6 THE SCHOOL: RESISTANCE AND REPRODUCTION

Introduction

Chapter 1 located this study within an established research tradition. Resistance theory (Willis. 1977). and the associated concept of cultural production (Willis. 1981. 1983). provided theoretical foundations for exploring how students respond culturally to their school situation. In particular. resistance theory was seen to offer a way of understanding the relationship between educational inequality. social reproduction and student oppositional behaviour. Drawing on resistance theory was well justified in the Greytown School context. which was characterised by low academic standards and strong opposition among its Koori students. While most studies in this tradition had primarily concentrated on the disaffected students themselves. it was argued that a more complete picture of school life could be drawn by focussing on the interaction between students and teachers in classrooms. It was considered important that the conditions within the milieu of Greytown School which might bring about resistance were examined. Central to the analysis which follows in this chapter. is that there is evidence that there were conditions at Greytown School which catalysed behaviour which would almost inevitably become resistant behaviour. There are two main sections in this analysis. The first revisits the discussion of conditions of resistance which were set in the opening chapter and discusses them in the light of data presented in Chapters 3. 4 and 5. The second proposes a framework which amalgamates theory and practice and shows the site where resistance conditions are

generated in the relationships between students and their school and teachers, and the curriculum.

The data focussed attention on the curriculum at Greytown School. At a whole school level, it was shown in Chapter 3 that there had been a long struggle to find a curriculum which would enhance outcomes for students. There was some attempt to focus most attention on the least advantaged group, the Koori students. Thus, in intent, the whole school curriculum embraced the principles of social justice (Connell, 1993). At the level of classroom practice, the data in Chapters 4 and 5 showed a curriculum which was constructed as a dynamic exchange between students and teachers. Chapter 4 discussed the pressure the opposition of the Koori students placed on the curriculum in all classes at the school. It was argued in Chapter 4 that this student opposition was a cultural response. Community themes penetrated to the school and influenced the way Koori students responded to their work in the classroom. Willis's (1981, 1983) model of cultural production was employed to show how the Koori students responded to their school situation utilising cultural resources from the ordinary milieu of their social life in Greytown. Chapter 5 discussed how, under the pressure from the opposition of the Koori students within the conditions of the Greytown context, teachers were forced to change the way they had previously taught. All Greytown teachers appeared to have their classroom practices shaped by the experience and conditions of teaching at the school. This phenomenon paralleled findings in the research which had shown that daily classroom conditions exerted a considerable influence on the curriculum decisions made by teachers (see, for example, Denscombe, 1982, Haberman, 1991, Hatton, 1994a). These changes made

by the Greytown teachers brought about a compromised, pragmatic curriculum which was described in Chapter 5. This curriculum enabled students and teachers alike merely to get through lessons. Immediate survival seemed to be the aim on both sides of the exchange. Such a curriculum, despite a socially just intent, appeared to offer little educational advantage to its most needy students.

It became apparent in the data that there was a distinction between Greytown's public image and private work. Consider the way in which its work in Aboriginal Studies and Education was considered seminal. This led to official acknowledgment in 1991 when the school was named a Centre of Excellence[1] in Aboriginal Studies. Likewise its DSP programs gained the school a reputation for leadership in terms of shifts in DSP ethos and practice (Hatton, Munns, and Nicklin Dent, 1996). Greytown's public work, therefore, was widely praised. Yet privately, all teachers in all classrooms faced enormous difficulties translating the school's commitment to social justice into classroom practices designed to bring about improved educational outcomes for the majority of its students. This failure, of course, impacted most severely on the Koori students. Consequently, despite years of seemingly valuable work at the school, classroom practice continued to contribute to inequality and social reproduction. Keeffe (1992:57) identifies distinctions between policy intention and classroom practice as a common theme in Aboriginal education. There is invariably a tension, he notes, between policy at a wide level aimed at improving outcomes for Aboriginal students, and classroom relationships which are dominated by the cultural theme of

[1] The New South Wales Department of School Education selected schools and named them as Centres of Excellence for their exemplary work in curriculum areas.

"Aboriginality-as-resistance." Keeffe (1992) argues that this theme takes the form of a variety of oppositional responses which undermine teachers' efforts to improve educational outcomes.

The next section conceptualises the continuation of educational inequality in schools as a crucial condition of resistance.

GREYTOWN, ITS SCHOOL AND CONDITIONS OF RESISTANCE

When it was established in Chapter 1 that there was value, especially in primary school settings, in moving the inquiry away from whether students are resisters to whether there are school conditions which might bring about resistance, five convergent conditions were proposed. It was argued that by using the framework provided by these five conditions, it could be determined whether the oppositional behaviour by the students actually constituted or was potentially a resistance position. In this way, it was argued that the framework also was valuable in defining resistance. Willis's (1981) conception of *culture* and *cultural production* supplied a theoretical basis for the framework. In Chapter 1 attention was drawn to key features of these conceptions. To recapitulate, these key features were a consciousness of social position, which brought forward creative culturally produced responses generated from the local milieu, but, which reflected wider relationships in society. The five conditions, namely inequality in the cultural relationship, consciousness of that unequal position, inequality at the heart of the educational paradigm, wide rejection of

the education system and cultural support for that rejection, are now discussed in turn with reference to the Koori community at Greytown.

Inequality in the Cultural Relationship

It was suggested earlier that Aboriginal people, as a group, continue to be the most oppressed in Australian society. On the continuum of social disadvantage, Aborigines generally suffer in comparison to all other Australians in areas which include law, employment, education, health and housing (Einfeld, 1993:1). It was also pointed out that Koories living in Greytown reflected this general position. Almost all lived in public housing, and the majority relied on welfare payments. The Centre was the extreme example at the lowest end of living conditions for Greytown Koories, despite efforts by local organisations to bring about improvements[2]. Koories, like Andy Taylor, told of how leaving the area was like going to another world.

Consciousness of their Position

Interviews with Greytown Koories conveyed a very strong message about their perception of where they stood in Australia's unequal society. This consciousness was fuelled by daily experiences in Greytown, but reflected wider relationships between Aboriginal people and the Australian community. There was a constant use of

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[2] This is a nation wide problem. Over 30% of the total Aboriginal population are homeless or living in substandard accommodation with inadequate water, electricity, waste disposal and roads (Response by Governments to the Royal Commission, 1992).

imagery associated with warfare as they talked of fighting the system, daily battles, a raging war. Although the system they fought was seen to be very much the combined forces of mainstream Anglo-Australian society, they believed that their social disadvantage stretched across ethnic barriers. Clearly they felt that their lot was worse than all other ethnic groups in Australia, and there was resentment that others (e.g. Greeks, Vietnamese) had been able to elevate themselves, while Aborigines remained at the bottom of the social ladder. The data also revealed that this deeply felt understanding of their predicament was common among all age groups. Koories talked about training their children to be tough in order to be able to withstand daily injustices (see also, Malin, 1990). The Centre again symbolised the enormous gaps between Black and White Society Andy Taylor's descriptions of Koori children crossing the road out of The Centre and being on their own, not trusting anyone, with the police their enemy, captured the reality of the gulf between Koories and what they saw as the other world. Neither was this distinction confined to perceptions of Black people. Teachers and the school were continually reminded that, in the eyes of the Koories, they represented part of the oppressing force.

Inequality at the Heart of the Educational Paradigm

Wendy Harris linked the first three conditions of resistance when she talked about how Koories suffered all the time because they were down the bottom of the education system. She saw that the continued failure of schools to bring forward significant educational improvement for the majority of Koori students condemned them to the lowest level in the continuum of social disadvantage. Although it was seen

that Greytown Koories looked to education as a way of improving their lives, the reality was that few Aboriginal students gained benefits from their dealings with educational institutions at primary, secondary and tertiary levels. This was the case for most of the Koori students who passed through Greytown School. Test results showed that academic standards throughout the school were depressed and Koori students were over represented in the low achievers. Teachers with experience in other schools confirmed that the standards at Greytown were lower than they had previously experienced. Aboriginal workers in the school knew that Koories spent a lot of time at school for little apparent academic reward. Neither teachers (White or Black), nor parents, believed that success at high school was guaranteed to follow, even for those who seemed to be doing well at primary level. This prediction was based on previous patterns. Most Koori students who went to secondary school from Greytown did not make it through to Year 12. Sue Lee's revelation that of all the Koori students who lived at The Centre only one ever made it through the system (gained the Higher School Certificate), was a telling statistic. It seems that the culturally produced curriculum at Greytown School is directly implicated in the failure of Koori students. Standards were lowered for all students, regardless of academic ability, as the curriculum was steered away from risk taking work, especially in the literacy/language area. A disturbing picture emerged from the data which showed that teachers felt that many Koori students had no chance for future educational success from a very early age. Teachers in the infants department readily listed Koori students who they were quite sure would not get through the school system. David Wheeler believed that was something that had to be accepted by the teachers at Greytown School when he observed: "You've got to steel your heart." Although such a

viewpoint would probably make it easier for the development and adoption of covert deficit teaching practices, this data should not necessarily be interpreted as callousness on the part of teachers. The interview data showed that teachers despaired over their inability to reach all their students and bring about improved educational outcomes. This was a real and debilitating pressure that they all faced. They knew that the students at Greytown were falling behind in the earliest years and thereafter fought a losing educational battle. As many students fell progressively behind standards even within the depressed range at Greytown School, teachers were faced with classes with enormous ranges in academic standard and this added to the pressure on the curriculum, a pressure which was forcing lower standards for all students. Connell *et al.* (1991:37) maintain that when aspects of community poverty (such as is found at severe levels in Greytown) interact with traditional features of an education system (competitive, Anglo-conformist, embodiment of state power), a noticeable effect is the greater time spent in attempting to convey the curriculum. The story of curriculum change described in Chapter 3 highlighted the effort and time Greytown School put into developing basic academic standards. But as was shown in Chapters 4 and 5, this brought about limited success in terms of measurable academic outcomes.

Resistance is Rejection of an Unequal Education System

The data clearly shows that the opposition of the Koori students greatly contributed to the low academic standards of the school because of the effect of that opposition on the curriculum. Patterns of behaviour were established as early as Kindergarten and prevailed across all classrooms. Importantly, it was established that student

oppositional responses were mainly directed at the curriculum. In particular the demands for help, the reluctance to take risks, and the work avoidance and refusal occurred when students were asked to engage in key areas of literacy and language. The students' reluctance to become involved, and the failure of the teachers to overcome that reluctance, certainly limited future educational opportunities.

Although this oppositional behaviour was being played out in the local school, there was a wider logic in operation which points to likely difficulties to be encountered by all schools and educators in the Aboriginal Education field. It was suggested in Chapter 4 that the oppositional behaviour did not distinguish between people, teachers, schools or educational theory. Instead it was inextricably connected with the protracted failure of schools to deliver educational success for the majority of Aboriginal people. Koori students increasingly felt that education was controlled by a system they were fighting. They also became aware that the community anticipated their failure, and consequently their opposition in class was supported to some degree within their local community. Chapter 4 showed that Koories had little trust that schools would deliver the education which they needed for their future. Koori students faced school with a basic fear of being wrong and the associated shame that would bring. Thus they were intimidated by school work even before it was offered to them. This is clearly seen in the comments by teachers about the students' apprehension of written work. The research showed that Greytown School "lost" students before they reached Year 6. It is important to recognise that educational loss was manifested in different ways. Many were seen to have little hope of educational success from their earliest years at school. The data indicated that a lot of these students stayed in school

and for the time being "survived" it. However, they were in real terms "lost". Others. like the street kids reached their moment and made, what Gary Driver quite correctly labelled, a straight forward choice that education had nothing further to offer them. Their choice signified a resistance position. History had shown that most Greytown Koori students would reject high school. There is convincing evidence from the data of this research that the oppositional actions of many of the Koori students would inevitably become resistance positions.

Cultural Support

When it was stated previously that resistance was supported in the community, it must be understood that this did not necessarily mean that Koori people happily accepted their children's rejection of school. Support, in this sense, signified an understanding that another person had been let down by the system. Allan Landa used the image of a community safety net which mirrored feelings of resignation: "Yeah, I got jarred up as well. It's another Koori kid that the education system didn't look after." Cultural support meant that there was a completely different family and community reaction when a student dropped out of school. Quitting school and cutting oneself off from future opportunities which education supposedly offers is usually associated with feelings of failure. However, in the Koori community, there appeared to be less shame in running the streets than fighting a losing classroom battle. This critical distinction was drawn by Vicki Hills when she reasoned that parents would allow their children to stay away from school if they were not coping and unhappy: "There's not as much shame in that, different from a Whitefella not turning up at school." Gary Driver also

noted this difference. He suggested that students at risk at his new school can get support and "survive better", whereas if they were at Greytown they would not be at school. His observation was that "at Greytown it was seen as a natural progression to fall away." Moreover, at Greytown, resisting school offered a sense of solidarity, another individual struggling against the wider oppression and rejecting success offered by the system under its own terms. The research has shown that invariably this position brought more cultural sympathy than being successful in the Whitefella's world.

Opposition and Resistance

In the light of the above discussion, two points need to be made about the notions of opposition and resistance. The first addresses definitions of opposition and resistance, and the second the role of student opposition which can both determine and expose inequality in the educational paradigm. First, it is necessary to return to the discussion over the use of the terms *opposition* and *resistance* in this thesis. In Chapter 1, I proposed that the term opposition would be used to describe behaviour of Koori students which appeared to work against the school, teachers or the classroom. The data presented in Chapters 4 and 5 indicated that at Greytown School this opposition by Koori students reflected themes mediated from the everyday milieu which extended into the classroom through the process of cultural production and influenced student responses to the curriculum. It was also demonstrated that opposition had common features among all Koori students, both boys and girls, across all age groups. Whereas opposition was observed in the earliest years at Greytown School, resistance,

it was suggested, was more likely to develop at a later stage. The framework of the conditions of resistance is useful in drawing distinctions between opposition and resistance. In particular, the fourth condition, which points out that resistance is rejection of an unequal education system, is the critical point in defining resistance. There are two interdependent aspects to this fourth condition. First, resistance is a wide sweeping rejection of education. Second, this rejection is based on individual and group perceptions that education has nothing to offer. It is this conscious decision to reject education which differentiates opposition from resistance. Willis (1977) refers to this awareness among the lads he studied as "penetrations". In the light of these penetrations, the lads reached what Willis (1977) calls a "moment", when they made what they believed was a free choice to leave school. This is the "end of the line" position which Furlong (1991:306) describes, the point at which students have a well developed "rationale for rejecting school." Furthermore, resistance is rejection of schooling based on perceptions by students that school has failed them as it has continued to fail others in their group. This is shown in the research data. Comments from Allan Landa and Vicki Hills illustrated the logic of resistance, an individual choice which reflected a group feeling: in this case an awareness of the pointlessness of Koories attending school. Allan Landa said he could empathise with students who knew they had to go through the education system but questioned "what's it going to do for me in the end?" Vicki Hills recalled that school meant nothing for her, and how she was well aware that few of her people achieved anything or made it "right through the exams." She continually asked herself during her own school years, "What was the point of it?"

A resistance position is reached within the relationship between the student and the school. It relies on an interplay between students, their school and teachers, and especially the curriculum. As well, there is an intensifying awareness of structural constraints as students become older. Furlong (1985:206) argues that the responses of young students are "directly and indirectly related to class, race and gender", but as they move through their schooling they "experience an increasing tension between their lives, structured in specific ways and what they see school is able to offer them." Wendy Harris agreed, describing the growing sense of awareness as Aboriginal children feel the pressures which constrain their lives:

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

At a theoretical level, opposition and resistance are both directed at the curriculum as the arbiter of educational success. There is not, however, a direct linear connection between opposition and resistance, as the data in this thesis shows. It is clear that the kind of oppositional behaviour seen at Greytown School will not in every case, for every Koori student, result in resistance. In the end, individuals respond differently to their perceptions of their future possibilities. However, the existence of conditions of resistance within the world of the school means resistance is a distinct and logical likelihood.

Second, it is acknowledged that in the discussion of the conditions of resistance, the oppositional behaviour of the students is seen to be both directed at the failure of the curriculum to bring forward equitable outcomes for Koori students and to contribute

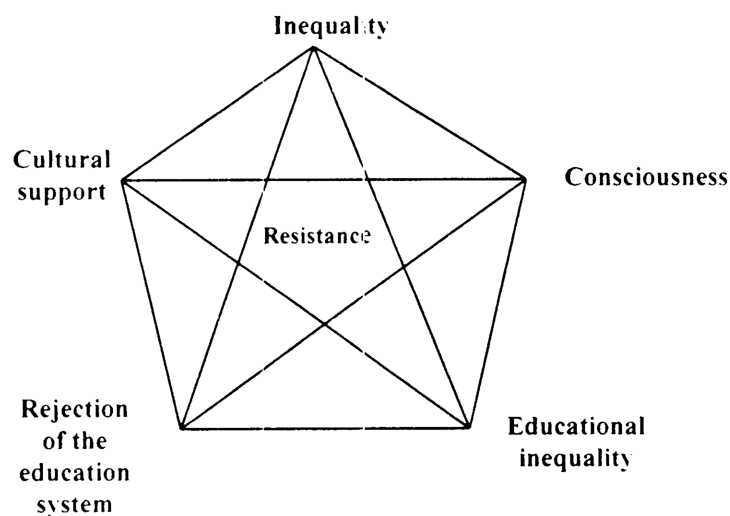
to this inequality in the Greytown context by its influence on the production of classroom practice. This apparently contradictory position is understandable within a theoretical position which takes the view that curriculum is constructed in an exchange between students and teachers. Thus, opposition contributed to inequality at Greytown School mainly because of the teachers' manner of dealing with the opposition of the students which led to precisely the forms of classroom practice which make inequality and social reproduction inevitable (see Hatton, Munns and Nicklin Dent, 1996).

Summary

Within the context of Greytown School it has been shown that there were conditions which were likely to result in Koori students making a final rejection of education. The crucial condition was the continuation of educational inequality within the school. There is a strong case for proposing that the persistence of the other four conditions depended on an educational paradigm which was implicated in the reproduction of an oppressed position in society. The likelihood of students adopting a resistant position and choosing to reject education depends on the strength of the five conditions. There is evidence in the data, that at Greytown School, all of the conditions were in place at extreme levels. These included the disadvantaged position of the Koori community, the deep consciousness among the students of fighting, but being defeated by, the system, being involved in a schooling system that continued to condemn Koori students to the lowest academic levels, students' oppositional behaviour which was targeted at aspects of schooling which were vital for future success, and finally,

withdrawal of student allegiance from school and from education which received wide community understanding and support. Figure 6.1 illustrates the five resistance conditions and shows that as the conditions strengthen there is a greater likelihood of resistance. The interdependence of the five conditions is depicted by the connected lines. As each becomes stronger, represented by movement towards the centre of the figure, a resistant position becomes more probable.

Figure 6.1 Resistance Conditions



The next part of this analysis presents a framework which considers the role of the school, teachers, students and the community in the production of the curriculum, and proposes that there is one crucial site of resistance, namely the interplay of school and educational relationships.

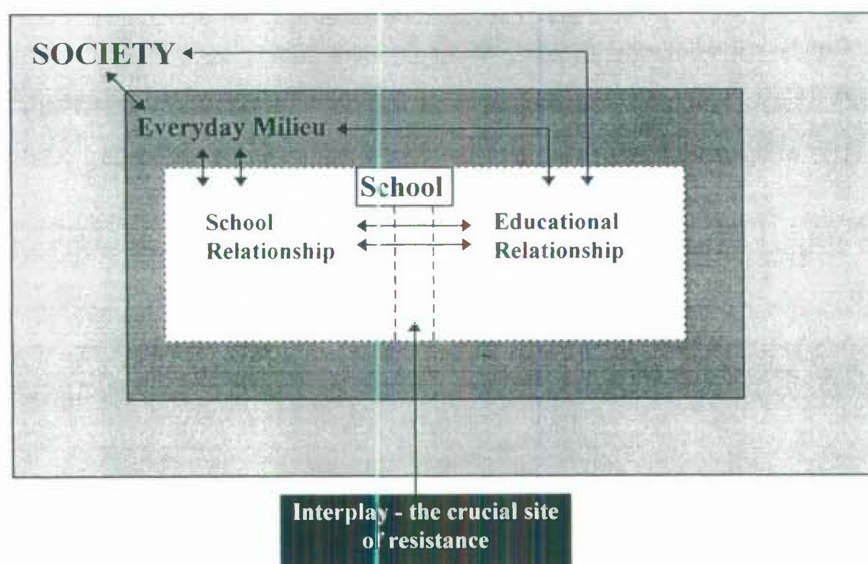
SCHOOL RELATIONSHIPS AND EDUCATIONAL RELATIONSHIPS

It has been established that there were conditions at Greytown School which promoted resistance to school as a likely future option among its Koori students. This section contextualises the conditions of resistance in a practical framework which allows further consideration of the data and suggests possibilities through which schools and teachers may work towards non reproductive education.

Definitions of School and Educational Relationships

Figure 6.2 shows the point where it is proposed that resistance to school occurs in the relationship between students and their school.

Figure 6.2 School and Educational Relationships



At the centre of the figure is the school in which there are two relationships. The first is termed the school relationship which is important to all students, but, as will be argued below, crucial to those who are educationally disadvantaged. The school relationship is what is immediately encountered by all students at their school and encompasses the whole range and interplay of social, cultural and academic experiences. This is the daily, active connection with an institution and a group of people. There are personal relationships with other students and school staff which, in a context like Greytown, invariably involve negotiations over social and cultural differences, discipline, academic work, extra-curricular activities and the continual exchanges within all aspects of the school's curriculum. The school relationship is very important in determining the attitudes and feelings held by students about their own school. In all schools the school relationship is experienced in an individual and a group sense along the whole continuum of positive and negative emotions. It is the feelings associated with walking through the gate of the school and taking a place in classroom, assembly and playground, in short, within the everyday milieu of school. The diagram shows that the school relationship is directly linked with the world of the local neighbourhood through the process of cultural production as everyday resources are creatively engaged as students respond to what they experience at school. At Greytown School developing positive school relationships had been central to its philosophy. As shown in Chapter 3, this step began in the endeavour to overcome the school's endemic discipline problems, especially with the Koori students. The school made significant gains in this regard. Teachers went out of their way to forge good relationships, there was humour and a commitment not to encourage student dissatisfaction through punitive and divisive disciplinary measures. Links were made

with the community at a personal level, and at a curriculum level through the introduction and development of Aboriginal Studies. Many extra-curricular activities were directly aimed at encouraging the Koori students to feel good about their school. Physically, as well, there was the projection of the powerful image of a Koori school. Moreover, it was clearly seen in Chapters 4 and 5 that the desire for positive school relationships affected classroom practices. Students were cared for and "protected" in a social curriculum aimed at not getting them offside. Sally Stubbs summed this up: "We really nurture them, it's like a family and they feel very comfortable."

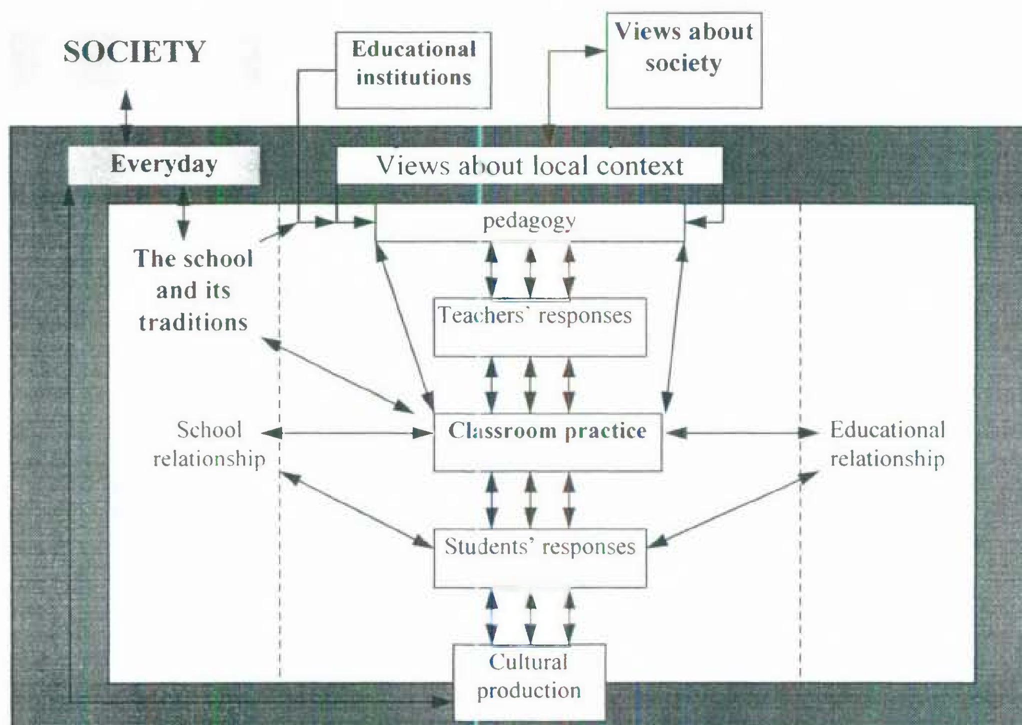
While the school relationship may influence student success at school because of the importance of positive feelings, such as security, happiness and a sense of belonging, its real importance is in its interplay with the educational relationship. The educational relationship is a wider relationship which signifies the educational probabilities (as opposed to possibilities) which students inherit by virtue of the intersection of their ethnicity, social position and gender. As students move through their schooling the educational relationship is extended or reduced. That is, what happens at school largely determines future academic potential. This determination of potential relies on the interplay of the school and educational relationships as the school and its teachers attempt to articulate the immediate and long term needs of their students. This attempt by Greytown School was precisely the struggle described in Chapter 3 when the school increasingly realised that gains in school relationships would not necessarily improve educational outcomes. Since curriculum and classroom practice are produced within this interplay of relationships, they are critically important for future academic success. They are also the crucial site of resistance when success is denied. Resistance

to school is largely a student response to the failure of the local school to articulate the educational curriculum in such a way that it brings about enhanced educational outcomes. The situation at Greytown School points to some salient features of resistance and the school and educational relationships. It was evident from the data that the school had achieved a degree of success in making many Koori students feel good about their school. Many were able to have a positive school relationship. However, feeling good about their school did not necessarily translate into expectations for future educational success. Educational relationships were characterised by negative feelings. And this tension between the two relationships seemed to be implicated in promoting resistance. The elements of this tension are next discussed and illustrated in the light of research data.

The Interplay of School and Educational Relationships

The interplay of the two relationships is dependent on responses by teachers and students within the school context. Figure 6.3 shows factors which influence these responses.

Figure 6.3 Interplay of School and Educational Relationships



Classroom practice is shown to be constructed as teachers and students respond to their context. In the students' case, responses are influenced by community themes in the everyday milieu which penetrate to the school and classroom. This process was described in Chapter 4. Koori people related perceptions of their struggle with Anglo-Australian society. The education system was viewed as a critical component of that struggle, and this was seen to affect the way students reacted to their classrooms. However, it was also illustrated in Chapter 4 that although there were certain common features of student responses, most particularly their oppositional behaviour, other aspects of student behaviour had to be acknowledged. The data indicated that the Koori students did not all respond in the same way to their school and classroom. Incidents from the Research Diary told stories of some students who added to the

pressure of teaching at the school because of the violent nature of their behaviour. It is important to distinguish between their extreme behaviour and the general Koori student opposition aimed at the curriculum. There are dangers, as Furlong (1991) suggests, in seeing all acts of school rejection as rational responses by well adjusted students. There was no doubt that at Greytown School there were Koori students who might be classified in psychological terms as behaviour problems, and it would be romantic to suggest otherwise. Climbing out of windows, sitting in the middle of busy roads or walking out of the school indicated that some students reacted very emotionally to situations they found themselves in at school. Consider the case of Ben who seemed to be seriously affected by his mother's heroin addiction and subsequent death. Ben's individual "problems" demanded and needed community and school support. However, these problems were compounding, for him, the difficulties which confronted the other Koori students. The data also indicated that within the general Koori student responses to these perceived difficulties, there were other critical points to be considered about both influences on students' position and consequences of their position.

The first point concerns the question of gender. With the exception of dramatic incidents which seem to have origins in personal problems, the data indicated that in the general oppositional behaviour of the Koori students there were no discernible differences between teachers' perceptions of the responses of boys and girls. Both groups were said to oppose the curriculum in the same way and in relatively equal numbers. The Research Diary entries also showed that girls were involved in serious breaches of discipline, even though their responses were not as dramatic as those of

the boys during the observation period. The issue of the lack of significant differences in the oppositional behaviour of Koori girls and boys seems to be contrary to the findings in the literature, where research had shown that girls are likely to respond differently because they inhabit a structurally different position to that inhabited by boys (see, for example, McRobbie, 1978. Jones, 1989). There are two possible explanations of this phenomenon at Greytown School. The first is to do with the nature of the relationship between Aboriginal people and Australian society. It was evident from the data that the fears of failure and low expectations among Koori community members significantly influenced the Koori students' classroom responses. Koori students were not expected to succeed at school, and this low expectation applied to both boys and girls. In this sense it may be argued that the effects of gender were modified by more dominant cultural themes (see a discussion of this notion in Hatton and O'Brien, 1995). That is, all Koori people were battling the system. Second, data in Chapters 4 and 5 illustrated how Koori parents trained their children to be tough and resilient so they could survive a system characterised by their continued subjection to racism and oppression. These findings agreed with Malin's (1990) research. The data from both this thesis and Malin's study indicated that Aboriginal parents trained both boys and girls to be able to withstand future racist treatment. It is quite possible that this training was implicated in the development of a different version of femininity among Koori girls. Other social groups who do not face the same oppression may have different expectations, and consequently different training for boys and girls. Often this seems to encourage the boys to adopt more aggressive behaviours. On the other hand, the data from this thesis indicated that the Koori girls were just as likely to refuse work as aggressively and persistently as the

Koori boys. Hatton and O'Brien (1995) proposed that this was also the case in a DSP school they studied. They suggest that at this school there were Aboriginal and non Aboriginal versions of femininity, and the Aboriginal version more closely resembled the stereotype of male oppositional behaviour:

> It seems overall patterns of behaviour of Aboriginal female offenders compared to those of non Aboriginal offenders may be less influenced by implicit demands for passivity and conformity. Indeed, there are considerable similarities in the Aboriginal version of femininity to patterns of behaviour which are stereotypically male (Hatton and O'Brien, 1995).

However, evidence from Greytown confirms that although patterns of oppositional behaviour appeared similar in the early years of schooling, the consequences of a final rejection of schooling would have gender implications. As McFadden (1995:297) puts it, "resistance has differential racial, ethnic and gender consequences." Thus, selection of available options after school has been rejected seemed to be influenced by how Koori boys and Koori girls differently understood their different structural positions. Often the selection of options proved damaging for individuals and the community. The post school situation of Greytown Koories should not be generalised, exaggerated or dramatised. Tragically, however, many Koori boys who left school early became involved in crimes like car stealing and bag snatching. Many girls faced difficulties associated with early motherhood and subsequent single parenting. Problems of drug and alcohol addiction (e.g. prostitution, stealing) were common among boys and girls in the community. The street influence was referred to in interviews with Koories during this study.

Second, there seemed to be two barriers in the way of achievement in school work. Fear of failure was certainly a major obstacle to progress. A pattern for avoiding failure was set by the students early in their schooling. From then on it seems that survival became more important for many Koori students than learning. This student position of survival has been identified in the literature as a means by which some Blacks have attempted to withstand social threats brought about by their colour (Griffin. 1993). The second obstacle threatened the minority of Koori students who had achieved some academic success. Despite the fact that many community members wanted their children to succeed, success was often equated with being "White" and taken as proof of conformity and collusion with the system their people were fighting. Again, this has been seen to be a common barrier to Black students (Ogbu, 1987, 1992; Griffin, 1993). Academic achievement was therefore doubly threatened. Low standards of literacy among the Koori students were key components of poor educational outcomes. Indeed, as this research progressed it became increasingly evident that literacy was a vital issue. It was seen to be the specific focus of the student opposition and also the point at which educational futures were largely determined. Without educational tools Koori students were disempowered, regardless of how clearly they were able to understand the terms of their oppression. There have been suggestions by those adopting a resistance framework (see, for example: Giroux, 1981, 1982, 1983; McLaren, 1985; Jones, 1989) that there are possibilities in education to produce "creative agents capable of changing social structures" (McFadden, 1995:295). Disregarding the tensions between questions of structure and agency identified by McFadden (1995, see Chapter 1) inherent in this process, the evidence of this research is that before students in similar positions to the Koories at

Greytown are encouraged to make significant changes to constraints in their worlds, their educational needs must be met in the very earliest years of schooling.

Meeting these educational needs was a difficult task for Greytown School and its teachers. Influences on teachers' responses to their context are also illustrated in Figure 6.3. Hargreaves (1982a) asks why teachers contributed to reproductive processes. This research posed a similar question. The research did not aim to distinguish between "good" and "bad" teachers. In fact to determine teaching qualities at Greytown was a paradoxical endeavour. I was called to certain classrooms (for example, Sarah Mann's and Simone Young's) more than others to assist with problems, but this could not necessarily be equated with poor teaching. The data had suggested that both students and teachers changed in the developing relationship of the classroom curriculum. It was seen in the data that Marjory Olsen got on with her job of teaching and kept her students quiet and outwardly contented. Her Year 4 students seemed able to "survive" in the room. Debbie Smith appreciated this classroom because at least the Koori students were in their seats. Yet Debbie admits that students in this class were getting nowhere. It was clearly quite difficult to pass judgement on teachers within this context. Therefore, rather than attributing "blame" to individual teachers, my concern was to look at the general position of teachers in the school and the problems they faced as a group. Figure 6.3 recognises that teachers come to a school with a pedagogy which has already been shaped by a number of factors. Previous experiences in school and society, as Hatton (1994a) suggests, strongly influence teaching theory and practice. At Greytown School the teachers were drawn from a variety of backgrounds, and two were Aboriginal. It is argued in

research that conservative forms of teaching are likely when teachers come from White middle class backgrounds which may limit their understanding of social and cultural diversity and social inequality (see, for example, Hatton, 1994a). This cannot be dismissed as a contributing factor at Greytown. Certainly the data agrees with Hatton's (1994a) assertion that teachers' backgrounds may make it easier for them to accept the hegemonic processes, though in the case of the Greytown teachers they appeared to do this with an uneasy reluctance. However, it is important to consider that even the Koori staff (Vicki Hills, Allan Landa), although naturally well aware of the pressures felt by the students, and understanding their responses, also had their curriculum moved in a conservative direction. (See also Nicklin Dent and Hatton, 1996.) Additionally, the data suggests that working within the traditions of Greytown School, and being involved in development of programs associated with DSP and Aboriginal Education, forced teachers to confront notions of social justice in the curriculum, and challenged the public expression of a deficit view of students. Teaching at Greytown also brought daily contact with Koories, either in the school or in the streets. This continually encouraged teachers to consider the plight of Koories. Again, school traditions had emphasised the acceptance of community and an understanding of their oppression. Indeed, as shown in Chapter 3, Greytown School had strongly associated with their struggle against the system. Experiences at Greytown seemed likely to develop an empathy for Aboriginal people and a commitment to their cause. In varying degrees this was shared by staff members, and indicated by the care teachers expressed for their Koori students. As is indicated elsewhere, "at Greytown, staffroom culture is characterised by a clear, overt political commitment to the students and the community" (Hatton, Munns, and Nicklin Dent,

1996). Despite this, relationships between Whites and Blacks were always undercut with tensions, and encounters with members of the community often forced a questioning of developing views. It would be reasonable to conclude, then, that teachers at Greytown were moved away from ethnocentric positions towards well intentioned, socially just ideas about their work. However, as demonstrated in Chapter 5, a socially just intent does not guarantee social justice in educational outcomes.

It would seem that at Greytown the strongest force in the construction of classroom practice was the daily experience of trying to find ways of teaching and a curriculum content which the students would accept. This experience forced teachers like Sarah Mann and Simone Young, who stated that they were philosophically committed to a more progressive pedagogy, to abandon their ideals and teach in the same way as the others. They both admitted that this was a step which they had strongly resisted. Although Denscombe (1982) proposes that classroom experience produces conservative teaching practice, he suggests that this is largely the result of a concern to be seen by colleagues to have a quiet, ordered room because this is often associated with judgements about professional competence. At Greytown the feeling was much more of a combined struggle in which no one seemed to have the answers. Talking about classroom problems and helping others on staff were seen to be an important part of being a Greytown teacher. Sally Stubbs' comments that teachers should "be willing to support other members of staff when you're knowing they're having problems, get in and do it without making a fuss of it, everyone supporting each other", emphasised this. As has been highlighted throughout the data, to "get in and do it" usually meant teaching in a way which contradicted the school's wider search

for a socially just curriculum. It also signified the inability of the school and its teachers to translate positive school relationships into an extension of the educational relationship through enhanced educational outcomes. A crucial part of this defeat was associated with the teachers' apparent inadequacy to overcome the ubiquitous fear of failure among the Koori students. Although the data showed that this fear had a community basis, questions must be raised about whether classroom practices surrounding checking of work and assessment procedures heightened the fear which students brought with them to the classroom.

The data also highlighted the role of School Principal in this kind of context. It was quite obvious in extracts from the Research Diary that being Principal of a school like Greytown was difficult, both professionally and emotionally. On a professional level the Principal has a prime responsibility for the learning of the students. Yet having worked in the school as a teacher I was well aware of the classroom pressures that all staff members faced. There is little doubt that I consciously placed fewer demands on teachers because of my empathy with their position. In other words, even as Principal I colluded in prioritising peace over outcomes. David Wheeler identified that a key difference at Greytown compared to other schools was the absence of pressure from the Greytown executive. Given the daily turmoil of many of the classes and the demand that placed on my time and emotions, it was inevitable that quiet classrooms would become a priority. Thus, although at a whole school level I continued to encourage teachers to work for changes which would benefit the students, my understanding of the teaching situation encouraged my complicity in the conservative, socially reproductive curriculum. Too often I was seduced by the quiet times. It was

also evident from the data in Chapters 4 and 5 that the role of Principal invariably placed me in a compromising situation. In this sense it was hard to be "right" all the time when interests of teachers and students and community seemed to run in contradiction to one another. In particular, this was apparent in issues to do with severe disciplinary cases and suspension. Like many of the teachers, I found myself invariably being forced to go against my ideals, and my comments at the time reflect the anguish this caused me. An example of this was my feeling when Suzy was suspended: "And me, another Whitefella throwing black kids out of school."

This section has shown influences on students' and teachers' responses to the Greytown context and their consequences for curriculum. The next section considers the inability of the school and its teachers to overcome the Koori students' educational disadvantage with reference to research data.

The School as a Cubbyhouse

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

The analogy of the school as a cubbyhouse was incisive. It was the image of a place where children sit around and do nothing, a sanctuary removed from the real world which in the end offers no real protection from the world. In many ways it captured the success and failure of Greytown's work, the tension between the school and educational relationships.

At a whole school level this tension was described in Chapter 3. The changes brought about at the beginning of the watershed period were primarily aimed at improving the school relationships of the Koori pupils. This was arguably a very sound educational decision. In the definition of school relationship which was previously offered, it was stated that the school relationship was crucial for educationally disadvantaged students. It is at this point that many of these students are denied access to education because they find school a place of intimidation and cultural estrangement. Malin's (1990) research was valuable in showing how cultural misunderstandings by teachers she studied had alienated urban Aboriginal children in their earliest years at school. Koori people, in this research, indicated the cultural gaps between community and school. An example of this was given by Vicki Hills who explained that many Aboriginal people lived in happy environments[3] with friends and relations around and this was in contrast to what they experienced at school: "You come through the gates of the school and it's gone."

Greytown School attempted to make Koori students feel good when they walked through the gates of the school. Aboriginal Studies, Koori workers, camps, community involvement, extra curricular activities, alignment with Aboriginal political movements: all aimed to reduce the cultural distance between Blacks and Whites. These were vital changes which brought a degree of acceptance by students and the community and recognition to the school. However, it was shown in Chapter 3

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[3] This must be accepted with caution. The effects of poverty and oppression condemn many Aboriginal people to harsh and difficult lives, evidenced in, for example, overrepresentation in prisons and low life expectancies (Einfeld, 1993). It would be a gross generalisation to suggest that all Aborigines are happy.

that the school increasingly realised that gains in school relationships would not, in themselves, guarantee improved educational outcomes for the students. Consequently there was an increased focus on classroom curriculum while still acknowledging the need for cultural awareness and support.

The real difficulty lay in this process of attempting to transform the positive school relationship into a productive educational relationship. Essential elements of the school relationship had reached into classroom practice. Among these, keeping students happy and comfortable within a friendly, culturally sympathetic environment were valuable aspects of Greytown's wider curriculum. Yet it seemed that when this aim (admittedly in the face of student opposition) became paramount in classrooms, access to knowledge and skills needed for future success at school was denied. There was evidence that official school policy was implicated in this movement towards a restricted curriculum, despite contrary intentions in its programs. Note, for example, that the 1992 Discipline Policy suggested teachers should abandon lessons which seemed to be failing. Chapter 5 showed this had become a common survival practice which resulted in an avoidance of high risk lessons and contributed to lower academic standards. On an official level it is also interesting to consider the role of assessment in this movement towards a protective school relationship. The school acknowledged that traditional forms of assessment discriminated against the educationally disadvantaged. Again, its position, in theory, was apparently a socially just one. Again, the data indicated a gap between intention and practice. Connell (1993:77) argues that forms of competitive and standardised assessment "have been integral to the educational exclusion of the poor." The school rejected quantitative competitive

measures when assessing students. Staff members refused to administer Basic Skills Tests in support of the local community and the Aboriginal Education Consultative Group[4] because of their supposed cultural bias. Reporting became less of a threat. Teachers wrote and spoke positively in reports to parents, well aware that for years Koori parents had expected only bad news from their schools about their children. However, when this concealed a low standard which became increasingly apparent as students approached or reached high school, parents saw it as a cover-up. This confirmed their fears that school was letting down another group of Koori students. Debbie Smith captured this feeling in her perceptions of report cards being lies "to cover up their dirty work because they are not educating the kids."

The data indicates that at Greytown School the positive school relationship became seen to be an end in itself, and in the process the educational relationship was restricted for the majority of its students. This again stresses the distinction between the school's successful public and failing private work. "Indeed it is fair to say that Greytown's failure is often masked by its successes" (Hatton, Munns, and Nicklin Dent, 1994:18). Nowhere was this more evident than on Aboriginal Day, a glorious celebration and a community highlight which earned kudos and publicity for the school but which deflected attention away from statistics showing most of its Koori students were failing in the classroom. At the point where the school relationship interplayed with the educational relationship, a restricted and compromised classroom curriculum offered illusionary success. Thus, Greytown did not enable its Koories to

[4] The AECG is an Aboriginal advisory group which operates at a local community, state and federal level.

overcome cultural barriers in educational terms. It did, as Wendy Harris observed, offer a form of refuge not always available to Koori students in their hazardous educational journey: "It is like swimming against the current. The only way they can stay afloat is to grab on to something or to grab a branch as they are going down with the current." Yet protecting students in the school relationship nurtured, deflected and delayed resistance. Resistance becomes an option when there is a consciousness that the local school will not be able to deliver the wider educational promise of success for all. Teachers and parents were well aware that high school was going to be a problem for most of the students because no longer would they be protected from confronting their educational relationship. Outside the cubbyhouse was a threatening educational reality:

"It is a big shock, a terrible big shock. No, they're not prepared." (Vicki Hills)

Summary and Conclusion

This research has shown that the pedagogical practices at Greytown School contributed to the educational disadvantage of the majority of its Koori students. It has also indicated that curriculum and classroom practice was produced in a complex relationship between a school and its community, and teachers and students. There was an inevitability to the failure of its curriculum to make an educational difference.

The Koori community daily faced enormous pressures. They battled the effects of poverty, racism and a relationship with mainstream society which contributed to

feelings of inferiority and expected failure in all areas of life. Most parents were resigned to the fact that their children would probably not succeed at school, and believed their happiness was a priority. Students carried these community effects into the school as they culturally responded to their curriculum. It would seem, that for most of the students, their educational fate was sealed early. Oppositional behaviour in the first years of school was met with changes to the curriculum which offered fewer academic demands. This pattern continued throughout the school, compounded by a general low standard and increasingly wide academic ranges. Survival or rejection then became the choice for students, in the light of sharpening consciousness of their educational position. Neither choice would be educationally beneficial. At one extreme Sue Lee's son "survived" by being a compliant and well behaved student. Not causing any trouble at school and seeming to be happy had covered up his inability to read. It perhaps would have been more rational for him to turn desks over in the classroom and Sue agreed: "I would've jerried[5] then." The street kids, by contrast, calmly and politely walked away from school and education. They reached their moment of resistance. Both positions were lamented, but understood and supported by the community. More Koories had been beaten by the system.

Greytown School and its teachers made many genuine attempts to improve the educational outcomes for its Koori students. At a theoretical level the school was apparently both up-to-date and innovative. At a practical classroom level the sheer difficulty of the teaching conditions was the overriding factor in shaping a curriculum which was clearly socially reproductive. Teachers showed an obvious concern for

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[5] This is Aboriginal English meaning "discovered what was happening."

their pupils and regret for their failure. The collective feeling among staff was summarised by the common cry: "What else can I do?"

Greytown's failure points to the complexities of attempting to bring social justice to socially and culturally diverse educational contexts. However, there is much to learn from their efforts, some of which were arguably shaped in productive directions. The point of their failure, the tension between positive school relationships and improved educational outcomes, provides a site for further inquiry. The possibilities for schools moving beyond the point of Greytown's failure is explored in the final chapter.