

**The dismissal of a school principal:  
the micropolitics of the  
critical incident**

**William T. McKeith**

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THE DISMISSAL OF A SCHOOL PRINCIPAL :  
THE MICROPOLITICS OF THE CRITICAL INCIDENT.  
AUTHOR : WILLIAM T. MCKEITH

## ABSTRACT

Organizations, such as schools, can be perceived of as political entities in which informal aspects, interests and power struggles, as well as co-operation and support building, help shape and define the organization. This study is an examination of the interplay of the micropolitical forces combining from within and from outside the school, Presbyterian Ladies' College, Croydon, Sydney, to destabilize and eventually unseat the principal. The culmination of this extraordinary period at this school is the critical incident at the heart of this study, a botched attempt at forcing the resignation of principal, Freda Whitlam, giving rise to her decision to resign a short time later. The circumstances and events surrounding these final months of 1976 are the subject of some detailed consideration in this study.

The specific aims of the study include the clarification of events, key players, and their respective roles in the critical incident. A further aim addresses the extent to which Whitlam's character, gender, and leadership practice and style contributed to the critical incident, and to what extent did her achievements consolidate her hold on the principal's position? Further research questions include to what extent did micropolitics influence the outcome of the critical incident, and what were the micropolitical forces and how did they interact to influence the critical incident?

The case study method, using qualitative data gathering and analysing techniques, is applied to this study. Interviewing, supported by documentary searches and analysis, are the techniques available to the researcher. Interviewees include the subject of the dismissal, Freda Whitlam, the initiator of the dismissal, Chairman, Peter Graham, and members of the School Council, the staff, and the school support groups. Open access to sensitive documentation was granted to the researcher.

Analysis of the data revealed a complex interplay of forces acting on the school which included national influences that were largely beyond the control of the principal. These external forces combined with issues and instability within the school to create destabilizing competition for power, and factional activity that unsettled the principal. Issues of character and personality, and leadership style, were significant in affecting the outcome. Freda Whitlam had begun her nineteen years service with great promise and youthful enthusiasm. She served through a unique period in Australian social, political and church history and became unavoidably entwined in the dynamics of these years. By the mid 1970s, the external influences had so intruded upon, and damaged relationships within the school, that essential trust and loyalty had been lost. In 1976, a combination of these external and internal forces culminated in the critical incident at this school.

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# CHAPTER ONE

## INTRODUCTION

### A WAY FORWARD

This opening chapter will examine the nature of this study. It addresses the objective to be achieved which is a case study examination of the micropolitical forces resulting in the sudden resignation in 1976 of Freda Whitlam from the principal's position at the Presbyterian Ladies' College (P.L.C.), Croydon. The chapter outlines the key theoretical aspects of the study and the qualitative methodology to be used in gathering data. This is a scene-setting chapter for what is to follow.

The case study is conducted within a school organisation at a time of enormous change in Australian society. The importance of this dynamic external environment to the case study context is the subject of some attention in this chapter, as is the formative family and professional experience of the living actor at the centre of the study, Freda Whitlam. The chapter will conclude with a brief examination of some of the more significant external influences impacting on this school and other institutions during the period of Whitlam's headship, 1958-1976.

## THE NATURE OF THE STUDY

This study is not an attempt at writing a biography of Freda Whitlam nor an attempt at defining her substantial contribution to education. In view of the very interesting journey of her life, the significance of her family in Australian and world affairs, and her enormous contribution to secondary and tertiary education and community affairs, especially subsequent to her years at PLC, it is indeed surprising and disappointing that her life has not been subjected to more documentation and critical appraisal.

The broad aims of this study relate to the critical incident which initiated her departure from the school. The main aim of the study is to isolate the micropolitical forces that acted from within and without the school community, to bring on the critical incident. This is a study that examines a relatively short period of Freda Whitlam's life and focuses on the final stages of this period. It is a study of the issues and circumstances resulting in Freda Whitlam's sudden resignation from the position of principal of the Presbyterian Ladies' College, Croydon, thus ending a nineteen years period of service to the school.

At a more specific level, the study seeks to address a number of research questions. Central to the task is to determine a chronology of events, the key players, and their respective roles in the critical incident. As is distinctive with most qualitative research, this study begins with many uncertainties in these details. Whitlam's headship came to a sudden end after a long period of service. To what extent did her character, her gender, and her leadership

practice and style contribute to the critical incident, and to what extent did the achievements of her years at the school consolidate her hold on the headship and prolong her period of service? To what extent did the micropolitics operating in the school community contribute to Whitlam's departure? What were the main micropolitical forces, and how did they interact to influence the issues and the outcome? These specific questions will be addressed in the study and, as answers are revealed, a more complete explanation of this critical incident will emerge.

Issues of 'leadership' are interwoven throughout this study. I suspect there is no more thoroughly researched field of education nor more inconclusive in its findings than that of leadership of schools. Definition of universally applicable qualities of outstanding leaders has found uneasy agreement amongst researchers. Beare et al (1993), summarise the research on leadership in schools, concluding that there is no one correct meaning and that differences in definition reflect different contexts as well as different perspectives. They conclude 'concise definitions and descriptions are difficult, if not inappropriate' (p.143). It would appear that there are some fundamental qualities appropriate for leadership in almost any context, and beyond that there will be a matching of particular personal attributes to particular leadership contexts. Further, what is an initial successful matching can well deteriorate as either the individual leader or the organisational context alters with the passage of time.

The traditional theories of leadership are normative, concentrating on the formal aspects of organisational life and on authority. They generally fail to

provide an understanding of the individual school and the covert and overt dynamics that operate at that level. This latter perspective perceives the school as a political entity in which informal aspects, interests, power struggles amongst community members, and also co-operation and support building help shape and define the organisation. As is the case with all schools, PLC is a complex web of interwoven relationships amongst and between community individuals and groups of staff members, parents, students, former students, members of School Council and members of the school's external community. The principal relates to all individuals and groups and is the universal subject of observation, discussion and criticism. The principal's leadership style and the strategies adopted are crucial to harmony and the advancement of the vision and goals of the school. A principal's ability to translate a personal vision into that for the school depends on her skills in convincing individuals and groups of the merits of the vision, and on her strategies for implementing the vision throughout the community of the school. The school continually operates within an ever-changing internal and external community with events and issues impacting on the principal and the school.

This study traces the family and early professional experience of Freda Whitlam, the consequence of which was her arrival in 1958, at age thirty seven, as principal at PLC. From a combination of data collected from interviews and documentary searches, her contribution to the school is assessed. The study will reveal an approach to leadership strong in educational and symbolic qualities, and a leadership style that drew to her extremes of loyalty and praise, and disloyalty and intense dislike. The study

will also highlight internal relationship difficulties emerging early in her headship and growing in the school in response to a combination of momentous external forces and internal interpersonal issues.

The study is an examination of the interplay of these micropolitical forces combining to destabilise and eventually unseat Whitlam. All institutions include personalities and groupings that seek to exert an influence on the direction of that institution. This was certainly the position during Whitlam's headship. She led this school during a time of unprecedented turmoil in the national community, a time when her brother was central to all that happened at the national level, and when her church, the denominational owner of this school, was torn apart. The complex interaction between issues and events external to the immediate community of the school, and the internal personalities and groupings of the immediate school, form the micropolitical environment that gives substance to this study. The culmination of this extraordinary period at this school was the critical incident at the heart of this study, a botched attempt at forcing the resignation of Whitlam, giving rise to her personal decision to resign a short period later. The circumstances and events surrounding these final months will be the subject of some detailed consideration in a later chapter.

The micropolitics of this school leading to this critical incident are central to the study. The study is also an examination of Whitlam's leadership style and the part that character can play in destabilizing one's ability to maintain stability in one's own leadership. Integral to this is an assessment of the relationship between a School Board (Council) that had a very hierarchical,

controlling approach, and an ill defined understanding of role, and a principal with an idiosyncratic leadership style which for nineteen years was not understood nor appreciated by the school's governing Council. In self managing schools, of which PLC is a typical example, the relationship between principal and School Council is central to the school's effectiveness and its future development. In this school an unsatisfactory relationship was instrumental in the growth of destabilising forces from within, and in the effectiveness of the influences from without. The study is a case study of leadership under exceptionally difficult circumstances, where support and encouragement were uncertain, and where internal and external forces went beyond the management ability of the principal.

Later chapters will focus on these issues that combined to destabilise Whitlam's leadership. A drawing together of the key themes and issues of this period of school leadership will conclude the study. A brief account of Freda Whitlam's wide range of involvements and interests since leaving PLC, will form a postscript to this study.

## PLC SYDNEY - A RESUMÉ

The Presbyterian Ladies' College, Sydney (PLC) is an independent school for girls aged 4-19, located in the inner western suburbs of Sydney, the capital city of the State of New South Wales. The school is located adjacent to Croydon railway station, approximately ten kilometres from the city's Central Business District and one kilometre from the geographic centre of this sprawling city. The suburb is composed of detached bungalows and semi-detached single and two storey cottages, many of which were built in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. The suburb was once regarded as of medium to high socio-economic status. However, during the middle to latter periods of the twentieth century, the suburb deteriorated and it is only in very recent years that a regeneration has been evident.

The school began in 1888 in a neighbouring suburb, moving to its current site in 1891. The school occupies a twelve acre site, significant for its National Trust classified central buildings and established gardens and grounds. An additional substantial school property, Branxton, housing a preschool for boys and girls, was until recently owned by the school and was located two suburbs further west, at Strathfield. This inner western area of Sydney is recognised for its concentration of primary and secondary government and non government schools.

On the Croydon site the school's roll currently stands at 1150 girls, of whom approximately seven hundred are in the Senior School, Year 7-12. The remainder are in years Reception to Year 6 and share the facilities and staffing

arrangements with those in the Senior School. The school accommodates between sixty and seventy boarders. These students are drawn from many countries, especially countries on the Pacific rim and from locations within Australia. Twenty of these girls are weekly boarders, living in from Monday-Friday. Parents of boarding students pay fees generally twice that of equivalent day students. In 1999 combined boarding and tuition fees total \$18,000 p.a. and place PLC amongst the highest of the fee paying schools for girls.

There are approximately one hundred and thirty members of staff, some of whom are part time. The staff includes academic staff; residential supervisors; administration and clerical staff; cleaners and domestic staff; gardening and maintenance staff; Development staff; specialist instrumental music tutors; and sports' coaches. The majority of staff members live off site with approximately six living on the school property in flats or houses. The principal and family reside on the edge of the campus. The current principal is the eighth principal of the school and is the first to live in a residence separate yet adjoining the main school campus. Previous principals, including Freda Whitlam, have lived in the main central building of the school, above the principal's office and Reception rooms and adjoining the Boarding House. Access to the principal's quarters was through the offices and general Reception Rooms.

The curriculum of the school is recognised as liberal arts in its tradition, academic in its focus. This has been consistent throughout the school's history. A broad general base gradually gives way to academic specialisation

with entry to tertiary education as the primary goal. Minimal emphasis is given to vocational and employment directed courses. In the Senior School the curriculum is composed of the following subjects: Biology, Business Studies, Chemistry, Commerce, computing Applications, Design & Technology, Drama, Economics, French, General Studies, Geography, German, History (Ancient), History (Modern), Indonesian, Chinese, Japanese, Latin, Modern Greek, Mathematics, Music, Physical Education/Health/Personal Development, Physics, Religious Studies, Textiles & Design, Visual Arts.

This list shows a remarkable similarity to that of 1892 - Scripture and Scripture History, English, French, German, Latin, Grammar and Composition, Ancient and Modern History, Physical and Political Geography, Arithmetic, Mental Arithmetic, Algebra, Geometry and Trigonometry, Science (Botany, Geology, Physiology and Science Lectures), Domestic Economy, Music, Writing and Needlework. According to McFarlane (1988) most pupils attempted English, History, Geography, French, German, Music and Mathematics (p.26).

A wide range of co-curricular communication, Arts and sporting activities is offered and participation is strongly encouraged. These activities are conducted outside the 'normal' hours of school and usually involve some aspect of competition external to the school.

The present size and structure of the school results from a period of rapid expansion in student numbers, staff members, property and internal

complexity. Throughout the school's history the student roll has varied significantly. Curriculum initiatives, especially in the fields of gifted and talented, and special education, have been significant.

The establishment in 1987 of the PLC Sydney Foundation with its own committee structure and multi million dollar asset base has added to the complexity of the school. A Parents and Friends' Association was formed during Freda Whitlam's period of leadership. An Ex-Students' Union has existed for many years meeting monthly, organising reunions and small fundraising activities.

Since 1888 the school has been owned by the Presbyterian Church of Australia in New South Wales with responsibility delegated to a school Council of fifteen men and women each elected by the Assembly (Governing Body) of the Church to serve a three year renewable term. The School Council is composed mostly of men and a few women. Traditionally the Council has operated with a dominant male chairman. No Councillor is a representative member and there is no length of service or age restriction on membership. The level of involvement and motivations of council members varies greatly with most attending meetings and required to do little else. Former Chairman, Mr. F.L. Thompson, was a Council member for a record fifty years, forty four of which he served as Chairman, retiring as Chairman in 1974 and from Council in 1977. He was followed by Mr. P. Graham who served as Chairman until 1985.

The school operates as a self managing school, without regular system support in any form. Through the Schools and Colleges sub-committee, formerly the Trustees' Schools Commission, of the Presbyterian Assembly, the Church meets from time to time to discuss the financial and general management concerns of the various Presbyterian Schools. Unless the continuing existence of the institution is threatened, or unless the school(s) requires development financial assistance, the Church continues 'at arm's length'. The most significant period of church involvement in the affairs of its schools was in the mid 1970s when the Australian properties of the Presbyterian church were divided between the newly formed Uniting Church - an amalgamation of the Methodist, Congregational and a majority membership of the Presbyterian Church - and a continuing Presbyterian Church. This school remained with the considerably smaller Presbyterian Church.

Policy determination and general responsibility for the school are vested in the College Council through the Constitution of the School Council, a document prepared for PLC in 1890 and amended on a number of subsequent occasions. To the principal is delegated the management of the school. There is a clear separation in roles between that of policy formulation entrusted to the School Council and the management of all aspects of the school's development, entrusted to the principal. The efficient and trusting relationship between Council Chairman and principal is central to the satisfactory maintenance of these roles.

## THE PRINCIPAL'S ROLE

The role and responsibilities of the principal have been variously expressed over the years. It was only following Freda Whitlam's departure in the mid 1970s that attempts were made to define these in writing and to include them in a contract of engagement. In 1980 a Contract was established between the incumbent principal and the College Council. The principal had been appointed to the school in January 1978. Within this Contract the parties agreed that in accordance with the Constitution of the College:

"2. The Principal shall be responsible for implementing Council Policy and decisions and for the detailed administration of the College.

3. The Principal shall be responsible for the appointment, dismissal, salary and conditions of appointment for all staff except the Bursar of the College and all such staff of the College shall be responsible and answerable through the Principal to the Council with the exception of the Bursar. New appointments shall be reported to the Council by the Principal. Proposed dismissals shall be reported to the Council by the Principal before such dismissals are effective.

4. The Bursar shall be appointed by the Council in consultation with the Principal. The Bursar shall be responsible to the Council for the financial and property management of the College and responsible to the Principal for all other matters.

5. The Principal shall make regular reports to the Council and include therein such recommendations as she shall from time to time deem necessary for the advancement of the interests of the College.

6. The Principal shall normally be required to be present at all ordinary meetings of the Council and its sub-committees.

7. The Principal shall have the authority to select pupils for admission and to suspend pupils for conduct which she shall in her absolute discretion deem sufficient to warrant such suspension and shall report any such action to the Council. The right of expulsion rests with the Council." (Contract of Employment, PLC Principal, 1980.)

This statement of the role and responsibilities remained in place until 1985. The statement presents a clear separation of roles between Council and principal, for the first time formalising this in contractual obligations. In August of that year the current principal was appointed to the school, the former principal having resigned early in 1985. The contract referred to above was slightly amended and formed the basis for the contract between the new principal and the College Council. This contract again contained a statement of role and responsibilities. Clauses 2-6 of the 1985 Contract of Agreement make reference to responsibilities of the principal. There are some significant alterations to the earlier form of contract, bringing the contract into line with general expectations of the Association of Heads of Independent Schools of Australia.

"2. The Principal shall be responsible for implementing Council Policy and decisions and for the detailed administration of the College.

3. The Principal shall be responsible for the appointment, dismissal, salary and conditions of appointment of all staff and all such staff of the College shall be responsible and answerable through the Principal to the Council. New appointments shall be reported to the Council by the Principal.

Proposed dismissals shall be reported to the Council by the Principal before such dismissals are effective.

4. The Principal shall make regular reports to the Council and included therein such recommendations as he shall from time to time deem necessary for the advancement of the interests of the College.

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6. The Principal shall have the authority to select pupils for admission and to suspend pupils for conduct which he shall in his absolute discretion deem sufficient to warrant such suspension and shall report any such action to the Council. The right of expulsion rests with the Council." (Contract of Employment, Council of PLC and Principal, 1985.)

Between the two statements significant changes relate to the inclusion of the bursar's appointment, dismissal, salary and conditions of employment, within the responsibilities of the principal. The bursar has been a regular attendee at meetings of College Council, at various times acting as Minutes Secretary. The relationship between bursar and principal and bursar and Council have been confused for many years.

## **FREDA WHITLAM - THE EARLY YEARS**

The skills and talents and the ideas that one brings to a vocational setting are directly and indirectly shaped over the course of one's life. Family and the circumstances of one's upbringing; schooling and tertiary training; one's exposure to influential and wise counsel and sources of ideas and knowledge;

one's professional background all contribute to the wholeness of the person that arrives at the door of a new professional experience. We are influenced and subtly shaped by an array of inseparable forces. How one completes the task ahead can often be traced to the seeds of one's early life experiences.

Freda Whitlam's formative years gave early indications of a life of service and community involvement. Her nineteen years at PLC is just one period in a long life distinguished by these qualities.

Freda Leslie Whitlam was born in Sydney to Martha and Harry Frederick Ernest Whitlam in the early 1920s. Her father was Deputy Crown Solicitor and her mother cared for the family that also included her older brother, Gough. In 1928 the family moved to the infant capital of Canberra and in 1936 Frederick Whitlam was appointed to the prominent public service position of Commonwealth Crown Solicitor.

Freudenberg (1977) writes of Canberra of the 1930s as the only place in Australia where the community experience was in any way comparable to that to be shared by families in the post-war growth suburbs of Sydney and Melbourne in the fifties and sixties. "The economic circumstances of Canberra in the thirties were quite different from those of the rest of Australia but its social circumstances were quite comparable to those of the Sydney western suburbs of the fifties and sixties." (p67). The task of creating a decent community life and building social structures and a sense of belonging were significant concerns for those in positions of influence and authority to the Canberra in the 1930s and 1940s.

Frederick Whitlam was a prominent public servant and a highly regarded one. He became well known in the small Canberra community of the time because of his involvement in community affairs. He was active in many spheres of life, for instance as secretary of the Canberra College Association, which finally brought the Australian National University into being; he was a member of the ABC concert Committee in Canberra, and he was an elder of the St Andrew's Presbyterian Church. He was generous in his giving to the church and to charities. Freda Whitlam said 'My parents without saying anything about it, tithed. They were always very generous in what they gave away.' (Woman's Day, 1977, p17). He gained distinction in actively pursuing the cause of human rights and through his interests in international affairs. He was Chairman of the Australian Churches Committee on International Affairs, and a driving force within the Canberra branch of the Institute of International Affairs. In 1946 he attended the Paris Peace Conference as a member of the Australian team and was later to be Australia's representative on the United Nations' Human Rights Commission (Walter, 1980).

Freda's home life appears to have been close, stable and stimulating to young minds. 'Words and concepts like peace, honour, efficiency, skills, creativity and excellence were used with some meaning and without embarrassment.' (Freudenberg, 1977, p68). The children were included in discussions amongst the parents and the many visitors who came to the Whitlam home. They were surrounded by good food and books. There was no alcohol and no smoking. Martha Whitlam was a lively woman, with a good sense of humour.

Oakes (1973) comments that Martha Whitlam was not a woman who could simply be taken for granted. Although she was deaf, this seemed to provide no significant handicap for her. She was strong and impressive with a rather caustic humour. 'When it came to domestic affairs, she dominated her husband.' (p3). Home life was profoundly religious and intimately linked with the Presbyterian Church. However, according to Freda Whitlam, 'There was no Bible bashing in our home; certainly we had many clergymen there and I suppose my father had the best theological library outside a theological college, but they were not prominently displayed. I said to my father once "I've never seen you pray". He said, "My life is one long prayer."' (Woman's Day 1977, p17).

Separated by six years, Freda admired her older brother. Gough was tall and impressive in appearance at a young age, and displayed an incisive formidable intellect with a very wide general knowledge. 'As a child I was always in awe of him. You know, he was my big brother and all that, but a tremendously strong man intellectually. He was a vast fund of general knowledge, extraordinary as a child.' (West Australian, 12 January 1977). However, separation between them occurred in 1935 when Gough moved to St. Paul's College at the University of Sydney. In her early years of adolescence and with a father fully involved in his own demanding professional life, Freda was at the time forced to rely more on her own resources for companionship and interests.

These were depression times with severe unemployment and generally lower incomes. Education was seriously affected throughout Australia with teachers irregularly paid and spending on education reduced. Freda attended Canberra Girls' Grammar School where she remembers teachers as appalling and, always in a small class, she never saw good teaching. 'I was shockingly taught, but in our home we had masses of books, encyclopedias and atlases, and histories, and so on and we were welcome to use them all; so I had a very good general knowledge. I'd read more than the teachers had. I knew a lot about history and of course Gough was interested in that too. However, I was very badly taught' (first interview with Freda Whitlam....FW1).

From Canberra Girls' Grammar School Freda was sent to Abbotsleigh Girls' School in Sydney for her final two years of schooling. Well established and strong financially, Abbotsleigh had an impressive reputation in education circles. This was the first time that Freda had been in a standard class size situation. Freda's interests were with English, History and Modern language studies. Although she remembers Abbotsleigh as providing a limited and very conservative approach to learning – 'We were stuck with Roberts' History of Modern Europe which we underlined in red and blue, and that was our History' (FW1) – she passed successfully through her Leaving Certificate, managing to achieve amongst her results a notable "lower Maths pass". Freda's parents wanted her home in Canberra and so from Abbotsleigh she graduated to University studies in Canberra where she continued her love of languages until struck down by a serious bout of measles.

Having recovered her health and following a short period of war service with the Air Force, Freda then went to Melbourne University to complete her initial Arts Degree. She studied English, French, German, Philosophy and some Economics and Geography, and thoroughly enjoyed the exciting academic community of Melbourne University.

Once again encouraged back to Canberra, Freda accepted a teaching opportunity between Canberra Girls' and Canberra Boys' Grammar Schools. The boys' school was wanting to recommence French having lost it during the war. The girls' school had two girls from Indonesia who were of German parentage who had been interned during the war, and the school wanted Freda to take them for German and introduce German studies more widely throughout the school. Freda had 'a wonderful three years' teaching individual students and small groups between these two schools working with some inspirational educators who were 'up to date in educational methods' (FW1).

Her love of language teaching is based as much on the beauty and discipline of the language itself as it is on the freedom granted the teacher of a language. 'Languages are marvellous because every lesson is a revision and anything goes in a language – you can talk about anything, you can do anything, and language is a wonderful study because you have to read the history, the philosophy, the geography, the literature – so that the young get a very good rounded education doing languages' (FW1).

Freda returned to Melbourne University at the end of her three years at the Canberra Grammar Schools. Keen to 'become a proper teacher' (FW1) she completed a one year Diploma in Education Programme in a group of seventy students working under Professor of Education George Brown. His specialty was International Education and this was the focus of the course although Freda with three fellow students was allowed to include an Honours programme in the Philosophy of Education.

A further short period at the Canberra Boys' Grammar School full time teaching French and some Latin followed. Fully immersed in the school she found time to also involve herself in church activities and in the running of a busy Girl Guides' company. And then in 1953 Freda organised through her Melbourne University contacts, and her father, now on the Human Rights Commission meeting alternately in Geneva and New York, to study for a Master of Arts degree under Professor Brubacher, Professor of Education at Yale University. She lived in at Yale during 1954 and 1955 funded by a Fulbright Scholarship. Freda remembers this period as a wonderful experience full of exciting opportunities, visiting schools and places of interest, able to gain a good idea of the range of education in the United States, and with Yale possessing a library 'that was out of this world' (FW1).

Prior to returning to Australia, Freda spent a summer through personal contacts in France as a missionary in the Pyrenees with the French Reformed Church, and then a month on a farm with a leading Protestant family. She then followed these experiences with a term at London University where she could go to any lecture of her choosing and had time and opportunity to visit

schools in England and Scotland. This was clearly a very special time for Freda. It was intellectually stimulating and she was free to explore her interests and her independence. 'This was superb', she says. 'I stayed in a flat with friends I'd made at Melbourne University – it was idyllic' (FW1). From London, Freda returned to Australia and to a teaching position at Frensham School for Girls, two hours south of Sydney, to commence the 1956 school year.

Her Frensham experience is interesting because it reveals a deepening love of language teaching and of community living. She taught English and Latin and was closely involved with the girls, all of whom were residential students. By this stage in her career she was also observant of education and school administrative practices and the relationships that existed within the school. She was aware of the significance to the European settlement of Australia of a large number of the Frensham families. Freda tells the story of an English class to which she put the question 'How many of you had family members here in the first decade of Australia under white domination?' A quarter of the class were descended from pioneers of the eighteenth century. She observes how the parents were wealthy and well established and yet were very, very loyal and appreciative and how close was the 'family' of the school (FW1).

For Freda there were some outstanding education practices at Frensham. The school had a strong student Christian movement and an ecumenical Christian Headmistress in Miss Bryant. Some services led by Miss Bryant, were held at the school and in her second year Freda was given experience in taking

services. There was an excellent club for writers that Freda ran which had produced women writers such as Nancy Keesing and Joan Phipson.

The approach of Frensham was to focus attention on the child rather than the subject and this impressed Freda. The most significant procedure for her was the way Miss Bryant approached Student Report preparation. On a class by class basis each child was considered, one at a time, by all the staff – housekeeper and gardener included – meeting together. Subject teachers each had to defend their comments written about the child and comments were drafted, and redrafted until an acceptable outcome was achieved. ‘People had the chance to say, ‘well, she mightn’t have been much good at Maths but she is a real leader and an unselfish player and a team player’, so that every girl got a really fair summing up’ (FW1).

Freda regularly worshipped at the local Mittagong Presbyterian Church during her two years at Frensham School. It was one morning, late in 1957, that Freda was sent for to go to the school’s Reception Room to meet with the Presbyterian Minister from Bowral, who also served Mittagong, and the Presbyterian Minister from neighbouring Moss Vale. They formally asked her to apply for the vacant position of principal of Presbyterian Ladies’ College, Croydon, a school of which she was barely aware.

Her knowledge of PLC Croydon extended to an experience when she was at Abbotsleigh. There was a Dempster Shield for Music for which all the independent girls’ schools competed. In that particular year, Abbotsleigh was confident of success, only to be beaten by a little known school PLC Croydon.

She remembers the Abbotsleigh people being 'rather miffed that a school that wasn't north shore had beaten them' (FW1). Without the knowledge and advice of Miss Bryant, absent abroad at the time, and motivated by the wish to serve her church, Freda Whitlam submitted an application for the headship of this Sydney school about which she knew virtually nothing.

A short time later and following an interview at the school, Freda Whitlam was invited to accept the position of principal of PLC, Croydon. In mid October of 1957 news of her appointment was released to the school and to the wider public.

## NEW PRINCIPAL CROYDON P.L.C.

The Council of the Presbyterian Ladies' College, Croydon, announces the appointment of Miss Freda Whitlam, B.A., Dip. Ed. (Melbourne), and M.A. (Yale, U.S.A.) as the School's new Principal. She succeeds Miss



**Eunice Macindoe who resigned as Principal in December, 1956, and will take over from the Acting-Principal Miss Jean Tassie at the end of the year.**

Miss Whitlam was educated at Canberra Church of England Girls' Grammar School and at Abbotsleigh, Wahroonga, and she is a graduate of Melbourne and Yale Universities.

In 1954 Miss Whitlam studied at Yale under Professor Brubacher, one of America's most distinguished teachers in the field of Education and she later took a course in Education at London University. In addition to this she travelled widely visiting schools and educational establishments in England and in the United States. Miss Whitlam is a specialist in education and modern languages.

(*'The N.S.W. Presbyterian'*, Oct. 18, 1957)

Freda Whitlam came to PLC Croydon with a stable family background. Her parents had provided her with an upbringing that was intellectual, religious and highly moral. She loved her parents and her brother and admired the intellect and the achievements of her father and her brother, Gough. Her education was strong in the study of History and foreign languages and her life experience was guided by concepts of service, learning, equity and compassion. Her schooling was in single sex institutions where privilege and wealth were features. At school and in her post school experiences, she was exposed to an international community and issues of her home and her education had a constant international focus. In her mid thirties, Freda Whitlam had very little experience of management and of co-ordinating the activities of others. Her personality and her personal and professional background had not been tested by experience as a Head of Department, Deputy Headship or leadership of a small school. She had only limited personal experience of community leadership. The knowledge and skills associated with this experience were to be gained in the practice of leading PLC Croydon.

## **A NATION IN TRANSITION**

The issues and circumstances surrounding any historical event must always be contextualised. The event must be placed within the social, political and economic culture of the period in order to assist in our understanding of the forces impacting on individuals and institutions. Australia of the 1960s and 1970s was subject to vastly different pressures than the Australia that is on the cusp of the twentieth and twenty first centuries. To assist in our

understanding of the relationships between Freda Whitlam and her school community, it is important to give some attention to the broad cultural setting in which these relationships developed.

The years of the 1960s and 1970s are generally regarded as the most dynamic and most turbulent in Australian political history. Menzies retired as leader of the Conservative Liberal-Country Party Coalition and as Prime Minister in January, 1966 ending a record sixteen year period of leadership. Menzies was followed in rapid order by Conservative Prime Ministers Holt, Gorton and McMahon. In December of 1972, the Australian people voted for a change in government. The Labor Party led by Freda Whitlam's brother, Gough, ended the twenty years of Conservative rule.

The mid-late 1960s saw enormous changes in Australian society. Although all eras are times of change and uncertainty, this period was particularly so. Australians had to face a devaluation of sterling, the beginnings of a black power movement by Aborigines, claims for independence by Papua New Guinea, and all with conspicuously untried leaders. Australia's participation in the Vietnam War, and the spread of an international dissident youth culture – with its protest songs, student movements and counter-culture – provided a focus for dissatisfaction with the Australian way of life. The impact of television and the growing links with the United States were very significant influences on attitudes and actions. For many of the younger generation Australia had sold out to consumerism. Universities, schools and the streets were centres of student protest actions that gained pace into the early 1970s. Alienated, intellectuals were the new generation of academics

and social critics. An emerging 'new nationalism' was identified by an increasing pride in Australian achievement, particularly in film, art, writing and the study of Australian History in schools; and an increasing disquiet at the extent of foreign investments in Australia. The Women's Movement made considerable progress as new leaders emerged, pointing to the restrictiveness of the role of women in Australian social and organisational life. (White, 1985)

The 1960s and 1970s disillusionment of the 'minorities' was evident in this second wave of the women's movement together with the student, environmental, peace, and civil rights movements. Women workers' average wage was still two thirds male average wage in comparable work (despite equal pay movements); women were still under-represented in formal political systems, workplace or social reform organisations; women with equivalent education to men still received inequitable rewards in the workplace due to discriminatory structures and attitudes; and women experienced oppressive domestic arrangements (despite civil rights movements' promises of equal personal, civic and economic rights). Blackmore (1997) suggests that the dominant Liberal political and economic theory was premised upon a public/private dichotomy between the private (home) and the public (work) which was based upon and justified a gendered division of labour in the labour market between the 'caring' occupations of education, health and welfare, perceived to be women's work, and trade based, management and industrial occupations, constructed as men's work. However, in all occupational areas, women were concentrated in casual and lower levels jobs and occupied a low proportion of positions of leadership.

Another change affecting popular attitudes through the 1960s, was the weakening of the racial exclusiveness and intolerance associated with policy on Aborigines and on immigration. White (1985) comments how in aboriginal policy, in theory at least 'integration replaced assimilation, and although official attitudes to 'Our Aborigines' remained paternalistic, they at least allowed for the maintenance of the sort of cultural identity which Aborigines themselves were developing' (p.168).

The period also introduced changes to Australia's approach to immigration that would eventually permanently alter all aspects of Australian culture. The 1950s had been dominated by the issue of immigration. The large scale postwar assisted immigration begun by the Chifley government and continued under Menzies was the product of earlier 'populate or perish' fears, the Japanese threat to Australia and the decision to industrialise Australia. 'What distinguished this from earlier immigration schemes was not only its size and effectiveness – between 1947 and 1964 more migrants were added to the population than in the 80 years before 1860 – but also, the fact that a large proportion of migrants were not British' (White, 1985, p.159). By 1979 the population of Australia was 14.418 million, 11.8 percent of which had no connection by either birth or descent with Britain (Clark, 1980).

By the early 1970s, Australia was being promoted as a pluralistic, tolerant, multi-cultural society, although it did not reflect any real improvements in the position of Aborigines and migrants, most of whom remained in the lower rungs of the socio-economic ladder.

The late 1960s were characterised by community prosperity and national wealth. By 1966 the population of Australia was enjoying a relatively large increase in income, expressed in measures such as overseas touring holidays; car ownership; the development of vast suburban shopping centres, the first having been built in 1957; and the increasing investment by small investors in the share market (Griffiths, 1977, p.90). The new prosperity in the period was the result of an upturn in Australia's balance of payments position encouraged by heavy investment from the United Kingdom and the United States in Australian companies. It coincided with an extraordinary mineral boom marked by the increasing fortunes of companies such as Poseidon whose share value rose from \$1 to \$120 between September and December 1969.

The change in leadership evidenced in the Liberal-Country Party during the 1960s had also occurred within the Federal Labor Party. Whereas the changes in the conservative party leadership were destabilizing and divisive, the change in Labor Party (ALP) ranks was rejuvenating and 'contemporary'.

Whitlam took over from Caldwell as leader of the ALP in 1967, and immediately set about modernizing the party structure, developing a series of new policies in education, social services and foreign affairs. The essence of the programme was redistributive; by vastly expanding welfare and public services, Labor intended to redistribute social goods to workers, migrants, pensioners, women, school children and the growing middle class voters who lived in the expanding outer suburbs of Melbourne and Sydney. McGregor

(1980) talks of Whitlam as being reformist, urbane and innovative; 'his technique when confronted with obstacles was to crash through or crash' (p.212). Proselytizing a powerful vision for the future, the charismatic Whitlam led the ALP to power at the elections of 1972, immediately implementing a programme of radical change in all spheres of social and foreign policy.

1972 and 1973 were years of hectic activity with reforms forced through Parliament in many areas of life. Australia's first comprehensive national health scheme, Medibank, was set up; pensions were increased to one-quarter of average weekly earnings; in the 1973 Budget, expenditure on education doubled, housing rose by 400 per cent, urban development by 300 percent. A series of legal reforms gave equal pay, status and rights to women; established a system of legal aid, guaranteed aboriginal land rights; an increasing interest in the affairs and developments of Australia's immediate northern Asian neighbours occurred; Australia's involvement in the Vietnam War was ended; conscription was abolished; the Republic of China was recognised; independence was granted to Papua New Guinea and Australia abandoned its pro-South Africa position. (Clark, 1980)

Amongst the most controversial initiatives was the new education policy, for schools expressed through the establishment of a Schools Commission. The Commission's role included responsibility for the distribution of finances to schools on the basis of need, instead of the per capita basis which had been claimed to favour wealthy independent schools. Smart (1978) presents a useful account of the emergence of this active funding position from the 1963

decision to provide Commonwealth aid to schools in the form of specific purpose grants to secondary schools for science laboratories and apparatus; through the 1968 Commonwealth funded secondary schools libraries programme, to persistent demands from schools for Federal and State aid for education in the early 1970s.

Between 1963 and 1968, government and independent school pressure groups, acting on their respective beliefs that Menzies' 1963 'education package' was a clear precedent for Federal and State aid, vigorously renewed their demands at State and Federal levels. Significant concessions were gained from State governments, by independent schools during this period. An acceptance of the need for increased support from the Commonwealth government was incorporated as policy by both the Liberal-Country and the Australian Labor Parties.

The detail of the Whitlam government's needs-based schools policy emerged from internal Labor Party factional argument and widespread public debate. The most divisive feature was the categorization of independent schools in order of relative need, with the Cabinet in 1973 resolving to end all grants to 'wealthy' independent schools. This decision gave rise to passionate opposition to its legislation from independent school sources confirming for them the distrust and deep anger already felt.

Whitlam's education programme was one plank of a general reform programme that was expensive and seemed to lack substantial revenue raising initiatives. Everything in the Australian experience of the 1960s had

encouraged the view that the ordinary old-fashioned problems of economic management were solved, 'growth' having removed these concerns. This explained why Whitlam and his colleagues turned their attention to the development of programmes for social change rather than economic planning.

Although Whitlam always resented the assertion that he was not interested in economic matters, the most common criticism of Whitlam's abilities has been that he lacked economic expertise. He could not accept that economic expertise was a necessary qualification for political leadership (Freudenberg, 1977). Labor's programme was predicated upon the fatal assumption that the long economic boom of the 1950s and 1960s would continue, and that the government would be able to finance its ambitious initiatives without raising taxes or setting up an overall economic planning organisation to restructure the Australian economy.

By mid term the economic conditions at home and abroad had radically changed. Unemployment had risen from 100,000 in December, 1972 to 270,400 in June, 1975; investment had declined; there was a downturn in business confidence; annual inflation increased from 4.5 per cent in December, 1972 to 16.9 per cent in June, 1975; (Clark, 1980, p.284); all converging to create deep anxieties, instability, and within the government, seemingly uncontrolled and erratic decision making. The Loans Affair of late 1975, in which Labor ministers secretly tried to borrow four thousand million dollars from Arab sources, presented the leader of the Federal Opposition, Malcolm Fraser, with his chance to force the blocking of Government Supply Bills in the Senate.

The Governor General's historic decision to dismiss the elected government of the day followed shortly after. To most conservatives, Kerr, the Governor General, had courageously saved Australian society from a government which appeared to them to destroy the very foundations of civilized behaviour in the community. To Labor's supporters, he was and will always be guilty of an act of treason against the people, the democratic order and the Crown. (Clark, 1980)

The national political and economic issues were extreme and divided the nation. The developments were unusual in Australian political history. Every family, institution and social group was attuned to what was happening. The media was preoccupied by developments in Canberra throughout November and the national elections which followed in December of 1975.

Following the victory for the conservative Coalition parties in these elections, the temper of public life did not change. The Fraser Government set about fulfilling its election promise to restore sanity and probity to public life by implementing a rush of economic reforms. Gough Whitlam assumed the role of leader of the Opposition until the ALP lost the December 1977 Federal elections, at which point he resigned the leadership (Clark, 1980, p.287).

The two years 1975 and 1976 were pivotal years in Australian political history. The general economic circumstances, felt most severely in country and regional Australia, developments in the international community, and the rapid pace of change in the social and community culture, compounded the tensions and drama of the political stage.

For those involved in Protestant Christian denominations there was denominational division and momentous change with which to contend, as the Congregational Church, Methodist Church and two thirds of the Australian Presbyterians were joining to create the new Uniting Church, a process completed by June 1977. (Burke and Hughes, 1996, p 14) For the leader of any institution or organisation these were difficult years with immense and quite unusual pressures to confront. For Gough Whitlam's sister, heading a conservative, Presbyterian school - self managing with a significant rural community - it must have been especially daunting under the umbrella of these external influences.

## **SUMMARY**

The main aim of this study is to examine the various micropolitical forces and their role in the critical incident of 1976 at this school. The critical incident is the forced resignation, its retraction, and the subsequent self-initiated resignation of Freda Whitlam, the principal. Issues of 'leadership' and the integral relationships and power balances, are central to an understanding of this critical incident.

Whitlam came to this school with a unique mix of life experiences, very limited leadership opportunity, a strong intellect, and a will to be of service to her church. She led this school during a period that was extraordinary in Australian political and church history. At both a personal and a school level, Whitlam was unavoidably at the centre of these momentous historical events.

This study will consider the interaction between these external influences and the internal community of the school and examine what, if any, part they played in Whitlam's departure from the school. The focus of the study is to achieve a clearer understanding of the events, the motivations, and the issues that surrounded this 1976 critical incident.

## CHAPTER TWO

### LITERATURE REVIEW

In December, 1976 Freda Whitlam resigned as principal of PLC Croydon. Her resignation followed an attempted forced resignation two months earlier subsequently withdrawn, and ended nineteen years of service to this school as principal, a long period of leadership that had begun with great promise. Whitlam was forced from office, and this study examines the interplay of internal and external factors that contributed to this critical incident at PLC. This chapter will provide a theoretical framework to assist in the understanding of the issues and circumstances of this period.

This school is self-managing with authority delegated to a School Council by the 'arms length' owners, The Presbyterian Church of Australia in New South Wales. The school is not a member of any system. Its continuance depends on its ability to attract and retain students. A positive, mutually respectful relationship between the School Council and the principal of the school is essential to the satisfactory and harmonious conduct of the school. Questions of leadership will always be at the centre of this relationship; questions, such as: are the approaches of the Council and the principal complementary? Is there clear understanding of the respective roles and responsibilities? Is there mutual respect between Council and principal and is this apparent to the wider school community? Is there periodic review of roles and performance, an assessment of the school's future directions and of the ability of Council members and principal to continue to contribute?

Any institution where the relationship between Board (Council) and CEO (Principal) is not founded on mutual respect, trust and clear role delineation, is vulnerable to internal dislocation and intrusion from external forces. Leadership is a central theoretical construct to this study and from various aspects, will be examined in this chapter.

In this micropolitics study the leader at the centre is a woman heading an all-girls school, with a Council that is dominated by men. The Chairman, for much of Whitlam's headship, was a very long serving man, F L Thompson, who was in his sixties when Whitlam arrived at PLC and retired as Chairman in late 1974, in his early eighties. He served on Council until 1977. He was followed as Chairman by the youngest member of the School Council, P J Graham, a man who, like his predecessor, sought to exert a strong influence on Council and the school. Issues of gender may well have been significant in the approaches of the School Council and the principal, and the relationships that were established.

This chapter will examine literature on gender specific approaches to leadership and will discuss the view that an entrenched male culture exists in school leadership and in the way schools function. Could it be that Whitlam's style of leadership was a 'female' style, ideally appropriate for a school for girls, but inappropriate in the 'male' management milieu established by this School Council? Could it be that two contrasting gender specific approaches to management created a school management context that, without substantial compromise, was never going to work?

Issues of leadership interact with a community - both immediate and external, to build a condition conducive to, or disruptive to, an effective teaching-learning process. Interactions that occur in any organisation, especially those which are people rather than product-based, should be cooperative, and consistent with the goals of the organisation, if there is to be harmony and unity of purpose. For much of Whitlam's time at PLC, this was not the case and in the final years, tensions were at breaking point. On occasions, there was open and bitter argument, deep anger and resentment expressed. Micropolitical activity, significant in any organisation, was instrumental in destabilising the leadership, and in undermining Whitlam. It was not adequately dealt with at any point. At the institutional level, an understanding of the micropolitics at work, is essential to an understanding of the evolution of a critical incident, such as the removal from office of the incumbent leader. In the case of PLC, the internal relationships that composed much of the political activity, must be understood, if Whitlam's removal is to be explained.

The theoretical framework for micropolitical activity will also include a consideration of influences external to the institution, and of how they interact with internal factors, to build a situation. The last five years of Whitlam's headship were unusual in terms of Australian history; unique in church, national politics, social and economic terms. At a personal and family level, these years were traumatic for Whitlam and for her church denomination. At a wide range of points, the external community had opportunity to influence this school. The literature's findings on the

interaction between internal and external, generally informal factors in micropolitical activity will be explored. The evolution of critical incidents through a combination of these active forces, will be the subject of some additional attention.

## **MICROPOLITICS AND THE SCHOOL**

'It is almost a taboo subject in 'serious' discussion, yet informally it is a favourite theme of organizational gossip as people talk about 'playing politics', 'hidden agenda', 'organisational mafias', 'Machiavellianism', and so forth ... We know very little about this darker - or lighter - side of organisations'. (Hoyle, 1986, p 125)

The micropolitical perspective perceives schools as political entities in which informal aspects, interests, power struggles, and co-operation and support building help shape and define the organisation. Schools share many of the same qualities of other organizations, including everpresent micropolitical activity. 'While national governments determine the broad framework for education, micropolitics apply to schools, colleges and other organizations just as much as they relate to political parties'. (Bush 1998)

Writers have frequently focused on the part that micropolitics can play in creating disruption and conflict in organizations. Morgan (1986), for instance, examined political behaviour from the perspective of connections between interest groups, conflict and power: 'We can analyze organizational politics in a systematic way by focusing on relations between interests, conflict and

power. Organizational politics arise when people think differently and want to act differently. This diversity creates a tension that must be resolved through political means... Divergent interests give rise to conflicts, visible and invisible, that are resolved or perpetuated by various kinds of powerplay'. (p148)

Although micropolitics are most commonly associated with interest groups' tensions, conflict and disagreement over goals, writers have increasingly recognized the more constructive, co-operative actions that may compose micropolitics in institutions.

Blase (1991) has developed a comprehensive definition of micropolitics from a review of the relevant literature and includes co-operative and conflictive qualities. To Blase, micropolitics refers to the use of formal and informal power by individuals and groups to achieve their goals in organisations. Blase says that in large part, political actions result from perceived differences between individuals and groups, coupled with the motivation to use power to influence and/or protect. Although such actions are consciously motivated, any action, consciously or unconsciously motivated, may have political 'significance' in a given situation. Both cooperative and conflictive actions and processes are part of the realm of micropolitics. Moreover, macro and micropolitical factors can frequently interact'. (p.11)

In these terms, micropolitical activity may be either consistent or inconsistent with the goals and values of the organisation. Micropolitics deals with the realm of co-operative (i.e. collaborative, collegial, consensual, democratic) as

well as conflicting forms of interaction in organisational settings and may either serve the interests of those leading the institution, or be in opposition to these interests.

Burns (1961) was one of the first theorists in public administration to discuss organisations as political systems. He argued that organisational life consists of co-operative and conflicting elements. Burns contended that both aspects of organisational life are necessary and that political coalitions and political obligations were the 'exchange currency' of organisational life. (p. 261)

Micropolitics is about conflict and co-operation - it is about power and how people use it to influence others and to protect themselves. It is about what people in all social settings think about and have strong feelings about, but what is so often unspoken and not easily observed. It can form the ingredients for informal coalitions and pacts, understandings, bargains, agreements, protracted criticisms and gossip. Blase and Anderson (1995) summarise: '... micropolitical perspectives have emphasised the dialectical, interactive, multi-directional, strategic, conflictive, ideological and interpretive/perceptual aspects of organisations as they relate to the use of power'. (p.3)

Since schools are people-based organisations with complex multi dimensional and multi directional relationships - teacher / parent; teacher/ student / parent; teacher / teacher / department head / principal; teacher/ principal / school council; and so on, it is not surprising that micropolitics is a feature of most spheres of activity. Researchers, such as Ball (1987), and Baldrige (1971), position micropolitics as endemic in schools: 'I take schools, in

common with virtually all other social organizations, to be arenas of struggle; to be riven with actual or potential conflict between members; to be poorly coordinated; to be ideologically diverse'. (Ball 1987,p.19) These dimensions define a fertile ground for vigorous micropolitical activity.

Research in the micropolitics of education is a relatively recent development. Hoyle (1986) suggests that 'there may be good reason for the academic neglect of micropolitics. It is perhaps considered slightly unrespectable, or too self-indulgent'. (p.88) Issues are often sensitive, personally revealing, addressing motivations and values, opinions of others, and other issues that many would prefer to conceal, deny or ignore.

Bush (1995) summarises from the research, six major features of the micropolitics model that are valid for schools. He states that micropolitics tend to focus on group activity rather than the institution as a whole; they are concerned with interests and interest groups often resulting in fragmentation rather than organizational unity; they stress the prevalence of conflict between interest groups and can assume conflict to be a normal feature of organizations; they assume that there is no overall institutional goals to which individuals and interest groups are committed and disagreement over goals is a regular feature; decisions emerge after a complex process of bargaining and negotiation; outcomes of the complex decision-making process are likely to be determined according to the relative power of the individuals and interest groups involved in the debate.

Much of the research has occurred in recent years, and has included some noteworthy accomplishments, particularly in understanding relationships between schoolteachers and principals. Blase and Blase (1997) report a substantial body of research produced in the 1980s on how principals influence teachers (p 139). Notable amongst these studies is that by Ball (1987) which describes the major styles - interpersonal, managerial and political - used by British school heads to control teachers. Ball also alludes to the tactics and 'ploys' teachers use to further their career goals.

Some studies have produced valuable insights into teachers' relationships with other groups in schools - the students and the parents and with other teachers. Teachers' work-life literature consistently emphasises the centrality of internal school problems related to academic instruction and discipline as causes of political interactions between and among teachers, students and their parents (Blase and Anderson, 1995). The studies reveal that parents attempt to elicit special favours for their children in each of these areas. Teachers develop ways to deal with parents whose inclination it is to 'interfere' in school matters and to challenge teachers' authority. Connell (1985) found that teachers generally responded defensively and sought ways to minimise contact with parents. Other researchers have noted coalitions between teachers and parents, or other devices by teachers such as politeness or avoidance.

## LEADERSHIP THEORY AND MICROPOLITICS

Micropolitics is concerned with the day to day behaviour of members of organisations. It is an operational model that contrasts with traditional theories of leadership that are normative focusing on the formal aspect of organisational life and on authority.

The traditional theories have been criticised by some (Blase and Anderson, 1995) for lacking a grounding in the daily realities of school life. 'Because of this lack of grounding, many of their elaborate prescriptions and recommendations for leadership assume a rational, predictable and controllable world that does not exist in schools. Partly for this reason school practitioners have found these theories unhelpful in understanding politicised internal and external contexts of schools'. (p.11)

Donovan (1992) speaks from a practitioner's perspective in casting doubt on the practical usefulness of educational research findings: 'But while I still relate to some individual pieces of research, I seriously question whether a principal in 1992 can rely on generalisations from research'. (p.88) School practitioners have sought ideas and proven practices, tested in the school context, adaptable, flexible and transportable.

However, political theories of school life have tended to suffer from the opposite dilemma: 'although they provide rich descriptions of the realities of day to day life in schools, they have been less successful at providing school practitioners with models of leadership that help them to survive politically

and create a democratic, humane environment'. (Blase and Anderson, 1995, p11)

Taken together, the studies support the contention that, almost without exception, the leadership role of the principal is found to be diverse and crucial to the success of the school (Caldwell, 1992; Coleman, 1994; Blase and Anderson, 1995). The leadership of the broad community of the school and all its interactions is a central feature of the role. The principal is positioned as the primary leader of the school community.

Beare et al (1993) summarise the research on leadership in schools, concluding that there is no one 'correct' meaning and that differences in definition reflect different contexts as well as different perspectives. They go on to say that 'concise definitions and descriptions are difficult, if not inappropriate'. (p143) Salancik et al (1975) similarly conclude that there is perhaps no area of study in organisational behaviour which has more blind alleys and less critical knowledge than the area of leadership'. (p.81)

Practitioners and researchers alike have groped for years with such questions as : What is leadership? How does it work? How does one become an effective leader? What model best describes the nature of management in schools? Yet after many years of investigation, it appears we have no ready, useful answers. Duke (1986) summarises the position, 'Leadership seems to be a gestalt phenomenon; greater than the sum of its parts'. (p.10)

Accepting these difficulties, there can be no doubt that school leadership is an essential ingredient in the mix of factors contributing to the culture of the school and the effectiveness of schools. In relation to the British study, Ten Good Schools (1977), it was concluded that, '... the most important single factor in the success of these schools is the quality of leadership at the head'. A range of studies has supported this view (Rutter et al, 1979; Mortimore et al, 1988; Beare et al, 1989). In down to earth terms, Banks (1976) summarises the received wisdom on headship: 'All the teaching methods and procedures, all matters relating to curricula, the relationships with parents and the control of teachers and their duties are recognised as matters for the head to decide and education committees will rarely try to interfere'. (p.134)

Others are more dubious, highlighting external constraints on the ability to operate independently. Ball (1987) expresses the power of the principal in micropolitical terms as contradictory pressures and expectations - the principal must achieve and maintain control while encouraging and ensuring social order and commitment. When a struggle for power occurs, it is not always the principal who wins the battle. The principal does not have absolute power to determine institutional decisions and at times can be subject to serious competition for what power she does possess. The school leader can adopt one or more political strategies in order to maintain or extend control or achieve a preferred decision. Hoyle (1986) outlines some of the more significant strategies employed by principals, including dividing and ruling; co-optation; displacement; controlling information; controlling meetings. The principal is positioned with considerable power through substantial resources of authority and influence, and a wide range of

strategies available for use. However, a great deal depends on the principal's personal qualities and skills, and the internal and external environment of the school community. Irrespective of the model of management or the historical period in which the study is placed, the principal's capacity for leadership emerges as a central requirement for schools. (Caldwell and Spinks, 1992, p19)

### **THE EVOLVING PRINCIPAL**

Research on the principalship points to the complex nature of the principal's job. This can be explained by high stress, a wide variety of tasks to perform, and the diversity of the roles (Duke, 1986). The demands of the various constituencies and their expectations and being aware of the interactions impacting on the school are a constant stressor on the principal.

Whitaker (1996) emphasises the current pressures facing principals : the dilemma of how and to what extent to restructure learning environments with mounting pressure for traditionalists to move 'back to basics' and simultaneous pressure from state legislatures and school boards to implement higher standards for student performance. The external pressures of the day are considerable, although not necessarily greater than those of previous periods. Restructuring; decentralised authority and responsibility; a radically altered 'classroom'; new ways of thinking about the curriculum, and all in a larger environment of continual change and uncertainty, are relatively recent circumstances that together encourage school leaders who are more

transformational, more visionary than managerial, more artistic than scientific. (Caldwell and Spinks, 1992, p.20)

Studies in Britain, the United States, and Australia have traced historical changes in the perception of appropriate school leadership. Researchers have noted changes in the principal's role in terms of both the scope and complexity. (Heck, 1991, p.68)

Grace (1995) traces the evolution of school leadership practice in Britain from the turn of the century through to the 1990s. His analysis is of particular interest in this study because of PLC's strong British base, a heritage that is common to most Australian independent church schools founded in the nineteenth century. A majority of the founding guarantors of PLC were men born in Scotland having emigrated to Sydney (McFarlane, 1988, p6) and they carried to this new school enterprise an admiration of the discipline and rigorous academic heritage of Scottish education as well as a religious drive to establish a strong intellectual and moral education for girls of Presbyterian families.

Grace (1995) writes of the influence of nineteenth century British society on the development of leadership in institutions. He relates the hierarchical and class-stratified society to the pedagogical and moral leadership model common in early twentieth century schools and persisted with in a particular tradition of independent schools.

Pedagogical leadership positioned the head teacher as an exemplar of efficient and effective whole class teaching; teaching to the requirements of a prescribed curriculum, and an organiser of the deployment of other teachers who were, in this sense, literally assistant teachers to the head teacher.

Moral leadership was concerned with being a personal exemplar of certain religious and moral values in schooling and of being the chief agent for their transmission in the schooling process. 'The notion of school leadership as moral leadership was a dominant construct across the whole range of English schooling incorporating working-class elementary schools, middle-class grammar schools and upper-class public schools'. (Grace, 1995, p.9) Head teachers at all levels of schooling had a particular responsibility to ensure that appropriate moral socialisation relevant to the class destinations of its students, was accomplished effectively by the pedagogic arrangements of the school and by the amplification of its moral and cultural codes. Known as the 'Headmaster tradition', school leadership as moral leadership was pre-eminent in the public schools of Britain, the successful creation of influential leaders such as Arnold of Rugby and Thring of Uppingham. At its most influential, the mystique of headship was distinguished by personal charisma, moral and frequently religious authority, impressive scholarship, the capacity to 'master' all other members of the school, indefatigable energy, and a sense of mission or vocation in the role.

For many schools, whole institutional leadership was not entrusted to the head teacher. Responsibilities, such as establishing the school's mission, allocating resources, and setting the goals, values and ethos, resided

elsewhere. Women head teachers in this period had to face not only the ideology of class superiority distinguishing head teacher from Board members, but also the ideology of male superiority often accompanying membership of School Boards. The Head Master tradition as a cultural and organisational strategy did work to empower head teachers vis-a-vis the formal authority of the governing body. (Grace, 1995)

The passing of this dominant leadership tradition did not occur uniformly. In some schools it has persisted until the present. In most schools the emergence of the head teacher as 'the' school leader, in the mid-twentieth century was related to a complex of cultural and historical elements. In a more democratic and participative political culture, the membership of school management committees and governing bodies had become socially comprehensive and heterogenous. Head teachers were no longer in a servant relationship to the governing body. Considerable whole-school responsibility was delegated to the head teacher. Grace (1985) calls this period of relative autonomy through to the 1970s the social democratic period of schooling. 'Head teachers as leading professionals were able to exploit to the full this ideology in their relations both with parents and with governing bodies. The head teacher advised the governors as the formal school leaders from a position of considerable strength as the manifest school leader and as the acknowledged leading professional in the school'. (p 14)

Grace (1995) writes about the interesting conjunction in English schooling of this period especially in public schooling, of what he calls pedagogic professionalism coexisting with the cult of the gifted amateur in

administration. The idea that head teachers required training or specific administrative experience to run their schools had little currency at this time. 'Efficient administration was expected to arise out of general, professional competence, previous experience and in the case of secondary schools, the services of a deputy head teacher or senior master' (p.33) The pervasive and lingering belief that accomplishments in certain high status cultural forms would lead to competencies in other areas of endeavour was strong in English upper-class schooling. School administration was thought to be neither complex nor esoteric. It was secondary to the prime purpose of educating children and young people.

The extent to which this position was realised depended upon the style, personality and confidence of individual head teachers and the strength of operative leadership which they encountered from their governing bodies or others in positions of influence. In British public schools, significant control of financial, resource and staffing decisions generally remained with Governing Boards, whereas in state schooling such decisions were largely vested in local democracy through the agency of the Local Education Authority.

By the 1960s and 1970s, structural and organisational changes to secondary schooling throughout the western world, particularly the development of large comprehensive schools and the movement towards achieving economies of scale in schools, had important implications for the culture and practice of school leadership. Democratic participation, involvement of the school community, the work of teams, consultation, were terms used to signify new mechanisms in which the power and leadership of the Head was

maintained but given a new perspective. The HMI Report of 1977 described this quality: 'Effective leaders .... appreciate the need for specific educational aims ..... and have the capacity to communicate these to staff, pupils and parents, to win their assent and to put their own policies into practice ...'. Those who continued to operate on the old 'Headmaster Tradition' were forced to confront the new democratic order and to integrate to some degree the new expectations.

The contradictory influences contained in the world wide trend of the 1980s and 1990s towards centralised national controls on curriculum and professional matters, alongside restructuring of schooling and distributed autonomy and decision making, increased external pressures and emphasised market forces. In many schools there has been increased competition for control between interest groups. As schools have become more accountable for their offerings and for their very survival so they have become more subjected to a combination of internal and external micropolitical forces.

Instructional leadership, which includes those actions that a principal takes or delegates to others to promote growth in student learning (DeBevoise, 1984, p14), faded alongside the long term needs for institutional development in schools. This instructional leadership imagery of the 1980s placed the principal as central to curriculum and instructional control and development. Sergiovanni has noted that the term 'instructional leader' implied that the principal was the leader and others have got to be followers. 'The boss/subordinates' terminology of Kefford (1987, p.58) is not unfamiliar to this image of the principal. "The centrality attributed to the principal's role in

effective schools led to a view of the principal as the manager of others in the school" (Hallinger, 1992, p.42). Procedures, plans, models, budgets were imported to the school to address someone else's definition of the problem faced in a local school. The principal accepted the definition of the school's problems and directed the staff towards solving these.

By the 1990s studies were confirming the view that the principal's role had moved away from the 'instructional leader' model, and had been replaced by a whole-school leadership concept consistent with change management, the demands of self management and shared and competing interests. (Wildy and Dimmock, 1993; Hallinger, 1992; Caldwell and Spinks, 1992)

## **THE TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADER**

Recent literature on leadership, change and 'best management practice' emphasises shared and transformational leadership, recognition and respect for cultural diversity, teacher collegiality and professionalism, valuing democratic relationships in situations and creating caring environments. Bennis and Nanus (1985) define the transformative leader as a person who can shape and elevate the motives and goals of followers. 'Transformative leaders achieve significant change that reflect the community of interests of both leaders and followers; indeed it frees up and pools the collective energies in pursuit of a common goal'. (p. 127)

The transforming leader, while still responding to needs within the school community, looks for potential motives in followers, seeks to satisfy higher

needs, and engages the full person of the follower. The result of transforming leadership is a relationship of mutual stimulation and elevation that converts followers into leaders and leaders into moral agents. Sergiovanni explains transformative leadership as a means to empower the school community: 'transformative leaders are more concerned with the concept of power to, than power over. They are concerned with how the power of leadership can help people become more successful to accomplish the things that they think are important to experience a greater sense of efficacy. They are less concerned with what people are doing, and more concerned with what they are accomplishing'. (1987, p.33)

The transformative leadership image is one closely associated with the self-managing school, where the school is responsible for the initiation of change, not just the implementation of changes conceived by others. The emerging state schools of the 1990s and the traditional independent schools with their established School Councils (Boards) typically are responsible for their own management and their own future. Teachers are viewed as important sources of expertise, rather than as the targets of others' efforts to improve schooling.

Hallinger identifies this emerging role model in those American schools that are part of the restructuring process (1992, p.40). Beare et al (1993) feature transformational leadership amongst recent advances in knowledge about leadership. Caldwell and Spinks (1992) consider this model to be that which is most appropriate for the pressures and challenges on self managing schools. They identify six fundamentals of transformational leadership focused on the self-managing school:

- (i) leaders have the capacity to work with others to develop vision;
- (ii) leaders have a personal 'educational platform' that they can communicate to other members of the school community;
- (iii) vision is communicated in a way that develops commitment from school community members;
- (iv) there are many facets to the leadership role; technical, human, educational, symbolic, cultural;
- (v) leaders keep abreast of trends and issues, threats and opportunities in the school community and in society at large, nationally and internationally; they discern the 'megatrends' and anticipate their impact on education and the school;
- (vi) leaders should seek to empower others, especially in respect to decision-making. (p20)

The model is a normative one subject to local variations arising from conditions applicable at the time.

## **THE LEADER IN THE SCHOOL**

At the school level, leadership roles will continue to demonstrate qualities of the 'strong leader' imagery of the effective schools and of the 'headmaster' tradition, amongst the transformational notions inherent in contemporary school restructuring. The role has been and always will be influenced by the personal and professional qualities of the principal; by the condition of the school at the time, for instance a condition of stability or one of crisis; by expectations of others. Each interest group in the school will seek to shape

principals in their own image - but none of the ideal images may coincide with what is necessary to ensure the wise governance of the school (Kefford, 1987, p 66).

Miskel (1977) suggests that the effect of administrative leadership depends on the situational effects of various community, political and organisational variables. It is increasingly clear that effective leaders are not effective in all conditions. Behaviour results from the intersection of the individual and the situation. Amongst the combination of variables that affect principals in their role is the particular leadership style of the principal - effective in one context, ineffective in another.

Each leader comes to a leadership context with her own background and life experiences, her particular personality, interests, strengths and weaknesses. The individual's character is likely to have an important impact on both organisational success and organisational growth. Kets de Vries and Miller (1984) have argued that strategic failure in organisations is often due to the CEO's rigidity. Kitson (1986) distinguishes between 'adaptive' and 'innovative' leaders. Adaptive personalities direct their institutions towards doing better within the agreed, existing definitions and previously established practices, whereas innovative personalities are concerned with doing things differently. By reconstructing a problem, the latter personality can manage crisis situations and lead institutions successfully through the unexpected crisis. Personal qualities, such as integrity, assertiveness and commonsense can be instrumental in a leader's capacity to influence and direct the institution's progress.

Neumann and Finaly-Neumann (1994) relate organisational growth and decline to the personal characteristics of the senior manager. They conclude from their study of private liberal arts colleges that the personal qualities of the principal are crucial to college enrolment growth/decline. The most important facet of the principal's personal characteristics is the capacity to innovate and the innovator's style. 'Colleges whose CEO's are innovators are associated with a higher level of enrolment growth than colleges where CEO's are not innovators'. (p 75). Within the innovator's style, the capacity to think originally in meeting and solving challenges and in addressing policy issues, is the most important leadership quality.

Peters and Waterman (1982) claim that the best leaders in times of organisational and social turmoil 'are idiosyncratic people who deliberately build a culture and create symbols .....'. The role is one of juggling, balancing, creating, assessing and many more desirable qualities.

In matching personal qualities to responsibilities, Kefford summarises the relationship: 'Even if all of these personal qualities were part of the individual's temperament, the ambiguous nature of the role unavoidably creates many dilemmas which highlight the difficulty of doing the job' (Kefford, cit 1987, p 66).

There is definitely no single criterion for ascribing effectiveness or excellence to a particular school or, for that matter, to principals (Donovan, 1992, p 89). Contextual circumstances and issues help define the role, and in times of

crisis and rapid change the role can change unexpectedly, urgently and extensively. Leadership qualities not otherwise required or evident are called upon at times of crisis.

## **RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE PRINCIPAL IN A SELF-MANAGING SCHOOL**

The 'self-managing school' is both a reality and an administrative ideal. Self-managing characteristics are common features of the non-government schools sector. These schools are generally termed public schools in Britain and independent or private schools in the United States and Australia. Such schools have become something of the ideal for administrative policy in the government schools sector in western countries. They exert substantial or total control over their financial management, governance and administrative practices.

In the context of the self-managing school, principals will vary the emphases given to their responsibilities according to a great range of influences acting upon them and the school. These influences can derive from the personal qualities of the incumbent principal -gender, age, health and so on, and these might vary in their influence over the period of the principalship; they might derive from the external community and external pressures on the school; from the internal community of the school - the year group and age distribution of students, gender mix, changing socio-economic factors. The expectations of the policy makers - the Board of Governors (School Council), will be significant especially in terms of establishing priorities for the

principal and boundaries within which the principal must manage. Each responsibility will continue in importance but it may vary in relative importance over time and across the school.

The tasks, or responsibilities define the role for the school principal. The contemporary principal leading a self managing school focused on quality, can be seen to meet the responsibilities broadly grouped as: teaching, ethos, policy, operations/administration, human management, external relations (Hall, Mackay and Morgan, 1986). Kefford (1987) in different terminology posits a similar grouping: chief executive, facilitator, pastor, figurehead, friend-raiser. Greenfield (1987) analyses the principal's world of work and identifies five dimensions to the role: instructional, managerial, political, social and moral.

Research in this area emphasises the multi-dimensionality of principalship, the complexity and variety of responsibilities and interrelationships and the exposure of principals to an enormous range of pressures, conflicts and potential tensions. Further, the research identifies a variety of responsibilities and situational expectations of principals and the mostly underestimated impact of the personality of the principal, the local context, the dynamics of a school's internal and external community, and the history of a particular school (Vandenberghe, 1995, p.32).

Sergiovanni (1984) is helpful with his identification of five facets to the principal's leadership role. He finds that leadership in excellent schools will exhibit the following groups of responsibilities:

- (i) technical leadership, including planning, organising, co-ordinating, scheduling;
- (ii) human leadership, including the building of team work, harnessing human resources to maintain morale, to encourage growth and creativity, providing support for staff and empowering others;
- (iii) educational leadership, including using expert knowledge about education and schooling to diagnose student needs, develop curriculum, select appropriate approaches to learning and teaching, supervising and evaluating; setting a personal example of professional development, and current knowledge;
- (iv) symbolic leadership - involves focusing the attention of the school on matters of great importance to the school through words, actions and rewards; developing and communicating matters of value and building and communicating vision;
- (v) cultural leadership, including the to and fro of information and ideas within and beyond the immediate school community; the bonding of the school community, forging links within the school community, developing partnerships.

Sergiovanni emphasises the relative importance of symbolic and cultural leadership aspects to effective leadership of self-managing schools. He sees teaching and school leadership as a calling that is devoted to the social and spiritual well being of the whole student. He uses ecclesiastical terms such as stewardship, servant, ministering, covenant and mission.

These leadership emphases are also stressed by Caldwell and Spinks (1992, p 52) in defining the leadership role that is integral to their refined model of the self-managing school. Symbolic and cultural tasks are increasingly reported within the developing notion of transformational leadership (Caldwell and Spinks, 1992; Murphy and Hallinger, 1992; Goldring, 1992). Sergiovanni (1996) summarises the central tenet of his writing on school leadership: 'It is in this quest for community toward which the roots of school leadership must be directed. It is not enough to want to do the right thing. We must have the will to take up the challenge of school leadership as our life calling. The essence of leadership is, after all, action. "Faith without work is dead" (James 2:17)'. (p 97)

Researchers, such as Sergiovanni, are sometimes grouped together and linked to the work of Kohlberg and what is termed the humanist tradition of leadership theory. The humanists argue that leadership is a moral, political and social activity that requires the making of value judgments and not merely forming factually based decisions more commonly associated with conventional organisational and administrative leadership theory.

## **LEADERSHIP AND GENDER**

In recent years a growing body of research has highlighted the gender specific characteristics commonly associated with the above models of leadership. Feminist theory challenges the dualisms implicit between emotionality and rationality, the individual and the community, assertiveness and passivity, the public and the private, dependence and autonomy - as not only being

false, but also as limiting the potentiality of both women and men to promote change. (Bardo in Blackmore, 1993).

Much of the research is directed at increasing our understanding of the role of gender in education leadership, the appointment of leaders, the progress of leaders in bureaucracies, and the feminisation of teaching; and are all issues confronting education leaders. Studies such as that of Byrne (reported in Blackmore, 1989), have been encouraged by the gender inequity in leadership representation. Chapman's 1983 Australian study highlighted the under-representation of women in school leadership. At that time, women constituted fifteen per cent of principals in government primary schools, nine per cent of principals in government secondary schools and seven per cent of principals in schools combining both primary and secondary sections. Women were able to become primary principals in Victoria after 1973 and by 1978 only comprised thirteen-fourteen percent of principals in all schools. For the relatively few women who have achieved significant positions of institutional or bureaucracy leadership, style of leadership, internal and external pressures and other issues have attracted a growing research interest.

The whole issue of gender in schools is controversial. Arguments over the performance benefits of attendance in single sex as against co-educational schools, role modelling and stereotyping, and so on, are problematic and beyond the purposes of this study. It is not the intention of this study to examine leadership styles of female and male principals. The study focus is not on the question of whether female and male principals differ in their leadership style. However, the study does examine a 1960s/1970s situation

where a female principal was leading a girls' school with a male Chairman of Council, a largely male Council with a strong tradition of male membership. Management issues related to gender may well emerge as the study develops. Although there are no studies reported that address the specific situation of a female principal and a male dominated Board, there are many studies reported - essentially controversial and with findings unclear - which present a picture of the features characteristic of 'female' and 'male' management. There are studies of organisations that are largely 'male' or 'female'; and studies identifying stereotypical female/male gender paradigms. (Blackmore, 1993, 1994a, 1994b; Burton, 1991; Mills and Tancred, 1992; Sampson, 1979) These studies may assist in revealing possible/real differences and conflicts in a context where leadership responsibilities lack clarity and definition, where men and women sought to exert influence.

Whether schools represent a 'female' or a 'male' culture or possibly some combination of attributes commonly associated with being female or male, is problematic. Blackmore (1993, 1994a 1994b) and other feminist writers are of the view that an entrenched male culture exists in school leadership and in the way schools function. In the modern devolved authority, autonomous system of schooling, this culture is no less significant, than in earlier times according to this view. She believes that there is an expectation in schools that principals will lead on the basis of this 'male' way of thinking and acting, largely irrespective of whether the leader is a male or a female.

Blackmore sees a paradox existing in the current global movement from centralised to devolved systems of education, the devolved systems requiring

autonomy, community ownership, flexibility and diversity; being forced to coexist with the managerialism/entrepreneurialism contemporary theme which emphasises accountability, quality, the executive mode of leadership and demarcation between policy and implementation. (Blackmore, 1994b, p.51) She sees dominant management practice as encouraging competition and rewarding individuals, behaviour more commonly associated with the 'male', whilst at the same time calling for new forms of leadership such as professional collegiality and team work, cooperation and dispersed decision making, behaviour more commonly associated with the 'female'. In this management context Blackmore sees women as being disadvantaged, 'positioned as powerless' (op cit, 1994, p.52), within the new gender order, a context that is no less 'masculinist' than the 'paternalism' of earlier times.

This idea that schools are representative of a masculine culture is developed in a range of studies some focusing more generally on organisations. It has been accepted by various contemporary writers that organisations do function in a gender-specific manner (Mills and Tancred, 1992, Sampson, 1979), and that most organisations are 'saturated with male values' (Burton, 1991; Hall, 1993). In a New Zealand study of diversity in women's organisations, Pringle and Henry (1993) state that the masculinist nature of organisations is manifest by the continuous eight hour work day which assumes domestic support; the exclusion of children from work places; the small numbers of women who succeed in organisations but single and child-free women are often over-represented in this more successful group; the under representation of women in managerial positions.

There is extensive research available on different expectations for women's and men's attributes and social behaviour. (Deaux and Lewis, 1983; Eagly, 1987.). Gray, (1993) divides gender paradigms into female, labelling them nurturing 'feminine' attributes, and male, labelling them defensive/aggressive, 'masculine' attributes. In the school context, these paradigms indicate that women tend to work against formal hierarchy, are more collaborative, and tend to focus on students' pastoral concerns, and curriculum. Financial management is seen as a means to an end (Adler, 1993; Ozga, 1993). The extent to which women's preferred way of thinking and behaving is compromised by the 'system', and the management structure, is problematic. The studies quoted above tend to support the contention that attributes considered to be masculine are more commonly associated with school management and are more clearly identifiable in the established culture of our schools. This is despite the dominance of 'feminine' attributes seen to be desirable in the transformational leadership of dynamic contemporary schools. These attributes are:

'feminine'

caring

creative

intuitive

aware of individual differences

non competitive

tolerant

subjective

informal

'masculine'

highly regulated

conformist

normative

competitive

evaluative

disciplined

objective

formal

(Gray, 1993, p 111).

Some studies have found that 'feminine' and 'masculine' qualities are rarely exclusive of one another and that most principals exhibit a mix of the two groupings of qualities such that no clearly 'male' or 'female' leadership style exists in school management and that there is thus no generalised gender linkage between management style and school culture. England's (1995) Australian study of women managers, and Coleman's (1996) study of female head teachers tend to support this increasingly popular approach. In Coleman's study, for instance, she concludes that the data generated could not yield generalisations about gender and management style. It is even possible that gender has little relevance to management style and the most important factor may be age or the way(s) in which the personality of a head teacher shapes how he or she interprets and plays the role (p 173).

Accepting that conclusions in this area remain uncertain, it would appear that the dominant view in the literature supports a further conclusion emanating from England's study (1995): 'the trend would suggest incorporation of stereotypical male characteristics in order to survive in business environments which are predominantly masculine. This lends support to the literature which indicates women have to adapt to male cultures and paradigms in order to succeed' (p.8).

Although a great many uncertainties remain in this area the studies serve to create an impression that organisations, and schools as examples of these, and organisational leaders, tend to function in ways and with attributes that could be considered 'masculine'. Some reasons for this have been expressed in the preceding discussion. The extent to which this occurs in gender specific,

established, autonomous private schools such as PLC is problematic and has not been widely researched. Organizations where the senior leader or principal's dominant leadership style is either 'feminine' or 'masculine', and the mode of operation of the Board is the opposite to this, has also failed to attract substantial research attention.

## **INTERACTING INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL SCHOOL ENVIRONMENTS**

The history of school leadership reveals periods when schools operated relatively independently of their external environment, and other times when external forces such as legislative and political demands, and social trends and ideologies, have brought fundamental change and internal restructuring of practices, to school leadership. External forces have at times been in sympathy with the aims and goals of the school and on other occasions, in conflict with the interests of the school.

No school organisation is ever totally free of external influences. The influences can be informal or formal, subtle or overwhelming. The influences can alter a child's relationship with a teacher; a school's relationship with its community; the curriculum offered by the school; the playground supervision practices of teachers; the degree and complexity of responsibilities expected of a principal. State schools and independent schools are affected by influences from outside the school. In both groupings the influences can be as extreme as to put in doubt the very future of the school.

The sensitivity and vulnerability of schools to pressures originating in the environment and the significance of these pressures for the internal structures and dynamics of the school have been studied by many researchers (Callahan, 1962; Chubb and Moe 1986; Blase 1988; Grace 1995). Schools are generally conceived of as conservative institutions, that accommodate rather than initiate change; that have leaders who see themselves as the boundary riders of schools - mediating and neutralising with the external environment.

Ball (1987) expresses the view that schools and organisations cannot be conceived of as independent from the broader environment, and secondly that schools cannot be analysed simply in terms of adaptation to that environment (p.247). Ball highlights the tension which is built into parental, societal and political expectations of the role and purpose of the schools: the tension between the moral and the cognitive, or integrative and economic, aspects of schooling. Schools are expected to produce well-behaved and well-adjusted citizens and at the same time select and train those citizens to adopt different roles and statuses within society. The expectations are multidirectional and vary over time. They can be ambiguous. They can be reflective of the school's goals and vision and they can be destructive of, and at cross-purposes with, the school's goals and vision.

Hannoway and Crowson (1988) illustrate this quality in a comment on the pressures on schools and their principals in the 1980s: 'Theorists and practitioners, administrator associations and teacher associations, state mandates and local traditions, public expectations and professional interests, legislators and executives, building administrators and classroom teachers -

all are embroiled sometimes heatedly and nearly always confusingly in an energetic search for school improvement, a search filled with images of new accommodations, altered alliances, changed working relationships, revised operating procedures' (p.4).

Researchers have identified a number of groupings external to the school, that tend to consistently impact on the school. From experiences as a principal, Donovan (1992) finds four groups that are frequently at odds with one another and that together, direct the new political environment of the Australian school: politicians, bureaucrats, teacher unions, and pressure groups in the community such as the media. Donovan expresses the view that the successful principal is one who can read the political winds amongst these groups and can thus create stability, consistency and cohesiveness in the education world that children see and experience.

Ball (1987) refers to the successful head as the one who is able to present different versions of their school to different audiences. 'As a public-relations officer the head must make best use of public events and maintain a flow of good publicity in the local press while still being able to respond to diverse pressures from interest groups campaigning from within'. (p.253) He identifies teachers' unions, education bureaucrats and the school's governing body as influential 'external' forces. Like the school, the successful head will be influenced by, and will seek to influence, the external features of the school.

Dinham et al (1995) position the principal as source, facilitator and conduit for both formal and informal communication within and without the school, needing to use a variety of communication measures. As the Steering Committee of the National Project on Leadership and Management Training of Principals (1993) found, Australian principals require: 'creative and interpersonal skills to inspire others through empowerment and interaction ... The skills needed are those which facilitate the collection of information, as well as critical reflection on the impact of local, societal and cultural changes in the school's work ... The ability to negotiate with teachers, parents and community members is vital if the school is to achieve its stated mission and goals'.

There exists a complex interplay between the external features, the features of the school, and the specifics of a given time, place and group of people. The principal is generally responsible for the construction of an effective harmonious learning culture from amongst this mix of internal and external forces with which s/he is presented. At times, this can be an exceptionally difficult task. 'The realm of human agency is bounded. Men (sic) produce society, but they do so as historically located actors, and not under conditions of their own choosing'. (Giddens, 1976)

## THE CRITICAL INCIDENT

Critical incidents in institutions can occur as a result of a great variety of circumstances. The sudden death of a senior member of staff, a serious accident of a student on the way to school, a police action against a member of staff, the dismissal of a senior member of staff, are but a few of the incidents that can initiate extraordinary responses and uncertain outcomes. They can develop out of a series of what may initially appear as unconnected and insignificant issues and events. These incidents are generally rare in an institution. The future of the institution and its members can turn on the outcome of these events.

Ball (1987) researches a number of case studies where the interaction between particular internal and external issues and circumstances resulted in critical incidents. He concludes from his research that two aspects of micropolitical relations emerge as crucial. 'One concerns the containment of internal conflicts; the other is the management of relationships with external audiences. The head teacher is the crucial figure in both'. (p.253) In Ball's research the interaction between these two sets of forces leading to critical incidents suggests links between micropolitics and major political movements. Political features suggestive of wider political issues and conflicts may be identified.

Ball (1987) illustrates this linkage from his studies of a selection of schools in crisis:

- opposition to the head from a passing coalition of malcontents of staff, and of parents;
- an authority's inspectorate in disagreement with the school;
- high status local people against 'modern education';
- politicians who can neutralise the Director of Education and pursue a policy of attrition to the end;
- media which will both bias and keep the balance of forces in tension. (p252)

Against this collection of political forces is the strength and unity of purpose shared by the head, staff, teachers' union, governing body, parents and pupils. The cohesion amongst these groups will determine the ability to confront the influence from outside. Ball illustrates the potential danger of the internal/external interface, quoting an observation from Hannan (1980), who examined the interaction between internal and external forces in a case study of Redmond College: 'For the conflicts within the school to have reached the point where they endangered the school's existence, it would have been necessary for outside forces to penetrate the exterior boundary of the school which was publicly managed by the Principal'. (p.162)

Blackmore (1994) suggests that leadership in crisis management requires high levels of trust and openness, as well as a capacity to make sound moral, ethical and emotional judgments. Trust is the mediator of reason and emotion, which considers not only moral obligations and rights, but also the conditions and relational aspects of judgments which take into account historical, personal and institutional relationships. (Bauer 1993, p.27)

The crucial role of the principal is consistently emphasised as a force for unity and cohesion amongst disparate internal and external interest groups. Short and Greer (1997) refer to the importance of establishing 'trusting' relationships amongst interest groups. For a situation to develop to a critical level where the school's future is in doubt, trust has been exhausted, external forces have generally transformed an otherwise redeemable situation into one that has moved beyond the control of the principal.

## **SUMMARY**

This chapter examines literature that assists the author in interpreting and understanding the micropolitics of the critical incident at this self managing independent school.

The principal is the main actor in this incident and her relationship with the School Council is fundamental to the developments of 1976. The principal sought to lead this school in partnership with a School Council composed mainly of men and chaired by a powerful dominating sequence of two men, each with his own priorities. The extent to which gender is a factor in relationships is explored here and the largely inconclusive literature has been the subject of some attention.

The respective roles of principal and Council, and the quality of their relationship, is central to considerations of effective school management, and of their ability to successfully manage critical incidents. Issues of

complementary or conflicting leadership styles, interests and visions are thus integral to an understanding of what occurred in the mid 1970s. The author, in this chapter, has therefore given some attention to models of leadership with an emphasis on those that may have some particular relevance to Whitlam at PLC during this period. The critical incident was played out in an extraordinary period of Australian history, when national political, economic, labour-market, and church issues brought immense potential for conflict, tension, and individual and factional power groupings, into this school. The micropolitics model is thus at the heart of the study, and an understanding of the qualities of micropolitics, and the relationship between micropolitics and critical incidents has been the central focus of this chapter.

## CHAPTER THREE

### METHODOLOGY

The Methodology chapter will present some background to the development of this study; it will also explain the selection of methodology for the study, and examine and justify the chosen instruments. It will outline the sources of data and the techniques used to gather the data.

The study is not a history of a prestigious independent school, Presbyterian Ladies' College (PLC), Sydney, nor is it a biography of its principal for a significant period, Freda Whitlam. It is a study of the micropolitics of a 1976 critical incident at the school. The critical incident is the forced resignation, the retraction of that resignation, and the self-initiated resignation that followed shortly after. The focus of the study is the removal from office of the principal of this school and the micropolitical issues which influenced this.

Data collection techniques must be appropriate for gathering information on events that occurred during the period 1958-1976 and on the various contributions to these events of people in the school community. Most attention will be directed towards increasing our understanding of the environment external to the school that influenced developments inside the school, and towards events, actions and relationships within the school that combined to destabilize Freda Whitlam. Techniques must be able to reveal personal relationships within the school that were central to issues and concerns of the time and must be able to bring forward evidence- whether

convergent, inconsistent or contradictory, so that reasonable explanations of the critical incident can be made. The character, leadership practice and style, and contribution to the school of Freda Whitlam will be significant considerations. A chronology of events concluding with her December, 1976 departure will need to be established and evaluated. Data collection techniques must reveal to the researcher the existence of socio-political forces within the school, such as the national political culture of the period, the changes within the denominational church, the industrial developments in the teaching force, and allow the researcher to establish what, if any role these played in constructing the micropolitical dynamics of the school community.

## **DEVELOPMENT OF THE STUDY**

This study began as an idea to examine the contribution to P.L.C. Sydney of Freda Whitlam. Having occupied the position of principal of this school for some years, the author had come to recognise a strong polarising of attitudes towards Whitlam within the broad community of the school. Also, it was clear that some of the very significant and valued traditions maintained in current practice had developed during her years of leadership. The author was interested in examining her years of leadership in order to gain a clearer understanding of her particular contribution to the school.

After much consultation and having begun to collect data on the period, it was decided that the study may well be too extensive and may lack focus. It was suggested that the author concentrate on the issues and events that culminated in her sudden departure from the school. In focusing on a critical incident it

would be necessary to give some attention to the characters, their relationships and the historical context within and without the school. It had already been revealed to the author that there were varied interpretations of the issues resulting in her departure. To some, Whitlam's departure was a 'resignation', to others a 'dismissal', to others the terms 'resignation' and 'dismissal' were on this occasion semantic distinctions. They amounted to the same thing. The author had heard that responsibility for her sudden departure was with her - her character and management style, her family and political leanings, her church involvements; that her departure was the responsibility of an inept and mismanaged College Council; and that her departure was the result of a sensible response to declining school enrolments and approaching school bankruptcy. Attitudes to Whitlam varied from extraordinary admiration and affection, to a passionate dislike and lack of respect.

From a personal point of view, the author was interested in bringing together the various perspectives and in gaining a clearer understanding of the issues and the events surrounding this incident. The author had also come to the position that with such an obvious polarity of school community opinion surrounding her latter years at the school, much of what had gone before had been lost in people's memories. There seemed to be some advantage in defining her legacy, if only in seeking to achieve some balance in our understanding of the circumstances of the past.

Having left the school in 1976, Freda Whitlam had not returned for many years. It was not until 1988, the year of the school's centenary celebrations, that she made her first return to the school, in response to an invitation from the

school's Chairman of Council. The Chairman, appointed in 1985, was keen to renew the school's contact with Whitlam and on this occasion, and on various appropriate occasions in the years that followed, Whitlam was welcomed to functions at the school. In the role of principal, meetings occurred with her on each of these occasions between 1988 and 1999, possibly numbering five instances in total. From an early coldness in 1988 to a friendship and trust in the latter years of this period, the author's relationship with Freda Whitlam developed and her contact with the school became a more agreeable and enjoyable experience for her. In 1998, in a vote of School Council, it was agreed to name a new building development in her honour, as the Freda Whitlam School of Science. With her brother and sister-in-law, she attended and presented an impressive address at the opening of this building. Following a written approach from the author, it was in 1998 that Freda Whitlam agreed to participate in this study.

The author started talking to people about her and reading through school magazines from the period. There were many informal conversations with teachers of her period, currently on staff. Their initial response was twofold: happy to see something being written about Whitlam's contribution to the school and about what they saw as her 'unfair treatment'; and a cautious willingness to be involved when many of the core participants were still alive, some still active in the school community. However, having spoken informally with them, with former students and with parents of former students, as well as having read widely of archival material in the school, it became evident that there was a great pool of resources to tap in any study of Whitlam's era.

It was also during this time of informal research that the author's own ideas were clarified and a decision was taken to examine the critical incident that culminated in her departure from the school. Significantly, it became apparent that Whitlam's difficulties began well before the final few years. From her earliest years in the school, attitudes towards her were hardening and a sense of confrontation was evident. From those from whom support should be expected, there was an emerging contrast in role expectations and a different approach to her leadership role.

The micropolitics operating within the school became significant in understanding the developing situation and both the external and internal environments were to play a part in this. Through reading and talking to people the author was able to gain a sense of what kind of leader Whitlam was, and what relationships existed with the Chairman of Council, the Council itself, the parents and the staff. Interpretations varied greatly, as did detail in people's recollections. However, patterns began to emerge and the outline of the current study gradually gathered shape.

## CASE STUDY RESEARCH IN EDUCATION

'The case study relies on many of the same techniques as a history, but it adds two sources of evidence not usually in the historian's repertoire: direct observation and systematic interviewing. The case study's unique strength is its ability to deal with a full variety of evidence - documents, artefacts, interviews and observations'

(Merriam, 1988)

Approaches to research - the research strategies - have been classified in various ways. One simple approach which is widely used identifies three strategies: experiments, surveys and case studies. Robson (1993) summarises the characteristics of these three traditional strategies:

1. **Experiment:** measuring the effects of manipulating one variable on another variable.

Typical features: selection of samples of individuals from known populations; allocation of samples to different experimental conditions; introduction of planned change on one or more variables; measurement on small number of variables; control of other variables; usually involves hypothesis testing.

2. **Survey:** collection of information in standardised form from groups of people.

Typical features: selection of samples of individuals from known populations; collection of relatively small amount of data in standardised form from each individual; usually employs questionnaire or structured interview.

3. **Case study:** development of detailed, intensive knowledge about a single 'case', or of a small number of related 'cases'.

Typical features: selection of a single case (or a small number of related cases) of a situation, individual or group of interest or concern; study of the case in its context; collection of information via a range of data collection techniques including observation, interview and documentary analysis.' (P.40)

When selecting the appropriate strategy to be used in a research project, the purpose of the research and the type of research questions being asked are determining issues. Experiments tend to be associated with explanatory work, surveys with descriptive studies, and case studies with exploratory work. Whether the research focus is on current or past events, whether there is or is not substantial control over events, and other research questions, will influence the choice of strategy. Robson (1993), Yin (1984) and others emphasise that the relationships noted here are not necessary or immutable. Each strategy can be used for any or all of the three purposes.

A feature of the case study is that it is descriptive. In case study or 'holistic' research, to arrive at an explanation requires a rich description of the case and an understanding of it, in particular the relationship of its parts (Sturman 1997). Rich description is a term from anthropology and means the complete, literal description of the incident or entity being investigated. Case studies include as many variables as possible and portray their interaction often over a period of time. Case studies can use prose and literary techniques to describe, elicit

images, and analyse situations. They are able to present documentation of events, quotes, samples and artefacts.

For a study of an individual's contribution to an institution and the circumstances resulting in her sudden departure it is appropriate to apply a case study approach using data collection techniques which are able to elicit the data sought. It has the advantage of being able to illustrate the complexity of many of the situations in which Whitlam was placed showing that not one but many factors were contributors.

In this case, the events occurred over twenty years ago and in such circumstances experiments and surveys and the application of rational highly structured techniques to data collection are inappropriate and largely impossible. Quite a few of the participants are no longer living; one can expect that with others, memories may well be unreliable; the passage of time will have affected the availability and reliability of all sources of data. The influences of personalities and the events of that time on issues can critically be evaluated from the perspective of history. In these circumstances a minimal amount of prestructuring and a very loose design is appropriate. However, a conceptual framework that serves to describe and explain the major facets of the study is useful in the design of the study. The case study method enables the researcher to cover a number of years and describe how the preceding years led to a situation. This study of the closing period of Whitlam's headship documents influences which extend from the early years of her term of office.

## QUALITATIVE DATA COLLECTION

Qualitative data gathering techniques can be distinguished from quantitative techniques and each is underscored by conflicting paradigms. The one is derived from the humanities with an emphasis on holistic and qualitative information and interpretive approaches, whereas the other is modelled on the natural sciences with an emphasis on empirical quantifiable observations which lend themselves to analysis by mathematical tools. The paradigm determines how a problem is formulated and methodologically managed. Depending on the objective of a particular research project, emphasis is laid more on the one or the other paradigm. In recent years research projects have increasingly sought to find complementary value in the application of the quantitative and qualitative paradigms. The choice or mix of paradigms is also determined by what kind of knowledge one is searching for - is one seeking the collectivity, the generalizability; or the individual, the particular? (Husén, 1997). In this historical study of a particular situation with discrete circumstances and players, the application of qualitative rather than quantitative techniques is required.

Qualitative data for a case study in an historical context consists of diverse elements. These include detailed descriptions of situations, events, people, interactions and observed behaviours; direct quotations from people about their experience, attitudes, beliefs and thoughts; and excerpts or entire passages from documents, correspondence, records, autobiographic writings and recordings. These varied elements are the raw data which provide depth and detail necessary for the study. The qualitative study of people in a

particular situation is a process of discovery and learning about the subject as the research progresses.

Owens (1982) states that these studies, often grouped under the term 'naturalistic studies', seek to 'illuminate social realities untainted by formal measurement procedures or re-ordering of the situation to fit the pre-conceived notions of the investigator' (p7). Owens identifies four salient features of such studies:

- (i) they primarily employ direct contact between investigators and others as a means of collecting data;
- (ii) the use of emergent strategies to design the study rather than a priori specifications;
- (iii) they develop data categories from examination of the data after collection; and
- (iv) they do not attempt to generalise the findings to a universe beyond that bounded by the study.

Miles and Huberman (1994) argue that the preliminary analysis of qualitative data should proceed concurrently with data collection, so that the phase of data collection merges to some degree with data analysis. The analysis begins with the first interview and the first document read. Emerging insights and observations direct the next stages of data collection, which in turn leads to refinements and reformulations of one's questions. It is an interactive process throughout. Advantages that they identify relate to the ability to manage large bodies of evidence; gaps in data become apparent, and new hypotheses and

relationships emerge before it is too late to collect relevant data; understanding of the evidence is assisted by the longer period involved. Rigour in a qualitative case study derives from the researcher's presence, the nature of the interaction between researcher and participants, the triangulation of data; the interpolation of perceptions, and rich description. The more grounded in supporting detail the findings are, the more credible and trustworthy, reliable and valid they are.

Miles and Huberman (1994) suggest that while researchers possess the human skills for finding meaning in the world by organising and interpreting information, the central question as to whether the meanings found in qualitative data are valid, repeatable, and right, must be answered. They suggest several tactics based on their own work and the work of other expert qualitative researchers, for generating meaning from data and arranging them from the descriptive to the explanatory and from the concrete to the more conceptual and abstract. They offer the following steps which begin by helping the analyst see which data go with what, moving the analysis towards identifying what is available, sharpening understanding and differentiating among pieces of data, seeing abstract relationships, and assembling a coherent understanding of the data.

The tactics are: noting patterns and themes; seeing plausibility; clustering; making metaphors; counting; making contrasts and comparisons; partitioning variables; subsuming particulars into the general; factoring; noting relationships between variables; finding intervening variables; building a logical chain of evidence and making conceptual/theoretical coherence

(pp.246-262). It is important to note that in following this process, the tactics of Miles and Huberman (1994) are not intended to be implemented in a linear pattern but are used as the data dictate.

In keeping with established methods of qualitative research as defined by Miles and Huberman (1994), and by Bogdan and Biklen (1992), Glaser and Strauss (1967), Lincoln and Guba (1985), and Keeves (1997), the data analysis follows a broad organisational process which includes unitizing and coding, where the information is divided into single units of information and coded with a designation for the respondent; categorising where units are clustered according to patterns and themes; and relating, where each category is analysed in terms of its relationship to other categories. In this study each tape or document was coded with either the initials of the interviewee, for example FW1 refers to the first interview with Freda Whitlam, or the initials of the document, for example SCMix76 refers to the Minutes of the School Council for September 1976. The material from transcriptions and photocopies or originals of documents was divided into categories. Because I conducted my own interviews and completed all my own searches, I was able to detect natural categories. These emerged as the study progressed and reflected the purposes of the study. The categories were:

<u>Freda Whitlam</u>	:	Her background/character	fa
	:	Her education ideas	fb
	:	Her management style	fc
	:	The school - general	fd
	:	The broader education community	fe

<u>Issues</u>	:	Church Union	d1
	:	Politics/national	d2
	:	Industrial - awards	d3
	:	Council tensions	d4
	:	Enrolments - financial pressures	d5
	:	Parents' tensions	d6
	:	Staff tensions	d7
<u>Resignation/dismissal</u>			h
<u>Reactions</u>			j
<u>Other Matters</u>	:	Schools commission origins	ki

This then allows for the following classifying:

d5 CMix76 - the topic of enrolments and financial pressures is the subject of an entry or entries in the Minutes of the School Council for September 1976.

For the purposes and scope of this study it is intended to extend the clustering of units of information only to this depth. There is some overlap of categories and this became observable as the collection of data proceeded. The need to develop additional categories emerged as the study progressed.

## TRIANGULATION

Regardless of which philosophical, epistemological, or methodological paradigm one is working from, triangulation techniques are essential to the credibility of the study. In qualitative approaches to research the scope is wide for people to see, or to interpret what they see according to their own perspective. In conventional research methodology, procedural objectivity, when it is present, provides much less scope for personal interpretation. In that sense, the qualitative study is more vulnerable to unreliability. Eisner (1991) says that because of this difference it is especially important not only to use multiple types of data, but also to consider disconfirming and contradictory interpretations or appraisals when one presents one's own conclusions. 'The issue is one of fairness, of considering reasonable alternative interpretations. It does not mean relinquishing one's own view.' (p111) Eisner affirms the crucial role of triangulation in qualitative research.

Denzin (1978) introduced the idea of triangulation into the discussion of qualitative research as 'the combination of methodologies in the study of the same phenomena'. (p291) The concept of triangulation has progressed some distance since the late 1970s. Significant in the developments has been the emergence of a range of typologies, and an increasing willingness to question the validation role of triangulation in qualitative methodology, recognizing the researcher's goal of interactionally grounded interpretations.

Within the typology developed by Denzin (1997), is the multi-method or 'methodological' triangulation form. Triangulation in this typology is

generally the application and combination of several research methods in the study of the same phenomenon. Cohen and Manion (1994, p.241) link triangulation with case study research, 'a particular example of complex phenomena'. The diverse methods and measures that are combined should relate in some specified way to the theoretical constructs under investigation (Denzin, 1997). The rationale for this strategy is that the flaws of one method are often the strengths of another, and by combining a number of methods, the best of each can be achieved, while overcoming their unique weaknesses. It is essentially a strategy that will aid in the elimination of bias and allow the dismissal of plausible rival explanations such that a more reasonable proposition about some social phenomenon can be made.

However, even after the application of multiple methods, there is no guarantee that validation is achieved. Validity is the primary concern confronting researchers applying triangulation techniques seeking convergence of data. McCormick and James (1983), reported in Cohen and Manion (1994, p.241), write 'one way of doing this is for the researchers to write out his/her analysis for the subjects of the research in terms that they will understand, and then record their reactions to it. This is known as 'respondent validation'. Researchers, especially those using qualitative techniques, must be aware of the uncertainty of data convergence. The application of a variety of techniques may result in convergence, however the data may prove to be inconsistent and even contradictory. The responsibility is with the researcher to apply techniques that are the most helpful in bringing about convergence and then constructing plausible explanations about the issues being studied.

The opportunity to use multiple methods of data collection is a strength of case study research and is a construction applied to this study. The methods used in this thesis are interviewing and documentary searches. Each of these methods will be discussed in some detail in the sections to follow.

## **INTERVIEWING**

Interviewing is an acceptable method for gathering qualitative data and is often used in conjunction with other qualitative methods, or one of a number of quantitative methods (Keeves, 1997, p.306). Glaser and Strauss (1967) reinforce that interviewing techniques, as a form of naturalistic enquiry, are concerned with providing insightful, descriptive data and formulating concepts that are analytic and sensitising.

An interview is defined by Johnson as a social encounter between two people, that has a particular focus and purpose. They are initiated by the interviewer, with a view to gathering certain information from the person interviewed (1994, p43). Dexter (1970) simplifies this in describing interviews as a conversation with a purpose. Interviews allow the researcher and respondent, the interviewer and the interviewee, to move back and forth in time; to reconstruct the past, interpret the present and predict the future (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). Interviews may also help the researcher to understand and put into a larger context the interpersonal, social and cultural aspects of the environment (Erlandson, 1996, p85).

Interviews can take several forms each defined largely by the questions, their wording, and their sequence. A basic question in developing any interview is whether to use open ended or structured questions. Interviews will be tightly structured by the question schedule or they will be semi-structured or non-structured (Erlandson, 1996, p86; Rosnow and Rosenthal, 1996, p112). Interviewing in case studies is often more open-ended and less structured in an attempt to access and understand the perspective of the person being interviewed. Most common is the semi-structured interview that is guided by a set of basic questions and issues to be explored, but neither the exact wording nor the order of questions is predetermined (Merriam, 1988). Such interviews are generally regarded as the style most likely to be followed in small scale research 'when it is of greater importance to gain the co-operation of a limited number of interviewees than it is to ensure that the information they give is supplied in a standardised and readily collectable form' (Johnson, 1994, p51). In research where the researcher seeks to collect the same amount of data from all respondents, then a tight schedule structured interview may well be necessary (Nachmias and Nachmias, 1976, p102). Quite specialised interviews are common in exploratory work where boundaries and parameters of the topic are not clearly defined, and guidance is needed from insiders about key elements of the topic under study (Johnson, 1994, p51).

The interviewees in this study were not limited to single or brief answers. The interviewer approached each interview with a mental check list of general objectives to guide the interview. In the early interviews in particular, the objective was to encourage the interviewees to tell the story of the Whitlam they knew and, where relevant, to tell of their recollection of the last period of

her time at the school. Each interview was preceded by a conversation about how the interview would proceed, the preferred setting was explored and what was to be discussed - the 'conversation', was outlined with the interviewee.

As data became available from the early interviews, there was an increasing direction in the interviewer's approach to questioning, however at no time was a tight schedule or even a loose listing of open ended questions prepared to give pattern to the interviews. The distinctive feature of in depth interviewing is 'that the answers given, continually inform the evolving conversation' (Mischler, 1986). Questions presume neither neutrality nor objectivity but reveal the researcher's personal interest in the subject. This was the case in the process of interviewing in this study. Despite a mental checklist of areas to be covered, there were occasions when both the researcher and interviewee entered new areas and both searched for understanding and ways to express a new insight.

The literature emphasises the importance of avoiding bias or sources of error. Owens (1982) suggests that the credibility of the findings is dependent upon the use of multiple data-gathering techniques. The diverse methods and measures that are combined should relate in some specified way to the theoretical constructs under examination.

Triangulation, or multiple operationalism as it can be termed (Keeves, 1997, p318) has traditionally been used as a method of improving the trustworthiness of data, and interviewing is one of the commonly accepted measurement instruments. Lincoln and Guba (1985, p283) write of an 'audit trail' as a

technique to assist in ensuring that data were collected, analysed and confirmed by the participants in a way sufficient to guarantee the trustworthiness of the data. In this study the audit trail is a major trustworthiness technique, kept in a number of ways in relation to the interview data. The first way was through field notes, that were kept on every interview on each participant. These field notes consisted of factual matter, such as context and difficulties associated with the interview. The second way was through the audio tapes and complete transcriptions of each interview. The third way was the coding of the transcripts and categorising of the data into manageable units so that integration with data gathered through other techniques became possible.

In addressing concerns with interviewer bias, Keeves (1997, p308) emphasises the importance of preplanning and interview training. He stresses other qualities of good interviews that are shared by Johnson (1994), Erlandson (1996) and Dexter (1970). Keeves summarises these as the development of an integrated repertoire of techniques which includes speaking skills, listening skills, skills of concept acquisition and skill in the interpretation of verbal and non verbal messages, along with the ability to show empathy with the respondent (p308).

Erlandson (1996, p89) suggests types of questions that should be avoided in an interview, such as those that cause a response to be distorted or reactive. Merriam (1988, p80) further advises avoidance of multiple questions, of leading questions, and of yes/no questions.

The literature identifies phases in interviews which reflect desirable interview qualities. These phases are sequential and interconnected. Even in the most unstructured of the in depth interviews in this study, the interviewer sought to generally conform to these phases. Erlandson (1996, p91) summarises the phases as : determining the respondents, preparing for the interview, beginning the interview, maintaining productivity during the interview, and bringing closure to the interview. Keeves (1997, p307) refers to an introductory phase where rapport is established, the credentials of the interviewer are established and accepted, an appropriate language style is developed, and often non threatening background information is obtained; a second phase where the main content of the interview is developed, where less threatening content is developed first followed by the more detailed exploration of the topic characterised by probing and elaboration of the interview structure; a third phase or denouement where the interviewer concludes the interview, releases the respondent and expresses appreciations.

Ethical considerations should always be at the forefront of naturalistic research. These will include the interviewer's respect for the individual or group under study. At all times the respondent should be considered a full partner in the study. Matters of confidentiality, purpose, and procedures such as tape recording, should be openly discussed with the respondent. This process was followed in this study. An opportunity to read the transcribed interview is recommended (Burgess, 1993) and was offered to each participant in this study. Some participants took advantage of this offer. Some participants in this study were concerned to avoid commenting on the actions of people they knew still to be alive. Occasionally a participant would express an 'off the record' point of

view, or a comment was made that was 'not for publication', but could be used in the study. Comments of this type are a feature of naturalistic research, and must be sensitively managed by the researcher such that the interviewee's requests are always treated respectfully.

Each participant contributed to the interview process having been informed of how the interview material would be used. Interviewees were told that responses could be included in the study and that these would be attributed to the respondent. The researcher was anxious to avoid using interviewee comments that were made 'off the record'. All such comments were removed from transcripts. 'Editing' included the removal of repetitive and awkward phrasing, adding pauses where required, and generally following Allport's (1942) advice, that recommends the editing of transcripts in this way, whilst retaining the style of expression which is unique to the interviewee. All comments that the researcher felt could defame someone were removed. With some potentially hurtful or intensely personal remarks, the researcher rephrased them in order to address this concern.

## THE INTERVIEWS

The interviews were conducted by the one interviewer over a period of months in a variety of settings, each setting negotiated independently with the interviewee. Each interview was in depth, face-to-face, in most interviews using audio tape machine. This assisted content analysis, preserved the context and the meaning of the discussion and identified areas that needed further clarification or amplification (Mischler, 1986). In two interviews, where the

interviewees were known to have very limited experience of Whitlam and the last period of time at the school, the interviewer made an assessment that less information would be revealed, and written note taking replaced the use of a recording machine.

A pilot interview was conducted with a current member of the school's teaching staff. This teacher had been employed by Whitlam and began at PLC in 1959. She had been a member of Whitlam's staff throughout the period of her headship. This pilot interview was conducted with two purposes. Firstly, to gain an overview of the issues and events of the period - a broad sweep of what could emerge in the study; and secondly to refine methodology and test interview technique against the findings revealed in the literature. This pilot interview formed the basis of an early assignment in the Doctorate programme.

Settings for the interviews were negotiated between the interviewer and interviewee. The interviewer travelled to the participant's home for most interviews or to the workplace in the case of others. Interviews with two of the current PLC teachers were conducted at the school out of normal work hours.

The interviews generally extended over a period of one-two hours. The pilot interview ran for three hours. The interview with the former Chairman of Council was held over two sittings in his office; the first extended for one hour and was early in the research period, the second extended over two hours and was the final interview in the research period. There were two interviews with Whitlam, each conducted at the researcher's home and each extending over a two hour period. These interviews were conducted later in the research period.

The successful use of semi-structured interviews required very careful preparation, based on prior analysis of raw data drawn from archives and from informal conversations. The writing up of the interviews was time consuming, but crucial if the data were to be useful for later reference and analysis in conjunction with other data on the same topic.

## THE PARTICIPANTS

The population from whom information could have been drawn included all living members of the broad school community: students, teachers, Members of School Council, parents, former students, friends - who were associated with the school during the period 1958 - 1976 and who could be located. This was well beyond the scope of the study and beyond the time and cost limitations of the researcher. Defining the sample population to be interviewed thus became an early focus of the study.

Following the period of informal discussions, initial archival searches and consultations with University staff, it was decided that the two central actors in the critical incident: the principal and the Chairman of Council from 1975/76 were of greatest importance to the study. Fortunately both these people agreed to participate and to attend multiple interviews each, should that emerge as helpful. They were accessible to the researcher and flexible with their personal arrangements.

Beyond the two central players each of the participatory groupings was considered independently and advice from University staff taken on how to proceed with sample selection. Selection was influenced by the time available to the researcher and the scope of the study, and most importantly, by the need to involve those people who were central players or who were close to the various incidents that occurred at the school during the mid 1970s.

It was decided to include all living and accessible members of the School Council from 1976, the population at 1976 being only fifteen and the fairly safe assumption being that quite a few will have died in the intervening twenty three years. It was further decided to include all current staff members who were on staff at the time, believing these would be readily accessible and representative of the staff of the period under examination. However, it was decided to add to this grouping two participants who were at the time close to the principal and the Chairman of Council, assuming that they may well provide insight and information not otherwise available from the other members of staff. These two additional players were the deputy principal and the principal's secretary, both no longer on staff, but accessible and agreeable to participation.

Beyond these groups, the decision had to be made about whom to include from the broader school community. It was decided to try to locate those people who held leadership and representative positions in the school's parent and ex-student groups from 1976, rather than approach people in a convenience 'hit and miss' style of sampling. Fortunately, this was possible and all the representatives from the final period of Whitlam's headship were accessible

and agreeable to participation. The decision not to interview students of the day was based on their distance from the micropolitical activity and decision-making that would have determined the outcome of the critical incident.

The final sample of participants included:

- Six staff members of 1976 currently on staff
- One senior staff member of 1976 no longer on staff
- The Principal - Freda Whitlam
- The Principal's Secretary
- Four Members of School Council during 1976
- Three senior school community representatives from the Parents and Friends' Association and the Ex-Students' Union, from the latter years of Whitlam's headship.

To obtain a balanced picture of the micropolitics of the critical incident it was necessary to gather as many views as possible, within the usual constraints of time, management of material and accessibility. From the early informal talking with people it became clear that there were conflicting ideas and varied perceptions of Whitlam's contribution and status within the school in the mid 1970s, and of the issues and circumstances surrounding her departure. In this context it was clear that all views needed to be represented, and care had to be taken to ensure that a one hundred percent sampling of the above populations should be approached. What was especially pleasing to the researcher was the willingness of players to participate in the interview process.

## DOCUMENTARY ANALYSIS

Documentary analysis is used in the study to support interviewing, the primary source of data collection. Documentary analysis is an indirect rather than a direct form of analysis. As Robson (1993) explains, 'Instead of directly observing, or interviewing, or asking someone to fill in a questionnaire for the purposes of our enquiry, we are dealing with something produced for some other purpose.' (p.272) In Johnson's words: 'it cannot be individually designed to suit a particular research purpose, but must be drawn on as a source of data in the form in which it stands.' (1993, p.58)

Documentary materials are 'singularly useful sources of information, although they have often been ignored, particularly in basic research and evaluation.' (Lincoln and Guba, 1985, p. 276) There is an enormous diversity of these documentary materials available to researchers. Amongst the written material which could be subjected to document analysis are diaries, memoranda, graffiti, notes, memorials on tombstones, scrapbooks, membership lists, newspapers and magazines, business and personal letters, autobiographies, minutes from meetings, policy documents, proposals, codes of ethics, statements of philosophies, students' records, letters to editors of newspapers or journals, budgets, brochures and newsletters, development plans, lunch menus, rosters (Miles and Huberman, 1991; Glesne and Peshkin, 1992; Bogdan and Biklen, 1992). The list of documents useful to researchers is "not quite endless, but very large". (Miles and Huberman, 1991, p. 51). Documentary material is also assumed to include 'non-written' forms such as films, television

programmes, comic strips and cartoons, photographs and architectural drawings. (Robson, 1993).

Lincoln and Guba (1985) felt that the complexity of analysing documents was exacerbated by there being so many 'typologies into which documents can be sorted, all of which have relevance for analysis' (p.277). Categories which they suggested for the sorting of documents included: the source of the document; or alternatively, whether 'primary' or 'secondary' (or 'hearsay'); 'solicited' versus 'unsolicited'; 'comprehensive' versus 'limited'; 'edited' versus 'unedited' (or, 'complete'); 'anonymous' versus 'signed' (or 'attributable'); 'spontaneous' versus 'intentional'. Dimensions of authorship and access have been used by Scott (1990), to classify documents into twelve categories:

**Table 1**

		Authorship		
		Personal	Official	
			Private	State
Access	Closed	1	5	9
	Restricted	2	6	10
	Open-archival	3	7	11
	Open-published	4	8	12

Others have suggested simple, binary classifications. For example, Strauss and Corbin (1990) divided documentary material into two categories, 'technical' and 'non-technical'; Lincoln and Guba (1985) distinguished between documents and records; and Ekman (1988) separated documentary material into 'conventional' and 'non-conventional'.

Historical research, whether in sociology, science, education or any other discipline, generally seeks to distinguish between primary sources and secondary sources. Primary sources are those that are original to the problem

under study and may be considered in two categories: the remains or relics of a given period, for instance fossils, tools and coins; those items that have had a direct physical relationship with the events being reconstructed, for instance wills, letters, maps, photographs, newspapers, magazines and log books. Secondary sources are made up of data that cannot be described as original such as quoted material, textbooks, and prints of paintings. Both primary and secondary sources can contribute significantly to valid and reliable historical research. (Cohen and Manion, 1997).

For this study the author had open access to the school archives and to the archives of the Presbyterian Church Trustees. The school archives provide a useful background history of the school and are reasonably well ordered and easily accessible. The archives of the Presbyterian Church Trustees are poorly ordered, generally unclassified and difficult to sort through. From these two locations the author gained access to some vital primary sources of useful material especially on the relationship between the School Council and the principal, the emerging issues affecting the management of the school, the educational concerns of Whitlam, and the chronology of events preceding Whitlam's departure from the school. Primary sources included:

School Archives:

- School Prospectus: 1958 - 1976
- School Magazine : 1958 - 1976
- Principal : Reports to School Council : 1958 - 1976
- Principal: Reports to General Assembly of the Church: occasional
- Principal: Speech Day reports : 1958 - 1977
- Minutes of meetings of College Council: 1958 - 1976

- College Council correspondence: 1958 - 1976
- Principal : Letters to Parents : 1958 - 1976
- Principal: Correspondence : 1958 - 1976
- Freda Whitlam collection: assortment of clippings, photographs and letters from the period 1958 - 1975.

Presbyterian Church (NSW) Trustees Archives:

- Minutes of meetings of the Presbyterian Schools Commission, 1974 - 1976
- Reports of Trustees' Special Committee on Schools' Finances, 1974

Other sources of documentary material included the State Library of NSW, the Australian Parliamentary Library and the archives of the Australian Consolidated Press. From these sources, newspaper and magazine articles were obtained that carried comment on Whitlam's departure from the school and some more general comment on her interests and her future. A wide range of secondary sources was accessed from libraries available to the researcher.

A considerable proportion of the documentary material that was read was found to be insignificant for the purpose of this study. As is often the case, with Minutes of meetings in particular, there were regular questions that arose as to the reliability of the document and the usefulness of the document as a 'stand alone' source of information. For instance, in one set of Minutes of a special meeting of the School Council extending from 5.00pm for three hours, the Minutes are a mere one and a half pages in length. There appears to be more unsaid than said, with a mere reporting of the Meeting's resolutions on matters that were very sensitive and controversial. During the collection and analysis of data for any study, the nature of the documentary material used as

sources must be carefully considered, since judgements as to the reliability of the documents as sources of data are, by necessity, made. Whatever system of classifying written material is used during a document analysis, and whether that classification is formed a priori or whether it emerges throughout the study, a researcher must be aware of the significance of documents as well as summarising them (Miles and Huberman, 1991).

Assessing the significance of a document, and the immense complexity of documentary analysis are two of the issues amongst a number about which the researcher must be aware. Various writers have expressed caution or highlighted problems in the use of documents for research purposes. Cohen and Manion (1997) quote Platt, where she considers the problems of authenticity, availability of documents, sampling problems, inference and interpretation (p51). Robson (1993) identifies several weaknesses: the documents' availability may be limited or partial; the documents have been written for some purpose other than for the research, and it is difficult or impossible to allow for the biases or distortions that this introduces; as with other non-experimental approaches, it is very difficult to assess causal relationships.

These concerns are possibly most pronounced in the use of newspaper and magazine articles. As general news or magazine articles, they form part of the public domain and provide unrestricted access within the public domain. They are written by journalists outside the theatre of activity often at a time of heightened emotional tensions, structured on brief comments by a selection of

main participants, generally quoted out of context, for the purpose of selling newspapers or magazines. They should be approached very cautiously.

Concerns with the trustworthiness of the documents should be central to the researcher's task. Robson (1993) emphasises the validity and generalisability of findings. 'Validity' is concerned with whether the findings are really about what they appear to be about, and 'generalisability' refers to the extent to which the findings of the enquiry are more generally applicable. With documents, especially those written in an earlier time, often by a now deceased author and in an altered or now non-existent context, the trustworthiness of documents is an important consideration for the researcher. The trustworthiness of a particular document or group of documents can sometimes be confirmed by checking against other documents, or through the application of appropriate additional data gathering techniques to which reference has already been made.

Robson (1993, p.273) restates a helpful checklist taken from Gottschalk et al (1945, p35) for use in relation to checking the accuracy of all documents.

1. Was the ultimate source of the detail (the primary witness) able to tell the truth?
2. Was the primary witness willing to tell the truth?
3. Is the primary witness accurately reported with regard to the detail under examination?
4. Is there any external corroboration of the detail under examination?

Whilst acknowledging weaknesses and problems associated with documentary analysis, there are also advantages and strengths associated with the application of this technique in some research projects. Robson (1993) cites the unobtrusive quality of documents where you can 'observe' without being observed; the permanence of the data and hence they can be subject to reanalysis, allowing reliability checks and replication studies; the 'low cost' involved when a run or a series of documents may be available for longitudinal analysis. Lincoln and Guba (1985) highlight the availability and inexpensive quality of the data; the documents represent a stable source of data that can be analysed and reanalysed; the documents are 'contextually relevant and written in the natural language of the setting'; they can be statements that satisfy some accountability requirement, and the documents are non-reactive, unlike some human respondents. Glaser and Strauss (1967) provide very similar justifications of the value of documentary material : the accessibility of historical data via documents, the value of written material in overcoming problems of distance, the willingness of those who have committed their ideas to paper to be observed, cost, stability of records, speed of data gathering and the opportunity to revisit the sites of data gathering (that is the documents) in order to review analyses.

Glaser and Strauss (1967) make the point that a cache of documentary material could be regarded in much the same way as a set of interviews or 'conversations' with a sample of people or representatives of different groups. A cache of documents could be of great use in checking out, or correcting, or amplifying whatever hypothesis might be emerging in a study.

Documents can be useful in providing corroboration of observations and findings made by the researcher and can, thus, make these more trustworthy (Glesne and Peshkin, 1992). More than just providing corroboration though, documents in their own right may shape new directions for observations and interviews and provide the researcher with 'historical, demographic, and sometimes personal information that is unavailable from other sources' (Glesne and Peshkin, 1992, p52).

## **SUMMARY**

In this study, documents are helpful in supporting the interviewing techniques that are central to the gathering of the qualitative data. The study is an historical case study of a particular critical incident with discrete circumstances and players, where the application of qualitative rather than quantitative techniques is appropriate. The application of these qualitative elements reflects an approach to the social world that accepts its dynamic and living quality. These elements include detailed descriptions of situations, events, people, interactions and observed behaviours; direct quotations from people about their experience, attitudes, beliefs and thoughts; and excerpts from documents, correspondence, records, autobiographic writings and letters. These varied elements are the raw data which provide the depth and the detail for this study. The qualitative study of people in a particular set of circumstances is a process of discovery and learning about the incident as the research progresses.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### RESULTS

The data for this study have been gathered through two qualitative techniques: interviewing and documentary searches. The aim of this chapter is to report the significant findings of each interview and of the various documents. Findings identified as 'significant' will be subjected to a process of working and reworking as the chapter develops. 'Significance' is determined by applicability to the aims and research questions of the thesis as defined in Chapter One, and, as is common with the methodology, the significance will tend to emerge as more data are revealed and considered.

Interviews have been recorded from the principal of the period, 1958-1976, Freda Whitlam; the Chairman of Council for the period 1974-1976 (retired as Chairman in 1985); members of Council of the period; members of staff of the period still on staff; senior members of staff of the later years of the period, no longer on staff; former leading office bearers in the Ex-students' Union and the Parents and Friends' Association.

The period under examination is 1958-1976 and from these years many of the members of staff have left the school and quite a few are now deceased. This is also the case in relation to members of the School Council and the various support groups of the school. Every effort has been made to locate participants who compose the above groups. The decision to focus on these groups was determined largely by the need to provide some limits to the

number to be interviewed and by the need to focus on those participants most likely to contribute useful information and ideas to the study. School students of the day were rejected as potential participants because they were considered to be too distant from the concerns that form the focus of the study. A more detailed account of sampling procedures applied in this study is presented in Chapter Three.

The edited transcripts and documentary material that appear in this chapter, result from a lengthy process of editing that has involved substantial decision-making on the researcher's part. In this regard, it is impossible to extract the researcher from participation in the results gathering and interpretation process. As is common in qualitative research, the researcher is active in the process. An attempt is made to present the results as free of comments as possible. In some instances, this has not been possible; in other instances, some editorial comment has been helpful to the meaning or the significance of the data. In deciding to either include or exclude data, or in presenting data thematically, the researcher has been called on to make decisions: to evaluate significance; to interpret meaning; to categorize data with other data; to selectively apply data to analysis and conclusions.

The documentary material has been drawn from the archives of the Presbyterian Ladies College, at Croydon and the Ferguson Library in Sydney, the Library of the Presbyterian Church of Australia in NSW. Other primary sources have been found in the Meriden School Library, Strathfield and primary and secondary material has been drawn from the Parliamentary Library in Canberra, the State Library in Sydney, various local libraries and

the archives of Australian Consolidated Press. During the course of interviews, some documents of interest were passed to the researcher.

From all of these documentary sources, useful items have included school magazines (*Aurora Australis*), minutes of meetings; reports to committees; photographs and private notes; letters; newspaper and magazine articles. As is the case with the interview data, the documentary editing process has focused on the micropolitical environment of the school which culminated in the critical incident, the resignation of Freda Whitlam. Following Kerlinger (1986) selection of material to include in the data was determined by its significance for this purpose, and for its potential to contribute to an understanding of the micropolitics of the school community in which Freda Whitlam was the principal.

This chapter will report data collected from each interview conducted. With the exception of the Whitlam interviews, data will be drawn from the edited transcripts and arranged thematically through reference to the literature collected and reported in chapter two, and through the emerging understanding of the micropolitics that impacted on the events and issues of late 1976 at PLC. The two Freda Whitlam interview transcripts will be merged and reported here as a discrete unit, whereas all other data from interviews will appear thematically. The Freda Whitlam interviews are central to the study, and very little of the edited transcripts can be ignored. They are given some focus of attention in the interviews' section of this chapter. The Whitlam interviews were helpful in forming substantial sections of chapter

one. They will be drawn on to form the analysis and concluding comments to the study, and they will contribute to the postscript that follows the study.

The second section in this chapter will examine documentary material collected. Information in school magazines and Principals' Reports to Speech Day will be given some attention, as well as the useful material in School Council documents; the Presbyterian Schools Commission Minutes; letters on various issues and, finally, press articles. There is a great deal of documentary material that makes reference to Freda Whitlam, her character, actions, and others' impressions of her. It is impossible to include everything. The researcher has chosen what to include and what to exclude, an honest attempt being made to choose representative data. As is the case with the interview data, an attempt is made to group these data gathered from documents into categories that are representative of the emerging themes that will give structure to the analysis which follows this chapter.

## INTERVIEWS

### INTERVIEW PARTICIPANTS

Edited transcripts have been prepared from these interviewees:

**Table 2**

1976 Members of staff	1976 Position	1999 on Staff	Code
Freda Whitlam	Principal	No (Res.1976)	FW1/FW2
Judith Hancock	Dep.Principal	No (Res.1976)	JH
Audrey Keown	Teacher	Yes	AK
Ronne Webb	Teacher	No (Ret.1998)	RW
Erna Tan	Teacher	Yes	ET
Pam Nutt	Teacher	Yes	PN
Rosalind Rennie	Teacher	Yes	RR
Deborah Aitkin (nee Vine Hall)	Teacher	No (Ret.1984)	DA
Mrs. Forrester	Secretary	No (Ret. 1975)	MF

**Table 3**

1976 Ex-Students/Parents	1976 Status	Code
June Smith	Sen.Ex-student/daughter withdrawn 1971	JS
Jeannette York	Sen. Ex-student/daughter Sc. Captain 1976	JY
Madge Thornton	Sen. Ex-student/daughter Grad 1972	MT

**Table 4**

1976 Council Members	1976 Position	1976 Occupation	Code
Peter Graham	Chairman	Admin./Pres.Church	PG1/PG2
Yvonne McBurney	Member/current PLC parent	Home/Writer	YMcB
Jean Crawford	Member/daughter Sc.Captain 1975	Home	JC
Neil Colquhoun	Member	Accountant	NC

## **DATA FROM INTERVIEWS**

With the exception of categories devoted to 'Whitlam: before and after PLC', and 'Whitlam's Contribution to PLC', three thematic categories are used to classify the data: 'Internal Forces', 'External Forces', and 'Chronology of the Critical Incident', chosen in an attempt to highlight micropolitical influences that were instrumental in the critical incident of late 1976. These categories and any sub-categories will be consistent throughout the chapter and will guide the researcher in the analysis of these data.

### **INTERVIEWS WITH FREDA WHITLAM**

(FW1 and FW2)

At the request of Freda Whitlam these two interviews were conducted at the researcher's home. They occurred in early and mid February, 1999.

#### **Internal Forces**

The micropolitics of the 1970s can be traced to relationships and actions within the school, that occurred early in Whitlam's Headship. Whitlam's relationship with Chairman of Council, Thompson was complex and began awkwardly and confusingly. Freda Whitlam makes frequent reference to Thompson, the School Council and her relationships with them, during these interviews.

## Uneasy Relationships

*'PLC was very difficult that year before I went there. Miss Tassey, acting principal, didn't give me any real knowledge or advice, but she did say Mr Thompson, who was a wholesale grocer of course, insisted that everything that we buy that he sells, we have got to get from him. She didn't tell me to do the same but I was bright enough to realise'.*

*'Mr Thompson took me to afternoon tea at Concord Golf Club - he loved golf - and as we were talking there, I got the first hint of disapproval because I said something, I forget whether it was a person or a thing. I said, "It was a honey of a thing" and his eyebrows rose. I realised I had used slang, which was inappropriate. Mr Thompson had come from a very good Presbyterian background. His business experience, and I'm sure he was a man of great integrity, was built on wholesale grocers and penny pinching'.*

*'As my brother pointed out to me, Mr Thompson had no formal education this century; he was in a very narrow field. He was a man of integrity, of a certain amount of presence, a man in good standing in the church, and it should have been all right, but he had had no experience in Councils, where everybody contributed'.*

Whitlam says that Thompson conducted Council business very dictatorially. She says he felt ownership of the Council and the school and felt very proud of the school, although he saw very little of the classrooms. *'He was interested in the garden and his idea was encapsulated in the elegance of Shubra Hall, and the garden, the entrance, he wasn't interested in the classrooms. He was a humble man,*

*he didn't feel worthy to comment at all on the classrooms, but when we met at Concord Golf Club, one thing he told me was I was to get the cheapest staff I could get, and that raised my eyebrows'.*

Whitlam frequently comments on Thompson's lack of preparation for the role of Chairman and his inappropriate actions. She says: *'The Presbyterian Church never trained people how to go on School Councils; what they could do for a school. They were nit picking and Mr Thompson, under Dr McQueen's headship, developed a habit of listening to the parents and lingering outside the school to talk to the girls and the parents, and the staff, and he never gave up those habits'.*

*'Mr Thompson came to an understanding of the complexity of the school and of my role, only in the latter years of his Chairmanship - really after his retirement from business. He then used to come into the school most afternoons and sit talking to my secretary and to others - his wife had alzheimers and the school was his escape. I think he grew in his respect and admiration for me in this latter period. I found his early attitude to me very dominating - a man dominating a female, the weaker gender. He also had a low regard for the demands and pressures of teaching'.*

Amongst the parents in the school, alliances between interest groups developed and these extended into other areas of the school community.

Whitlam comments on an alliance that caused her considerable concern:

*'Now I found Strathfield parents were the most burdensome. They were the most ambitious. They could be unscrupulous. They were fiercely competitive with each*

*other. They were very conscious they were the elite of the west, and they had Mr Thompson's ear'.*

Freda Whitlam presents an account of how the Parents and Friends' Association (P&F) developed during her time, evolving out of work of the 'pie ladies' and the provision of lunches for the girls. She states that, although Mr Thompson was initially against such an organization, the fact that it raised funds for the school, eventually swayed him. The Parents and Friends' organization became a source of factional development, and gave rise to individual parents of girls, who sought to exert an influence on developments within the school. Whitlam relates numerous examples of this, some supportive of her, others less so. One of these also touches on the chronology of the critical incident:

*'Ian Gordon was a solicitor and he and his family were always very supportive. He was in the Parents and Friends. My own natural inclination is to favour lawyer's children because my family has lawyers and they invariably are good students. In my understanding, because they see their father working, they grow up with books and dictionaries and encyclopedias and atlases. He had a city firm, he was a very good lawyer. I remember him best when Peter Graham came and announced that I was leaving at Assembly and then went, his eldest daughter Felicity was a senior girl so she was near the back of the Assembly Hall and she slipped out immediately and went around to the office and rang her father. So, by the time I got back to the study, he was on the phone to me. He said, don't you do a thing without consulting me, and he stood by me the whole time. He saw he vetted or dictated everything I wrote, the whole process'.*

*'Parents and Friends can take over but I would rather have parents and friends take over than old girls. The ex-students are run by people who peaked at school, and they can be very troublesome, whereas when the parents run it, they don't stay forever'.*

Whitlam was often uneasy with the ex-students, especially the PLC Ex-Students' Union. She cites occasions on which she believes ex-students took advantage of their position as ex-students to achieve some personal benefit. For instance she tells of one senior member of the Ex-students' Union who on Christmas Eve one year *'bounced in and demanded a train pass for her daughter because the girl had a chance to go down to Hobart to see her father arrive on a yacht. So she assumed I would be there when she wanted me to sign her train pass. She used her position as an ex-student to the greatest advantage'.*

The Documentary section of this chapter will present an account of Whitlam's first written report to Council. This February, 1958 Report was significant in setting Whitlam's early relationship with the School Council. Whitlam acknowledges this and refers to it in some detail in interview.

*When Mr. Thompson asked me to do this report on the school, I took him seriously - it was a dashed good report - and I analysed the results over the previous three or four years, and so on - it was good. And when I did it, my secretary said, "I don't think this is wise"; well, I said it was what he asked for, and I've got my own integrity. I mean this is what my experience was going to be. If they'd listened to that, it would have been to their benefit. I read it out to them and there was a stony silence and then we passed on to the next matter. But I'm told he carried it around with him and was saying, "this is a dreadful thing, isn't it?", and, of course, the Council never stood up*

*to Mr Thompson - they weren't really interested. I think it was quite a good thing to be on the Council of a church school if you were a Presbyterian, but they didn't contribute anything'.*

*'That first report was true. I was a fool, of course; Mr Thompson never forgave me for that first report'.*

The February 1958 Principal's Report initiated an Inspectors' Report of the school. Whitlam recalls: *'After that first report at the first Council meeting I attended, Mr Thompson was out to get me. Rev Petrie, from Council, told me that straight out. Well, it blossomed in 1961, when they had an inspection of the school by a man and woman whose experience was in the Education Department, Primary. They were inspectors, which meant they weren't up to date; they were mature, they were older. The man had at least retired, the woman was almost at retirement age. They were Presbyterian; they knew nothing about secondary, nothing about boarding schools'.*

*'Well, they came in and their brief was to get me. They took up their places in my study. I offered them somewhere else, but they used my study, so I was homeless. They came in for a month and they interviewed everybody. And what they asked people was, "What don't you like about the school?; what is wrong with the school?" Well, you ask a teacher what's wrong, and they'll tell you'.*

*'In the second week, teachers began to compare notes, and they became very upset and they were coming to me and saying, look, can we see the inspectors again because we realise we were not given a chance to put the positives, so the inspectors had to stay*

*on an extra week, receiving all the positives. Then they produced their report and Rev Petrie, whom I liked, told me all about it, "You know, they're not going to show you that report because it's too good". He said, "it's the best reference you will ever get and they don't want to show you"*.

*'So then, Mr Bensley from Burwood came to see me; he was a good pastor and he came to see me and he sat down and he said it was my Christian duty to be merciful to Mr Thompson because I had been cleared, magnificently, totally, but it was a damning report. More damning of the facilities than my one of three years before'.*

*'I always felt it was one of the great ironies that I had to be merciful to Mr Thompson, because he'd been badly disappointed; he was stricken. They finally had to show it to me, because they needed my cooperation'.*

The relationship between Thompson and the school's bursar, and Thompson and others in the school community caused unease for Whitlam, and created distrust in relationships. She comments:

*'The bursar was a former bootmaker - and he would have had to keep books for that. That was his qualification. Mr Thompson liked the bursar. He was an okay man, but Mr Thompson treated him as though he was the principal. I was in charge of seeing the uniforms were worn correctly, the girls behaved in public, and kept the pupils coming and kept the parents happy. But the bursar was the one that Mr Thompson related to, because they spoke the same language'.*

*'The bursar always knew in his quiet way that he controlled me. I was given the accounts after they had been passed by everybody, to initial every month, but I knew everything was done for them. I couldn't make any changes. Occasionally, I did sort something out. I knew Mr Thompson always got the lowdown on the school from the bursar before he came near me. He was a ferret and he took over as Chairman in the 1920's when there was already suspicion of Dr McQueen. He never trusted the principal, but he trusted the bursar'.*

*'There was another man, Evans, known as "good Evans". Evans had been at the school since the First World War ended. He was an Englishman and he was a handyman, a little man, and he knew everything that was going on. Mr Thompson always made sure he talked to Evans, and Evans had his own view of things. He was a widower by the time I came here. He lived on the school premises. Mr Thompson had Evans, he had Mr Harris the bursar, and all the people that he used to talk to at the gate'.*

*'When I came to Croydon, they weren't interested in any expertise I had in finance, because the bursar did all that, and Mr Thompson basically had little respect for women - he'd grown up in an era when women were okay to teach little children. He never reduced me to tears'.*

*'Well, one thing that I always resented - that Mr Thompson was very friendly with Mr Wallace, who was the Chairman of Methodist Ladies College. Anything I suggested, he used to go to Mr Wallace and say, "would this work?" I didn't realise that for a while. Mr Thompson had no training in being a Chairman - so he needed*

*help, so he went to people because there really hadn't been a College Council for him to learn on, you know'.*

Whitlam says that the Council was quite inappropriate in its expectations of her at times. She cites instances where she says she was forced into taking onto her staff friends or acquaintances of Council members. *'One was a librarian friend of Dr Cumming-Thom, from the School Council. The librarian was a hopeless older woman who was a disaster as a librarian.'* Whitlam recalls how Thompson caused the appointment of another staff member which also required a higher salary for her:

*'She was a run of the mill teacher, and she was a gossip. I was never comfortable with her. I think at the beginning for Mr Thompson it was handy to have a spiv on the staff, but I think she realised pretty soon and I don't think that he got much from her. But I thought that was quite unethical'.*

### Enrolments decline

Whitlam levels much of the responsibility for the enrolments situation at the school at the condition of the national economy during the late 1960s. She says that *'there was a very big depression in 1969 and that affected the country kids very badly. And our boarding school was shabby. The parents couldn't afford to send them'.*

## External Forces

As has been emphasized in chapter one, Freda Whitlam led this school at an extraordinary period in Australian history. Through family connections and through church affiliations, she was a participant in the developments of the period. Her brother, Gough, was at the centre of national politics, holding positions of party leadership that were not in sympathy with the party politics position commonly associated with the parent community of schools such as PLC. Issues of party and church politics, and the economic conditions of the later years of her headship, focussed the attention of Whitlam.

### National politics

Whitlam is of the opinion that the national political scene, and her brother, Gough's critical role there, played a significant part in establishing attitudes towards her, even though Thompson at the beginning said it would be otherwise.

*'When Mr Thompson told me they would have me here, I said there was one problem, I have a brother in politics. Will that matter? Mr Thompson said, "no, we're employing you, not him". But it did matter. Gough only came to the school once. A History teacher asked if he could come and speak to the girls. And he came, and he was very good. It wasn't about politics, I think, it was about Australia and international aspects. It was before the Vietnam War. It certainly wasn't political'.*

*'I wouldn't have Gough in the school. I wasn't going to have anybody say that I was influencing anybody in any way'.*

*'Politics didn't matter until the Labor Government got in and brought in equal pay and they never forgave Gough, or me for having a brother, because all the salaries had to go up, mine included'.*

*'But politics came into it when Labor got in during the early 1970s, because Peter Graham was on the Council and was rabidly Liberal. He stood for Liberal pre-selection for North Sydney. I mean, he wasn't even a qualified accountant. He had no qualifications. North Sydney was the plum Liberal seat and he was so arrogant that he could think that he'd get it - of course, he didn't. His profession was being a Presbyterian. He came on the Council and his ambition was to be Chairman of Council. Now, nobody else particularly wanted to be, and in the Church, if you want a job, really you'll get it. People tend to be ladylike and gentlemanly in the church, so he got it. He was rabidly political.'*

*'Peter Graham was on the Council before Labor won and he never believed they would. And after they won, at every Council meeting he would be making jibes about politics and then, of course, when they put up wages, Mr Thompson was furious that he had to pay decent salaries to the staff. He was mad. One time Mr Thompson went to visit our infants area, Branxton. This was early in my time. The children were having their rest after lunch, and he never forgot it. Whenever I mentioned Branxton, he said, "all they do is sleep, why should we pay people to watch them sleep. We don't need all the staff there, all they do is sleep". That used to grate on me. He always tried to underpay the staff, but from then he had to pay them decently and he resented it bitterly. It was my fault, of course, because I had a brother'.*

*'Everywhere private school numbers were going down. We were lucky that we got the Science block Commonwealth Government State Aid. Mr Thompson was so proud of it. What he didn't realise was we were in the first batch who were the disgracefully needy ones; it was no credit to us that we got State Aid for our Science Block. It was because our need was desperate'.*

### Church Politics

Whitlam says that the impact of the church on developments was more subtle than direct. The influence was largely through the politics associated with the movement towards church union and was essentially restricted to the School Council. She says that *'the church let Mr Thompson do anything. The church never took an interest in their schools unless there was a blow-up'.*

*'I had no idea that our School Council was a core of the continuing Presbyterian Church. And they were watching me, of course. I certainly did nothing to promote the Uniting Church. It was known I was going with the Uniting Church but I was very careful to be fair to the Presbyterian Church'.*

*'With Peter Graham, a lot of it was political, definitely...Uniting Church had quite a lot to do with it; I think my Deputy was not loyal to me. Everything came together and Peter Graham was very proud of himself. He did a great job for the Presbyterian Church. I think probably some people would remember that now. I didn't realize it was going on. I was naive and busy'.*

## A Chronology of the Critical Incident

Whitlam displayed a lack of knowledge of the details surrounding her dismissal from the school. This could be explained by either the emotional turmoil of the time, her being unaware of the sequences of event, or a combination of both. *'One morning the bell had gone and I was just collecting my things ready to go down to assembly when Peter Graham rang the doorbell; he just walked into the study, and I said, good morning. He said he'd come to attend assembly and I said, oh do you want to do anything? Do you want to take prayers? He said, "oh no, I've just come to announce that you're leaving at the end of the year". So we went down and I took assembly'.*

*'I had no idea. So I went down to assembly and took it and then he announced this and Felicity Gordon tore out the back, although we weren't aware of it. Then we went back to my study and at the study door he said "goodbye", and he went'.*

*'They had been having Council meetings without my being there. I didn't know that. And he had been talking to my deputy. I went down after school one day to see her in her office and he was there and then it came out. But she had already decided to put in for Brisbane Girls Grammar School'.*

*'I think Peter wanted her to stay on as Principal. And then I think she realised that it wouldn't be all sweetness and light. He wanted her to go on the Education Commission of the Presbyterian Church and I was irate, I think they might have mentioned it to me. But she was very ambitious'.*

*'The Council pulled back. My understanding was that the parents were so up in arms and you see the Council thought I had no support among the parents. They got a tremendous shock when a lot of parents reacted, and some of them sent me copies of what they had written'.*

*'The Council had to retract. Peter Graham sent out a letter saying that I wasn't leaving and everything was sweetness and light; they asked me not to go until 31 December and I was willing. I actually stayed on looking after archives and cleaning up things and trying to make it easier for my successor'.*

Whitlam says that by the end she had lost all respect for Peter Graham and for the School Council. *'After that, I didn't want to go on working with Peter Graham because he was doing it for his own honour and glory - and I'd had enough'.*

### **Whitlam: Before and After PLC.**

Chapter one and the postscript to this study draw heavily on data from these interviews with Freda Whitlam. Much of Whitlam's educational practice, management style and character can be traced to qualities and experiences mentioned here. This is particularly important to the micropolitics because this broad picture assists in interpreting actions and events that occurred later, and in understanding the depth of feeling, for and against Whitlam, in the critical period. For instance, positive contributions that drew support, encouragement and alliances from amongst the school community, would have been influential in Council's decision and Whitlam's future. Whitlam recalls how she began at PLC and how prepared she was for this new role:

## Before PLC

At the age of thirty seven Whitlam was approached by two church ministers and asked if she would be willing to go to Croydon.' *They needed a principal and they couldn't get one because no school encouraged the staff to apply to go to Croydon. It had a very bad name. And the ministers weren't aware of that. Now it was my bad luck that Miss Bryant , the headmistress was overseas, and I had no one to consult, but I've always been one if the church asked me to do anything, I will do it. I was called to an interview, and then I got it'.*

Whitlam comments on relevant experience for the new role. She says:'*I had never, until I went to Abbotsleigh, been in a proper classroom situation. Abbotsleigh wasn't all that good, really. We were stuck with Roberts' History of Modern Europe and it was underlined in red and blue. And that was our history'.*

'*I had no trouble with discipline - At Frensham, I got along with the kids well - I think I was younger and livelier than most of them. I enjoyed teaching'.*

'*But I had really never had decent teaching conditions'.*

'*My best experience was in the Guide movement because I learnt more about teaching and organising people through the Guides than I ever did through the Dip.Ed or teaching. I had to be in charge; I had to organise it; I had to consider the needs of all the kids; I had the administrative experience from Guides'.*

*'I knew how to take a service, taking prayers; I had a wide general knowledge; I liked people and I respected them. That was the main thing. My father was a very earnest man. He was a lawyer; he was actually the Ombudsman in early Canberra, but we didn't use that term then. He was a man of great integrity and a man who was always just, and fair. Before he made an opinion, he weighed both sides, so I grew up in that sort of atmosphere'.*

*'Before I came here, I went to the bursar at Frensham and they went through all the accounts with me and showed me the whole system. It was very good of them, so I understood the pattern that they used for everything on the financial side'. I learnt a lot, and they were very good explaining it all to me'.*

*'I had no close friend. I knew nobody because I'd done my education in Melbourne and in Canberra, and Frensham was a fair way away'.*

*'What I had going for me was the fact I had a very stable home background; I had my father, who was a very senior public servant, who had great respect and internationally with his work with the United Nations, the Human Rights Commission, he had great international respect; my brother was already, of course, in the wrong Party, but he was in Parliament and making a name for himself. I had a good church background; I'd had experience in different schools; I had a stability that they couldn't crack easily'.*

*When I got here, I realised I had to stay ; I was the seventh in 30 years; somebody had to stay, there had to be some stability if the school was to survive. I couldn't tell anybody else what it was like, could I?'*

## After PLC

Whitlam tells of her move to the new outer western suburbs of Sydney and her vigorous involvement in community activities: *'I was already on the committee that formed the College of Advanced Education in Western Sydney and built the campus at Kingswood, so I knew there'd be a university, so that's what decided me to go to Penrith. I'd grown up in Canberra when it was starting. We were very conscious as children we were helping to build the national capital and I saw Penrith with getting a university it couldn't go backwards. There would be interesting people there so I wanted to be part of its development. I'm very involved with the University of Western Sydney in various ways; I was on the Community Advisory Committee for them'*

*'I went to Penrith and I just was available to be used however. I became very involved in the church and eventually became Moderator. I had been very involved with the training of lay preachers in the Presbytery in Western Sydney, I was on the Board for Social Responsibility of the Uniting Church until I became Moderator'*

*'I was very involved with something call Quota which is like Rotary and I was District Governor the year after I left PLC. I stayed until about '79'.*

Her involvement in the western area also included the Youth Support Services at Penrith, membership of the Q Theatre Board, initiating the University of the Third Age and teaching its courses, public speaking at Conferences and opening the United Nations Year of Older People at

Liverpool, serving on the Westmead Hospital Board and on their Ethics Committee. She has also been a member of the NSW Higher Education Board and a consistent member of the Australian College of Education although not as active since the mid seventies when she felt it was too strongly influenced by Liberals. In 1984, Whitlam spent nine months on a NSW Department of Health Review of Drug and Alcohol Services.

However, her greatest joy is *'to close the door at home! Because when I was at the school I was available day and night. I more and more tended to stay within the school - because in the evening the kids, so often the sixth formers, would come just for a chat, wondering who was going out with their boyfriend'*.

#### **Whitlam and her contribution to the school**

Whitlam recalls the early years within the school. She tells of the fear that seemed to exist between students and teachers, and teachers and principal, and principal and Council Chairman. She traces this unsatisfactory condition to the Chairman's bullying approach and Whitlam's predecessor's inability to stand up to him. Whitlam says she set about improving this quality within the school and her relationships with staff were a positive feature of her years at the school. She also highlights other positive features of her legacy.

*'I was appalled when I discovered that, if I asked a member of staff to come to me, they would go white and begin to shake. So I never asked a member of staff to come to the study to see me unless I had good news for him or her. I understood within the first two or three days that I must never ask anybody to come to the study for anything*

*that could put them on the defensive. I made opportunities for people to come to my study to be commended for something or other,*

*'Mr Thompson destroyed Miss Macindoe; it was wicked what he did to her. She was well qualified, she was a good woman, but he reduced her to a shuddering weeping mess. He was just a bully, and as Principal, she took it out on the staff. They took it out on the kids, to some extent, and I realised very quickly what was happening, so I always took the attitude with members of staff, any member of staff, when you are appointed to do that job, you are the best that I could find for the job. Now it's over to you. You are responsible. And I took that attitude whether they were a laundress or whether they were a maths teacher'.*

*'I never put anybody down, a kid, or anybody and I always respected them and very soon I had them all on side. They appreciated it'.*

Whitlam considers her special contributions to the school to be in the pastoral care area and in the development of self confidence in the girls, for instance through the religious practices in the school and the encouragement of various public speaking initiatives; in implementing policies and initiatives to achieve social democracy and social justice; and in her involvement with the boarders and the boarding staff. She cites examples of how she managed personal tragedies in the school; how she opened leadership opportunities to more girls, such as through the replacement of prefects by a shared approach to leadership. She introduced social service activities to the girls, such as class charities and year-group social service groups, and took a special interest in the less able girls. She opened the school to acceptance of aboriginal girls and

enrolled a number of them on Commonwealth- assisted arrangements. Her actions were sometimes controversial:

*'There was always a slow kid in every class; I told the staff to see they never got under 40%. And it worked because it meant they were usually not bottom of the class. Some of those kids achieved pass marks. I explained to the parents that your daughter is just not academic, she will always have difficulty doing really well, but we're going to give her a mark which will be false, but it will give her confidence. She won't always be bottom of the form. We tried to see that no kid was always in the bottom form. We organised it. There was no dumb class. I thought that was terribly important'.*

As well motivated as many of Whitlam's initiatives were, there was often the potential for them to cause a negative response amongst parents and staff and to be used against her. The example above has this potential.

## INTERVIEWS WITH THE OTHER PARTICIPANTS

The data gathered from the other interviewees is compiled here according to categories. Substantial editing of interview transcripts has preceded this compilation. At least three stages of editing have led to the data that appears here.

## Internal Forces

### Uneasy relationships.

The relationship between Whitlam and Judith Hancock, her deputy during the 1970s, is frequently the subject of respondent comment. Hancock, a PLC ex-student and former Science Mistress at SCEGGS School, Darlinghurst, Sydney, came to PLC as deputy in 1972. Both the process and the nature of her appointment unsettled Whitlam. The ongoing relationship destabilized Whitlam. It was rarely friendly and mutually respectful. The relationship between Hancock and the School Council is the subject of considerable conjecture amongst the interviewees. Hancock (JH) recalls the appointment process:

*'It was the Council interviewing for the deputy and it was the Council who were going to appoint the deputy - it was not Miss Whitlam. She was at the interview. What happened was that I was the last interview and I had been waiting in that front sitting room and Coral Dixon, who later became Head of Ravenswood, was also there for interview. Coral at the time was an English teacher at PLC. Freda was very fond of Coral and really wanted Coral as the deputy. I'm in the sitting room next door, and the Coral Dixon interview was finished. Freda came out and said to Coral, "well Coral that went well, but don't get excited because this next woman is an old girl of the school, who the Council want to appoint because they want to get rid of me'.*

*'All I remember of the interview was their obsession with religion. Thompson probably controlled it because he controlled everything. I got a phone call not long*

*after offering me the job, but it really was under the Council's terms and that I was a Council appointment'.*

*'I was given a seat on Council. It had power. It wasn't as an observer. It was the first time that had happened. The reason was they didn't trust her. They told me and I wondered what on earth I had gotten into'. Smith (JS) confirms this, stating that it was common knowledge that Hancock was attending Council meetings to make sure that the reports submitted by Whitlam were true. Hancock says that 'Freda was very angry that I'd be going to Council meetings. They used to ask me for input on things, to report on things and to do different things. And Mr Thompson used to listen to me. He was a difficult man and I used to stay at the school - I had a bedroom that I'd sleep in when I had to go to meetings or be late at school and so on. I remember after, it must have been the first or second Council meeting, and before I went up to bed Freda said, "Oh they're just waiting to say good bye Miss Whitlam, Mrs Hancock you're the next principal of PLC." And she was obsessed with that. And I think there was some justification in that but I always used to say to her, "well, I wouldn't do that to you, I would never accept that - I didn't come here to be the Head of the school, I came here to be the Deputy and to learn from you". We used to have long discussions about the threats that she perceived I posed to her'. Hancock says that she found on arrival 'this insecure woman heading the school and they didn't like her attitude to the girls, they didn't like her attitude to the old-girls, they didn't like her philosophy'.*

The unease between Hancock and Whitlam was evident to members of staff. The school was a small institution and it was difficult to hide such things. Audrey Keown (AK), recalls: *'Part of the destabilizing of 1976 resulted from the*

*difference of opinion between Freda and Judith Hancock, and there was sufficient disturbance there to affect staff. There just seemed to be quite a few emotional upheavals both from Judith Hancock and at times, from Freda'. Ronne Webb (RW) confirms this observation. She says that, 'Judith Hancock was very ambitious and I think there was a power struggle there.'* Nutt (PN) observes that *'one was in one corner and the other was in another and they were doing their own thing'*. She comments on a lack of teamwork and an absence of a close working relationship.

The relationship Council-Principal-Deputy was confused; lines of authority were not respected. Hancock recalls tensions and power-plays:

*'Thompson was a very, very strange man. He was very fond of me . If Freda had stood up to old Thompson, she'd have been a lot better off. But she never used to stand up to him or the Council. He was so controlling. He was literally there every day and he had a set car park. He'd come to my office. He'd sit and talk to me in my office, which Freda hated. He'd go and talk to the bursar in the office and not leave for ages. He'd talk to the gardener. He'd talk to anybody other than her. He didn't spend a lot of time with her and he used to do the same with Miss Macindoe - she told me that'.*

Thompson's domination of the School Council is mentioned by Graham (PG1) and Colquhoun (NC) from Council, and by Hancock. Hancock talks of his attempts at undermining Whitlam: *'They'd go out to get Freda and she'd be really put on the hot seat. I remember one night the Council trying to prove she'd lied to them because it was held by some that she used to lie to them; I was there to try and keep her honest, "And Mrs Hancock, what do you think about that?" and I'd have to*

*um and ah to try and use words to get around it so that I wouldn't say "Well what Miss Whitlam said is quite wrong". She didn't get her way very much. I think she became very defensive and I think this obsession, that they wanted to get rid of her, was so bad it over-rode everything. She was paranoid about that'.*

Webb remembers discussions that she had with Whitlam and Thompson about their relationship. She says that each acknowledged the difficulties between them and that there was a lot of disagreement. *'I think perhaps it was all over money. I think the school was having a problem financially'.*

Hancock states that by the time she got there, in 1972 she did not consider Whitlam a powerful person. *'She was weak. She felt very alone'.* This is an observation confirmed by others on the staff at the time. Nutt comments that Whitlam seemed to find close personal friendships difficult. Others have noted the loneliness that seemed overwhelming during the difficulties of the mid 1970's. Hancock recalls that during these years Whitlam *'was a very sad, unhappy, woman and she put on a lot of weight. She became very puffy and was unhealthy. Then Gough was going to India to meet Mrs Gandhi and he decided to take her. So she decided to go to Weight Watchers, because she knew how revolting she looked and she loves India and Indians. Up until her involvement with Quota she had nothing - she was alone, she was sad'.* *'I really think that the Council had tried other ways to get rid of her and maybe they thought I was the key to getting rid of her. But that backfired. I'd have never looked at myself in the mirror'.*

Hancock believes Whitlam should have been more forceful with Thompson. She recalls when Whitlam took up horticulture and used to go off on a

Wednesday and Mr Thompson used to get angry about it. *'It was about the only time she ever stood up for herself, and she said, "I'm here seven days a week, 24 hours a day, I am going to take this time"'*.

Graham and Hancock remember Freda Whitlam as being a very generous and tolerant person, however, Hancock says she was *'the most intolerant person when it came to Mr Thompson and the Council, and so on. She literally hated them. And yet, she had this enormous Christian charity'*

*'I did have a lot of power, actually. Freda didn't trust me because she thought I was their plant and I wasn't, you know. I remembered Mr Thompson from when I'd been at school, but I had no relationship with any of them. I didn't eat with them or 'sup with them', as she'd have said, or befriend them in any way. Mrs Drummond tried to befriend me and used to write to me a lot and so on and ask me to go and see her, but I didn't consider them friends, and I certainly never went to anyone else's home or went out with them. I knew it was wrong. I wouldn't do it'*.

On the other hand the staff had a view of Thompson that was more indicative of their interactions with him and their distance from many of the issues that caused tensions for Whitlam. Keown expresses a view that was not uncommon amongst the staff. She says that Thompson was held in high regard for his position and his longevity; *'an elderly gentleman, I guess he did what he thought was right for the school. It was just that, by 1970, the thinking of 1930 was definitely out of date. He always behaved in a gentlemanly fashion and was always courteous to everybody in the public area'*. Webb recalls Thompson's battered Mercedes as often in the school. Thompson is often portrayed by the

staff members and the younger Council members of the period as not sufficiently current with the needs of the school at the time. Whitlam's secretary (MF) refers to their approach as '*fuddy duddy*' and '*Victorian*'. She expands: '*To attend the school in those years the attitude of Mr. Thompson and the Council members and Freda seemed to be that it was a privilege and that they didn't need to go out looking for students. I felt that attitude was starting to change in the latter period of Miss Whitlam's service at the school.*'

Peter Graham replaced FL Thompson as Chairman, although Thompson continued on as Chairman Emeritus. Hancock and others, such as Nutt and Keown on the staff, had a low opinion of Graham and his Council.' *I think Peter Graham was worse than Thompson. I really do*', says Hancock. '*Peter Graham thought he was brilliant, he thought he knew everything. He thought he controlled everything and he didn't know what a fool he was. He was horrible. Terrible man. And I think he'd be a very bitter man now because everything passed him by. He'll always be looked over*'.

Within the staff, Hancock was not alone in these views. Keown for instance , states that the relationship between Graham and Whitlam was not unlike that between David and Goliath. '*Unfortunately*', she says, '*David had the final slingshot and the stone. I don't know what it was, but he was a very weak person and I think he was quite fearful of Freda's intellect and her brilliance, because she was so quick witted and she knew so much. His inadequacy showed up in just about everything he did*'. She goes on to say that '*his ego far surpassed his intellect. To hear him address the girls was just painful - it was such an embarrassment. He would be so patronising to them, and just couldn't have a conversation with them*'.

By contrast, McBurney and Colquhoun from Council, consider Graham to have been an affable sort of fellow who was a good Chairman. Colquhoun says that Graham knew how to get people moving, to get people together and to co-ordinate things. However, he also says that the Council meetings were sometimes *'like a prize fight; it was like the world heavyweight boxing bout, there is no doubt about that'*. He recalls the pressure as being so great that he had a frightening stress attack requiring hospitalisation for a week. Colquhoun and Graham comment on the resistance to change that they first confronted on the Council and the domination by Thompson. They each mention the lack of well maintained and contemporary facilities and the possible impact on enrolments, the lack of development plans and an out of date role distinction between Council and principal. They each tell of their determination to initiate change.

### Tensions within interest groups

There were tensions amongst the ex-students and the parents during the 1960s and 1970s and these were often attributed to Whitlam's actions and personal qualities, her leadership style and her relationships with the students. These tensions were frequently the subject of comment in interview. Thornton (MT) recalls the relationships with ex-students as unwelcoming and as damaging ongoing contact between the school and ex-students. Deputy, Judith Hancock commented on unrest amongst the ex-students because Whitlam was seen as *'too facile. She had ducks in the quadrangle; she had animals everywhere; the dog and so on. She'd go to old girls meetings and reunions and*

*that's all she'd talk about , Crinkle and the ducks, and they thought that the school deserved more than that. And it did. They saw her as a fool and trying to trivialise it all. In reality she didn't like any of the old girls of the school. I don't know what it was'. Smith and Rennie (RR) endorse this observation noting that the ex-students were pleased to see her going.*

Rennie says that Whitlam would not have allowed the Ex-Students' organization any say in the running of the school and the ex-students would not have liked that. As an Ex-students' president and parent of the period, Smith says that there was a lack of respect for Whitlam and Whitlam failed to represent their grievances through the school to the Council. Smith says that *'they wanted a greater involvement in the actions of the Parents and Friends Association and through that, in the way that the school was run'.*

Repeatedly, interviewees comment on Whitlam's 'caustic' sense of humour. Hancock, for instance, remarked on Whitlam's use of humour and the reaction of some ex-students: *'There is a Whitlam-esq quality to her humour that could be quite biting. She could be the twin of Gough and this with the old girls was so bad that the Council wouldn't let her go to the reunions in the country - they sent me'.* This impression is confirmed by Council member McBurney (YMcB) and from the parents /ex-students, Smith and Thornton, who state that Whitlam did not show well the educational side of the school to ex-students in country areas. Thornton advised Whitlam not to speak at country reunions of ex-students because *'at that stage Gough's policies were annoying a lot of people in the country and she had recently invited Gough to speak to the school which had incensed a lot of people'.* McBurney says people were upset because *'there was so*

*much about her dog, crinkle, and the ducks on the pond and little things like that, and people wanted to hear about the school itself and the educational standards'.*

Hancock says that *'Freda was not accepted by the ex-students; the Council wanted to make major changes and with that they brought Peter Graham and Neil Colquhoun into the Council'.*

*'Jeannette York was bitter. Her daughter was at school while I was deputy there and she wasn't a high performer so Freda got the blame for that. The other one, of course, who ended up hating Freda was June Smith. So there was Jeannette York, June Smith, Marjorie Palser - I know them all, in the ex-students - I stay away from them because I don't like what they were on about and they're still there. But their aim was really to get rid of Freda. June Smith had Peter Graham's ear, and so did Jeannette York'.*

Freda Whitlam's relationships with parents could also be tense and give rise to conflict. Council Member McBurney says that the tone of Council meetings changed because of the volume of complaints from parents and because she and others were seeing Whitlam as *'two-faced'*. She says that the girls' parents did not appreciate her and she was not as tactful as she should have been, a recurring theme in the comments of interviewees. Crawford (JC) recalls that parents and students began to notice mood swings consistent with mid-life crisis and that she seemed to encourage factions amongst the parents. Crawford says that *'people at this stage considered that she was as silly as a two-bob watch'*. Crawford says that Whitlam lived a very secluded life at the College; that she was a very religious and good living person but extremely lonely, and that she was foolish to make friends with certain parents *'because that in*

*turn, caused problems within the College. It was virtually one parent against another'.*

Keown recalls how Whitlam could appear aloof from parents, deliberately so from *'self-promoting and pushy parents'*. She says that this attitude and her outspokenness about children's behaviour if she thought a child spoilt, would upset people, especially as she was rarely tactful. Colquhoun says that *'it was black and white as far as Freda was concerned; you either liked her or hated her, there was nothing in between. Some girls and some parents thought she was terrific and got along really well with her, but the others on the other side loathed her. Freda was a very strong personality and you had to kind of adjust to her way of doing things'*. From amongst the parents, Smith contrasts Whitlam with the elegance and the *'old-fashioned values'* of Whitlam's predecessor, Eunice Macindoe. York (JY), Smith, Thornton and Crawford comment critically on what they saw as Whitlam's emotional instability and vulnerability.

Nutt and Keown remember the large and influential Strathfield group of parents. Keown recalls the influence of the Strathfield parents: *'Eventually, I became aware of the discontent amongst some parents, referred to as the Strathfield parents. It was Freda who coined the phrase, "that island that is Strathfield"; it has been quoted so often that she was irritated by the blond haired Anglican doctors' daughters from Strathfield; they obviously had quite powerful parents'*. Nutt says that *'in unsettling ways, Freda could be confronting....and the feeling that I began to get was that lines had been drawn and that anything she did or said was open to possible use against her'*.

Hancock remarked on the different attitude that senior girls displayed towards her, as against that displayed towards Whitlam:

*'I never found out exactly what had happened to cause my appointment to the Council except that there had been troubles with the sixth form and that her relationship with the senior girls was not very good. Miss Whitlam had a very cruel streak to her and she could be very scathing of anybody, but particularly of young people. Whether she thought that she could train them in that way or not, I never quite understood, but the girls really related very well to me and they'd come to me and say, "we don't understand what she wants of us".'*

Whitlam's attempts at democratising leadership opportunities caused conflict within the school and Nutt makes considerable mention of this. Keown recalls that often Whitlam's decisions were made autocratically, in contrast to the initiative that her action was often intended to introduce. Keown explains:

*'There was a great conflict - she liked to see herself as being extremely democratic, especially towards the girls, but when she wanted something done, she became almost autocratic, and it was this constant conflict that was one of the things that unnerved the staff. For example, in the late 1960s, when she decided that it would be much more democratic to do away with prefects and senior leaders in the school, well, there was just the most unholy upheavals and that was another factor that was her undoing, because the ex-students, parents, just about everybody connected with the school, had very strong views about it. There was a polarisation amongst the staff, because they had certain views about student leaders'.*

Whitlam's decisions often caused consternation within the school. Nutt recalls instances of decisions that were small in detail, but were on little things that

affected people. She relates this to uniform and students' hair styles, and states that even for the 1970s it seemed to be very old-fashioned. She also recalls assemblies where Whitlam would '*pontificate on the reading*' and the girls would become very frustrated.

The polarisation within the school community is mentioned by Webb and Crawford. Aitkin (DA) also, noted the variety of responses to Whitlam from amongst the staff and Whitlam's changeable relationships with the staff, sometimes very friendly and other times quite distant. Webb observed the mixed feelings amongst the girls of the times, attitudes that linger to this day. Webb expresses a point of view shared by Crawford from the School Council. Webb says that '*she made comments that were cruel to some girls, and she would be kind to other girls so there was a discrimination between those she liked and those she disliked; and I think she made it known to them*'.

### Enrolments decline

The national economy went into recession during the late 1960s and the early 1970s and the blame for this was often levelled at the Government led from 1972 by Freda Whitlam's brother. Colquhoun recalls the rural recession felt by PLC boarding families as contributing to a decline in enrolments. Graham recalls the increasing Award conditions for teachers and the pressures these imposed on the school's finances, tuition fees, and consequently on enrolments. Nutt recalls the general decline in student numbers in the early 1970s and sees linkages to the national economic situation and what she terms the poor management of the school; '*they were 19th century trying to manage in*

*a 20th century world'*. Crawford, Thornton and Colquhoun also recall the decline in numbers and link the national political developments of 1975/76 with this decline. Council member McBurney says that Whitlam was asked to resign because parents were not enrolling their daughters at the school and parents were taking their daughters away from the school. She believes this was because of Whitlam's relationship with the parents. Smith says that her daughter was one of those taken out of the school and it was because of their dissatisfaction with Whitlam, her style of leadership, and the lack of what Smith regards as appropriate standards of discipline and manners.

Colquhoun says that the financial position was desperate because enrolments were declining so rapidly without required internal changes being made. He says: *'the enrolments were going to be down to around about 400 to 450 and that was not viable. The school could not run with less than 500 because of the financial commitments we had. The problem was that a lot of the classes were very small. There was a certain degree of inefficiency in the way the timetabling was done, the pupil teacher ratio was very inefficient and we said, you've just got to make changes to your staff; you've got to reorganise things so that there is a net reduction in the staff; we said you've got to cut your salaries bill by \$50,000; \$50,000 in those days was a lot of money, it was huge. And she said, "I won't do it". She flatly refused.'*

## External Forces

Issues involving national Party politics and the establishment of the new Uniting Church are credited with causing instability and unrest within the school community. Whitlam was entwined in these from a range of perspectives.

### National Politics

Deputy Principal Hancock, Keown, Chairman Peter Graham and others, confirm that Whitlam barely ever mentioned her brother or national politics in the school. However, Hancock recalls that in the 1970s *'she was paranoid about Gough and that it was all Gough's fault, even though she didn't put it that way'*. *She'd say to me, "The only reason they don't like me is because my brother's a Labor Prime Minister" - it wasn't that at all. I don't think they even thought about that, to be quite honest. I think the problem was far more her inability to be able to get through to them what her philosophy really was. I don't think they understood who she was, what her vision was, because she never articulated it or I don't remember her ever articulating it'*. Thornton takes a different view, noting that Freda Whitlam attended her brother's installation as Prime Minister, and that she *'used her contacts with the Labor Party to obtain advantage for the school'*.

Others, such as Keown from the staff, believe that national political issues did play a part in forming attitudes and destabilizing Whitlam. She says: *'Freda's brother's role did have an effect on incidents in the school. One must remember that at that time there was a great deal of upheaval with the Vietnam war and people's*

*reaction to that, and the strong views that were held. There was a polarisation that I had never been totally aware of. It became very much a feature of the school'. Colquhoun states that the Presbyterian Church has always had strong connections to the Liberal Party. He and Peter Graham acknowledge membership of this Party during 1975 and 1976. Graham (PG2) agrees that politics played a part. He says 'you can't help it when people come up to you at a function and start yabbering politics to you - you have to respond. By and large politics did have an influence in Freda's final twelve months as we went through the '75 business. Wrongly in my view, the parent body and the Council identified Freda with Gough'. He says that there was an undercurrent of comment that was hard to pin down, which was 'snide in a way'.*

Nutt, Keown, and members of Council of the period observed the Liberal Party leanings of the school community at that time. They cite instances to illustrate the anti-Labor feelings in the school. Nutt recalls the statement being made that in 1975, Fraser got his Whitlam and in 1976 Graham was going to get his. Keown says that *'I think people were scared or fearful to a degree, or apprehensive that the old order was changing and that they couldn't cope with the new'.*

Keown also observed Whitlam's reactions to national political incidents that involved Whitlam's brother during the 1970s. She helps in the interpretation of the impact that national politics was having on Whitlam during this period. *'I never ever heard her speak about politics until after she'd left, but I think she was very conscious of the fact that this was going on'.* Other members of staff confirm this observation. Keown goes on: *'Perhaps she over-reacted when people*

*would think that it was clever to make wisecracks about her brother, and she was very sensitive to that and the whole rough and tumble of politics and cynicism and everything. There were occasions when she would be frightfully upset and I've seen her extremely distressed by comments from rather unthinking members of staff. This, of course, would undermine the structure of the staff room. I think it created its own friction and it just seemed to get out of hand'.*

Keown remembers the November day in 1975 when Gough Whitlam's Government was dismissed. *'She was extremely distressed at the dismissal of her brother in 1975. I just happened to meet her as she was going out the door into boarders' stairs, looking very distressed and I said to her, "has something happened?" and she very quickly told me of the dismissal. She didn't stop, went on her way and I noticed from my teaching room at the front of the school, I saw her walking through the garden and I don't think anyone saw her for the rest of the day. That's how privately she kept her emotions and views about things - it was most unfair to accuse her otherwise, as I think some people did'.*

Whitlam's reactions to these national political events were also observed by Members of the School Council. Crawford comments that Whitlam did bring politics into the school, *'to a certain extent because of her distressed state; she appeared to be very distressed with the events that happened in Canberra'.*

Peter Graham mentioned after the interview that he was only reconciled with Gough Whitlam in 1995 when he (Peter Graham) was in attendance at a Function at Curzon Hall in the northern suburbs and the Prime Minister John Howard was there and Gough and Margaret Whitlam were also in

attendance, and Howard brought the Whitlams up to him and introduced them to him. Gough Whitlam leant across and said "Are you the Peter Graham of Croydon?" to which Peter Graham replied "Yes, Prime Minister, the very same Peter Graham but that was a long time ago". Gough Whitlam had remembered the incidents of over twenty years before which had affected his sister. Margaret in Gough's ear said "Come on darling it's time that we put those things in the past and moved on" and the two of them moved away from the conversation. However, at the end of the evening they came up to Peter Graham and said goodnight to him with a sense of putting things of the past firmly in the past.

### Church Politics

Deputy principal, Hancock is of the opinion that this was the most significant external influence on the school during the 1970s . Like others, such as Crawford and Graham, she sees this issue as impacting on Whitlam's relationship with the School Council and having little effect elsewhere in the school. She comments: *'The whole issue of divying up the property, the money and so on, was the main issue - All I can remember about it was the bitterness, the conversations about which school would go with which branch of the church. In the end it was so bitter that they wouldn't talk to Freda, because she was Uniting Church. And this was where, if I'd wanted to, I could have really done her in, but I didn't, and I wouldn't - it's not my nature. But I don't think she ever understood that, you know. It was just so sad'*.

Keown and Nutt each presents the picture of a school where depth of religious opinion at the time was passionately held. Keown says that it is

hard at the end of the '90s to understand how strong the codes of religion were within the school. *'It was such an integral part of what everyone was supposed to think. They were very turbulent times'*. Nutt believes that church politics would have had a lot to do with the critical incident of 1976. She says that in her observation of church history the Presbyterians love a fight; *'I think that particular issue would have had more play in later relationships than political issues'*, says Nutt.

Hancock remembers *'anger and disagreements over religion at Council meetings. It's all so painful, the Minister from Ashfield Presbyterian Church, Rev Petrie, he was a magician. He used to give my son all these magic things; he was just lovely, but I always thought he died from all that stress because he liked Freda but he wasn't Uniting like her; and then there was the local Minister at Burwood, who was Uniting and he used to be Freda's friend and he became staunchly her friend; and Rev Durban, he used to get on well with her until he was Continuing, and so the relationships she'd ever thought she had, disappeared. The Council split and the fights that went on were all over money. It was all over possessions'*.

*'She was paranoid about what was going to happen to her from the beginning. It was a self-fulfilling prophecy and she did a lot to get rid of herself, if you know what I mean. Why Peter Graham was so obsessed with getting rid of her I can only put down to the terrible rift between the Uniting Church and the continuing Church. It was so bitter, especially the fight over Church property; and PLC, where it would go'*.

*'But Freda kept saying no, it's nothing to do with the church, it's all about my brother, because he's a socialist. She tried to take the heat away from the church*

*argument and blame the politics. Peter Graham wanted, even from then, the school to be PLC Sydney and to stop calling it PLC Croydon'.*

### **Chronology of the critical incident**

What appears here is a rather disjointed series of accounts drawn from the interviews: anecdotal, incomplete and on occasions vague. The chronology in chapter five is formed by piecing together details from all the interviews and from the documents, in particular the Minutes of the School Council Meetings. A far more complete overview of the events and players that compose the critical incident appears there.

Colquhoun remembers initiating Graham's action to seek Whitlam's resignation. He says that his office was in the same building as Graham's and he simply went to Graham and made it clear how desperate was the financial position of the school, and said that the only way out was if the principal was to be removed. Graham responded almost immediately to this. Graham gives his own account of his actions that followed, beginning with his receipt of news of Hancock's appointment as principal of Brisbane Girls' Grammar School, and his arrival at PLC to discuss this. Graham says that he asked of the location of Whitlam from her secretary, and, finding her with Miss Keown, he asked to see her when she was free. He says that on this same occasion, on the day of the Council meeting, he also sought and gained Whitlam's verbal resignation, which was announced to the Council that evening. Graham says that Whitlam was calm, collected and measured at the Council meeting, but in the days that followed a letter was received from her

solicitor that had to be taken to the Council. From there, he says, the Council agreed to begin again.

Graham recognizes two errors in his action. He believes now that he should *'have first of all put a few more full stops in place and then written to all the parents to tell them what was going on, because of all the hullabaloo that broke out all over the place'*. Secondly, he says that he was in breach of the Constitution in that he should have called a special Council Meeting to deal with the matter.

Keown recalls events that followed within the regular operating hours of the school. With her personal comments, she presents this sequence:

*'After a Monday morning assembly Miss Whitlam came in to see me about something. Peter Graham came in and said he wanted to see her. She was quite on the defensive and her body language was very expressive whenever he came near her, and she went around to her study. Later in that day we heard that he had dismissed her that morning and that this would take effect from the end of the year'*.

*'The rest of that day was a daze. The rest of that week was terrible. The staff were very, very angry at the way this had been done and we sent messages to Council. Even though the staff weren't all enamoured of her and her approach, still they were aware at this stage of the unjust and undignified manner in which the principal of PLC had been treated'*. Nutt confirms this, stating that the staff responded to Freda Whitlam's pain and dignity at the end. She says the staff's ultimate affection and respect prevailed even though all of them could list *'the puritanical outlook things, the frustration they felt when things they wanted were just said no to without explanation, the rigorous and what maybe they saw as*

*meaningless restrictions placed on students, what seemed to them to be irrationality, the unpredictability of what life could be on a day to day basis with her, whether they were going to get extreme kindness or foot-stamping temper'.*

Keown continues: *'I believe Freda got in touch with the Trustees of the Church and other members of the Council and, of course, it was discovered that what Peter Graham had done was totally illegal as well as very, very poor form'.*

Keown and Nutt each state that many on the staff felt that Graham was replicating 'the grand dismissal' of November 1975 and that this would achieve for him some form of status in Liberal political circles. They remember his poor handling of a meeting with the staff in the school's Front Sitting Room and how Graham was unable to read the intense feeling within the staff. Nutt says that *'if he had an ear to hear, and I don't think he did, he would have read a great deal of anger, quiet anger, from the staff, over Miss Whitlam's eventual going'.*

Keown and Colquhoun each recall that legal initiatives and a reinstatement followed. Keown also remembers the reaction in the school community during this tense, emotional period. She remembers the depth of passions, the upset, the anger. She tells of the *'collective display of bad manners and cruelty';* and the *'rally of support and loyalty from so many extraordinary quarters'.* Tan (ET) recalls Whitlam's emotional condition during this period: *'Miss Whitlam was always in tears. During the last term she went to the doctor to have a needle and to get tablets to stop herself crying'.* Rennie and Nutt each remembers the period as the worst days that they have experienced at the school, in Nutt's words *'in*

*many ways because of the obvious pain that Miss Whitlam was going through - she maintained a dignity through all of that'.*

It was shortly after this and close to the end of the school year that Whitlam resigned. Keown remembers that Whitlam had planned to resign in 1978, following a time as Chairman of the Heads Association, and that this was common knowledge.

Hancock states that she was in Brisbane attending interviews for the headship of Brisbane Girls' Grammar School when the action against Whitlam was initiated by Peter Graham. However, she recalls some matters from what followed.

*'Then, eventually, when it was decided she'd go, the figures were done to see what it would cost to close the school. They literally couldn't afford to close it. They didn't have the money - it was so badly managed that there were no contingency funds to close it down'.*

Peter Graham shared his sense of relief with Hancock on Whitlam's resignation. They discussed potential acting replacements. *'What then happened was Peter came to see me to say, well, she's going, thank God, she's going. She wants to put in Audrey Keown and Jill Healey, and I said, "Oh Peter", I said, "what does she want - to close the school?" Freda then came and saw me and she said, "If it's the last thing I do, I want this school to close, I will get them". It was worse than Gough, I reckon. But as for any decision making with it, no. I wasn't warned and she wasn't warned'.*

Crawford and Colquhoun recall acrimonious meetings of the School Council through November, 1976. Crawford recalls Scotford, an appointee of the Chairman of Trustees and his strident defence of Whitlam at a 1 November meeting. She quotes from notes relating to a 17 November meeting of the Council, where it was recorded that the bursar contacted the Chairman stating that Whitlam wished to retire on 30 June, 1977 and go on leave as of 31 December, 1976. She states that the school was in such a poor financial position because of low enrolments that it was likely to close. According to Crawford, what saved the school was the departure of Freda Whitlam.

Hancock recalls: *'She was going, I mean, she wasn't game not to go. As far as she was concerned, she was finished in the October. And so she then worked on going at the end of the year and then our relationship broke down because I was being given all the farewells. I mean, people did like me and there were the ex-students, the parents, everything, you know. I was given beautiful farewell gifts and everything else and she got nothing and then they wanted me to get her to go to a dinner. She said, "I would never sup with the devil". She refused - I didn't blame her, I said, "well, I don't blame you". She said, "I couldn't bear the hypocrisy of it all"'*.

Hancock was reluctant to talk of her brother, the school bursar during the mid 1970s, because their relationship suffered through the events of this period. *'My brother Fred Best, was bursar at the end, and he and Freda had a very good relationship . I think Fred actually tried to get her to do a deal with the Council, because she had no money and I think he was acting in her interests. So she had no*

*superannuation or anything - she virtually had nothing. Fred would have been representing her interests for her because he liked her and Joan his wife, loved her'.*

Colquhoun states that at a special meeting of the Council held in the city the suggested figure that was put by the bursar and discussed was not accepted. Graham recalls Colquhoun *'thumping the table and refusing to pay her'*. Graham says that the Council was being niggly and petty minded and a bit of nastiness crept in such that her request for six months leave was rejected and a lower payout was eventually determined. At much the same time that Whitlam left the school, Fred Best also departed for reasons that Graham, Colquhoun and Crawford all state to be due to his inaccuracies and unprofessional management of the school's finances.

The Speech Day at the Sydney Opera House, and the various dinners that concluded 1976, were tense. Interviewees recall aspects of this final formal occasion of the school year. Some, such as Chairman Graham comment on the anxiety of the Council beforehand; others such as Keown and Rennie recall statements and reactions of participants on the day. Soon after Speech Day, there was a staff-convened farewell to Whitlam followed, in January of 1977, by a further farewell gathering of friends and colleagues in the home of a student's family. There appears to have been no Council convened farewell.

**Whitlam: before and after PLC**

Interviewees comment on aspects of Whitlam's character and how these were evident in her management practices and in her relationships with people around the school. In some instances these qualities can be traced to her formative years. Some qualities and behaviours continued beyond PLC.

Judith Hancock refers to qualities of weakness that she observed in Whitlam:

*'I used to see her hiding herself in her office. You could always find her in there. She wandered the school, but if you really wanted her she'd be there. Mrs. Forester literally did everything for Freda, everything; shopped; Miss Whitlam couldn't use money; she didn't understand it. I bought her car for her. She gave me the cash and I went and bought a white Toyota Corolla. I'd just bought a little lemon one and she said, "Oh I really like that. You go and buy me a white one". When she moved from PLC, she had absolutely no idea of how to set up a home or to look after herself'.*

Tan says that Whitlam had no domestic skills when she left PLC and she needed considerable assistance in establishing her independent lifestyle. In the most basic of home maintenance tasks, she required advice and guidance.

**Whitlam and her contribution to the school**

During her years at this school Whitlam made a significant impression on teachers, and the young people in her care. Interviewees remember her years as being distinguished by many important contributions.

Hancock cites the impact Whitlam had on her: *'She taught me to think about what it was to be in a multicultural society, in an era when Australia really wasn't very multicultural. Gough's government had brought in the scholarships for Aboriginal children. Freda had gone to the trouble of really finding out about Aboriginal children and how they were brought up and so on, and she decided that we had to take Aboriginal children, but you weren't to take one or two, no, we actually had to have a clan of them. Freda appreciated the value of culture. She wanted to expose the girls to that, but it didn't work, we never kept them through the years. I don't remember ever keeping one of them for any length of time'*.

Keown, Webb, Rennie and others interviewed, recall the efforts put into good works especially charities. Hancock also remembers Whitlam's emphasis on equality and social justice:

*'It might not have been articulated but, my goodness, she knew what equity and social justice were. But you would never have used those terms, they were unheard of, or just being heard of. She certainly did talk to the girls a lot about the inequities of life, of how it was wrong to have those who have too much and those who have nothing, and she always called upon her experiences in India - it permeated the whole ethos of the place and, as a result, there was a lot of social work done. I picked up a lot of that and brought it to Brisbane, her attitudes to people and, particularly, in relation to never be patronising. She used to drum it into us, So, I think that that would have had an enormous impact on a lot of people. It certainly did on me; so her philosophy was a very humanitarian philosophy, it did exist'*.

Hancock continues: *'I don't really think Freda thought of articulating an education philosophy as such. I think that what came through very strongly was that she really*

*was a socialist, and that this had come from her experiences in India and what she had seen there. She is the person that changed my own political persuasions. I'd come from a fairly conservative background. Mum had been a teacher, Dad had been a headmaster and they were probably small 'l' liberal. Now, although I don't belong to a party, I certainly embrace a Labor philosophy far more than I would ever embrace a Liberal philosophy'.*

Whitlam's emphasis on lifelong learning and a love of learning is frequently recalled. For instance, Nutt cites examples of school activities that illustrate Whitlam's passion for learning, her excitement with new opportunities and with learning things that were not boxed into subject barriers. Judith Hancock remembers Whitlam's love of learning. *'Every time before the school reports went out, the staff teaching a class would sit down with Freda and me and we went through every comment and she'd then write her comment. But she used to make me verbalise them because she was training the staff in how to say something positive about the child, but still have the message in it. I do it to this day. I teach my own staff that. It was always how do we get the girls to do better, how do we get them to understand that learning really is wonderful'.* The importance and the structure of the Reporting process is a memory common to staff members of the period. Whitlam's leadership emphasis was on learning - both intellectual and moral. She seemed to give very little emphasis to administrative matters. Colquhoun makes this point and it is reinforced by Whitlam's secretary who states: *'I think the administration wasn't really her strong point such as financial matters and expanding the school under those circumstances. The administration was more or less another part that she didn't really have a leading role in; I suppose she left it to*

*everyone else to do. She was more into the teaching and looking after the children, looking to their welfare'.*

Whitlam's concern for the use of language and the development of a range of language skills, is acknowledged as a priority of her period of headship. Keown emphasises the fundamental role of public speaking and drama in Whitlam's education platform. She says that presentations and readings in assembly were critical to Whitlam's emphasis on speaking skills and confidence building for public performance. The assemblies were crucial to the Christian practice of the school and the leadership that Whitlam gave. To each of Nutt and Webb, what stands out was her deep but simple way of communicating the Bible to the girls; Webb says that *'she was never dogmatic'*. Hancock states that the attention given to language extended to the study of Asian languages taught by native speakers and was innovative for the period. *'no one else in schools was appreciating the role of Australia in Asia. She did. She saw us as Asian. It was very, very unusual for the times'.*

## **DOCUMENTARY SOURCES**

Consistent with the structure adopted in the earlier section of this chapter, the data collected here will be organized thematically. As with the data from interviews, the categories will be chosen to give connection to the literature and the analysis chapters of this study. The categories address the internal and external forces that together contributed to the critical incident; the chronology of the critical incident; Whitlam - before and after PLC;

Whitlam's contribution to this school. The data lend support to the various observations and conclusions emerging from the interviews.

## **Internal Forces**

### Uneasy Relationships

Two early reports stand out in Freda Whitlam's period of tenure. Whitlam's February, 1958 first monthly Report to School Council was influential in establishing her relationship with the Council, the Chairman, F L Thompson in particular, and in conveying the style of her headship to follow.

The 1961 "Report on Appraisal" grew out of Whitlam's 1958 Report. It initiated substantial improvement in facilities and staffing, at the same time clarifying weaknesses in relationships and lines of responsibility within the school community. This 1961 Report contained mixed messages about Freda Whitlam's leadership of the school. The substance of these two very significant Reports is included in some detail here.

Report to PLC Council by Freda Whitlam, 17 February, 1958

This eight-page Report is considerably more detailed than any monthly Report that followed, and addresses a wide range of features and concerns. It is possible that a 'state of the school' Report was requested of Whitlam by Thompson.

Written only two weeks into her first school term, the Report addresses enrolments, staff, examinations, changes, facilities and equipment, school bank, security, art making, dates. The Report describes features of the school and provides information to the Council. It highlights areas of strength and weakness. It contains comment on immediate and long-term needs. It also carries suggestions on how relationships between parents and staff/principal, and between Council members and staff/principal, should be conducted.

The Report is remarkable in many respects. It is an honest attempt at bringing before the Council matters that should be of concern to them. It shows an ability to come to terms with some of the complex matters faced by a school principal, and after such a short period in office. One would expect this to be encouraging and reassuring to the Council members. The language of the Report is direct, naïve, on occasions confronting. It assumes some knowledge and understanding of the writer on behalf of the readers. The Report makes it very clear to the Council members, how Whitlam wanted the school to run and how she expected the Council to interact with her and the school. The sensitivities of the Council are tested by the language of the Report and by some of its 'reforms' content. Some Councils would be offended by the Report, others would grasp its opportunities, the abilities and excitement that shine through it, and move forward as team players with this new young leader.

Information in the Report relates to various features of the practice of the school. Whitlam gives details about enrolments; staff - strengths, weaknesses

and staffing needs; examinations; condition of facilities and equipment. With regard to the latter she emphasized the needs of the school, for instance:

*'I have been very dissatisfied with the office equipment ...'*

*'Last year, almost no broadcast lessons were used in the school because there was no portable wireless available.'*

Whitlam's comments on the poor facilities and equipment were generally placed in the context of their importance and followed by suggestions for improvement or replacement. The comment about the portable wireless above, for instance, went on to explain the importance of these lessons and informed the Council that she had instructed the teacher to purchase a wireless *'on my account'*, having *'inspected various makes'*.

*'Speed was essential as we had to have these lessons from the beginning because they form a sequence.'*

The Report contains some significant reforms to education practice that Whitlam sought support from Council for. Each reform was explained and given a framework. One of these, that had caused some parent unrest, involved the repeating of 21 girls in First Year.

Unrest had resulted from this decision, such that Whitlam felt compelled to mention it here and to make a more general comment on the matter of procedures for processing criticisms.

*'In connection with this form and other matters there has been a certain amount of irresponsible and inaccurate criticism of the school latterly, criticism which is constantly and unfortunately being directed at every school. To all parents and ex-students I have met, I have stressed the need for any criticism to be written, signed and sent to the principal, who is the only person in possession of the relevant facts. Only written criticism is worth considering, but too many people have been listening sympathetically to grudges and information collected from children, who are quite unreliable in their judgment'*

Whitlam's advice on such matters was not restricted to parents and ex-students. Council members were also recipients of her direct comment and advice. I suspect this would have been unusual and unexpected practice for the time. It was a clear indication of how Whitlam wanted the roles defined:

*'If I feel that the child of a particular parent is not likely to benefit from this school enough to warrant her enrolment, I must feel that I am trusted to make the decision. At present, I do not feel entirely trusted, and neither have my predecessors. Are members of Council, for example, to press for the admission of a child to such an extent that they overrule the principal?';*

*'I have not been faced with the problem to any extent, but I demand a vote of confidence on this issue before the matter becomes urgent';*

*'I have already made a few changes because those were difficulties demanding quick action. In some instances, I consulted members of the Council, but I wish to know from you to what degree this is necessary';*

*'We also expect visitors to come to the front door before they look around the grounds and I think this should apply to the members of the Council, too. The parents have been most cooperative when they have realised why we insist. Another related demand is that parents should not phone members of staff without arranging with me to do so. Some of the staff have been abused in this way quite unfairly by unscrupulous parents. I feel I also have a right to demand that the Council inform me before they phone members of staff';*

*'I have also noted, with dismay, the Council's continual carping over relatively small expenditure. The criterion must be the mental and physical welfare of the girls and, in the past, far too much of the principal's time has been taken up by accounting for various items of expenditure, which so often have been authorized by the Council; have been checked by the staff member concerned and by the principal before they have been passed for payment'.*

The Report concludes with the following challenging statement:

*'My demands may sound unnecessary, but they are essential if this is to be a school which carries out its professed aims. Everyone in the school watches the budget carefully and I think I may say, has the welfare of the school at heart. This is a good school, with a fine past. I am prepared to give of my best and proud to do so - if I can rely on the cooperation and confidence of the Council for the good of the children entrusted to our care'.*

Bound Report to PLC Council: 'Report on Appraisal', Oct- Dec, 1961.

This Report was commissioned by the Council and grew out of the first Report to Council of the Principal in February 1958. Observations and

recommendations are many and varied. The general tone of the Report is positive and encouraging of the work and direction of the school. *'This is potentially a very sound school, fully meriting the confidence parents have placed in it.'* (p 3). A great many positive comments appeared.

There were also criticisms of accommodation in most areas of the school especially in the Boarding House and Primary teaching areas. Amongst the many comments were those relating to the principal. These comments addressed personal qualities, leadership and support structures. *'It must be said at once that this school is satisfactorily served by its Principal. She has some serious difficulties and deficiencies to contend with, some of which are personal'*. (p 13). The Report noted Whitlam's *'youth and inexperience'* without placing much emphasis on this. *'It is felt she has the qualities which will enable her to serve the school well'*. (p 13). *'Her abrupt manner'* was the subject of some comment in the Report, noting the offence that this has caused, and equally to those who appear to her to be prejudiced against her. *'She apparently finds it very difficult to maintain what she feels to be a pretence of affability to any person she suspects of being an ill-wisher'*. (pp 13-14). The Report notes that *'She has failed to realise that such an attitude could conceivably make serious enemies'*.(p 14).

Whitlam's relationship with the staff was not all that should be expected. A small section of disloyal staff members was identified and staff control was seen to be historically of an inadequate standard and *'undoubtedly one of the main causes of the present difficulties'*. It was noted that direct communication of grievances from staff to Council members had been an unfortunate aspect of relationships. Considerable attention was given to the need to improve the

movement of information and concerns through appropriate channels especially avoiding the bypassing of the principal.

Thompson's dominating control of the school and its staff is frequently referred to in the data. Whitlam's relationship with him was critical to the success of her headship. An exchange of letters of April, 1958 expresses the formality in Thompson's approach, the level of control and the nature and style of the principal's response in this matter. The letters illustrate the detailed, tight monitoring of expenditure exerted by Thompson. Also evident is Whitlam's defence of her position, and her determination to pursue things her way at this early stage. The letters help in interpreting this critical relationship. These two letters are reprinted on the following page as they appeared:

## LETTERS

Dear Miss Whitley,

1st April, 1958.

PROVIDORING.

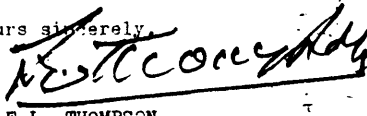
Going through February accounts I notice fruit and vegetables well up on February of last year and that Oranges alone account for just on 30% of the total purchases coming to some £52. 0. 0d. !! The pattern continues in March.

The point is, of course, that Oranges being out of season, are costing something like eightpence each and should be discontinued. If it is vitamin content, then this can be secured by Tomatoes and Tomato Juice, supplies being available in the No.10 can, a size holding about 6½ lb. This applies also to Pineapple Juice. It is a matter of rearrangement as arises in all budgetary and domestic control.

I notice apples in February priced at 58/- per case. I am quoted "Delicious". 165 to the case, at 35/- and even lower prices are available. Will you chat this over with the Housekeeper please for I am sure with a study of the market and some dietary rearrangement we can fare as well and at a much lower cost. What of tinned beans and peas? I observe purchases of quick frozen peas which would surely be higher in cost than the canned varieties.

May I leave it with you please. We want the girls and staff to be well nourished, of course, and think this can be done without spending about thirty percent of the total purchases of fruit and vegetables (potatoes excluded) on Oranges a fruit out of season and exceedingly scarce and dear just now.

Yours sincerely,



F.L. THOMPSON.

Dear Mr. Thompson,

I have talked over with Mrs. McNamara the providoring matters mentioned in your letter of 1st April.

The children are given two pieces of fruit a day, one each at 11 a.m. and at 3.30 p.m. This usually means an apple and an orange each day. We have found that for our purposes there is no fruit to equal oranges in size, food value, keeping quality and price. We shall consider tomato juice next year to supplement the oranges if you wish, but the juice would have to be served at the meal table and biscuits be given after school, which would be no saving in cost and would add to the work and wages of the domestic staff. Tinned tomatoes are a problem because most of the children do not like them and they have to be served at meals rather than at the morning or afternoon break.

The apples quoted in your letter as 165 to the case are very small and would have to be supplemented by other fruit to satisfy the children's needs.

You may have noticed that this is the first year that grapes have not been bought for the children. This item was omitted because of the price. Plums also have appeared very rarely.

Tins of peas and beans have a great deal of juice which makes up the weight so that we have found the quick frozen varieties are cheaper in the long run. It takes 18 tins for a meal at 3/2d. = £2. 17. 0.

4 packets (5 lbs. each) = 2. 0. 0.

peas and carrots @ 2/- per lb. = 2. 15. 0.

peas alone @ 2/9 per lb. = 2. 15. 0.

Scoots and Knox get the quick-frozen foods and we should perhaps consider whether all our purchases of peas and beans should not be quick-frozen. The quick-frozen fruits e.g. apricots are significantly cheaper than the tinned varieties.

Yours sincerely,

PRINCIPAL.

### Tensions Within Interest Groups

There are letters and pieces of correspondence that show appreciation and support for Whitlam's initiatives, her contact with organizations and individuals outside the school, including from the church and other schools. There are also letters which give indications of factional activity and tension within PLC interest groups. One of these letters was written to Freda Whitlam in February, 1974 by Mr Ian Gordon, a parent of children at the school. This three-page typed letter addresses matters arising in relation to *'the pie mothers, the School Council and the Parents and Friends' Association'*.

The letter makes reference to meetings of parents with members of School Council regarding issues of concern, letters to the Moderator of the Church and factions within the Parents and Friends' Association. It is not a letter critical of Whitlam, rather, it is a letter of information and support. It assists the author in establishing relationships and the micropolitical culture in the school in the early 1970s.

*'I myself am personally critical of the School Council as a whole and not, of course, as individuals and I accordingly went to see Mr Thompson ...'*

*'In respect of the talk relating to a faction of the Parents and Friends' Association. After my defeat as President, I attended one further meeting and I think thereafter, since that time, I have been to one special meeting in connection with the Science Course. I certainly agree that there has been a faction, but not of my making. The School, and particularly you as Principal, has been subject to a great deal of abuse and*

*vilification emanating from within the Parents and Friends' Association. I consider that parents who have removed their children from the School should not be entitled to hold any executive position on the Parents and Friends' Association and, indeed, go so far as to say that they should not be entitled to vote in its affairs whilst feeling terribly embittered towards the School and you, as Principal'.*

Ian Gordon writes in defence of the actions of 'the pie mothers' who, it would appear from his letter, have been criticised by members of the P&F and with whom there is a clear antagonism and difference of attitude towards the principal. His criticism of the School Council is on the basis of their apparent lack of knowledge of the issues, especially the divisions amongst the parents. He writes: *'they appear to be unaware that there is indeed a faction within the Ex-students' Union, that parents who have removed their children from the school continue to mix with members of the Parents and Friends' and who voice their dissatisfaction. Unless attention is turned to these matters, they will always create a problem'.*

Ian Gordon concludes his letter with a parting comment directed towards the school and the principal, *'My wife and I are more than happy with the school and with the progress of our three daughters'.* Ian Gordon states that, *'he and his wife are not members of any faction and, indeed, have taken great pains to avoid it'.*

During 1975 and 1976 the Council Minutes record parent disturbances and complaints being discussed at meetings. There are various instances of this, such as at the April 1975 and the April 1976 meetings. The earlier meeting contained a report from the principal in which she told Council of the many

letters of support that she had received from parents over an issue that was causing tensions within Council and amongst the Branxton Junior School parents. She concluded that, *'the staff are restless at the method of Mrs Farr's dismissal', 'that the staff had no confidence in the Council', 'that, for the past seventeen years, I have been humiliated and was not respected by the Council'*. Miss Whitlam further stated that she was prepared *'to stay on a little longer, to help the Council through a very difficult time'*.

At the April 1976 meeting the Minutes record that the Chairman read a letter from parents of fourth grade pupils and the minutes of a meeting held by that group. He also reported on his recent visit to the Primary School, *'including the combined fourth/third grade and discussion with the teacher and Mrs Price'*. At this meeting *'Council resolved that the Chairman, with the Principal, Deputy Principal and Council members, should now meet with the parents and the Chairman agreed to advise Councillors when a date for the meeting was arranged'*.

### Enrolments Decline

During the 1970s Council Meeting Minutes consistently carried comment on the school's finances and the need for economies. It was at the peak of these concerns that Peter Graham moved to remove Whitlam. Enrolments' projections were of concern to the Council. In 1971, the Council sought financial assistance from the Trustees to help improve its liquidity problems (Council Minutes, 15 Feb. 1971).

The July Finance Committee Report of 1971, links the cash flow difficulties to the staged introduction of non-award salaries for teachers. The Report notes: *'... the 14% increase in teachers' salaries as sought by the AMMA has been approved by the Court and became effective as to 85% in relation to salaries paid at the end of June. For seven months at this rate, plus the 6% national wage increase, salaries, plus wages for the year, will exceed 1970 by approximately \$36,000'.*

The Report continues elsewhere:

*'The decline is occasioned as pointed out in my report of last month by substantially higher salaries and fee reductions due to the lower enrolment this year, but offset to some degree by the fee increase scheduled as from Term II of this year. Liquidity will be strained as indicated, but it is thought that bridging finance from time to time can be arranged with the Bank of New South Wales to meet the temporary needs'.*  
(Finance Report 19 July, 1971).

From the Trustees' Special Committee on Schools' Finances, the - 'Report on the Effect of Church Schools on the Finances of the Church', 19 December, 1974, states that although the economic indicators were not positive, there was not deep concern within the Trustees over the school's future.

This Report noted the impact on church schools of a range of 'severe economic circumstances' of 1974 -

- (a) Strong continuing inflationary pressure which made it difficult to offset with the increase in fees;
- (b) Poor economic conditions and unemployment, as well as a sharp reduction of farm incomes in the country;

- (c) A sharp rise in interest rates which may continue for a sustained period;
  - (d) The withdrawal of, or changes in, support for private schools by the Australian Government;
  - (e) The alteration of income tax allowances to parents for school fees.
- (p19)

The Report noted the operating forecast for 1974 for the Presbyterian Schools: PLC Croydon - deficit of \$34,000. The Report stated that the school which may have problems of financing its deficit would be Croydon. Further, *'It will be remembered that PLC Croydon had, at the end of December, 1973, only \$245,000 of debt against \$1,214,000 of valuation of assets. It would seem, on the surface, therefore, that Croydon ought to be able to finance the extra amount it requires outside of the Trustees'. 'If, however, all else failed and the deficits continued in following years, then it may be that Croydon would have to get further assistance from the Trustees'* (p20).

Attached to Presbyterian Schools Commission Minutes 15.6.1976 page 5, was financial data that indicates the position at Croydon was not seen to be a great deal more alarming to the church than the position in other metropolitan Presbyterian schools:

(a) Amounts owing to the Trustees, banking and other institutions, etc at 31 December, 1975 are shown in Table 5:

**Table 5**

Metropolitan Schools	Totals \$
Croydon	\$208,713
Pymble	\$543,178
Knox	\$754,629
Scots	\$888,049

(b) The Enrolments position for the two years, 1975 and 1976 is also shown amongst this material and is presented in table 6:

**Table 6**

Metropolitan Schools	1975	1976
Croydon	551	509
Pymble	1,194	1,091
Knox	1,287	1,331
Scots	1,151	1,009

Summary comments in this 1976 document include:

*'The surpluses and deficits forecast for 1976 seem to indicate that the Metropolitan Schools should be able to hold their own, either through their realised profits or by being able to finance their own deficits. The one conjectural case is that of Croydon, but even this appears to be all right.'*

Audited Annual Financial Statements for PLC Croydon report the annual figures for the period 1974 - 1979 and show that the school recorded either a small annual surplus or small annual deficit during this period and that the financial position was not desperate even though there was a severe decline in the roll. There was an improvement in the figures between 1974 and 1975 and a further surplus in 1976, the critical years for Whitlam's headship. This is shown in table 7.

**Table 7**

<b>Year</b>	<b>Income</b>	<b>Expenditure</b>	<b>Surplus/Deficit</b>
1974	\$561,589	\$587,504	(\$25,915)
1975	\$772,621	\$747,228	\$25,293
1976	\$874,952	\$869,123	\$5,829
1978	\$1,073,512	\$1,095,463	(\$21,951)
1979	\$1,299,193	\$1,270,588	\$28,605

During the years 1975 and 1976 the PLC School Council Minutes contained many entries relating to the state of the school's finances and enrolments. Sub-committee reports highlighted these matters. Related tensions between principal and Council were reported from time to time.

At the 17 February, 1975 Council Meeting the Chairman tabled a letter referring to enrolments, addressed to the principal from a parent of a potential boarding student:

*'Mrs Natt had thanked Miss Whitlam for the time spent with her at the interview, but had decided not to send her daughter to PLC because accommodation standards were not up to those at other schools. The Chairman suggested that this could also apply to other parents who had contemplated enrolling their daughters in the Boarding School. It was agreed that the Works Committee be requested to examine accommodation standards and suggest any improvements which could be made as economically as possible'. ( Minutes of Council, 17 February 1975;p1 ).*

Possible economies to be made in the gardening and housekeeping areas, and in salaries and staff numbers, were discussed.

Financial matters focused the attention of the 17 March, 1975 Council meeting - a short fall of cash was anticipated by the end of the first term; enrolments

were a concern; the bank overdraft limit was reviewed with a resolution to seek an increase from \$10,000 to \$100,000 approved. The Chairman lay on the table circular advice from the Independent Schools' Association, relating to the new award for the teaching staff. (Council Meeting 17 March 1975)

The Finance Report of 12 September, 1975, again highlights the liquidity difficulties and foreshadows continuing enrolment problems:

Attached to this Report are enrolment figures for the period 1970-1975 and these are presented in table 8:

**Table 8**

<b>Year</b>	<b>Enrolments</b>	<b>Include boarders</b>	
1970	695	100	
1971	652	90	
1972	649	76	
1973	634	71	
1974	626	66	
1975	583	69	Projected 1976: 540

By late 1975 Council was deeply alarmed at the enrolments decline. The Finance Committee noted a decline in enrolments of 150 in six years and no improvement anticipated. The establishment of a special committee to examine the situation was recommended. In October 1975, Council approved an advertising campaign to attract enrolments.

From the Principal's monthly reports to Council the enrolment figures for some earlier years have been obtained and these are shown in table 9:

**Table 9**

Year	Enrolments	Include. Boarders
1957	585	
1958	604	115
1959	608	115

In 1967, secondary schooling went from five years to six years duration, thus adding a further year group to the figures, and yet the roll of the mid 1970s is much the same as that of the mid 1950s.

Comparable figures for the neighbouring Independent Girls School, Meriden Anglican School for Girls, have been obtained from a search of that school's Minutes of Council Meetings for the period 1960-1979 and show a decline from the 1960s to the mid 1970s. These figures are presented in table 10:

**Table 10**

Year	Enrolments	Year	Enrolments
1961	- 581	1974	- 486
1968	- 465	1975	- 449
1970	- 514	1976	- 460
1971	- 531	1977	- 471
1972	- 530	1979	- 513

The Report of the PLC Finance Committee to the November, 1976 Council Meeting addressed the financial position for the coming year, amongst normal monthly matters. The Report shows the level of concern that focussed the Council at this time.

The Report recommended tuition fee increases '*as the maximum possible without unduly affecting enrolments. The expected deficit would be \$70,800*'. '*While the Committee considers it could spare say, \$10,000 from the estimated budgets for*

*non-salary/wage items, any major savings would have to come out of the salary/wage budget which represents 76% of all expenditure'. The Report contains quite lengthy discussion of the staffing options available without reaching any specific recommendation on a way forward. The recommendation to emerge was alarming. 'That the Council inform the Corporate Trustees that the financial position of PLC Croydon has now reached the stage where the school is no longer financially viable and request the Trustees to take appropriate action to assist the Council overcome the present situation'.*

The 15 November Council Meeting extended over four hours with consideration of budget items; a wide range of general issues; a long report on the possibility of PLC going co-educational to extricate it from its financial problems, prepared by Council member Neil Colquhoun; and the formalities to farewell the deputy, Mrs Hancock.

The Budget for 1977 was presented with the recommendation that staff expenditure should be substantially reduced. It also recommended an increase in fees from the first term in 1977. Miss Whitlam expressed her objection in very strong terms and requested her objection be noted. Hancock supported her position.

The Council rejected Whitlam's pleas and resolved -

*'That the Council direct the Principal and the Deputy Principal to reduce the Salaries Budget by \$50,000, less the fee income applicable to conditional students over and above 477 in the Finance Committee's Report and that the Council direct the Finance Committee to reduce the remainder of the Budget by at least \$15,000.*

*That to the matter of staff reductions, Miss Whitlam liaise with the Chairman and the Staff, Scholarships and Library Committee'. (p 2)*

## **External Forces**

### Church Politics

A listing of denominational groupings at the school, pre-church union, (1974) shows that the school had a student population that was almost exactly fifty per cent Presbyterian.

In November, 1974, Council member, Peter Graham wrote to Freda Whitlam advising her that Judith Hancock had been appointed to a Schools and Colleges and Church Education Policy sub-committee of the Presbyterian Church, of which he was the Convenor. He reports that Hancock has been distressed over the response to her membership of this committee, and he proceeds to tick-off Whitlam without directly referring to her.

It was evident that Whitlam was following a different denominational pathway. At the April 1976 Council Meeting, PLC Council recorded that it had no objection to the principal joining committees of the new Uniting Church

In April, 1977, Chairman, Graham wrote to fellow Council members informing them that the Property Commission of the General Assembly had

placed PLC with the Presbyterian Church of Australia. By mid 1977, the division of property in NSW had been determined. Milliken, writing in the National Times, commented rather naively on the Sydney situation:

*'A harmonious outcome has already been reached on the Presbyterian schools in NSW, where feeling against the Continuing Church is not so volatile. In Sydney, the plum schools agreed willingly to divide evenly, Scots College and PLC Croydon, going to the Continuing Church, and Knox Grammar and PLC Pymble choosing to stay with the Uniting Church'. (The National Times, 16-21.5.77 p16)*

### National Politics

Whitlam's comments made following her departure from PLC and quoted in five newspaper and magazine articles, show her conviction that national politics and the position there of her brother were the cause of the critical incident.

In an interview reported on the front page of The Sydney Morning Herald (31.12.76) she says that political opposition to her brother, the former Prime Minister, led to her resignation. Whitlam says that opposition to her brother has reflected misunderstanding of his policies, and in coolness towards her from certain people connected with the school.

She acknowledged difficulties with the School Council over the 19 years but said that the present difficulties could be traced to her appearance on the television programme, This Day Tonight, before the 1972 elections; the programme carried interviews with the political leaders and their families

and Freda Whitlam appeared on the programme: *'There was a definite cooling in my relationship with some people after that. Certain ex-students would not speak to me'*. The difficulties in many cases had continued ever since. In that article Council members are quoted as denying any impact from national politics. An anonymous Council member states that Whitlam resigned over a staffing issue, having refused to decrease the staff when asked to do so. Others state that she was welcome to stay on for as long as she wished.

### **Chronology of the Critical Incident**

From the October 1976 meeting of College Council until the end of the year, the Minutes of the Council record many of the events that compose the critical incident.

At the Council Meeting of the 18 October a special report was presented by the Chairman concerning the retirement/resignation of the principal. This states:

*'During a discussion between the Principal, Miss F.L. Whitlam, M.A., Dip. Ed., MACE., and myself on the morning of the 18th October, 1976, I raised the question of retirement and Miss Whitlam will retire from the Principalship of the Presbyterian Ladies' College, Croydon, on 31st December, 1977. It was agreed that in the event of the acquiescence of the Council in the proposed resignation, Miss Whitlam would proceed on leave prior to retirement as from 30th June, 1977.'*

*As Chairman I desire to place on record appreciation of the leadership given by Miss Whitlam since her appointment as Principal on 1st January, 1958, which resulted in the maintenance, despite increasing problems facing Independent Schools, of the high standards and achievements of PLC Croydon, and of the consideration, co-operation and guidance she has given me since I assumed my present post.*

*On my own behalf and that of the Council, may I express the hope that Miss Whitlam will enjoy a long and happy retirement'.*

The Council resolved:

1. That the Council accept with regret the resignation of Miss F. L. Whitlam, M.A., Dip. Ed., MACE, from the principalship of the Presbyterian Ladies' College, Croydon, as from 31 December, 1977.
2. That Miss F.L. Whitlam take leave as from 1 July, 1977 prior to retirement.

Other resolutions related to the Council wishing her well in her retirement, expressing their appreciations to her, placing advertisements for the purpose of finding a replacement, and seeking a change to the Constitutional requirement that the PLC principal be a Presbyterian.

On 1 November, 1976 a Special Meeting of the College Council was held at the school at which no staff members were in attendance.

The Chairman, Peter Graham, extended a warm welcome to Mr H E Scotford who had been appointed by the Chairman of the Church Trustees 'to act as his

*deputy on the Council'. Reports of the Chairman and Mr Scotford address the matter of Miss Whitlam's resignation. The records from the Minutes are printed below in full.*

**Chairman's Report:**

*'The Chairman reported that he had on the morning of 21 October, 1976 received a letter from Miss F. L. Whitlam asking that the decisions of the Council Meeting held on 18 October, 1976 relative to her retirement be forwarded to her.*

*He further reported that upon receipt of the letter he had conferred with the Law Agent and the Chairman of the Schools' Commission and requested that Mr Scotford might meet with Miss Whitlam. Mr Graham expressed concern over the difficulty he had experienced in obtaining the draft Minutes of the Meeting held on 18 October, 1976. They were eventually forwarded to him through Mr Scotford'.*

**Mr H E Scotford's Report:**

*'Mr Scotford reported that the Chairman had telephoned him regarding the problem which had arisen. It seemed there were inherent dangers which should be dealt with immediately and looked at closely. He had discussed the matter with the Chairman of Trustees, Mr. S.C.Gilmore, who, in view of the construction put on Council's action by Miss Whitlam, advised that he proposed to take advantage of the Constitution and appoint him (Mr Scotford) as his Deputy. Mr Scotford had talked with the Law Agent, who also expressed concern. He then talked with Miss Whitlam in order to clarify the steps the Chairman had taken with a view to her retirement. It became obvious that not all members of Council knew that an approach had been made to*

*Miss Whitlam about her retirement. Some members of Council had not known until they attended the meeting on 18th October.*

*Miss Whitlam had accepted the situation on the basis that she thought the Council were unanimous about her retirement.*

*The situation now is that the Chairman was advised that the Resolutions relating to Miss Whitlam's retirement should be rescinded, and Council should start de novo concerning her retirement.*

*Mr Scotford said he considered this was an inappropriate time to act regarding Miss Whitlam's retirement. She is to become President of the Headmistress's Association on 1st October 1977, and also President of the Australian Association of Religious Education. She stated verbally her intention to retire at the end of 1978.*

*Mr Scotford said he has received a letter from Miss Whitlam setting out her intention, which was read, and he stated he would deal with the letter after the rescission of the motions.*

*Confusion appears to have arisen when the opportunity was taken to discuss with Miss Whitlam the question of her retirement without prior consultation with all members of the College Council'.*

Following receipt of these two reports, it was resolved to rescind the motions of the meeting of 18 October. The Council further resolved to hold a special private meeting under the Rules and Regulations of the Presbyterian Church

of Australia in the State of New South Wales, to discuss the position of Miss Whitlam, and to release a prepared statement on the proceedings of this meeting.

This prepared Statement was written by Graham on 5 November. The statement informed parents that Whitlam's services had not been terminated nor had she resigned and the principal and staff had the full support of the College Council.

The letter is misleading. It gives no indication of the very poor relationship between Council and principal at this time. It proceeds to plant the impression that the two parties are in discussions over mutually agreeable retirement plans: *'Discussions have been held between myself and Miss Whitlam on her plans for retirement'*. It concludes in this tone: *'We look forward with confidence to the new school year in 1977, and the close cooperation of all the elements in the College community, the College Council, the Trustees of the Presbyterian Church, the Principal and staff, parents, ex-students and Students ...'*. Two weeks after this letter was posted to parents, the Principal had resigned.

A Special Meeting of the College Council was then held at the Presbyterian Assembly building on the evening of 26 November, 1976. The only item discussed at this meeting was that of the resignation of the principal and associated matters. In the context of this study, this is a pivotal meeting and will be given some considerable attention here. The Chairman's opening report to this special meeting included that, on 17 November, he had received a telephone call from the bursar, seeking a meeting between himself and the

Chairman. At the resulting meeting, the bursar, acting on behalf of Miss Whitlam, indicated that she wished to retire on 30 June 1977, taking leave from 31 December, 1976. A letter from Miss Whitlam was received on 18 November, 1976. The Chairman noted that the whole school was aware of the issue between principal and Council.

The letter of resignation from Miss Whitlam was received:

It was moved and seconded that Miss Whitlam be paid a severance amount of \$35,000 to cover her entitlements under the terms of her appointment and long service leave and that, in addition, she be paid any entitlements to holiday pay.

Following an amendment and an amendment to the amendment, it was agreed that -

*'Miss Whitlam be paid an ex-gratia retiring allowance of \$20,000, plus any entitlements to holiday pay'. (p 1)*

At this point, Mr Scotford requested his dissent, as a representative of the Chairman of Trustees, as a Trustee and as the Chairman of the Schools Commission, be recorded in the Minutes.

It was further resolved that -

*'the resignation of Miss F L Whitlam as Principal of the Presbyterian Ladies' College, Croydon, be effective from 31 December, 1976'*

This resolution changes the understanding under which Whitlam was prepared to resign. No longer is a period of leave allowed for in the arrangement.

At this point, Mr Scotford retired from the meeting. Resolutions that followed related to procedures of notification and the appointment of a temporary replacement. A resolution expressing the Council's appreciation was also passed:

*'That the Council place on record its appreciation of the outstanding contribution Miss Whitlam has made to the life and witness of the College, and the scholastic attainments of its students, during the 18 years she was Principal, as follows:-*

*The Council of the Presbyterian Ladies' College, Croydon places on record its appreciation of the leadership given by Miss F.L. Whitlam during the 18 years since her appointment as Principal. Her devotion and dedication to duty, often outside the requirements of her appointment, have resulted in the high standards and achievements of the College being not only maintained, but enhanced. This has been achieved in spite of increasing problems facing Independent Schools. The Council expresses the hope that Miss Whitlam will enjoy a long and happy retirement'.*

Whitlam's wage sheet, 1976, contains calculations applicable to her departure from the school. Her annual salary in 1976, as at December was \$17,955. After entitlements and taxation, Whitlam's payment at the end of 1976 was \$14,913.85.

### **Whitlam before and after PLC**

From written follow-up after the interviews, Whitlam provided data about her formative years that supported the information gleaned from the interviews. She also gave more detailed information about her involvements since leaving PLC that has been helpful in constructing the Postscript.

From newspaper and magazine articles, formed largely on the basis of journalists' interviews with her, and printed following her public resignation, some helpful insight into character and influences on her early professional and personal life emerged. There was considerable repetition in these articles.

Journalists revealed that Whitlam was Gough Whitlam's younger sister; was a specialist in education and modern languages, with degrees from Yale and Melbourne Universities; she came from a bookish stable family; she had taught at Frensham school; her background was religious with a strong community focus, and she never married. Some of these data were developed further in accounts of Gough Whitlam's life that were written following his retirement from active politics.

## SUMMARY

The combination of interview and documentary data presented in this chapter gives a rich source of information from which to piece together interpretations. The micropolitics are complex and could well be interpreted in various ways. Wherever possible the researcher has sought to check and confirm data, trying to verify verbal and written statements and avoid bias. Interpretations are made as the various pieces of qualifying data have emerged, a process recognizable in, and common to, qualitative research.

The study has benefited from the willing involvement of those who were key participants in the critical incident, and in having such open access to sources of documentary data.

The data in this chapter have been grouped thematically according to their interview or documentary source. These themes are in two groupings: internal and external micropolitical forces, and are found on the basis of their influence on the critical incident of 1976 at this school. The forces will guide the analysis and interpretation of data that will form the substance of chapter five.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### ANALYSIS OF A DISMISSAL

'The realm of human agency is bounded - Men (sic) produce society but they do so as historically located actors, and not under conditions of their own choosing'. (Giddens, 1976)

#### THE CRITICAL INCIDENT

Freda Whitlam resigned from PLC Croydon in November, 1976. Her resignation occurred suddenly though not unexpectedly. The events leading to her decision to resign have been the subject of conjecture and controversy. The school's public profile, the 'Whitlam' name, and the suddenness and emotions surrounding her departure, led to public interest in the wider community and in the media. (Appendix 2). The School Council was intent on minimising what they saw to be potential damage to the school and was reluctant to release information. (SMH 3.12.76).

It has remained uncertain as to whether Freda Whitlam resigned, the timing determined by her, or whether she was forced to resign with limited or no options. Did she resign or was she dismissed? Whitlam's media statements of late 1976 and early 1977 reveal her perception of the reasons for her resignation. These comments were made when emotions were heightened. She was upset, angry, disappointed and the complete picture did not emerge.

From these comments one concludes that Whitlam resigned of her own choosing and in her own time, frustrated and disappointed by the School Council.

The events leading to Whitlam's decision have not previously been revealed. This chapter will attempt an account of the events immediately before and after Whitlam's decision to resign. The issues that led to the deeply upsetting final months of 1976, can be traced to Whitlam's early days at this school. Internal and external influences interacted throughout her headship to destabilise her leadership. It is remarkable that she stayed for nineteen years. In the final months the school was torn apart from within. A total breakdown in trust occurred evidenced by the gossip, anger, frustration, factional behaviour of members of the school community, indecisive actions by those responsible for the school's direction, and the obvious emotional turmoil of the principal. (RR, PN) Trust is the mediator of reason and emotion (Baier, 1993) and in the final months of 1996, trust was exhausted and a state of crisis existed in this school

## CHRONOLOGY OF EVENTS

\* *Week beginning 11th October, 1976.*

Council member, Neil Colquhoun, whose office was in the same building as that of Chairman of Council, Peter Graham, meets with The Chairman and encourages him to take action on Freda Whitlam, in response to declining enrolments and the state of the school's finances. (NC, PG2)

\* *18th October, 1976; Monday morning.*

The Chairman arrives at the school going first to Whitlam's secretary seeking Whitlam then is sent to a staff member's office where Whitlam is found; (PG2) he asks to see her in her office and there he seeks her resignation; (AK, PG1) a proposal is agreed to whereby she would retire at the end of 1977 having taken leave from mid 1977. (Council Meeting Minutes, 18th Oct. 1976)

\* *18th October, 1976; Monday evening; regular monthly meeting of School Council at the school ( as usual, staff members Whitlam, Hancock and bursar, Fred Best are present).*

The Chairman reports on his 'discussion' with the principal informing Council members of her agreement to resign/retire, (the two terms are used interchangeably in the documents). Motions relating to her resignation/retirement are passed at this meeting in essence accepting the arrangements as proposed and expressing appreciation to Whitlam for her years of service. ( Council Meeting Minutes, 18th Oct. 1976)

\* *19th October, 1976; Tuesday morning;*

The Chairman unexpectedly arrives at the school before school assembly and informs Whitlam that he is there to tell the girls and staff of Whitlam's resignation; they proceed to the assembly where the Chairman informs the school. (PG2, FW2) From the rear of the assembly Ian Gordon's daughter leaves to telephone her father, a solicitor and long term supporter of Whitlam. (FW2)

One of the teachers recalls her feelings at the time: 'You don't resign at the end of nineteen years, and her distress was evident in her appearance rather than anything she said. They were the worst days we lived through in many ways, because of the obvious pain that Miss Whitlam was going through - she maintained a dignity through all of that.' (PN) Another teacher remembers the upset created throughout the school. She remembers people writing letters and having meetings. 'There was such a turmoil and unfortunately it brought out very strong characteristics in people. There were many, many people who behaved so badly. I just didn't think people could be so venomous; they had found a target for all sorts of prejudices and intolerances. I don't think I have ever seen such a collective display of bad manners and cruelty.' (AK)

\* *21st October, 1976; Thursday;*

The Chairman receives a legally constructed letter from Whitlam asking that decisions passed at the Council Meeting of the 18th October, relevant to her resignation, be forwarded to her. As a result of the receipt of this letter, the Council Chairman confers with the Church Law Agent and with the Chairman of the Schools Commission of the Church Trustees, Mr Scotford. (Minutes of Special Meeting of School Council, 1st Nov. 1976; PW2)

\* *1st November; Monday;*

Special Meeting of the School Council at the school. The meeting received Reports from Scotford and the Council Chairman concerning the principal's resignation; a decision was taken to rescind all decisions of the Council meeting of October 18, relating to the resignation. A decision was taken to

communicate with the parents on this matter. ( Minutes of Special Council Meeting, 1st Nov. 1976) A Member of Council at this meeting remembers Scotford 'thumping' the table and 'for a good half hour or more, telling us how wonderful Freda was, how dreadful the Council were..... I remember when it was all over, there was silence. And I looked up at him and I said "well sir, you have thumped the table all night, but you haven't scared us one little bit".' (JC)

\* At some stage during this week there was a meeting of the staff conducted by representatives of the Church Trustees, possibly Mr Scotford. 'The Board of Trustees, or their representatives, explained to us how there had been this misunderstanding and that Peter Graham had no legal right or positional authority to do what he had done. I'm sure Miss Whitlam got proper legal advice, and she was reinstated'. (AK)

\* *5th November.*

Letter from the Chairman of Council sent to parents reassuring them that the principal had not had her services terminated nor had she resigned; looking to a positive year in 1977 etc. (Letter from P.Graham, Chairman of Council, 5th Nov, 1976)

\* *15th November:*

Monday evening; regular monthly meeting of School Council, held at the school.

In response to a Report of the School's Finance Committee and the presentation of the draft 1977 school budget, Whitlam is directed to reduce the staff expenditure by \$50,000; Whitlam seeks to have her strong objection to this recorded. She is supported in this by Hancock. (Minutes of School Council meeting, 15th Nov 1976; SMH 31.12.76)

\* *17th November.*

The Chairman receives a telephone call from bursar Fred Best, acting on behalf of the principal. A subsequent meeting at the Menzies Hotel (PG2) was held where Best indicated Whitlam wished to retire on 30th June, 1977 and to go on leave as from 31st December, 1976. A written communication containing these details was then requested of Whitlam. (Minutes of Special Meeting of the School Council, 26th Nov. 1976; PG2)

\* A letter containing an offer to retire under the above conditions was received by the Chairman. ( Minutes of the Special Meeting of the School Council, 26th Nov. 1976)

\* *26th November:*

Friday evening. Special Meeting of the School Council held at the Presbyterian Assembly building in the city.

The retirement proposal was read to the meeting. The resignation/retirement proposal was made effective from the end of 1976; there was no provision made for Whitlam to take leave; a severance payment of \$35,000 , originally proposed in the resolutions of this meeting was subsequently reduced to

\$15,000 then increased to \$20,000; it passed at this amount. Other formalities associated with notice to the school, appreciations, and the like, occupied this meeting. Mr Scotford's retirement from the meeting was noted in the Minutes at the point at which the Meeting resolved to accept Whitlam's resignation effective from the end of 1976. (Minutes of Special Meeting of School Council, 26th Nov. 1976) Others have commented on the passions in this meeting: "Neil Colquhoun thumping the table and refusing to pay her; in the end Scotford and I said, "right, this is what we're going to pay her and that's it".' (PG1)

\* *30th November; Tuesday morning.*

Whitlam, firstly announces in the staff room, (RR) and then, in the presence of the Chairman and some Council members, announces in a school assembly, her intention to leave the school at the end of 1976; this assembly was followed by a long session together of the Chairman, Council members and staff. (Minutes of Special Meeting of School Council, 3rd Dec 1976) Members of staff recall their feelings at that meeting: 'I can still feel the quiet anger that people had to him (Graham) in that particular meeting - nothing was said and he didn't show any sign of reading this, but people were very upset and very very angry'. (PN)

Either from this meeting, or from a conversation between the Chairman and the departing deputy, Judith Hancock, (JH) came the suggested names for acting principal and deputy principal.

\* *3rd December; Friday.*

Special Meeting of the School Council, at the school.

The Chairman reports on the meeting at the school of the previous Tuesday. Resolutions were passed relating to acting principal and deputy for 1977, the Chairman stating that the suggested names had emerged from the meeting of the staff with Council members; a draft letter to be posted to parents on the next Tuesday was approved. (Minutes of Special Council Meeting; 3rd Dec. 1976)

\* *7th December 1976.*

Letter from Chairman to parents posted. Letter refers to previous letter to parents on this matter (5th November, re: 'retirement plans of Miss Whitlam'). The current letter announces Whitlam's request to 'relinquish the principalship effective as from 31st December 1976'. The names of the acting principal and deputy principal for 1977 were also included in this letter. (letter contained in Minutes of School Council of 3rd Dec 1976)

\* *8th December, 1976. Speech Day. Sydney Opera House.*

Staff members recall the sadness and tensions of the occasion. 'People were crying and there was anger. It was just awful.' (AK) Hancock gave the Annual Guest Speaker's address, in recognition of her years at the school and her departure at this Speech Day, an arrangement made before Whitlam's November resignation.

Whitlam presented the Principal's Annual Report and contrary to the fears of some Council members about what she would say, she said nothing to cause embarrassment or upset. (PG1)

One staff member recalls Whitlam's appreciations. Amongst all of her thank-you's was that to the Council: 'and we all went "hhhhh"; then she said, " for designing the new beret;" I think that was all she said about the Council.' (RR)

Peter Graham's actions to force the resignation of Freda Whitlam were amateurish, impulsive, and grossly inappropriate for a person and principal of Whitlam's length of service, character and public profile. In reflecting on his actions, Graham acknowledges his errors: 'I think if I had time over again I wouldn't have approached Freda the way I did, probably because I was a young whippersnapper...but I was young, 30 years old....I really needed, probably a few wise heads to have consulted with. But there was nobody there who was objective'. (PG1)

Peter Graham failed to consult and did not have the support or the authority of the School Council or the Church Trustees in forcing Whitlam's resignation. Although the School Council immediately endorsed his actions, the damage within the school community had already been done. The Council's endorsement and Graham's announcement to the school assembly of the following morning , made that error public compounding the damage and setting in train a process that was hurtful, upsetting and immensely disruptive to people within the school and to the school community as a

whole. Subsequent rescissions, reversals, and misleading half truths in written and verbal communications, could not conceal from the community, the mismanagement and naivety that had characterized these actions of the School Council.

How was it that the school community had come to this point? Why did Graham feel the need to take such urgent action against a public figure, nineteen years in the role as Head of this school? There was no gross crime: no charge of theft or assault; there was no public scandal: no adulterous behaviour or other 'inappropriate' relationship. There was no one single action or incident that was the catalyst for Graham's actions. Rather, a complex interplay of conflictive internal and external political interactions, relationships, and personalities developed, which together destabilised Whitlam's leadership, eventually resulting in the School Council's attempts to remove her. (Blase, 1991)

It is unlikely that any individual issue could have brought on these actions. Although this chapter will consider on an individual basis issues such as national politics, church politics, Council/principal relationships, and the threat posed by declining enrolments what is crucial to an understanding of the circumstances that apply here is the interaction between these issues, and their development over a long period of time. As Ball(1987) has emphasized, it is the interplay of particular internal and external issues and circumstances, that results in critical incidents; in these micropolitical relationships, the containment of internal conflicts and the management of relationships with

external audiences, with the headteacher as the crucial figure, is central to institutional stability.

## **EXTERNAL ISSUES : CHURCH POLITICS**

Freda Whitlam came to PLC Croydon in 1958 as a committed member of the Presbyterian Church, known to her church for her personal faith and religious observance. During her years at PLC, whilst regularly attending the local Presbyterian Church with the PLC boarders, (RR) her interest and involvement in the emerging Uniting Church grew, to the point where shortly after leaving PLC, she was appointed New South Wales Moderator of this church. (FW2) The PLC Council Meeting Minutes of April, 1976, note Whitlam's membership of committees of the Uniting Church and the Council's approval of this. The Uniting Church was formally inaugurated in June, 1977. (Burke and Hughes, 1996) The Presbyterian future of the school was announced shortly before this in a letter to the Members of Council from the Chairman of Council on April, 25, 1977. (Letter from PJGraham, 25th April, 1977)

Whitlam's final years at PLC coincided with those years leading to the establishment of this new church and, as an integral component of this, the division of the Presbyterian Church into the remains of the Presbyterian Church, and the Uniting Church. There was bitter infighting within the Presbyterian Church especially over the division of church assets, including school properties. A member of the School Council recalls how church union was a divisive issue causing one of the most turbulent times in the history of

the Australian Christian Church; 'It divided people, you know. They took up battle lines if you like and faced each other. It certainly polarised people within the church. They were volatile times for everybody'. (NC) Nationally, this was public, acrimonious and intense. (The National Times, 16-21.5.77. p.16) All institutions of the Presbyterian Church of Australia were affected as members came to decisions on which denomination of either Presbyterian or Uniting they would personally commit to, and as the future direction of each Presbyterian institution and parish was determined.

PLC had a substantial population of Presbyterian families within its community during Whitlam's period of headship. The documents show that approximately half of the children at the school in 1974, nominated Presbyterian as their family's religion. (Denominational Groupings List, 1974) However, it appears that amongst the families of the school the issue of the new church was generally insignificant. (JC) One of the senior ex-students and a parent of one of the girls comments that church union didn't seem to be any concern amongst the parents. She says that 'there was the strong Scottish background in those days. The number of girls at the school who had their own tartans was incredible. We were very strongly on the Presbyterian side so if there had been any conflict I'd have probably been aware of it'.(MT)

Whitlam, throughout her years at the school sought to maintain a close relationship with the church. (FW1) There appears to be a consistent view that although Whitlam made it very clear as to where her future commitment would be, she did not allow this to influence her responsibilities within the school. (PG1) Whitlam confirms this observation: 'I had no idea that our

School Council was a core of the continuing Presbyterian Church, and they were watching me of course. I certainly did nothing to promote the Uniting Church. It was known I was going with the Uniting Church but I was very careful to be fair to the Presbyterian Church'. (FW2) A member of staff of the 1970s supports this comment of Whitlam: 'Notions of faith and understanding were a very public thing for her. I don't recall her ever saying anything that would really distress too many conservative theological minds'. (PN)

Although Whitlam did her best to keep clear of the issue and to keep it out of the school, it was impossible to do so. The school's future ownership was in the balance, as indeed was the future composition of the School Council. Ball(1987) states that the principal must seek to exert some influence over the impact on the school of external factors. In this context Whitlam had little role to play at policy and school direction level. As Graham states, these were decisions to be made elsewhere. (PG1) By positioning herself openly in one of the two denominational groupings, she had also unintentionally exaggerated these divisions within the school, divisions that were mainly evident at Council level. A member of the teaching staff from 1976 comments on these divisions: 'The Church issue is the big issue. Miss Whitlam was very passionately committed to the cause of the Uniting Church. Others were passionately committed to the cause of the continuing Presbyterian Church.... I would think the church politics probably had a lot to do with it and in my observation of church history, the Presbyterians love a fight'. (PN)

All members of the School Council were members of the Presbyterian Church, appointed by the Assembly of the Church. A varying proportion of these

Council members, normally not less than four, were Ministers of the Church. (Aurora Australis, 1976, p3) Within the School Council there were some Members who were aligned with the emerging Uniting Church, and there were others who were fiercely continuing Presbyterian. The Council was dominantly continuing Presbyterian. (JC) Milliken's article in The National Times (1977), rather ignorantly refers to 'the harmonious outcome' of the division of schools in NSW, suggesting that, relative to elsewhere in Australia the schools neatly divided themselves between the two churches. This was not the case and the PLC Council experienced many of the same tensions that were apparent elsewhere. From her observations at PLC Council meetings Hancock remembers the emotions. 'I can remember the Council meetings being so heated and so angry and it was all to do with religion...it's all so painful.' She remembers the bitterness and the conversations about which school would go with which branch of the church. Hancock says that the Council split and the fights that went on were all over money and possessions'. (JH)

Hancock also talks about the changing alliances that developed on the School Council through the 1970s and the increasing isolation this created for Whitlam. 'The Minister from Ashfield Presbyterian Church was just lovely; I always thought he died from all that stress because he liked Freda, but he wasn't Uniting; and then there was the local Minister at Burwood, who was Uniting and he used to be Freda's friend; and then there was Rev. Durban who used to get on well with her until he was continuing; and so the relationships that she had ever thought she had disappeared It was just so sad'. (JH)

As with most Members of the Council, Peter Graham had declared himself to be remaining with the Presbyterian Church. He was a full-time employee of the church and was active on committees of the church that were instrumental in planning for post-Union. One such committee of which he was the convenor, was responsible for Schools and Colleges and Church Education Policy. From her position as deputy at PLC, Hancock had accepted appointment to this committee. This was not a situation that Whitlam found to her liking. Already in the highly unusual and very awkward position of having Hancock attend all Council meetings, Whitlam now found her deputy in regular church meetings with the new Chairman of Council on the side of the church issue that was opposed to her own. The tensions are evident in the correspondence from Graham to Whitlam in late 1974 on this matter. (Letter from PJGraham, 11.11.74) Hancock was aware of the power that she could have exerted over Whitlam on this issue: 'In the end it was so bitter that they wouldn't talk to Freda, because she was Uniting Church. And this was where , if I'd wanted to, I could have really done her in, but I didn't and I wouldn't - its not in my nature. But I don't think she ever understood that'. (JH)

The formation of the Uniting Church in Australia, a process at its peak in the early-mid 1970s, added to and confused issues already actively destabilising the principal. Opposing sides developed, representing contrasting theological positions, each seeking to maximize financial and property interests. The PLC School Council was intimately entwined in these tensions, with Whitlam, and the majority of Council members and her deputy, representing the opposing

positions. The general school community was peripheral to this issue and would have displayed very little understanding of the depth of emotions felt by the people involved. The formation of the Uniting Church distanced Whitlam from her Council and further consolidated attitudes and factions well entrenched within the school. Alone it would not have threatened Whitlam's headship. However, the issue of church union certainly contributed to the instability in the school especially at School Council level.

#### **EXTERNAL ISSUES : NATIONAL POLITICS**

Grace (1995) has emphasized just how sensitive and vulnerable are the structures and dynamics of a school to the impact of the external environment. This impact can be direct, such as a reduction in government financial support, or the imposition of a national curriculum; or it can be indirect and possibly more subtle such as the principal's Presidency of her national professional association, or the impact of a local Education Authority's personal relationships with the school's Governing Body or principal. As one such external force, Government, at its various levels, and Government agencies, will consistently influence internal systems and processes of schools. Every school is required to manage a combination of these direct and indirect forces over a period of time. The responsibility for doing so, in self managing schools, falls generally to the School Council and the principal. (Vandenbergh, 1995)

For PLC Croydon, Whitlam's period of headship was especially vulnerable to the influence of external forces. Within these forces one that had considerable

potential impact on the school, was the role of her brother in national politics and the attitude to her brother of members of the PLC school community. As leader of the Australian Labor Party from 1967, and then as Prime Minister in a Labor Government from 1972 - 1975, Gough Whitlam presided over arguably the most turbulent, divisive and radical period in Australian political history. Was it possible for his sister to separate herself and her school from this external political influence? Ball (1987) states that at the very least, political features suggestive of wider political issues and conflicts can usually be identified in critical incidents in schools. In the case of Whitlam and PLC there is good reason to suggest that the external macropolitical scene posed a subtle yet substantial threat to her leadership of this school.

There is no doubt that Whitlam attempted to keep from the school, the potential damage to her leadership posed by national politics. In her earliest conversations with Chairman of Council, F.L.Thompson, Whitlam addressed the issue of her brother's political interests: 'I do have a brother in politics - does that make a difference?' she asked him. To which the reply was: '...no, we're employing you, not your brother.' (FW2) Staff members comment on how she successfully avoided referring to politics or mentioning her brother in the school. Her long serving secretary states that she saw Gough at the school on only one occasion. 'He kept apart from the school and she kept that part of her life away from the school.' (MF) Others state that they never heard her speak of politics to the children, (RW, RR) or declaring any political allegiance. (PN) Freda Whitlam quite deliberately avoided the topic: 'I wouldn't have Gough in the school,' she said. 'I wasn't going to have anybody say that I was influencing anybody in any way.' (FW1)

Gough was invited to PLC on only the one occasion. He was invited by a History teacher to speak to the senior girls about Australia and international issues. Whitlam states that it occurred before the Vietnam War, and it was certainly non political. (FW1) The visit caused some upset within certain quarters of the school community. One ex-student and parent of the period recalls the visit: 'She'd invited Gough to come along and speak to the school, which had incensed a lot of people and at that stage Gough's policies were annoying a lot of people in the country; and this really stirred it up'. (MT)

It is possible that responses to Gough Whitlam's visit would have been much the same as responses to the visit of a leader of a conservative Liberal Party. However, when contextualised, the sensitivities to Gough Whitlam, can be viewed more clearly as those of a generally conservative Liberal-leaning institution towards a radical Labor party whose policies were upsetting the old order.

The Presbyterian Church has historically had a close relationship with the Liberal Party. A member of the PLC School Council of the time makes reference to this historical feature: 'It's interesting to note how many members of the Federal Parliament were either Church Ministers or Elders of the Presbyterian Church; there is actually quite a number. And the Presbyterian Church, of course was strongly aligned with the Liberal Party politically and always has been. There was a very strong relationship between the Presbyterian Church and the Party.' (NC) This Council Member from the later years of the Whitlam period, and Chairman of Council, Peter Graham,

acknowledge membership of the Liberal Party during that period. Other senior members of the Ex-students Union and parents' groups were also members of the Liberal Party, one currently an office holder and active in Local Government politics. A Presbyterian ex-student and parent of the period states that 'basically the parents who sent their children to PLC were Liberals and therefore they resented Freda bringing anything political into the school.' (MT) Freda Whitlam's secretary reflects on the macro political polarities within the school: 'There was nothing there that would have influenced her with any particular political party; it was always funny in a way that although her school stood more or less for a Liberal thing, her family was Labor; but it didn't really make any difference as far as she was concerned.' (MF)

Unfortunately, the confidence of Whitlam's secretary was not borne out by comments and actions elsewhere in the school. Whitlam was made constantly aware of the attitudes of people towards Labor and her brother. She comments that after the Labor victory of 1972 it became more obvious. 'Politics didn't matter until the Labor government got in and brought in equal pay and they never forgave Gough, or me for having a brother, because all the salaries had to go up, mine included. Peter Graham by then was an Alderman on Local Council and was rabidly Liberal....After they won, at every Council Meeting, he would be making jibes about politics and then, of course, when they put up the wages, Mr Thompson (Chairman Emeritus) was furious when he had to pay decent wages to the staff. He was mad'. (FW1)

Council members of the time state that politics was never discussed at Council meetings. (JC) This may have been the case, however Peter Graham acknowledges its influence at Council level. He states that he never heard Whitlam speak of politics but 'wrongly....the parent body and the Council identified Freda with Gough...Council had some very... rabid right wingers, who at the very mention of the word 'Labor', would go off their brain. Politics plays a part in everybody's life whether it is a school or even a church. It was like an undercurrent - sort of snide in a way - occasional comments but nothing you could pin down. Generally, Freda ignored barbs like that and most of it passed over my head too'. (PG1)

Peter Graham's role in the management of this situation was crucial to Whitlam's position in the political environment of the times. However, he was an active player himself and he found it difficult separating himself from the disturbing and destabilising 'undercurrent'. Graham states that he was placed in situations where it was difficult to keep his own 'strong political views' away from the school: '...you can't help it when people come up to you at a function and start yabbering politics to you - you've invariably got to respond. By and large politics did have an influence in Freda's final twelve months as we went through the '75 business'. (PG1)

Teachers from the 1970s recall incidents from the staffroom and the classroom. Although infrequent there were occasions when teachers made insensitive comments in Whitlam's hearing (AK), and comments by students disclosed attitudes being shared at home. One teacher tells of a classroom incident to illustrate the strong anti-Labor feeling in the school at the time. It

was the early 1970s and State aid to schools was a prominent public issue and 'people would have felt threatened by Federal Labor policies'. (PN) She was a new teacher to the school. A colleague with daughters in the school cited a comment about this new teacher told to her by one of her daughters. The daughter was a student in this new teacher's English class where the class had been examining politicians' speeches and the use of language as a persuasive tool in newspaper reports and the like. The daughter's comment was about what a nice person and good teacher this new teacher was, 'but it's a pity she votes Labor'. (PN) The teacher recalls the anti Labor feeling from the students typified in this ill-founded observation. 'I was very much aware of very strong political expression from the students in a fairly blind and ignorant way'. (PN)

It seems as though the 'undercurrent' was a constant feature of gatherings of parents and ex-students in the early 1970s. It was apparent at meetings in the school and in the country regions. (MT) One former Council member thinks country parents were especially vitriolic during the 1970s and boarding numbers suffered because of their attitudes. He states that the parents of country girls were suffering significantly from the policies of the Whitlam Government. 'They suffered very badly by the policies of the government of the time, and I guess they vented their anger against Freda and she got a rough time'. (NC) It appeared to unnerve Whitlam. Some are of the view that she exaggerated its importance and influence, and later attributed far too much significance to its role in these years. (JH) Certainly her public statements in late 1976 and early 1977 illustrate her view of the importance

that national political issues played in her departure from the school.  
(Appendix 2)

One has to wonder too at what subtle unintended part many of her education initiatives played in this fertile field of micropolitical activity. Blase (1991), writes of the 'political' significance in a given situation of actions both consciously and unconsciously motivated. So much of Freda Whitlam's educational philosophy was implemented through social welfare and democratising initiatives. There was an intellectual social democracy inherent in most of what she attempted as the educative leader of this school - programmes such as the Year group Pet Show; initiatives for aborigines; the Eureka House activities; changes to student leadership opportunities; her emphases in the Student Reporting process; her early attempts at developing confidence in the staff; and her consistent emphases in addresses at morning Assembly, were all qualities somewhat reflective of a social democratic world view. Her deputy of the 1970s comments on this motivation; 'I think that what came through very strongly was that she really was a socialist, and that this had come from her experiences in India and what she had seen there'.  
(JH)

At a national level her brother was trying to achieve many of the same goals, and some school community members appear to have experienced difficulty in distinguishing between the two. During the day their experience was of the sister and at night television brought into their homes experience of the brother. There were certainly qualities of manner, humour and use of voice

that were similar. In many respects there were also similarities of world view that characterized their professional practice.

Freda Whitlam had a close, loving and respectful relationship with her brother, evident to all in her public comments after leaving PLC. (Appendix 2) At the school she was known to over-react at times, and to take as intensely personal, comments about her brother and his politics. 'Perhaps she over-reacted when people would think it was clever to make wisecracks about her brother, and she was very sensitive to that, and the whole rough and tumble of politics, and cynicism and everything'. (AK) Graham states that Whitlam was well aware of the close talk - the 'undercurrent'. He says that that was where the 'graciousness of the lady kept coming to the fore, because she always turned the other cheek and walked away'. He comments that 'she had a very rocky road with the Ex-students' Union'. (PG1)

Freda Whitlam had no-one in the school with whom she felt able to share her feelings. The brave exterior that she displayed on most occasions concealed a lonely and private person who was intimately feeling the highs and lows of her brother's turbulent public life..... the joy and excitement of her brother's elevation to the Prime Ministership; her distress with the innuendo and gossip about him; her upset as his leadership came apart in 1975. One teacher from the Boarding House comments on Whitlam's reaction to the December 1972 Labor victory at the polls : '...I just don't know who else she could have shown how proud a little sister was. She couldn't in the school, but this was at the beginning of the holidays, and it was before we were going for a walk and she was just sitting at her desk as she told me about it. But that is the only

time Federal Labor/Liberal business was ever mentioned that I know of'. (RR) Another teacher observed how upset and how private she was on the occasion of the dismissal of her brother by Kerr in late 1975: 'I just happened to meet her as she was going out the door into boarders' stairs, looking very distressed and I said to her, "has something happened?" She very quickly told me of the dismissal. She didn't stop, went on her way and I noticed her from my teaching room at the front of the school. I saw her walking through the garden and I don't think anyone saw her for the rest of the day. That's how privately she kept her emotions and views about things. It was most unfair to accuse her otherwise, as I think some people did'. (AK)

It is an atypical situation to find a principal having to manage a macro/micro political interface as complex, serious and intimate as this one at PLC. Ball (1987) highlights the importance of strength and unity of purpose shared by the Head, Governing Body and other core interest groups in confronting a potential danger to the school from outside the immediate community. This quality was certainly not evident at PLC during the crucial years of the late 1960s and early - mid 1970s. Freda Whitlam was unavoidably and unintentionally a participant, largely through her personal reactions to events at the national level and to the 'undercurrent' within the school. Individual School Council members and other senior members of the PLC community were active players in macropolitical matters generally as members of the political Party opposing that of Whitlam's brother. They did not supply the personal or practical support required for Whitlam to minimize the potential disruption to the culture of the school. Alliances that were damaging to Whitlam's leadership inevitably developed with the issue of Freda's brother,

Gough, and his role in national politics, as the rallying point. This issue was a major force in destabilising Whitlam's leadership at PLC.

## **SCHOOL FINANCES AND ENROLMENTS**

Those who have traced the historical development of 'school leadership', identify periods when it has been customary for principals to have responsibility for the school's financial affairs, and other periods when this has not been so. (Grace, 1985) With the relatively recent emergence of the self-managing school, it is a growing feature of principal leadership that accounting to a School Board for the financial affairs of the school, is assumed in the principal's responsibilities. (Hall, Mackay and Morgan, 1986)

Commonly associated with marketplace economics, the self-managing school is generally more independent in its structure and internal operations, and more individually responsible for attracting to it, potential students. Its future is more within its own control. In many respects it reflects features of Independent schooling in the non-government sector. It is not surprising that amongst the leadership qualities identified by researchers as required to meet the responsibilities of these schools, are those of basic marketing and promotion skills, and an understanding of how institutional financial management operates. (Caldwell and Spinks, 1992) In the majority of these schools, especially those in the Independent sector such as PLC, the control of such matters is a delegated responsibility to a financial manager or a bursar whose responsibility to a School Board and/or to a principal has frequently been the source of some confusion and tension . In order to exert some

influence and control in this area, it is important that the principal has a personal understanding of matters pertaining to this more technical group of responsibilities.

For Freda Whitlam, the roles interface of Council Chairman, bursar and principal was poorly defined and was the cause of immense tension especially during the many years of F.L.Thompson's Chairmanship of the School Council. Whitlam states that, although she had only limited administrative and financial experience, she did have some and she had made an attempt to gather knowledge after appointment and prior to arriving at PLC. (FW1) Whitlam is correct in acknowledging her limitations in these areas. Experience in a position of some responsibility in a school was lacking and any significant experience of management of volunteer or paid staff members in any community organization was non-existent. She traces what little administrative experience that she had to her activities as a leader in the Canberra Girl Guides' Movement.' (FW1). Before arriving at PLC, Whitlam went to the bursar at Frensham school and was shown through the accounts . She says that she understood the pattern that they used for everything on the financial side. 'I learnt a lot', she says, 'They were very good to me'. (FW1)

Thompson was not prepared to entrust Whitlam with the school's financial management and future planning. (FW1) Her first Report to Council, and Thompson's response, did not help in setting their relationship on a positive respectful course. (Principal's Report to Council, Feb. 1958) From the beginning he expected her to impose tight control on routine expenditure. (Letters exchange, Thompson and Whitlam, 1958) But this was the limit to her

role in these matters. Whitlam was to be responsible for the moral and educational leadership of the school and Thompson saw himself as the senior financial manager, working closely with the bursar on routine and long range planning details. He established a pattern for himself which involved generally unannounced regular, some say daily, visits to the school that included discussions with the bursar and with anyone else who happened to be about. (ET, MF, JH) 'He turned up at the school every afternoon to sort of check up on what was happening. He must have been a difficult man to cope with.' (MT)

The division of roles upset Whitlam. She wanted more involvement with the control of school finances. Her early Principal's Reports consistently call for spending on good quality staff and on the most routine and basic of items. (Principal's Reports to Council, Feb. 1958; Sept. 1959) She felt excluded from the decisionmaking in this area and, without some say in how the money was to be spent, it was difficult to successfully implement change. Whitlam saw management as a means to an end, in contrast to Thompson who saw efficient financial management as an end in itself, an essential outcome for any well run institution or organization.

Whitlam had a complex relationship with F.L. Thompson. A senior Ex-student and parent of the times describes their relationship as a 'love-hate relationship. In one sense they wanted one another to be there and in another sense they didn't; it was a funny sort of relationship really'. (MT) Whitlam considered him a 'humble man, with a certain amount of presence; a strong church man', who had come to the role of PLC Council Chairman totally ill-

prepared for the role. She respected his achievements from the early death of his father, to his leaving school at fifteen and then his accumulating business interests. (FW1) However, she said he had no experience of Councils, where everybody contributes. Others have commented on Thompson's domination of Council. Hancock, Whitlam's deputy in the 1970s and an ex-student of the school, says that Thompson controlled everything. He controlled the Council and he controlled Whitlam. She says that Whitlam would never stand up to him or to the Council and that if she had she would have been a lot better off. (JH) Early in his years on Council, Peter Graham observed how Thompson never gave Whitlam or the staff 'the rein to run the school like a principal and staff should do. He was an old autocrat; if the sign said don't park on the grass, what did he do, he'd park his car on the grass.' (PG1)

Whitlam says that Thompson tried to dominate her as ....'a man dominating a female, the weaker gender'. (FW1) Whitlam believes Thompson had very little respect for women, coming from a tradition where men lead and women follow, the women looking after the children and children's concerns. She is of the view that his dominating, controlling personality had 'destroyed Miss Macindoe', her predecessor as principal. 'It was wicked what he did to her.....he reduced her to a shuddering weeping mess. He was just a bully'. (FW1) There was a paternalistic attitude in Thompson's approach that Blackmore would see as disadvantaging Whitlam and positioning her as powerless in the school. (Blackmore, 1994)

By 1958, Thompson had already served a quarter of a century on the School Council, the bulk of these years as Chairman. People report that he saw the

school as 'his school' and certainly his controlling attitude towards Whitlam and his constant presence bear this out. A new Member of Council in the early 1970s recalls his impressions of Thompson on joining the Council: 'People were just too frightened to say anything. Or, if they weren't frightened to say anything they just couldn't be bothered. He overshadowed everything. I think everybody else was simply a rubber stamp.' (NC)

Whitlam did not like the relationships that Thompson established around the school, in particular those between himself, the bursar of the day, and her. 'The bursar was a former bootmaker - and he would have had to keep books for that. That was his qualification. Mr Thompson liked the bursar. Mr Thompson treated him as though he was principal. I was in charge of seeing the uniforms were worn correctly, the girls behaved in public, and kept the pupils coming and kept the parents happy. But the bursar was the one that Mr Thompson related to, because they spoke the same language'. (FW1) The result of this close relationship between Chairman and bursar was her perception that 'the bursar always knew in his quiet way that he controlled me. I was given the accounts after they had been passed by everybody, to initial every month, but I knew everything was done for them. I couldn't make any changes. I knew Mr Thompson always got the lowdown on the school from the bursar before he came near me'. (FW1)

Thompson's main concern in the school was the stability of its financial position. Financial issues were a constant issue at Council Meetings and a source of continuous tension between Whitlam and Council. Tuition and Boarding fee income formed the bulk of the income for this school, as was,

and still is the case with most fee-paying independent schools. Throughout Freda Whitlam's time as principal, enrolment numbers and matters of expenditure occupied Council meetings and were the cause of disagreements and angry exchanges between Whitlam and Council members at meetings. (PG1) A staff member of the period comments on the position within the school : 'There was not a feeling of abundance about anything, and again, salaries for the staff was a great issue. I know that the principal was in constant conflict with the Council about this and the fluctuation in student numbers, because they felt that the scapegoat for this was the principal.' (AK)

Consistently, the Council Meeting Minutes and the Finance Committee Minutes record concerns about the financial condition of the school. The Finance Committee report to Council of July, 1971 illustrates the nature of these entries: 'The decline (in surplus) is occasioned as pointed out in my report of last month by substantially higher salaries and fee reductions due to the lower enrolment this year...', (Finance Committee Minutes, July 1971) and in the February, 1975 Council Minutes: 'Discussion took place regarding possible economies in salaries and reduction in teaching staff and choice of subjects' offering, in view of the present financial difficulties and reduced enrolments for this year.' (Council Minutes, Feb. 1975) The March Meeting that followed, focused on financial and enrolment concerns. (Council Minutes, March 1975) The October Finance Report to Council noted the six year decline in school enrolments of 150 students with 'no improvement anticipated' (Finance Committee Report, October, 1975) When the roll was trending downwards in the late 1960s and early -mid 1970s, (Principals

Monthly Reports to Council) the school's possible closure became a topic of conversation amongst Council members. (NC)

Conditions and uncertainties in the national economic and political community created anxieties within the institutions of the church. 'Severe economic circumstances' of 1974 imposed external pressures on the schools. A Special Report of the Trustees listed the pressures as inflation; unemployment and a reduction in farm incomes; a sharp rise in interest rates; the withdrawal of, or changes in support for private schools; the alteration of income tax allowances to parents for school fees. The report further noted PLC's debt but expressed no alarm at the financial position of the school. Quite the contrary, with the Trustees concluding that 'Croydon ought to be able to finance the extra amount it requires outside of the Trustees.' (Trustees' Special report on schools' Finances, 1974)

An additional financial pressure on Independent schools during these years was posed by the improvement of teachers salaries as they moved towards parity with colleagues in Government schools. The July, 1971 Finance Committee reported to the School Council that '....the 14% increase in teachers' salaries as sought by the AMMA has been approved by the Court and became effective as to 85% in relation to salaries paid at the end of June. For seven months at this rate, plus the 6% national wage increase, salaries plus wages for the year, will exceed 1970 by approximately \$36,000.' (Finance Committee Report, July, 1971) This salary progress accompanied the strengthening of teacher unionism and the improvement of general Award

conditions for teachers in Independent schools. (Council Minutes, April, 1975)

The decline in enrolments at PLC throughout the 1970s was alarming. The school tried measures to arrest the slide, such as advertising campaigns and visits of senior members of staff to country regions. (Council Minutes, October, 1975; JH) A teacher observed the effect of the enrolments issue on Whitlam. 'By about 1973-74 the decline in enrolments was very evident and Freda was unnerved and was having more and more conflict'. (AK) The roll fell from 695 of whom 100 were boarders, in 1970, to 540 of whom 60 were boarders, in 1976. The 1976 figure was lower than the roll at the time of Whitlam's appointment to the school in 1958, and during the intervening years an additional year had been added to the length of schooling. The impact on the roll of the host of external issues of the time was felt in schools other than PLC. At neighbouring Meriden Girls' School a similar but less dramatic decline occurred with the roll dropping from 514 in 1970, to 460 in 1976. (Meriden Minutes of Council Meetings; 1970-1976) Of the four metropolitan Presbyterian schools, including Croydon, three experienced a decline in roll between 1975 and 1976. PLC's debt per capita was either similar to, or less than the three other schools as at December, 1975. (Presbyterian Assembly Paper, No 3, 1976) At PLC tight internal controls, a preoccupation with financial matters, and a reluctance to spend, served to minimize the potential damage that could have been generated by the very severe decline in the roll and the combination of other factors affecting the school's financial position.

By the time Graham took over as Council Chairman, at the end of 1974, there was a considerable depth of anxiety developing in Council about the deteriorating enrolment and financial position. Graham came to the position under some pressure to remedy the situation within the school. He says that when he became Chairman the school's enrolment was down to the point where the school 'was not really viable.' (PG1) This appears to be an exaggeration of the situation although there were certainly people who considered this threat to the school to be a very real one. The School Council reported a small deficit at the end of 1974, however by the end of 1975, this had been turned around, and a small surplus was achieved for the year. (Audited Annual Financial Statements, 1974-1979) There was no improvement in the constantly falling enrolments.

An important early initiative of Peter Graham was the repainting and refurbishing of the school's central heritage building. Very soon after this, Graham launched the school on a major property acquisition and expansion programme. However, for Whitlam these actions came too late. (PG2) Graham expresses a not uncommon view that one of the reasons for the decline in the roll was the poor physical appearance of the school. (PG1). One of the teachers who joined the school in the early 1970s states that the school 'was not being managed well. I recall when the school was painted for the first time, grey; talk was there had been no maintenance work done like that for seventeen years, and it seems to me that if you want to go looking at why enrolments fell you might look at the broader picture of management. They were nineteenth century.' (PN) A Member of Council new to the role in 1975 shares this view. He says that the Council was living in the past; that

change was anathema to them. He says that the Council was not addressing the real problems of good financial management, and that this was probably at the heart of the problem. He recalls that there were no development plans and no Building fund with any money. (NC)

During most of Whitlam's headship she was subjected to the dominating presence about the school of F.L.Thompson. He clashed with Whitlam from her earliest days at the school. Their relationship was complex. Together they failed to develop united and productive measures to improve the deteriorating enrolments position of the school. Whitlam proved unable to establish for herself a clearly defined role in the broad institutional leadership of the school. Thompson saw himself as the senior person in the school and publicly positioned himself that way.

Thompson manipulated the relationships within the Council and within the senior staff, such as bursar and deputy principal, in order to retain this dominance. However, his positive contribution seems to have been largely technical. (Sergiovanni. 1992) His attention was consistently on routine matters of balancing the books, daily expenses and gossip about the school. He presented a dignified persona at public functions. By the early 1970s he was an elderly man in his late 70s and early 80s with failing hearing. (PN) He was unwell for much of the time (PG1), rigid in his approach and reluctant to consider the opinions of others. (PG1) Kets de Vries and Miller (1984) have argued that strategic failure in organizations is often due to rigidity in leadership and indications of this causal linkage could well be evident here. When the enrolments problem deepened, Thompson was unable to

demonstrate the flexible and innovative qualities that writers such as Kitron (1986), and Neumann and Finaly-Neumann (1994) consider as crucial in meeting challenges of enrolment growth and decline such as those threatening PLC in the early 1970s. The turbulent national political and economic circumstances, and sudden increases in salaries for teachers, were forces that contributed to this deepening enrolments crisis.

Other schools were experiencing some of the same difficulties, especially in these forces driven from outside the school. However, by 1976, the PLC roll had declined by over 150 students in six years and there was growing talk of the school's capacity to continue to operate. The School Council with its untried, ambitious Chairman, was looking to quickly solve the problems and move the school on. Inevitably, a change in school leadership was seen as the way out of these difficulties. Impulsive decisions were taken on Freda Whitlam's headship in this unstable and deteriorating climate.

## **INSTABILITY AND DIVISION WITHIN**

What has emerged in the unfolding of this study is the multidimensional complex nature of the issues and relationships. Since schools are people-based institutions functioning in an interactive internal and external community, one should expect strategic alliances, struggle and conflict between members. (Blase and Anderson, 1995) In this school, relationships between and within the various school support groups, were often divided and were inconsistent over time. What is clear from the earliest days of

Whitlam's headship is the tension and destructive factionalism within the community relationships of the school.

Theoretical studies of leadership, and micropolitical studies at the more local level, point to the important role of the principal in the success of the school. (Caldwell, 1992; Blase and Anderson, 1995) In bringing harmony, unity, and focus to the teaching-learning process, the principal has the key role to play. (Banks, 1976) At PLC, Whitlam faced extraordinary barriers to her ability to achieve this. Her leadership was confused by the dominant and dominating role adopted by the Chairman of Council, F.L. Thompson and the fragility of her relationship with him, a relationship that began poorly with her 1958 Report to Council, and remained unsatisfactory until the end. (Principal's Report to Council, Feb. 1958) The 1958 Principal's Report was the thorough product of an intelligent, politically naive, inexperienced principal. There was much in the content to commend it. However, its bluntness and confronting language, its direct advice to Council members, was harmful to an immature relationship between Chairman and principal. The 1961 Investigation Report that followed, confirmed many of Whitlam's observations, amongst these the urgent need for improvements in the physical environment, and significantly, the level of disturbing gossip and destabilising undercurrent amongst community members.

The Council was itself divided and some members formed alliances and friendships with senior members of staff, and with senior parents and ex-students who were personally dissatisfied with Whitlam's leadership. (JS) Her Deputy in the 1970s comments on alliances involving Council members:

'But their (the Ex-students' Union) aim was really to get rid of Freda. June Smith had Peter Graham's ear and so did Jeanette York'. She also recalls how a member of the School Council tried to befriend her and used to write to her a lot and ask her to go and see her. (JH) School community leaders from the period have revealed alliances in which they were participants. Jeanette York says that Peter Graham telephoned her on the evening Whitlam resigned. (JY) Another parent of the period, also an ex-student, recalls Graham when Chairman of Council arriving at her home at ten in the evening on a matter involving Freda Whitlam. June Smith acknowledges a close friendship with Deputy Hancock, an intense dislike for Whitlam, and a strong relationship with Chairman, F.L. Thompson. (JS)

However, for a school to achieve its stated mission and goals, the principal must possess the ability to negotiate with teachers, parents and community members. (Steering Committee of Nat. Project on Leadership and Management Training of Principals). At PLC, alliances and factions existed amongst the Council members, senior staff, parents and ex-students, that were allowed to grow and unsettle the leadership of the principal, weakening any negotiating potential for Whitlam. (Letter from Gordon to Whitlam, Feb. 1974; JS)

Ball (1987), expresses the power of the principal in micropolitical terms, as contradictory pressures and expectations. By the 1970s Whitlam was under pressure in a range of areas and yet was still expected to lead her staff and students, and function in a public sense as though she was in control of the school. A teacher of the 1970s observes that by this time 'lines had been

drawn and anything she did or said was open to possible use against her.’ (PN) Her deputy in the 1970s recalls her early impression that ‘they didn’t like her attitude to the girls; they didn’t like her attitude to the ex-students, they didn’t like her philosophy.’ (JH) One gains the impression that there was regular destabilising contact happening amongst the senior members of the School Council and the support groups. Unavoidable and generally uncontrollable national issues in church and political areas, imposed a significant influence on Whitlam’s ability to bring purpose and direction to the school community. Her personality and character did not encourage universal admiration and affection. Personal qualities seem to have contributed to the divisions that developed.

Amongst some members of the school community there was a sense that Whitlam did not represent the modern face of education: ‘The school was a fairly gentle place where things just seemed to roll along in a haphazard sort of way.’ (AK) Under Thompson’s Council, there had been very little physical change to the appearance of the school. However, society had been turned upside down by revolutions in music, moral standards, student protests, the war in Vietnam, developments in science, drugs, and the women’s movement - a broad range of concerns each having some impact on schools. In New South Wales, schooling had been extended to six secondary years in the late 1960s, accompanied by a transformation in teaching and learning processes. There was a growth in questioning and investigative methods and a push for schools to be better resourced. Parents were less willing to relinquish their children to the school, wanting to be more involved and expecting to have a say in how schools were conducted. Although Whitlam embraced

developments in curriculum and teaching she was not comfortable with some of these changes. She accepted a Parents and Friends' Association reluctantly (MF; AK) in the late 1960s and was always ill at ease with the Ex-students' Union. However, the societal momentum was a powerful force. By the 1970s Whitlam appeared to some to be out of touch with the contemporary needs of children and schools, and seemed determined to hold back the tide for as long as she possibly could. (JS; MT)

Whitlam was an honest and naive person who showed a peculiar inability to compromise and to unite interest groups. Some have observed a shyness and unease with people that may well have contributed to this. (JC; AK) People tell of her ability to offend and to set people against one another and against her. (NC, JH) She was impatient with those for whom she had little respect. (AK) She was an intellectual who was intolerant of greed and shallowness. Others comment on her dress sense - her somewhat 'old fashioned' attitude to personal presentation; her non-contemporary appearance. (DA; JS) They mention her poor judgement of people and their motives, (AK) and her misjudging of the expectations of public audiences, small and large. (PN; JH; JS)

Some others, including Council members of the 1970s, saw her as having girls whom she liked and others whom she disliked. One Council member of the time says that Whitlam had favoured some students and made life difficult for others. If she liked a student, she made their life very happy but, if she disliked a student she made their life rather difficult. (JC) This assertion is strongly rejected by Whitlam, who claims she was determined that all

children were treated equally, including those whose parents were of the opinion that their status warranted special attention. (FW1). Whitlam's stated attitude towards the children of doctors and lawyers indicates that there may have been an element of unequal treatment, or at least a perception of this, in her actions towards the girls.

Whitlam appears unconcerned that her attitudes towards others were known and discussed within the school community. She was not interested in shaping opinion or in compromising short term gains for long term benefits. She was quite capable of building significant blocks of opposition through her public positions, and tactless comments or quick-witted one liners. A member of Council of the mid 1970s supports the observation that she was the kind of person who could easily get somebody offside: 'her P.R. skills were not all that brilliant. I think that another person may have perhaps exercised a bit more discretion in dealing with parents and the Council and whatever.' (NC) For instance her strange attitude towards the daughters of Strathfield doctors was well known within the school community especially in Strathfield and is recounted by a teacher new to the school in 1972: 'The one story I heard very quickly on my arrival in 1972 was the reference to blue eyed blond haired Strathfield doctors' daughters and I can quite believe it; it had the concise ring of a Freda statement. But I also know how that would have affected people because when I started here the Strathfield group was a very large and influential group.' (PN) Another teacher from the 1970s recalls Whitlam's attitude to the Strathfield parents. She says it was 'Freda who coined the phrase "that island that is Strathfield," and it has been quoted often; she was

irritated by the blond haired Anglican doctors' daughters from Strathfield; they obviously had powerful parents.' (AK)

Whitlam confirms this attitude and explains it in terms of what she saw as their inflated self perception. She says that she found Strathfield parents 'were the most burdensome. They were the most ambitious. They could be unscrupulous; they were fiercely competitive with each other. They were very conscious they were the elite of the west, and they had Mr Thompson's ear.' (FW1) Thompson lived in this district, as did some other members of the School Council and senior members of the school support groups. Whitlam was disconcerted by the alliances that she believed existed there. Parents felt that this came out in her general attitudes in the school and towards their children.

Whitlam had a difficult relationship with what was a fairly active Ex-Students' Union. (JH) There were arguments and bitter exchanges at meetings. (PG1; JH) She acknowledges that she can be brought easily to tears and this is reported as occurring at times at these meetings, interpreted by some as a weakness in her character or as a sign of emotional instability. (MT) Some of the outspoken ex-students were also parents of the time or in the recent past. Her deputy in the 1970s tells of the dislike that some of the senior members openly exhibited towards Whitlam. Whitlam found it difficult at times maintaining a working relationship with these people. She explains her attitude towards ex-students: 'Parents and Friends can take over, but I'd rather have parents and friends take over than old girls - the ex-students are run by people who peaked at school, and they can be very troublesome,

whereas when the parents run it they don't stay forever.' (FW2) Some of these ex-students had well established networks in the city and in country regions through which their opinions about the principal were communicated.

Like the ex-students, there were others who claim to have been unsettled by Whitlam's fragile emotional state and her unpredictability. Teachers and parents of the period comment on how distressed she could become. (MT; JC; ET; RR) A teacher recalls how Whitlam could get very angry about something and express that anger very emotionally and people would get upset. (PN) Another teacher comments that 'there were occasions when she would be frightfully upset and I've seen her extremely distressed by comments from rather unthinking members of staff.' (AK). Perceptions and opinions were wide-ranging, often unsupported by substance, and contributing to a destabilised internal school community. For instance, a Member of Council and parent of the 1970s recalls that 'students and parents began to notice wild mood swings consistent with mid-life crisis; people at this stage thought she was as silly as a two bob watch. It was said she called some students names that I'd better not repeat, insulting names.' (JC)

For Whitlam to have had any chance of finding a path through the dynamics of 1975 and 1976, she would have needed the respect and loyal support of her deputy principal and Council Chairman. However, each of these people had their own career agendas and their own alliances within the school. They were ambitious people. The deputy was a competent, highly regarded educator, interested in furthering her career to a headship, whilst the Chairman was pursuing his interests in the bureaucracy of the church and

within the Liberal Party. Their positions were compromised and they failed to give the complete backing that their principal required.

The deputy was a powerful person with leadership experience in schools. She was an ex-student of the school. She replaced a person with whom Whitlam had quite a sound working relationship. (FW1) On appointment as deputy, Hancock already knew members of the Council, and senior members from amongst the ex-students and parents' groups. She accepted a position at Council meetings, which was highly unusual in schools of this tradition and very insulting to Whitlam. Whitlam was hurt and angry at this. (JH) It had not previously arisen at PLC. It also sent a clear message that did not go unnoticed to the broad school community; 'Judith Hancock was put on the School Council, I'm quite sure to make sure the stories or the reports that were being presented were true. They wanted to be able to say to Freda, that that's not right.' (JS) Hancock confirms this reason for her appointment stating that the Council did not trust Whitlam and that Council told her this (JH). This was a very public vote of no confidence in the principal's ability to provide accurate, honest and wise advice to the School Council. It gave structure to the attitudes that appear to have saturated the School Council for many years.

Hancock did not decline the Council position nor at a later point try to relinquish it. Although she asserts that at no stage did she seek to undermine Whitlam, she was well aware of the way Whitlam and others viewed her appointment to the school. Hancock recalls frequent conversations with Whitlam where her loyalty as deputy was questioned. Hancock states that

Whitlam was obsessed with Hancock's threat to her position as principal. 'And I think there was some justification in that, but I always used to say to her that I wouldn't do that to her; I didn't go there to be head of the school. I went there to be deputy and to learn from her. We used to have long discussions about the threats that I posed, or she perceived I posed to her. She was paranoid. She was obsessed with it.' (JH) Appointed by the Council and then sitting at the Council table, Hancock was in a position of considerable power in the school and she was conscious of this. (JH) Staff members were aware of the personal differences between principal and deputy. They recall the lack of teamwork and the differences of opinion. (PN; AK)

There was some staff gossip about Hancock's loyalty. This went so far as to link her to a possible plot with Chairman of Council, Graham targeting Whitlam's removal from the headship. (AK) This perception appears to be due more to the fact that Hancock was trying to find for herself a principal's position than to any overt attempt to unseat Whitlam. Some explanation for this gossip is to be found in the low opinion that members of staff had for Peter Graham. They describe him critically as 'a very weak person whose ego far surpassed his intellect' (AK); and as someone for whom they had very little respect. (PN) In this matter Whitlam and Hancock are as one, each condemning Graham. One staff member cites incidents in public gatherings where Graham was inadequate for the demands of the occasion and where there was a stark contrast with the dignity and experience of his predecessor, F.L. Thompson. (AK) He was strongly criticised for the October, 1976 actions towards Whitlam and for his failure to accept responsibility for the impulsive

mishandling, and ungracious manner in which Whitlam's services were then terminated. Although his status with some must have been improved by these actions, with many on the staff, he could never recover.

#### **'THE BEST AND THE WORST OF TIMES'**

Clearly, the focus of attention in this study is not on Whitlam's positive contributions to this school. It may well be argued that these contributions are not relevant to an analysis of the Whitlam dismissal. However, it could also be argued that whenever an authority or an individual contemplates action to remove a senior member of staff, not only will there be consideration of forces creating instability and disturbance to the institution, there will also be consideration of the contribution of that individual and what will be lost with that person's departure. In a sense there is a weighing up of the positives and negatives, sometimes subconsciously, at other times consciously and quite deliberately. In an examination of the micropolitical forces, key players will have ranged from those supportive of Whitlam, valuing her positive contributions, to passionate opposition, ignoring or not recognising her positive impact on the school, and only seeing what they consider to be the harmful and destructive aspects of her leadership. In this study almost without exception interviewees from the school acknowledge strengths and positives about Whitlam's period of leadership.

Briefly then, what are the central positive features that people recall about this period? The most commonly mentioned quality is the notion of service and servant leadership. For Whitlam, this has its origins in her Christian family

upbringing, is evidenced in the professional and community involvements of members of her family, in particular her father and brother, and is persistent in the astonishing social contributions that followed her nineteen years at PLC. (Postscript)

Sergiovanni (1991) cites the Gospel of Matthew 20:25:28 as the Biblical basis for this motivation: 'But Jesus called them to him and said, You know that among the pagans the rulers lord it over them, and their great men make their authority felt. This is not to happen among you. No; anyone who wants to be great among you must be your servant, and anyone who wants to be the first among you must be your slave, just as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many'.

Whitlam saw herself as ministering to the needs of the girls and the staff at PLC Croydon. She modelled this in her personal devotion to the school and in her faith practice. She translated it into school programs, activities and management practices. The core of Whitlam's vocation was to be a servant of her God. In its various forms, this was the most significant contribution that Whitlam made to this school. This was a calling to serve and it was her duty to give fully of herself, to persevere and to provide some longevity and stability to her period of service. (FW1).

The school had no chaplain on staff. The principal was expected to provide Christian leadership and this Whitlam demonstrated in morning assemblies, teaching scripture classes, leading prayer and bible study groups, attendance at services in local parishes, and in an inclusive attitude towards Church

activities hosted by the school. The servant leader ministering to a school community is one who is devoted to a cause, mission, or set of ideas and accepts the duty and obligation to serve this cause. As one staff member stated, '...she was a deeply religious person. I believe she was very kind, very charitable, and she always had a little message regarding the history of the school, linking it with the Bible readings and the hymns and she always emphasized charity, kindness to people who were less privileged ... It was all Christianity and the welfare of people less fortunate than ourselves'. (RW).

The assemblies were a time for reinforcing the aims and goals of the school, the traditions and history of the school, the broad qualities of culture and aspects of personal development that Whitlam wanted to emphasise. Symbolic forces are concerned with the management of sentiments, expectations, commitment and faith. This was fundamental to the practice of Whitlam's daily assembly. (Sergiovanni, 1991).

As a servant to her school, Whitlam encouraged a concept of service and selflessness in others; activities, such as the annual pet show - a fund raising activity for the Guide Dogs for the Blind, was one initiative, as was the practice of class supported charities; fundraising appeals for overseas aid organisations; students' involvement with Eureka House, a local institution for intellectually and physically disabled people; and the attempts at providing a PLC education for indigenous Australians.

Whitlam's somewhat idiosyncratic approach to staff employment reflects her emphasis on church membership, personal example and character

recommendations, rather than paper qualification and skills in teaching an academic discipline. It was unusual to have a PLC vacancy advertised in the general press (MF). Teacher shortage characterised most of the 1958-76 period and schools, such as PLC that generally paid less than what was paid in the government sector, had to take who they could find (AK). Whitlam was known to employ teachers who were unqualified (RW) or those with esoteric qualities (AK).

Whitlam sought to employ women who would stay, who would devote themselves to the children in their care, who would reflect the commitment to the school that she had made. She had a vision of a shared covenant where symbolic and cultural leadership were key leadership forces and staff members joined their principal in ministering to the needs of organisational members, central concepts in a servant leadership view of management. (Sergiovanni 1991, Murphy 1995).

There was a naive, spontaneous, almost childlike quality to Whitlam's character that, in practice, attracted to her, extremes of praise and criticism. She could be unpredictable - angry or compassionate; reckless or graceful with her use of language; tearful or resilient in moments of private and public tension or confrontation. When it came to new experiences and expanding her knowledge, she could be infectiously excited, joyful in a way that we more commonly associate with a child's opening of a Christmas-wrapped gift. Unlike the child, she rushed to share the experience with all about her.

Whitlam was an academic who loved learning. She placed herself at the centre of the instructional process in this school. She expressed an independent, democratic role for classroom teachers, somewhat confused with a directive autocratic approach in some matters, especially those involved with moral leadership.

Instructional leadership focuses on the promotion of growth in student learning (DeBevoise, 1984). Whitlam's School Council limited her to a broad instructional role by denying her a role in financial matters and in property control and planning. (FW1). The leadership that she exerted at PLC placed the advancement of learning as the prime object. (Duke 1987) In many respects she epitomised the British tradition of leadership commonly referred to as the 'Headmaster tradition', (Grace, 1985) where school leadership is expressed in terms of 'moral leadership' and principals are responsible for providing instructional arrangements and processes for amplifying moral and cultural codes, appropriate for the class destinations of the school's students. Whitlam held 'learning' to be more than the subject-based acquisition of a body of knowledge. She was preparing girls for a life of learning and for a life of service to the community.

Learning and teaching should be carried out, '... with the ideals of wisdom and reverence and service ... with cooperation and thoughtfulness, as well as true discipline and true freedom'. (Aurora Australis, 1959, p 16). She was building character and mind. Learning for Freda Whitlam went to the needs of spirit and intellect. She sought to influence the staff and the girls in their

enjoyment of the unexpected and the new, and to embrace a spiritual dimension in their lives.

In some respects, Whitlam was ahead of her times. She encouraged an understanding of what it meant to be part of a multicultural society at a time when Australia's national approach to international relations and immigration was experiencing the beginnings of immense change. She opened the school to learning about other cultures, especially those of Australia's northern Asian neighbours.

Freda Whitlam was concerned about the position of Australia's indigenous people and, with the experience and knowledge of the times, she tried to help relations with Aboriginal people by taking young Aboriginal girls into the school on the national scholarships available in the 1970s, provided by the Labor government.

Inevitably, her educative leadership was directed at broadening the school's compassion and thoughtfulness towards those less fortunate - '... she certainly did talk to the girls a lot about the inequities of life, of how it was wrong to have those who have too much and those who have nothing and she always called upon her experiences in India - it permeated the whole ethos of the place'. (JH).

Freda Whitlam communicated to others the love of learning that she knew herself. Nourished by a bookish learned family home; an early life in an international academic community, and an inquisitive, excitable intellect, she

encouraged learning for mind and character, a lifelong learning where school was one step along the way.

Whitlam had a strong educational focus on language in all its forms. Her mastery of language - oral and written - is evidenced in her Reports and in her addresses on public occasions. She has an academic background strong in the study of Modern languages and Latin. Her teaching was in these fields, in English and in Scripture. She had the ability to hold an audience with her oratorical skills; to argue an issue without notes; to use a public address to convey a message with conviction and reason.

Language was a powerful device that she could use to further the goals of the school, and that she could also use as a weapon for the expression of her rage or her displeasure. Teachers have commented on her inconsistent and unpredictable use of humour. Whitlam has an open round face that can break into vigorous, jolly laughter. (RR) She can be spontaneous in her response to a good tale. She can also be ill-advised in her use of humour as was noted by this teacher: 'She had a very sharp wit. She didn't always identify when it was being used'. (PN) Another member of staff made a similar observation: 'There is a Whitlam-esque quality to her humour that could be quite biting. She could be the twin of Gough...' (JH)

Public speaking lessons were compulsory for every secondary school girl. Used constructively, language is a crucial tool in academic success; it expresses culture, and without a maturely developed language, people lack the tools to express their emotions and their views. Whitlam acknowledged

this and early in her term, set about strengthening the range of language skills of the girls. Elocution, drama and Writers' Club were early initiatives, (AK) followed by debating, and the study of Asian languages in the mid 1960s. It was unusual to find a school teaching Indonesian and Japanese, with a native speaker as teacher in each language, at this time. (JH)

Through the thoughtful and creative approach to language usage in its many forms, Whitlam sought to directly and indirectly influence the character and the intellect of the girls in the school. Her considerable personal abilities with language worked to advance her goals and those of the school. Paradoxically, at times she could be both skilful and ill-considered, some would say hurtful, in her use of language and this served to unsettle people and draw to her criticism and dislike. However, she set an example to her staff and the girls of the power of language, of its multi-functional uses and of the care that should be taken with both the oral and written word.

## SUMMARY

When Graham acted in October, 1976, he set in motion events that closed an astonishing chapter in the life of this school. It raises the inevitable question as to whether any other individual could have drawn to herself such passionate and such polarised opinions and alliances. Almost every senior person in this school had doubts about Whitlam's abilities to lead the school in the 1970s and beyond. Yet each one could see strengths, and positive developments in the life of the school during her term.

Clearly, qualities of Whitlam's character and personality contributed to her demise. Her two Chairmen of Council also failed to provide the support and encouragement that were essential if she was to work her way out of the tangle of difficulties. Each actively contributed to her problems.

Graham in the end brought on the critical incident that seemed premature and mismanaged to some within the school, especially within the staffroom, and yet well overdue to others in the school community. A somewhat cynical observation was made by one member of staff in an attempt at summarising the outcome: "In 1975, Fraser got his Whitlam; in 1976, Graham got his." It was the view of some at the time that Graham would be pleased with this interpretation of History. (PN)

## CHAPTER SIX

### CONCLUSION

#### INTRODUCTION

This study began with the aim of examining the micropolitical forces that acted within and from without PLC Croydon (Sydney), to cause the critical incident, the dismissal of a long serving principal, Freda Whitlam.

In the achievement of this aim, the study sought to address a number of research questions. Significant amongst these was the early concern of what actually comprised the circumstances and events of the critical incident and who were the main players. Questions emerging with the findings included:

- to what extent did Whitlam's character, gender, and leadership style contribute to the critical incident, and to what extent did the achievements of her years at the school consolidate her hold on the leadership and prolong her period of service?
- what were the main micropolitical forces, and how did they interact to influence the issues and the outcome?
- to what extent did the micropolitics operating in the school community contribute to Whitlam's sudden departure?

This critical incident case study was examined using a combination of qualitative research methods. Semi structured, largely open-ended interviews formed the main data gathering technique and at times became

conversational in style. The interviewees were drawn from the school community of the later years of Whitlam's headship which spanned the period 1958 - 1976. Supplementing the impressions formed from these interviews were data gathered from documents searched from archives, personal files and libraries. Qualitative techniques were used to analyse the interview and documentary data.

### **THE CRITICAL INCIDENT**

The research findings indicated that the later months of 1976 were traumatic for members of this school community. What was also shown was that the events and issues of this critical period, had their genesis in the early days of Whitlam's headship. The findings reveal discontent with Whitlam within the school, back as far as her first Report to College Council. At this time, and in the years that immediately followed, Whitlam's relationship with her Council was affected by her direct, at times confrontational use of language and her failed attempts at establishing clear lines of authority between herself, her bursar and her Council. Her Reports to Council, the correspondence between Chairman and principal, and her interview comments, support this observation. Relationships were established in the early stages that were not helpful in the solution of difficulties that developed in the school with the passage of time.

The data further revealed that the critical incident, the forced removal of Whitlam, was influenced by a combination of internal dynamics, and extraordinary external circumstances. The findings lend strong support to the

conclusions drawn by Ball (1987), who found that the crucial element in micropolitics leading to critical incidents is the failure of the head to contain internal conflicts and to effectively manage the school's relationships with external audiences. At PLC, Whitlam was at the centre of this critical incident and was in no position to guide the school successfully through it. Much of the responsibility for this was with the Council, however an adversarial culture existed between many on the Council and the principal. Members of Council had formed alliances with others in the school community who were openly campaigning against the principal. The strength and unity of purpose, and cohesion amongst interest groups, required to confront threats to the stability of the school (Ball 1987), were rarely a feature of this school. The trust required of cohesive and positive relationships, and to which reference is frequently made in research (Blackmore 1994; Short and Greer 1997; Bauer 1993), had been exhausted in this school. In the mid 1970s, when the external threats were at their greatest, Whitlam, alone and personally exposed and vulnerable to these threats, eventually became their victim.

The critical incident of 1976 was spread over a period of months and its chronology is revealed, for the first time, in the analysis of the data from this study. The incident was initiated by Chairman of Council, Graham, in October of that year and was concluded by Whitlam in late November. It included a series of Council meetings, some with, and some without the senior staff, legal advice for both parties to the incident, the involvement of the denominational church Trustees, written and verbal communications with groups within the school, tension and emotional responses. Graham was new to the role of Council Chairman. He was young and inexperienced in the role,

and was a keen continuing Presbyterian and an active member of the Liberal Party. His motivations were the source of some suspicion within the school community . He was seen by many to be inadequate in the circumstances , an observation borne out by his mismanagement of the events of these months.

When Graham acted in October to seek Whitlam's resignation, he did so without Constitutional authority and without any of the customary courtesies that some have argued were owed to a principal of nineteen years service. He contextualized his action in terms of the desperate measures required to solve a desperate situation. He expressed the opinion that the enrolments and the finances of the school were so depressed as to put the survival of the school at risk. His actions implied that Whitlam was responsible for this position. In acting as he did, he also confirmed the impressions that some had of him. He hardened attitudes, and exposed the factional passions that had been implicit in relationships within the school.

Having acted inappropriately, Graham and the Council were forced to revisit the matter and under the direction of the Church Trustees, Whitlam was reinstated. With no respect for the Council, and in spite of her earlier intention to retire in 1978, Whitlam resigned in late November of 1976. The frequency and substance of Council meetings of this period, the uncertainties arising from the Council's public statements, the factional activity amongst parents and ex-students, the emotions of Whitlam and her staff, and the intimacy of the school community, combined to severely destabilize the school during these concluding months.

Although some minor uncertainties in the chronology remain, from the data, an order of events and the respective roles of key players is revealed. The motivations of these people and the influence on them of the various internal and external issues will be the subject of the next section.

## **MICROPOLITICAL FORCES**

### **LEADERSHIP, CHARACTER, AND GENDER**

Although researchers such as Blase and Anderson (1995), and Donovan (1992), have questioned the value of traditional normative models, it seems that there is the need for both the traditional theories and the political models, when seeking to understand the internal workings of schools. Possibly the strongest conclusion to emerge from the analysis of the data is that leaders of institutions should be aware of, and understand the features of, the micropolitical model. For the practitioner it is essential that there is a strong grounding in the day to day realities of how institutions function.

This study exposes the influence that micropolitics can exert on a school, when the leaders fail to understand, and/or fail to control, the internal and external dynamics of the school community.

Throughout the literature, the leadership of the principal is emphasized as crucial to the stability and success of the school. (Caldwell, 1992; Coleman, 1994; Beare et al, 1993; Rutter, 1979) This is especially evident in the self managing schools examined in the research. This is the case with either the

normative or the political models, although the political model acknowledges the compromising role of external pressures on the principal's capacity to perform the role. (Ball, 1987) The study confirms the findings of researchers, such as Duke (1986), and Kefford (1987), who conclude that there are no certainties and no guarantees in leadership, and that it is increasingly clear that effective leaders are not necessarily effective in all conditions. As Miskel (1977) concludes, much depends on the situational effects of various community, political and organizational variables. A knowledge and understanding of traditional management theories may be helpful to the school leader, but an understanding of the particular school context and the operational variables at work is essential.

Whitlam was principal at PLC for nineteen years and throughout these years she experienced difficulties with members of the School Council. She had a complex relationship with Chairman of Council, FL Thompson. Whitlam considered aspects of his role in the school to be inappropriate and to demonstrate a poor understanding of the role of Chairman. In the 1960s and 1970s he was an elderly man and spent a great amount of his time around the school talking to parents, staff members and students. This unsettled Whitlam. She felt that her headship was constantly under threat and this became a matter of deep personal concern. This feeling increased when the new deputy, Hancock, a Council appointment, was also required to attend Council meetings and was used there as a check on Whitlam's advice to Council.

Early in her years at the school, Whitlam tried to establish clear boundaries in this key relationship with the School Council. She was unsuccessful, due to a combination of her tactless and direct methods, and more importantly, Council's determination to control financial matters, and their general lack of interest in achieving any substantial change in policy for the school. Whitlam was chosen with an expectation that she would lead in the moral and pedagogical spheres, and anything beyond this was quickly terminated. The Council expected the principal to lead in the 'Headmaster tradition' of British schools (Grace 1995). Her considerable achievements during her headship reflect these emphases. Whole institutional leadership resided with the School Council and it was in the School Council, in particular the Chairman, that the power lay.

There was a patronizing, controlling quality to the Council's relationship with Whitlam. To the extent that this was gender driven is difficult to determine. However, there is evidence to indicate that this school was saturated with male values along the lines outlined by Burton (1991), and Pringle and Henry (1993). The Council's concern to exclude Whitlam from the financial, whole-school planning aspects of school management was not uncommon in schools operating in this tradition, although the literature indicates that it was more a feature common to women in leadership than it was to men. (Hall 1993)

Early in her headship Whitlam was dominated by FL Thompson . Possibly because she was young and inexperienced, and it was customary for the times, Whitlam seemed to acquiesce to the pressure. However, it appears

that she wanted more than the servant leader role that she had assumed and to which she was restricted. Whitlam sought clarification and breadth in her role, but this was denied her. By the time Graham took over as Chairman, and some opportunities were opened to her, it was too late, and attitudes and perceptions had hardened towards her.

Attributes for which Whitlam was both praised and frequently criticised, are those commonly referred to as 'feminine' (Gray 1993): qualities, such as caring, non competitive, aware of individual differences, subjective and informal. Her critics claim she was lacking in those 'desirable' attributes of the stereotypical 'male': such as highly regulated, objective, competitive, disciplined and formal. Council members and other senior members of the school community, go so far as to relate physical and emotional changes in Whitlam during the 1970s to gender status. They tell of personal changes in Whitlam applying terminology stereotypically associated with women who are menopausal. They refer to Whitlam as overly emotional, too easily upset, unbalanced, flushed, unable to cope, passing through change of life, prone to put on excess weight in response to stress, and so on. There is considerable evidence of an entrenched male culture that comes through these comments that were made as often by the women as by the men.

Whitlam needed strong allies in the school, preferably at Council level and ideally in the person of the Chairman. However, in the main she was alone, at times lonely. She did not seek out friendship with members of staff and was wary of friendship amongst the parents. Her family was remote from the school and her brother's political position meant that she needed to keep

him at some distance from the school. Although respected by many, she was rarely seen as friendly or warm. There is a shyness about her that could easily be confused as arrogance or aloofness. Within the school, she could be both admired and feared. Researchers, such as Kets de Vries and Miller (1984), Kitson (1986), Neumann and Finaly- Neumann (1994), and Kefford (1987), have found that the personal characteristics of a school leader are closely related to organizational growth and decline, and to an organization's ability to manage change or turmoil. Qualities of character have been frequently suggested as factors in Whitlam's deteriorating leadership position. There seems little doubt that this was the case.

However, the study also lends support to the conclusions of researchers such as Kefford (1987), and Donovan (1992), who state that even if all the personal attributes required of effective leadership are present in the leader, the ambiguous nature of the role can unavoidably create dilemmas. At PLC, the situation in the 1960s, and especially the 1970s was unusual, and without friends and with very few allies, it was a lonely and stressful position for the principal.

## TENSIONS AND CONFLICT

Throughout her years, Whitlam rarely had a supportive, positive relationship with members of the school's Ex-students Union. She believed the Ex-students Union to be interested only in the ex-students and not in the future welfare of the school. She saw them as a restricting influence on the school, seeking to keep the school as they remembered it. When some of its

influential senior members were also parents of girls in the school, and trying to exert an influence on the direction of the school, this relationship deteriorated significantly.

At this stage, during the late 1960s and early 1970s, these ex-students had formed alliances with members of Council, including the young ambitious Peter Graham, soon to be Chairman. Whitlam discouraged the involvement of ex-students. It was not surprising that she should have felt threatened by the Council's appointment of deputy principal, Hancock, also an ex-student, with established relationships amongst these influential ex-students. Whitlam displayed this attitude towards ex-students quite publicly at meetings and reunion activities, so that considerable hostility developed towards her.

Whenever Whitlam attempted to change established practice, such as the approach to student leadership, ex-students and ex-student/parents would protest to Council members, create opposition groups, and generally undermine her efforts. Goals and values for the school were contested by micropolitical activity during this period. (Blase 1991) Conflictual forms of interaction were commonplace and this destabilized Whitlam's leadership, and created disharmony within the school.

Whitlam's attitude towards ex-students was well known within the school, as were her views on daughters of doctors who reside in Strathfield. She did not refrain from expressing her point of view when the opportunity arose. Her peculiar attitude towards these families, confirmed by her, became

synonymous with her inequitable treatment of girls in the school. Those who disliked her, spoke of this in developing a critical argument about her unfairness towards the girls. They argued that she showed disproportionately positive treatment towards the weaker academic students, aborigines and those with emotional problems, and insufficient attention, even negativity, towards the able academic students and girls from more financially secure families. Those who supported her appreciated her emphasis on social equity and the stimulation of a lifelong love of learning in all girls irrespective of their intellectual abilities.

Researchers position the principal as the source, facilitator and conduit for formal and informal communication within and without the school. (Dinham et al 1995) It is to the principal that the role of communicating her philosophy falls. For Whitlam, who held selfishness and greed to be the greatest failings, the lack of subtlety and tact in her personal use of language, was instrumental in serving to undermine this very essence of her educational philosophy. Whitlam failed to adequately explain herself to the school community. Why she held certain attitudes and why she emphasized particular approaches and qualities, was difficult for many to understand and appeared to be inconsistent and disadvantageous to their own daughters. When seen knitting on stage at a parents' meeting, this was interpreted as Whitlam out of touch with the important issues being discussed, rather than what it was: Whitlam completing for one of the boarders, a knitted garment for the child's class charity exercise. She allowed her actions and statements to be interpreted by others, many with disruptive agendas. What some would consider her greatest strengths, it was possible for others to interpret as her greatest

weaknesses. There was enormous polarizing of attitudes within the school community during this period.

Whitlam did not see that it was necessary to share this level of explanation and inclusion with all members of the school community. It was a feature of her general inability to compromise and to unite groups. However, the 1960s was a period of immense change in community expectations in this regard. There was a revolution underway in community expectations of authority, disclosure, and 'people power'. Explanation and a sense of inclusion were expectations of any initiative during these momentous years in Australian history. Developments in mass communication, street protest and political relationships were forcing institutions to be more democratic and transparent in their practices.

Schools and universities were at the cutting edge of these changes. Whitlam was in sympathy with the developments and sought to implement some democratic practices within the school, especially in relation to student leadership, preparation of students' reports, and service activities. However, teachers saw inconsistencies and contradictions in her democratizing efforts. They recall Whitlam at the centre of these attempts, seeking a breadth of opinion, but always trying to control the process and the outcome.

PLC was a conservative school community and much of the drive for change from outside the school was not endorsed by those responsible for policy and direction within the school. People were anxious that the traditional features of the school, that they had valued either as students themselves or valued in

choosing the school for their daughter, would be lost in the wave of protest and unrest sweeping through organizational life. They confronted Whitlam whenever the smallest changes were attempted and they looked for reasons, such as her personal appearance at assembly or at public functions, in order to find criticism.

#### THE INFLUENCE OF NATIONAL POLITICS

Whitlam, the school leader, was too easily linked with Whitlam, the national leader. Those who disliked Freda Whitlam or were unsettled by her, saw qualities similar to those of her brother, by the 1960s a prominent Labor Party politician and soon to be Prime Minister and leader of Australia's most radically progressive, and most chaotic, twentieth century government.

The Whitlam government, in power during the early 1970s, introduced sweeping changes to social and community life, threatening funding arrangements for the more established independent schools such as PLC, dramatically altering existing priorities and emphases in almost every sphere of domestic and foreign policy, and unleashing a reaction from conservative power bases that was overt, extreme and quite exceptional in Australian political history.

Gough Whitlam was at national centre stage throughout the late 1960s and the 1970s and many of his government's policies were seen by members of the PLC school community to undermine all that they represented. There was an intense dislike for him and for his government throughout the school,

observed by teachers in the classroom and the staff room; at functions of parents and ex-students; and at meetings of School Council. Freda Whitlam's emotional reaction to comments critical of her brother, and to events and incidents in Canberra, was on occasions obvious and upsetting to colleagues and others in the school community. Freda Whitlam could not escape the powerful influence of the national political developments.

The vulnerability of schools to the influence of external forces has been a subject studied by researchers. (Callahan 1962; Chubb and Moe 1986; Blase 1988; Grace 1995) The uniform finding is that schools do not stand separate from their external environment and are sensitive and vulnerable to its influence. Ball (1987) emphasizes the contradictions and ambiguities that can characterize this relationship, and how destructive it can be to the school's goals and vision. This was certainly the situation at PLC during this period. Freda Whitlam attempted to separate herself from the national political scene, but was unsuccessful in doing so.

From the occasion of her first meeting with FL Thompson she made it known that she had a brother who was a significant political figure, and that she was to be considered as a separate and discrete individual. In the early years of her headship this appears to have been the general response. However, by the elections of 1972, this was no longer the case. Ball's research of critical incidents in schools, highlights the interaction between micropolitics and major political movements in initiating critical incidents. (1987) This is supported here, where the external political community was to be an active

influence on the internal dynamics of this school and on the future direction of Freda Whitlam's leadership.

By 1976, the two new and youngest members of the school Council, one of whom was Chairman, were both members of the Liberal Party and were instrumental in initiating the critical incident. To what extent they were swept along by the wave of protest and indignation, possibly revenge, felt broadly towards everything 'Whitlam', is impossible to determine. It is fair to say that decisions were made hastily, without consultation, and in a culture of conflict, disharmony and anger, where national political tensions were active within the school community and some school leaders had adopted entrenched anti-Labor positions. The new Chairman had public political ambitions that have been linked by some to his impulsive action of October, 1976. Blackmore (1994) stresses the importance of high levels of trust and openness, as well as a capacity to make sound moral, ethical and emotional judgements, during times of crisis management. For members of the PLC School Council and the principal, these qualities were no longer evident and the mismanagement of the events of October/November reflect this.

#### THE INFLUENCE OF CHURCH POLITICS

The situation was further complicated by the break-up of the Presbyterian Church and the impending formation of the Uniting Church. This divisive external influence exaggerated the polarity of Council members' positions and seemed to harden attitudes towards Whitlam. The principal, along with a small minority of Council members, was joining the new Uniting Church.

Deputy Hancock had aligned herself with the continuing Presbyterians, the Chairman of Council, and the majority of Council members, thus further isolating Whitlam.

Whereas the Uniting Church issue appears to have been of very little concern to the broad school community, its impact within the Council was considerable. Issues surrounding the financial stability of the school and declining enrolments were already dominating Council discussions during the 1960s and 1970s. The division of church property as Church union approached created further tensions and bitter infighting, with anger directed at those aligned with the threat posed to the Presbyterian Church. At both the national and state levels, contrasting theological positions sought to maximize financial and property interests. The future survival of the school was the subject of some discussion at meetings of School Council through the 1960s and 1970s. Whitlam was the head of the school, and yet it was her emerging church that was seen by some to be destabilizing the school, and at a time when declining enrolments were already causing severe financial pressures.

At the end, Peter Graham used the enrolments position and the apparent financial situation of the school to bring about the critical incident. Although there was a substantial, consistent and worrying decline in enrolments, it was not seen by the Church Trustees as threatening to the continuance of the school. The condition of the country schools was of considerably greater concern to them. Internally, PLC, under the cautious eye of FL Thompson, had closely monitored and adjusted its income and expenditure over the

years, such that in the face of declining enrolments, the general financial position of the school had not substantially deteriorated.

The issue that was at the heart of the critical incident was that those with the power at PLC no longer wanted Freda Whitlam as the school's principal. Those with the power placed a lower value on her ability to contribute positively, than they did on their urgency to remove her. For many years there were individuals and interest groups that considered her as inappropriate as head of the school. The Council had openly demonstrated its lack of faith in her advice and leadership on numerous occasions. Divisive and disruptive external issues were allowed to intrude on the school.

The micropolitics went largely unchecked by the School Council and were encouraged and manipulated by some senior members of the school community. Qualities of character were exploited by those determined to undermine her. Whitlam was unable to exert the control required in the extraordinary circumstances that impacted on the school during the early 1970s. Freda Whitlam was powerless to contain these influences and soon became a participant, eventually a victim.

#### SIGNIFICANCE OF THE RESEARCH

It is unusual for a study of such potential sensitivity with a living main actor, to have the open access to participants and archival material that was afforded this researcher. This privileged position is rare and the trust and confidence required to achieve it, possibly helps explain why so little

research interest has been shown in critical incidents of the type examined here. The dismissal of school principals is not a well researched field and yet there is much to be gained through such study.

The analysis of critical incidents assists in drawing out their causes. From this analysis, measures can be suggested that may well be successful in reducing their occurrence. For instance in this study the importance of a supportive and trusting relationship between School Council and principal emerges as a central feature of a stable and successful self managing school, a finding that supports existing research. Such a relationship was not a quality of this school.

The relationship between these two school entities has surprisingly received only recent research interest, and yet it is integral to the 'new school'.

Schools where the principal and the School Council assume contrasting visions, styles or understandings of policy, risk the intrusion of divisive external influences, the undermining of relationships and the destabilizing of the school community. It would seem that role clarity and common understanding of approach and direction are essential qualities of the shared leadership of the self managing school. Critical incidents of the type studied here can result where these features are vague or deliberately violated. Further research in this area would be helpful in clarifying these matters.

The focus on a critical incident encourages the emergence of a complex web of events and relationships. By necessity this takes the form of a case study and

the findings are essentially restricted to this critical incident, the subject of the case study. The literature is devoid of critical incident studies of this type, and could well benefit from an increased attention to this approach.

The political model is helpful here in understanding the critical incident. Clearly, the incident had no one cause. The Chairman's action in pursuing the removal of the principal was explained by him in terms of declining enrolments and financial pressures. Freda Whitlam considered the politics of her brother and the weakness of the School Council to be responsible. Each was a convenient explanation, but the background was considerably more complex than this. The political model assists the researcher in interpreting these complex internal and external factors that combined to destabilise Whitlam. Issues of power, trust and leadership are central to this model, and are studied here in response to the research questions posed. Amongst the many implications to emerge from this study, is a revealing insight into the lengths that individuals and groups will go when they feel threatened by a leader in whom they have lost respect and trust. Issues of institutional leadership benefit from an understanding of this model. In this study some attention is given to both normative studies and political studies, in an attempt at establishing as broad an understanding of the critical incident as possible. Further studies would assist in forming more generalized conclusions about the actions of individuals and groups manipulating power in an attempt to remove a leader.

This case study allows conclusions appropriate for this critical incident. The study does confirm many of the conclusions of the micropolitics literature, in

particular those relating to the potentially destructive influence on schools of uncontrolled external forces. It also highlights the advantages to further research of inclusion of a political focus in studies of institutional behaviour, management style and institutional leadership.

The study affirms the fragility of leadership. It serves to reassert the importance of mutual respect and trust in a leader's ability to maintain a position of power. In the self-managing school, this trusting relationship between the School Council and the principal, is crucial to leadership stability. A leader's position is secure for as long as the trust and respect of community members are preserved. The micropolitics of an institution constantly influence behaviour, responses and policy. The influence can either contribute to the aims and direction of the institution, or it can have a negative impact. Where leadership is fragile, micropolitical activity can become a disruptive, destabilizing influence on the school and on the leader's capacity to effectively function. In this school, the micropolitics played a critical role in the circumstances and events leading to the principal's removal.

## POSTSCRIPT

### A LIFE LIVED TO THE FULL

'O God, lead us as we try to make the most of our opportunities and show us how to use our talents as You would have them used.'

(from a handwritten anthology of Freda Whitlam's school prayers)

From PLC, Freda Whitlam moved to Penrith, an outer western suburb of Sydney fast developing as a vigorous Central Business District serving a vast dormitory region of young families and needing rapid infrastructure expansion. In many respects Penrith of the 1970s was similar to the Canberra that Whitlam had known as a young person in the 1930s and 1940s. She could be of use here. As was the case in Canberra, the community issues and problems were those associated with regional development, growth and the provision of social services. There was a role that she could play and she quickly absorbed herself in church and community life in this region.

Things were not easy for her in the beginning. She was upset, angry and shaken by the events at PLC. Her departure from the school was earlier than she had planned and she was poorly prepared for the self management that is required with everyday independent living.

Teachers remember her transition from live-in school principal to home owner having to care for herself and her home and garden. One teacher recalls Freda Whitlam's total lack of domestic skills. 'Everything had always

been done for her at PLC. The staff was worried about how she would manage. Some staff members helped her with the move to the western suburbs. Miss Townsend from the pre-school actually moved in with her for a week to show her how to do things like cook, clean and take the garbage out.' (ET) However, it wasn't long before she was rejoicing in this, the first home that she had owned, and the new found freedom that came with non-institutional living. 'I'm discovering supermarkets, and I have a place to hang up my pictures, put my books and my piano. I have a little garden, and best of all, I can entertain my friends and family', she was quoted as saying shortly after the move from the school. (Woman's Day, March 28, 1977) She was soon looking for ways to make her self available to contribute to this young, expanding region.

The move from PLC brought on a change in direction for Whitlam. She had hung on at the school for too long and could well have moved on some years earlier. She was a person with an immense capacity for love and service. By the mid 1970s, PLC was not the most suitable environment for her. The changes and the expectations of the emerging school community were not those that Whitlam could be comfortable with, and she was not a person who could sit back and let things change about her. In many respects she was ready for new and different challenges. PLC was remaining Presbyterian and Freda Whitlam was expressing an active interest in the emergence of the new Uniting Church. She had joined the Uniting Church Board of Social Responsibility in 1974 whilst still at PLC, and continued in this role until 1987. She was increasingly frustrated by what she saw as the privilege and self-indulgence in some of the PLC families. The new community emphasis on

'rights' and 'self' presented a stark contrast with Whitlam's principles of 'responsibilities' and 'selfless service'. She had lost respect for the School Council, and found little satisfaction in her efforts on its behalf. She became increasingly aware of how alone she was.

During Whitlam's later years at PLC she was invited to join the first Board of the Westmead College of Advanced Education. The College began in the western suburbs to serve the growing tertiary education needs of the region. Whitlam was a Board member from the Board's inception in 1974, through the conversion from College to University status, retiring in 1985 because of the demands of competing commitments. She continued to participate in the University's activities as a member of the University's Nepean Community Consultative committee from its commencement in the late 1980s until the Committee's termination in 1996. In 1997, she helped her brother open the Mechatronics Section of the Engineering Faculty and she opened the Post-Graduate Building on the new Parramatta campus in 1998. In 1993, a university building was named in her honour. She spoke at a student graduation ceremony in 1995, and in late 1999, now in her mid 70s, Whitlam received an Hon.D.Litt. from this University for her remarkable contribution to the University's development.

Freda Whitlam was a member of the New South Wales Higher Education Board after leaving PLC, serving on that Board from 1978 until 1985. During this period she chaired the sub-committee which assessed the Theology Degree of the Seventh Day Adventists and was the first non Seventh Day Adventist and woman to preach at one of their graduation ceremonies.

Although she maintained her membership of the Australian College of Education, she had been upset by what she saw as the Liberal Party orientation of the College in the 1970s and the insults directed at her. She withdrew from active membership at that time, having been a member of the New South Wales State Council for some years during the 1960s and an occasional speaker at meetings and conferences.

One of Whitlam's emotionally charged public statements on leaving PLC was that she would no longer involve herself in education. This has fortunately proven not to be the outcome. Her life has been rich and full and education has been a continuous focus of her community service. One very special area of involvement for her has been the University of the Third Age (U3A), which began in France in the early 1970s and came to Sydney in 1988. In late 1989, Whitlam and a few colleagues introduced the U3A scheme of classes to retired people in the Penrith District. Whitlam was the first President, from 1990-1993, in that time playing a role in establishing the NSW Network, which she chaired. The Network now has over nine hundred members, the Western Sydney Chapter providing companionship, and maintaining an academic emphasis in its taught courses. Whitlam has taught Comparative Religion and Latin, and in 1999 is teaching Ethics to thirty elderly people in her Springwood class and to fourteen in her Penrith class. As a student at the U3A, Freda Whitlam is learning Arabic. She frequently addresses meetings and Conferences on issues related to aged care, in 1999 opening the United Nations Year of Older People, in the Western region of Sydney.

In any developing region the provision of adequate health services is central to community needs. Not surprisingly, Whitlam has sought to play an active role in this field. She was a member of the Westmead Hospital Board until the early 1980s, and since 1990 has been on the Ethics Committee of the Western Sydney Health Area. In 1984, Whitlam was a member of a six-person Committee formed by the NSW Health Department to review drug rehabilitation services throughout the state. The Committee visited all the Psychiatric Hospitals, many of the prisons, halfway houses and rehabilitation centres, as well as meeting with streetworkers, community groups, and others involved as users or carers. The Committee's work took nine months and formed part of a general reconstruction of the NSW Health Department. Also in 1984, Freda Whitlam was asked to join the first NSW AIDS Council, a controversial initiative of the State Government of the day. Whitlam says that she learned a lot from the work of this committee. She says that this helped develop in her, tolerance and understanding of others in the community.

The mid 1980s-early 1990s was an especially busy time for Whitlam. Her early involvement with the new Uniting Church had blossomed, now occupying a significant proportion of her time. She was involved as elder, lay preacher, member of Presbytery, member of a range of committees, and as sometime pianist at her local church. Whitlam served on the Board of the local church parish Retirement Village from 1977-1999, in the capacity of Chairperson from 1990-1993. She was a member of the NSW Women's Advisory Council as a representative of the Australian Council of Churches, during 1987-88. She was the Uniting Church State Moderator Elect in 1984, Moderator in 1985-86, and Past Moderator in 1986-87. She was a member of the Uniting Church

State Executive from 1983-87. From 1993-1998, Whitlam was Chair of the Inter-Church Commission on Religious Education in Schools, a committee composed of representatives drawn from the main denominations of the day. These activities involved extensive travel and widespread exposure to issues and concerns that confront people on a daily basis, and to problems that regularly challenge institutions and committees.

Whitlam sees herself as something of an ambassador for the western suburbs of Sydney, a region that can be publicly characterized more by its social and economic problems than the richness of its community life. She will make herself available as a speaker whenever she can. 'I do like organisations having to come to western Sydney for a speaker!' she says. She has spoken at Rotary and Probus functions, at Peace Rallies, at annual conferences of doctors, hospital administrators and surveyors. She has preached as far afield as the main Protestant Church in Ahmedabad, and the Methodist Church in New Delhi during one of her twelve visits to India since leaving PLC. Having joined the Australian Labor Party in 1990, Whitlam attends local Branch meetings and helps the party whenever called to do so. Whitlam's many contributions to the western suburbs of Sydney also include Board membership of the Q Theatre from 1987, chairing it from 1993-1998, and responsibilities associated with being named Penrith Woman of the Year in 1983. In 1987, Whitlam was awarded Membership of the Order of Australia (AM), one of Australia's highest public honours, in recognition of a lifetime of service to the community.

Whitlam's astonishing service to Sydney's western suburbs and the broader Australian community spans education, health, politics, church and social welfare. She has not sought public recognition nor has she sought praise. In her own living she has been humble, generous, compassionate and extraordinarily active. She has taken her opportunities, her family name with it public recognition advantage, along with her considerable abilities and talents, and shaped a unique, substantial contribution to the Australian community. She has lived out in the example of her own life the three educational qualities that were so clearly evident in her leadership at PLC: the power of written and oral communication, and a love of lifelong learning are two of these qualities that are central to her living and are reflected in so much of what she has achieved throughout her life. Most importantly though and at the core of Whitlam's lifetime contribution is her modelling of Christ, the servant leader, a model that is so beautifully developed in Matthew's Gospel:

'Anyone who wants to be great among you must be your slave,  
just as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and  
to give his life as a ransom for many'. (Matthew 20:27-28)

## APPENDICES

### APPENDIX I

Interviews were transcribed and then passed through an editing phase. A sample of an edited interview transcript is presented here.

Interview with Peter Graham (second) in his office in town on 26th February , 1999

WTM As I've gone through the various interviews, there still remains some uncertainties about the last period of time, going really through from October until the end of 1976. The uncertainties relate to what Neil and other members of Council have told me as against what Freda and various members of staff have indicated, and they relate to things like the Assembly at the school, and the technicalities when you actually came in and saw Freda and things like that. There are varying interpretations and people's memories are not clear I mean I'm sure your memory would be probably as good as if not better than any of them and you were the main player of the time. Can you tell me when you actually came to see Freda to ask her to resign, how did that actually take place?

PG I saw her in the afternoon before the Council meeting that night.

WTM The Council meeting was on a Monday?

PG Monday night, I can't remember the exact date.

WTM It was in October though.

PG Yes. It was just after we'd received advice that Mrs. Hancock had been appointed Principal of Brisbane Girls' Grammar school and I came across, to discuss with Miss Whitlam the question of whether we proceed to appoint another deputy principal and during the course of conversation I raised the issue of what her future intentions were. And we then got around after about an hour's discussion to the question of her retiring which she verbally agreed to.

WTM At that time?

PG At that time. And then I informed the Council that night.

WTM Did you go to the school Assembly?

PG The next day and that's the mistake I made, in hindsight, I was young and rash in those days. I announced to the school...

WTM Sorry Peter, I rushed you there. You went to the Council that night.

PG On the Monday night and on the Tuesday morning I went across to the school and I announced Miss Whitlam was retiring which came as a complete shock to the school. Miss Whitlam didn't attend the Assembly, Mrs. Hancock took it. I saw Miss Whitlam before I went in to the Assembly and she knew what I was going to do and she said she wouldn't attend which was understandable. But in hindsight when you look back on your actions over twenty odd years I should not have done that, I should have first of all put a few more full stops into place and then written to all the parents to tell them what was going on. And then of course hullabaloo broke out all over the place.

WTM But before we go to that Peter, Audrey Keown remembers you, again this is a long way back so people I think don't remember things clearly, but she remembers you coming to the door of her office and asking Freda if you could see her in her office.

PG That was the Monday afternoon.

WTM After an assembly.

PG No, It was on Monday afternoon. I came across to the school and I asked Mrs. Forrester if Miss Whitlam was in, and she said I think she's around in Miss Keown's office. I walked around and said when you're free could I see you. And we didn't meet in her office, we met in the front sitting room.

WTM And did she object to resigning.

PG Not at that stage.

WTM How did she deal with that?

PG Quite calmly, in fact I was expecting a broadside or a blast and she took it very calmly and I thought you know interesting and even at the Council meeting that night she was calm, collected, measured. The mistake, and there's another mistake I made in that I breached the constitution - I should have had a special meeting of Council to deal with the question of the ...

WTM Before speaking to her?

PG Yes. But Then as events went on I received a letter from Miss Whitlam's solicitor which I took to the Council. The Council agreed to in effect start again ... and from then we worked through the processes. Some weeks later Fred Best the bursar rang to say could he meet with me and he put to me that Miss Whitlam would go if

certain conditions were fulfilled. I was quite happy with that arrangement. I then received a formal letter of resignation from her.

WTM Just on that one, when Fred Best came to see you, the Minutes show that he came with a figure that she was prepared to resign subject to receiving I think it was about \$30,000 - in the discussion that followed it seems like that was not what was paid. And I understand from Neil there were other issues.

PG The Council started to quibble about the payment. Quite frankly I thought they were being niggly and petty minded. Miss Whitlam was prepared to retire if she was paid that figure - and I was quite happy, and Bert Scotford who was Chairman of the Schools Commission at the time was quite happy to pay the figure to her. In fact even if she'd asked for more I would have agreed to it because it was one way to in effect resolve what had become a very nasty situation and I didn't want her to be penalised because after all I think she was only in her late fifties at the time and as has been proven, she is a long laster. That's when the bit of nastiness crept out amongst the Council members.

WTM They didn't authorise that payment of that amount though did they.

PG I'm not too sure of the exact final amount she was paid. It could have been around \$20,000 to \$25 000.

WTM It was substantially less than what she had originally requested. Did that figure equate with what she was entitled to, do you know.

I mean things like long service leave and all these things. Was there any calculation done on those.

PG That I couldn't say because thereafter Fred Best looked after that.

WTM And another issue that came up in that Peter was she'd requested six months leave, that she would retire half way through 1977

PG Yes, yes, and the Council wouldn't agree with that, They wanted her to go at the end of the year.

WTM Yes because that's a little uncertain in the minutes as well as to how that was resolved.

PG I was quite happy, quite frankly I was quite happy to fit in with any arrangement that she wanted so that if she wanted to take six months leave and then retire at the end of the six months well and good but the council in those days was a pretty fiery bunch of people.

WTM Scotford comes in for a bit of a serve from one or two of the other Council members at the time. He was going to the Uniting church I gather. Was he editor of the Sydney Morning Herald?

PG No, Scotford was secretary of John Fairfax Limited then became Chairman of Sungrave which was a wholly owned subsidiary of Fairfax which ran the women's magazines and all this sort of thing at that time. He used to come in on his way from Lindfield in his chauffeured car and pick me up at the Assembly building and we'd have meetings in his office which is down here in Regent Street, Surry Hills, which is now a block of flats.

WTM Now he was appointed by the trustees?

PG Yes, he was the chairman of the Trustees' Schools Commission, and the Trustees asked Scotford to take passage of the thing to work it through. I must say he was a tremendous help to me and I think he was a tremendous help to Miss Whitlam in working through the issues.

WTM Sort of a middle man in a way. You need that in that situation. I've used that for various staff, it's good to have someone who comes in between. With the fuss that came after that Assembly, you'd have received letters from groups supportive and groups opposing ....

PG That's right. The school went in all directions. But by and large the majority of parents stuck with the Council because if they hadn't, well we would not have had a school. There were two views in relation to the leadership of the school from parents, staff, on the other side, ex-students. The ex-students were always difficult to deal with at the best of times, because they wanted their demands and what they wanted for the school was totally different to what the needs of the school were. The school's function was to provide an education not to debate whether we have a red gravel drive or a blue gravel drive or we prune the roses twice a year or whatever the case may be, and that 's what the ex-students were concerned about. I suppose the aesthetic appearance of the school rather than the quality of the education was their focus, and my concern was to ensure that the girls who came to the school received the best education possible with the limited funds we had at the time. Quite frankly the school was running on the smell of an oil rag in those days but we managed to succeed in laying the foundation from

1978 onwards for the school to be what it is today. It took a lot of hard work to even convince the then council of the school to negotiate with Burwood Council to buy the land where Drummond field is.

WTM That's the most important developmental action in the school's history?

PG When I look back on my tenure at the school I see that as my greatest achievement, not the other things that went on but the fact that we had acquired the land for future expansion.

WTM I wish Thompson had done a bit more.

PG So do I. There was a house next to the school on the corner of whatever the streets were then which the owner came to us and said would we like to buy it and Thompson said no. We eventually got it because Burwood Council bought it and when we bought up the Burwood council land it came back to us. But fortunately the house which was pivotal to the whole land deal was owned by Mrs. Lowe who was an ex-student of PLC unbeknown to me and I got a call one day. I sent Fred Best to have a talk to her whether she'd be willing to sell and she said no. But then I got a phone call from old Mr. Paisley who was senior partner at the time of the Law Agents firm Colin Biggers and Paisley to say could I come and see him in his office. What have I done now, you know! And Mrs. Lowe was in the office and she said "I'll sell it to you for this amount of money nothing more nothing less" and I said, "righto, done" and we shook hands. And she said we've done our deal now. And she said to Mr. Paisley I'll leave it all to you."

WTM That's terrific. Fred Best was Judith Hancock's brother. He's no longer alive. I interviewed Judith in Brisbane and had a good day with her. She was great. She spoke very fondly of you and you've kept in touch with her from time to time and that sort of thing and she said that period of time broke the relationship that she had with her brother.

PG I wasn't aware of that. I know that she and Fred differed on the subject. Fred was supportive of Freda whereas Judith was more objective - she took the support - she was a tremendous support to me during her final months at the school because we had to run the school on a day to day basis. Keep it going, and the interesting fact was Speech Day was coming up and so we were expecting all sorts of trouble. Well I wasn't, I knew that speech day would go alright and that Miss Whitlam would act with dignity.

WTM Had she resigned by this time?

PG Yes, she had.

WTM But you'd already put in place Judith Hancock as the speaker.

PG That's right.

WTM Before Freda resigned.

PG Yes. Under old FL Thompson the Principal's speech was vetted - I discontinued this practice when I was Chairman because it's the Principal's Report on the school to the parents and the girls. It's not the Council's report. The Council was at me to get her speech and make sure she said the right things. I said I am not going to vet Miss Whitlam's speech. She can say what she likes, quite frankly, and if we get a serve, we get a serve. And she made an

outstanding farewell speech, she got a standing ovation from the girls and I had great difficulty getting the Council to stand on their feet.

WTM Yes, you mentioned that before. But Judith was pretty good through all this? When you spoke to her earlier, you mentioned before that you had spoken to her, did you offer her the Headship?

PG No. I think old FL might have raised the issue at one stage but I didn't talk to Judith until she'd received written confirmation of her appointment to Brisbane. I had the Archbishop ring me.

WTM You've said that before. I thought at that point you might have got pretty anxious because the Council would have liked her to be principal.

PG Well that might have been with the Council - they may have gone down that line and she may have withdrawn from Brisbane but because of the ruckus that broke out, the question of who was going to be the principal went out of everybody's head because I said Miss Whitlam's still the principal so you can't go talking about who's going to be the principal.

WTM At that stage you didn't know if she would resign.

PG Yes that's right. So I told Judith to go to Brisbane and enjoy herself.

WTM I think she was keen to break away too.

PG She needed the break, to get right away from the place, and she's made a success of Brisbane Girls' Grammar and when I go to Brisbane I go around and have dinner with them, David and Judith, and it's great to catch up with them, and reminisce.

WTM With Fred Best, just to tidy that up, there have been comments made that he wasn't as accurate in his bookkeeping as he could have been.

PG He left under a cloud. Yes. I would say that he wasn't as accurate as he could be, the ledgers never reconciled, particularly the fee ledger, and I used to get the auditors to do that once a year.

WTM Did Judith know this?

PG Yes. Well not until it came out and then there was another question which led to his departure.

I'd had Fred in on a couple of occasions. Evidence was produced to me by the auditors - Bert Scotford was with me on a couple of occasions - because I wanted someone else present because I liked Fred as a person but I also knew what my responsibilities and obligations were. I didn't want to be in the situation where 'you said this' or 'you said that' and I said something totally different - that's why I asked Bert to be part of the process so that I had an independent observer. I also offered Fred the opportunity to have an independent witness present as well but he always declined because I think deep down he knew that what he'd done was wrong.

WTM I thought that was the case but I just needed to clarify it. There was only one other thing that I needed to clarify with you. One of the ex-students from the time said that FL Thompson, who was still about after retiring for a period of time, was unwell and he had prostate cancer I think. He'd received something like, this was probably in about 1975, about 400 letters of complaint. Judith

Hancock was quoted as having said to this particular person that there were 400 letters of complaint from parents most of which didn't get to Council.

PG Well I don't think any of them came to Council. I don't recall a letter writing campaign. And quite often FL never responded to correspondence anyway. He had this big folder of stuff. He didn't know what was in it, he just carted it around.

WTM Did Council get a lot of letters of complaint?

PG No more than what you'd normally get. And most time the letters didn't go to Council because during my time I dealt with them in conjunction with the principal. Mostly they were over some minor matter. But there was a lot of scuttlebutt around the place. There was a campaign by the ex-students and parents to undermine Freda because every time we went to an Ex-Students' Union meeting there'd be these barbs going across the room towards her and Madge Thornton of course, she and Freda certainly didn't get on at all. Really you're not there to get on with the principal. The principal is there to run the school and you can't have every former student or parent telling you how to run the school. Even though they're paying fees or whatever the case might be. It's impossible and it's a really untenable position to be in - I took Freda's side on most battles and I got battered and bruised too by the Ex-Students' Union in particular. But the fact is the Chairman has to support his or her principal. If you don't, it's like being in Council. If the Mayor doesn't support the general manager and the officers the whole place comes apart.

- WTM I guess it just gets to a point where.....
- PG Enough's enough.
- WTM You have to weigh it up and I guess you got to that point. That's it.  
Anything else you want to add?
- PG No. Actually going through this exercise has been an interesting  
therapy for me and a useful stretch of my memory.

Peter Graham mentioned after the interview that he was only reconciled with Gough Whitlam in 1995 when he (Peter Graham) was in attendance at a Function at Curzon Hall in the northern suburbs and the Prime Minister John Howard was there and Gough Whitlam and Margaret were also in attendance, and Howard brought the Whitlams up to him and introduced them to him and Whitlam leant across and said "Are you the Peter Graham of Croydon?" to which Peter Graham replied "Yes, Prime Minister, the very same Peter Graham but that was a long time ago". So Gough had remembered the incidents of over twenty years before which had affected his sister. Margaret in Gough's ear said "Come on darling I think it's time that we put those things in the past and moved on" and the two of them moved away from the conversation, however, at the end of the evening the two of them came up to Peter Graham and said farewell to him with a sense of putting things of the past firmly in the past.

**APPENDIX 2**

Newspaper and magazine clippings printed following the dismissal of Freda Whitlam from PLC Croydon.



No. 43,002 5/17/76 Telephone 21

Coolness at PLC,  
says former head

# Whitlam's sister tells why she quit

Miss Freda Whitlam said last night that political opposition to her brother, the former Prime Minister, had led to her resignation as principal of PLC, Croydon.

Opposition to Mr Whitlam had been reflected in coolness towards her from certain people connected with the school.

Miss Whitlam, who has been principal of the Presbyterian Ladies' College for 19 years, said she had intended resigning at the end of 1978 but had now changed her mind.

"There is a minority in the school council that I can no longer feel loyal to," she said.

There had also been difficulties in her relationship with some ex-students and some parents.

### 'She could have stayed'

Members of the college council denied yesterday that there had been any pressure on Miss Whitlam to resign or any political motive behind the resignation.

One member, Mrs B. Drummond, said: "She did it of her own accord. She could have stayed for as long as she wanted to."

Miss Whitlam's decision to leave the school at the end of the year was made known early this month. At the time she declined to comment.

She is a specialist in modern languages and education and holds a Master of Arts degree from La Trobe University.

She has also taught at Frensham School, Mttagong.

She said last night: "I have a brother who is articulate, forceful and idealistic.

"A lot of people don't understand politics.

"A lot of opposition springs from a misunderstanding of his policies."

One of the policies that had aroused opposition was Medicare.

Miss Whitlam said that she had never at any time discussed politics within the school.

"I don't even belong to a political party."

**Inside today**

**Rock music's changing styles**  
Mike Parker reviews the rock music industry's trends and gains in 1976. Page 7.

**1976 — year of non-events**  
Catherine Harper looks back on a year of speculation and little else. Page 8.

**The PROMETHEUS CRISIS**  
Radioactive fallout heads for a city that can't be evacuated. Final instalment of our holiday thriller. Page 11.

**Tomorrow**

**The cat that got**

**away**

A tale to charm all pet-lovers. Text by Barbara Blackman, drawings by Charles Blackman.

Phone 2 0946 to have the Herald delivered! It's easier.

Anthony not to visit Japan, Page 3.

### LATE NEWS

### US-Japan talks move

TOEYO, Thursday. — Japan's newly elected Prime Minister, Mr Takeo Fukuda, instructed his Cabinet ministers today to make preparations for a US-Japan summit meeting, and a council of leaders of the major non-communist industrialised nations. Government sources said. (AAP-Reuters)

"I have an overwhelming good relationship with my present staff and students and the students I have taught over 19 years."

### Difficulties

But the present difficulties had arisen in 1972.

"It was when I appeared on This Day Tonight before the 1972 elections," she said.

"They were interviewing the political leaders and the families and I appeared on a program.

"There was a definite cooling in my relationship with some people after that. Certain ex-students would not speak to me."

The difficulties in many cases had continued ever since.

Mrs Drummond of the school council said last night that she was worried what effect the case would have on the girls at PLC and on the reputation of the school itself.

Another member, the Rev Luchlan McGuinness, said: "Miss Whitlam is a lady and I try to be a gentleman. This has been a difficult problem and I would say that there has not been any politics involved whatsoever."

Another member, who asked not to be named, said Miss Whitlam had resigned over a staffing issue. She had been asked at a council meeting to decrease the number of staff but she refused to co-operate in this move and the next morning she resigned.

The chairman of the Presbyterian Schools' Commission, Mr H. E. Scotford, said Miss Whitlam had known she was welcome to stay on as headmistress at the school.

He said during his association with the school, the school's council, and Miss Whitlam, he had not been made aware of any of the pressures to which Miss Whitlam referred.

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## FREDA WHITLAM: Politics

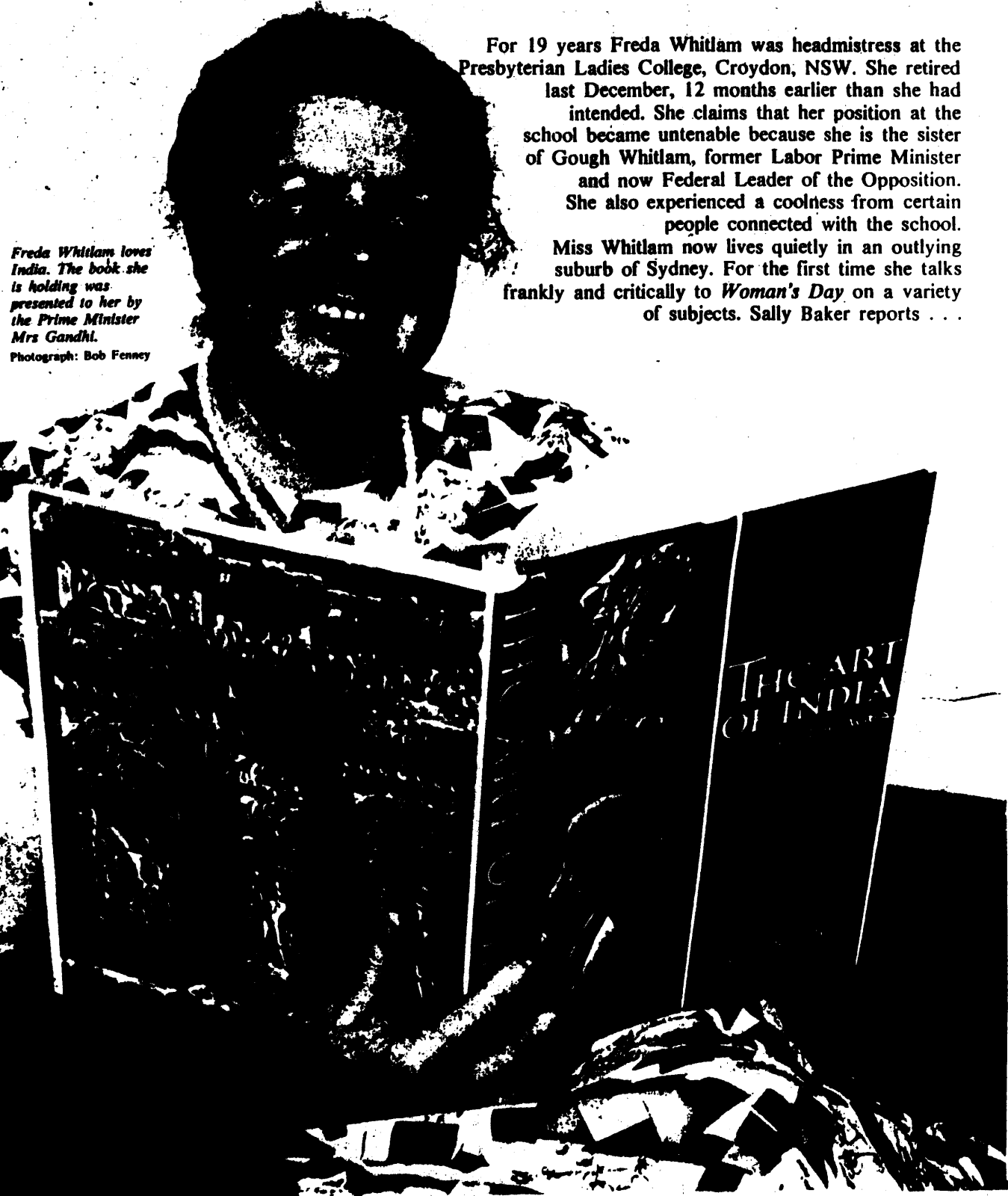
For 19 years Freda Whitlam was headmistress at the Presbyterian Ladies College, Croydon, NSW. She retired last December, 12 months earlier than she had intended. She claims that her position at the school became untenable because she is the sister of Gough Whitlam, former Labor Prime Minister and now Federal Leader of the Opposition.

She also experienced a coolness from certain people connected with the school.

Miss Whitlam now lives quietly in an outlying suburb of Sydney. For the first time she talks frankly and critically to *Woman's Day* on a variety of subjects. Sally Baker reports . . .

*Freda Whitlam loves India. The book she is holding was presented to her by the Prime Minister Mrs Gandhi.*

Photograph: Bob Fenney



# (but not hers) ended her career

"I'm having a ball; it's a whole new life. Why, I even get to put out my own garbage bin!" Freda Whitlam was talking in the small garden of her town house in an outlying Sydney suburb.

She is a specialist in modern languages and education, and has a Master of Arts degree from Yale University, U.S. Although she admires and supports her brother, Freda Whitlam does not belong to any political party. "Nor did I ever discuss politics at the school," she said.

When Gough became Prime Minister, the coolness towards me began. The mother of a pupil telephoned me and said I dishonoured the school by my name. Why do people get so emotional? It is a fact that although I lived at the school all the time I was headmistress, I could never have my family visiting me there."

Miss Whitlam said that another reason for her early resignation (she had intended to continue as head until the end of 1978) was that she could no longer work with the School Council.

"I didn't respect their judgment; I don't think they were capable of making the best decisions in a very demanding field. Education now is big business and is changing rapidly and I didn't believe the council had the expertise to deal with that situation."

Basically the council is elected by the General Assembly of New South Wales, and once anyone is on it, they are on it for good. There is very little change and there is no age limit. No particular educational background is required — but you must be a Presbyterian. The council has full control of the school's policy.

A small majority in the council made it difficult when Labor came to power, partly for political reasons but also because I am a Uniting Presbyterian and



Gough, Freda and their mother. It was Freda's second birthday.

Freda Whitlam makes a little face as she says this, but her eyes are laughing. It's easy to believe her when she says, "Life is full of fun and I love every moment of it." She lives alone with her black Labrador, Clarence. "He's social, not sporting," she said. (Clarence the Cocker was a well known Sydney racing poster.)

She prefers not to discuss her difficulties with PLC because she doesn't believe in looking back. "It's all in the past and I don't bear any resentment. I have a great religious outlook on life and have never planned anything. I do basically think that if it is God's will then it will happen. I am sure I did the right thing to set out while I was still capable of taking a great interest in the wider world."

Living in a school is a bit like living in a nursery. When I was first appointed headmistress, the chairman said to me, "From now on you have no other life but the school. I didn't really believe him, but I came to see that he meant it."

The town house is the first home Freda Whitlam has ever had and she finds everyday things fascinating. "I'm discovering supermarkets, and I have a place to hang up my program, put my books and my piano. I have a little garden, and best of all, I can entertain my friends and my family." With enthusiasm she showed me her washing machine, ("never owned one before"), an electric mixer and the greatest delight of all, a pair of scissors that can cut up chickens and open bottles. "I never knew such things existed."

To understand Freda (and Gough) Whitlam it is necessary to realize that they came from a profoundly religious background.

Freda Whitlam said, "Although it was so religious, apart from the fact that we said Grace before meals, you could be in our home and not realize how we felt. We had Bibles, but they were not prominently displayed. I said to my father once, 'I've never seen you pray.' He said, 'My life is one long prayer.'"

"Father said that with the self-mocking attitude that is so misrepresented in Gough. Just look at Gough's life. He's brilliant; he could have got far more

Just before the war: Freda was at boarding school in Sydney, Gough was at University.

money, social approval and honours of all sorts if he hadn't chosen to go into a field where he thought he could help people.

"Coming from a home like ours, we would have had to go into some sort of service to the community. Gough doesn't go to Church every Sunday but he is completely motivated by our religious background; he would not accept that, but it's true."

"There was no Bible-pushing in our home; certainly we had many clergymen there and I suppose my father had the best theological library outside a theological college, but there was nothing dreary about it. Of course there was never any drink. We are all very punctilious, but yet it wasn't obviously so. It was the way we lived. My parents without saying anything about it, hated. They were always very generous in what they gave away."

I asked Freda Whitlam if she thought she had missed out on anything in life by not marrying. "But for the war I would have married. Actually I think I was better off not being married. Gough and I were brought up to be individuals and I think I would have found marriage very cramped. I think we were very lucky because my father always believed in our hearing both sides of any story and so we grew up to be very open minded."

"I had too many interests to be sex-oriented. I pity the young people today. Teenagers feel they must have sex experience before they marry or they are not being fair to their future mate. In some ways I can see that this is a good idea because so many women have had a life of sexual hell in the past; a woman was often supposed to be merely the receptacle and given no opportunity for her own fulfilment. But I think that it is a tragedy there is now so much emphasis on sex; after all sexual intercourse is an extremely small part of any marriage."

Miss Whitlam said she had always been available to advise girls at the school on any subject they cared to bring up — including sex. "But I was always very conscious that one was watched carefully and I had to be sure that no scandalous version was taken home."

Does she think all schools should be co-ed?

"It is not being considered yet at PLC, but I personally believe in co-education for primary, infants primary and tertiary, but not for the early years of secondary. I



Freda and Gough at Middle Harbour, Sydney. She was three.

think it does the two sexes good to have the chance to get away from each other. Girls miss out badly because they don't get enough experience of leadership in a co-ed situation; nor do I believe they extend themselves academically. And just physically, I think it is very hard on boys in first form to have the girls all bigger than they are. In those early secondary years I think they are happier apart, learning."

"After all, school is only a very small part of their lives; even for boarders. One quarter of the year is holiday and I feel very strongly that parents should direct their children's social lives during their secondary years."

"More parents than you realise do this. Look at the social pages over the years. The eastern suburbs marrons — how they organise their children. It is never confessed but they organise their daughters as much as the Indian mothers do. They see their daughters only meet the 'right' people; they meet them in the cradle. It is just a big caste system and it is very hard on you if you break your caste."

Freda Whitlam believes in women's lib because she thinks it gives men a chance to be liberated. "I'm not interested in an aggressive way — that burning bra thing made me really mad because it never happened, but it's a cheap way for men to denude women's efforts."

"I do believe that in our culture we are terribly hard on men. The man is expected to be the person who can make decisions on all sorts of things; he has to be the handyman, the person who knows how to cope with insurance. Why should he be better able than a woman to cope with these problems? He's expected to have a profession and to take the lead and then he is put in the position of those ghastly comic characters like Dagwood. I really hate Blondie. I think she is an iddle-pated, rating; so selfish, so egotistical, greedy — you name it. I would like to think that women's lib got rid of the Blondies of this world."

"And another thing. A girl has three chances for a career. One she takes up when she leaves school; one as a wife and that can change her outlook enormously, and another when her children are growing up and she can take on a totally different career."

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Snap from the family album: Freda and Gough Whitlam in 1970 before he became PM.

have always been against any form of what you could loosely call snobbery."

To meet Freda Whitlam for the first time is somewhat of a surprise. She is short (would barely come up to her brother's shoulder), well rounded, with a clear pink complexion and direct blue eyes. She said, "Everyone expects me to be as tall as Gough. A woman who was introduced to both of us ran her eyes up to Gough and down to me and said, 'Obviously you were the runt of the litter.'"



## women continued from page 17

"A man has only basically one choice. I think women have got it all over men."

Freda Whitlam believes that the Church has to have an enormous shake up. "It is getting it now; when we have overcome a few things like this then we can get on to the men and give them a fair spin. I think the Church is appalling in its attitude to women, and the Church is the loser."

Freda Whitlam believes in euthanasia. I asked her to explain

and why keep a person from union with God after death by keeping them in indignity here? Death comes as a friend; we wear out this body and we go on to another. I don't know what it's like — I think it's blasphemous to query what happens after death. It is in God's hands and I'm willing to leave it there."

Freda Whitlam was obviously moved when she spoke of the strong support received from former pupils and friends after her resignation. "I have had

obituaries."

It's said with a twinkle of blue eyes because really she's brimming over with the joy of living.

And what of the future? "I want to get involved with migrant education on a voluntary basis. It's what is called a 'one to one' where you help one person with the language."

"And I want to go back to India. I've been there a number of times and I love it so much I regard myself as an honorary

SCHOOLS

A TREMOR is going through the council rooms of Victoria's nine Presbyterian schools, including Scots College and the Presbyterian Ladies' College, over their future independence.

The control of these schools is about to be carved up between the two rival wings of the Presbyterian Church, and the issue contains the seeds of division that seems likely to shake the whole system.

Some school authorities are predicting problems if their schools are allocated to the Continuing Church the ultra-conservative wing of Presbyterianism. They fear that the Continuing Church may try to impose a reactionary and authoritarian regime on whichever schools it receives.

The disposal of the schools is one of the secular aftermaths of the theological split in the Presbyterian Church of Australia three years ago. A large part of the Church decided then to join with the Methodist and Congregational Churches to form the Uniting Church. The more traditional ministers and elders refused to be part of this ecumenism, and established themselves as the Continuing Presbyterian Church.

# Like divorce, church splits bring custody wrangles

By ROBERT MILLIKEN



Under State legislation formalising the split, at least two schools, one for boys and one, for girls, must be allocated to the Continuing Church by the commission set up to dispose of

the vast property holdings of the Presbyterian Church around Australia - conservatively estimated at about \$140 million.

The issue is hot in Victoria,

not only because that State was overwhelmingly pro-union (only about 20 per cent of parishes voted to go with the Continuing Church), but also because church schools in Vic-

torian historically have been more prominent than in other States.

Like the other non-Catholic denominations, the Presbyterian Church traditionally has

played little or no direct part in running its schools. It holds the titles to the land and property, but provides no money. Virtually all this comes from fees and State aid.

The schools want to keep it that way. They see their relationship with the Church rather like that between the Queen and Parliament, with the day-to-day governing vested in school councils and principals.

Scots College, for instance, was established in 1851 before the States set up their own education systems, and when all educating in Australia was done by church schools. Even then its task was to provide good secondary schooling for prospective Melbourne University entrants, not necessarily Presbyterians. Only about half its students today are Presbyterians.

Besides Scots' and P.L.C. the other schools whose futures are at stake are Halsebury College, St Leonard's Presbyterian Co educational College, Penleigh Essendon Grammar School, Hamilton and Alexandra Colleges, Geelong College, Ballara and Clarendon College, and Morongo Presbyterian Ladies College.

It is no secret that the Continuing Church would like the two most prominent schools, Scots and P.L.C. I understand that none of the schools wants to go with Continuing Church.

There has been some rather bitter and undignified infighting going on behind the scenes. Sensitive are all concerned, though none of the school heads wanted to talk about it, while the secretary of the Property Commission, Mr Farquhar Gunhung up when The Nation Times rang to make inquiries.

One school head, who asks not to be named, said: "The working relationship between us and the Church has been very good, until now. But would be positively damaging the Church tried to return the nineteenth century and the schools."

The headmaster of Ballara and Clarendon College, Ron Horner, said: "Any school will resent it if they are handed over to a branch of the Church against their choice. I think the schools would not like to be tied to either Church, but may raise a loose allegiance to both."

The decision is to be made the end of May by the Property Commission, which is chaired by a non-Presbyterian QC from NSW, Kenneth Handley, a composite of two other independents, as well as three representatives each from the Continuing and Uniting Church. The decision has been deferred once.

A harmonious outcome has already been reached on Presbyterian schools in NSW where feeling against the Continuing Church is set on a stable. In Sydney, the 16 schools agreed willingly to vote evenly, Scots College to P.L.C. Croydon, going to Continuing Church, and Kyr Grammar and P.L.C. Pymat choosing to stay with Uniting Church.

The two separate churches officially come into being in month, so the effects of outcome remain to be seen. old-fashioned Scottish Presbyterianism is more conservative in Victoria, and the schools there may be reluctant to change in their councils by the Cor

# HE AIN'T HEAVY . . .

By TESS LAWRENCE

"OH yes," sighs Freda Whitlam.

"No wonder the sin of Lucifer was pride—so easy for us to be proud. It's easier for man to learn to split the atom, than learn to live together. That's the tragedy of life."

Miss Whitlam may not be her brother's keeper but she is very much her brother's sister in appearance. Her mannerisms are similar—and Whitlamesque rhetoric, like a spider, dangles from her thread of conversation.

And like her brother, she knows what it's like to be displaced. She resigned as headmistress of the Presbyterian Ladies' College in the Sydney suburb of Croydon because of "a concentrated campaign against me by the school council."

"Even when I became head in my thirties, 19 years ago, they were on my back," she says. "I was thought to be too frivolous, apparently, because I laugh a lot.

"The antagonism intensified as soon as Gough became more powerful. Which shows

you what bigots some people can be."

She maintains she has always remained apolitical at school concentrating on instilling in her girls, confidence and consideration for others—and encouraging them to be articulate but individualistic.

"I've always been religious," she says. "Not like Gough, he sort of grew out of it. We had a terrific, stable home."

"If you've read any books about Gough you'd know he was one of the few Prime Ministers in the country to come from a stable family background.

"As a child, I was always in awe of him.

"You know he was my big brother and all that, but a tremendously strong man intellectually. He has a vast fund of general knowledge, extraordinary as a child.

"My memory of home is one of books, books and more books. Father was a lawyer. We didn't have radio. Father said it wasn't necessary. Although we were very well looked after we were allowed no extravagances.

"We had everything we needed but our parents were careful not to spoil us.

"Our parents brought us up in such a way that we were never conscious of worldly possessions. No child in our home could ever be a snob.

"Undeniably this fostered my outlook. I believed that every girl in the school was equal—didn't matter who her mother was. And of course this upset a few so-called important people.

## Forthright

"I know I'm very forthright. Don't believe in hedging around. For this reason I've never got on well with the council, which is safe and conservative."

She likes to think she was approachable as head: "I had certain views and I expected the girls and teachers to abide by them while at the school.

"I'm old fashioned in that respect. I believe in school discipline. I think we've steered too far away from ordinary rote learning."

Miss Whitlam (no first names with anyone at school) says she's of the old school.

"I believe in chastity before marriage. I don't gamble, don't drink, don't swear—complete wowser, I am; but I don't get pernicious about it, although I abide strongly by my beliefs.



• Miss Whitlam

"Although I lead a very moral life, I don't expect everyone else to. I mean, I must be a bit of a hypocrite because I don't believe in gambling but I'll happily go to the Opera House, which was built on gambling."

She shrugs philosophically: "As head of such a school I've had to live an immaculate life—one that's been like a glass bowl."

At first the young headmistress resented such personal restrictions. "But once you accept the situation, the resentment sort of melts away," she says.

"Besides I don't think I'd have been a terribly easy person to live with. That is to be married to.

"My attitude is that it's better to know a whole lot of people than to be tied down to one person.

"I'd nag all the time, anyway. I know I would—about smoking and all that. The only thing that can live with me is my dog Clarence.

"Basically I still maintain the attitudes I had when I was in my twenties. Generally I believe one does except I'm less rigid—dare I say more liberal.

## Pressures

"Like others, I feel sorry for today's youth, in a sense. They are confronted with such pressures, job quotas and the like. It isn't enough to be clever."

"I don't want to harp on this Christian bit, but I do have a belief that God will take care of everything.

"He has so far.

"Whatever I do, I try to do the job as best I can." And now that her last speech night has finally come, Miss Whitlam says it saddens her to watch the girls go out the door for the last time.

"I can't really explain the feeling a headmistress has when she watches a girl grow up through a school like that, and then slip away.

"Like parents whose children leave home, I suppose, but then it happens to me a thousand times."

## Tear ducts

Tears came to her eyes. She wipes them away matter of factly.

"Terrible family trait," she says. "The old Whitlam tear ducts flow at the drop of a hat. Anything slightly emotional and we're gone. It's terrible (sniff). Gough's like that too. He'll probably kill me for saying it."

The last person she blames for her premature retirement is Gough.

Occasionally she gets angry about the things people say about him "not from a political viewpoint—but from a sister's."

"In the sphere in which I work so many people hate and distrust him. Of course, it hurts. He's my brother. Most of the time the school staff refrained from talking about Gough.

"Sometimes the silence was worse. At school meetings often one was given the cold shoulder.

"People would look at you sideways while discussing education (government) policy and all that sort of thing. As if it ever had anything to do with me.

"I couldn't accept that sort of tarring. It made me really mad.

"I've got too much pride for that.

"Yes," she chortles, "The sin of Lucifer again. One of the few ways it shows in me.

"I can't take too much knocking of Gough," she says and gets up to turn the light on.

"No," she says, "he ain't heavy." And finishes the line to the song.

After Miss Whitlam completed her BA at Melbourne University, she did some postgraduate study in philosophy at Yale. She was awarded a Fulbright scholarship to study in the U.S.

She also studied at London University and spent some time in France in the Pyrenees with a Presbyterian missionary group.

Her literary background has often prompted her to seek wordsmiths who moved her most. While in the U.S. she sought out Ezra Pound, who had been "imprisoned" in an asylum, accused of being a communist.

His country thought he was mad.

She says: "He was saner than most. They had to unlock three sets of doors before we could get to him. I remember seeing him there, a commanding man of great power.

"He was in shorts, and he had these great hairy red legs and sandals on. Very muscular. His red hair was greying. They were mad really because they let him lecture on poetry several afternoons a week to students."

Her adulation of T. S. Eliot prompted her to walk past Faber and Faber in London's Russell St. where she knew her idol would be working in a particular room.

"My friend and I could see the light on in the room where he was working. We'd just stand there and look up at it."

Miss Whitlam says that unlike her brother, she has never been ambitious.

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