

CHAPTER 12

THE GOLDEN YEARS AT BURWOOD TEACHERS COLLEGE (1961–69)

*Hide not your talents, they for use were made,
What's a sundial in the shade?*

Benjamin Franklin

Remember the weeks of preparation that went into the Burwood Statement? Remember the call for, and the preparation of new courses which would bring us out of the years of complacency? They were the years of provocation – remember the startled reaction to the Statement that our methods of examination themselves required examination, that (heaven preserve us!) our examination papers were too stereotyped and were in need of an overhaul? They were the years of good fellowship, of sparkling conversation; knowing that one was a member of a closely knit and purposeful group; years of knowing that one's loyalty was well placed, and that Lawrie was as loyal to the members of his team as they were to him.

Yes! Lawrie could be relied on for the freshness and variety of his ideas, for the leadership and friendship given both to staff and students; and, in the long term, it was his warmth and friendship which remained as something to be treasured.⁴¹⁶

The dawn of the new decade challenged educators globally. In Australia WF Connell, Professor of Education at the University of New South Wales, described a time of mounting economic, social and political interests as moving 'underneath the surface "down under" ... one can feel the first stirrings of the irresistible forces of

change that promise to transform beyond recognition not only a vast continent but its people.⁴¹⁷ Expressing agreement in the inaugural Buntine Oration in 1962, Peter Karmel, Professor of Economics at the University of Adelaide, allied education to economic productivity. Vital components of a skilled workforce were ‘ingenuity and inventiveness of technologists and scientists’. Education, a major factor of economic growth, was a valuable tool for ‘accelerating the flow of ideas – ranging from minor brain waves to scientific discoveries, from managerial tricks to philosophies of social organization’. Increasing opportunity from primary to tertiary levels underpinned the flow of ideas. In turn, technological and administrative innovation would enhance the education system and proffer the nation a skilled workforce.⁴¹⁸ Karmel stressed:

... there must be a considerable increase over a number of years in the share of our resources devoted to education. On this there are no restraints other than those we ourselves impose.⁴¹⁹

Karmel urged additional funding and long-term planning but warned ‘a large increase in educational output cannot be achieved overnight’. Two years prior, delegates at the National Education Conference similarly called for additional funding. Premier Heffron of New South Wales claimed, ‘If we are going to survive as a nation we must educate our people.’ He argued, ‘We spent a million pounds a day to carry the war to a successful conclusion. If we could do that then, in these piping times of peace we can do a better job than we are doing by way of providing finance for education.’ He continued, ‘This is a problem that belongs not only to the States but to the Commonwealth as well.’⁴²⁰ In further debate Dr Robert Madgwick, Vice Chancellor of the University of New England, warned of a snowball effect throughout the entire education system if sufficient money were not available. He advised:

... without sufficient primary teachers of sufficient calibre, our secondary schools receive inadequately prepared pupils; without rapidly increased expenditure in the secondary schools, the universities will receive insufficient students – and these inadequately trained and educated; without suf-

ficient students there will come from universities too few science teachers – and these inadequately trained by universities inadequately staffed and equipped – and too few research workers and recruits for industry and government service.⁴²¹

Madgwick stressed, ‘our age is unique – never before in history have technical changes, and the social and moral issues they raise, been communicated so universally over such wide areas of the work’. While they have ‘revolutionized our thinking about industrial, economic and social development’ education remained ‘tragically starved of funds – and of the buildings and equipment money could buy’. He feared ‘loss of standards’ and warned, ‘competition for manpower from a dynamic expanding economy means that we cannot attract enough teachers to keep pace with the growing pupil and student population.’⁴²²

In Victoria the tides of leadership turned as Alex McDonnell replaced Alan Ramsay, the Director who had led the education system through a decade of rapid growth. In tribute, Education Minister John Bloomfield acknowledged Ramsay’s ‘single mindedness’, ‘conscientiousness and absorption in what he was doing’. Ramsay’s response expressed his ongoing faith in the schools and the teachers’ commitment and reflected on his privilege to serve:

... at a time of rapid development, to help gear up the machine to meet demands made on service since the war. In ten years the number of schools has trebled ... There has been development in the training of our teachers ... we have facilities for the establishment of a three years’ course when the present colleges are developed to their fullest potential.⁴²³

The Ramsay Report of 1960 was a blueprint for Victoria’s educational future. It identified that more money was vital for ongoing expansion and called for action to boost building programs for new and existing teachers colleges. However, entry standards remained a dilemma, particularly for secondary recruits. Post-matriculation three-year courses would raise academic standards but the serious shortage and demands on the present infrastructure made this unfeasible; hence a secondary teachers college at Monash University was a priority. The report claimed that courses of study should ‘prepare

children for a changing world' with teachers and schools increasingly involved 'in determining their content and methods of teaching'. Acknowledging that education should offer the 'fullest opportunity for every child' the report identified regional differences among the children in Corryong, Footscray, Montrose or Mansfield. Regardless of ability, aptitude, mental or physical ability, distance from school or location, equal opportunity was the ideal premise.⁴²⁴

Throughout his term Ramsay had endeavoured to increase recruitment, accelerate building programs and improve conditions in schools yet despite foresight and effort the Education Department was admonished for lethargy in planning ahead. Members of the Victorian Teachers' Union (VTU) and the Victorian Secondary Teachers' Association (VSTA) continued to agitate to boost recruitment and train better-qualified teachers, advance buildings programs and provide better work conditions.⁴²⁵ Ron Reed, Director of Secondary Education (DSE), noted the impact of policy trickling through to the welfare of the child. He firmly believed the government held responsibility to organise policy and finances to satisfy the community's wishes in respect to education, arguing:

It is the responsibility of the Education Department, to give leadership in education to the schools and to provide the teachers, buildings and equipment needed for their proper functioning, within these limits of policy and finance; it is the responsibility of the principal to establish in his school the conditions under which teachers may do their best work; and it is the responsibility of the teacher to so organise his classroom and his work that his pupils are enabled to make the best progress of which they are capable.⁴²⁶

From this environment Ramsay moved on, McDonnell stepped in and Shears took his next career step. The Education Department continued to grow and, despite forward planning, found it hard to satisfy demands. Increasing intakes of new teachers and re-employment of those not currently serving barely met replacement needs caused by resignation, retirement or death let alone catering for ongoing growth in student numbers. Shears advocated the need to boost primary teacher graduates to 1,200 annually although admitting three-year

training and class-size reduction would reduce the effectiveness of the increased number.⁴²⁷

Ripe for his next leadership role Shears remained enthused by the Harkness experience and enriched with knowledge of education in the USA and the UK. As he stood on the threshold of his new position, education systems across the globe prepared for the challenge ahead. American educators Spaulding and Meindl spoke of professional standards of teachers, an endemic problem requiring review. They claimed, 'we hope to make progress for our profession. Progress is not achieved by inaction.'⁴²⁸ The thoughts of Shears similarly aspired to these ideals. Equipped with knowledge from abroad he stepped readily into his principalship at Burwood TC. Situated in Melbourne's outer east it was one of the State's eleven government teachers colleges. His tendrils were extending across the education spectrum. The appointment to Burwood fulfilled both Alice Hoy's prediction of his leadership potential and his next career step.⁴²⁹

Teacher training was Shears' focus. Believing the colleges were 'centres of ideas' he sought depth and consistency in course content and exposure of student teachers to the classroom. As with doctors and nurses, careful guidance was the key. He drew on his own teaching experience and recent observations in the USA and the UK. He was alert to Freeman Butts' challenge to 'permit' and 'encourage every child to climb up the educational ladder as far as his talents would take him. The dull, the normal, and the brilliant all need special attention.' Moves were afoot that 'trainee teachers master a professional body of knowledge and actual professional skill in practice.'⁴³⁰ Butts believed would-be teachers [and administrators] deserved more than accumulated hints on subject matter and methods with short classroom stints. They deserved general and professional training that presented 'the foundations of education, a major field of competence, and a period of induction to teaching experience.'⁴³¹

Agitation was rising regarding qualifications and standards. Within Victoria's growing secondary sector the system failed to differentiate between two- and three-year certificate courses for primary, infant and secondary training and university graduates who completed a fourth year DipEd. The skewed professional stakes between primary and

secondary bothered Shears. He agreed with Butts that 'primary school teachers should have as much and as high-quality preparation as secondary school teachers',⁴³² and detested proposals to compartmentalise teachers according to their expertise with particular age levels. Believing it folly that one group should hold greater importance he refuted beliefs that primary teachers knew about children whereas secondary teachers knew about subject matter. He contended, 'in all teaching and therefore in all education, the teacher, the child and the relationship between them is as fundamental as the subject matter concerned'.⁴³³

Burwood Teachers College

At Burwood TC, Don Waller, the first principal, had established firm foundations. Waller's leadership had been admirable. Staff valued the opportunities he afforded. He was 'a quiet man' with a 'very, very dry sense of humour' and 'tremendous capacity to let people go' if they had something to offer. Publications on art, English and music education had put Burwood 'on the map, not only in Victoria, but Australia and worldwide'. He had encouraged students, to 'set your course for the stars ... see them clearly and follow a purposeful course'.⁴³⁴ Burwood had become 'an exciting place with a sound reputation in its seven-year history'.⁴³⁵ On the brink of the new era, the Burwood community reflected on Waller's 'fair-mindedness, wisdom and devotion to duty [that] inspired all who knew him'.⁴³⁶ They saw the dichotomy between old and new: the staid, fatherly and encouraging Waller with the small, lithe and lively, energetic and effervescent replacement.

Shears' arrival roused 'anticipation and pleasure. He was well known amongst the educationists and teacher trainers'.⁴³⁷ He was seen as 'intelligent, only a small man, he was physically active and skilful at sport and had the most persuasive manner ... he got the best out of people'.⁴³⁸ He acknowledged Waller's fine leadership and was encouraged by the bright, enthusiastic staff. As the new principal-cum-family man he had notable credentials but his skills were not yet tested. Aged 39, he had bypassed many on the promotional ladder, which led to jealousy by some members of the Education Department. On paper Shears had impressive credentials with three degrees and a doctorate.

Though direct teaching experience in Korong Vale, Bairnsdale and the RTC, and in England, were more than a decade past he had knowledge of teaching, and had lectured at Toorak and Burwood TCs and throughout the UK. To his credit he was abreast of developments in teacher training in the USA and the UK and aware of what schools in Victoria required. As Burwood's principal he became a member of the Primary Teachers College Principals' Association. Among colleagues were Len Pryor at Toorak, Len Whiteoak at Geelong, Ida Lowndes at Coburg and Warwick Eunson at Frankston The association promoted the status of teachers colleges in general but particularly those preparing primary teachers, and argued strongly for improved course length and depth.

On 27 April 1961 Lawrence William Shears became Burwood TC's second principal. It was a juggling act keeping pace with ongoing educational growth, settling in to college life and taking charge of 400 students and 57 staff while maintaining his family role and broader interests. Students attending the welcome assembly observed a sprightly young man. With formalities complete he perched on a chair to flap his arms and cluck as they sang 'chick chick, chick, chick chicken, lay an egg for me ... chick, chick, chick, chick, chicken lay one for my tea ...' While he became at one with the group he had to prove himself.

Living in residence the Shears children became popular with staff and trainees. They had space to play and the younger three walked to nearby Bennettswood State School, No. 4693. With the family all at school, Mavis enrolled in Matriculation English and prepared for tertiary studies. Each morning as he walked to his office Shears chatted with groups of students who lounged on the lawns. Between daily appointments he walked along the wide linoleum corridors to view the college in action and at day's end took the dog for a walk to check all was secure. Despite apprehension among some older colleagues, the young principal gained their respect and the Burwood community welcomed his accessibility. Though 'a prodigious worker' he had time to listen and over the years offered personal and professional support to staff and students alike. He welcomed all, whether to seek advice, share their vision or express concern. Shears became a good friend to many and was often considered one of the lads who shared a joke or

had a kick. Music lecturer Chris Limb stomping into his office to state a grievance, banged on the desk with both fists. 'Lawrie took it', didn't flinch, 'a lot of principals wouldn't. He certainly didn't hold it against me or reprimand me.' The trait of knowing 'who was who' in a group or at a function held Shears in good stead. He paid attention to detail and made a point of knowing his colleagues and their professional backgrounds. New staff member Graham Corr was delighted when his rural teaching experience was acknowledged.⁴³⁹

Staff selection in the 1960s posed problems. As Pryor had claimed, the number and quality of secondary graduates was a determining factor. Burwood staff members in 1954 were a select group, several recalled that they were 'plucked from the system' and others were there by chance. Due to a fire in his school, art teacher Leon Jackman sought another position. He heard of the vacancy at Burwood and applied immediately.⁴⁴⁰ Like others he was young, little older than college students, but he accepted the role in the post-secondary setting, and was required to support his young charges. Aware of this, Shears supported Jackman and other young staff in finding their professional feet.

Shears maintained routines established by Waller, which reflected those of Principal Law at Melbourne TC. Students were divided into clusters of 30 and with two lecturers appointed as tutors, they established friendships and received support and guidance. Lectures, assignments, tests and teaching rounds punctuated college life. Teaching methods, child development, philosophies of learning, approaches to assessment, remediation and classroom practice were part of the structured tuition program and supervised experience in schools. Easing into their roles as teachers, students moved gradually from an observational role to conducting lessons and assessing students' learning.

Fundamental to good teacher training was the relationship between the training schools and the institution. In California Shears had noted disconnection between the teacher training institute and the practising schools, a weakness that he described as 'ridiculous!'. From his own experience and now as a teacher educator he sought to establish a firm link (or consolidate the link) between the college

and training schools. To ensure successful training and a smooth transition to a teaching career, college and school staffs collaborated. Lecturers liaised between individuals in their group and the schools. The Burwood Model, as it became known, was pivotal and building the link was vital. Hence, three times a year school principals and infant mistresses met with college staff. Following social interaction Chris Limb recalled 'reporting what was going on in the college and what we would like them to do. The practice schools were an integral part of the teacher education program; the institution and training schools felt as though they were one'.⁴⁴¹

Tutor group interaction assisted students' social and personal adjustment and their transition to adulthood.⁴⁴² It also encouraged positive experiences, and supported the development of leadership skills and roles in student governance. Secondary teacher trainers doubted the Burwood Model applied to their specialist fields. Not afraid to speak out, Shears claimed contact between staff and schools was fundamental to all teacher training. The reality of the model's success was the relationship between specialist teachers, college staff and the school; hence the secondary training institution should:

... get the teachers of English, the teachers of geography, and other subjects in contact with the people who conducted the schools. Physical contact with the buildings of the training institution and the people working in them would benefit both. They would work together. I do not think it is beyond the wit of human beings to handle such an arrangement.⁴⁴³

The tension between primary- and secondary-qualified teachers remained contentious. Not only was primary training considered less prestigious, but teachers graduating from primary teachers colleges were ranked lower on the Classified Roll. Shears objected. He argued that trainee primary teachers were among the most intelligent of their age groups with average ability equal to university entrants. Though in the 1960s the number of matriculants was increasing, in 1958 only one-third of all teachers college entrants had attempted matriculation.

Eager to boost the status of courses and unite staff Shears introduced the Burwood Statement. Staff worked in faculty groups to specify course aims and objectives. Enthusiasm was amazing, he recalled,

and vigour was sustained throughout. While planning ahead was the ultimate goal, the activity united staff, and boosted morale as clear goals enhanced college courses and staff confidence in what they were teaching. Retrospectively, Shears lamented that the Statement was not officially published; however he achieved his goal to generate energy, and attain valuable input from the united faculty groups.

The college timetable operated on the platoon system that Shears experienced as a trainee teacher at Melbourne TC. On Community Wednesdays when all students were present they divided into their tutor groups to share experiences. They later joined club activities and took part in their selected sport.

At morning assembly they sang the Burwood College Anthem *Animum, Cultum, Parabo* with passion; *Bush Night Song* with serenity; the *Stein Song* with vigour; and *Goodbye* with a tinge of sadness, especially when there were exiting students. In weekly addresses Shears stressed the importance of personal wellbeing in the teacher's complex task. The college program 'takes account of your needs as developing persons who will become successful teachers, citizens and scholars', he said. He promoted philosophies of Martin Buber and Arthur Jersild, which lay at the heart of teaching. 'In any teaching situation there is the teacher and the child, the subject matter and the relationship between them. The greatest joy comes in *I - Thou* relationships in which you answer for the need of others.'⁴⁴⁴

Academic and social events in the college program gave students room to grow and promoted personal confidence that in turn enhanced their teaching. Ultimately they would share the moment of ecstasy, as Buber described, when 'the Holy Spark' leapt across the gap. Fundamental to meaningful teacher-child relationships such 'moments' were shared from a personal perspective and from that of the child.⁴⁴⁵ At assemblies, and in later years, Shears recited:

A dog has looked at you, you answer for its glance
A child has held your hand, you answer for its touch
A host of men move about you, you answer for their need.⁴⁴⁶

Likewise Jersild's notion of self-understanding was essential to serving others: