PART B

Educational Activities

CHAPTER 5: INTRODUCTION

Who Should be Educated?

The dialogue approach to education has been illustrated in earlier chapters by drawing on examples of oppressed groups in the Third World. It has already been suggested that these case studies are still relevant in "developed" countries, both because of widespread "political illiteracy" and because of the need for "privileged elites" to give up power and resources.

A focus on oppressed groups is also relevant in wealthy "developed" countries because of the continued existence of poverty, social injustice and discrimination in those countries. Though not suffering the same degree of exploitation as Third World peasants or slum dwellers, oppressed groups in the "developed" countries do suffer significant social injustice and they are also the most vulnerable to environmental problems, particularly poor urban planning, inadequate housing and transport, and serious pollution risks. Any transformation of the environment always takes place in a social context where different social groups benefit from those changes while others lose. Whether it be freeways or high rise, woodchipping or sandmining, there is always a question of social justice built into issues of environmental destruction because it is invariably the most oppressed groups in society who pay the price for such "development".

These oppressed groups, composed mainly of working class communities, women, migrants, and Aborigines are a "natural" constituency for dialogue approaches to education. They are invariably under-resourced and their social situation is one which needs critique and action to transform it. However, it would be naive for environmental educators to simply draw up a target group strategy and attempt to work with such a group in a political vacuum. As the CARE project in Northern Ireland showed, it is crucial to link educational activities into an existing activist framework so that learners do not have to start from scratch when it comes to mobilising politically.

For this reason it is recommended that any projects involving working with oppressed groups be located within a concrete social context and the following points should be carefully considered:

1) Are there existing networks with which any political activity fostered by environmental education can link up?

2) Does the project actually reflect what such groups themselves want or is there a danger that we are projecting our own priorities onto them?

3) Are the kinds of resources which effective political action require available? This is particularly important if the environmental educators are to assist with the activism of the learners since to promote intentions but offer practical support is an irresponsible step and can lead to cynicism or distrust.

Possible Activities

In pursuing this strategy of giving oppressed groups
priority for educational resources but still working within an
existing network, there are a number of specific approaches which
are possible. There is the prospect of working with existing
educational institutions such as schools and TAFEs. There is the
possibility of becoming an educational arm of existing community
groups. Within this role, it might also be possible for the
Environment Centre to develop an "outreach" programme. Finally,
it is also possible that the Environment Centre could become a
learning centre. In each of the following chapters these
possibilities are discussed and again local and overseas case
studies are employed to illustrate the points being made.

CHAPTER 6: WORKING IN EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS

There can be many pitfalls to working within existing educational institutions. Teachers in schools, for example, may be genuinely interested in environmental issues but the constraints under which they operate may mean that a visit to a school by an environmental educator may be reduced to a "fill-in" or "once-off" lesson. This means that there is little possibility for implementing the dialogue approach to education which underlies this policy. Such visits are obviously useful and better than nothing but they do not fulfill long-term environmental education aims. For these to be fulfilled, the following minimum requirements should be met:

1) There should be a minimum number of three visits so that the following activities are possible:
        a) an investigation phase whereby the existing level of environmental awareness and the everyday lived reality of the students can be gauged;
        b) development of educational materials may be necessary and this could involve a number of possibilies:
            i) environment educators return to the Environment Centre or other resource areas and develop materials;
            ii) the students themselves initiate research and create materials with the environment educators acting as facilitators or resource persons;
            iii) other organisations or persons (eg. environmental activists) can be called upon to provide materials and/or activities;
        c) a follow-up phase would be necessary to provide feedback to the environmental educators about the success of their efforts. After all, the educators are themselves learners and need to continually evaluate and improve their activities. Such follow-up would also serve to provide continuing support to the students if they have engaged in any forms of activism.

Environmental educators should not automatically reject all ad hoc invitations to visit schools since these can indicate an existing area of interest or enthusiasm which should not be wasted. However, it is preferable that such ad hoc visits be linked to existing topical campaigns (eg. anti-nuclear issues, forestry campaigns). In this way the "one-off" nature of the visit is not entirely irrelevant since some students may become involved in that wider campaign.

2) The existing politics of schools and TAFEs (Colleges of Technical and Further Education) should not be allowed to undermine the dialogue approach to eduction which underlies this policy. It must be recognised that educational institutions function to reproduce an oppressive division of labour and an inequitable distribution of wealth and power in society. They are not designed to empower students but rather to "package" them in ways that suit the needs of industry and government. The authoritarian climate which pervades educational institutions is not an accidental feature but is intrinsic to this packaging process. Environmental educators must recognise the basically contradictory role they play when they enter such institutions.

Empowerment is at the top of their agenda whereas
"disempowerment" (for want of a better word) is built into the
very structure of the schooling system. In practice, this means
that environmental educators must not employ or give support to
any of the techniques which teachers use to disempower their
students, particularly "dissemination of information" styles of
education (such as testing, grading, lecturing with content
questioning afterwards, assigning set tasks, and so on).
Instead, environmental educators must insist on employing
dialogue techniques as much as possible within the constraints of
classroom teaching.

3) If resources are limited, it is recommended that
environment educators concentrate their activities on a single
class within a single school rather than soliciting visits
wherever possible. This closer involvement offers far greater
possibilies for long term educational work since the contacts
within the school, the relationships with students and the links
between school and community can all be consolidated more
effectively. It also offers a better chance of discovering where
the openings lie, where the gaps for liberating experiences are
to be found amidst the structural constraints of authoritarian
schooling.

4) Any materials developed by either students or members of
the community must remain under the control of their creators.
The following case study of the Wreck Bay project is offered as a
concrete example of the dangers of alternative educational
practices being co-opted when they are carried out within
schools.

Wreck Bay

In the late 1970s Ann Nugent initiated a project involving
the Aboriginal community at Wreck Bay (near Jervis Bay) [1].
Well acquainted with Freire's approach, she developed a series of
curriculum materials for use at the primary school level which
reflected the "generative themes" of the local Aboriginal
community. These materials were intended to introduce aspects of
Aboriginal culture, particularly oral history and language, into
the local school where both white and Aboriginal children were
studying.

During 1978 and 1979 Ann Nugent and another teacher made
numerous field trips to Wreck Bay and, through talking with the
Aboriginal community, built up an extensive collection of oral
history tapes. From these tapes a series of key themes were
identified:

* prehistory and adaption (modern settlement) of
  Wreck Bay by Aboriginal families;
* language (Aboriginal);
* kinship;
* the Aboriginal Way;
* the Land (bush skills and survival).

These themes were then clarified by further consultation
with the Aboriginal community at Wreck Bay and eventually a set
of curriculum materials were produced. These were then used in

classroom situations and many favourable responses were recorded.
Whilst not having the potential to fundamentally alter the
material conditions of schooling, this form of intervention did
nevertheless shift the power relationships within the school in
positive ways. As Ann Nugent put it:

> it was hoped that the Aboriginal children within the
> classroom would be seen as having access to knowledge which
> was valued by teachers and other pupils. In fact the
> teachers reported that other children actively sought
> information from the Aboriginal children. [2]

To this can be added the observations of Margaret Clark (who
wrote an evaluation):

> ... the Aboriginal children did display a greater amount of
> interest than normal and took a more active role generally in
> the classroom. It appeared to give them an immense boost in
> confidence and enabled them to express, at the classroom
> level, positive feelings aobut being Aboriginal. [3]

To these positive outcomes must be appended a note of
warning. The parents lost control of the process once it entered
the classroom. In a sense, the knowledge they had once owned and
the power that went with it was relinquished to the school once
it became an object in the curriculum materials which the school
held. As Ann Nugent noted:

> It was as though, once the materials entered the school, they
> underwent a [transformation] which changed their nature in
> the eyes of the community. Therefore the use of the
> materials in the school did not lead the Aboriginal parents
> to take any greater part in the school activities nor did it
> lead the school to actively encourage greater involvement. [4]

This warning is not offered in an attempt to dissuade
environmental educators from venturing near schools. Rather it
shows how much an intrinsic contradiction exists between dialogue
education and formal schooling systems. Environmental educators
will be caught within this contradiction and need to be aware of
its dimensions whenever they initiate programmes within schools.
There are at least three parts to this contradiction:

> 1) the dangers of co-option (illustrated in the Wreck
> Bay case study);
> 2) the tension between class-room teaching with is
> tendency toward dissemination education and the dialogue
> style of education which outside educators will bring with
> them;
> 3) the small likelihood of education leading to action
> because of the underlying focus of schools on knowledge as a
> means of certification. Sometimes this may be less severe
> and in some schools knowledge as an end in itself may be
> valued. In either case, however, there is still a major
> difference between these uses of knowledge and that promoted
> by the dialogue approach which stresses that the value of
> knowledge lies in its effective use for action.

Finally, none of these warnings should be seen as minimising the importance of environmental education taking place in schools.   Particularly at the primary school level, there is a vast reservoir of good will and idealism to be tapped. Children at the upper primary level have a very well developed sense of justice ("It isn't fair, miss" is a common phrase in their vocabulary). If these attitudes can be built upon, if a sound environmental awareness can be integrated into their outlook, then many years of later re-education may be saved. As the Catholic Church was so fond of saying, "Give us a child for the first seven years and we have them for life."   If children's sensitivity to environmental destruction can be developed at a formative age, it is more likely they will build personal life style changes oriented toward ecological sustainability. Children may also educate their parents in this regard.

It must be remembered, however, that environmental education has been in existence in many schools for over a decade. In many cases the approach has been superficial and also repetitive. [5] ("Pollution", for example, may be "done" at grade 3, then grade 6, and then again it may arise in early high school.) To ensure that superficial approaches do not become part of the baggage of environmental educators who venture into schools it is strongly recommended that the Social Literacy material be studied and that the three books by Steve Van Matre ("Climatizing", "Acclimatization" and "Sunship Earth") be consulted. (They are available from the Victorian Gould League Association.) Another important approach which is also locally available is "Windows - A Guide to Sharing the Earth" developed by Liz Lowrie whilst working for the Perth City Council. (This is available for perusal from Liz Lowrie at the Centre for Continuing Education, the Australian National University, Canberra.)

TAFEs

It is recommended that TAFEs (Colleges of Technical and Further Educations) not be overlooked through too great a preoccupation with schools. Many of the students at TAFEs will be working at present or in the near future in industrial or commercial areas where environmental problems (such as occupational health and safety) will be an important part of their lives. They are thus potential activists who could address such issues as a part of their daily existence. Furthermore, some TAFEs have a commitment to community education and reasonable resources to pursue this. Because community action and education is one of the major planks of this education policy, the TAFEs and the trade unions are probably the best institutional areas in which to find existing resources which can be tapped.

There are at least two ways in which this strategy could be promoted. First, educational resources could be offered to existing community groups engaged in a particular campaign. This would include educational materials, offers to conduct educational activities, offers to run training workshops, and direct involvement in the campaigns by environmental educators themselves.

The challenge for environmental educators is to ensure that dialogue approaches are adopted in campaigns which are usually based on "information dissemination", "shifting public opinion" and other non-dialogue principles. Environmental educators would therefore need to:

        a) resist co-option into "public opinion" approaches such as giving public lectures and producing large slabs of information;

        b) promote the adoption of dialogue approaches within these community groups by running workshops on appropriate techniques and constantly offering suggestions about alternative methods when campaign strategy is being discussed by the group.

The second way in which environmental educators could support community groups is to run activist training workshops. Rather than linking in with any particular campaign, environmental educators could attempt to work with a range of activists involved in different campaigns and bring them together in courses and workshops. Here they could be offered the opportunity to:

        * share a range of campaign skills;
        * discuss mutual problems and successes and thereby learn from each other's experiences;
        * be introduced to dialogue techniques for promoting critical consciousness and action.

This idea has been most fully developed by Russell Fisher and the reader is referred to Appendix 7 for more details.

To make each of these suggestions more concrete the following illustrations are offered.

1) Linking in With Existing Campaigns

During April 1985, the Environment Centre re-established its Education Collective. As part of their discussions about possible projects, the Collective canvassed the following options which illustrate different ways in which linking in with existing groups might take place:

        1) Linking in with Animal Liberation in its campaign against Parkwood Eggs.   Animal Liberation is considering legal action as part of its campaign and the Education Collective envisaged a possible supportive role at

the level of public education. This could involve mobilising
school students around the issue of intensive animal farming
and promoting research by school students into the
availability of free range eggs in their suburbs. The aim
would be to get students active in lobbying their families to
consume free range eggs and in lobbying local shop keepers to
stock such eggs.

2) Linking in with a recycling campaign to promote
"at-source" recycling in the community. A number of groups
(including representatives from the Australian Conservation
Foundation, Jobless Action, the Environment Centre, the
Conservation Council and Rupert Public Interest Movement)
have linked up in an attempt to promote at-source recycling
as a means of creating employment and as a more ecologically
sound method of waste disposal. This campaign faces the
initial task of preventing a likely government decision to
move toward larger collection bins (which would undermine the
feasibility of recycling). The Education Collective could
play an important role in working with trade unions to
highlight the benefits of increased employment opportunities
through recycling.

3) Linking in with an Australian Conservation
Foundation group who are working on junk mail. When the junk
mail proposal was originally raised it was considered a very
useful project because it illustrated in microcosm the issue
of environmental destruction and alternative employment
strategies which have been major parts of many environmental
campaigns (e.g. forestry and the Franklin Dam). Such a
project would address specifically the issues of advertising,
consumerism, wastage, and forestry and it would do it in a
way that was immediately relevant to school students since
they often earn income delivering such mail and are also
consumers of its products.

Finally, linking in with existing community groups is also the most likely area in which the theatre aspects of environmental education (mentioned in Chapter Two) could be pursued. For this reason, it is strongly recommended that the Environment Centre establish stronger links with the community arts groups based at Gorman House and with other similar groups in Canberra.

2) Training Activists

It was mentioned in an earlier chapter that an activist training component was part of the CARE project in Northern Ireland. The people working in the CARE project did not start from scratch but modelled their workshops on the example provided by Highlander Folk School in the United States. It is worth briefly looking at this example before examining the CARE workshops.

Highlander Folk School

Beginning in Tennessee in the 1930s, a number of progressive educators set about founding a school which would serve the needs of its local community by offering residential adult education programmes for potential political activists. In the 1930s, this meant working with unions activists in order to build a better future for a working class caught in the poverty of the Great Depression. In the 1950s the school embraced the civil rights struggle and worked with black activists. By the 1960s this has broadened to include involvement with the struggles of Mexican-Americans, Puerto Ricans and Native Americans. All through this time, the school continued to forge close links with its immediate community and serve as a means by which the poor communities of Appalachia could fight for social justice. [1]

Highlander operated with the same axiom which underlies dialogue education: "learn from the people and start education from where they are". Its aim was "to educate people away from the dead end of individualism into the freedom that grows from co-operation and collective solutions to problems." [2]

Its main approach was to provide information and training to activists by offering short-term residential workshops as well as research support.

Highlander adopted radical political positions and explicitly propagated a vision of the kind of humane society they were working towards. It lived this out in its daily activities and it pursued methods which were strongly democratic and involved considerable joint decision making between staff and students. Both of these features led to Highlander developing an explicitly anti-academic bias.

The Reflection on Community Action Workshops

With Highlander in mind, the CARE project set up a series of workshops and conferences for activists engaged in community work in Northern Ireland. [3] These were divided into two main areas:

1. Issues workshops: where trade unionists, political activists, activists in the areas of human rights, poverty, one-parent families, housing, women's issues, all came together to reflect on the broad themes of community action, especially the links between ideas and actions.

2. Problem workshops: these were focussed on the practical problems of specific community organisations and explored their internal problems and their structures and roles.

Both workshops were seen as a means whereby activists could engage in group problem-sharing and thereby foster co-operation and encourage the growth of social movements.

The workshops sought to strike broad themes which pointed to the external forces responsible for the problems facing those involved and the inevitability of political and economic conflict in the search for solutions to those problems. [4]

CARE also conducted a series of Community Education Forum Weekend workshops during 1978 and 1979 where activists engaged in the following tasks:

1) reflection upon current work and concerns, sharing of experiences, and discussion of disagreements;
2) the acquisition of technical skills and information (specifically, video, newspaper layout, and interviewing techniques);
3) analysis and discussion of wider, long-term issues. [5]

The CARE workshops attempted to avoid Highlander's anti-academic bias because the co-ordinators were aware of the need for a coherent and rigorous philosophy to underlie their approach. Tom Lovett, for example, was very aware that participation in community activism by itself is not necessarily a radicalising experience. American studies had shown that it was possible to ve involved in fighting basic social and economic injustices and yet to still personally maintain a set of traditional conservative values. [6] This situation can be contrasted with labour movement activism in Great Britain where community activists could draw upon a long tradition and a more coherent world view which made it much more likely that their efforts toward "social change" and "personal change" would move forward together.

The British historian Eric Hobsbawm draws two distinctions which are relevant here:

1) Pre-political thought: This is less coherent and has little conception of long range goals or programmes. It

responds in a fragmented fashion to immediate grievances and often sees little relationship between the concrete problem at hand and the larger social system.

2) Political consciousness: This involves "a coherent viewpoint providing an interpretative framework for the understanding of relations between society, culture and political economy". [7]

The CARE workshops attempted to work toward this second kind of thinking but only achieved limited gains:

Such successes were limited however by the very nature of the contradictions discussed above i.e. open debate on the hidden political and social viewpoints of the participants would have threatened the existence of the group, but the very lack of broadly agreed social and political viewpoints meant that it was extremely difficult for the group to pursue a coherent and dynamic community action strategy. The participants in these workshops confined themselves to identifying the particular local issues and problems they should tackle and in what order of priority. However, they were reluctant to discuss questions of broad strategy and the relationships between the latter and their structure, organisation and role. [8]

In a way, Hobsbawm's contrast is applicable to the environment movement in Australia in general. By its very nature it is a loose political coalition devoid of a coherent viewpoint. This is necessary in terms of the autonomy of the different groups which form the environment movement yet politically it does mean the absence of a systematic, long term political strategy.

If the Environment Centre does take on the task of running activist workshops these kinds of issues need to be seriously confronted. Any activist workshops which the Environment Centre organises must not only be set up along dialogue lines, but they must develop a structure which facilitates the emergence of coherent viewpoints and long term political strategies. The conceptual approach to environmental awareness should be part of this process. This could be supplemented by familiarity with some of the newly emerging local literature on long term strategy for social changes [for example, Friends of the Earth's Strategy Against Nuclear Power, (Canberra, 1984) and Brian Martin's Uprooting War, (Freedom Press, 1984)].

Developing an Outreach Programme

Discussion of this strategy is included here because it will invariably involve networking at some stage in its development.

In many ways an outreach programme is the most ambitious approach and the one most likely to meet with frustrations. It offers the advantage that dialogue principles can be incorporated into the project right from its inception rather than being fought for within an existing framework. However, it runs the risk of not being able to fully mobilise action and thereby failing in its key objective of education for action.

For such a programme to be most successful, the lessons of CARE in Northern Ireland should be taken seriously. The key insight is that existing organisations should be involved in any educational work right from its inception so that they have a commitment to the project and their resources and activities can sustain any activism which the educational work promotes.

A good example of how this might work in Canberra was discussed in one of the proposals before the Education Collective. The idea of working on the issue of urban planning in the Tuggeranong Valley was suggested. This area was chosen because it suffers the worst provision of public facilities of any of the newly developing Canberra residential "satellites". The programme envisaged investigating how the residents in Tuggeranong saw their community needs and what changes in urban planning they wished to see develop. At this stage finding what existing community groups existed (for example, residents' groups) would be essential and gaining access to schools would also be very useful. Networking with Radio 2XX and Photo Access would also be necessary since they could play an important role in the educational task of creating material to facilitate critical reflection. For example, using the CARE project as a model, interviews made by residents of Tuggeranong about their community could be broadcast over 2XX and listened to by learning circles set up by community groups in Tuggeranong. These learning circles could also make use of visual materials also created by residents with the assistance of Photo Access.

Commonwealth Video-Access Centres

These were a Labor Government initiative of the early nineteen seventies which saw a number of resource centres set up in the poorer suburbs of the larger cities. [9] They contained video equipment and resource people and were intended to be used by the local community as a means of political expression. They provide a useful example of extending the CARE concept of using radio and they also mirror the photomontage approach of promoting audio-visual expression by local people.

A good example of the possibilities in this area is illustrated by what happened at Newport in Victoria. The Shell Petroleum Company had been badly polluting the waterways of this area for many years without any effective action being taken by local government. The residents were angry at the health risks their children suffered in being exposed to this pollution so they made a video which graphically highlighted the severity and extent of the problem. When taken along to a local council meeting the video provided powerful ammunition for their case and long-overdue action was finally taken.

CHAPTER 8: THE ENVIRONMENT CENTRE AS A LEARNING CENTRE

The Environment Centre already functions as a resource centre for the Canberra community but in order to expand our conception of what a community learning centre might look like, it is worth examining a Victorian case study, the Nunawading North Neighbourhood Centre.

Nunawading North Neighbourhood Centre

In the mid-seventies, a learning centre was established in Nunawading North, a suburb of Melbourne, to respond to the needs of members of the community seeking further education. The idea initially sprang from a series of Holiday Happenings held between 1973 and 1975 which involved hundreds of people. These were carnival-like celebrations with various themes: a gypsy village, a trip to the moon, a dragon festival. The local community became involved in celebrating life using "magic, philosophy, poetry, dance, music, song, numbers, paint, structures, clay, animal friends." [1]

From these community festivals, the neighbourhood centre took shape. Locating itself in an old building called The House, the Nunawading North Neighbourhood Centre (NNNC) proceeded to offer a range of alternative educational programmes. Its major constitutional aims were:

1) To provide an opportunity for people to come together and through their involvement with others to increase their self-awareness and concern for other people.

2) To foster in people a sense of belonging to a caring community in which members accept and support each other. Hopefully this will carry over into their families and into the wider community.

3) To provide an opportunity for people with personal and family problems to meet with others in a natural social setting.

4) To institute activities with sufficient structure to enable people taking part in them to feel secure, while at the same time keeping the organisation and program flexible enough to allow those involved to develop their own initiatives and to meet needs that arise.

The activities of the NNNC can be pursued by looking at any of their publications. The best overall view is contained in a book simply called "Nunawading North Neighbourhood Centre". Some of the creative writing of a group of women who met at the Centre can be found in "And Now It Flows - Release of Learning" (August 1979). An account of the story of the House and its development is traced in "The House" (August 1979). Some of the social justice activities of the Centre are covered in "Work, Justice & Community" (September 1980) and its activities with unemployed youth in the local community is portrayed in "The Shopback Story" (October 1982).

Dialogue principles provided an underlying philosophy for
the activities of the NNNC. As one of the educators summed up:

> Beginning with the people themselves, their language,
> problems and culture and at the same time enabling them to
> gain awareness of their capacity to shape their environment. [2]

For learning to proceed along these lines it is crucial that
fostering self-worth and self-confidence be placed high on the
agenda. As the foreword to one of the NNNC publications
stressed: "a sympathetic environment and appropriate learning
processes can unlock creative powers and give the confidence for
creative expression." [3]

In the case of NNNC, the creation of such an environment
relied not only on appropriate facilities and skilled people but
also on a high degree of mutual respect and support amongst
learners. For example, the book of women's writings ("And Now it'
Flows") "show what can happen when a group of people come
together with a commitment to trying out new ideas, to sharing
their learning needs and skills, and to being a sympathetic and
sensitive audience for each other." [4]

As well as working with the powerless, NNNC also turned its
critical eye upon the powerful. Throughout its history, NNNC had
faced constant battles with bureaucracies to secure adequate
funding for its activities. In the course of these struggles,
the workers at The House developed a perspective which closely
mirrored the point made earlier by the Grupo Educacion de Popular
about privileged elites. Whilst at first glance, powerful
bureaucrats seem far removed from the category of oppressed, in
an important sense they stand in need of education. Namely,
learning to give up power. An Evaluation Report on NNNC
commented on how its Reflective Cell Group (the core people)
directly yet sensitively confronted this issue of power:

> in seeking to right the wrong they find that they have to
> help 'owners of power' to give back power to the 'little
> people', to devolve power from the centre back to the grass
> roots. This is done with a sense of respect for the dignity
> of the person who occupies that position of power. [5]
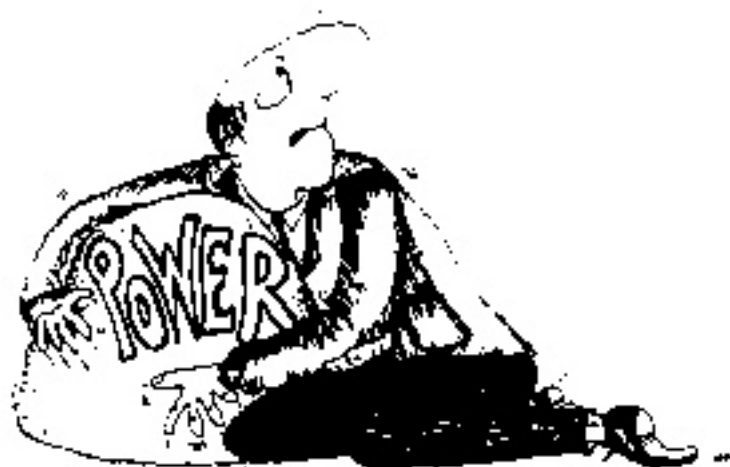
This Evaluation also noted that NNHC had evolved into a learning centre which interacted with the community in at least three important ways:

1) a geographic neighbourhood for which NNHC is a resource;
2) a community of learning that has been developed through the activities of The House, Childcare and Shopback;
3) the community of interest consisting of public servants in the health, education and welfare sectors that the Reflective Cell Group seeks to engage in a learning process. [6]

The success of these interactions emerges clearly in the Evaluation's final summing up:

The results of a learning approach which truly values the experiences and insights of each group member, which seeks to develop both self esteem and the ability to see the world around along with one's part within it, and which seeks to develop particular knowledge and skills, are striking. People are empowered to take control of their own learning and once they find this is authentic, not just another trick by some educational expert, they surge forward through self learning and development. [7]

Possible Changes for the Environment Centre

The example of NNHC should not be taken too literally. In many respects its activities are already undertaken by other organisations, for example CYSS projects like the Foundry. Clearly, the Environment Centre should not attempt to embrace too great a diversity of activities nor duplicate activities undertaken elsewhere. This still leaves the question of how to narrow down the range of possible activities.

The criteria for selection should be closely tied to the overall policy of the Centre: the focus on social justice and ecological sustainability. Further narrowing could be based on the idea that a learning centre should service the needs of environmental activists and also people in the community whose needs for environmental education are not currently being met.

If the Environment Centre did undertake the role of offering courses and workshops, then certain developments would be necessary. Adequate space would be essential and a larger range of audio-visual resources (both hardware and software) would also be necessary. Funding for co-ordinators would be needed. The library would also need to develop in certain new directions. Each of these issues needs further elaboration.

The Environment Centre has been lobbying for a considerable time for a new building to house the Centre. Any design work undertaken in this lobbying should take into account the extra space needed for running workshops. This also means giving careful attention to the kind of space allocated (for example, white boards or walls for butcher's paper; smaller areas for groups to work in; a large area for plenary sessions; and so on). In the absence of a new building, the main improvements needed to

the current building are adequate heating in winter, smaller
areas for groups to work in and more wall space for butcher's
paper and brainstorms etc.

The Commonwealth Video-Access Centres and the examples from
CARE in Northern Ireland highlight how important non-print media
is for educational work in the community. Already the
Environment Centre is involved with radio programmes on 2XX and
tapes of these programmes, as well as collaboration with Photo
Access, could form the basis for building up a substantial audio-
visual collection. Clearly there is no need for duplication of
hardware in terms of producing the media (cameras, recorders etc.)
but there is a need for acquiring the hardware necessary for
using these media in the library (e.g. slide projectors, videos,
listening booths etc.)

The co-ordinators need not necessarily be staff of the
centre but could be activists or invited "specialists" who could
come in to run courses. However, it is essential that this
overall strategy of setting up courses should not degenerate into
a dissemination of information approach but be strongly
channelled along dialogue lines, and I would strongly advise a
preliminary training course for all co-ordinators in the
necessary aims and techniques. (See Appendix 5 for an example.)
Consideration should also be given to inviting into the courses
particular groups of people who share a common experience of
environmental problems and who would be likely to act as a
cohesive activist group. This is preferable to an open
invitation to the "public" since the warning about "artificial
grouping" given by the Grupo de Educacion Popular (see Appendix
3) is very relevant here.

The existing Environment Centre library is very well
stocked and a valuable research resource. However, in terms of
environmental activism, further developments are necessary. At
present, most conventional libraries are based on a "research
model" of knowledge and usually have the following
characteristics:

        1) the learners already have reasonable print
information skills;
        2) they may often be pursuing an information
gathering exercise;
        3) they may sometimes be researching an abstract
area (i.e. not something which is part of their own concrete
reality);
        4) they may be often pursuing an assessable piece of
academic work rather than seeking knowledge for action.

On the other hand, the dialogue approach is based on a model
of problem posing and for this to be effective library resources
need to be organised around the following basis:

        1) Specific concrete environmental problems need to
be identified and cross indexed in a way that makes them
accessible to specific groups (e.g. rather than just
"pollution" an indexing which went "air pollution - inner
city areas - urban planning - public transport" etc.)

2) Positive options and alternatives should be collected and then incorporated alongside the material which defines the problem. This is a crucial requirement for avoiding the pessimism endemic to a pre-occupation with negative aspects of problems and it is also the basis for suggesting possible actions where people do not have to start from scratch. (To continue the example, it would be necessary to find concrete instances of public transport campaigns in various cities, of inner city resident action campaigns, of progressive air pollution controls, and so on).

4) Lists of resources and other material necessary to promote specific actions should be readily available (not simply an address to write a letter of protest to, etc.)

5) The form in which library resources are held needs to be examined. It should not be assumed that library users have highly developed print-information skills and more emphasis should be given to:
      a) building up a significant audio-visual collection;
      b) "translating" existing information into forms in which it is more accessible (particularly, along the problem-posing model);
      c) material should be available in a sufficiently flexible way that takes into account the constraints people face (e.g. childcare demands, shift work, etc.)

                        *   *   *

    Finally, it is important to realise the extent to which each of the activities outlined in these chapters are inter-related. It is not a question of picking one option from a list. Rather, we need to see that something like training activists could be:

      * a strategy which takes place within schools (for example, once students have begun mobilising around a particular issue);
   * something offered as a major course by the Environment Centre operating as a learning centre;
      * a major activity of the environmental educators when they work as an educational arm with community groups.

It should be clear by now that at the heart of the dialogue approach to education is the necessity to begin all educational activities at the point where the learners are at. This means promoting awareness of the problematic features of learners' environments, particularly in the areas of environmental destruction and social oppression. To make these features problematic, particularly for people who might normally take them for granted, requires a particular conceptual approach. The immediate environment of the learner should be located within a wider, structural setting and a set of ecological and social concepts employed to move beyond simple questioning into the area of constructive analysis. Ira Shor's expanding frames and the Social Literacy project are offered as examples of this kind of conceptual approach.

The dialogue approach is very much a "learner-centred" method of education but this should not be allowed to develop in a way which undermines the importance of rigorous conceptual development. This is particularly important because of the stress on education for action. I noted above that both willingness and capacity are the two main requirements for action and I suggested
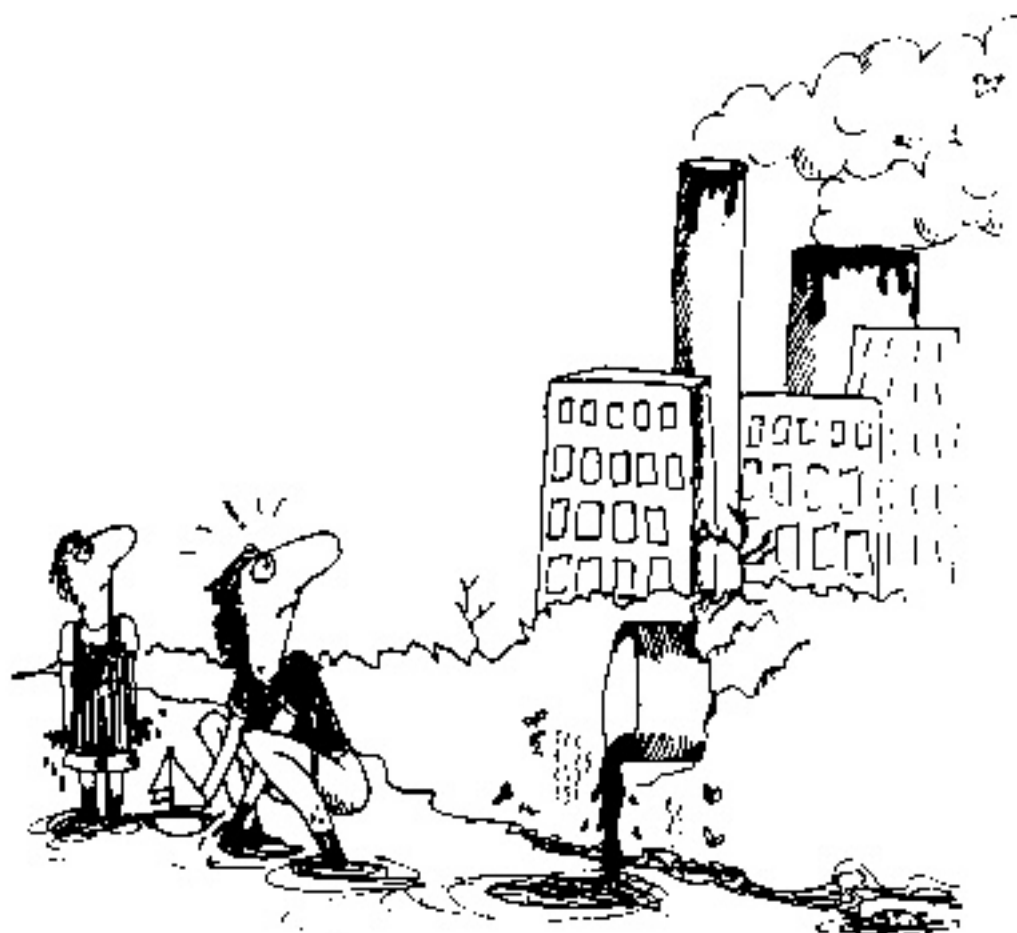
in Chapter Four how these might be fostered. Assuming action
gets underway, what is the guarantee that the best strategies are
being pursued? It is not enough to simply be critical of
existing social arrangements, to be able to envisage alternatives
and to feel highly motivated to engage in action. It is also
necessary to develop feasible alternatives! For this to occur it
is necessary that everyone develop a "scientific understanding"
(in the positive sense of the word [†]) of why things are the way
they are and what underlying mechanisms are at work. For
example, in confronting pollution it is not enough to keep
dealing with the symptoms by having clean-up campaigns. It is
crucial to intervene at the level of causes, to work out both the
chemical mechanisms and the social arrangements which produce the
toxic symptoms.

     Critical consciousness is a key step in challenging existing
social arrangements but it is only a first step. It must be
supplemented by scientific understanding so that the alternatives
being developed and promoted do not simply reproduce another set
of social and ecological problems. For example, soft energy
proposals must employ a knowledge of physical science,
engineering and sound ecological principles and not simply be
part of a gut-reaction against mainstream hard energy systems.

     It is for this reason that the emphasis on conceptual
development promoted in Chapter Three does not run counter to the
learner-centred stress of the dialogue approach. There is always
the danger that an emphasis on systematic conceptual development
can degenerate into teacher-centred lecturing and this
possibility must be constantly monitored. However, overreacting
against this danger by denying the significance of conceptual
development makes it likely that alternative proposals for action
stay anchored in the realms of Utopia, their long term
feasibility undermined by an unwillingness to scientifically
think through the real nature of existing problems.

NOTES

Chapter 1

[1] Alberto Melo, "Portugal's Experience of Reform Through Popular Initiative", in Convergence, An International Journal of Adult Education, Vol. XI, No. 1., 1978, p. 37.

[2] For more details on Paulo Freire see his works: Pedagogy of the Oppressed (Penguin, 1972), Cultural Action for Freedom (Penguin 1972) and Education: The Practice of Freedom (Writers and Readers, 1974), Pedagogy in Process (Seabury, New York, 1978). The last work mentioned is the most accessible for the general reader. A good introduction to Freire can be found in Bob Mackie, "Freire, Revolution, and Education" in Radical Education Dossier, No.2, March 1977.

[3] The Search Conference was a planning workshop to redefine the purpose and direction of the Environment Centre and was held in December 1984. The education collective held a workshop on the theme; "What environmental issues should form the basis for an education policy?" during April 1985 and the details of that workshop are to be found in Appendix B.

Chapter 2

[1] This example is taken from Hallgjerd Brattset, Adult Learning - the Study Circle as a Method, IACE Research Seminar, Kungalv, Sweden, 24-27 June, 1979, p.3.

[2] Ibid., pp.5-6.

[3] Tony Stewart (personal communication).

[4] This example is taken from Max Ogden, "Union Study Circles", in Australian Left Review, No. 84, Winter 1983.

[5] Ibid., p.3.

[6] This example is taken from Convergence, An International Journal of Adult Education, Vol. XI, No. 1., 1978.

[7] Ibid., p.56.

[8] Ibid., p.58.

[9] Augusto Boal, Theater of the Oppressed, Pluto Press, London, 1979.

[10] Ibid., p.155.

[11] Ibid., p.141.

Chapter 3

[1]   This example is taken from Ira Shor, Critical Teaching and
Everyday Life, South End Press, Boston, 1980.

[2]   Ibid., p.127.

[3]   Ibid., pp.164-5.

[4]   Social Literacy - a social education project, Chris Hughes,
Mary Kalantzis, Bill Cope, Maurice Leonhardt, 87 Clarendon Road,
Stanmore, NSW, 2048, Phone: (02) 569 1057.

Chapter 4

[1]   Shor, p.116.

[2]   Details of the CARE project can be found in the following:
booklet - Summary of work done by The Community Action Research
and Education Project (C.A.R.E.) at Magee University College,
Londonderry; Explanatory Booklet for Discussion Leaders for What
is Happening to Us; Tom Lovett and Michael O'Donnell, The
Community and the Media in Northern Ireland; Tom Lovett,
"Community Education and Local Radio", in Michaela Dungate et.
al., (eds), Collective Action, A Selection of Community Work Case
Studies, Published by the Community Projects Foundation and the
Association of Community Workers, London, 1979; Tom Lovett, Chris
Clarke and Avila Kilmurray, Adult Education and Community Action,
Croom Helm, London, 1983. (The last work mentioned is the most
easily available and best overall summary.)

[2]   "Summary of work done ...", p.6.

[3]   Lovett et. al. (1983), p.89.

[4]   Lovett (1979), p.59.

[6]   This example is taken from "Putting Victoria on the rails ..."
Julius Boe interviews John Alford, Australian Left Review, No. 81,
September 1982.

[7]   Ibid., p.29.

Chapter 6

[1]   The details of the Wreck Bay project can be found in Ann
Nugent, Final Report to the Schools Commission of the Jervis Bay
/ Wreck Bay Aboriginal School / Community Project, June 1980; and
Ann Nugent, "Reflections on the Jervis Bay / Wreck Bay
Experience" and Margaret Clark, "An Analysis of Inequality in the
Light of the Jervis Bay / Wreck Bay Innovations Project", both in
School and Community News, Volume 4, No. 2, August 1980, School
of Teacher Education, C.C.A.E., P.O. Box 1, Belconnen, A.C.T.,   2616.

[2] Nugent, "Reflections ...", p.38.

[3] Clark, "An analysis ...", p.26.

[4] Nugent, "Reflections ...", p.40.

[5] Tim Hardy, Lecturer in Education, School of Teacher Education, C.C.A.E. (Personal communication).

Chapter 7

[1] A good summary of Highlander's work can be found in Frank Adams, "Highlander Folk School: Getting Information, Going Back and Teaching It", in Harvard Educational Review, Vol. 42, No. 4, Nov. 1972. A review of the school is also found in Lovett et. al. (1983).

[2] From Lovett et. al. (1983), p.5.

[3] Ibid., p.75.

[4] Ibid., p.75.

[5] Ibid., p.116.

[6] Ibid., p.73.

[7] Ibid., p.73.

[8] Ibid., p.83.

[9] For more details see Bruce Abrams and Fred Emery, Video-Access Centres – An Evaluation, Centre for Continuing Education, ANU, Canberra, 1974.

Chapter 8

[1] The main book is simply titled Nunawading North Neighbourhood Centre and is available from the centre at 25 Mountainview Road, Nunawading, Victoria, 3131. Ph. (03) 878 7631.

[2] Ibid., p.60.

[3] And now it flows – release of learning, Nunawading North Neighbourhood Centre, 1979, p.9.

[4] Ibid., p.9.

[5] Michael Gloster, Barrie Brennan, Peter Grayson, Ben Hart, Community Based Continuing Education for Turbulent Times: Discovering a quiet revolution in Australian continuing education, Monograph, Canberra, July 1981, p.17.

[6] Ibid., p.29.

[7] Ibid., p.21.

Chapter 9

[1] Western science has been rightly attacked in recent years
for its role in the domination of nature and its strong links
with militarism and social oppression. At the same time our
understanding of how social and political values intrude into
every facet of scientific research has lead to considerable
scepticism towards the claims of scientists that their enterprise
produces objective knowledge. Nevertheless, in recent years a
philosophical position known as "realism" has made considerable
progress in recognising these issues yet still maintaining that a
"realist" scientific approach to social life is extremely
important if we are to understand how society works and how we
might move toward a more just and humane future. It is in this
sense of the word that I use "science" in the text and this
should not be seen as any kind of endorsement of "positivism"
(which is at the heart of western science's technocratic
structure). For more details of the "realist" position see:
R. Keat and J. Urry, Social Theory as Science, Routledge and
Kegan Paul, London, 1975; Ted Benton, Philosophical Foundations
of the Three Sociologies, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1977;
Roy Bhaskar, A Realist Theory of Science, Harvester, Hassocks,
1975; and Andrew Sayer, "Abstraction: A Realist Interpretation",
in Radical Philosophy, No 28, Summer 1981.