

## Pioneers of the ACT Government School System

- Barry Price

From 1913, the New South Wales (NSW) Department of Education administered government schools in the Australian Capital Territory (ACT). While the Commonwealth Government provided the buildings and eventually the preschools and their teachers, the NSW Department supplied the teachers and curriculum services for schools. Growing parent dissatisfaction with the NSW administration resulted in a public meeting in November 1966 at the Australian National University (ANU). A working party under Sir George Currie was formed to draft a proposal for an independent education authority for the ACT. The Currie Report<sup>1</sup> was the basis for continuing agitation for an expert inquiry into ACT education, with the ACT Education Working Group being prominent in the lobbying.

In October 1970, the Commonwealth Government decided to establish the Commonwealth Teaching Service but rejected the proposal for an education inquiry. Legislation for the Commonwealth Teaching Service was passed early in 1972. Professor W. Neal and Dr W. Radford investigated an appropriate organisation and salary structure for teachers in Northern Territory (NT) schools and their Report<sup>2</sup> had relevance for the emerging position in the ACT.

A Commonwealth Department of Education and Science proposal in 1970 for the building of secondary colleges in 1970 led to the formation of the Working Committee on College Proposals for the ACT, chaired by Dr Richard Campbell. The Campbell Report<sup>3</sup> was the basis for the restructuring of ACT secondary education in the mid-1970s into secondary colleges and high schools. It also provided a model of a partnership of parents, teachers and officials for the later Schools Authority.

On 18 July 1972, Malcolm Fraser, Minister for Education and Science, announced that the Commonwealth would assume responsibility for staffing ACT schools and introduce a statutory authority to administer ACT schools and preschools, with the form and timing to be decided by the Joint Parliamentary Committee on the ACT. In September 1972, he established the Liaison Committee as a discussion forum to prepare for the transition.

The advent of the Labor Government in December 1972 led in March 1973 to Kim Beazley, as Minister for Education, announcing that the Joint Parliamentary Committee inquiry would not proceed. Instead, his Department issued a discussion

---

<sup>1</sup> SIR GEORGE CURRIE (Chair): *An Independent Education Authority for the Australian Capital Territory: Report of a Working Party*, (Currie Report), ANU, 1967.

<sup>2</sup> W.D.NEAL & W.C.RADFORD: *Teachers for Commonwealth Schools*, (Neal/Radford Report), ACER, 1972.

<sup>3</sup> DR RICHARD CAMPBELL (Chair): *Secondary Education for Canberra: Report of the Working Committee on College Proposals for the Australian Capital Territory*, (Campbell Report), AGPS, Canberra, 1973.

paper<sup>4</sup> on an education authority and he appointed the Panel, chaired by Phillip Hughes, to analyse reactions and report 'on the most suitable form of education authority for the ACT'. The Hughes Report<sup>5</sup> provided the blueprint for what was to become the ACT Schools Authority.

The Interim ACT Schools Authority Council of ten members first met on 10 October 1973 to prepare for a new system of government schools and preschools to operate from the beginning of 1974. It was chaired by Phillip Hughes as a Ministerial nominee and included three parents, three teachers, an ACT Advisory Council representative and another Ministerial nominee, with Frank Smith soon replacing Brian Peck as Executive Officer. Dr Hedley Beare was appointed as the first Chief Education Officer at the beginning of 1975. The administrative contributions of Brian Peck and Terry O'Connell are related in separate articles.<sup>6</sup> The Interim Authority administered the system until the end of 1976. The NSW Department progressively withdrew its services. With the passing of the Schools Authority Ordinance 1976, the ACT Schools Authority came into operation at the beginning of 1977 and held its first meeting on 21 January 1977. It included the Chief Education Officer as a full-time member and fourteen part-time members, six nominated by the Minister, two by the ACT Council of Parents and Citizens Association, one by the Canberra Preschool Society, three by the ACT Teachers' Federation and two by the ACT Legislative Assembly.

Four people prominent in the movement to establish the separate school system were interviewed by the author in 2005.<sup>7</sup> Catherine Blakers wrote an account to replace the interview transcript. The other three accepted, with minor amendments, abridged versions of the transcripts. Catherine Blakers, as a parent, was involved from 1966 and was a member of the Interim Authority from 1973 to 1976. Phillip Hughes was the first Head of the School of Teacher Education in the Canberra College of Advanced Education. He chaired the Panel which produced the Hughes Report and then chaired the Interim Authority from 1973 to 1976 and the Schools Authority during 1977. Richard Campbell chaired the Committee which recommended the restructuring of secondary education in the ACT. He was a member of the Schools Authority from 1977 and its Chair from mid-1979 to mid-1985. Milton (Mick) March, a teacher in Canberra from 1960, was involved in the formation of the Commonwealth Teachers' Federation (which became the ACT Teachers' Federation) and was one of its nominees on the Interim Authority from 1973 to 1976 and the Authority during 1977. A member of the Campbell Committee, he was prominent in the establishment of the secondary college system.

---

<sup>4</sup> DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION: *An Education Authority for the ACT: A Departmental paper*, Canberra, March 1973.

<sup>5</sup> PHILLIP HUGHES (Chair): *A design for the governance and organisation of education in the Australian Capital Territory*, (Hughes Report). AGPS, Canberra, 1973.

<sup>6</sup> BARRY PRICE: 'Mr ACT Education - Terence John O'Connell - (1916-1977)' in *Canberra Historical Journal*, No. 39, March 1997.

BARRY PRICE: 'Planning a New School System: The Role of Brian Peck' in *Canberra Historical Journal*, No. 53, March 2004.

<sup>7</sup> Interviews of 18 May 2005 (Phillip Hughes), 6 June 2005 (Cath Blakers), 24 June 2005 (Mick March) and 19 July 2005 (Richard Campbell).

## Catherine Blakers

I became interested in ACT education in the early 1960s when we first settled in Canberra and my four children began to attend schools and I began to realise some of the deficiencies of the school system – not just in the ACT but in fact throughout Australia. Clearly, in the post-war years, the quality of schooling had been badly undermined by insufficient resources to cope with increasing population, students staying on longer in schooling, scarcity of fully qualified teachers, crowded classrooms and, in many States, ageing buildings and temporary classrooms. We knew that the NSW Department of Education was responsible for the education in ACT schools, while the Commonwealth Government (which was responsible for the governance of the ACT) provided the school buildings.

One of the interesting things immediately was the wide gap between the quality of the bricks and mortar of the schools and the kind of education provided within the schools. The ACT education system was strictly controlled by the NSW Education Department which seemed at the time to be the archetype of Australian patterns of education administration – large, highly centralised, impersonal, rigid in its administration by formula and secretive in its fear of challenge and criticism. I remember that it even used to count the number of column inches of favourable press comment contrasted with the inches of critical comment. In 1966 also, the NSW Department with a new Director-General was continuing its own minor revolution, trying to introduce the Wyndham Scheme which demanded not only highly qualified teachers – especially in science and mathematics – but also added a year to secondary schooling. A well-intentioned attempt to meet the needs of a wide range of students, without the range of resources essential for success. The results could only be described as chaotic. These were the circumstances in which **parents in Canberra** began to develop a close interest in their own schools.

At the same time Canberra itself was changing rapidly as the Commonwealth Government pursued its intention to make the city the centre of its administration as well as of its legislative affairs. The population had doubled to 96 000 by 1966 as people came in from all parts of Australia, and settled in the rapidly-building suburbs defined by the National Capital Development Commission (NCDC). Campbell was typical: new houses going up, new people settling in, new gardens being made – and children everywhere. It became a community very quickly and the schools became a focus of attention.

By this time, **education deficiencies** had become a running issue in Australian newspapers, and not least in Canberra. Then, in order to stretch its supply of teachers, the NSW Department began to rigidly enforce the rule that a primary school needed a designated minimum enrolment to qualify for a non-teaching principal. **Campbell Primary School** was just under the required minimum and the Principal was now required to teach full time in addition to his administrative duties – which in a new school and a new suburb and a continuing stream of new settlers – were enough to keep him busy all day in his office. The decision was announced to an unusually large and very silent Parents & Citizens Association (P & C) meeting. Parents were not slow to grasp the implication that whichever class the Principal was responsible

for would be without a teacher or farmed out to other classes for a considerable portion of each week.

The **Campbell P & C Association** took immediate action, writing letters of protest to Doug Anthony (then Minister for the Interior including education). His reply was sympathetic, but pointed out that he had no power to intervene. Replies from Charles Cutler, NSW Minister for Education, were dismissive. And in June 1966, primary class sizes were raised to forty. It became clear to Campbell parents that we might have to engage in a more public, more sustained and more highly organised campaign to draw attention to the problems of Campbell Primary and to attract support from other schools with similar problems. The President of the Campbell P & C, John Aitken, called a special general meeting to discuss the possibility of a campaign and the forms it might take.

This meeting was very, very well attended. The serious questions arising were debated and explored, and finally a motion was carried that the P & C should involve itself in wider education issues as a means of improving conditions at the school. A **sub-committee** of three was appointed to work with the President. They were: Lois Perry (Executive of the P & C), John Olroyd (P & C delegate to the Combined Council of P & C Associations) and myself as parent.

It was realised from the beginning that **the campaign** was likely to be long and perhaps arouse antagonism in many quarters. The sub-committee – and indeed all the parents who became involved – therefore consciously set out to be and seen to be accurate in facts and reasonable in tone and style. It was seen as essential also that cooperation and goodwill should be gained as far as possible from administrators, teachers and other parents with whom contacts and relationships would develop. Several causes of action were planned and pursued:

- establishing contacts with the Education Section of the Department of the Interior, the Teachers' Federation and the ACT Council of P & C Associations;
- organising a campaign of letters to *The Canberra Times* from a wide variety of people and groups;
- continuing the pressure of letters and deputations from the P & C Association to the Minister, the Education Section of the Department of Interior and the NSW Inspectorate based in Canberra;
- exploring the possibilities of a campaign for an independent education authority in the ACT.

It seemed essential that we try to interest *The Canberra Times* in what we knew would be a fairly long and trying campaign. The paper had already shown an interest in the issues of education, and we hoped for a sympathetic hearing. I went to see John Allan, the Editor, and found him not only sympathetic but also extremely cooperative and personally interested in the issues we were raising. He agreed to print the **letters to the editor** which were being organised (and would be ongoing) from various parts of Canberra and from groups of parents as well as individuals.

Other **contacts**, formal and informal, were made. The Secretary of the Department of the Interior, Richard Kingsland, gave a sympathetic response to the possibility that the Commonwealth Government might fund extra casual teachers to meet needs (as it did

relief teachers) if NSW agreed. Cutler rejected the need and the proposal and implied equivalent withdrawal of permanent staff if it went ahead.

The question of a campaign for an education system for the ACT independent of NSW now needed to be faced. Dr John Burns suggested approaching Lascelles Wilson (Department of Adult Education at the ANU) with a proposal for a public meeting on an independent education authority for the ACT. Wilson was encouraging and agreed to contact relevant organisations and to approach **Sir George Currie**, who was now living in Canberra and who might be interested. A subsequent meeting of the representative organisations agreed that a **public seminar** on 'An Independent Education Authority for the ACT' should be arranged and that Currie should be asked to chair it. *The Canberra Times* of 5 November carried an announcement of the seminar and Sir George's agreement to chair it. Planning for the seminar proceeded with close consultation between the Campbell Sub-Committee and Wilson, and with the informal and none the less active interest of Kingsland. The lively discussion of issues, difficulties and possibilities resulted in an agreement to set up a representative Working Party, chaired by Currie, to investigate the need for and feasibility of an independent education authority for the ACT.

Sir George's acceptance of the position of Chairman of the **Working Party** was of fundamental importance to the seriousness with which the subsequent report and the continuing campaign were accepted during the following years. He brought with him not only his reputation, but the stimulus of his ideas, experience and leadership and a continuing interest in ACT education.

There were twenty-two members of the Working Party, representing various parent and teacher organisations as well as some members of the Currie Committee and some interested individuals. It says much for the virtues of frank and wide-ranging discussion under the guidance of a wise and experienced Chairman that such a diverse group could eventually come to an agreement in principle – and even on some matters of substance – and produce a report which all members were happy to sign. The aim of the **Report**, which was released in December 1967, was to make a minimum of firm recommendations and to indicate further issues for more detailed and public discussion. Among the latter were crucial questions of parent and teacher roles in education decision-making and of how far schools in a public system of education could be independent in matters concerning their particular school.

The Report aroused wide interest and not only in Canberra. Newspaper comments ranged from approbation to cautious approval to outright condemnation. Political reactions were more cautious still. Senator John Gorton, Minister for a newly established Commonwealth Department of Education and Science, developed a response which was to become very familiar in the next few years: that a separate system of education for the ACT was 'almost inevitable' but not just yet. However, the ACT Council of P & C Organisations, headed by John Riddell as President, formally accepted and supported the Report.

With the intention of maintaining interest in the education issues already aroused, a **follow-up seminar** was planned for March 1968 as a public presentation and discussion of the Report. In his response to this seminar (reported in the *The Canberra Times*), the new Minister for Education and Science, Malcolm Fraser,

stated that while ‘ he was opposed to any immediate move for an independent education authority for the ACT’, he hoped that ‘ in the long-term education in the Territories – particularly the ACT – could be developed as a model for the States’. In June , the ACT Teachers’ Association, despite the disapproval of the NSW Teachers’ Federation, approved the report in principle and set up a special sub-committee to give it further consideration. The Report was also formally accepted by the Advisory Council of the ACT.

Where to next? **Articles** in *The Canberra Times* by members of the Working Party kept the issues alive from time to time, but more was needed. Some sage advice from a senior officer of the Department of Education and Science pointed the way. The next stage must be to go out and change public opinion. So began the long five-year haul to October 1973 – a period of doldrums and frustrations interspersed with intense activity and some exciting moments of real achievement.

In May 1968, a letter was written to the Secretary of the **ACT Council of P & C Associations** suggesting that the Council might consider taking up the issue of an Independent Education Authority for the ACT as a major project for the year. Discussions with the President, John Riddell, followed immediately and it was decided as a beginning to make panels of speakers available to P & C Associations to discuss issues involved in establishing an ACT system of education. It was felt that to try to achieve consensus for an independent authority itself could simply polarise opinion for and against, with the majority playing safe with the known and the established. The end purpose of the campaign therefore became the setting up of a public, expert and wide-ranging inquiry into a separate system of education for the ACT. This became an issue which could be supported without commitment by all who were dissatisfied with the system as it was, but were not themselves prepared to decide whether a separate system was required and, if so, what form it should take.

The **panels of speakers**, consisting of P & C members and four members of the Currie Working Party, operated through the bleak (and I can vouch for that) months of late winter and cold spring, accepting invitations to speak at P & C meetings throughout Canberra. The meetings varied from well-filled halls to groups of five or six stalwarts in new school areas shivering in their as yet unheated buildings. Receptions also varied from the sympathetic to the hostile; but by the end of the year the ideas were becoming familiar, if not yet accepted, and discussions were perceptibly changing from *Why?* to *When?* and *How?*

Apart from the plodding heroism of the panels, there were other reasons for change. A new College of Advanced Education was planned for Canberra which could include a School of Teacher Education. Then there was the rapidly worsening school situation in 1968, just after the first year of the full six-year Wyndham Scheme. Perhaps most important of all was the space given by *The Canberra Times* to education; reports, letters, articles and editorials. Because of this, education issues were able to achieve their own momentum, continuing with undiminished vigour into 1969.

The ACT Council of P & C Associations accordingly arranged a **public seminar in June 1969** to discuss again the question of a separate education system for the ACT. It drew a large meeting which carried resolutions urging the Minister for Education

and Science to set up without delay an inquiry into the form of an independent ACT education authority, the educational philosophy on which it should operate and the administrative arrangements which would be required. The resolutions were conveyed to Fraser in a letter from Riddell and subsequently by a small deputation. While not accepting the resolutions, the Minister noted the extent of the public response and went on to say that he was asking his Department to investigate and advise him on the problems of the present system. However, by November, Fraser had become Minister for Defence and Nigel Bowen Minister for Education and Science.

It was in the doldrums at the end of 1969 that the **ACT Education Working Group** came into being, without inauguration or formal intent. It was a small group of people drawn together by a common interest in achieving better standards of education in the ACT. The nucleus of the Group had been members of the Currie Working Party who had maintained contact with each other. These were joined after the P & C Seminar by other parents and teachers to make an informal group which operated without agenda, minutes or finance; which met irregularly when required, and which discussed courses of action in broad terms – but left it to individual members or small groups to pursue projects as determined by their available time and particular capability. But any member could be assured of support from others when it was needed. Through its members, the Group had close contact with the P & C Council, with teacher organisations and with other bodies such as the Mathematics Association and the Science Association (an informal group which tried to fill some of the gaps in science education in the ACT resulting from the inadequacies of the Wyndham Scheme). It could also, when necessary, arrange informal meetings with political parties or departmental officers. Though it designed (through one of its members) simple but impressive letterhead paper which could be used by members as required, it did not act nor sign letters as a group except in the later stages when making formal submissions. Yet it did, somewhat to its own surprise, establish itself as a group to be taken seriously, and, in the latter stages of the campaign, came to be accepted as an informal coordinating group for various other bodies interested in education.

My own main contribution as a member of the group was to ask Allan whether *The Canberra Times* would be interested in publishing a **series of monthly articles** on education which I undertook to arrange through 1970. The series was intended to provide articles contributed by persons in the ACT and other parts of Australia, chosen for their experience in education and their ability to contribute to the discussion of issues. He accepted with interest, and so began *The Canberra Times* 'Education Series' which in 1971 was formalised as an 'Occasional Series' and which continued into the 1980s under later editors. In addition, *The Canberra Times* through 1970-1973 continued to increase the space given to letters, interviews and statements on education reflecting the deteriorating situation in school staffing.

The year 1970 was one of frustration despite continued efforts to persuade the politicians to set up **an inquiry**. Sir George Currie wrote to Minister Bowen, who also received deputations and written proposals. Various members of the Group, individually and in small groups, had discussions with Sir Hugh Ennor, then Secretary of the Department of Education and Science, and with senior officers of the Department. It came to be known that the Department had recommended to the

Minister that an inquiry should be set up. But in October, Bowen announced the establishment of a Commonwealth Teaching Service (made necessary by the withdrawal by South Australia from responsibility for Northern Territory staffing); and a decision against an education inquiry in the ACT 'for the present'. Instead he offered 'an advisory body through which the Canberra community could formulate and express its ideas'. This was met with wide public indignation and a meeting of protest titled 'ACT Education – What Now?'. The response filled the Albert Hall to overflowing and left no doubt of the strength of community support.

The ghost of an advisory body hovered around in different guises until March 1971 when Bowen was replaced by David Fairbairn as Minister, and the cycle began again – with Fairbairn's decision not to hold an inquiry 'for the present' and his question: 'Has there been a general demand for a separate authority in the ACT?'. In November 1971, Fraser had been welcomed back as Minister for Education and Science with petitions organised by the P & C Council calling for an independent education authority, as well as public demands from a variety of groups in the ACT including the Catholic Parents Reform Group and the Australian College of Education.

The ACT Education Working Group followed up a substantial submission to the Senate Inquiry into Teacher Education with an even more detailed **submission to Fraser** on 'The Commonwealth Role in Australian Education' and on proposals for the establishment of an education authority in the ACT. The submission was discussed with Fraser by members of the Group in February 1972, producing a feeling of optimism and another of caution based on previous experience and concern that separation should not come too precipitately or without proper preparation. Nevertheless, the interview with Fraser had been encouraging; the community, through the College Proposals Working Party, was effectively involved in planning new secondary colleges; an inquiry was under way into the form of the Commonwealth Teaching Service, and discussions were known to be taking place between the Commonwealth and NSW Governments. About this time I was called to an informal meeting with Sir Henry Bland whom I had known for some time when he was Secretary of the Department of Defence. He had apparently been asked by Fraser to conduct an unpublicised personal inquiry to gauge the real strength of support for an ACT education authority. While himself disapproving of the campaign and its objectives, he had apparently come to the conclusion that things had already gone too far to retreat. In July 1972, Fraser announced: that a **statutory authority** to administer government schools would be established; that the Joint Parliamentary Committee on the ACT would hold an inquiry to decide the form and timing of the authority; that the ACT would become responsible for its own education from the beginning of 1974. These decisions obviously left much to be desired. The Parliamentary Committee was unlikely to be expert or even particularly familiar with trends in education; the separation had to be accomplished in less than eighteen months and almost inevitably the early establishment of the system would be managed by the Department of Education and Science until the Authority could be set up. Furthermore, as the weeks went by without further action, it became quite clear to all concerned that the Parliamentary Inquiry would be a long process and unlikely even to start until 1973 after the election. The resulting protests prompted Fraser to set up a representative **Liaison Committee** 'to act as a central point for discussions, consultations and the supply of information'.



The election towards the end of 1972 made further ministerial changes almost inevitable whichever party gained government. In the light of this, the ACT Education Working Group set up a sub-committee to prepare a submission for the new Minister whoever he might be. It stated that in the seven years of community discussion and consideration of a system of education for the ACT a general consensus of opinion had been reached on the type of authority and system which should be tried in the ACT. Given the rapid changes already affecting education in the ACT, the immediate establishment of the Authority without further inquiries and delays had now become essential.

This brief two-page submission, accompanied by the detailed submission previously presented to Fraser, was on the desk of the new Minister, Kim **Beasley**, the morning after the election results were known. Beasley replied on 31 January that he was examining the question and had read the submission with interest. Further meetings of the Liaison Committee led to the **decision to establish an Interim Authority** to manage the separation from NSW and prepare the way for the legal establishment of the permanent Authority. There followed a Departmental Discussion Paper; the appointment in March of the Hughes Panel of Inquiry, and in May the Hughes Report. With its final submission to the Hughes Panel, the ACT Education Working Group dissolved itself as unceremoniously as it had begun.

After still more delays, the ten members of the **Interim Authority** finally met for the first time on 10 October 1973, with less than three months to prepare before the ACT became responsible for its own system of education. At its first meeting, the Interim Authority was confronted with a long list of activities which should be undertaken urgently and simultaneously. Nevertheless, it was considered of fundamental importance that the nature of the Authority and the principles which should guide its direction and management be made explicit as a basis for decision-making. Because I had been involved in discussions from the beginning, I was asked to put together a paper on the fundamental principles and characteristics which had emerged and gained consensus through all the years of meetings and discussion. This, considered and confirmed by the Interim Authority, resulted in *The Guiding Principles and Aims of the ACT Schools Authority*, which was circulated to all schools in November 1973 as *Information Statement No 1*, and published in *The Canberra Times* Education Series with an introduction by the Chairman of the Interim Authority, Phillip Hughes. It was statement of faith, hope and intention – an embodiment of the principles expressed in the Currie Report, the Neal-Radford Report on the teaching service, the Campbell Report on secondary colleges, and the Hughes Report; a yardstick by which future outcomes might be measured.

### **Phillip Hughes**

I came to Canberra in 1970 and had a year on my own at the Canberra College of Advanced Education, to plan for the first teacher education process in Canberra. I made a point of talking to the schools and, in particular, talking to the Teachers' Federation about what sort of conditions would operate.

I attended some of the **ACT Education Working Group** meetings and they used me as a reference point. The influential people in the Group that I remember were Cath Blakers, Kath Abbott, Hugh Waring, Tony Ketley and Alan Barnard.

The formation of the **Commonwealth Teaching Service** (CTS) impacted on the School of Education because we were given the brief of drawing up the conditions for entry. I remember the influence and work of Jock Weeden in particular in those early days. We travelled to the Northern Territory and then to the schools in Canberra, talking to people. So I was very much involved with the initial planning of the Teaching Service. We had to prepare teachers for the ACT but the CTS altered our situation. We saw ourselves as having a wider role. We trained most of the initial teachers for the Northern Territory and quite a few teachers for the States. I had a lot of contact with both the ACT and the NSW school systems. The NSW Department controlled the curriculum and the staff. They were very tough. I remember some interesting sessions with some of their Teachers' Federation people including one of the Federation secretaries who said you had to be very well qualified to get into teaching. I said: 'What if you had Shakespeare come to teach English?' and he replied: 'Not if he didn't have a diploma of education'.

I wrote a brief for the Committee on College Proposals, about the Tasmanian colleges which I'd had a lot to do with. Committee members subsequently went down there and the visit influenced what they finally adopted. They were quite impressed. The **Campbell Report** made a major break at the Year 10 level. It didn't impact much on the rest of the system except that in the longer term it developed earlier patterns of leadership for students in Year 10.

I wasn't part of the **Liaison Committee** of 1972-3 but I met with them on a number of occasions. They asked me to talk to them about what new patterns might look like. I had quite a lot of contact with individual schools. In the early years of the School of Education, there was a very strong emphasis on practice teaching; every lecturer had to go out to see the student teachers.

Early in 1973, I was asked by the Minister of Education to chair a **committee 'on the most suitable form of education authority for the ACT'** and was asked who should be on it. So we invited Professor Bill Walker from the University of New England at Armidale and David Hunt from the Tasmanian Teachers' Federation. Ken Fry was a local representative and he was a good sounding board. The others were very active as members. We visited New Zealand because their system had been giving more authority to individual schools. We were impressed with the operation of the school boards in New Zealand. That was a confirming reason why we went for school boards in every school. We also received quite a bit of information from overseas; while away for a year, I had talked about patterns of administration. The interesting thing was the very lively interest of the people in the schools. The very strong and continuous links with parents were crucial. They showed a community which was very strongly committed to education and played a very large part in the pattern we finally came to.

We took on board the **Department of Education paper**, *An Education Authority for the A.C.T.*, but it didn't seem to us to cover a lot of the issues. It was a fairly constricted paper. I don't think it was written with much vision. Some of the

informal groups in the ACT, like the ACT Education Working Group, had a much broader concept in their minds. Teachers and parents played a very big part. We had evidence that came in written form and from talking to people and that gave us a broader insight than the official paper. The Commonwealth Minister, Kim Beazley, wasn't particularly pleased with it. He had a genuine personal interest in what we were doing and had a lot of contact with us. He was a person of great vision and integrity and helped very much in the early stages.

The main principle of our **Report, *A design for the governance and organisation of education in the Australian Capital Territory***, was to put as much authority as we could at the school level, while ensuring that the school was wider than just the teachers at the school, that the school did actually meet with its community and that the community played an active part in the school itself. We were thinking, both from the English pattern of schools and American and New Zealand school boards, that if you really have a community that is so strongly committed to education that was a good way to go ahead. The biggest problem when you don't succeed in education is the fact that the homes have little contact with the schools, are unaware of schools and don't get involved. The Currie Report of 1967 was certainly one of the significant influences on the Report. Indirectly, it was a response from New Zealand because he came from there and his contacts were there.

**Bill Walker** was a professor in a different vein to most professors of education at that time in that he had completed the course in educational administration in Illinois and kept a very close contact with schools and teachers. When he came back, he put that into practice at Armidale. He was interested in education as a practical issue; it wasn't a theoretical thing. He was quite concerned with the ways schools interrelated with the central authority and with what authority there was at the school level and so he played quite a significant part. He was certainly impressed by the idea to give as much authority as you could at the school level and give them the responsibility to carry it.

We looked at the many **submissions to the Committee** very carefully and they were of a very high quality. The thing that was impressive was the degree of consistency. There were a few alternative viewpoints but not many. Most of them were pressing very much on the same lines.

The **non-government schools and the Canberra Technical College** indicated their unwillingness to be part of the education authority. I certainly saw them as part of it. We pressed hard for that but Paul McKeown, for example, objected and they would not have gone along with it. Similarly with the technical colleges, some Principals saw technical education in a very limited frame and wanted a very independent technical college. I still think that was a pity. We do need good connections between technical and secondary education. We still don't have it.

The **short-term task of the Interim ACT Schools Authority** was to draw up a cycle for the future and to get a clear idea of the shape of the system. It's quite a small system really and did not need a massive structure.

**Staffing** was an interesting issue for the Interim Authority because I felt then and I still feel that a school should select its own staff. That would have been the decision

except that the Federation wouldn't buy it at all and threatened industrial action. It is inconsistent to say to a school: 'You've got responsibility for your curriculum but you can't select your own staff'. Schools did need to have the capacity to pick their own staff and decide those sorts of things and be given an envelope of money and spend it in a flexible way.

Otherwise, **school boards** went very much as we had expected. We saw them as important. I think the place of school boards has diminished and people have less involvement than they did at the beginning. As a starting point, there was quite a bit of competition to get on school boards. Now they have trouble filling some of the positions.

The **restructuring of secondary education** overall had quite a positive impact. I worried as to whether the high schools would see themselves as diminished, not just in numbers but in standing. But, in fact, after a little while that seemed to operate well and Year 10 students took on a different stature. There were quite a few different issues about assessment at the end of Year 12. We were trying to get a system which would give schools a good deal of flexibility but still deliver a score which was acceptable, not only in Canberra but outside Canberra, because so many Canberra students went to Sydney and Melbourne to university. We had to develop a framework that would be acceptable in all those areas and I think in the end we did. Again, Canberra Boys' Grammar was a problem with a separate operation.

I'm not sure we got the balance right on the issue of **curriculum**, in what the school does and in what the centre does. A lot of the things they are doing now I think we could have done back then to give a framework on which to build a curriculum. It is ludicrous to have so many different patterns. Students not only go everywhere in Australia but all around the world and you've got to have a pattern of curriculum which holds up in that framework. I'm more and more inclined to have a fairly clear framework which still gives schools a good deal of leeway. A good teacher can make all sorts of options within a framework.

I was fairly unenthusiastic about the establishment of the **School Without Walls** (SWOW). The benefit was that it gave adolescents who were totally unwilling to cooperate in normal schools a chance to go to school in conditions where they could cope. But a lot of students who went through that pattern found it difficult to settle to anything later either. Maybe it was helpful to other schools but not a good situation for SWOW students. The French-Australian School at Red Hill was quite an interesting initiative as long as people could move in or out of it. Some of my grandchildren went through and it worked well for them. Having some schools with particular interests and particular strengths is a good thing.

Within the **Interim Authority Council**, Mick March had a good deal of influence in the discussions. The other Teachers' Federation people were Margaret Dempster and Max Badham. Cath Blakers and Kath Abbott were also quite influential; they'd been committed to it for a some time and were fairly strong in their ideas. We had some good arguments with them. Terry O'Connell, as an officer, had a lot to do with it. All very good people. There was not much tension there. There was a big to-do over one small issue, whether Easter Tuesday was or was not a holiday. There was great fuss

about that. We increased the number of holidays a year but they didn't want to lose Easter Tuesday.

**Frank Smith**, as Executive Officer, and **Brian Peck** were both very easy people to work with during 1974. They didn't play a very hands-on role. Brian wasn't so much an initiator as someone who was good at putting things in process. It was different when **Hedley Beare** came in 1975, as Chief Education Officer, because he had quite strong educational ideas. I happened to agree with most of them so it was a fairly easy relationship. He played a much stronger leadership role naturally than Frank or Brian. There were never any tensions in those situations.

The Interim Authority had quite a bit to say about **the legislation for the Schools Authority**, talking to the people involved in the drafting. **Relations with Commonwealth Ministers** were very good most of the time. All the time with Kim Beazley. He was a remarkable man with clear ideas of his own but ones he was prepared to discuss and reach agreement about. John Carrick was also very interested and had his own ideas. Occasionally things became a bit frosty with John Carrick as he became very irritated if I made any public critical comment. I came out once in the papers on what I saw as the necessary level of finance for the ACT. He didn't like public criticism. *The Canberra Times* was very positive about education, was very supportive all the way through and gave publicity. The Federation was mostly positive. The relationships overall were pretty good.

A major **achievement of the Interim Authority** was to get a system with a different outlook to the State systems. It wasn't so tightly bound and people felt they had a bigger stake in it. That was partly a matter of size but it was also very much a matter of philosophy. Teachers and parents had really strong ideas about education. The main innovation in the context of Australian education was the role of school boards and their place in curriculum. We also put in place a system of assessment at the end of secondary school which was not dominated by external exams. Individual schools had the capacity to develop different strengths as long as there was a common framework. In particular, the role of teachers was enhanced so that they had a genuinely professional role. We also profited from not having school inspectors. I don't think they were necessary in the ACT system because senior officers in the central office had a fair idea of what was happening.

I was Chairman of the Interim Authority and in the first year of the Schools Authority, 1977. After that, I kept a link with Hedley Beare and with later Chairs of the Authority. I had quite a lot to do with them up until 1980 when I went to Tasmania. I was brought back from Tasmania later to look at the size of schools and we recommended a pattern for school closures but it turned out to be a totally abortive exercise.

### **Richard Campbell**

I was first involved in ACT government school education as a father. My family had settled in Cook and went to Cook Primary School at the start of the 1970 school year. My then wife and I decided that I should be involved in the **Parents & Citizens**

**Association.** She would be involved in the daytime school activities. So I went along to the local Cook P&C. The school was pretty new and was struggling. Someone active in the Cook P&C had friends at North Curtin, where I'd been a bit involved. So when I showed up, they grabbed me and put me on the committee of the local P&C. Then pretty rapidly from there, I was appointed to the ACT Council of P&Cs. My serious involvement in the ACT education system just took off from there. I wrote letters to the editor and was generally engaged in the activities of the Council of P&Cs. I didn't do a great deal in the movement for the ACT education authority beyond that.

The Commonwealth Department of Education had released the **discussion paper on secondary education proposals** and had convened a meeting of people to talk about it in what was then the Old Canberra High School. I think it was John Riddell, the then Chair of the Council of P&Cs, who said: 'Look, we ought to get a committee to look at this carefully'. The little group of parent delegates who were at this discussion agreed and so we proposed that. The Department accepted this suggestion, and soon after I went along as one of three people representing the ACT Council of P&Cs for an evening to talk about setting up a committee. In fact, because I thought that was the purpose of this meeting, I didn't fuss about the fact that I was a bit late.

When I arrived, to my surprise, I found it was the first meeting *of* the committee. The room was full. There was only one vacant chair and it was at the head of the table. I quickly surveyed the scene, marched up, picked up the chair, moved it to the side and sat in it and found they'd already launched into the question as to who should chair this committee. Some of the principals were nominating Bob Breen who was the NSW inspector for the region. The other two parent representatives at that meeting, Hugh Waring and Ken Townley, both thought this wasn't a very good idea. After those two had quietly discussed between themselves how to respond, I vividly remember Hugh digging me in the ribs with his elbow and saying: 'Will you do it?' I said: 'I suppose so'. So he nominated me and was supported by Neil Edwards of the Commonwealth Department. About half an hour later, I found myself moving my chair back to the head of the table.

I believe that the Commonwealth Department saw this committee just as a kind of exercise in repressive tolerance, since it was not established in anything like the way proper committees of inquiry normally are. I believe that they envisaged it as a soft soap public relations committee that would simply endorse what they had proposed. But, as I put my chair down, the thought that flashed across my mind was: 'Whatever this committee says, it will be known as the Campbell Report, so it'd better be good'. So there and then, I decided to turn it into a full-scale inquiry.

Initially, we had the Commonwealth discussion paper. I think there were **preliminary submissions** from the Teachers' Federation and from the Council of the P&Cs. The first few meetings were devoted to kicking this idea around and discussing how we should best proceed in dealing with it. An early question was how were we to solicit the views of the various interest groups. We decided to issue a general call for submissions, which, of course, generated a discussion about the way in which that call should be framed.

Very soon after this, I realised that I would be in a difficult position as a nominee of the Council of P&Cs but chair of a participatory kind of committee. So I said to John Riddell that I thought I ought to detach myself from the Council of P&Cs. That way John joined the committee as another nominee of the parent group, and I then became a moderating chairman who was not officially aligned to one side. There was also the view that we ought to have somebody from the technical education area on the committee, so we asked for a nominee to come from there. That way, yet another member, Bruce Davy, was added.

The decision to call for submissions in turn led to the question of how to consult students. I decided that the only way to do that would be to see if we could commission a proper **survey of student views**. So I went to see Don Anderson and David Beswick, who were then working in an education research unit within the Research School of Social Sciences at ANU, to ask them whether they could help out. They leapt at the idea because it gave them an opportunity to survey the attitude of secondary school students to their schooling. So I said: 'Well, let's do that'. This led, however, to the only serious difficulty I encountered within the committee. When the wording of the proposed questionnaire became known, John Riddell became very upset because the questionnaire had questions asking for estimates of parental income and the usual kind of sociological background details. My judgment was that such questions just had to be asked. Fortunately, John did not create too much of a ruckus about this issue but that disagreement did put a bit of distance between him and myself, and made it easier for me to become more independent from the parental group.

The **results of the survey** were startling. I was still, of course, lecturing at ANU, so Don Anderson rang me up there one day and said: 'Listen, we've just finished processing the results of the survey; I think you'd better come up and talk about them'. So I went up to do so with him and David. Their view was that the survey had revealed so much hostility amongst the students towards their schooling that he thought the Minister needed to be briefed, in case it became a political issue that would be embarrassing to Government in a way that wouldn't do our cause any good. So we set up a **meeting with Malcolm Fraser**. At the beginning and end of that meeting, he pretended to have no interest in this issue but in between he was in fact very keenly interested. I think the indifference was for the record, as it were. The other interesting outcome of the survey was that Don said to me that of all of the then six-year Wyndham high schools, there were four that were more alienated than the rest. I said: 'Would that be A, B, C and D?' and he said: 'Spot on, how did you guess them?' I said 'I picked the principals'. The strength of the adolescents' opposition to the *status quo* was so strong that all the hesitations and negativity to the idea, particularly from the principals, some of the teachers and the inspectors were completely cut out from underneath them. It was clear something radical had to be done. I think that was the decisive moment.

Don and David then said they ought to do a follow-up to get a **comparison with Sydney and Tasmania**. The NSW Department did not want to know about such a survey but eventually the researchers wangled their way into two high schools in Sydney, a small sample but one that sociologically would be a fairly reasonable match to the kind of socio-economic background manifest in Canberra. In contrast, the Tasmanian Department of Education, which already had a matriculation college

system, welcomed such a survey, and the researchers also ran a small survey in Gippsland because Tasmania was a bit more rural in character than Canberra and so they wanted to see whether any differences could be attributed to its being more rural, rather than its having had a college split. So Anderson and Beswick constructed a second round survey of that kind. This clearly reinforced the conclusion that it was the NSW Department and the way NSW schools operated that was the major source of alienation. The two Sydney schools showed up like the Canberra ones did, but Tasmanian students showed a difference in attitude that could not merely be attributed to their being more rural; the college made a significant difference. In so far as any social survey can, this multi-dimensional survey constructed a pretty good argument for concluding that the structure of schooling and the style of the Education Department made a huge difference, and therefore we had to address those two features.

The **Commonwealth Department** was always very supportive. The person who took the running inside the Committee – I know less of what was going on in the background – was Neil Edwards who was very thoughtful, rather academic in his approach, and very effective. Behind the scenes the important person was Alan Foskett, who was clearly strongly committed to it. That came out quite nicely when I presented Fraser, who was then Minister, with an interim report.

There was virtually no reaction from the **Canberra Technical College**. As I said, we added a Technical College teacher to the committee. Bruce Davy was a nice guy but, with due deference to him, I think he was a bit out of his depth.

The second stage of the survey was extended also to the **non-government schools** in the ACT. They were willing to cooperate with it. The survey showed up again that it was the NSW Department that had a statistically significant effect on the reaction of the ACT government school students. I think the non-government schools saw the college concept as interesting but not really involving them. Paul McKeown, the principal of Canberra Grammar School, didn't like our recommendations, in particular the scrapping of the external examination. But that was *post hoc*. I am not aware that his view was influential.

There were a lot of **submissions** and I certainly read them all. The most useful input came from the Anderson and Beswick Report. That was by far the most useful and provided what I thought was the central argument for the college split. Let me return to that argument in a minute. Another useful submission – although I had to do a bit of work on it before I could incorporate his text in the final Report – came from Phillip Hughes. His submission drew attention to various aspects of the changing social context within which the college proposal had to be evaluated. Amongst other issues, he highlighted the decline in the onset of puberty, which alerted me to the relevant research. The startling evidence of a reduction in the age of onset of puberty is world-wide. In Australia, evidence exists from 1900 onwards. The age of puberty here has dropped one year every thirty years. This decline forms a straight line; it seems not to have been affected even by two World Wars and the Depression. Why this global phenomenon should have occurred has generated a lot of speculation in the literature. I have my own hypothesis for it – but absolutely no evidence – namely, I think the Industrial Revolution seriously disturbed everyone's biology and what we



have been seeing is a kind of reversion back to the norm, because in a lot of tribal societies, puberty often occurs at quite a young age.

Phillip Hughes' submission also drew attention to increases in the retention rates of students into the upper years of secondary school. Because the enrolment patterns revealed considerable turbulence in the school population, that was hard to quantify precisely for the ACT, but the Report presents three approaches which all point to increased retention as also a significant phenomenon.

Now, what the Anderson and Beswick submission provided was unmistakable evidence of alienation from the structure and style of school. Putting these three findings together constitutes the central argument I see in the Report: that mid-adolescent students then, and I think still, are caught in a severe contradiction, that they're becoming adults sooner and being treated like children for longer. (As a philosopher, I saw that argument as nicely Hegelian!) That that contradiction had somehow to be resolved became very clear to me. So, given that dropping in the age of puberty, a custodial view of schooling for young people who at the age of eighteen were allowed to marry without permission and buy a beer, and drive a car, and engage in a whole lot of adult activities, was just impossible. No committee could change whatever was the profound cause of the change of the age of puberty, nor what was driving increased retention rates. That being the case, it was a question of providing a space, as it were, where the students might have a better chance of resolving the contradictions in which they were placed. That was the most we could hope to do.

We were aware of the **Tasmanian model** where a college split had already occurred, but we were also very aware that that could be an unreliable model in the sense that the Tasmanian colleges were set up strictly as matriculation colleges, that is, in Tasmania there were only relatively small numbers of students who would be on the kind of academic track that would head them towards university. So the rationale for the Tasmanian colleges was to gather those small numbers together into some critical mass for which you could provide a decent pre-matriculation style of education. Indeed they were initially called pre-matriculation colleges. Our situation was the opposite. On a large number of social indicators, the Canberra population was ahead of where the rest of the Australian population was moving; indeed on just about every indicator I could dig up where there have been significant changes in the Australian population, the Canberra population was further down that line, and this was especially true of retention rates. We already had a retention rate to Year 12 of over two-thirds back then in the early 'seventies. So for us the question was not one of introducing matriculation colleges. Accordingly, we were rather wary of the Tasmanian model.

We were attracted to the idea of a 'middle school', to be followed by secondary colleges spanning more than two years, and said so in the Report. But to pursue the middle school idea would have meant restructuring the primary schools as well as the high schools, and in a time when the school population in Canberra was already alarmingly turbulent, we believed that that would constitute too much disruption. So we reluctantly decided not to investigate that idea any further.

For me, and I think for the ultimate nature of the Committee's recommendations, the most influential visit was to **Victoria**. At that time, the secondary teachers' union

(whatever it was called in Victoria) was quite radically left in its politics but was very innovative and progressive in its exploration of educational models. Pedagogically, they were ahead of anyone else and doing interesting, thoughtful things. So I took a group of us to Melbourne where it became clear to me, especially from our visit to some inner-city Melbourne schools, that something had to be done about the curriculum. We had, in Wyndham-type six-year high schools, the whole secondary system geared towards matriculation to university, with the gate being kept by an external examination. That meant that teachers had to teach to a tightly prescribed syllabus which was necessary in order to be able to set a fair examination. The result was that the students were being taught to pass the exam. In this way university entry requirements had come to dominate the whole secondary school curriculum. But in Canberra it was manifest that there were about two-thirds of the cohort staying on to the end of Year 12. They were not all headed for university. As a university man myself, it seemed to me important that we do something about these ones who were not headed that way. Consequently, I saw the rationale for the college split here as a way of providing a much wider horizon of educational possibilities that would not necessarily be focussed upon those students who were headed to university. Our schools desperately needed a freeing up of the curriculum, and that meant we had to get rid of the external exam.

I came to these conclusions on the plane on our way back from Melbourne – I vividly recall, just about over Albury – and I decided there and then ‘we’ve just got to get rid of that exam’. (I had, by the way, done a major in education as part of my BA at Sydney University, which had included a unit on examinations.) I was acquainted with some of the research literature which clearly showed that these formal external examinations were, in the literal, technical sense of the word, invalid – that is they didn’t measure what they purported to measure – and unreliable – that is, they didn’t always yield the same result if run again on the same population. So I knew that the evidence was that they were unsound as measures of learning, and yet they were politically mandated. So we had to find a way of getting rid of that political mandate. Otherwise we couldn’t really free up the curriculum, and if we couldn’t free up the curriculum, we couldn’t free up the system. That being the case, I decided by the time our visiting group had landed at Canberra that I had to sell this conclusion to the Committee. Then the Committee would have to sell it to the population at large. But none of the ones who came back with me from Melbourne took much convincing.

Neil Edwards was an influential member of the Committee. Ken Townley actually drafted the chapter on examinations. He said: ‘I am a geologist, not an educationist. But I know how to do research, so I’ll go and research this topic and I’ll write up what I find’ and, of course, what he wrote up was what I expected him to find, because of the studies I had previously done. I think his contribution was really very significant. Alec McPherson was clearly the leader amongst the principals. Lance Chapman, who joined the Committee when we were in the second stage, made a lot of useful contributions to the discussion about curriculum. They were the main **influential members**. The two most important recommendations were to have a split and to get rid of the external examination. I should also add that the Report picked up from the submission from the Council of P&Cs a specification relating to the governance of schools, which was very influential with the Hughes Committee when it came to recommend a governing structure for the new ACT Schools Authority.

We were required to put in an **interim report** round about April-May, 1972. That was required in order to feed into the budgetary process for the 1972-73 financial year of the Commonwealth Government. As background, I need to explain that Canberra at that stage was expanding at quite a rapid rate, about 9% per annum. The NCDC had said that there would be a need for two new secondary institutions four years hence, by 1976. So they had to start planning these new schools no later than mid-1972. They wanted to know, not whether we were in favour of the college split *per se*, but what kind of schools they should plan to open in 1976. The point was that if we were going to say 'there ought to be colleges', then that's what they would plan for '76. If we were to say 'we don't like this idea', or at any rate 'we're not ready for it to be implemented by '76', they'd then build two more Wyndham-style six-year high schools. Consequently, we came under considerable time pressure in order to produce a recommendation as to what should be done in '76. The Committee's response was to say: 'Well, we think the college split should happen, subject to a list of provisos' and those were spelt out in an interim report of about nine pages long, and eventually incorporated in the final report.

I had an **appointment with Fraser** to present this Interim Report to him, in May 1972, I think it was. That morning, the Commonwealth Department sent one of their PR people across to visit me at the ANU so that he could draft a possible press statement. He'd been given a copy of the Interim Report by someone in the Department, Alan Fosskett probably, and had come to discuss his draft press statement which attributed to me a number of the key sentences from the Interim Report. So when Fosskett and I saw Fraser about two in the afternoon, the latter already had the Interim Report plus the draft press statement. Fraser was not pleased. He didn't like the sort of language it was couched in. It sounded far too radical for a conservative like him. So I was meeting with a whole lot of resistance from the Minister. I was trying to defend it as best I could, while Fosskett just sat listening. Fraser then abruptly ended the meeting, saying that he was already late for a Cabinet meeting, and that, if we wished to pursue this further, we'd have to come back at five o'clock. So Fosskett and I withdrew, while Fraser went off to his Cabinet meeting. At that point, Alan took me back to his Department to redraft the press statement, taking out all of the phrases that Fraser had objected to, the result being a much more anodyne statement. (It didn't alter the Report of course.) Fraser was late coming back from his Cabinet meeting; it was going on towards six o'clock when he strode back into his office, outside of which Fosskett and I had been waiting for nearly an hour, wondering how we would get on. Fraser sat down, glared at me and said: 'I've just spent the last three and a half hours sitting through a Cabinet meeting worrying about this when I should have been attending to the business, and I keep coming back to one thing. It's very strange that the chairman of a committee appointed by the Minister is the one making the press statement. I would have thought that was for the Minister.' To this day I'm surprised how I kept my cool. I simply replied: 'Mr Fraser, I agree with you, and if there were only one or two copies of that report, I wouldn't be worried, but there are fifteen copies of it floating around town and if you think you can keep it out of the press, you're a better man than I am' and I continued: 'I don't know about you but if I were sure that it was going to get into the press, I'd like to have some control over *what* gets into the press'. He glared at me again, and after a long silence said: 'All right, let's get on with it.' We then went through the statement once more, making it even more anodyne, and that was what was then released.

Later on, about August, **Fraser wanted to meet with the whole committee** to assure himself that what I had said was our view was indeed the view of the whole committee. He seemed by then to be less hostile to what we had proposed and I think that he, as a good politician, was guarding against the possibility that he might be ambushed by the parents' group, the teachers' group, or whatever, suddenly decamping and disowning the report. In fact, I felt terribly proud of the committee at that meeting. Everybody backed what we'd said. He said to me about that time – you'll recall that Billy McMahon was the Prime Minister –: 'Look, I'm going to have an awful time trying to get this through Cabinet, so we've got to be very careful about what we say and how we say it'. He didn't want to rock the boat, but it was also clear that by then he was committed to our proposals.

Well, then the McMahon Government was defeated in the December election. We'd almost completed our report at that stage but there was a bit of editorial tidying up to do. So by the time it was actually ready, the Government had changed. It was around Christmas that the portfolios were distributed and Kim **Beazley** Senior became Minister for Education. I answered a phone call at home on New Year's Day, and heard a voice saying: 'This is Kim Beazley here. I gather you're wanting to see me'. I was quite taken aback; I never thought ministers would just ring me up. When I explained my business, he said: 'I'm still feeling my way into the job, but I'm told one of the first things I've got to do is look at this Report. When would suit you?' So he and I arranged that we'd meet the following Thursday. We spent the first five or ten minutes in just 'getting to know you' chat, in which he spoke with great pride about his young son who had just got off to Oxford as a Rhodes scholar. (The connection was that he had seen that I had an Oxford degree). When we turned to discuss the Report I sensed none of the resistance Fraser had initially shown. I think Beazley saw our recommendations as offering the new Government just the sort of new broom it would be happy to sweep with. So he was kindly disposed, although not gung-ho; indeed, Kim Beazley Senior was never gung-ho about anything. He was a much more thoughtful, reflective man than most Ministers I subsequently had dealings with; I developed a lot of respect for him. So I think he just saw it as one of those interesting and desirable innovations that he would take carriage of.

As **advocate for the Report**, *Secondary Education for Canberra*, I had great difficulty because it was to be printed by the Australian Government Publishing Service. They took ages, both in finalising their editorial work on it and then in getting the printing done. In the meantime, I was getting increasing flak because it was clear that our Report intersected importantly with the task of the Hughes Committee, which had been appointed to advise on the structure for a new ACT education system. Quite reasonably, people wishing to make submissions to the Hughes Committee wanted access to our Report before doing so. Also, the Hughes Committee needed to be able to refer to it in their own report. Of course, I'd had talks with Phil Hughes about it, and he might have even been flipped a copy, but he didn't have it officially; it hadn't been officially released. So I was very anxious to get the thing out. I even got to the point of having to try and explain in the pages of *The Canberra Times* why our Report was not available, that the delay was just a hold-up with the publication. That explanation, although true, evoked a very hostile response from the head of the AGPS; he wasn't used to being criticised publicly. We eventually got the Report out – that was about May of 1973 – and then for the rest of that year I spent a great deal of time going around and talking with local P&Cs,

including some connected with non-government schools who were also interested to hear about it all. I was asked to address the Secondary Principals' Conference down in Goulburn, and so on. I was quite busy for the rest of that year basically explaining and selling the Report's recommendations.

What the **Hughes Committee** came up with was basically the endorsement of what we'd recommended, although we were looking at it with a focus upon how the many secondary schools in the system should be developed whereas their focus was upon what should go 'in the middle'. Nevertheless, the governance arrangements they recommended were essentially the same. The only significant difference, and that's not significant at all, was that what we called 'school councils', they called 'school boards'. I also believe that the way our Committee had operated – how we had worked through a complex set of proposals, and had come to agreements about major changes – served as a powerful demonstration that a collaborative approach involving participation by representative parents, teachers and bureaucrats could work. Although this was not our leading intention, I believe that the Committee thereby provided a model for the later ACT Schools Authority itself. It is my strongly-held view that the eventual replacement of that Authority by a conventional Department of Education has been a retrograde step, one not necessarily required by the introduction of self-government for the ACT. Had more imagination been exercised at that time, the model of Local Education Authorities in the UK could well have been creatively adapted to carry on the participatory tradition which had been ventured with considerable effectiveness here in the ACT. But that is another, and rather sad, story.

I didn't have first-hand experience of the **Interim Authority reaction to the Report**. But Phil Hughes, who had made an influential submission to our Committee, was clearly in favour of it all. I think the Interim Authority, which Hughes chaired, simply took our Report as one of the foundation documents that they had to work with.

Perhaps there should have been more **emphasis put on the high schools**. That's the part I think the Interim Authority got wrong in the implementation. The Committee did not spell out this point explicitly, but when the new colleges were first set up – within refurbished buildings at Dickson and Narrabundah and two new buildings at Hawker and Phillip – they were universally seen as new institutions, and accordingly had newly-appointed principals. I believe that for political reasons, small 'p' political reasons, largely to do with Teachers' Federation and the Secondary Principals' Council, the Interim Authority or those who were in the Schools Office at that point were just scared of there being too much disruption – I'm not sure what the reason was – but any rate they left the old high school principals in charge of what were then decapitated four-year high schools. My view is that they were new institutions as well. I firmly believe that the Committee had seen them as such. That was certainly how Lance Chapman had talked about it when we were discussing the curriculum for them. Despite that, in the implementation I think they were seen simply as decapitated institutions with the new institutions being the secondary colleges. I believe that was an administrative error of a very serious order.

I took study leave at the end of 1973 and didn't return to Canberra until February 1975. I was in London writing a book. Some time early in 1975, by which stage the Interim Authority was up and running, Alan Foskett asked that I serve on an interim

authority to set up a TAFE system here. I served on the **Interim TAFE Authority** in 1975 and 1976. In that role I was involved in the establishment of the Canberra School of Art. When the **Schools Authority** was established in 1977, I was asked to be a ministerial nominee. I was on the Schools Authority from the beginning of 1977 when Phil Hughes and then Ros Kelly were Chairs. I was on study leave for six months in 1978. I was made Chair in the middle of 1979 and served as such until the middle of 1985.

### **Milton (Mick) March**

I came to Canberra as a teacher with the NSW Education Department in December 1959. I was in charge of Mathematics and Science at Lyneham High in 1960 and Narrabundah High in 1961. After a year at Young High, I was Mathematics Master at Telopea Park High from 1963 to 1969. I was appointed as Deputy Principal at Narrabundah High School in 1970, became acting Principal in May 1973 and then Principal for 1974. In May 1974, I was seconded to work in the Interim Authority Office. At the end of that year I was appointed as Principal of Narrabundah College. During 1975, I was Planning Principal for the College, at Griffith, but retained a desk in the Authority's Office.

The **Currie Committee** was established following a public meeting, which I attended, at the Australian National University in 1966. Previously, much of the agitation for change had been taking place among people with an academic background. While there was a lot of parent agitation, there was little teacher representation, apart from people like Terry O'Connell and Gil Hughson at the principal level. As union members and teachers, we made very big noises at the public meeting and, subsequently, Len Childs, who was the President of the ACT Teachers' Federation, and Bruce Milne, who was the President of the Secondary Teachers' Association, were included as members of the Committee. I was on a Secondary Education Sub-committee of the Committee but not a member of the Committee itself. I was also involved in preparation of submissions to the Committee on behalf of the NSW Teachers' Federation branch.

The **ACT Education Working Group** was a ginger group that was set up after the Currie Report was published and nothing happened. It was to continue meeting and talking about the situation and to try to promote public discussion, to keep the issue alive. For the first couple of years, it was mainly the parents who were active. Then, gradually, the teachers thought 'we've got to get into this or otherwise it's going to go in ways different from the way the teaching professionals would want it to'. In 1971, I became chairman of that group at a crucial time. One of the first decisions we made after I became chairman was to buy an official letterhead. From that time on, people started to reply to our letters; previous letters written on plain paper had not received answers. But the main workers pushing the cause of an independent education authority in the ACT were Netta Burns and Cath Blakers. The Group organised letters to the paper and visits to schools and made submissions to the Minister and Departmental officials.

I was a member of the NSW Teachers' Federation and its branch, the **ACT Secondary Teachers' Association**. During the 1960s, three of us, John Edmunds,

Bruce Milne and myself, tried to keep it going because interest fluctuated; we alternated among President, Secretary and Treasurer positions. I was a delegate to the NSW Federation Council. We used to travel down once a month for meetings. The Commonwealth Department officers accepted that eventually there would be a split from the NSW Department but were always pushing it back into the distance. So Departmental officers were interested in involving teachers on planning bodies. I was on the Secondary Schools Building Standards Committee from the mid-1960s through until 1972-3.

The first I heard about the **move towards secondary colleges** was on the Secondary Building Standards Committee in 1969, in the context of planning secondary schools for the Belconnen and Woden valleys. The first public airing was when the then Minister, Nigel Bowen, at a meeting at Campbell High School in March 1971, announced that his Department was considering Junior Colleges for Forms 4, 5 and 6. At that stage, the union was strongly opposed because they believed in the policy of a comprehensive six-year high school. When the Committee on College Proposals (Campbell Committee) was formed, it was basically teachers, as nominated by the Teachers' Federation, principals, nominated by the Principals' Association, parents and Departmental representatives and I was a member of that. I was invited to join a group to go down to have a look at what was happening in Tasmania. Richard Campbell, as Chairman, was the person who had the final say in writing the Report. It was named the **Campbell Report** quite justly because he did most of the hard work. His liaison with Don Anderson, who oversaw the survey of students by two of his group at the ANU, was also crucial in gaining acceptance of the proposal. We had sub-committees to discuss different things that came up. Dick Lee came up with quite a few ideas. Of the principals, Alec McPherson made a valuable contribution. John Riddell was a parent who was also influential. To some extent, the recommendations made were taken up by the Interim Schools Authority so I was involved in just keeping the thing rolling.

The **Liaison Committee** was set up on 5 September 1972 to advise the Commonwealth Department of Education on the views of teachers and parents. We met quite regularly. It seemed to be a committee to keep in touch with people but not necessarily pass on extremely important information. Nevertheless, it allowed one to keep in touch with Departmental thinking and to express a teacher point of view— it was a forum rather than a decision-making or recommendation-producing group.

The **Commonwealth Teachers Federation (ACT)** was formally launched at a mass meeting of teachers at the Canberra Workers Club on 3 August 1972. Previously, there had been informal discussion and planning amongst local teacher members of the union. It occurred because of the proposal to separate ACT schools from the NSW education system and because South Australia was finding difficulty in continuing to supply teachers to the Northern Territory; it appeared appropriate to put the two Territories together into a single teaching service. A group of us became involved in that. If there was to be a separate teaching service, there had to be a separate union structure to cover teachers in the ACT and the NT and discussion for change could not be left in the hands of the Australian Teachers' Federation. Locally, Dick Lee was one of the prime movers. Errol Sweaney worked as union secretary for some time. Then it went quiet for a while. We formed a 'Ship Committee' to try to

keep the ship afloat. It met once a month to try to push things forward. In 1973, I became the vice-president.

I certainly contributed to the Federation's submissions to the **Hughes Committee**. The Education Working Group was still meeting at that time and also made representations.

One of the **problems** when the **Interim ACT Schools Authority**, of which I was a member, met in October 1973 was that it was a committee of idealists. They had battered out a fairly common ground of what they wanted to do but there was very little mechanism to push it forward. There were no staff, for example, and so it was all done by well-intentioned amateurs who tried to spread themselves as thinly and widely as possible. They probably also thought that everybody thought as they did and, consequently, there was not a need to make a lot of recommendations. But we were still seen in 1973 as an interim group whose basic task was to get down the aims and objectives and a clear statement of the guidelines for operation. We put a lot of effort into the production of *Information Statement 1* to set out the guiding aims and principles. We were also dependent on the Commonwealth Department for support and implementation of plans. In addition, this was the transition period from NSW administration to Commonwealth administration for staff and some teachers in senior positions in schools were not intending to stay in the Territory. Other major considerations were what to do about curriculum and assessment of students. The importance of developing a credible and acceptable form of certification for final year students exercised the minds of many of us. Fortunately, the Campbell Committee recommendations gave a starting point there.

Margaret Dempster, Max Badham and I were nominees of the Federation but not as representatives bound by Federation. The **Interim Authority** set up a lot of **sub-committees** such as the Curriculum Committee, the Structures Committee and the Staffing and Establishments Committee; I was on most of those. As Chair of the Curriculum Working Party, I coordinated the curriculum development work to ensure that the teachers were motivated and equipped to develop school-based curricula. My major contribution at that time was on the Assessment Working Party which developed and negotiated acceptance of the proposal *ACT Procedures Alternative to the NSW School and Higher School Certificate Examinations*. It was adopted and promulgated by the Authority on 17 April 1975. I then further contributed as a member of the ACT Schools Accrediting Agency set up under that proposal.

The Interim Authority was formed but was moving very slowly because it had no staff. As Chairman of the Curriculum Committee, I was, with the agreement of the Commonwealth Teaching Service Commissioner, seconded to the Authority in 1974 to work. I sat over in a little office in the Coombs Building at the University and I wrote policy. Anything you put on paper became a documented policy no matter how ill-considered. You tried to make it as considered as possible. Once we were located at Woden, I also recommended teaching staff to be brought into the Office.

**Frank Smith** was Executive Officer. He found that a difficult role because he had not been involved in very much of the original planning and he'd been dragged out of another position to take it. Frank was a very well-intentioned and, to some extent, a very able person. But he didn't ever really seem to get on board with what really was



moving. He'd often call me in to sit at a meeting with other people because he didn't have the background. There was also a slight resentment amongst some Authority people against Frank because he was an outsider who'd been popped into the job, not selected by the Authority members themselves. So Frank was constantly trying to deal with issues when he had only half a bag full of knowledge. He certainly often called for help.

**Brian Peck** had been involved in a lot of the interim administration. He had been with the Liaison Committee so he had that background and he had also been involved in writing Departmental submissions. Brian was always a very deliberate mover. He was far more involved. It was possible to get things done with Brian. Frank would tend to defer decisions because he didn't have the basis to make the decision. Brian might defer a decision because he wanted to push it in a particular way.

On his arrival as Chief Education Officer in 1975, **Hedley Beare** was the person who had been selected and approved of by the Authority and was therefore seen to have more personal authority as an individual. He was recognised by all members of the Authority as a knowledgeable person in education and somebody with a few ideas and, of course, he was a terrific speaker. He was not always the ideal administrator - nobody ever is - but he was a good figurehead. He seemed to adopt the philosophy very quickly. He said: 'if this is a school-based system, I'm going to treat it as a school-based system'. He wasn't fighting against the system whereas people like Frank had been controlled by their origin back in the Department and were somewhat guarded in allowing complete freedom to the Authority.

The attitude of the Commonwealth Teachers' Federation (ACT) to issues before the Interim Authority was based on the old NSW system. It was possible to move gradually towards a more local viewpoint. Initially, the union was against the involvement of parents in the **selection of teaching staff**. Having been very involved in discussions with parents during the planning period, I could understand their interest in staff selection. Indeed much of the parent motivation to support the forming of an independent education authority arose from dissatisfaction about staffing. There was a strong degree of opposition amongst teachers to parents being involved in selecting staff and to some extent the Federation was directly opposed to having the parents involved. At that time, parents were seen as very good people to run tuckshops and to raise money but not very good at making decisions about educational matters. A contemporary writer said the parents had come to see themselves like the other woman at the funeral, not even accorded the right for public grief. That was very much the stance of the union. My personal view was that there might be a role for parents but I suppose that I was still fairly protective of the professional position of teachers. I was probably a bit more liberal than the union in that regard.

The teachers as a union probably saw **school boards** in an adversarial light, as a controlling enemy, rather than as a support. My experience with parents' associations and groups was that they were usually very supportive of teachers. I was influenced by Phillip Hughes's view of the Governor-General, that the Governor-General in Council is a more powerful person than a Governor-General on his own because he's a part of a group. A principal in council, with a board of parents and staff

representatives beside him, is in a more powerful position provided he can manage that situation. I was well inside the standard union view on that.

The Currie Report recommended that there should be more **school-based curriculum**. It was fairly obvious in the Curriculum Committee that there would have to be some formal means of getting a curriculum for the high schools. We talked with Bert Townsend, who was advising the Curriculum Development Centre, about what we could do about this. I spoke to Bill Radford, head of the Australian Council for Educational Research, who wrote the Radford Report on Queensland. Our initial response was to get Radford or someone like him to write a report. But they rightly said 'it's up to you' because we had to accept responsibility for what we were hoping to accomplish with the new system. The NSW form of examinations might not be available. We were also moving to a restructuring to colleges, requiring an entirely different approach because of their higher retention rates. It also became obvious by talking to Bert Townsend that there wasn't time to write a general curriculum. So I took a recommendation to the Curriculum Committee that we ought to base our system on school-based curriculum and that was accepted. We'd never have got the colleges off the ground if we hadn't had a school-based curriculum. On 18 March 1974, the Council of the Authority accepted the Curriculum Committee's recommendation that 'schools should have the freedom to develop their own educational programs within broad guidelines established by the Council'.

We could have had trouble if Dr Campbell had not been overseas because he supported a centralised curriculum process. He later came back and became Chairman of the Authority. But in that Interim period, all were feeling their oats a bit. There was a huge thrust for new ideas within the Commonwealth Teaching Service. With the teachers' enthusiasm for taking more charge of the system, school-based curriculum was not a difficult idea to sell. It was very important to use the enthusiasm of teachers to get them to accept these challenges, such as making courses attractive to students and presenting them well, but new teachers were coming in to the ACT and those remaining from the old service could see the opportunities opening up. They felt an ownership of the process.

The **School Without Walls** was established and became a pressure valve for the system because of the level of alienation among students. Some people didn't like it but I supported the concept behind it. It became unnecessary in time. It was invented at a time when people had not really realised the freedom in the new structure of the system. If you were not bound by compulsory curricula, you could run all schools with the freedom that the new system would allow. You could provide meaningful educational experiences for the sort of individual, student or teacher, not being catered for in the straight jacket provided by the traditional patterns of instruction and discipline.

There was the usual amount of involvement from the union in the drafting of Schools Authority and Commonwealth Teaching Service **legislation**. The Federation Executive met every Tuesday night with meetings that ran through to midnight; we'd break and have dinner and go back again. There was a lot of argy-bargy on individual points and issues. As an individual, even though a Federation nominee on the Authority, I was also able to influence consideration at the Authority level when discussion of the Ordinance came up, both from a union viewpoint and along my own

personal line of thinking. I was not involved in the actual direct drafting of legislation but was involved in providing advice to those who were.

Legitimacy was an issue in the three years of the Interim Authority. There seemed to be a great dragging of feet. The Commonwealth Department of Education didn't like surrendering its autonomy to a statutory body. So there was quite a deal of argy-bargy and tension between Department and the Authority, the same sort of tension that eventually killed the Authority. Staffing levels and the interaction between the Authority and the CTS Commissioner were **issues** that exercised peoples' minds. Building planning and provision for future development were issues.

Hedley Beare pointed to the fact that there were many committees that were loosely tied together. Consequently, it was necessary to form them into **standing committees**. For example, the Curriculum Committee became the Education Programs Standing Committee and there was the Building Standards Committee. I was on most of those. The Colleges and High Schools Planning Committee, which I chaired, tried to fill the gap between the Campbell Committee Report and initiating the college system.

The NSW Teachers' Federation had a very definite view that there should be no **restructuring of secondary education**, that there should be a six-year comprehensive high school because that was the model across NSW and it should carry on. The Commonwealth Teachers' Federation didn't initially have a formal view. I'd become convinced that the alienation of senior students was a very sad thing. I saw some of the very brightest of our students totally alienated by being treated as kids rather than as mature people. Some very good students opted out and adopted 'don't care' attitudes because they weren't being treated as befitted their age. There had to be something different. Prior to the Campbell Report, we formed a committee and I worked very hard to have a referendum across the secondary teachers of the ACT on whether or not there should be secondary colleges. We had that count and it was positive. It was possible to move away from the NSW Teachers' Federation view.

With respect to the **form of assessment at the end of Year 12**, I became convinced fairly early that the examination system was a very restricting system. If you just taught your curriculum to what was going to be in the exam, you were missing out on a lot. In the last six months of their time at school, you trained the students in parroting answers. You'd try to get as many trial papers as you could from other schools, particularly from schools where you knew there was a member of the board of examiners. If you found a question that was slightly different from the normal run of questions in that school's examination, you taught that particular aspect. It came up so many times. It didn't seem like teaching to me. The other thing I became convinced of was that the kids in the class knew who was the best mathematician. They and the teacher knew roughly their pecking order, without sitting a formal examination. Often the result was more valid as you were looking at a longer period of time. By abandoning system-wide examinations, you had more freedom to select what you thought was important and interesting. You could teach what you should be teaching without narrowing the subject matter down because there might be an examination question on this. It became accepted on the Interim Authority because of a very good article in *The Canberra Times* by Peter Thompson. I wrote one myself in

*The Canberra Times* on alternative assessment in that period, 1973-4. Even on the Currie Committee, that same sentiment had been expressed by parent and teacher members. Time was put into negotiating the acceptance of our Year 12 students into interstate universities and even our local tertiary institutions. Initially, it was hoped that our students would not have to be ranked against each other, with assessment of progress based on the student's development against his or her own individual standards and abilities. Interstate bodies did not accept this and it became necessary to produce a system of certification with a ranking system.

In 1974, when it became obvious that the decision had been taken to have colleges, the **selection of staff** was a huge issue. I fought many battles as many people just wanted every position in every college declared vacant, with everybody starting again. It was going to be virtually impossible to get Dickson and Narrabundah Colleges off the ground if all the staff there in 1974 were alienated by being told that they didn't have a job the next year. So I fought very hard for the teachers, who were on the ground in the schools and were prepared to work and write courses, to be given the right to stay, provided there were positions they would match against. I was prepared to put my position at Narrabundah on the line because I could re-apply and get another suitable position. I was pretty smug at the time as I thought, as senior principal in the town, I'd probably get one of the colleges. But I didn't want any of the staff disturbed because, with the tight timetable, there wasn't time to write curriculum. It was important that the people in the two existing schools ensured continuity and produced workable education programs.

Several people had been identified as key movers and shakers in terms of interest in **curriculum writing**. But having said to teachers 'you can stay if you write curriculum', we found that no curriculum was being written, that the staff didn't have the expertise. So we set up courses to train teachers and pulled teachers out of schools for five days. You could convince people it was absolutely necessary; otherwise we'd be starting off schools without any curriculum. So we sat them down for a few days in nineteen groups looking at areas of secondary curriculum and eight groups at primary curriculum, having got the curriculum from the different States and overseas. In mathematics, for example, we could offer curricula from Oxford and Cambridge, Victoria and Western Australia. I had for years been heavily involved in the Mathematics Association, and more loosely with the Science Teachers' Association. So I knew we had a background of intense interest in curriculum content there to work on. It was similar in all subjects. You had to get those people interested in curriculum involved but then you had to say: 'It's not just the curriculum that you've been teaching for the last ten years. Look at all these other places and sit down and write something.' We also had to find mechanisms to involve the non-government schools in the planning process.

I had a desk in the Office and also at Griffith with the planning principals and assistant principals, as well as having access to my former base at Narrabundah. My various roles were different but complementary. I was a member of the Authority and I was still Chairman of the Education Programs Standing Committee. During 1974 we had formed a **College and High School Planning Committee** as a sub-committee of the Curriculum Working Party (myself as Chair, Cath Blakers representing the Authority, Doug Morgan and Mal Lee as curriculum officers, Arthur Judd and Jim Ryan representing the Secondary Principals, Brian Brown and Ian Warfield

representing the Federation, John Morrow and John Wells as interested secondary teachers). Some of these people had now been appointed as principals and assistant principals. I had also written to several former ACT teachers alerting them to the changes that were taking place and some decided to return to participate in the action.

The four **college principals** had intensely individual views but nevertheless were prepared to accept and listen to other points of view, argue ideas out and work together. The most significant common belief was in the need to value students as individuals rather than see them as fodder for the classroom. So my role was sort of coordinator of both policy developments at the Office and Authority level and implementation procedures at the planning principal level. I suppose I could still tend to push things along. The Authority formed an **Assessment Working Party** (Phillip Hughes, myself, Bruce Davy, Father John Littleton and Richard Johnson, with Doug Morgan as executive officer) to look at assessment for the ACT. This eventually led to the establishment of the **Accrediting Agency**. The processes and procedures we recommended went through fairly smoothly in those years, with one or two exceptions. I also convened joint meetings of the planning principals and principals of non-government schools as I realised the importance of having them join the new system. Only Canberra Grammar chose to stay as part of the NSW structure. As an Authority member and Agency member I was responsible for developing and negotiating policy. As a planning principal, I was responsible for establishing structures that would implement those policies. As a principal of a school about to become a college, I was concerned to keep an eye on what was happening there as well. As a union member, I was anxious that the needs of teachers were protected.

The important thing about education is the learning that takes place and this involves the teachers in the schools and their interaction with the kids. So I was quite happy to stay on in the Authority till 1977 and then to move back and become a college principal. I felt that that role was more important than the general policy, much of which had been set. Implementation of even the best ideas can be obstructed if sympathetic structures aren't established. What was perhaps wrong in the long run was that some of the appointments were done by parachuting in from outside experts who had different points of view. This led eventually to the demise of the Authority. What was prescribed in the Authority Ordinance was that there would be a Chief Education Officer; it didn't specify anything about his having any staff. That staff built up and eventually formed the bureaucracy that ran counter to the Council. The other big mistake that I think was made was not accepting a Currie Report recommendation that the Chief Education Officer and the Chairman of the Authority be the same person, called the Commissioner. If the Authority had been established under a Commissioner who was head of the Authority and also had the control of the bureaucracy, they would have bound together much better than having two separate bodies. When self-government came along, with ministerial responsibility running through one channel answerable to the electorate and the community responsibility running through the Authority and answerable to different interest groups and subsets of the community, the resulting tension led to the split, with fights over staffing directives and similar issues.

Phil Hughes was one of the important **pioneers of the ACT government school system**. He was parachuted in because he came well after the Currie Report and the early movement for change. But he was there at a very important time, attended

meetings of the Education Working Group and became very familiar with the views of many who were involved. Phil was very important for several reasons. He came with a cap of legitimacy, had a role in training teachers, was a person with some very good ideas and had a credible image. His production of the Hughes Panel report was extremely important. Brian Peck kept things rolling along in the background. He wasn't a good front person and his educational image wasn't always accepted. Alan Foskett was a supportive Departmental figure. People like Dick Lee were important because they carried the teachers along with an idealistic view. Peter O'Connor and Terry O'Connell were important persons. Teachers seconded into the Commissioner's Office, such as Ken Gollan, played a major role in ensuring that policies at that level were compatible with what was happening in the schools. The members of the Interim Authority Council were all important in their various roles. The teachers in the schools were vital to the success of the system and the cooperation amongst parents, teachers and students was the essential ingredient that cemented the whole process together.

The beginning of the ACT system was conditioned by several things. First, there was this inevitable move to separate Commonwealth from State education services, which was evident in South Australia as well as in NSW. We'd just gone through an intensive teacher shortage and both States were reluctant to look after the Commonwealth teaching. Second, Peter Karmel was very important. His Report, *Schools in Australia*, that established the Schools Commission, was enabled by a climate favourable to change but also supported the feeling of legitimacy for change. The switch from Liberal to Labor in 1972 was important because the Whitlam era was a period of intense change and re-thinking, partly because a whole group of people came into government without pre-conceived ideas and had no established allegiance to maintaining the *status quo*. The Schools Commission's thinking was original, wide, broad and to a great extent coincided with work that was being done by Malcolm Skilbeck and the Curriculum Development Centre. I spoke quite often to Ken McKinnon and he couldn't quite understand how he'd been able to keep his Commission free from the bureaucracy of the Commonwealth Department but we could not get the Authority free. He had more money and he had more inside clout.

Barry Price  
20/10/2005