally by CDVEC in 1960 on the advice of the then C.E.O. the late Martin Gleeson and with the sanction of the Department of Education. He perceived the need to provide vocational, educational and personal guidance for our students; to halt drop-out; to work with teachers, etc.

The personnel of the Schools Psychological Service were chosen formally via CDVEC's selection boards.

They were given a brief to organise, operationalise and develop the Service within agreed policy guidelines.

Their contracts include a brief "to develop programmes in schools where a need for them becomes evident, i.e., curriculum".

C.D.U.'s origins

The C.D.U. was - from this writer's memory the brain-child of its present Director.

She remembers his efforts at innovation in the school in which he was principal. She also remembers later his advocacy of curriculum development at the Board of Studies.

Finally she remembers that he obtained leave of absence as principal to set up the C.D.U.

Comment

This informal process of setting up the C.D.U. as opposed to the formal process by which the Schools Psychological service was set up may have at least in part led to a sense of vulnerability in one and a relative sureness in the other. The similarities of brief in both, i.e., curriculum/programme development may be a core cause of the boundary violations referred to in A.

D. Lack of trust - its origins - the evaluation and alternative to the Leaving Certificate

Although not overtly stated in the chapters submitted there is an obvious absence of trust between the heads of both units on the issues of evaluation and the development of the alternative to the Leaving Certificate.

The Record

There is an omission in the chapters of a description of the original boundary breach which led to that lack of trust - between two erstwhile friends. The breach occurred as a result of an attempt by the head of C.D.U. to take over a programme for students with special needs in CDVEC's Junior Cycle second level schools - an area traditionally both here and abroad the function of the Schools Psychological Service. This programme had been piloted and later developed and operationalised in twenty-two CDVEC schools and evaluated by the Schools Psychological Service.

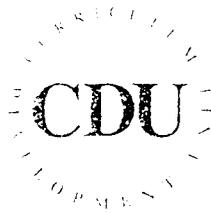
The take-over was unsuccessful due to the intervention of a group of principals given the task by the Board of Studies of negotiating/facilitating discussion between both unit heads and also of stating their own preferences.

It was not so much the attempted take-over which breached trust in this writer. It was the fact that three days prior to the attempted take-over she met - as part of a series of arranged meetings - the head of the C.D.U. in Trinity College in order to discuss how both units might continue to work together most efficiently. She therefore felt a real sense of betrayal when a few days later the issue of take-over was presented at the Board of Studies out of the blue by the then C.E.O. - seemingly following negotiations with him.

In an effort to resolve this difficulty both heads met subsequently on a number of occasions. This writer shared her lack of trust with the Head of the C.D.U. He shared his sadness about the breach. On a later occasion he asked the writer what the core of her difficulty with him was. She replied that it was his need to control all of CDVEC's programmes. Her recollection is that the Director of C.D.U. replied that her perception was correct. This need to control is evident in his comments on evaluation but most obviously in his role in the development of an alternative to the Leaving Certificate.

Brede Foy
Chief Educational Psychologist.
CDVEC

July 1992.



CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT UNIT, SUNDRIVE ROAD, DUBLIN 12. TEL: 535487, FAX: 537659

14 September 1992

Ms Brede Foy
Chief Psychologist
Winstead
25 Darty Road
Rathgar
DUBLIN 6

Dear Brede

Many thanks for your response to the extracts I sent you. I appreciate the time and trouble you took and I would be grateful for your permission to include the response in its entirety in the final text.

There are a number of things I would like to emphasise about what I am trying to do and I do not know whether these emerge from the Prologue I subsequently sent you. The first relates to my intention in attempting the exercise in the first place.

I undertook the enquiry into a period of my own past in order to understand it more fully and to take responsibility for it. I do not try to defend, I hope, the positions I took on various issues and in some instances I would do things very differently, had I the chance to live my life again. Nor do I wish to open old wounds by renewing past controversies. What I hope for is a deeper insight into why there were differences and what lessons can be drawn from these. I suppose all this demands humility and I am not sure to what degree I possess that virtue.

The method that I follow, as I tried to explain in the Prologue, is a mixture of the historical and the autobiographical approach. This is a risky business and I am not always confident that it succeeds. That is one of the reasons I submitted my work as a Ph.D. thesis to a university removed from the Irish scene. It is a discipline I have imposed upon myself.

Your comments about the Career Foundation Course and the Humanities Evaluation are fair and although I would not always agree with them, I acknowledge them as reasonable, courteous and sincere. Your remark about 'the enemy' prompts me to make a small clarification. The Unit had plenty of enemies, God knows, and other chapters of the thesis show this I hope quite clearly, but I never counted Winstead as one of them.

The section in your response which concerns me most is that on Lack of Trust. It is not mentioned in the thesis at all and yet it is clear from what you write that you regard it as the most fundamental issue of all. I know we discussed this in the past but I have to say that I never clearly understood what had happened, nor do I to this day. Before I can do penance I must first know what my sin was. To achieve this understanding, I realise now, I would have to undertake the same kind of rigorous exercise as I did for the other issues in my thesis, starting with an examination of all



the written documentation available and going on from there. That I hope to do some day but I trust you will understand when I say I have to finish my thesis first. It's long overdue.

Thank you Brede for your open, honest and very full response. I would hope that the fact that we have disagreed in the past does not preclude our having an understanding of each other's positions and a respect for each other's professional and personal integrity. The thesis I have written is a fairly long one and I would hesitate before burdening you with any further reading of it. However, I would like to let you see at least the last chapter I wrote, the Epilogue - that is if you have the time to peruse it.

With renewed good wishes,

Sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Anton Trant". The signature is written in a cursive style with some loops and flourishes.

Anton Trant

SCHOOL OF EDUCATION
Department of Higher Education & Educational Research
4048 Arts & Social Sciences Building.



4th August 1992

Dear Anton,

Further to our telephone conversation, here are my "quick" responses to your thesis sections, for in case I get no more time to consider them.

My first impressions are that your perceptions are in accord with mine as regards the development of ISCIP evaluation. The -- initially perhaps rather uncritical -- espousal of the RDD model, with formal evaluation playing its classical role of finding out whether or not objectives had been achieved, was duly followed by emphasis on trying to establish the alternative mode of examination. I remember the day that we visited the Department, meeting (was it?) Liam Mulcahy and Brendan McDonagh; printout galore enveloped the table, and I like to think -- whether with justification or not! -- that our reasonably professional-looking approach helped to produce the decision in favour of the mode.

I am not quite so happy with your interpretation of the events that brought me into, or at least alongside, the ISCIP team. Looking back, I approached the task with academic open-mindedness rather than with the intention of "making a case". Thus, I took on the evaluator's role in order to find out *whether or not* "ISCIP worked", rather than to prove to all comers that it did. Certainly I hoped very much that the results would be favourable to ISCIP; but it did not occur to me that adverse findings might be regarded as personally embarrassing to Bryan, and I would have reported them with regret but no apprehension. You have, perhaps, over-estimated my political awareness.

One other point may be worthy of mention. The exigencies of evaluation were regarded as secondary to the immediate needs of the students in the project; thus, if "good practice" conflicted with what were felt to be the interests of the participating children, or indeed of the curriculum team, then evaluation took second place *and was duly reported as having done so*. In retrospect, I suppose I can wonder if this pointed to a longer agenda than I realised; but in view of the phrase I have italicised, I think not. The evaluator's closeness to the team was commented on by Bryan's former colleague Iolo Williams when I visited him (under your auspices) in the mid-seventies, but I had no problem with explaining our rationale.

It is nostalgic to look back to the heady days of structural expansion and curricular visions and dreams. I hope that we do have a chance to meet and discuss them in the not-too-distant future. In the meantime, however, I wish you the best of luck in completing the doctorate.

Yours sincerely,

Elizabeth

Elizabeth Oldham

4th August, 1992

Anton Trant Esq.,
Director,
Curriculum Development Unit,
Sundrive Road,
Dublin 12.

Dear Anton,

Enclosed are the results of my "labours". Whatever you find here will have to be read in the context of the recent career and life-style of the writer. Bear in mind that I have left the walls of "academia" for some ten years now and have spent the most of the interim amid the mountainy men of Wicklow, building schools and learning the language of politicians.

All in all, I must say that I can only admire your perseverance, tenacity and dedication over a period of eight years. Others would have given up long ago. One must recognise the mental discipline involved, the continuous and consistent level of deep concentration, the great attention to the selection of the relevant sources especially those profound works associated with the history of thought and the essence of history itself. The number of well balanced observations and judgements having significant and critical implications make this work a reference that would need to be consulted by students of Irish and European education systems especially within the time-frame 1960-89.

At a personal level, I found the work inspirational, having a soul-cleansing effect and raising deep concern regarding many unfulfilled aspirations which were never seriously addressed or adverted to while I was associated with the doings of the Unit.

I do not however, share your apologetic style in presenting your thesis. You start by describing the Unit as "small" and "frail". You direct at the Unit a very strong beam testing for the "institutionalisation" factor; other tests which would show up more positive results would seem to be placed in the background. Not having read the other Chapters, the conclusions or the Epilogue, I cannot fully stand over this observation - but I have my fears.

This is a proud story which identifies and describes the achievements of the Unit, its gross failures from which many lessons have, and can be learned. It constitutes a very significant chapter in the recent history of Irish Education; it enables the reader to place the work of the Unit beside the other Curriculum Development projects which achieved some notoriety both in the UK and Europe from 1960 onwards.

In general that would be all that I would submit. The remainder of my observations are in the form of glosses pencilled along the margins of the text. Some of these are spontaneous reactions to small irritants that were motivated often by pique; others perhaps were more profound.

The writing styles of the two documents were quite in contrast. Chapter 7, I must say, was easier to read while the Prologue was ponderous,wordy and needed "punch". But that is the Geographer in me thinking, "get things done, quickly if possible;there is no time to waste. " I think you should ignore that observation.

I hope I have provided you with some little inspiration. At this stage all you need are some minor adjustments and it is ready for the desk-top. I wish you every good wish in the run-up to the home straight.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Micheal S. Breathnach". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long, sweeping flourish at the end.

Micheal S. Breathnach.

APPENDIX 3

Examples of documents which have been used in the dissertation.

- 3A Minutes of First Meeting of Unit's Steering Committee, 7 April 1972.
- 3B Copy of letter from Department of Education, approving the experimental examination modes in ISCIP and Humanities, 21 June 1974.
- 3C Letter to Minister for Education from principals of some of the Unit's pilot schools, protesting at the intention of the Department of Education to terminate the experimental examination modes, 30 May 1978.
- 3D Letter from W. J. Webb, President Teachers' Union of Ireland, agreeing to proposals for the participation of teachers in ISCIP and Humanities, 23 June 1977.
- 3E Minutes of Unit's Management Committee, 21 April 1986.
- 3F Letter from the Department of Education announcing the intention to reduce the scope of the Unit's activities, 4 June 1987.

Meeting of Steering Committee of Joint Curriculum Development Project of City of Dublin Vocational Education Committee in association with School of Education, Trinity College, University of Dublin

Friday, 7th April, 1972 at School of Education, Trinity College Dublin.

Present: Chairman - Mr. Sheehan, Chief Executive Officer, City of Dublin Vocational Education Committee.

Professor Rice, School of Education, Trinity College
Dublin

Dr. Powell, School of Education, Trinity College
Dublin

Mr. Trant, Principal, Ballyfermot Vocational School

Mr. Trant acted as secretary to the meeting.

1/1/72 Draft Proposal for submission to the Board of Trinity College and to the City of Dublin Vocational Education Committee

Mr. Sheehan presented to the meeting a draft document in which he outlined the main proposals concerning the joint curriculum project for submission to the Board of Trinity College Dublin and to the City of Dublin Vocational Education Committee. The document was discussed in detail and was adopted unanimously by the members of the Steering Committee after some minor changes had been agreed to. The amended document is appended to these minutes.

2/1/72 Status of Mr. J. A. Crooks

The members of the Steering Committee unanimously expressed their preference that the status of Mr. Crooks for the duration of the project be that of a research junior lecturer. It was also agreed that a decision be reached on the point as early as possible. Professor Rice agreed to discuss the matter with the officers of the College Board and to report to the Committee.

3/1/72 Inclusion of Ballymun Comprehensive School (Girls) as a pilot school

Dr. Powell reported to the committee that he had reason to believe that Ballymun Comprehensive School (Girls) was very anxious to join the science project. The committee felt that should Ballymun be included among the other pilot schools it should accept both the science and the humanities projects. Mr. Trant expressed reservations about including Ballymun as a pilot school for the humanities before 1972. The committee arrived at two conclusions:

- (i) To await a formal proposal from Ballymun to join the joint curriculum project
- (ii) In the event of such a proposal being submitted, to consider the possibility of a 'phased introduction' to the project i.e., joining the science project in 1972 and the humanities project in 1973.

4/1/72 Personnel Development - Visits abroad

The Steering Committee agreed in principle to the following proposals:

- (i) Dr. Powell to go to Edinburgh (25th April - 28th April, 1972) for discussion with the directors of the Scottish Integrated Science Programme and to visit some of the pilot schools. (Cost approximately £50)

- (ii) Mr. Trant and Mr. Crooks to attend an international training seminar on the American Humanities Programme, 'Man, - A Course of Study', to be held in Fife, Scotland (28th May - 2nd June, 1972)
(Cost approximately £100)

The meeting was then concluded.

Signed: _____
Chairman

Copy

Department of Education,
Post Primary Branch,
Inspection Section,
Apollo House,
Dublin 2.

21st June 1974.

Mr. Anton Trant,
Unit Director,
Curriculum Development Unit,
School of Education,
University of Dublin,
28 Westland Row,
Dublin 2.

A Chara,

Please refer to previous correspondence about the projects in the Integrated Studies and alternative syllabuses in which your Unit is involved.

The Department has decided to approve, in principle, the projects in question as alternative syllabuses for certain subjects in the Intermediate Certificate Examination. We would be glad, therefore if you would arrange to have detailed draft timetables and syllabuses submitted to the Department (at above address) as soon as possible, so that the matter may be further considered.

Mise le meas,

L. MacUistín.

UNIVERSITY OF DUBLIN

SCHOOL OF EDUCATION

Telephone 772941
Ext: 1715 or 1550

CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT UNIT

28 WESTLAND ROW

DUBLIN 2.



Mr John Wilson TD
Minister for Education
Dail Eireann
DUBLIN 2

30 May 1978

We, are principals of schools associated with the work of the Curriculum Development Unit, which is sponsored by the City of Dublin Vocational Education Committee, Trinity College Dublin and the Department of Education. We understand from the director of the Unit, Mr A Trant, that a letter was sent on 20 February 1978 by the Department of Education stating that the experimental examination modes for Group and Intermediate Certificate in the Unit's science and humanities projects should terminate after 1979. We deplore this decision, all the more so since we understand that it was not in accordance with the sentiments which you yourself expressed on the future of the Unit to a delegation of the City of Dublin Vocational Education Committee on 14 December 1977.

We feel strongly that the continuance of the experimental examination modes in the science and humanities projects at both Group and Intermediate Certificate should continue, as the courses based on them are designed to cater for the needs of our students. These courses are relevant to the everyday life of our students, while at the same time they maintain standards of proficiency equal to those of the traditional courses. The courses also provide a direct link with the philosophy and methodology of the new primary school curriculum.

We are so deeply concerned about the possible consequences of the attitude of some officials in your Department that we would like to meet you personally to apprise you of the situation. We are confident that as the Minister responsible for the educational welfare of our students, you will give us a fair hearing.

J B Arney

Dr. Philomena Collins

Mr. B. O'Connell

Mr. O'Connell

Mr. O'Connell

Mr. O'Connell - School Principal & Chairperson

M. O'Connell

30 May 1978



M. F. Moneay
to L. D. Caughy.
John P. Mackey.

J. Ann Hogan.

J. Keeney

P. Halpin

E. Burke.

P. Heeran

R. G. Doyle

~~James W. Keenan~~

S. Eileen Doyle

John J. McGovern

Terence Doyle.

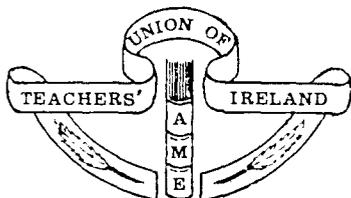
Alexander F. Sille



30 May 1978

T J Carney	Technical School, Ringsend
Sr. Philomena Collins	Loreto College, Cavan
J V Bond	Ashton Comprehensive School, Cork
N Corish	Vocational School, Killester
J Harris	Newpark Comprehensive School
Sean O'Beachain	Coolmine Community School
Miss M O'Carroll	Vocational School, Crumlin Road
Bro. M F Murray	Christian Brothers School, James' Street
Bro. L D Canny	Christian Brothers School, Parnell Road
John P Mackey	Mayfield Community School, Mayfield, Cork
Sr. Ann Horgan	Mater Dei Secondary School, Basin Lane
S Rossiter	Vocational School, Clogher Road
P Halpin	Dundrum Vocational School
E Burke	Vocational School, Cabra
P Heeran	Tallaght Community School
R G Doyle	Colaiste Dhulaigh, Coolock
James A Shortall	Vocational School, Ballyfermot
Sr. Eileen Doyle	Rosary College, Crumlin
John F McGovern	Colaiste Eoin, Finglas
Terence Doyle	Liberties Vocational School
Alexander F Silke	Scoil Ide, Finglas
Sr. Patricia	St Clare's Secondary School, Ballyjamesduff, Co Cavan

Aontas Muinteoiri Eireann/Teachers' Union of Ireland



73 ORWELL ROAD,
RATHGAR,
DUBLIN 6.
Telephone 903229

P. 77/6/13/mm

Mr. Anton Trant,
Director,
Curriculum Development Unit,
University of Dublin,
School of Education,
28 Westland Row,
Dublin 2

23rd June 1977

Dear Mr. Trant,

Teacher Participation in Pilot Curriculum Projects
organised by the Curriculum Development Unit

The T.U.I. Executive Committee at its meeting on 17th June considered the proposals submitted for teacher participation in pilot curriculum projects. I confirm that the Union is prepared to accept on the following basis:

1. Participation would be voluntary at both school and teacher levels.
2. Participation would be in the following areas:
 - (i) Feedback on materials and on how they are used.
 - (ii) Inservice courses, provided they are within the normal teaching working week.
 - (iii) Meetings organised by the Curriculum Development Unit, provided they are within the normal teaching working week.
 - (iv) Experimental assessment procedures.
3. A token goodwill payment of an annual sum of £25 to each participating teacher, subject to an annual review based on CPI.
4. Participation would be on the basis of each teacher involved being given one period weekly ex quota for joint planning sessions. A period per month would be given to a representative teacher from each pilot school for planning sessions at the Curriculum Development Unit.

I confirm that the Union will accept these proposals on an experimental basis and will use this to quantify the work involved and evaluate procedures.

Yours sincerely,

W. J. Webb

W. J. Webb
President

Minutes of Meeting of the Management Committee of the Curriculum Development Unit, Monday 21 April 1986

Present: Mr A K Asmal (Chairman), Dean of Arts (Humanities), TCD
 Mr W J Arundel, CEO, City of Dublin VEC
 Mr M Cotter, Member of City of Dublin VEC
 Mr C Ó Conghaile, Inspector, Department of Education
 Mr J Henderson, Inspector, Department of Education
 Mr A Ó Gormáin, Senior Psychologist, Department of Education
 Councillor M O'Halloran, Member of City of Dublin VEC
 Mr S Puirseil, Member of City of Dublin VEC
 Professor J V Rice, Director, School of Education, TCD
 Mr W S Sterling, Academic Secretary, TCD
 Mr A Trant, (Secretary), Director, Curriculum Development Unit
 Ms J Walshe, Psychologist, Department of Education

In Attendance: Dr J A Crooks, Deputy Director, Curriculum Development Unit
 Mr T Doyle, Education Officer, City of Dublin VEC

1 Minutes of Meeting of the Curriculum Development Unit, 10 March 1986

Mr Ó Gormáin asked that the following changes be made in the minutes: The first sentence in paragraph 5, page 4 should read: "Mr Ó Gormáin said that it would be necessary to review the work of the Curriculum Development Unit". The last sentence in the same paragraph should read: "He was also unhappy regarding the relationship in the Action Plan between the development and service functions of the Unit". The following sentence should be inserted before the last sentence in the last paragraph of page 4: "Mr Sterling said that members of the Management Committee should feel free to give their comments orally as well as in writing; Mr Ó Gormáin agreed with this".

Ms Walshe asked that the following change be made in the minutes. The last sentence in the second paragraph on page 2 should read: "Ms Walshe requested that since members of the Management Committee wished to be fully briefed on developments in the Dublin Inner City Education Project, the Project should be included as a special item on the agenda of the next meeting of the Management Committee, and relevant documents on the Project should be circulated".

2 Matters Arising

(a) Report of the Management Subcommittee on the Resocialisation Project

The Director reported that the Subcommittee had met the Management Board of the Resocialisation Project on Friday 11 April 1986. The subcommittee had put forward a plan for a conference to be held in December to disseminate the activities of the Project. This plan had been well received by the Management Board of the Resocialisation Project. The question whether patients should participate in the conference had been discussed and also the possibility of seeking financial support from the European Community.

(b) Release of Ms Nora Godwin to the Curriculum and Examinations Board

The Director reported that Ms Godwin had been seconded to the Curriculum and Examinations Board for the period 7 April to 6 June 1986 on the same basis as her release to the Board last year.

3 Action Plan of the Curriculum Development Unit 1986-90

The Chairman began by summarising the debate on the Action Plan during the previous meetings of the Management Committee. He said that estimates of costing and staffing had been provided and that Professor Rice had produced a document on research. He noted that important points had been made by the Department of Education representatives and added that he looked forward, later in the meeting, to hearing the views of the representatives of the City of Dublin VEC. He then asked the Director to introduce a document entitled Memorandum on the Future of the Curriculum Development Unit.

The Director said that the document had been drawn up as a result of meetings of the Management Committee, the Steering Committee, the Unit's staff and the CDVEC's Board of Studies. The document had also taken into account comments made by individual principals and teachers from the Unit's pilot schools as well as papers which had been written by Professor Rice and Professor Heywood. The document made the following recommendations:

- that the Unit's next cycle be from 1986-90;
- that the Unit's Management Committee continue on the same basis as heretofore;
- that there be consultative committees, which would report to the management committee, for each of the Unit's major programmes. The members of the consultative committees would be drawn from the existing Management and Steering Committees with additional members such as programme staff, principals and teachers from the pilot schools, and other key individuals;
- that the Unit develop a close working relationship with the Curriculum and Examinations Board;
- that the first year of the Unit's four year cycle be considered as a feasibility year which would facilitate the putting into place of the new consultative committees. The feasibility year would also be a period of review of all the Unit's programmes;
- that the feasibility year would be operated within the same staff ratios that exist in the Unit at present.

The Chairman then asked Professor Rice to introduce his document, The Question of Research, which had already been circulated. Professor Rice said that he had been a member of the Management and Steering Committees from the start, and that he was well disposed towards the Unit. He thought that the question of research was one of balance and considered that the developmental work of the Unit would be more fruitful if it were informed by research. Professor Rice concluded by making the following recommendations:

- the Management and Steering Committees should develop and implement an effective research policy;
- a Research Committee should be established for the Unit. It should report to the Steering and Management Committees and advise them on the formulation of a research policy. It would oversee the conduct of relevant research in the Unit and would arrange for its publication;

- in order to provide for more effective communication with the School of Education and to provide for additional expertise with regard to educational research, the Management Committee should contain more than one member of staff from the School of Education;
- the Steering Committee should meet more frequently;
- a defined and realistic proportion of the Unit's total budget should be designated for research;
- each project within the Unit should have the guidance and support of a steering committee of experts in the particular area with which the project is concerned. The Steering Committee should include the project leader, a member of the Management Committee, and selected staff, as appropriate, from the School of Education, the Department of Education and the CDVEC. The steering committees would ensure that each project had an appropriate research dimension and would provide feedback on the project to the Unit's Research, Management and Steering Committees.

Mr Arundel then said that he would like to speak on behalf of the CDVEC. First of all the CDVEC wanted the Unit to proceed on a four year programme. They were happy to see changes in the consultative process of the Unit and felt that if the present Steering Committee did not fulfill a useful function then its format should be changed. He stressed the fact that the funding for the Unit came out of the VEC's overall allocation for its schools. The main reason why the Unit had been established in the first place was to serve the needs of the CDVEC schools. The CDVEC had about 800 teachers in 22 second level schools. It was important that work in curriculum development in these schools should not be duplicated but that there should be a unit that would act as the overall coordinating and servicing agency.

Mr Arundel said that the Unit had a budget for certain externally funded projects but that the mainstay of its financial support was the CDVEC allocation. It was within this context, he said, that the question of research should be examined. Before the Unit could undertake any piece of research it would be important to know who would fund it. His Committee had no specific budget for research outside its allocation for schools.

Mr Arundel said that he considered that the Unit had been very successful in publishing documents on various aspects of its work. The Unit had also a very good record in its service to schools. It was closely linked to schools; it was relevant, involved, participative, and gave the teachers a feeling of ownership in the activities in which they were engaged.

Mr Arundel also said that the CDVEC was responsible for the development of out-of-school and community oriented programmes, and in this regard the Unit was carrying out the brief that had been given to it. If the Unit did not work in such areas then the CDVEC would have to find another agency which would be willing to do so.

Ms Walshe asked whether teachers who had been seconded from the CDVEC had not been replaced within the scheme. Mr Arundel replied that members of the CDVEC staff who worked in the Curriculum Development Unit had been seconded without replacement except in the case of externally funded projects.

Ms Walshe said that she felt that it was necessary to have some research in order to have full value from the developmental work. Mr Arundel replied that he would welcome support from the Department of Education in providing funds for such research.

The Chairman asked Professor Rice if he could describe the kind of research that he would like to see the Unit engaged in. He added that Professor Skilbeck had been happy with the Unit's research performance as recently as four years ago. Professor Rice replied that he would not be dogmatic about the kind of research that the Unit should undertake. The kind of research would vary depending on the needs ascertained by the reserach committee which, he hoped, would be established.

Mr Sterling said that Professor Rice's department could provide some of the research needed by the Unit.

Mr Arundel said that the criterion that the CDVEC would use with regard to any research project (other than externally funded projects) was the relevance of such a project to the CDVEC scheme.

Mr Sterling said that he considered the Unit's work to be excellent and essential to the Dublin metropolitan area. He thought that this work should be closely aligned to that of the Curriculum and Examinations Board. He also felt that the establishment of a research subcommittee would solve the problems that Professor Rice had referred to.

Mr Ó Conghaile said that he welcomed the CDVEC's response to the Unit's Action Plan and he also welcomed the documents from Professor Rice and Professor Heywood. He considered that the Unit's Management Committee was essentially a subcommittee of the CDVEC. Since the CDVEC proceeded on annual budgets he thought that the Unit could also proceed on a year-to-year basis.

Mr Puriseil said that he understood that all state funding was on an annual basis, but that did not prevent the Government or the Department of Education from drawing up four year plans.

Mr Arundel said that he wished to repeat that the CDVEC wanted a four year plan. This plan could be reviewed on a regular basis but to proceed with short term plans would be a waste of public resources.

Councillor O Halloran said that the value of having a four year plan was that it enabled the Unit to set objectives which would guide its work. There should be no problem, he felt, with reviewing these objectives on a regular basis. With regard to research, it would be necessary, he said, to take a practical approach. He understood that the Unit's approach to research was action oriented in that it concentrated mainly on issues that arose out of immediate concerns, and which aimed at producing results that could be used in working towards some practical goals.

Mr O Gormain said that he was not against forward planning in the Unit but that he was not in favour of the four year plan under discussion. He would like, he said, to be able to recommend to the Department of Education a programme which he fully supported. If the CDVEC was only interested in the Unit providing services for its own schools, then this was a matter for the CDVEC committee - in which case the purpose of the Management Committee in its existing format would have to be called into question. However, he considered the situation was more complicated than that, and he would like to see a balance between the service and the developmental areas of the Unit's work. He also said that the Department of Education would have to pay attention to the points that were made by the School of Education in Trinity College. For these reasons Mr O Gormain felt that it would be unwise to proceed with the present four year plan.

The Chairman said that he would like to know what was the essence of the problem under discussion and whether the conflict was more apparent than real. Four years ago, he said, the Unit's sponsors had agreed to a four year plan; he wondered why a problem was now arising.

Mr Arundel pointed out that externally funded projects such as Information Technology and Environmental Education proceeded on terms of more than one year. He added that he saw no problem with the Unit having a commitment to research provided that it was directly related to its projects. A special committee could look at research needs and bring forward recommendations to be discussed by the Management Committee.

The Director said that the Unit was now in operation for fourteen years and that its sponsors should decide whether they wanted it to continue or not. In 1978 he had gone before the University Council to justify the Unit's research record in three areas: helping teachers to bring a research element into their teaching, encouraging a research element in the work of students, and the research output of the Unit staff. Afterwards, the Director said, he had had a meeting with the Provost, the late Dr F S L Lyons, who had declared himself quite satisfied with the Unit's research record. The Director added that with regard to one year plans that he would find it impossible to staff the Unit on a year to year basis.

Mr Henderson said that he felt that the 1982 Unit plan and the 1986 Unit plan were very much the same, and that what was being proposed now was basically a consolidation of what had existed already.

Mr Doyle said that he wished to point out that when the Action Plan was first discussed at the meetings of the Management Committee in December and January, there had been a very positive acceptance of it from all sides. It was only in subsequent meetings that the problems had begun to emerge. Mr Doyle added that it was essential for the Unit to be able to plan in advance. It had been very difficult to plan ahead in projects such as Humanities and ISCIP when the Department of Education had only given a few months notice about permission to hold the experimental examination modes.

Councillor O Halloran asked whether the representatives from the Department of Education were suggesting that the Unit should recruit staff for one year only or whether it should recruit staff for a longer period and review its programmes at the end of each year.

Mr Ó Gormáin said that there was no question of the Department's representatives suggesting that the Unit should close. He felt that there was a sufficient number of whole-time staff seconded from the CDVEC to the Unit to ensure its continuity.

Mr Ó Conghaile repeated his conviction that the Unit's funding should be on the same basis as that of the CDVEC and that the Unit should plan on a year to year basis. He also said that he was unhappy with some aspects of the Action Plan.

Mr Sterling said that Mr Ó Conghaile should be specific about what he was unhappy with in the Action Plan. The Chairman added that this might be done in the form of a document which would be circulated in advance of the next meeting of the Management Committee.

Ms Walshe said that she welcomed the proposals for new consultative structures as outlined by the Director. She said that it was unfortunate that the Action Plan had been produced without a prior discussion of the issues with the Management Committee. She would

like to see a review of the basic policy of the Unit and that decisions should be made about the elements of the Unit's work that were ready for mainstreaming. Ms Walshe added that it was difficult to identify in what way the Action Plan was different from what had been proposed in 1982. She also questioned the appropriateness of some of the statements in the plan. Ms Walshe also pointed out that the previous four year plan had been changed to include a major development, namely the Dublin Inner City Education Project.

The Chairman said that he had frequently asked questions in the past about the appropriateness of some of the Unit's projects; he had for instance, expressed reservations about taking on the Resocialisation Project. He again asked the Department of Education's representatives to produce a document or at least a series of questions on which they would like clarification. The Chairman finally said that it might be necessary for the Management Committee to meet twice in the following month to come to a resolution about the future of the Unit.

4 Next Meeting of the Management Committee

It was agreed that the next meeting of the Management Committee would be at 4.00 pm on 12 May 1986 in the Conference Room, Arts Building, Trinity College Dublin.

AN ROINN OIDEACHAIS,
BRAINSE AN IARBHUNOIDEACHAIS,
TEACH HÁICÍN (3ú Urlár),
BAILE ÁTHA CLIATH, 2.



DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION,
POST-PRIMARY BRANCH,
HAWKINS HOUSE (3rd Floor),
DUBLIN, 2.

Freagra a sheoladh go dtí
Address reply to

An Rúnaí

Mr. W. J. Arundel,
Chief Executive Officer,
City of Dublin Vocational
Education Committee.

4 Meitheamh, 1987.

A Chara,

This Department has been reviewing the position of CDVEC Curriculum Development Unit with particular regard to

- (i) the scope and nature of its activities, its management structures and the draft four year plan under consideration by the Management Committee of the Unit;
- (ii) the present pressures on public expenditure generally and education expenditure in particular;
- (iii) the expenditure overrun incurred by your Committee on its second level scheme in 1986.

The Department wishes to place on record its appreciation of the valuable development work carried out by the Curriculum Development Unit since its inception. However, in view of present financial constraints it is considered necessary to effect a significant scaling down and restructuring of the Unit together with a reorientation of its activities.

I am to inform you therefore that with effect from the beginning of the 1987/88 school year the Department will confine the staffing allocation of the Unit to not more than two heads of staff with an appropriate allocation for administrative costs. This allocation is subject to a programme of work and appropriate management structures being agreed between CDVEC and this Department.

In deciding on this programme of work the Department would wish that priority be given to activities that would attract funding from other agencies and especially to work that would support the Department's ESF and other EEC supported programmes. Additional staffing to the extent necessary to carry out the above activities will be on a contract basis linked to the projects and subject to Departmental approval in each case.

The Department will be pleased to discuss the details of how these arrangements are to be implemented.

Mise, le meas,

P. Mc Donagh

P. Mc Donagh,
Príomnoifigeach.

Fón (Telephone) 714311

Fó-líne (Extension).....

TAG. (Ref.).....

DO THAG. (Your Ref.).....

CEO. ✓

Education Officer ✓

Principal Officer

Finance Officer ✓

Personnel Officer ✓

Buildings Officer

Industrial Relations

Officer.

Management Services

Officer

A NOTE ON THE UNPUBLISHED SOURCES

Sources in the Curriculum Development Unit

Most of the unpublished sources for the dissertation are housed in the Curriculum Development Unit. For the most part they comprise correspondence, minutes of meetings and various kinds of memoranda and position papers, and are grouped in box files under headings that suggest their subject matter. These groupings are as follows:

Assessment Papers - documents pertaining to the development of the experimental examination modes in ISCIP and Humanities.

Ballyfermot Papers - documents related to the development of Ballyfermot Vocational School as related in Chapter 1.

Career Foundation Papers - correspondence, minutes of meetings and memoranda related to the development of the Career Foundation Course as described in Chapter 5.

CEO Papers - correspondence and memoranda between the Unit Director and the CEO of the CDVEC.

Director's Correspondence - correspondence and documents related to the Unit director's relationship with various people in the course of the Unit's development.

Coleraine Evaluation Papers - correspondence and documents related to the Coleraine evaluation as described in Chapter 3.

Early School Leavers Project (ESLP) Papers - correspondence, minutes of meetings and reports related to ESLP, as described in Chapter 6.

European Community Environmental Education Network (ECEEN) Papers - correspondence, minutes of meetings, memoranda and reports related to ECEEN, as described in Chapter 7.

Green Paper Documents - documents related to the Government's Green Paper in Education 1985.

Humanities Papers - documents pertaining to the Humanities project.

ISCIP Papers - documents pertaining to the ISCIP project.

Management Papers - minutes, correspondence and memoranda related to the Unit's Management Committee.

Outdoor Education Papers - documents pertaining to the Outdoor Education project.

Pilot School Papers - minutes of meetings and correspondence related to the Unit's pilot schools.

Resocialisation Project (RP) Papers - correspondence, minutes of meetings, memoranda and reports related to RP.

Senior Cycle Papers - correspondence, memoranda and documents related to the development of courses at senior cycle.

Steering Committee Papers - minutes, correspondence and memoranda related to the Unit's Steering Committee.

TCD Papers - correspondence and memoranda related to various people on the staff of Trinity College, Dublin.

Sources in the CDVEC Head Office

Some of the unpublished sources consulted are housed in the CDVEC Head Office, Ballsbridge, Dublin. These are in two categories:

- Minutes and related documents of the meetings of the City of Dublin Vocational Education Committee.
- Curriculum Development Unit (CDU) Papers 1972-84 - a box file containing minutes of meetings, correspondence and various kinds of memoranda related to the affairs of the Unit.

Unpublished Dissertations

A number of unpublished dissertations have also been consulted. These are as follows:

J. A. Crooks, "A Participant Observation Study of the Factors which Influenced the Development of the City of Dublin Humanities Curriculum 1972/1976", Ph.D. dissertation submitted to the School of Education, Trinity College, Dublin, July 1978.

N. Godwin, "A Study of the Use of Non-Book Materials in the Feasibility Year of the City of Dublin Humanities Project", M.Ed. dissertation submitted to the School of Education, Trinity College, Dublin, August 1973.

L. Healy, "The Integration of the School with the Community", Higher Diploma in Education dissertation submitted to the School of Education, Trinity College, Dublin, 1972.

M. McCaffrey, "Some Theoretical and Practical Aspects of Curriculum Development in Secondary Schools", M.A. dissertation submitted to Department of Education, St. Patrick's College, Maynooth, June 1974.

E. Oldham, "Integrated Science Curriculum Innovation Project: Some Aspects of the Evaluation", M.Ed. dissertation submitted to the School of Education, Trinity College, Dublin, March 1974.

B. Rosney, "Computerisation of Assessment Results for the Integrated Science Curriculum Innovation Project and the City of Dublin Humanities Project", M. Sc. dissertation submitted to Trinity College, Dublin, December 1978.

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