

## STUDENT PARTICIPATION IN DECISION-MAKING

A review of student participation in decision-making and its validity in terms of learning outcomes and social values.

by

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I, Anker Julian Fuglsang declare that this dissertation contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other higher degree or graduate diploma in any tertiary institution and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, the dissertation contains no material previously published or written by another person, except when due reference is made in the text of the dissertation.

Signed: *Anker J. Fuglsang*.....

## ABSTRACT

Student participation in decision-making in secondary education has gained a great deal of respectability over the last two decades. Historically it is supported by contributions from both political and educational theorists. Recent growth in the acceptance of the approach is attributed to the influence of social values and government sponsorship.

There are concerns that the approach is primarily a product of social values and that it has a limited potential to determine educational outcomes. The discussion focuses on these concerns and develops the proposition that student participation serves to fulfil a number of fundamental educational purposes. It is recognised that there is a limitation in the availability of empirical evidence to substantiate the case for student participation. In many cases participatory approaches are responses to new problems that are the result of rapid and recent social change. As such they can only be plausible and not proven at this stage. It is suggested that: democratic socialisation is most effectively achieved through an experience based approach which accommodates all the varied forms of democratic decision-making that function in our society: Individual skill in problem solving can be enhanced through participation in decision-making: The integration of the student in the school community through a sharing of

decision-making responsibility can facilitate the achievement of a wide range of educational goals as a product of increased student motivation. (

The question of the 'common curriculum' is examined and documents from the United Kingdom and the United States considered to determine the degree of constraint that this movement may impose on student participation. The notion of 'client rights' is evaluated and it is concluded that any obligation educators have to implement student decision-making strategies springs from considerations of educational outcomes.

Subject choice and student representation are presented as limited approaches to student participation. It is recommended that a cross curricula approach be taken to the inclusion of a wide range of decision-making experience.

A selection of approaches to student participation is presented. Approaches that involve students at a number of decision-making levels are described. These include student contributions to curriculum planning, student representation programmes and classroom approaches, Curriculum Negotiation and Personal Interest Projects.

The discussion is based on a number of working definitions that are established for the key concepts of 'participation', 'decision-making' and 'client rights'.

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## INTRODUCTION

On the continuum of educational practice a large place is occupied by a mass which is maintained by an inertia of habit and familiarity. This is not surprising considering the demands that have to be met by the classroom teacher in order to satisfactorily conduct the business of teaching. Most of the teacher's activities must spring from behaviours that have become habit and even then the daily challenges of classroom teaching draw on reserves of nervous energy resulting in that state of exhaustion observed by David Hargreaves to be "quite unique to teachers" (Hargreaves, 1982, pp.202-203)

Nor is it a bad thing that a substantial body of educational practice that is tried and tested over time is preserved and protected. However, it is common for the whole business of public education to be founded on ideals based upon the notion of serving society and the individual. Many ideals, expressed in the aims of education systems, remain beyond the current means of those education systems to attain, either due to limitations in available understanding of method or, alternatively, limitations in terms of suitable structures or resources.

Occupying a smaller place towards an extreme on the continuum of educational practice is that which is innovative and experimental. It is the nature of innovation that it attempts to more successfully achieve the ideal. At the interface between these two approaches, the traditional and the innovative, the general

progress of education is conditioned by the rate of infusion of successful innovation through the main body of educational practice. As has been the case with the topic to be discussed here, legislation by governments, resourcing, and public demand may have the effect of substantially changing the rate of progress.

The term 'progress' is used advisedly in that the discussion supports the proposition that strategies that increase student participation in decision-making can indeed achieve a measure of the ideals of full student participation in education, effective development of student democratic participatory skills and individual student decision-making skills. Nevertheless, the key question to be resolved is whether the large scale redevelopment of school culture that is needed to produce real results is an expedient use of limited resources.

One of the key resources available in an education system is time for instruction, and since there exists an established relationship between time spent studying a subject and achievement in that subject (International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement, cited in Power, 1981, p.23), the value of approaches to student participation in decision-making that reduce time available for instruction in other valued subject or learning areas must be carefully considered.

In Australia for over a decade there has been a steady increase in the adoption of student decision-making strategies at all levels of policy-making from Commonwealth and State education authorities down to the individual school level. As Marsh observes:

Although it would be exaggerated to state that there has been a massive upsurge of interest in encouraging student participation (in school decision-making), there is now a definite tendency for this to occur in many government and non-government schools in Australia (1988:110).



The situation now exists whereby the adoption of student decision-making approaches to teaching, curriculum organisation and school governance is a reasonable option for all schools by virtue of the accessibility and acceptability of these approaches. Its inclusion in policy has made it acceptable, while the accessibility exists by virtue of the range of support materials that have been published as a result of the above policies (Beecham and Hoodley, 1980; Boomer, 1982; Dunn, 1986; Scharaschkin and Stoessiger, 1987) and the curriculum support, in the form of inservice training, that has been provided in association with such programmes and approaches as the Participation and Equity Programme (PEP), the Choice and Diversity programme, Curriculum Negotiation and Student Enterprise.

This generally favourable environment for the growth of student participation in decision-making has also been influenced by the provision of resources, demand from some public sectors and widespread acceptance from others.

The primary purpose of schools is generally accepted to be the achievement of optimum educational outcomes, however curriculum organisation, content and delivery are not necessarily determined solely in terms of learning and teaching effectiveness. In conjunction with resource constraints, various social values and a public demand, often considered by teachers to be ill informed as to the actual capabilities of the education system ( Musgrove and Taylor, 1969, p.83; Johnston, 1988, p.7; Hughes, 1985, p.13), all contribute to the shape of the curriculum.

The concept of student participation in decision-making appears to have a fundamental connection both with established and emerging social values. Aims relating to the perpetuation of a democratic society and the development of democratic citizenship

are common in our education system. Our social valuing of democratic principles finds expression in terms such as 'initiation into democratic life', 'democracy and social justice', 'democratic educational principles' (Commonwealth Schools Commission, 1985, 1987), 'a knowledge of citizenship and democratic processes' (Education Department of Tasmania, 1987, p.14).

There is also an emerging set of values relating to the rights of the individual student as a 'consumer and client' (Dynan, 1980). For some commentators the concept of student client rights is an extension of established student legal rights (Fitzgerald and Petit, 1987; Andrews, 1985; cited in Marsh, 1988, p.112). The whole question of the student's rights is initially a matter of 'political issue' (Rizvi and Kemmis, 1987), rather than educational issue but rapidly becomes the latter when those rights are identified with student 'participation' and 'collaboration' in decision-making (State Government of Victoria, Ministerial Paper number 1, 1983), and this identification is given legitimacy through the policy statements of central education authorities as has been the case with the Education Department of Tasmania:

All students have a right to contribute to decisions about their own education including matters relating to the curriculum (1989).

Ann Hurman (1978), in summarising the findings of a study of subject choice, funded by the Social Science Research Council at the University of Birmingham, concluded that teachers described their activities in terms that included "goals, values, symbolic elements, beliefs in what the organisation stands for" (p.:308). The system of beliefs about the value of individual children's gifts and their right to choose had figured so long in their thinking that it had become as fundamental as 'articles of faith'.

For Hurman, teachers' belief about choice has a character consistent with Malinowski's view and definition of mythology: mythology serves to express, embrace and codify belief; it is "not an intellectual explanation or an artistic imagery, but a pragmatic charter of primitive faith and moral wisdom" (p.308). Much of the literature concerning student participation in decision-making depends upon making a connection with our 'mythology' of democracy and individual rights for its credibility.

There is notably little empirical evidence cited in this literature that demonstrates a positive relationship between the suggested strategies and desired outcomes. In some cases evidence does exist which supports the claims made for particular approaches to student participation in decision-making and this will be covered in the relevant sections of this discussion. In other cases the gathering of evidence in itself presents formidable problems because a significant part of student participation in decision-making concerns preparing individuals for future adult decision-making and citizenship roles, the success of which can only be assessed through long term projects and only then with the added difficulty of isolating the particular contribution of the formal education experience from the myriad of other socialising influences such as the family and the media.

The evidence that is cited is often anecdotal in nature such as the various records of teacher's experience cited in relationship to 'Curriculum Negotiation' (Boomer, 1982). In other instances evaluation has been of the implementation of student decision-making strategies rather than the outcomes of those strategies. Rizvi and Kemmis (1987, p.20) described the PEP experience in Victoria as a 'major success' in relationship to

student participation in decision-making with teachers and parents. While this informs us that the 1985 PEP goal of developing a teacher/student/ parent interaction in decision-making was met it tells us nothing of the learning outcomes.

As has been suggested above, shared social values have contributed to the growth of student participation in decision-making in education, however issues concerning social values relating to this topic have not been totally resolved. Some views of democracy reject widespread participation of the citizens as impractical. Schumpeter and Berelson (see Pateman, 1970) held that representative democracy is more efficient if the participation of the people is limited to short periods of election activity. While Massey's (1981) description of society suggests that participation is becoming an ascendant social value, it nevertheless recognises the significant presence of other values in a contemporary society.

Furthermore, the application of the ideal of the client's rights to children presents serious problems. An increase in choice and therefore 'justice' for children can mean a decrease in choice and 'justice' for parents (Musgrove and Taylor, 1969, p.83).

Robert Dahl(1970) observed that:

Virtually all parents seem to agree that young children are not wholly competent to decide everything for themselves (p.28).

Other value issues concern the emphases that should be placed upon the various distinct roles that education systems have such as the initiation of children into the society, their preparation to be agents of change and improvement in the society or their training as contributors to the society's economic viability. The fulfilling of one role can often be at the expense of another, a conclusion which appears to underlie moves towards a common

curriculum in Britain, the United States and Australia at the expense of the curriculum diversity previously available. The fear has been that students have exercised a 'democratic right' of choice to opt out of studies which provide basic competencies of economic value such as literacy and numeracy

A concern that is fundamental to the question of student participation in decision-making is that of authority. An obvious concern about student participation in decision-making is that it implies that the students share the teacher's authority which the teacher has exercised by virtue of a professional training thus becoming an 'expert' in a field of learning (Marsh, 1988, p.113). One body of American research associated with the Project on Improving Urban High Schools (Miles, 1987; Farrar, 1987) provides strong evidence that teacher leadership is one of the key criteria for school effectiveness. Australian research (Caldwell and Spinks, 1986, chap.2) has produced similar results. Other researchers conclude that teaching effectiveness is closely related to the teacher's performance (Musgrove and Taylor, 1969, p.89). In the extreme, student participation in decision-making would place limitations both on the exercise of teacher leadership and teacher performance.

Perhaps the real need of an investigation of student participation in decision-making is to determine the mutual degree of constraint that operates between opposing values and educational goals. For instance can sufficient provision be made in the curriculum for student participation in decision-making to achieve the related educational goals and to satisfy society's notion of the individual's rights without sacrificing effectiveness in the learning of valued fields of knowledge and skill such as literacy

and numeracy, and without blunting the impact of teacher expertise and leadership?

In order to make any progress towards resolving this question and substantiating the earlier assertion that student participation in decision-making does in fact have real value in terms of increasing student participation in education in the widest sense, which includes retention and engagement in the acquiring of skills, it is necessary to pose and, in as satisfactory a manner as possible, to answer a number of key questions:

1. What is student participation in decision-making?
2. What are the historical and social contexts of student participation in decision-making?
3. What are the purposes of student participation in decision-making and can they be effectively achieved?
4. How is student participation in decision-making implemented and what is the range of suitable approaches?
5. What are the known constraints and limitations associated with student participation in decision-making and in what areas is there a need for further attention or research?

Having progressed towards gaining answers to these questions, it may be then possible to determine whether student participation in decision-making is an innovation that can promote the achievement of educational goals or is a manifestation of social values that may well be misplaced in its application to the classroom and the school yard. Since student participation in decision-making represents a large range of diverse student activities it may also be necessary to discriminate between these activities with regard to their potential contribution to the learning programme.

There is clear evidence that commitment to student participation in decision-making has been around for some time . Dewey's ideas, which will be discussed later, provide a strong

theoretical basis for the promotion of student participation in decision-making. Other democracy theorists such as Rousseau, John Stuart Mill and G. D. H. Cole have contributed ideas concerning participatory democracy that emphasise the importance of acquisition of appropriate participatory skills (Pateman, 1970, chap.2).

A wide range of choice in subject offerings has been commonplace in western education systems for a number of years, however the pendulum is swinging back towards common curricula even to the extent of national common curricula as evidenced in the British Education Reform Act 1988 (ERA) (Department of Education and Science, 1989)

The development in student participation that needs careful assessment concerns the inclusion of students in decision-making areas from which they were previously excluded. This incorporates student representation at all levels of curriculum decision making, the adoption of roles by students in domains such as discipline which were previously exclusive to teachers and freedom to negotiate what is learnt in the curriculum. These are forms of student participation that will be treated at some depth. Whereas the movement towards increased curriculum choice had a strong association with aims to raise the level of commitment of alienated students to education, the more recent emphasis appears to be influenced by social values such as client rights and equality.

## PART I

### STUDENT PARTICIPATION IN DECISION-MAKING: A DESCRIPTION

#### Developing a Working Definition

It is important to have a clear understanding of what is meant by 'student participation in decision-making' and why secondary education has been chosen for the focus of this discussion. Generally, commentators agree that the expression 'student participation in decision-making' concerns the actions of the student rather than the actual outcomes of those actions in terms of decisions made and implemented. There must be, however, a reasonable expectation in the student that their contributions will have some measure of efficacy. They must feel that their contributions partly or wholly influence outcomes at least some of the time.

McGregor stated that participation:

...consists basically in creating opportunities under suitable conditions for people to influence decisions affecting them. That influence can vary from a little to a lot (1960, p.126).

This particular definition, made in the context of management involving staff in decision-making in industry, recognises that the traditional decision makers must create opportunities for involvement. Individuals may then 'participate' by "influencing decisions affecting them".

It is very important to stress that the choice of the term 'student participation in decision-making' to describe the subject of this discussion is deliberate in as much as it allows for the distinction between students 'influencing' decisions that affect



them and making decisions that affect them. One extreme of influence is having the determinant influence but there is no suggestion here that students should always have the whole say in the decision-making process in question.

The degree of influence that students might have will depend upon the 'suitable conditions' that allow participation. Regardless of whether the motivation to allow students to participate in decision-making is based upon an attempt to increase their level of commitment to their learning or the extension to them of full democratic client rights, the influence that they might reasonably be expected to exert must be conditioned by the same criteria that govern the operation of any functional system of democratic decision-making, that will invariably have parts in which decisions are made in an undemocratic way for the sake of utility. A useful approach to democratic decision-making is that of Robert Dahl, who in his work After the Revolution (1970, part1) provides an explanation of the 'three criteria for authority': personal choice; competence; economy.

While the ideal is the maximisation of personal choice there are obviously limitations when one individual's personal choice impinges on that of another. Rousseau and J. S. Mill both advocated political participation on the grounds that it has an integrative function with the individual "consciously becoming a member of a greater community" (Mill, cited in Pateman, 1970, p.32). Students are members of communities that are greater than either the student or the school community and through representation mechanisms express collective choices. Student personal choice will often be limited by curriculum aims and objectives imposed by other communities whose democratic authority is based either upon greater

competence, relating to experience and maturity or professional training, or numerical superiority of personal choices which are expressed through representation. That is, the people elect the government which in turn directs the education authority on their behalf.

Decision-making authority must also take into account the criterion of competence. There are many contracts entered into in which the client's right to make decisions ceases to exist in favour of the expert judgement of another party. The passenger decides whether or not to embark on a flight but once having embarked does not under any normal circumstances consider the possibility of directing the pilot in the task of flying the plane. "For your own self interest your participation ought to stop where significant differences in competence begin" (Dahl, p31).

It would therefore seem quite reasonable that a school could organise itself on a genuinely democratic basis and maintain a place in decision-making for staff expertise. Participation in decision-making must take into account competence.

Participation in decision-making must also take into account efficiency and economy. Time and effort are scarce resources and as Dahl points out the optimum is very different from the ideal (p.41). Further, "the individual will not value participation and see it as an economic application of time unless he is really able to influence the outcomes" (p.41). Rousseau's ideal of citizen assemblies would undoubtedly consume a large proportion of the school's instruction time if it was adopted and used to resolve all those issues that concern students. In the school situation it is not only with respect to time utilisation that the criterion of economy is relevant but also to the

achievement of educational goals which require decision-making in accordance with the criterion of competence.

It would therefore seem that in all approaches to student participation in decision-making the identification of 'suitable conditions' should always take into account the criteria of competence and economy in particular, thereby limiting any tendency for the influence of teacher expertise to be unjustifiably diminished. This does not mean, however, that student participation in decision-making can be fostered without changes in authority:

Real participation means sharing in both responsibility and power. Therefore it is only possible when the people who currently hold the responsibility and power are willing or can be made willing to give some of their share (Beecham and Hoadley, 1980, p.15).

'Sharing power and responsibility' or being empowered can mean for the student the choice of subjects studied, the choice of content and approach to be taken in studying a part of a course, having views on any aspect of school policy represented in such a way that they will be considered by those in authority, deciding the make-up of the student behaviour code, taking control of part of the wider curriculum such as social activities for a year group or an enterprise or assisting other students with their learning.

Roger Holdsworth expresses a concern that 'student participation in decision-making' requires a wide involvement of students in relevant issues that will have meaning for them:

Student participation must be based within learning issues, it must deal with educational issues in the arenas where decisions are made and it must enable students to consider, decide and represent their views through their own organisations (1986, p.7).

Holdsworth also draws a distinction between representation and participation, rejecting representative functions that do not involve widespread consultation between representative and

constituency. It is , however, difficult to completely reject student representation as a valid form of student participation in decision-making unless the representation is actually 'tokenism'. Almost every manifestation of student participation in decision-making will vary in the degree of student involvement. Representation can be seen as an extreme in which a small proportion of the total student body are involved in decision-making activities. On the other hand representative structures can be modified to take on the form of participatory representation in which students at all levels get the opportunity to contribute their opinions, however, considerations of economy with respect to the use of the individual student's time and the duration of the decision-making process may favour the more representative form of decision-making with limited participation of the student body.

This question is an excellent example of the juxtaposition of the two approaches to student participation in decision-making. The first that emphasises a social values view of education and presents client rights as a fundamental social value calls for a highly developed participatory approach to decision-making in which the involvement of the individual student 'client' is maximised. Much of the PEP literature adopts this approach, although it may well be asked if in reality the notion of client rights is actually a product of pragmatism rather than idealism in the pursuit of a goal of increased participation (retention, attendance) in schooling.

The other approach is primarily concerned with learning effectiveness and the degree of student participation in decision-making is conditioned by the educational goal that is being

facilitated. That goal may be 'the initiation' of students into a 'public world' of democratic government, a goal framed in terms used by R. S. Peters (quoted in Bowen, 1974, p.352) and representative in theme of the published aims of many Australian education authorities (Commonwealth Schools Commission, 1987, p.13; Education Department of Tasmania, 1987, p.14).

An initiation into contemporary democratic government would of necessity include experience of all the range of democratic forms that operate: committee democracy; representative democracy; referendum democracy; primary (town meeting) democracy.

For the purposes of this discussion 'participation' is used in the McGregor's sense of 'influencing decisions' and representative decision-making will be considered a form of participation in which the influence of the individual is most likely to be 'little'. In documentation and writing cited, 'participation' is also used in the senses of being at or attending school, being engaged in education or a modern trend towards high levels of public contribution towards governing. Implicit in the view of participation in decision-making of high level policy makers at commonwealth, state government and education department levels is the notion of equity. That is, an equal opportunity to participate in and benefit from educational programmes for all students regardless of ethnicity, gender, disability or other social, demographic, economic and cultural factors.

For convenience decision-making might be considered to take three forms:

1) Simple Individual Decision-Making: Human behaviour is characterised by the cognitive rather than the instinctive. In other words, human beings consider their actions in situations

where corresponding animal behaviour is innate. Students at school constantly make decisions which in themselves are insignificant and relatively inconsequential. They make decisions like choosing which words to use in their spoken and written communication, when to speak, when to offer answers, where to eat their lunch, in what order to eat the items in their lunch boxes, which colours for their paintings and a myriad of other things every waking hour of every day. There is little dispute over the student's exercise of this type of decision making. It has little part in the discussions of participatory decision-making. There is a range of complexity in decision-making. Students process information to provide answers to comprehension questions, to solve problems concerning nutrition, history and the environment. Both the data collection and evaluative components of decision-making may be complicated. While at the extremes of the range it is easy to distinguish between the decisions belonging to the two categories described here, at the boundary between the two it is difficult.

2) Complex Individual Decision-Making: There is a higher level of individual decision-making that is equated with responsibility. It generally concerns matters of longer term consequence and in schools this type of decision is made for the individual as often as not by teachers. Students have traditionally had behaviour codes and learning activities largely imposed upon them. Student participation in this type of decision-making is referred to by Hurst as a 'skills in living approach' (1986, p.71). The essential ingredients are : identifying real problems (the students perception); acting to solve them (devising a course of action); taking appropriate action. This is a slightly condensed version of John Dewey's five stage sequence of the 'act of thought', which is

the "competence to solve current problems and test future plans of action according to the experimental method" (from Democracy and Education, quoted in Bowen, p168). Decisions in this category require a conscious assessment of alternatives and consequences and are often part of the processes of organising, being enterprising and taking initiative. Some decisions that may be complex are choosing a career, a course of study, where to live, a venue for a school social or a solution to an environmental problem.

3) Group Decision-Making: This type of decision-making involves the participation of the individual in making decisions that affect a group. It is the heart of democracy and theorists such as Rousseau, J.S.Mill, G.D.H.Cole and Dewey claim that individual involvement is necessary in order to produce 'citizenship', that is, individuals who have learnt through this process to modify their own desires and expectations in accordance with the public will. Group size and the role of the individual in the decision-making process are both subject to extreme variation.

These categories will not always be discrete. In some instances it will be difficult to assign a decision-making act exclusively to a single category. Dewey envisaged the process he advocated as part of a conjoint activity (Bowen, p170), although here it has been used to describe complex individual decision-making.

Nevertheless, the general characteristics of decision-making in each of categories two and three will clearly relate to distinct approaches taken to student participation to decision-making in education.

#### Student Participation in Decision-Making and Secondary Education

While many of the specific programmes that come under the

umbrella of 'student decision-making' have a valid application at the primary school level and have attracted a strong advocacy for their implementation at that level, consideration of the main purposes that are cited in the case for student participation in decision-making supports the conclusion that secondary education should be the main area of focus.

The target problems that many 'student decision making' strategies are a response to, are essentially the problems of teenagers and therefore principally in the domain of secondary education.

One important area of concern that has had a powerful influence on the subject of student decision-making is the transition of the youth to adulthood including the assumption of all the responsibilities there entailed. Secondary education is seen to be the most appropriate place for both preparation for, and the beginnings of, this transition to take place.

Another concern is the alienation of students that becomes increasingly evident through their schooling until they are able to exercise the option to escape. Although not exclusively a phenomenon of secondary education it is there that it has the greatest impact on the school climate.

The two forms of decision-making of concern in this study, complex individual and group decision-making, both require a degree of intellectual maturity which many students will not have attained in their primary years.

Some researchers note that at about thirteen to fourteen years of age the student begins to exercise the right to decide what 'he will become' (Musgrove, p87). Certainly from this age onwards the student gains increased responsibility for making critical



decisions about his future until reaching the age of majority at which time he gains full legal responsibility.

For these reasons student participation in decision-making is considered in the context of secondary education here.

Students can and do participate in decision-making in a huge variety of ways. The range is wide enough to prompt several authors to construct classifications that suggest hierarchies of effectiveness. Holdsworth (1986) differentiates between approaches in which all students participate, those forms of 'representation which can be participatory' and 'representation which is mainly individual'. He also classifies decision-making experiences into eleven categories:

- 1) Individual; 2) Class/group; 3) Year level/sub-school;
- 4) SRC and other student committees; 5) School Council and Council committees; 6) Local community; 7) Area or Regional Student Networks; 8) Area or Regional Boards and Committees; 9) Statewide Student Network; 10) Statewide Committees and Special Program Committees; 11) National Committees.

<u>Extent of student decision making</u>	<u>Arena of student decision making</u>	<u>Examples of the nature of student decision making</u>
All students can participate	Individual	Subject choice Group placement Selection of a school Nominating, electing and lobbying representatives Assessment and reporting Personal work goals
	Class/group	General course/subject goals and methods Class/group administration Assessment criteria within school policies Course/subject review and evaluation Group projects Social events

Extent of student decision making	Arena of student decision making	Examples of the nature of student decision making
	Year level/ sub-school	Resource distribution within school allocations General policy on curriculum structure and choice within the school's overall policy framework Social Activities
Representation which can be participatory	SRC and other student committees	Determination of student views on curriculum policy, uniforms, rules, discipline policy etc. Advice to representatives on other bodies Organisation of student-led school reviews/ curriculum days Policy reviews Social activities
	School Council and Council committees	Resource allocation and management Employment of ancillary staff School curriculum policy within state guidelines Discipline policy Forward planning Maintenance of buildings and capital equipment Authorise overnight excursions/camps Nominate staff requirements
	Local community	Carry out research and advise on local needs Resource allocation and use Co-ordination with other local bodies Social and recreational activities

<u>Extent of student decision making</u>	<u>Arena of student decision making</u>	<u>Examples of the nature of student decision making</u>
Representation which is mainly individual	Area or Regional Networks	Co-ordination between schools Determination of area/ regional student views on policies and practices Organisation of area/ regional student policy and curriculum reviews Social activities
	Area or Regional Boards and Committees (including funding programs)	Resource allocation with- in state allocations Area/regional policies and practices within state guidelines School policy co-ordination and review
	Statewide student network	Determination of student views on state policies and practices Advice and direction to representatives on state committees Organisation of statewide student forums and that reviews individual Determination of policies on matters raised by area and regional networks
	Statewide Committees and Special Program Committees	Curriculum and other policy guidelines Resource allocations Program policies and resource allocations
	National Committees	National policy directions and guidelines Resource allocation Curriculum advice and resources

(from Holdsworth, 1986, pp.9-10)

This classification must be viewed in the context of

Holdsworth's purpose in writing, that is, to describe and advocate a type of student participation in decision-making that reflects the value placed on 'client rights' by PEP

In the classification, individual decision-making concerns only that type which is 'complex'. Furthermore the examples neglect the application of decision-making within courses of study as a means of developing important problem solving skills. The detail given of various levels of 'representation that is mainly individual' is largely superfluous in a general classification, however in this case is consistent with Holdsworth's purpose of describing the PEP approach which encouraged representation at all levels.

Colin Marsh (1988, pp.117-121) considers student participation at two levels, the individual classroom and school wide. His hierarchical classification is determined by the degree of student involvement at these levels. It gives a far more balanced picture of classroom participation in decision-making and clear examples of the range of influence that students might exert in their participation. He identifies three degrees of student participation: 1) Students are consulted.

In the classroom the teacher may gather information in various ways about student needs and interests. Needs analysis is both common practice and valuable however student participation is passive and students' actual and perceived influence on decisions made can be minimal. At a school wide level students may be surveyed in order to evaluate school programmes.

2) Students play an active role in planning.

In the classroom the teacher is willing to give up some portion of control to students. Students may negotiate the content, approaches taken and the assessment of part of the course or a research project.

At the school wide level student councils may be invited to give opinions and recommendations in selected areas of school policy . Student councils may also plan and organise student social activities.

3) Students share decision-making in most activities.

In the classroom it is understood that the student shares responsibility for work with the teacher. There is widespread negotiation of the course , methods of learning and teaching, and assessment. Students may be involved peer tutoring or assessment programmes.

At the school wide level students will have participatory representation on the schools' decision-making bodies. Students will have representation on school councils, and Student Representative Councils will always be consulted on matters concerning students. Student organisations may have on-going roles to play in peer discipline, student welfare, social or school improvement programmes. In these cases students will expect their opinions to have influence on decisions made concerning them. They will frequently have responsibility for the planning, implementation and evaluation of programmes and events in the classroom and the school.

Whenever students exercise initiative they are participating

in the process of decision-making. The lessons to be learnt from the practice of decision-making appear to increase in value as the scope of the decision-making increases. Both Marsh and Holdsworth attach the greatest value to approaches to decision-making that maximise the individual's involvement and responsibility. In each case the conclusion that must be drawn is that the most effective student participation in decision-making takes place in schools where the school climate and culture promote it. Just what the educational results of effective student participation in decision-making might be remains to be considered.

#### Student participation in decision-making in Australia

Australian education provides a wide range of examples of approaches to student participation in decision-making. This in part must be attributed to the influence at a national level of the Commonwealth Schools Commission Participation and Equity Programme.

Part of the special charter of the Commonwealth Schools Commission under the Commonwealth Schools Commission Act 1973 was to "stimulate public interest in and support for education on the Commonwealth's behalf" and that "... the Commonwealth has a fundamental national role to uphold democratic educational principles" (Commonwealth Schools Commission, 1985, p.11).

The Participation and Equity Programme was announced in 1983, the stated objectives being to:

- a) Assist schools to give a positive and effective education to all children and to make substantial progress toward the more equal distribution of other outcomes of education such as the individual's access to paid employment and higher education.
- b) Assist schools to respond effectively and appropriately to the diversity of Australian society.

- c) Assist and help shape economic recovery and development.
- d) Restore the communities confidence in the national government's determination to give all children access to properly staffed and equipped schools.

(News Release, 28 July 1983, quoted in Hughes et al., 1985, p.3)

The programme began in 1984 with a budget of \$74 million with an initial emphasis on encouraging:

... all young people to participate in education or training at schools or technical and further education institutions, or in other forms of education or training, until they have completed a full secondary education or its equivalent (Costello, 1985, p.3).

In the following year, 1985, teacher/student/parent interaction became one of nine special areas targeted for action. The desire to establish democratic decision-making became explicit and three important sources of facilitation were identified. They were the latent desire of staff, PEP funds and resources and a participatory model of decision-making, the use of which PEP encouraged at all levels.

The achievement of PEPs goals logically had to be founded on encouraging previously non-participating groups to remain in the education system instead of leaving it. Groups who would be given special attention included Aborigines, women and girls, and some ethnic groups.

It would appear that the rationale that ties this retention objective to an increased emphasis on student participation in decision-making is that if students share responsibility for the shaping of schools and their curriculum they will become places that students are more likely to want to be in. . . Students alienated from the education system would be more inclined to participate if it was relevant to their needs. Since that relevance has to be judged by the students choosing whether or not

to participate, the simplest way to ensure a student perception of relevance is to have them contribute meaningfully to curriculum decisions.

Another important factor, social and cultural diversity, is also tackled by broadening the decision-making base. The development of school-based decision-making with community collaboration not only allows communities to specify their own needs in terms of general education but also with respect to specific skill development to serve local industry. School-based decision-making would allow for cultural diversity to have an influence in shaping individual schools to meet local needs.

Students would feel a greater sense of ownership of the school, facilitating increased participation in two senses, attendance and endeavour.

The rationale presumes that the target population of students, who would become non-participants without intervention, will value the same things in schooling as those who already participate and that the product of the combined student participation in decision-making will make school a more palatable place for all.

There also seems to be the presumption that such a process will not significantly change the value of the education offered, however the reaction to the choice and diversity movement, the call for the common curriculum, is some indication that there is strong opposition to the idea that individual freedom of choice is compatible with optimising educational outcomes. In the final analysis much depends on the degree of student influence envisaged by the PEP approach, remembering that it is proposed that parents and teachers also have a fundamental role in decision-making.



For the purposes outlined above and others, which include the notion of client rights in a democratic society and the perpetuation of a democratic system, the Schools Commission has, through PEP and since, championed school-based decision-making with a suitable recommendation for the inclusion of students.

In 1987 the Schools Commission stated:

Schools have an important part to play in shaping the future through the development of young people and should, in their practices and processes, demonstrate the best principles of democracy and social justice. Clearly, democracy is best learned in an environment which is democratic and where the principles being taught are practised.

In initiating young people into democratic life, schools need to work towards giving students increased influence over their own learning.

(Commonwealth Schools Commission, 1987, p.13)

At the state level there is a significant degree of acceptance of student participation in decision-making as evidenced in those policies that encourage and legitimise the practice. The states' exercise of their autonomy is manifest in the varying degrees of commitment that they have, however Victoria stands out in its attempt to cultivate a culture of student participation in decision-making in its education system.

The Victorian government legislated to guarantee student representation on School Councils. Government policy as expressed in Ministerial Paper number 6, on Curriculum, Development and Planning in Victoria, in 1984 stated:

Each school council is to ensure that its program will enable students to:  
- participate in democratic processes through which our society regulates its activities and changes its institutions and laws (quoted in Marsh, 1987, p.211).

The Victorian experience has provided a rich field for the investigation of the process of the cultivation of student

participation in decision-making. An integral part of PEP has been to report, monitor and evaluate. As a result of this work important issues have been raised by researchers. While some claim that the Victorian PEP experience of student participation in decision-making was one area of "major success" (Rizvi and Kemmis, 1987, p.:120), the breadth of the involvement (ie. the numbers of students really involved) and the depth of involvement (ie. tokenism or real representation?) have been matters for concern which have subsequently prompted the development of guidelines designed to help maximise the involvement of all students.

It has already been noted elsewhere, however, that the claims of success do not take into account variations in the quality of learning outcomes.

Tasmania has also sponsored student participation in decision-making. This has been a part of the major process of renewal that has been taking place in government education in that state.

The direction of education in Tasmania was outlined in the policy statement, Secondary Education: The Future (Education Department of Tasmania, 1987). This document contains a strong and consistent advocacy for student participation in decision-making:

This field (the social sciences as a field of knowledge and experience, not a subject or course) should include, where appropriate, special emphasis on practical studies on citizenship and democratic processes. (3.2.7.:14)

This (Acting Responsibly, as a necessary competency) includes ... valuing democratic processes. (3.4.4.:18)

Courses should be selected and developed in consultation with students and their parents. Students do their best when they feel involved in decisions about their work... They should feel that they are a part of a joint enterprise with their teachers.

This approach is best developed through continuous

consultation, counselling and co-operative planning.  
(4.3.1.:21)

The more recent Corporate Plan (Education Department of Tasmania, 1989) reiterates the intention to involve students in stating that "all students have a right to contribute to decisions about their own education including matters relating to the curriculum" (p.5).

Certainly these states have given strong approval in policy for student participation in decision-making and the others to varying degrees either have student representation at a number of levels or at least recognise the issue. However policies do not necessarily translate into actions unless a substantial amount of curriculum support is given to the school. Curriculum support usually consists of expertise and information, although it may also take the form of financial support or retraining time for teachers. Such support at various times has been given for such programmes as Curriculum Negotiation, Unitisation, and Student Enterprise to name but a few.

While the focus of this discussion is the role of students in decision-making it is obvious from policy documents cited that this aspect is a smaller part of what is perhaps a more significant whole. A comprehensive survey of the literature, in Australia, the USA and the United Kingdom, will soon convince the reader that for the vast majority the important issues still to be resolved pertain to the balance of decision-making powers held by the central authorities and the schools or the respective roles of principals and teachers in decision-making or the rights of the community and parents to be involved in the management of the local school. The popular issue is the matter of the devolution of authority to the

school community of which the student is only a part.

The trend in Australia is certainly in the direction of devolution of authority. This has been implicit in the discussion of policies of the Commonwealth Schools Commission and the Victorian and Tasmanian Education Departments. In Western Australia the Beazley Report (1984, p.268) recommended that the community be able to participate in school-based decision-making. Seven recommendations in the report support this approach while one other proposes legislation to facilitate the change. Similarly the Queensland document, Education 2000 (Education Department of Queensland, 1986), recognised public interest in the matter and recommended further inquiry. In recent years Queensland has transferred significant decision-making powers to principals, NSW has increased the responsibility exercised by school staffs and in South Australia schools have been invited to produce their own curricula. Despite specific purposes being associated with student participation in decision-making, student participation is most realistically considered against the backdrop of the devolution of decision-making authority and the development of school-based decision-making.

#### School-Based Decision-Making

Student participation in decision-making has always had some justification in terms of the aims of education systems regarding the induction of students into the processes of a democratic society. Although the effectiveness of active mode learning, learning by doing or at least learning through experience, has been asserted by many theorists including Rousseau and Dewey, its

comparative advantages over passive learning modes has not achieved sufficient recognition to influence the main body of educational practice until recent years. It is, therefore, not surprising to find that the advancement of the cause of student participation is also the result of other considerations.

As has already been observed it is the important change in social values that has acted as a fillip for it, and more specifically it is the move to school-based curriculum development which has carried it forward in its wake. Basic societal values with regard to hierarchical authority and clients' rights have changed quite dramatically over several decades, resulting in an acceleration of the development of participating education communities. In many instances students have been an integral part of the development while in others student involvement and responsibility has been tacked on the end of community involvement like an optional tail.

The 'community' that is the subject of this part of the discussion has been defined in the Beazley Report (1984, p.257) as:

individuals and groups who are interested and can influence or have the potential to influence the operation of the school. Whenever the term "school community" is used it includes students, teachers, school administrators, parents and other individual groups in the community.

From the early seventies in Australia a series of strong endorsements for school-based decision-making came from key reports on education. These reports include the 'Schools in Australia Report' (1973), The Report of the Interim Committee for the Australian Schools Commission, The Schools Commission Reports for the Triennia, 1976 -1978 (1975), and 1979 -1981 (1978).

The 'School in Australia Report' stated:

Responsibility should be devolved as far as possible upon the people involved in the actual task of schooling, in consultation with the parents of pupils whom they teach and, at senior levels, with the students themselves.

(1973, 2.4, p.10)

At a national level there has been a vigorous pursuit of this goal for over a decade and there has been provision of a considerable injection of funds to facilitate the change. The need to provide support in the form of expertise was recognised with the setting up of the Curriculum Development Centre in Canberra in 1975.

This expanded role for the commonwealth was prompted by a view of education as a "solver of political problems" and "social problems" (Hughes, 1985, pp.1-5), a view that has waned somewhat since the seventies in light of the great difficulty that schools have in replacing other social institutions such as the family and peer group as an important influence on the 'affective domain'.

This general movement towards constructing a socially responsive school, able to "shape relevant and effective programmes" (Schools Commission in Beazley, 1984, p.256) has been far from a purely Australian inception, although certainly in most other countries such as Canada, the United States and the United Kingdom, the national government has not had such a pervasive and sustained interest. The ILEA report of the Committee on the Curriculum and Organisation of Secondary Schools (Hargreaves, 1984, p.14) states:

If the school is to realise its aims, it must always connect with home and the community. The effective education of the young is a joint enterprise among several partners and any attempt to improve the education of the young must involve all the partners. This is the central theme of our report.

Since the social and political education roles for education systems have been re-emphasised the involvement of the community

has been encouraged as a means of accurately identifying and understanding the problems to be addressed. In Australia there has been a recognition of cultural and social diversity as a major source of problems. The unrealistic approach of eliminating differences, that is, transforming all into an english-speaking, middle class culture exhibiting English and, increasingly, white American cultural traditions has been disregarded in favour of one that recognises and responds to the local manifestations of that diversity.

As well as the need to respond to the specific needs of the community at a local level, there is also an underlying theme of the school's impotence in dealing with problems that are primarily social in nature, in isolation from the major socialising agencies in the community. The school can only function effectively when all parties "acknowledge from a position of common trust that each has an essential part to play". (Schools Commission in Beazley, 1984:256)

Complementing the move to school-based decision-making and to a degree providing an outline of acceptable limits in the diversification of schooling has been the growing interest in an increased central authority role in determining a common core curriculum. As the scope for shaping schools' curricula to meet diverse local community needs increases so too does the need to preserve the role of the school in developing the basic skills, including literacy and numeracy, that are essential to the economic well being of society.

Helping to make room in an already overcrowded list of priorities in the individual school curriculum is the growing expendability of the vocational training role of secondary education. This is a result of a view that the only way to prepare

a competitive workforce in times of continuous and accelerating technological change is to endow that workforce with the skills to be adaptable and continually educable.

As strategies to increase retention are successful and the period of the adolescent's formal education is extended so choice can be postponed.

Although much of this discussion of increased central authority role in curriculum direction and the limitation or postponement of choice might seem to be in contradiction with the themes of increased school-based and community participation in decision-making regarding the curriculum, in actual fact it highlights the important process that is currently under way, that will continue into the next decade, and possibly remain an entrenched feature of our education system. That process is the achievement of a balance between the three members of what has become the "triumvirate" of public education (Hughes, 1984, p.40). The balance has to be achieved not only at the highest decision-making levels, but more importantly, in light of school-based decision-making, at the school level. Balance must be achieved between the roles of government, the professionals and the public. In the school a balance which ensures a meaningful opportunity to contribute must be struck between the central authority, the professional staff, the parents and the students. The body of educative experience which forms the curriculum must be sufficiently negotiable to allow a real response to the needs identified by the individual school community and sufficiently rigid to ensure the opportunity for equal outcomes in terms of skill development for all Australian society. In support of the latter ideal is the very notion of differing school needs, that has



in a large part encouraged the move to school-based decision-making, and the notion of differentiated financing, exemplified in the PEP approach to targetting schools, in order to achieve equal outcomes.

The move to school-based decision-making and the resultant climate of co-operative goal setting can have a great number of positive outcomes for the school, provided that the balance between professional and public contribution has been struck that ensures that the school's effectiveness in achieving learning outcomes is either enhanced or maintained:

- 1) There is great potential for a substantial increase in harmony between the various parts of the school community as the relevance of the curriculum increases through the incorporation of some of the goals of each of the various parties. The very process of discussion and negotiation gives insights for all parties into the purposes and motivations of all the others.
- 2) Community commitment to the school's goals is increased and results in a supportive environment for teaching and learning. Here 'community' is used in the sense of those served by the school. There is evidence that an increasing number of members of the wider community that could be served by the school are declining the service. Australian Bureau of Statistics figures record 5.6 per cent increase in private school enrolments from 1975 to 1987 (cited in Johnston, 1988, p.4).
- 3) The school becomes a model of the type of co-operative decision-making that is desirable in society. The student is inducted into this process of decision-making through

participation and example. The model also provides lessons in social responsibility and accountability.

- 4) The school's ability to tackle social problems such as social equity, personal relationships and health is maximised through the involvement of the community in both identifying the precise nature of the problem and co-operative strategies that might be used to deal with it. The involvement of the community also provides it with a realistic assessment of the school's limited capability (Hughes, 1985, p.13) to deal with such problems. However, the involvement of the community in observing and evaluating the curriculum in action would have to be greater than it generally is at present for this to occur and for realistic expectations can then be set.
- 5) In times of constrained education spending the feeling of increased ownership of the school that is engendered in the community constrains the community to make available additional resources. Special expertise and effort can be sought from the community and the roles of both parents and students can be expanded to include administrative, resource acquisition and educative functions.
- 6) The utilisation of resources can become more efficient as the involvement of the various parties in the decision-making process produces a climate of closer and more immediate accountability.
- 7) As a result of the improved communication between the various parts of the community and the shared

understandings the image of the school tends to improve in the community which in turn impacts on many of the other factors.

- 8) The school may become more resilient and able to maintain and build upon the most successful features of its programme as those features become institutionalised as part of an identifiable school culture. Increasing the breadth of participation in this culture can make the school less vulnerable to suffering disrupted progress through staff changes or intake variations as there exists a greater critical mass to maintain momentum. This is based on the premise that increased accountability locally and greater participation in decision-making will lead to a process of refinement and there will be a consolidation of the most valuable features in the school programme, thus producing a school culture worthy of preservation.
- 9) The school is able to become increasingly sensitive to the changing needs of the community and the students and to maintain programme relevance to these needs. A greater appreciation of the out-of-school experiences of students improves the ability of the decision-makers to make an appraisal of needs. The school therefore becomes more dynamic in this respect and its programme remains appropriate.

It is the intention that the school-based curriculum will be made up of:

experiences of value, developed by the teacher and learner together from a close and sympathetic appraisal of the learners needs and his characteristics as a learner (Skilbeck, 1982, p.18).

This is the starting point of the rationale for school-based decision-making and suitably highlights the student as both the subject and object of education process. Considerations of importance are where the student is at any given time in the formal learning process and where the student ought to be at the end of this process in terms of learning acquired, and how the student can best be engaged in the learning.

The student role in school-based decision-making must not be considered subsidiary to any other, even though the contribution of students will be different in terms of 'expertise' from that of teachers. Each party can make important although not identical contributions. The ideal of client rights needs to be tempered by Dahl's three criteria for authority.

Nor should student participation be seen as the ultimate devolution of decision-making responsibility. Despite colourful catch-cries such as "declaration for a revolution" (Hurst and Shugarman, 1985) it is rarely the intention of proponents of student participation in decision-making for students to assume more than an integrated and responsible role in a partnership that recognises the usually greater expertise and responsibilities of the other parties.

The school-based decision-making movement presents student participation in decision-making as a means of making the curriculum more responsive to students' educational needs and of increasing student commitment to the achievement of educational goals.

Regardless of the benefits of student participation in decision-making, it is only change in some basic social values that has brought us to the point from which the movement might grow

towards universal acceptance in Australia. Much as is the case in North America, "participatory democracy has seeped to the core of (the)..values system" (Moynes, 1984, p.7). Associated with this has been the profound change in social values regarding authority, as Robert Dahl observed:

I have no serious doubts that old patterns of authority are losing out and that if I may use a bold new revolutionary expression, "things will never be the same again" (p4).

### Client Rights and Students

It has been noted in policy excerpts already quoted that the concept of 'client rights' is used as a justification for student participation in decision-making in isolation from considerations of learning effectiveness.

Careful consideration of the concept of 'client rights', as it pertains to students, is necessary in order to determine the extent of imperatives arising from social values that are binding on educators regardless of the impact of those imperatives on learning effectiveness.

'Client rights' has become somewhat of a catch phrase in its application to student participation in decision-making. References to student rights appear in education authority policy statements, in the writings of education theorists and during International Youth Year the United Nations promoted the view that participation concerns the right of young people to "make decisions about their own lives and the things that are important to them"(Dunn, 1986).

Client rights have been presented as a fundamental social value and the inclusion of the concept in education authority policy has placed a special obligation upon educators. It must be

determined as precisely as possible what student client rights entail for the educator?

Some progress in determining the meaning of the concept can be made by considering the nature of other widely accepted social values. For instance, children do not generally have a choice about whether or not they attend school until they are about sixteen years of age. We do not allow children to make decisions if we are unsure that they can make decisions that avoid harm to themselves and others. In Australia young people are not accorded full legal responsibility and voting rights until they are eighteen years of age. These rights are withheld because of a common understanding that the young do not always know what is in their best interest.

From these observations we can conclude that any assumption that client rights means that students should have the rights of adult citizens is clearly wrong. What then is the nature of the student right to participate in decision-making? Dynan (1980) states :

Students as consumers or clients have certain expectations and rights, including the right to evaluate the quality of the provision or service (p.4)

It seems reasonable to assume that the evaluation mentioned here must be communicated to those parties which are in a position to respond. This then represents a significant departure from the traditional position of the student in as much as he is now accorded the right to be 'heard as well as seen'. In policy statements, mentions of student rights are invariably linked to terms like 'contribute', 'influence' and 'co-operative'. It is also plain that this right most commonly refers to student contribution to decisions about their own courses of study and the school curriculum where it has potential to affect them.

Consideration of student client rights based on legal rights (Fitzgerald and Petit, Andrews, see Marsh, p.112) is a reminder that children are entitled to the protection of adults and also to a reasonable level of quality in educational service which is based upon the expertise of adults.

Parents also have client rights which, for the majority of the time that children are involved in compulsory education, take precedence over the rights of their children. It is also understood that parents, usually, having exercised full decision-making powers for their children in infancy, gradually relinquish that control to their children by the time that they gain that right legally. Similarly, schools can be expected to take into account the maturity and intellectual development of students in the approaches taken to student participation.

It would seem then, that an expectation has developed in society that students have a right to participate in decision-making by being consulted about their education, but this right does not extend to being the ultimate decision-maker. Nevertheless, by virtue of the definition of 'participation' this means that they must be able to influence decisions. In essence the notion of client rights is not as revolutionary and threatening to the teacher's position of authority as some imagine. Rather than there being an exponential increase in student rights to participate in decision-making there is evidence in the movement away from curriculum diversity and choice towards common curricula that students will have less opportunity to make choices.

The educational purposes and goals pertaining to student participation in decision-making, that will be discussed, make a far more specific demand on the curriculum for the inclusion of

approaches to student participation than considerations of the sort of broad social values that constitute much of the advocacy of 'client rights' for students.



## PART II

### STUDENT PARTICIPATION IN DECISION-MAKING: A SOCIAL CONTEXT

If the recent changes taking place in decision-making in western education had not been keeping pace with much wider social changes that have evolved at a continually accelerating rate, they might more often be termed revolutionary. Social change in the last few decades has been so dramatic that commentators have searched for a new name to describe this phase in man's development. Alvin Toffler has termed it the 'Third Wave Society', John Nesbitt, the 'Information Society' and Daniel Bell, the 'Post Industrial Society'. Microchip technology has been a central feature of the changes. In addition there has been the growth of participatory democracy and the decline of authoritarian structures, change in the position of women in the family and workplace, a decline in the prominence of the nuclear family, less uniformity in lifestyle, the growth of the permissive society and increases in available leisure time.

Although there is more comfort in viewing the changes in education as being deliberate and carefully considered, and certainly there is evidence to support this view, there must also be a temptation to see them as a simple and consistent by-product of general social change. Education itself may be viewed as a social institution. Durkheim claims that:

...education is only the image or reflection of society. It imitates and reproduces the latter in abbreviated form. (1952,p.372)

It may therefore be more realistic to accommodate both views by

suggesting that the most carefully considered changes will produce the greatest harmony between the school and the society of which it is a part, otherwise the resultant mismatch would inhibit the effectiveness of the school. While education planners implement changes, these changes are in response to, and conditioned by wider social changes.

The social changes that promote the development of student participation in decision-making in secondary education, broadly speaking, are all associated with the growth of participatory democracy. An important aspect of these changes is the pattern of social values held by identifiable groups in society, which are best defined in terms of historical sequence. Without the rise to influence in society of particular groups with shared value systems a broadening of the decision-making base would not be possible.

#### Social Change That Promotes Student Decision Making

One view of social change that provides a functional framework for the consideration of the growth of participatory democracy is that of Morris Massey (1981).

Massey identifies distinct groups in 20th. century western society, two of which have been of particular influence. These two groups he refers to as the 'traditionalists' and the 'rejectionists'. His classification is based on value programming and appears to provide explanations for social trends as well as an understanding of the varied and sometimes hostile responses met by proposals for student participation in decision-making.

While the characteristics of the two groups will be described it must be added that these descriptions only provide a broad

framework and that variations, exceptions and aberrations are to be expected. What is important is that the characteristics attributed to these groups can be identified in the organisational culture of western society in periods that correspond to the times that these groups exert their greatest social influence.

Massey's 'traditionalists' were generally born before 1930 and grew up through the great depression and two world wars.

'Rejectionists' were a product of the post war 'baby boom', a pampered generation, value programmed in times of prosperity and given all that their traditionalist parents had been deprived of.

The two groups have distinct and sometimes opposing value characteristics. The seventies and eighties have provided a battleground for the resolution of the conflicting values held by these groups. Many of the tensions in education systems over changes to authority and decision-making structures might be directly attributed to these value differences. Furthermore, changes in the view of education with respect to its role in teaching social values and assuming responsibility for areas of social education, previously the domain of other institutions in society such as the family and the church, have probably been influenced by the predominance of a new set of social values. The specific value characteristics attributed to each group are:

TRADITIONALISTS

Group/Team  
Authority Figures  
Institutional Leadership  
and Obedience  
Social Order  
Puritan  
Formal  
Work Ethic  
Stability  
Acquisition/Materialism  
Problem Focus

REJECTIONISTS

Individual  
Anti Authority/Participation  
Right to Question  
  
Equality Based on Performance  
Sensual  
Casual  
Self Fulfilment  
Change  
Experience  
Cause Focus

Over the years of traditionalist dominance the acceptance of authority figures and institutional leadership has put teachers in a position of respect. There has been little inclination on the part of the community to assume that it could contribute to decisions about policy in education that were made by trained professionals. The organisation of the education institution was seen as most suitably a hierarchy in which the specialist role of those at the top was to make decisions. In the school itself the 'headmaster' was the paramount authority figure, implementing the instructions of his superiors and demanding the obedience of his inferiors.

It has been the tendency for the traditionalist to have a faith in authority figures which has placed them beyond accountability. However, with the growing influence of the numerically strong rejectionist group and their growing ability to articulate their views, there has been a growth of demand for participation and a demand for the recognition of the individual's right to have a say and to question. The emerging values are 'equality based on performance' (which means that respect is earned rather than attached to position) 'individualism', 'participation', the 'right to question' and the acceptance of 'change'.

These same developments are noted from a different perspective by Hargreaves (1982) in his discussion of the rise of the cult of the individual and the decline of the community.

Rejectionists increasingly assume positions of influence in relationship to our education system. They increasingly make up the ranks of the parents of the children attending our schools. They increasingly fill the middle management positions and below in our education system and as the traditionalist generation

retires and dies they will fill the places in the upper echelons taking with them their pre-disposition to value participation.

It may be that as a result of the rise of the rejectionists, teachers as professionals have slipped down the scale of professional status and have been increasingly called upon to account to the community. In exercising its newly defined right to participate in educational decision-making, the community has expressed an expectation that the education system play a major role in healing social ills regardless of a demonstrated ability to do so.

This generation has shown an increasing willingness to allow children to express their feelings, to partake of adult domains of knowledge to do with human sexuality and drug use, to participate in media experiences that would have been deemed inappropriate for their predecessors and to exercise a greater range of choice in their education, although in this latter case the scope of that choice has been subject to revision through the common curriculum movement.

The predominance of rejectionist values is eminently compatible with the growth of student participation in decision-making.

Alvin Toffler (1980, p.425) described the trend that had been under way for over a decade as the "de-massification" of political life: the trend for decisions to be shifted back to the electorate and the de-centralisation of decision-making. The rising influence of the individual in decision-making prompted Alexander et al.(1975) to suggest that effective broadening of the participation base was a democratic priority since pressure groups that have become an important force in the decision-making process

"are often self-selected subgroups that have no legitimate claim to represent the entire neighbourhood"(pp.3-5).

The main distinction between representative democracy and participatory democracy has been the ongoing involvement of the citizen in the process of decision-making. The old model of citizenship (Alexander et al.) envisaged an intelligent, well informed individual who was capable of choosing between two or three candidates for a particular office, who when elected would be left to the decision-making tasks until called to account at the next election.

The new model portrays a citizen who is possessed of organisational and decision-making skills and an understanding of government and organisations, is able to access relevant information and determine which decisions are best approached through parliamentary debate and which are suited to other approaches.

In participatory democracy, status quo and majority decisions do not necessarily determine the resolution of an issue. Considerable efforts are expended by interest groups to create a new status quo or an impression of a new majority. Members of a constituency lobby their representatives whenever they feel it in their interest to do so. In such a climate the politically articulate exercise a huge advantage over the less skilled members of society. The feelings of low political efficacy and resultant low levels of participation of low socio-economic status groups in comparison with middle class groups is well documented (see Pateman, p.p48-49). Universal decision-making skill has become a fundamental prerequisite for social justice.

### Nations at Risk

This decade international economic trends have prompted some nations to question whether or not their education system was producing citizens who were suitably skilled to maintain competitiveness at the international market place. In the United States the National Commission on Excellence in Education produced the report, A Nation AT Risk: The Imperatives For Educational Reform (1983).

This report asserted that the United States was not competitive in the "information age" and that only an agenda of reform in education could begin to solve a number of serious problems which included unacceptable levels of illiteracy, a decline in achievement of students over the previous twenty six years and poor skill levels in students compared with those of competitor nations. Special needs were identified in the areas of: technology, specifically with respect to computers, lasers and robotics; social learning and a greater emphasis on achievement and disciplined effort.

The report in no way suggests that increased student participation in decision-making and the associated skill development have a place in the programme of reform. Perhaps the role of students envisaged is one that would be more in harmony with the class room setting of thirty years ago. However the report has not been alone in expressing concern over the quality of contribution of education systems to the development of a competent and economically competitive society. This theme has also been treated in the Australian context by G. W. Ford (1984).

Seemingly at odds with an increasing acceptance of student participation in decision-making in society, the report recommended

a common curriculum with prescribed minimum periods of study in basic subjects which include English, Maths, Science, Social, Science and Computing. In Britain the Education Reform Act 1988 (ERA) has introduced a national common curriculum which comprises a Core of English, Maths and Science, seven other Foundation subjects and compulsory Religious Education. In Australia the Federal Minister for Education John Dawkins (1988) canvassed the idea of a national common curriculum through a letter written to his state counterparts.

Choice and diversity in the curriculum had been encouraged in an attempt to raise the level of participation of disadvantaged groups in society. By the latter half of this decade various reports had cast serious doubts on the ability of the approach to achieve the desired ends. In Britain Hurman (chap.14) found that lower ability children tended to choose lower status subjects, neglecting the basics. This maintained rather than removed inequalities. Coleman (cited in Johnston, p.19), from his experience in the United States, suggested that a wider range of electives serves to 'further achievement disadvantages'. Powell et. al.(1985, p.5) claimed that the public wanted schools to have an 'atmosphere that actively pushes their children to seize educational opportunity' rather than a 'do-your-own-thing atmosphere'. The Quality of Education Review Committee in Australia (1985, p.82) cautioned that 'the curriculum should not be reduced to a smorgasbord from which students choose with more or less abandon.'

It is important not to attach too much significance to this movement as a disclaimer to the importance of student participation in decision-making. Basically it limits the range of subjects that



students may choose from and imposes others upon them. A careful review of time allocations specified for compulsory study of subjects reveals a great deal of scope for the continued, although reduced provision, for student choice in the curriculum. The ERA, for example, leaves room for the inclusion in the curriculum of Local Education Authority and Governors' requirements. The common curriculum movement does not promise to do away with student choice but rather to limit it so that its role is compatible with desired learning outcomes. Furthermore, student choice of electives is just one manifestation of student participation in 'complex' decision-making and as such does not offer an exclusive opportunity for skill development. Its importance can easily be exaggerated through an inaccurate association with student client rights.

Ford also identifies an urgent need for change:

The environmental changes facing Australia will not go away. By rigidly defending the status quo, there is an ever increasing danger that we will mortgage our children's future without giving them the appropriate skills to meet the mortgage (p.13).

One of the major areas of neglect identified by Ford includes the development of skills in organising and planning at an individual level, skills in organisational participation and skills in information sharing. The first two of these skills are to do with 'complex individual decision-making' and 'group decision-making' respectively.

His argument was:

That Australia's declining position in the international tables of per capita income is related to a similar but unresearched decline in Australia's comparative balance of skills (p.11).

He supported his argument by citing Australia's poor performance in the 1983 Skills Olympics in Austria. It is interesting to

note that the most successful competitors were those from nations which have been able to sustain their economic growth (eg. Korea, Taiwan, Japan, Germany, Switzerland). The United States and Australia, whose economies have suffered some decline, were similarly unsuccessful.

While this is hardly evidence in itself of the relative paucity of skill development in Australia, other economic and education indicators might support such a case. In Australia, for instance, key participative skills "are considerably underdeveloped compared to the more successful economies of Japan, Germany and the Nordic nations..." (p12). There has been particular interest in the role of Japanese workers in the process of improving their output through participation in the problem-solving and decision-making activities of their businesses (Aquila, 1982; Dunne, 1982; Phillips and McColly, 1982).

The suggestion seems to be that this is another problem that education must address and that the school can impart suitable skills, including decision-making skills, that are transferable to the workplace. This possibility will be discussed in Part III.

Demographic and education factors have also contributed to a situation in which Australia has a growing pool of inexperienced and unskilled youth seeking entry-level employment. Unemployment amongst the 15-19 yrs. age group in Australia rose steadily from 8% in 1972 to 29.8% in 1983 (Hughes et al., 1985, p.6). It is predicted that from a 65% engagement of this age group in the workforce in 1962, the level will drop to 20% engagement in 1992. Only the United Kingdom rivals Australia in the increase in the ratio of youth unemployment relative to adult unemployment. From the seventies to the eighties this ratio has tripled from 1.4

to 4.1 (Coleman, 1985, p.49).

Society therefore becomes confronted with generations of unskilled workers.

Even if the current school experience compensated by providing youth with the skills that will be necessary for economic viability in the near future, the associated problem of low comparative retention remains. The retention rate of students to year 12 in Australia has been in the order of 37-40% while in countries such as Japan, Canada, Sweden and the Netherlands about 80% of students remain at school to year Twelve.

The curriculum must therefore be shaped to provide the type of experiences for youth that will prepare them to make a valuable contribution to the economy in times of dramatic change and it must also acquire the ability to retain youth who at present choose alternatives to study, precluding them from being fully prepared.

The education system can serve economic needs in our society by developing the capability to produce citizens who are better qualified with information processing and decision-making skills to form an adaptable, progressive and dynamic workforce. From the time of Dewey and before there has been an advocacy that these skills can only be imparted through the provision of suitable experience of them in the curriculum. The 'common curriculum' ensures that adequate experience of other basic competencies is offered. There are more significant decision-making experiences in learning terms, than choosing subjects, that can be instituted across a common curriculum, providing a basis for the achievement of all curriculum aims.

### Problems of Retention

There are difficulties in increasing retention rates to favourably compare with those of other western nations. There are also problems associated with ensuring that the content of any extended education meets the real needs of those engaged in it. There are also the problems of retention itself as youth making the transition to adulthood extend their affiliation with an institution in which their most strongly identified role has been that of a child/learner. Coleman writes:

The consequence of the expansion of the student role, and the action-poverty it implies for the young, has been an increased restiveness among the young. They are shielded from responsibility, and they become irresponsible; they are held in dependent status, and they come to act as dependents; they are kept away from productive work and they become unproductive.  
(quoted in Holdsworth, 1986, p.20)

Obviously the employment trends exacerbate the problem, reducing the opportunities for youth experience of responsibility in the work place. All the significant changes that are taking place in the family militate against this institution even maintaining its traditional role in youth transition to adulthood. The focus of the family as an economic producer is much reduced. Families tend to form the basis for business enterprises less and the home is less often the centre of productive activities (Coleman and Husen, 1985, p.43). The family's influence and effectiveness in many areas of socialisation have been reduced by its own growing instability, the increased incursions of the electronic media into the home, and often by the absence of the desired qualities in the role models in the home.

All these factors confirm the family's inability to compensate for the changing circumstances in which youth find themselves:

Both the family's capacity for guiding its youth in the transition to adulthood and its interest in doing so, are reduced. This thrusts on society as a whole and on the educational system in particular a task for which it is not presently prepared. (Coleman and Husen, p47)

Coleman and Husen suggest the need for a reconsideration of the relationships between the family, the school and the workplace and the respective functions that they carry out in socialising youth into adult society.

The deferral of responsibility is at odds with the granting of citizenship rights earlier and the increased valuing of youth implied in this. Youth attend school at a time in their lives when their predecessors were learning the responsibilities of employment. They have little time between leaving secondary education and assuming full adult responsibility as a voter. While in secondary education some gain the right to consume alcohol, marry and make legally binding contracts. Many gain the right to drive a motor vehicle. Increasing numbers of adolescents engage in sexual activities and consume 'legal' and illicit drugs while not having the legal right to do so. As a result of improved diet, adolescents physically mature earlier. Youth gain responsibility earlier but have the opportunities to exercise it less. It would appear that secondary education must increasingly provide opportunities for youth to learn and practise adult responsibility and that, of the three members of the triad, school, family and workplace, it is the school which best lends itself to manipulation to meet this demand.

Yet this principle of creating a largely self-directed and self-responsible community of children and youth as a means of developing independence, responsibility and positive qualities of character has never come to play a large part in educational philosophy and theory, even as the school moves even farther from the adult world (Coleman and Husen, p.72).

All of which is understandable considering, first, the relatively recent social developments dealt with here and, second, the concern that the many other fundamental aims that education serves may not be as effectively achieved where opportunities for professional direction of the process are limited. It might be suggested that the common curriculum movement is an attempt to maintain a place in the curriculum for some of these aims and it might also be asked whether it is necessary for students to become 'largely self-directed' and 'self-responsible' in order to develop some of the characteristics mentioned. Relatively small experience components can have great impact if they are well chosen.

Another issue is that of valuing all individuals in society. Restricted access to employment and the expanded responsibilities associated with it, and extended membership of educational institutions diminishes the relative value of youths as participating members of our society. For many, the threshold of adult responsibility, the right to vote and make contracts will come suddenly without a gradual induction into the world of adult responsibility. This lack of inclusion draws a contrast between the value that the individual has as a citizen at two points over a short period of time.

For youth, valued activity is associated with notions of responsibility, independence and productive capability. When opportunities to develop these characteristics are restricted there can be serious implications for society as value comes to be seen as being conditional upon reaching 'post school age'. This is a contradiction of the equity movement in our society which seeks to do away with discrimination on the basis of factors such as age. In education the consequences of devaluing the individual are also

serious in terms of the diminished commitment of students unable to derive 'dignity' from their endeavours. (Hargreaves,1982)

Not only might there be a need for secondary education to provide skills in decision-making that will have value in the workforce, it is may also be necessary to promote student participation in decision-making in their education, in order that they will not be seriously socially disadvantaged as they extend their participation in education to acquire those skills. These circumstances clearly concern the latter years of secondary education and may be in part served by increasing student responsibility at that stage. Unless schools will allow students to exercise a similar degree of responsibility to that available outside, youth will be attracted to leave school and retention will be difficult to either maintain or increase.

Retention in itself has little value as a goal: "the value of the additional experience must be its final justification" (Hughes, 1985, p.10). A further problem that restricts increased retention, rather than being generated by it, is the steady growth of alienation of youth from school in secondary education. This growth becomes most apparent after the transition from primary school and increases as either the clash between autonomy and compliance becomes greater or the perceived value of participation becomes less.

A dissatisfaction with school that increases with age is a widely documented phenomenon in Australia. There are probably several variables that prompt this reaction. Connell et al. (1982, p.88) observe that resistance to school is quite widespread and often generated by the "interaction of the authority structure of the school with class and gender dynamics." Further:

In some circumstances - possibly where class strains are more acute than usual - it becomes the kids' main relation to the school, as the school becomes a focus of struggles with authority, with parents, or against oppressive futures (p.82).

Low achievement is also strongly associated with alienation from school and consequently early leaving to either take up low skilled and low paid occupations or to become unemployed (Karmel,1984).

Surveys of the unemployed revealed that their major dissatisfaction with education was associated with irrelevance, the emphasis on intellectual rather than all round personal development and the unfriendly, uncaring environment (Collins in Hughes, 1985).

Perhaps the simplest explanation is that if students do not see a real value in school, they do not want to be in school. David Hargreaves (1982) expresses the view that students are motivated to learn if in so doing they can acquire 'dignity'. Used in this context this term has a distinct meaning:

To have dignity means to have a sense of being worthy, of possessing creative, inventive and critical capacities, and of having the power to achieve personal and social change (p.17).

Hargreave's explanation of the behaviour of the disruptive and alienated in the school, the 'oppositionals', is that this group seeks 'dignity' from alternative sources due to a lack of success in gaining it in the academic arena. These students concentrate their energies on gaining the approval of a peer group that like them will not play the educational game because they are no good at it.

Some suggest that school is only a single part of an alienating environment which is characterised by drug taking, family breakdown, isolated subcultures, pessimism, a belief in the inability of the individual to bring about change and



pre-occupation with consumerism.

Invariably increased student participation in decision-making is cited as an important strategy in countering the problem of youth alienation from the education system. The problem is clearly substantiated in facts and figures, the suggested solution, however, suffers the disadvantage of not being supported by an existing body of evidence and cannot be until it has been put into practice and evaluated.

Holdsworth suggests (1986) that schools can play a large part in tackling alienation in general.

The best way to prepare people to adapt, to create, and to find new possibilities and solutions in the face of pressing social problems and rapid social change is to ask that students in school adapt, create and find new possibilities and solutions in the face of pressing social problems, starting from where they are - their classroom, their school, their neighbourhood, their community (p.15).

Others see student participation as primarily useful in identifying what it is that students deem relevant and valuable. Once students have the choice to opt out of the education system, it is irrelevant who else chooses what courses are best for them if the students' perception of relevance is at odds with what is available and they do not attend. Students have proven to be fair judges of what is relevant and usually the areas of focus that they select for curriculum building concur with the views of the community in general (Hughes, 1985, p.17). Students' perception of relevance may often be biased by interest which is not necessarily a problem in a system which values skill development, if the student becomes highly engaged in the education programme and the place of essential core knowledge is preserved in the curriculum. Karmel (1984) concludes that:

Curricula will have to be devised which will seize and

retain the interest of many students for whom the present curriculum does not.  
Teaching methods may have to become more individualistic and more co-operative...  
Structures may have to be created that are not school-like.

Kemmis and Rizvi (1987, p.198) suggest that empowerment is a means of countering the sense of alienation that students have. Their contributions to the construction of the curriculum would help dissipate the general feeling that the education system serves purposes and priorities of its own with scant regard for the purposes and interests of the clients.

Empowerment suggests that student views will be represented in the curriculum, however, as the previous discussions have suggested, representation of student views does not necessarily mean widespread participation. An accurate sampling of student views can go part of the way to meeting the problem of alienation by providing a relevant curriculum content but limited participation deprives many students from the real benefits of empowerment which are increased 'dignity' and a feeling of efficacy. An alternative possibility is to ensure that the 'individualistic' approach of Karmel is incorporated in the curriculum by giving students the opportunity to negotiate part of their course or conditions relating to it.

Student participation in decision-making has been proposed as an important contributor to solving major problems associated with education and society. This is not suggested as a simple remedy to the problems discussed and certainly, a superficial and cosmetic consultation of some student representatives will have no effect at all on these problems.

To have any meaningful and lasting effect, the type of student participation in decision-making that will have to be developed

is one that engages all students : shaping worthwhile education programmes, which they perceive as worthy of their full commitment; problem solving involving situational analysis; consideration of alternatives, planning, implementation and review; taking responsibility for decision-making and outcomes.

A theoretical framework has been represented here that suggests that a well developed, purpose-built school culture of student decision-making can serve three important functions:

1) Most social problems are perpetuated by the powerful role-model effect of adults on children.

If interventions are not made the endemic nature of the problems remains. Students must be equipped with the powers to become part of the solutions rather than part of the problems. Students must be endowed with the power to first recognize, and then solve social problems, if only at the point where those problems intersect their own lives.

2) A stimulating and relevant programme can be provided for students if they are consulted and involved in the formulation of it.

Retention is enhanced through:

a) an increased student perception of relevance.

b) an improved student performance arising from engagement through interest.

3) The economic viability of the nation will increasingly rely on the style of participation of the members of the workforce:

a) Information processing will continue to gain

importance in terms of an industry in itself, and as it relates to rapid and increasing technological change. Valued individuals will be discriminating in selection of, and skilled in the accessing of information.

- b) Collaborative decision-making will be a valued skill in utilising the aggregated talents of all members of any enterprise. 'Quality Circle' approaches may prove to be necessary to respond to the challenges of any increasingly dynamic economic climate.
- c) The individual ability to make decisions is becoming a priority skill in the workforce as the nature of work changes with the decline of process working through mechanization and the growth of service industry.

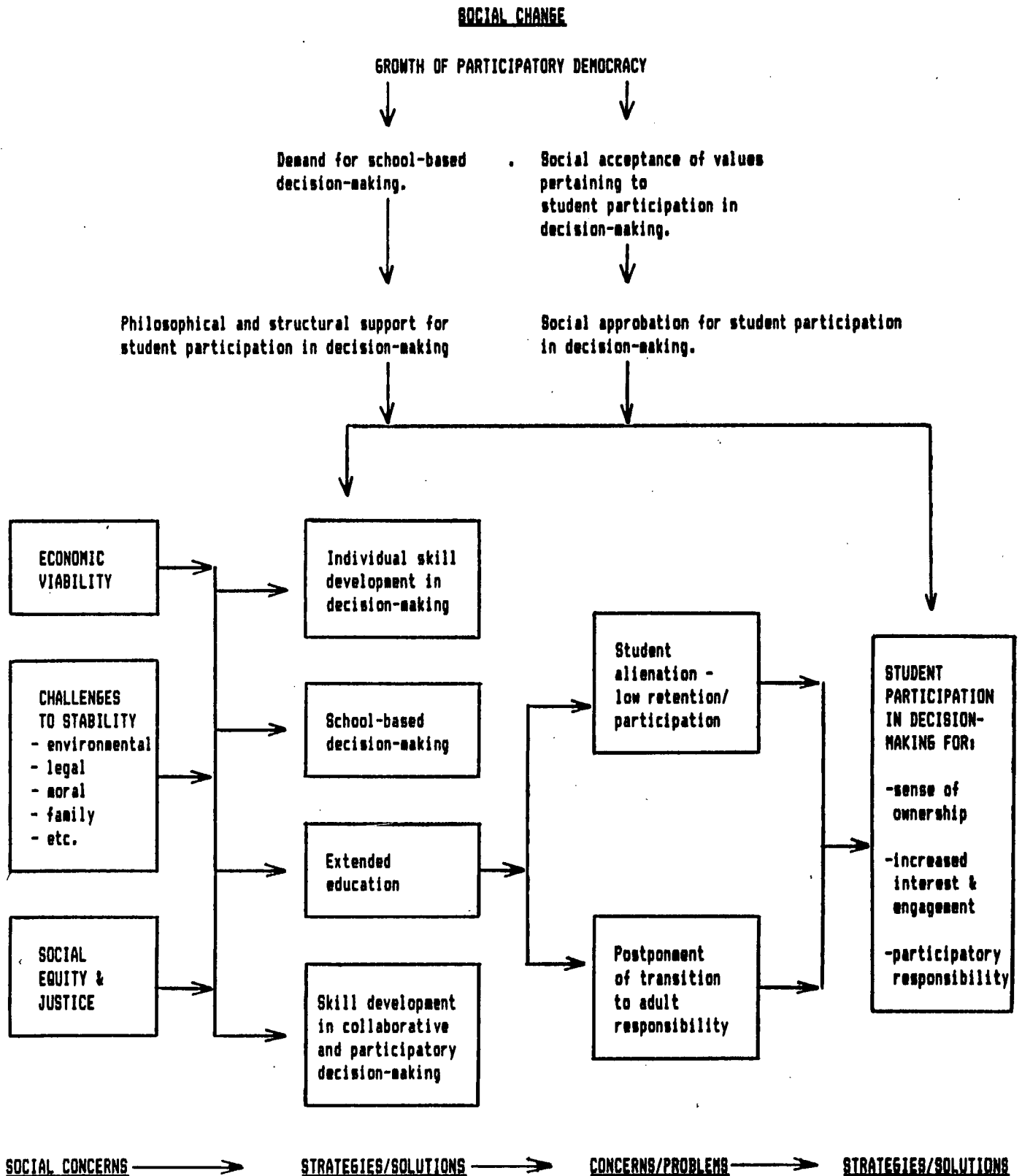
### Conclusion

In this section the attempt has been made to portray the complicated relationship between social conditions and the development of student participation in decision-making.

On the one hand, changing social conditions have prompted the demand for increased student participation in decision-making as, in theory at least, a problem solving strategy. Meanwhile, the growth of participatory democracy favourably disposes society to an increase in student participation in decision-making.

Social factors and their influence on student participation in decision-making is represented in Figure 1.

The proposition of student participation in decision-making has transformed from absurdity to desirability as society has

**Figure 1****Flowchart: Student Participation in Decision-Making,  
Social Concerns and Strategies**

undergone fundamental changes in basic values.

Durkheim's view of education and society, or a variation of it in which education reflects a social attitude to an ideal rather than the society's practice of it, may well come to be borne out in the history of Australian Education, given a lapse rate between wider social change and the accommodation of this change by the education system. With respect to participation in decision-making, schools may reflect it in either an amplified or abbreviated form conditioned by the need to optimise all learning outcomes.

Three identifiable, although far from discrete, stages of student representation can be described:

- a) The prefect system in which students assume a privileged position above their peers and qualify on the basis of teacher approval.
- b) The student representative system in which an elected minority act on behalf of students.
- c) Participatory representation in which a structure is developed to facilitate student input at all levels.

The historical counterparts to these in Australian society, although lacking simultaneity exhibit a similar sequence

- a) Representative government in which a privileged group, qualified in terms of land ownership contribute to decision-making.
- b) Democratic representation in which an elected minority act on behalf of their constituencies.
- c) Participatory democracy in which the constituencies exert a constant influence on decision-making through the development of participatory structures.

The loose association of these two sets of sequential

developments simply illustrates the way in which the education system, in a pale way, parallels the values and mechanisms of society at large.

On this basis the continued development and spread of student participation in decision-making will be conditioned by the development of participatory democracy in Australian society. However, there must also be a point at which the relationship becomes somewhat symbiotic with each development 'feeding' the other. Great care must be taken to respond to the social values in a way that both maintains a harmonious accord between the school and its community and preserves as the central function of the school the pursuit of learning. Finally, it must be recognised that in attempting to respond to new social problems and issues we can at the best offer plausible but not proven remedies. This is the status of most of the participatory strategies that have been proposed here.

### PART III

#### A RATIONALE FOR STUDENT PARTICIPATION IN DECISION-MAKING

It is clear that student participation in some forms of decision-making such as representation on school councils, student representative councils and 'curriculum negotiation' is significantly represented in practice in many Australian schools. It is also significantly represented, in intention, in much central authority policy, including that of the Commonwealth government over a sustained period of time.

A simple view of the curriculum sees it designed purely to maximise learning and teaching under significantly constrained circumstances arising from such influences as social and cultural values, economic limitations and political intervention. These influences will constantly impinge on the pursuit of basic curriculum goals. In some instances a paucity of funding, in others community expectations based on social and cultural values, will restrain the expert educator from implementing the most effective learning programmes.

It is important to evaluate the relationship between student participation in decision-making and teaching/learning efficiency. In the context of the growth of participatory democracy in Australia, it is not difficult to identify a strong political and moral motivation which has been expressed, often with exaggeration, in terms of the 'clients' rights'.

It has been claimed that student participation "can and should contribute to students' intellectual, social, moral, ethical and



emotional development" (Holdsworth, 1986, p.3).

An obvious problem in evaluating anything that has effects in such a wider range of areas, many of which are strongly affected by socialising agents other than the curriculum, is the determination of the exact nature and extent of those effects. Little in the way of empirical evidence can in fact be cited in support of the role of student participation in most of these areas.

Nevertheless, this difficulty in precisely measuring the outcomes of student participation in decision-making does not preclude the evaluation of the process in terms of what is known about the mechanism of human learning. The process of participation in decision-making does make strong connections with much that can be observed as essential to effective learning.

The strongest arguments for student participation in decision-making are educational. They concern both curriculum content and practice which in many cases are interconnected.

Student participation in decision-making has two distinct emphases in the curriculum.

- 1) It has been advanced as an approach to engaging students in education in order to promote realisation of the curriculum goals.
- 2) It constitutes an important content area in the curriculum itself with an emphasis on related skill development through practice.

Student participation in decision-making must therefore be evaluated both in terms of its effectiveness as a strategy in promoting learning and its validity as a curriculum aim.

Schools have broad purposes; Hughes (1985, p.14) describes a threefold purpose of schools:

- 1) Vocational preparation.
- 2) Preparation for citizenship in a democratic society.
- 3) Preparation for personal cultivation.

It is only with some difficulty that schools address some of the objectives implicit in these purposes, especially those relating to the affective domain. Much of the development that has taken place in the implementation of student decision-making in the curriculum has been a response to the growing demand that the school take positive steps to effectively fulfil social education objectives.

Student decision-making has been promoted as having significance with respect to each of the objectives:

1) Vocational preparation: Individual ability to make sound decisions has gained prominence as a desirable vocational skill, while collaborative decision-making is being mooted as a basic requirement for economic progress and international competitiveness.

2) Preparation for citizenship in a democratic society: Traditional knowledge-based approaches have fallen short of adequately meeting this purpose. Such an approach has not had the efficacy to compete with other socialising factors which replicate and perpetuate undesirable social qualities. The social equity and justice movement has emphasised the need for the development of the skills of democratic and participatory citizenship. The content-based approach must be complemented with adequate experience of democratic practice.

3) Preparation for personal cultivation: Decision-making skills are viewed as the most essential to individual satisfaction and fulfilment in modern society.

It is therefore difficult and inadvisable to take a simple approach to describing the purposes and effects of student participation in decision-making on and in the curriculum. Not all manifestations of student participation in decision-making serve all purposes. In many cases student participation in decision-making approaches serve specific and exclusive purposes. As a result, most catalogues of student decision-making purposes cover a relatively wide range. One such catalogue that is not necessarily exhaustive is presented in Marsh (p.111):

Reasons why students should be encouraged to be active in school decision-making activities.

- 1) Students as learners must be given the opportunity to be active, responsible and engaged with their learning tasks (Skilbeck).
- 2) Students are the only group who can portray the lived-in quality of schooling (Vallance).
- 3) Students are often involved in leadership roles in out-of-class activities which are part of the school community activities (Skilbeck) (levels of responsibility in school should be consistent with this experience).
- 4) Students as consumers or clients have certain expectations and rights, including the right to evaluate the quality of the provision or service (Dynam) and the right to negotiate certain aspects of their learning (Curriculum Branch of Victoria).
- 5) When students do participate in school improvement activities it often leads to positive collegiate relationships with their teachers (Dunn).

Student participation in decision-making receives an impetus often commensurate with the perceived purposes or functions that it will serve. These purposes are in turn conditioned by social climate often resulting in a changing emphasis and relevance that matches the dynamics of social change. Over a decade ago, student participation in decision-making was suggested as a means of alleviating the serious student unrest problem in North American schools. It was then a central consideration for North American

educators (Alexander, 1975) whereas now it seems remote.

In the following discussion the purposes of student participation in decision-making will be examined where possible in the light of impact and effect on student learning and fundamental curriculum purposes.

The emerging rationale presents the case that student participation in decision-making:

- 1) is essential in order to develop social justice in a democratic society and to endow citizens with the skills for participation in a democratic society;
- 2) prepares individuals to develop their potential and for fulfilment in modern society. It is an essential preparation for adult life;
- 3) enhances learning efficiency and teacher effectiveness;
- 4) provides, in the observations and perspectives of students, a hitherto untapped resource for curriculum review, refinement and implementation;

It is also recognised that it allows fulfilment of public notions of client rights, however this is seen as a justification for student participation on primarily social grounds rather than educational grounds which are the subject of this segment of the discussion.

#### The Historical Development of a Rationale

Historically, there are a number of contributions to the theory of student participation in decision-making that should be considered. In some instances political theorists have provided

frames of reference that are pertinent to the school's role in democratic socialisation. Davis (1964, quoted in Pateman), in commenting on the 'classical' theory of democracy stated that its purpose was:

the education of an entire people to a point where their intellectual, emotional and moral capacities have reached their full potential and they are joined, free and actively in a genuine community (p.21).

This certainly sounds like a goal for education systems, but in fact, the early 'classical' theorists, whose ideal was participatory democracy, saw the political system as the vehicle for achieving this education.

Jean-Jacques Rousseau, writing in the eighteenth century, advocated widespread citizen participation in the process of governing. Like John Stuart Mill after him, he advocated this participation in order to develop in the individual citizen a genuine sense of community. In the "Social Contract" (1968) he advances the idea that in order for individual independence and equality to be maintained an interdependence was necessary, in which the individual was 'excessively dependent on the republic' (p.99). Through participatory decision-making the individual learns to be a public, as well as a private citizen and learns the need for co-operation. Participation forces the individual to become socially responsible. Mill claimed that without participation,

the man never thinks of any collective interest, of any object to be pursued jointly with others, but only in competition with them, and in some measure at their expense (quoted in Pateman, p.30).

Rousseau and Mill saw participatory democracy as fulfilling two important functions which were the promotion of acceptance of decisions and the integration of the individual in the community.

However, neither saw a real role for formal education in this process. Mill did suggest that democracy was learnt through participation at the local level and forwarded the idea that co-operative forms of decision-making had a wide relevance and that their application in industrial organisation would lead to a 'moral transformation' of the participants (cited in Pateman, p.34).

Criticism of the 'participatory' (classical) model of democracy can be levelled at it on the grounds that, while universal participation in decision-making might work for agrarian communities in Rousseau's day, it is impossible to manage in an industrial society because of the sheer numbers involved.

Mill had suggested that participatory learning of citizenship could take place in more practical settings as did G. D. H. Cole in the first part of this century. Cole felt that individuals should participate in the organisation and conduct of the local associations to which they belonged. Citizenship development would take place in the local settings with which the individual was most concerned and best understood.

These political theorists saw the operation of democracy both as a means of justly administering the business affairs of the state and also as a means of shaping a desirable society.

Although not overtly making a connection between schooling and democratic learning, Rousseau did introduce the concept that the individual with his needs and interests was of central importance in education rather than the subject matter to be taught. Bowen (1974) observes that:

This then is a radical shifting of emphasis in the educational process, because coupled with the dethroning of subject matter as the basic element in the educational process, it also leads to a dethroning of the teacher as the figure of authority whose function it is to convey the subject matter to the learner (p.124).

John Dewey, another political theorist with a classical view of participatory democracy, differs from Rousseau in that in his substantial contribution as an education theorist, he strongly advocated student participation. He argued that the traditional authoritarian approach to education was based on learner dependence. Under these circumstances the student could not become a constructive, participating member of a democracy.

In Democracy and Education (1916) he promoted the view that the school is responsible for equipping the child to solve current problems and to test possibilities for the future according to a scientific experimental method. He also specified that education should be a 'democratic process' of 'conjoint effort' (Bowen, p170). Problem solving was to be accomplished through the 'act of thought' which involved five steps in sequence:

- 1) The student is challenged by a problem to seek a solution. (relevance facilitates challenge)
- 2) The student gathers relevant data.
- 3) The student constructs a hypothesis in the form of a set of steps in sequence.
- 4) The student tests the hypothesis through application.
- 5) If the hypothesis fails, the student gathers new data and embarks on the process of hypothesis construction and testing again. (cited in Bowen, p.170)

For Dewey (1916, ch.XXVI, quoted in Bowen, pp.203-207) a good citizen was someone who had developed 'moral character'. This "means to be fully and adequately what one is capable of becoming through association with others in all the offices of life." In this way Dewey's view, of citizenship development through participation with others in decision-making processes, echoes the views of Rousseau, Mill and Cole. He insisted that for this development to take place, the "school itself must be a community

life in all which that implies" and its learning "should be continuous with that out of school." In order for problems to be challenging to students, but selected so that they are not too daunting, the problems should be relevant and perceived to have value by the students (cited in Bowen, pp.206-7).

Dewey (ch.IV, quoted in Bowen, pp.175-183) emphasised the importance of schooling in developing desirable individual and social characteristics. This process, exercising 'the power to grow', depends upon two conditions, the need for others and the ability to transfer and adapt experience to subsequent situations ('plasticity'), "both of which are at their height in childhood and youth." In learning from experience the individual develops 'habits' which include both habitual behaviours and the disposition to be able to adjust behaviour to respond to new conditions. He argues that if 'active habits' which involve thought, invention and initiative are not developed in the formative years, this task becomes more difficult because of a decline in 'plasticity'.

Of all the contributors to the theory of 'learning democracy' that have been discussed here, John Dewey stands out as the one who has made a fundamental connection between schooling and citizenship in a participatory democracy. In addition he has also developed an educational framework for the development of the individual's problem solving and decision-making skills. The theory of participatory democracy is concerned with specific learning outcomes: the development of citizens who can contribute to society and exercise their own personal freedom without restricting the personal freedom of others.



## Social Justice in a Democratic Society

It is an expressed and accepted aim for education systems to prepare students to become contributing citizens in a democratic society. In the view of Frymier, et. al. (1984):

...the future development of a healthy society depends on the work schools can do in producing a more politically understanding population, with more flexible skills and a willingness both to adapt to changing circumstances and to adhere to values adopted by society generally.

Furthermore, some authors emphasise the important role of students in the 'reconstruction of society' (Kemmis in Holdsworth, 1986, p.16). David Bennett in "Labour Essays", 1982, presented the argument that schools could 'make a difference' in changing the patterns of power distribution in Australian society (in Kemmis, 1988, pp.51-2). Connell et. al. (1982) also take the view that schools should be a means of achieving democratic purposes.

National policy in education has, for over a decade, endorsed the role of the school as an agent in creating a desirable society. Of necessity, there must be some concept of values before such a role can be given any direction. Those values, the promotion of which is sought through student participation in decision-making, include:

- 1) a society that extends to all its members the right to share in all decisions that affect their lives;
- 2) a society that actively values all its members for their ability to contribute to that society; a society that makes active attempts to overcome prior or existing societal inequalities;
- 3) a society that develops the individual abilities of all its members to enable and empower them to shape, maintain and change their society;
- 4) a society that encourages co-operative effort and social development;

- 5) a society that develops awareness of and caring for issues related to the physical, social and intellectual environment;
- 6) a society that rejects forms of organisation that give some individuals or groups decision-making power while denying that to others affected by the decisions;
- 7) a society that rejects practices that directly or indirectly disadvantage particular groups, including practices that stigmatise or stereotype groups in ways that deny them access to equal decision-making power or to other aspects of society;
- 8) a society that rejects practices that deny some individuals the skills, abilities and opportunities to exercise responsibility for the nature of that society;
- 9) a society that rejects practices that promote division and competition between members of that society;
- 10) a society that rejects exploration of the human and physical resources of the society's environment to the advantage of some members of the society and without due regard to the broader consequences of such exploitation.  
(Holdsworth, 1986, pp.19-20)

In order to achieve its purposes the school must adopt three approaches:

1. The curriculum must present a knowledge content which identifies the features of a desirable society and the processes and structures of Australian democracy as they relate to the citizen. This curriculum provision has proven to be of limited effect without support by an appropriate programme of experience.

2. The school must be a model of those desirable social practices that it intends to teach.

Decision-making practice in the school setting should reflect what is ideal for the wider society, thus providing a source of socialisation in selected desirable practices, as a counter to the unselective socialisation process that is constantly at work outside the school, in the media and in the home, to replicate

society's good and bad traits alike.

3. The curriculum must include an experience content of those skills that characterise a desirable society. Student participation in decision-making is a fundamental approach upon which progress in the quest for an improved society may well depend. Hughes advocates the development of a new common curriculum:

...built on the felt needs and interests of its students. Their involvement in a process designed to make them valuable members of a democratic society must be genuine and sustained (1985, p.16).

If education for democracy is a major purpose of education, the model of society that schools must adopt is one in which the schools "reflect the principles of democracy in their own organisations" (Beazley, 1984, p.266) and in which the learners experience the operations of democracy, for "people learn as they live" (Glatthorn in Fantini, 1976, p.213). This theme has been repeated by Adler (1982, p.124): "telling people how to be good citizens is not the same as preparing them for the task", and Sizer (1984, p.123): "Values are taught by surround, living out values, not sermonizing". After reviewing the evidence Pateman concluded:

How can such experience (experience of successful participation) and socialisation take place when most organisations are 'oligarchical and hierarchical'? Education for democracy takes place through the participatory process in non governmental (political) authority structures. Experience of participation leaves the individual psychologically equipped to undertake further participation (p.45).

The growth of participatory democracy, while in some ways enhancing equality and justice by empowering the ordinary citizen, in other ways heightens the inequalities. There are huge disparities in the effectiveness of the initiation of the young into democratic roles between sub cultures in society. The

promotion of influence of the individual in decision-making is actually a very selective process in which those whose 'social surround' (family, class, culture, community) provides effective political socialization find themselves increasingly empowered, while those whose 'social surround' does not, remain politically impotent. It has been found that those who feel politically efficacious (competent) participate more than those who do not (Campbell et.al., Almond and Verba, cited in Pateman, p.46). Low socio-economic status groups were found to have a low sense of political efficacy while middle class families were high on the efficacy scale, a fact attributed to participatory family structure (pp.48-49).

Furthermore Almond and Verba found that the sense of efficacy was highest where most institutional opportunities existed for local political participation. Remembered opportunities to participate in the family and at school correlated with a high score on the political competence scale. High political efficacy was found to be directly proportional to the number of areas of participatory decision-making in which experience was gained (pp.46-50)

Social equality can only be ensured if the major agent of political socialization is universally available. The only such universal agent suitably disposed in terms of the duration of the individual's exposure to it, is the school.

In terms of value and justice, such an investment of the school's energies is vital, both for society and the individual. The survival of society depends upon citizen involvement, while individual citizens can best learn to participate if, through experience provided in formative years, they come to view

themselves as able to influence decision-making outcomes.

Byron Massialas described the process: (in Alexander, p.110)

The political orientations that children develop largely determine the political culture that will prevail. Cultures in which there is a relatively high degree of citizen involvement (civic cultures) are generally comprised of people who view themselves as politically efficacious. That is, that they feel that they can, through their own efforts, influence political decision-making...Systems that provide open mechanisms for rapid change and are responsive to the demands of their citizens, appear, in historical perspective, to have more chances for political survival and continuity than those systems that have no institutionalized means of change.

The school experience must therefore not only give all students the opportunity, not only to give opinions, but must also give all students the opportunity to perceive themselves as influential in the decision-making process.

That form of student representation that is often labelled 'tokenism', that only involves an elected few in decision-making, is by no means adequate for the purposes discussed here. The school must cultivate a culture of student participation in group decision-making that to some degree infiltrates all aspects of the curriculum.

### A Life Preparation

Change has become a characteristic of modern living. Technology, economy, patterns of personal and family relations, employment and culture have increasingly become subject to change.

The individual in society is increasingly called upon to make meaning of copious quantities of information and to choose between numerous alternatives. It is a matter of urgency that schools develop programmes to allow students to develop skills in dealing

with information, critical thinking and selection (Sher, 1983).

Maurice Gibbons (1974) in developing his view of the contrast between the limited choices in primitive society and the challenge that decision-making presents for young people in a technological society wrote:

...there is a bewildering array of alternatives in life-style, work, politics, possessions, recreation, dress, relationships, environment, and so on. Success in our lives depends on the ability to make appropriate choices. Yet in most schools, students make few decisions of any importance and receive no training in decision-making or in the implementation and reassessment cycle which constitutes basic growth pattern....The test of life is not what he (the student) can do under a teachers direction but, what the teacher has enabled him to do and decide on his own (p.57).

Increasingly a major role of education systems is to involve their students in 'deutro' or 'second order learning'. In Dewey's view a major purpose of schooling is to "insure the continuance of education"(quoted in Bowen, p.182). It is apparent that modern citizens not only need to respond to social change by accessing information and choosing between alternatives, they need to constantly add to their skills and knowledge in order to adapt to change. Rapid technological change and information expansion have asserted a need for members of society to be constantly involved in the process of learning. Economic competitiveness, employability, consumer, cultural and social participation all depend upon it.

Many educators see student participation in decision-making in the day to day classroom practice of their learning, in particular, as the only means of adequately preparing the student for life.

Boomer (1982) in his argument for an approach that involves students in negotiating their classroom work with their teachers and, through so doing, developing initiative and decision-making skills states: "when the opportunity to exhibit abilities is

unavailable, those abilities will remain hidden and underdeveloped."

Joe Hurst (1986) argues that it is essential for the incorporation of real-life participation for students right across the curriculum and especially in the classroom setting in order to develop the participatory, cognitive and affective competencies needed for everyday life.

When students are involved in the process of making informed decisions about their learning they do develop the capacity to generate and follow through a quest for knowledge (Reid in Marsh, 1988). The intrinsic reward that comes from the experience of independent learning reinforces the skill.

Although we talk about 'preparation for life', with some justification because of the expanded role of adult responsibility compared with the responsibility exercised in pre-adult life, life does not begin when a student leaves school. Decisions made by young people can and do have lasting consequences and can and do have profound effects on the quality of the individuals' life. There is some merit in the view that:

The school is not preparation for life but life itself. The formal and informal curricula of the elementary, middle and junior high and high school are real life... (Hurst, 1986, p.69).

The development of decision-making skills, while essential for full participation in adult life, also have an immediate relevance to youth who in their adolescent years have increasingly frequent encounters with decisions that may have far reaching consequences.

If there is any doubt that these skills need to be taught more effectively than they have been it is only necessary to reflect on the general state of society and the consensus of serious concern that has developed with respect to some aspects of our life style

itself, such as drug and child abuse, violence and financial mismanagement, and the impact of our life style on the environment.

Increasing experience in active, rather than passive, learning and learning through practice demonstrates the superiority of this approach. With the use of the 'Maxi-Economy Programme', an experience based economic education programme in the United States, it has been demonstrated that active participation is a successful method for students to acquire economic reasoning skills that are transferable to everyday decision-making (Kourilsky, 1985).

Often the artificial setting provided for the learning of life skills makes provision only for the student to practise listening, reading, writing and recall skills, usually with little real gain in the students' ability to act.

### Learning Efficiency

There is much concern that in order to meet the first two purposes described here, that is to prepare citizens for democracy and equip the individual with personal competence in decision-making, sacrifices in teacher authority and curriculum space would have to be made that would prejudice the accomplishment of the other major curriculum goals. It must be remembered that student participation does not mean a total transfer of decision-making authority to students and it has been recommended that Dahl's criteria of 'competence' and 'economy' must constantly be applied to determine the degree of student participation desirable. It is advocated here that varied approaches to student participation in decision-making can be incorporated in the student's experience of the curriculum without overpowering other



valid curriculum goals.

In actual fact, the development of student participation in decision-making has the potential to both enhance the learning performance of students and to provide a resource in carrying out many of the functions of the school with the need for a much reduced teacher input. Blumberg (cited in Pateman, p.58) found that individual participation in a range of organisational settings that included classrooms invariably produced beneficial results such as increased co-operation and productivity.

The final decision about what a student will learn rests with the student. One of the most important preconditions to learning is student motivation. If our society is to be a learning society, self motivation must be an attractive option. The nature of adult participation in education is very different from that of the adolescent. Is it because the adult chooses to participate in an education programme while the adolescent is constrained to participate in the education programme?

The adolescent's involvement in school is initially involuntary in the same way that conscription to the army or incarceration in prison is. While this analogy has obvious limitations, that it does have some validity is suggested by the, not infrequent, use of 'prison metaphors' to describe schools.

Boomer observes that the infant is possessed of a natural learning power which somehow, possibly through the entry to school, is turned off (1982, p.2). It is speculated that it is the shift of power from the child to the adult that is the mechanism that dampens the child's appetite for learning. Moore and Lawton (1982, p.36) explain education as an initiatory process which cannot satisfactorily take place without the participation of the

students.

If this premise is true, it would not be surprising to find, therefore, that by sharing some power with students and increasing their choice in the classroom, across the curriculum and with respect to it, there would be a significant increase in student motivation. This has been suggested in the findings of the National Choice and Diversity Project (Schools Commission, 1984). Verba (cited in Pateman), in the process of extensive research on political participation, commented that:

Significant changes in human behaviours can be brought about rapidly, only if the persons who are expected to change participate in deciding what the change shall be and how it shall be made (p63).

Some research confirms that increased student participation results in increased productivity and learning (Taylor, 1987), better discipline (Grottedson in Short, 1988) and reduced absenteeism (National Foundation for the Improvement of Education, 1986). However a problem presents itself in the form of the body of research that indicates that traditional schooling gets better results than other approaches (Coleman et. al., Williams et. al. and Rutter et. al., cited in Johnston, 1988)

These apparently inconsistent findings might be explained by the fact that the performance difference noted in this second body of research cannot be specifically attributed to student participation in decision-making in its fully developed form. Non traditional schools are not necessarily those that have the type of decision-making mechanisms that are advocated here, that is, mechanisms that function inside the classroom and out and that allow the student to have varied degrees of influence in different circumstances. Goodlad (1984) found that two thirds of the students in his sample did not participate in choosing what to do

in class (p.109) and that overall the teachers out-talked their entire classes by a ratio of about three to one (p.229). Based on this result, few of Goodlad's schools had a developed culture of student participation. Nevertheless, others might still have had a superficial appearance of being schools in which students exercised significant participatory powers. Although, in reality, their participation might have been limited to choice of electives, which only represents a very limited part of the culture of student participation.

The widespread practice of giving students extensive choice in their courses of study has probably been central in clouding the issue of student participation in decision-making. The criteria used in evaluating the performance of traditional schools against others usually involves measuring traditional competencies such as literacy and numeracy. At its height, the student choice movement allowed students to avoid experience in subject areas but focus on these skills. Student participation in decision-making must not be judged on this basis because it is as well suited to the curriculum in which subject choice is highly constrained as it is to others.

Finally, one of the purposes of encouraging students to participate in decision-making in the classroom is to motivate them to be work oriented and to focus on the subject matter of the lesson, which, as a result of their participation, they are likely to find more interesting and relevant. Work orientation and focus on subject matter were conditions that Rutter et. al. found to be associated with more successful schools.

For student participation in decision-making to increase learning efficiency the approach taken must not simply be to increase participation in decision-making generally, but rather to

develop a partnership in addressing the specific problems that are a matter of concern.

The low level of student commitment to the education programme is generally termed 'alienation'. This may be manifest in a number of ways which include:

- 1) Physically withdrawing from the school program by dropping out or through truancy.
- 2) Limited engagement with learning objectives, expressed through unruly or disruptive behaviour or withdrawal.
- 3) Underachievement in terms of academic performance.
- 4) Emotional maladjustment.

Studies of alienation (Seemen, 1959; Bardsley, 1976; Fischer, 1976; Mackey, 1977; in Dynan, 1980) generally concur that 'meaninglessness', 'powerlessness' and 'estrangement' are important dimensions of the problem.

Student participation in decision-making can provide a means of compensating for each of the major dimensions of student alienation. The choice in the decision-making process allows the student to reconstruct the educational experience so that it has relevance and meaning. The very acts of choosing and negotiating dispel the impression of powerlessness, while the act of participation, under favourable conditions, builds in the students a feeling of value, belonging and ownership, since the school and the learning come to be, in part, the student's construction. Alienation from school reduces in proportion to reductions in bureaucratisation of school (Anderson, 1973).

It would be misleading to suggest that the benefits outlined can be obtained easily. A theme of this entire discussion is the importance of developing a climate of student participation in

decision-making in the school that includes every student in a substantial way. Nor should it be assumed that the teacher totally abandons authority in favour of participation:

...that educational practices must be based either on the pronouncements of authority or on some shared participatory activity...would seem to be over simplified, if not incorrect.

We have two concepts, both of which have a proper application in an educational context, although in different ways (Moore and Lawton 1982, p.35).

One of the most influential approaches to student participation in decision-making in Australia is that of Garth Boomer and Jon Cook (Boomer, 1982) which has become known as 'curriculum negotiation'. It recognises the balance of authority and participation and presents a model of learning that largely reconciles the two. As Jon Cook (1982) observes:

...students who are passive or acquiescent, unwilling, resentful or co-erced, even externally 'motivated' do not make the best learners. Equally, laissez faire has proved generally inoperative and indefensible in the classroom. Freedom without discipline is aimlessness at the best, chaos at worst...

Learning is an active process. Teachers can't do it for learners (p.134).

'Curriculum Negotiation' involves inviting students to be involved in the planning and modification of the educational programme so that their interests are represented in it. The focus of programme development is the negotiation between teacher and student of the student's interests against the "constraints of the learning content and the non-negotiable requirements that apply" (Boomer, 1982, p.132).

The approach is not simply a negotiation of the extent that student choice may be represented in the learning programme. In practice the established models of 'Curriculum Negotiation' provide a structure which incorporates all the essential principles of

student learning, problem solving, decision-making and assessment.

The participatory approach to decision-making has been termed 'synergistic' (Phillips and McColly, 1982), which reveals a great deal about its potential. Often substantial teacher efforts are expended on overcoming student opposition, either active or passive. Student participation in decision-making provides an opportunity to tap the destructive energies of students and redirect them in constructive directions. Ownership of learning and a sense of belonging to the school community is a prerequisite to realizing this aim. A.S. Neill suggested that there was "no necessity for a gulf separating pupils from teachers, a gulf made by adults not children" (1972, p.17). Possibilities have been presented here for the unmaking of that gulf. Student participation in decision-making also recognizes the importance of engaging the student in thought. John Dewey stated that:

The sole direct path to enduring improvement in the methods of instruction and learning consists of centering on the conditions which exact, promote and test thinking. Thinking is the method of intelligent learning that employs and rewards mind (in Glasser, 1969, p.623).

Decision-making is a demanding mental process that widely utilizes the abilities that have been classified in Bloom's Taxonomy of Educational Objectives. It provides a stimulus for the development of such higher order mental processes as analysis, synthesis and evaluation.

The promise of benefits, a re-ordering of the school or learning environment to suit their needs, motivates students to engage in thought processes that are essential to human endeavour.

Although the application of student participation in decision-making must be extensive in order to achieve desired effects, it

need not be constant in the sense that it is equally emphasized at all times in relationship to all curriculum matters. In the classroom different parts of the course of study may be negotiable to different degrees. It must also be pointed out that at the secondary school level student interest in decision-making is considerably higher in some areas than in others. Areas often related as high interest relate to social behaviour and school uniform, while of moderate interest are the areas of discipline, new courses and curriculum (Alexander, 1975, p.47). Student interest can be expected to vary both with respect to time and place.

Given the possibility of a varied application of student participation in decision-making the way is open for it to be used as a special tool by the astute teacher to strengthen waning student engagement.

The teacher who is successful in facilitating the students' experience of the curriculum, as has been suggested, in collaboration with the student, is like a good entertainer who is sensitive to the level of audience rapport with the performance. Like any professional entertainer, the accomplished teacher will have a number of 'tricks up his sleeve' to use at those critical moments when it is sensed that the interest or engagement of the 'audience' is weakening.

Central to sustained student motivation in education is the consideration of morale. In order to maximise educational effectiveness, student morale must be maintained at a high level. Student morale is connected to their perceptions of the meaningfulness of the curriculum. However, a passive sameness in curriculum experience will erode student morale regardless of the importance of curriculum content.

Student participation in choice of curriculum components may be used at critical times to sustain high morale. This portrayal of student participation in decision-making as a 'trick' in the teacher/entertainer's repertoire is not meant to denigrate the value of this approach. What is suggested is that this approach has special qualities in terms of student morale that can be wisely and responsibly used by teachers to maintain maximum productivity and learning if astute timing is incorporated in its application.

This discussion has presented a scenario in which students work at their education because they want to. When anyone is doing what they want to do, even though that choice was constrained rather than absolute, they are happy. Beyond a net profit in terms of learning, an approach in which students share in decision-making also increases satisfaction for both teachers and students as a greater 'team spirit' and feeling of mutual acceptance develops. Such has been the experience of those involved in this approach.

#### Effective Utilisation of Resources

As has been suggested, the sharing of decision-making responsibility with students opens the way for a 'synergistic' approach to be taken in the management of the school. Experience has shown that students can assume roles that have traditionally been exclusively teacher domain. Students are a valuable resource of information about curriculum and teaching that is often overlooked. They can administer discipline, teach and practise enterprise for the benefit of the school.

Research indicates that students' perception of teaching



performance are reliable and valid enough to be worth considering as feedback (Meighan, 1976). When traditional authority structures in which the hierarchical position of the teacher is the foundation can be dismantled and collaborative participatory structures adopted which emphasise the student/teacher partnership, the oppositional nature of education will be reduced. As the co-operative nature of education develops teachers may better be able to find value in students' evaluations of their teaching practice and use these opinions as a data source for their assessment of their own teaching.

Students actually do make constructive and sympathetic comments in the vast majority of cases, when they are invited to provide information about teaching. Dunn (1978) reported on a project that used students to assist teachers in tackling various teacher nominated problems which included:

- What opportunities are pupils given to be involved?
- Does the teacher involve boys and girls differently?
- What is the spread of teacher questions in a lesson?

Students provided an unobtrusive source of observation. The tensions associated with peer judgements, that may be present when colleagues are used to act as observers, were absent, while the problems of time constraints and availability that are also associated with the involvement of colleagues were irrelevant.

Students not only produced results ranging from reasonable to high effectiveness, but also an unplanned and outstanding result which was the student satisfaction evident in being involved in a collaborative manner with teachers.

Students are also an important source of information about the effects of the curriculum. In the PEP programme, students were

widely consulted concerning the curriculum. In some instances the accuracy of student perceptions is irrelevant because the critical factor is the perception itself and its power to determine or influence the students participation in education.

It is conceited for teachers to assume students' perceptions of curriculum without consulting them. At times, student perceptions of curriculum purposes and teacher intentions with respect to curriculum are widely disparate. The process of harmonizing the two is extremely productive in terms of student commitment to the educational programme.

Action Research (Kemmis,1988) lends itself to collaborative curriculum improvement involving students, teachers, parents and other members of the community. The approach with its repetitive sequence of planning, action and observation, reflection and plan revision is ideal in that, in addition to providing a structure for co-operative endeavour between staff and students it gives students experience of being part of a self critical community seeking improvement.

One of the most promising approaches dealing with discipline problems in schools has been the sharing of responsibility with students. Where students have been involved in the construction of behaviour codes, through a process that encourages a substantial participation, they often "emerge as valuable allies in supporting and maintaining the new behaviour" (Dunn,1987, p.38).

In the view of Lescault(1988):

Involving students in the development or revision process is the first step towards creating (the desired) perception...i.e.(students) view a discipline code as a necessary means of creating a safe and orderly environment in which learning can take place (p.46).

In some schools the involvement has been taken even further by sharing with the students the responsibility for enforcement. At Thomastown High School in Victoria, it has been the practice for students to participate in 'juries' in order to judge their peers. At Bryant High School in New York, student disputes are resolved through referral to a trained student mediator. In his assessment of the use of Mediated Dispute Resolution at this school, Moses S. Koch reports that, "students do it better" (1988) and cites a fifty percent reduction in student suspension for fighting in one year as supporting evidence.

Students also provide a resource that can be used to dramatically increase small ratio teacher:learner contacts. Students assume the role of the teacher as tutors or peer supporters.

Peer tutoring results in measurable gains for the students being tutored (Limbrick et al 1985) while there are also important gains for the tutors. Cohen (1986, p.179) lists the following areas of skill development for tutors: persistence; concentration; setting reasonable standards; empathy; managing and organising; taking on responsibility; sticking to work schedules; introduction to and preparation for working.

Peer support programmes involving senior students working with small groups of junior students promotes confidence in all parties, reducing alienation and developing skills in communication and co-operation.

Limbrick et al (1985) list the following benefits that can be derived from developing the student as a teaching resource:

1. Instruction can be individualized.
2. Improvements in oral reading, fluency, accuracy, and comprehension follow.

3. Tutors improve in confidence and self esteem.
4. A co-operative non-competitive relationship between students is fostered.
5. Measurable progress accrues for both the tutor and the one being helped.
6. Classroom organisation and time can be better planned.

Another initiative in the area of student participation in decision-making has been the development of a student involvement in enterprise. The emphasis is on development of skills. Enterprise skills are defined as: "those skills essential to the design, planning, and review of a project organized by the participants" (Turner, 1988, p.2).

The Schools Commission has recommended that schools should be "places where entrepreneurial skills are developed" (1987) and that our society needs citizens who can "work together creatively, productively and confidently".

In schools, students have become engaged in a wide range of student enterprise projects. Generally, there is a guiding philosophy that those projects adopted may not be of economic value to the individual participants but must have value for either the school or the wider community. Student enterprise has taken the form of publishing school newspapers, providing information services for the community, fundraising for the school or community and so on. It teaches students how to make things happen.

This outlines only a few of the ways that student members of a school community can share in the responsibilities of managing that community while deriving important benefits for themselves in the most real educational terms.

Generally, student participation in decision-making has grown as a result of the strong case presented for it in terms of

learning effectiveness and worthwhile curriculum objectives relating to social learning.

Above all else , student participation provides a means of promoting active learning by introducing to the curriculum increased possibilities of 'diversity and variation', 'focus on student interest' and motivation and exercise of 'choice' (Skilbeck, 1984).

## PART IV

### Approaches to Student Participation in Decision-Making

Effective student participation in decision-making can only be achieved if real opportunities exist for all students to participate in the process regardless of their individual pre-disposition to exhibit leadership or initiative. It is therefore proposed that schools must develop a broad and multi faceted approach to student decision-making in order to involve all their students in a significant experience of the many aspects of individual and group decision-making.

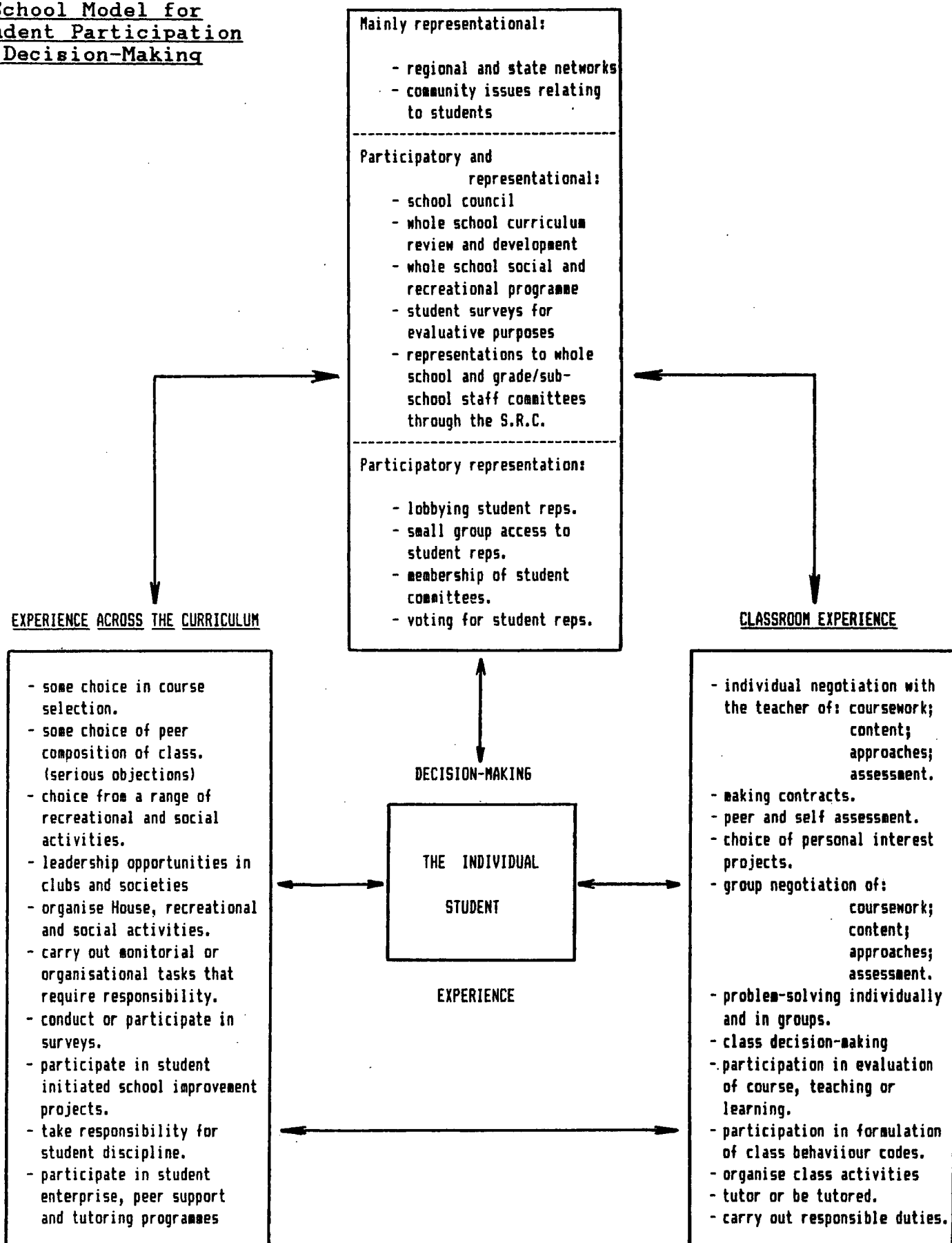
Decision-making skill, like any other, is only acquired through a process of trial and error, practice and refinement. Also, like any other skill, decision-making is best learnt when the practice of it is serious and committed. As decision-making is pertinent to all facets of life, so too can it be manifest in all facets of the student's experience of schooling. Decision-making in the school, truly reflecting life in general, is subject to varying degrees of constraint from situation to situation.

Opportunities for student participation in decision-making must be present at all levels in the school programme (see Fig. 2). Students can participate in:

- 1) Curriculum development in a school-based approach that involves the whole school community;
- 2) A system of participatory student representation which gives students input at all management levels from the school council to the grade or subschool;

Figure 2

## PARTICIPATORY REPRESENTATION STRUCTURE

A School Model for  
Student Participation  
in Decision-Making

3) Classroom decision-making pertaining to all class activities.

4) Various programmes that involve students in decision-making and initiative outside the classroom.

The selected approaches provided here are tools that can be utilised in developing a school culture of student participation in decision making.

### Curriculum Development

It is clear that with the acceptance of the principle of school-based decision-making the framework exists for students to take their place as members of the school community in contributing to the ongoing process of curriculum refinement. At this level students must take a place in the process that is compatible with the interests of the other major parties, namely, the teachers and the parents. Input from the central authority and other community interests will also shape the outcomes of curriculum decisions.

With this in mind students may not play a large role in determining final outcomes but must at least feel that they have had the opportunity to contribute their opinions for consideration. It has been a common experience for students to feel that they have only a 'token' presence in this process and that their contributions are of little importance.

Skilbeck (1984, p.252) describes three levels of student participation in curriculum decisions;

1. There are deliberate and systematic efforts to define curricula with reference to  
ascertained (a) learner interests and needs  
(b) styles and strategies of learning,  
thinking and behaving.



2. Curricula designed in such a way as to foster active, student-initiated engagement with learning, including tasks and projects chosen, devised and managed by students.
3. Curricula designed by groups and teams with full and active student membership whether through formal decision-making bodies or in working parties and discussion groups.

Ideally, curriculum development will involve the third level of student participation, but will include the outcomes described in the first two points; that it will take account of learner interests and needs, styles and strategies of learning, thinking and behaving and will include "tasks and projects chosen, devised and managed by students."

Skilbeck's 'rational interactive model' of curriculum development (cited in Hughes, 1988, pp.57-8), with its strong association with collaborative school-based decision-making, including teachers, parents and pupils, provides a suitable approach. It consists of five stages:

1. Situational Analysis of external and internal factors.
2. Goal Formation.
3. Programme Building.
4. Interpretation and Implementation.
5. Monitoring, Assessment, Feedback and Reconstruction.

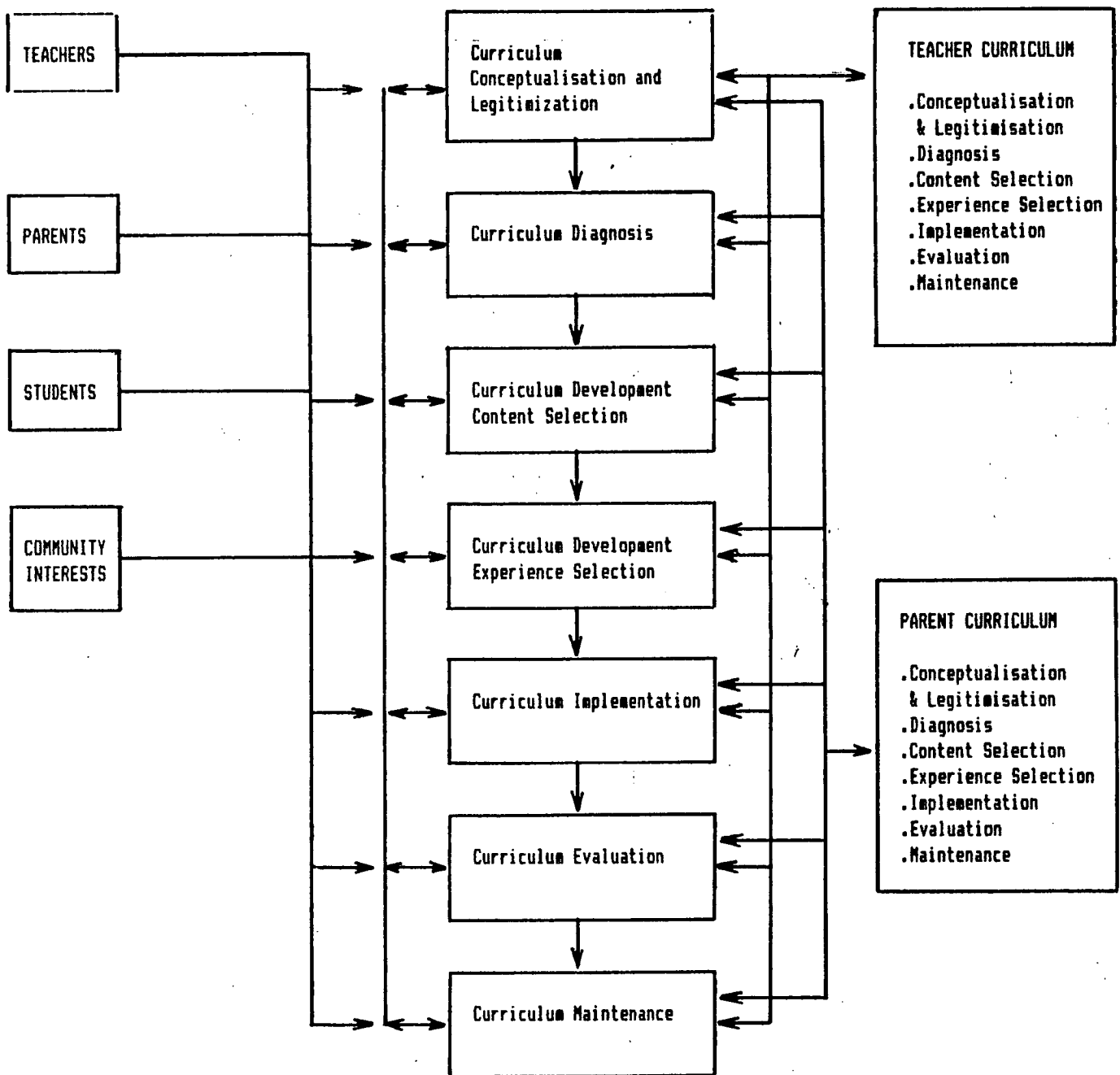
Another similarly applicable model of curriculum development is that of Francis P. Hunkins (1980) (see Fig.3).

Hunkins' recognizes the importance of mutual goal setting by all parties involved and that educational innovation is a "people oriented" process rather than a "thing oriented process" (page 39).

Hunkins' model comprises seven steps in order of operation, however, inter-related through a continual process of feedback and adjustment.

**Figure 3**     An Adaptation of Hunkins' Model of Curriculum Development (Hunkins, 1980)

THE STUDENT CURRICULUM



An important inclusion in Hunkins' model is the recognition that supportive curricula for teachers or parents may be essential to the successful implementation of student curriculum change.

Students can contribute to curriculum development in a number of ways. The most obvious way is to be represented on decision-making committees. However, for benefits to be realised two important functions must take place:

- 1) Students must feel that their views are heard. For this to happen they must be widely sought and the students' representatives must be able to reflect their own satisfactory involvement in committee proceedings back to the student body.
- 2) Students represent an important source of information about the curriculum. They are a vital feature of situational analysis with respect to what they know, how they learn and factors that influence how they learn. Students must be surveyed and records of their performance reviewed.

It has been demonstrated through experience that committees made up of adults and students must adapt special procedures to enable and encourage meaningful participation for all. Adults in committees with students must be trained to carry out a wide range of supportive roles.

Approaches required to support student participation in decision-making bodies include: (from Holdsworth, 1986:41)

- training of students in procedures for formal meetings;
- the adoption of inclusive procedures to encourage participation;
- support personnel such as a committee tutor to clarify decision-making procedures;

- restatement of decisions and checking students' accord and understanding;
- time-out in meetings to discuss and clarify the business with students;
- adjustment of times, places and duration of meetings to facilitate attendance;
- practical use of and acknowledgement of the use of the particular expertise that is brought to meetings.  
(from Holdsworth, 1986, p.41)

A number of side benefits can be gained from an informed approach to gathering information from students in curriculum development. Students may fill in questionnaires, be interviewed individually or in groups, tender submissions, and participate in discussions. The greater the participation of students, the more supportive they will be of the curriculum development process.

Students will be more responsive if information gathering instruments are easy to comprehend and use and in some cases if trained peers conduct the process. In his article on "School-Based Curriculum Development", Skilbeck (1982:30) produced a table which gives a good indication of the roles of the various members of the school community, including students in the curriculum process (See Fig. 4).

Student participation at this level of decision-making is important if the school is to develop a coherent and convincing participatory culture that includes students. It is also the most difficult level at which to have a widespread student involvement, however, it is hoped that the process could make a suitable connection with each student so that their general participation in decision-making in the school programme would be reinforced.

Figure 4 Curriculum Processes: Decisions

PROCESS	AGENCY	ROLE
Situational Analysis	Teachers incl. senior staff Pupils. Parents. Consultants. Administration.	Decision/Discussion Discussion Discussion Advice Support
Objectives	Teachers Pupils Parents Consultants National Governments and Government Departments Project Teams Administration	Decision Discussion Discussion Advice  Advice Advice, Discussion Support
Design	Teachers Pupils Parents  Consultants Project Teams	Decision Discussion Discussion, Support Advice Advice Advice, Support, Advice Discussion
Implementation	Teachers Pupils Administration	Decision Discussion Support
Evaluation	Teachers Pupils Consultants Government Departments Administration	Decision Discussion Advice Support, Advice Support

Student Representation Structures

Student representation is certainly nothing new. Many schools have Student Representative Councils. Some student representatives serve on regional or state committees. A number of

states have legislated for student representatives on school councils while others have provided strong support for student representation in their policies.

Although there is concern that in many cases student representation does not generally involve a wide enough cross-section of the student body in the decision-making process, this can be compensated for, with the development of 'grassroots' participatory processes.

The characteristics which need to be fostered in an effective student government have been listed by Alexander (1975, p.74), and include:

- 1) Elected representatives who feel free to speak their minds;
- 2) A mutual respect between student representatives and the principal;
- 3) A faculty adviser who supports the student government;
- 4) A mechanism for informing the student body of outcomes;
- 5) A student belief that they have the power to change things through co-operation;
- 6) Democratic decision-making.

The student representatives should have the opportunity to consider issues that have meaning for them. Their role should not be restricted to organising charities and social functions. It should include consideration of school management, curriculum development, student rights and welfare as well as the organisation of student recreation and social activities and sometimes student responsibility for routine school and classroom management duties.

To be done well, the job of student representative requires both time and commitment. The close scrutiny that student representation in Victoria in particular, has attracted, has resulted in consideration of the problems arising from this demand.

Holdsworth (1986, p.41) suggests that a new subject could be created such as "student government"; students could drop a subject, replacing it with time to work as a representative; representation work could be built into course outlines; there could be 'negotiated exemption' in which selected course requirements are replaced by work related to representation; at the least a specific reference or report on the work could be produced. Such an approach really depends upon its compatibility with curriculum aims and the question of disadvantage suffered through foregoing the alternative subject content.

The best results from student representation come when there are intrinsic rewards for the representative and when a structure is adopted that encourages a full student participation without relying solely on student initiative. Two systems in use which provide alternative models of representation are:

- a) Allan Glatthorn(1976): Decision-Making in Alternative Schools
- b) Claremont High School Student Representative System

a) Decision-Making in Alternative Schools

Glatthorn presents a system of participatory decision-making that attempts to draw all members of the school community into decision-making processes. It represents an attempt to have the school portray an ideal decision-making society and supports the impression with strong use of metaphor in the development of a school decision-making culture. It has the potential to provide experience in a range of democratic forms including Rousseau's primary democracy through the 'town meetings'.

The guiding principles that define the decision-making structure of Glatthorn's school are:

- People learn as they live. Those who live in a democracy learn to operate democratically. In so far as possible schools in a democracy should operate democratically.
- Boundaries are needed. Every community of individuals needs limits. In a democratic community, those limits should be set by those who are a part of that community.
- Leaders lead, even in a democratic community someone is in charge. It is always healthier if people are honest about the authority they possess and don't play games of participation with those who have less authority.
- There is no monopoly on wisdom. Problems are best solved when all competent and informed pool their insights.
- Students are people. Like the rest of us, they are more likely to support and implement those decisions in which they had a voice.

Decisions are made in a number of meetings which include: the Home Group (Family/Tribe); the Assembly (town meeting) using student leadership; standing committees made up of students; teachers; volunteers; staff meeting; meetings of the Schools Board. Clear boundaries outline the powers of each meeting. They define:

- 1) Processes and areas of authority;
- 2) Constraints from external sources;
- 3) A code of conduct;
- 4) Procedures for dealing with offenders;
- 5) A mechanism for reviewing boundaries.

Generally, problems surface in the homegroup meetings or assemblies and are either brought to the attention of the whole community for a preliminary informal consideration, or if serious in nature are brought before the assembly for a formal consideration.

After discussion the person in authority decides on a course of action which will either be to deal with the problem if this is possible or to refer it to a specially constructed task force to



study the problem. Task forces produce a written report which is discussed in small group settings to facilitate feedback. Recommendations are then acted upon in the assembly with everyone having had a chance to understand, review and respond to recommendations, which are adopted on a two thirds majority vote

Given the setting of boundaries with respect to the meetings, there are many areas of the curriculum which are not given over to be processed through the student participatory decision-making structure. However, with regard to those matters that are, all students have the opportunity for significant participation in decision-making.

#### b) Claremont High School Student Representation

##### A Case Study

The Student Representation programme of Claremont High School in Tasmania, in many respects is more conservative than that of Glatthorn's alternative Schools. It does, however, provide a model of a fairly traditional school attempting to accommodate meaningful student participation in decision-making. The 'representation' programme is the central feature of student participation at Claremont High School, however it is supported in the school culture by other participatory practices which include: a comprehensive Peer Support programme in which Year Ten students work with Year Seven students; use of 'Curriculum Negotiation' in some subjects; student organisation of regular lunchtime House sports.

The representation programme was designed to give all students the opportunity to participate in some facets of democratic decision-making. Pastoral care group teachers were given a major

role as facilitators of participation with their students.

Students are invited to express opinions and take an interest in decisions about:

- 1) The Recreation Programme
- 2) The Pastoral Care Learning Programme
- 3) Community Service and Fundraising
- 4) School Policy

The Student Representative Council, consisting of a representative from each of the grade based pastoral care home groups are consulted on many matters which have included: major participation in the PEP funded School Curriculum Review, students being represented on the management committee, designing and conducting surveys and responding to them; reviewing school uniform policy; the compulsory homework diary; and the student behaviour code.

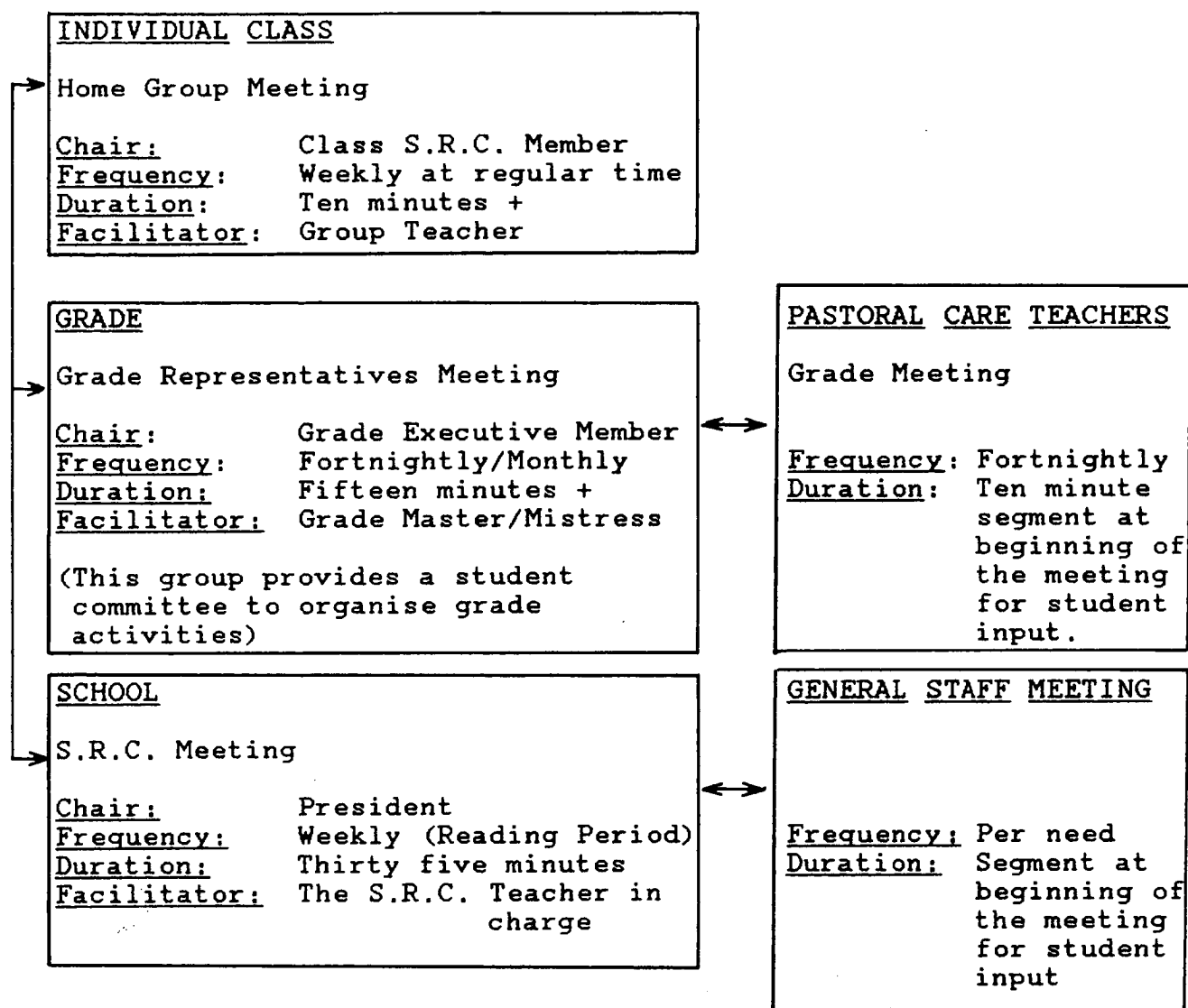
While students are consulted, there is no obligation on the part of staff to allow students to adopt the role of decision-makers. However, co-operative planning is the objective in order to gain optimum student motivation and commitment.

Student representatives are elected by their grade in a preferential voting system, conducted by secret ballot in a manner that duplicates the Australian electoral system. A student body president is elected by a vote of all staff and students.

The student representative council receives training early in the calendar year and is supported by a staff 'mentor'

A system of meetings promotes the participation of all students and provides student access to the major staff decision-making bodies.

Figure 5: Claremont High School Representation Programme



Student Decision-Making in the Classroom

It is not difficult to argue that what happens in the classroom is the most important consideration in the school. It is here that we have to focus on the major intentions of the curriculum. It is here that students have the opportunity to acquire the most significant decision-making skills.

Garth Boomer (1982), in his book Negotiating the Curriculum: a teacher-student partnership, presents an approach that has evoked widespread interest and support in Australia.

He and Jon Cook present very similar models of a process that

can transform the individual aims of the teacher and students into a single harmonious intention.

They assert that in the normal teaching situation the learning imposed by the teacher is conditioned by the teacher's previous experience and understanding of the planned curriculum. The teacher's intention is imposed on the student, who, as a result of previous experience and existing aspirations approaches the learning situation with individually distinct intentions.

The result is a tension arising from conflicting intentions and a nett loss of student commitment as the student yields core interests in order to accommodate the teacher's curriculum goals.

In the Negotiated Model, the teacher and student reveal their intentions to one another, and negotiate a shared intention in which the student will have a significantly greater core interest. Boomer points out that this has significant advantages in incidental learning about individual and group decision-making.

This is a simplified view in order to explain how and when 'Curriculum Negotiation' can contribute to learning. There are many occasions when the accomplished teacher is able to fully engage students without any negotiation. There are also occasions when factors that are external to the classroom, such as specific course and curriculum requirements, prevent negotiation.

One application of the approach (1982, p.8) is based upon students' response to four questions:

1. What do we know already?
2. What do we need/want to find out?
3. How will we go about finding out?
4. How will we know and show that we got there?

The approach emphasises reflection evaluation and group

sharing. The other side of the coin is the teacher who must also ask questions about knowledge and skill attainment, processes and assessment. The education process still depends on the judgement of the teacher in agreeing to a programme of student activity that will bring about desirable educational outcomes.

An outline of the view of the learning process, which may owe something to Dewey's 'act of thought', and the role of negotiation as the 'process helper' are contained in Figure 6., which depicts Jon Cooks Model 1: "Learners' Requirements for the Optimum Learning Process", and Model 2: "Negotiation as the Process Helper".

Personal Interest Projects (PIP) are another classroom approach to promoting student initiative and decision-making skill (Deer in Marsh, 1987).

The teacher may gain assistance in structuring this experience for the student by considering four questions:

1. What are my objectives in setting this project?
2. What skills do I hope to engender by setting a PIP?
3. Who will I need to consult or alert to the setting of the PIP? (librarian etc.)
4. Can I set guidelines as to length, method of acquiring material, organisation and presentation of material and assessment criteria?

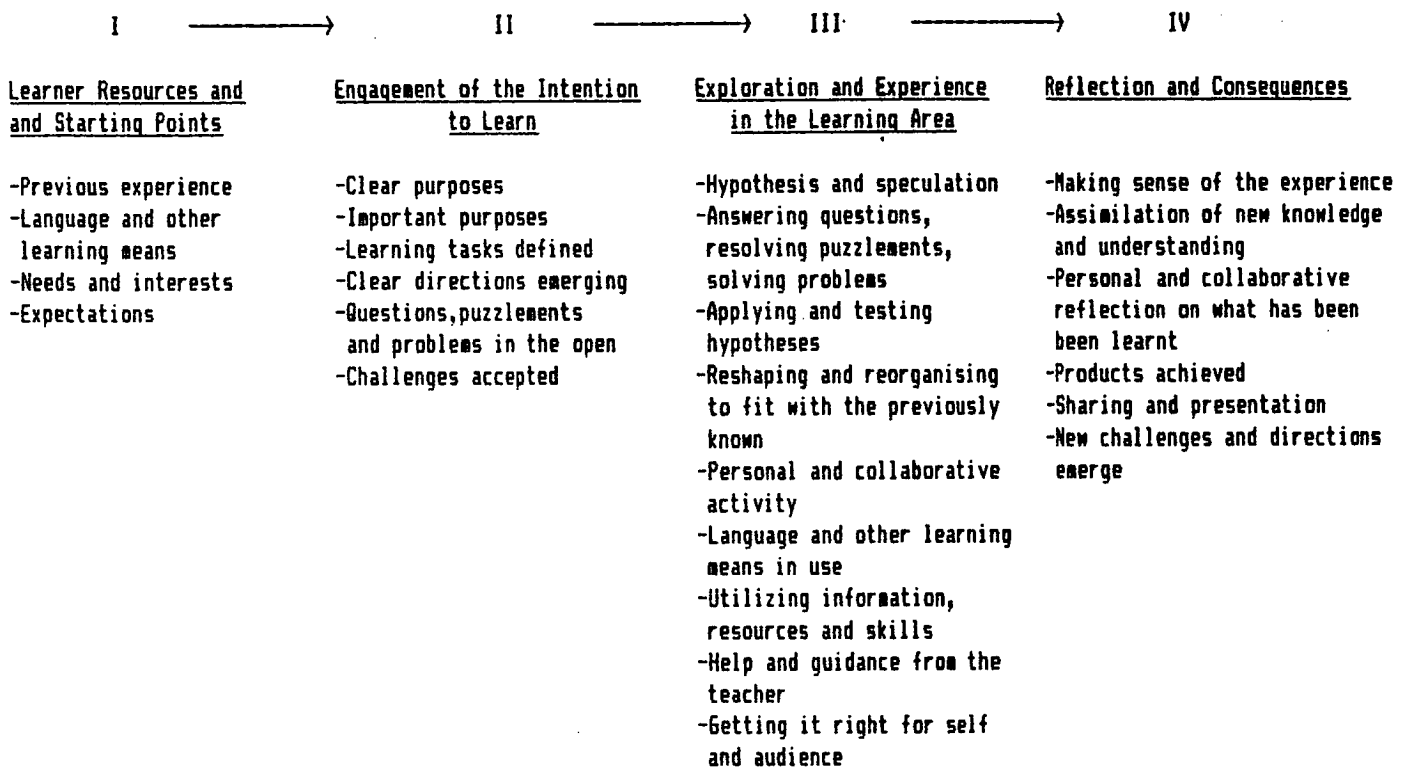
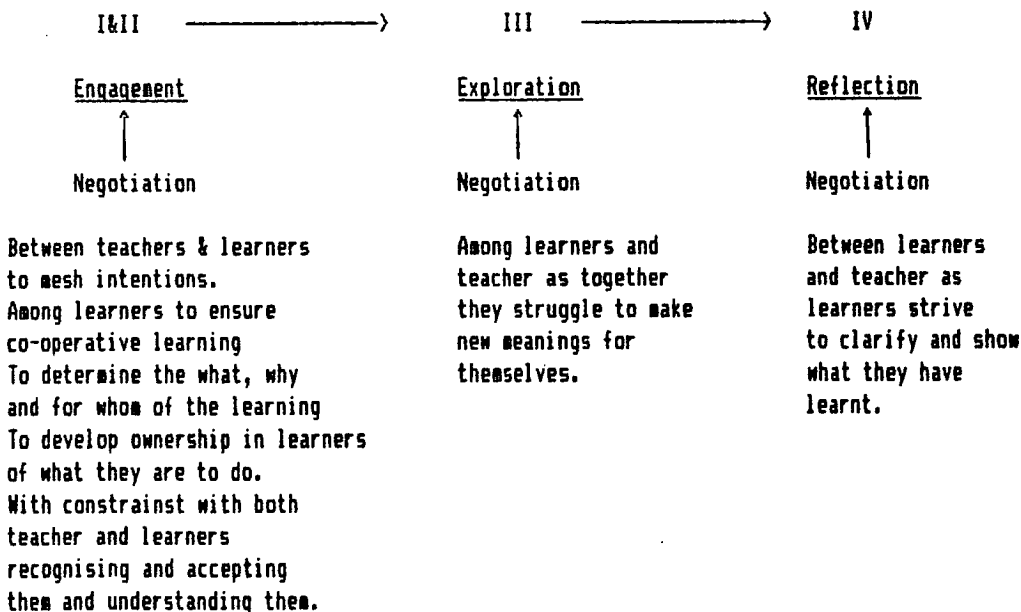
(page 174)

Although it is desirable for students to be able to move from teacher directed learning to student directed learning, the transition must be managed in an informed manner.

Students are guided to: list goals; complete a self diagnosis of the skill needed; divide the task into sub tasks, rate themselves on scales of time management, organisation, accomplishment and resource identification.

The approaches outlined here cover three basic areas of

Figure 6

Curriculum Negotiation and Optimum LearningMODEL 1 : Learners' Requirements for the Optimum Learning ProcessMODEL 2: Negotiation as the Process Helper

student participation in decision-making in education; however, many other approaches have been touched upon through the course of this discussion. There is a rich diversity of approaches which would prove both profitable to the student and the staff members of the school community. It has been suggested that students can assume roles as:

- sources of information about teaching and learning  
(Dunn,1987)
- contract makers (Glasser, 1969)
- dispute mediators (Koch,1988)
- peer group juries (Thomastown High, 1984)
- participants in enterprise (Education Dept.Tasmania, 1988)
- peer tutors (Payne, 1988; Erikson, 1972)
- peer supporters (Middleton et. al.,1986)
- and many more

## PART V

### CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Some of this discussion has been about social values and student participation in decision-making in education. After the deliberations here and on the basis of the documents cited, it would seem reasonable to make the following statements:

- 1) Society demands that education systems prepare the student to be a contributing citizen in a democratic society.
- 2) Society demands that education systems endow the student with certain basic competencies such as literacy and numeracy, and an initiation into the social culture.
- 3) Society demands that the principles of equality and justice are adhered to in the operations of its institutions.
- 4) Society accepts a student role or participation in decision-making in education as a complement to teacher expertise.
- 5) Social values are not always the product of a simple consensus but are often characterised by great variation in the views held by distinct groups.

Synthesised, these statements give rise to a clearer perspective of student participation. First, it is not promoted as an exclusive right by the pressure of social values. The notion of student 'client rights' is too easily contradicted by other prevalent value positions. Client rights is, in fact, a variation of values related to the accepted practice of developing dialogue between parties to a decision.

Student participation is, however, indirectly promoted by social values related to democracy, justice and equality. Aims concerning democracy are entrenched in the curriculum. Participation has, frequently been propounded since Rousseau as the



primary process by which democratic citizenship can be learnt. In this century, perhaps due to the extension of compulsory education, the school has been identified as an important venue for this learning.

Student participation has found a place in a number of theories about providing equal and just access to educational achievement. In these theories the process of participation establishes a 'rapport' between the student and education.

|The purpose of student participation is therefore, to facilitate the achievement of educational goals.) The criteria of 'competence' and 'economy' impose conditions upon student participation. Many decisions about how learning will take place have to be made by those with expertise (competence). The limited amount of time available for the achievement of curriculum goals will inevitably limit the time consuming process of student participation. Nevertheless, given such limitations, there remains considerable scope for the productive implementation of the participation of students in educational decision-making.

Students need experience in 'complex individual' and 'group' decision-making in order to fulfil the public expectation regarding education in democracy and the preparation of the individual as an adaptable, productive and 'problem-solving' member of society. This experience must adequately introduce the student to the various distinct forms of democratic decision-making that operate in society. In addition, competence in methodical approaches to problem-solving is implicit in the need to develop individual decision-making skills.

Student participation in decision-making is associated with

the 'progressive' rather than 'traditional' view of education. It is also in harmony with the ascendant 'rejectionist' social valuing system and at odds with the waning 'traditionalist' system. It therefore gains strong community acceptance when in place.

The type of approach described here that is advocated as the only suitable method of effectively imparting education in democracy and as a promising method of promoting student interest in all other goals is not widely represented in practice. The movement to introduce widespread choice for students and even the institution of student representation are both narrow and limited applications of student participation in decision-making.

Recommendation 1 The individual school curriculum should be developed so that it contains in its various parts sufficient opportunities for all the students to develop a knowledge of and a feeling of efficacy regarding all the various forms of democratic decision-making that operate in their society.

Recommendation 2 The individual school curriculum should be developed so that it contains in its various parts sufficient opportunities for all the students to develop their abilities to make 'complex' individual decisions as far as possible. Special efforts should be made to develop this competency in the context of 'real' life.

These are recommendations for an 'across the curriculum' approach to student participation in decision-making, in much the same way that Health Education has been treated in some states in Australia. For some low status socio-economic groups there may be a

need for greater emphasis on student participation in the curriculum in order to advance the cause of social justice and provide an equal access to participation in the political decision-making arena. This must not be at the expense of the achievement of other competencies that are essential to the individual's equal access to economic viability and lifestyle satisfaction.

The opinions of theorists, including Dewey, early this century, Alexander (1976) writing in Canada over a decade ago, do not present much variation from the views of much more recent commentators, such as Holdsworth (1986) and Marsh (1988) in Australia and Hurst (1986) in the U.S.A.

Influential Australian educators such as Karmel, Skilbeck and Hughes lend their weight to the cause of students participating in school-based decision-making.

The Commonwealth Schools Commission and a number of state governments have given unqualified and sustained support for student participation in decision-making movement.

One might then ask why the extent of the movement is as yet limited and the matter of universal acceptance at the level of the practitioner in the school is still in the balance.

There are substantial constraints which must be recognised. Some educational communities are not convinced by the evidence supporting student participation as a means of enhancing learning effectiveness. Much of the reasoning used to argue the case for student participation is of an 'intuitive' nature and relies upon making a connection with the experience and values of others in order to gain acceptance.

Recommendation 3 Extensive research must be conducted to establish

the qualitative and quantitative relationships between student participation in decision-making and educational outcomes. The school's role, potential and limitations in influencing political socialisation need to be established in current research.

It is difficult for some schools to make the transition from hierarchical, authority based structures to democratic structures. Often the matter of discipline becomes central to the resistance because the system of controls that have grown up over a period of time in such schools is one that relies upon a culture of teacher authority and student obedience.

To abandon long held values is not easy for any individual. The threat of having to change often incites suspicion, resentment and antagonism, especially when the proposed change involves empowering groups whose position has previously been one of opposition. In many cases great sympathy exists for Plato's notion of the rule of the intellectuals (philosopher kings), in the guise of the rights of trained professionals to make decisions in the areas in which they are trained.

There are difficulties associated with the initiation of any relatively new programme. Much implementation of student decision making strategies has been of a superficial nature and has not realised all the promised benefits.

The teachers role is demanding at the best of times and the adaptation necessary to install and support a new programme, regardless of its effectiveness can often be beyond the means of teacher communities. The promotion of student initiative in decision-making also presents a dilemma for teachers - To be and not to be, at the same time. (Education Department of Tasmania, 1988) The dichotomy of desired teacher attributes in

fostering student participation in decision-making is as follows:

Keeping a low profile	-	Being dynamic and enthusiastic
Having restraint and not interfering	-	Intervening when necessary
Allowing students to make judgements, experiment and take risks	-	Ability to advise, reassure and protect students
Be accepted as one of the group and as a trusted and resourceful ally	-	Be able to maintain an authority status and expect standards of responsibility from the students
Anticipating events and needs	-	Refraining from giving pre-emptive advice

Students need widespread teacher support in order to adopt any of the significant decision-making roles that are available and more often than not teachers themselves require training to enable them to provide that support.

The major constraints identified have been:

1. Difficulty in transforming hierarchical authority structures in favour of democratic ones.
2. Conflicts in basic value programming regarding authority of teachers.
3. The notion that the teacher has been trained to make educational decisions.
4. Constraints of external curriculum requirements.
5. The difficulty in effectively developing decision-making cultures.
6. Time taken in democratic decision-making.

These are the elements that supply part of the inertia that maintains traditional approaches to education and excludes that which is new and promising.

In the case of student participation in decision-making there

are powerful agencies that have the potential to intervene and there are major social and education currents that may carry the cause with them.

While student participation in decision-making can be reasonably expected to make some impact on problem solving abilities, as demanded by various social authorities, it remains to be seen whether schools at large are willing and able to make the substantial commitment to restructuring their processes in a way that will promote decision-making skill development for all students.

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