

CHAPTER V.

Certified Teacher – College of Preceptors - Special colour courses – Physics of Light – Artwork construction - College Inspectors – Wapping – Electricians union – Degree Course – Thatcher – Departmental organization – Planning – Film contacts.

Fortunately, I passed my Teaching Certificate. I had already submitted myself to taking the College of Preceptors exam, so it came as a relief! Having to write the essays for the Tutors was a chore but it did improve my English grammar and spelling.

There was this joint pressure on my lack of English Grammar - writing the essays and writing on the chalkboard and providing handouts. Nothing advances ignorance to a working knowledge faster than having to give a lecture and then writing on the board - I found my brain having to go into overdrive especially talking about something I had little knowledge about. I had to also engage with students, who did not want to be there in the first place - to try and keep them receptive!

All lecturers have to take turns at being a course tutor. This post sometimes requires them to chastise or report bad behaviour. At last resort, the Head of Department or School informed - to discuss the removal of the student from the course. If this is being contemplated a meeting is called, attended by all the teaching staff on that student's course, plus the Head of School. It is extremely rare for this to happen. The lecturers did everything possible to make sure all students finished the course - it was extremely rare for a student to fail an exam or ejected off a course. Both these events showed the course tutor had not acted fast enough to check student progress - perhaps indicate that the student should not be on the course.

I had recourse to call such a meeting. All the teaching staff had agreed prior to the meeting that this particular student had been a disruptive member of class. I had personally discussed the matter with each member of staff and attended their classes to see for myself. When seated in the Principal's conference room, I explained the situation presenting my case and proffering my written report. The Principal spoke to each member of staff in turn asking each if they had a problem with this student. Some said they had known worse, others said he was good some days and not others, and one teacher said that he had no trouble at all – a teacher who had less control than any other!

Fortunately, his employer took this student away from the course never to return. However, this does show how difficult it is to get teachers to admit they cannot cope with a disruptive student and how, by this omission, other students suffer, to be put off further education for good.

A good deal of my teaching programme was taken up with colour theory. As I learnt in depth the subject's theory the more I could relate, 'industrial practice to the science'. In practice: a lithographic artist, matched a swatch with a colour on the artwork - to assess how close it was, or what portion it represented... each colour on the artwork, followed the same procedure - with each of the printing colours. Teaching the subject interested the students because the theory proved – the students wanted to understand the practical relevance of what taught...

The colour retoucher had to match colours in much the same way as the lithographic artist. The only difference being, he worked with only three primary secondary light colours instead of a range of eight or more... The three process colours: yellow, magenta and cyan are secondary light colours... their complementary colours are the primary light colours - blue, green and red, being equal thirds of visible light – the spectrum. In theory: an overprinting of the secondary colours produces black. A projection of the primary light filters – to overlap each other, reconstitutes white light. Where two colour overlap another colour produced - a process colour – one of the printing inks, and complementary to the third missing.

These facts are not disputable – the science well known. What is not so well known: whereas, the primary light filters are spectrally near perfect the printing secondary colours less so...

imperfections that are corrected by compensation – reducing reflections of the other colours. It is not possible to print a perfect facsimile because the inks do not absorb two thirds of the spectrum and reflect the other third. Yellow, almost reflects all it should do, Magenta, lacks certain blue radiations and Cyan, lacks considerable blue and a lesser degree green reflections – is a weak colour.

The present rotary or tabletop, colour scanner, uses its circuitry to make these corrections. Enlarging or reducing the picture - with the type and tints, etc., in page and sheet position.

Producing a colour magazine no longer requires a fully trained staff. The reproduction scanners and printers linked to word processors do the job of half a dozen trained workers with a result previously unobtainable. Folding, cutting and creasing, and binding, produced by, equally efficient machines. The revolution complete within twenty years.

The Media Colleges now teach computer science... no longer troubled by union demarcation or petty labour controls. Manufacturing deficiencies - out of date machine tools and patched production lines, were laid-bare... by overseas competition. The working class mentality still operated, declaring that any falling off – lack of orders, ‘not their problem’. The promulgation by union leaders that, ‘they could foresee the changes coming about in the emerging industrial society’, was sheer nonsense. Every aspect of life was in flux for no one could predict the effects of global warming or computer advances.

Whenever, faced by a group of students that made it obvious they were not interested in either the lecture or in the theory, I resorted to a discussion about their work – their jobs - how they fitted in. Trying to compare their working conditions to past factory life and future workstations... making comparisons - as relevant as possible - to life...

Once or twice, I had to work very hard to maintain a reasonable learning environment. I was lucky that I had a string of experiences with which to relate to keep the students amused - to take them away from the present, distract them, and lead them back by another route. Motorcycling, camping, being a Marine, and other distractions served their purpose. Nevertheless, most of all they wanted to know about industrial matters and if you knew about the latest techniques and could talk about particular firms or had known individuals in the trade, then won over. They want you to understand and be sympathetic to their position and to the problems they are facing and above all ‘to be interesting’.

Once, in all my years of teaching, the college inspected. We were given a month with which to prepare for the event. Not being long out of teacher training I had all the notes to tell me what was necessary. I need not have bothered... streams of instructions passed down the chain of command... All lesson had to have a laid down teaching plan - to conform to the latest psychological learning pattern - so many minutes for introduction, three to five main learning goals, lecture subject and summing up... returning to the key points. Every teacher programmes checked, all classes had to be of a certain size; all rooms had to be fully utilised. All the equipment on the department’s stock list identified - proof of necessity shown. In other words, there had to be proof that the college was efficient - operating within budget. Frankly, it was not. It did not come up to any of those conditions never had nor would. Classes over a certain size had to have additional staff. Principle Lecturers programmed to be present - had to show a minimum number of teaching hours - but rarely turned up; running the department, they believed, demanded all their efforts. Rooms were not used to their full advantage. When the Inspectors attended classes, a specific number of students had to be there - to make the staffing, equipment and space viable... If the class lacked students - some dropped out, more co-opted in to make up the numbers. Similarly, the classroom: furniture, equipment, tools and machinery had to be necessary component of the lesson - shown to be so by inclusion in the teaching programme. No teacher I knew ever used a ridged lesson plan: lecture 8 on the syllabus was not the same as that taught last year, nor the same as other lecturers taught, nor

link into an overall plan. Assistants rarely had all the equipment. Class sizes were rigged and maximum generosity applied when marking internally invigilated exams.

It stated sarcastically, 'State run educational establishments are designed for the staff and not the students', in many cases, this was true. We could never work out whether the college provided education or training... if for education the staff not scientifically equipped, if for training, not the material, equipment or production line set-up.

Lecturers in the past, about to reach retirement age, found higher-grade work - to increase their salary - improve retirement payout and pension. It is perfectly obvious that lecturers who had been in Further Education for a lifetime towards the end of their teaching life are neither in full possession of the latest industrial techniques nor as fit to teach as they had been when young. A teacher's pension is calculated, by taking an average of the last three years salary. This falsified the standards taught to upper-level courses by acknowledged practitioners in specified fields of learning.

I have explained about the newspaper industry, which tended to control how the completely printing industry operated. The newspaper owners were very rich men who sometimes ran a business not necessarily reliant upon always making a working profit. There was, and still is, a certain status to be enjoyed by newspaper owners - as key political informers - as movers and shakers of government policy. In many instances, the owners knighted and feted by society. Their family also enjoyed the inflated position. They had an 'in' to Westminster and to power. This power, wielded by newspaper owners, manipulated and controlled the printing industry. Their greed retained the status quo over the life of the industry - stifled innovation, pandered to union demands. Their actions and social attitudes affected all trades in the printing industry - even to those that had nothing to do with the letterpress industry. In many instances, they were family run businesses and handed down to continue the attachments and political preferences. They were insidious, spiteful and in some cases above the law.

The workers knew all of the above. Therefore, they worked on those traits of greed and avarice. They became the highest paid, had the shortest of hours and enjoyed the longest holidays. In total, they had the best industrial conditions of any worker. They went to the annual wage reviews energetically ever ready to extract the maximum for the minimum.

Both sides knew each other and played upon each other's weaknesses. The union leaders wanted to keep their positions of power and influence and the bosses wanted to keep the industrial wheels turning. Gradually, conditions improved but not fast enough to hold off overseas challenges. Old machines kept going. Working conditions endured. Outdated systems maintained. Eventually the whole lot tumbled down simply because, as always, technology eventually controlled the outcome - ruled and new materials, presses and systems came on stream. You can only maintain old equipment and work out of date techniques for a limited period before spare parts obtained and new techniques learnt.

The first to profit from the change was the provincial newspapers, outside the Fleet Street's nationals. The new information technology implemented using a more flexible, less ridged union ruled staff. New materials and presses using the lithographic principle operated quicker and cheaper than existing letterpress methods.

The owners of the national newspapers were not slow in recognising the benefits to be gained by moving to another print base where it was then possible to throw out old arrangements and agreements employing workers [In this case it was the Electricians Union] who were not members of the old print unions.

In Britain in the late 70s, there were ten major print companies, four controlled outside the country. There were a number of mergers, which still did not improve print relations between management and the unions. Still, printing was about easy profits, weak management, high worker

earnings, and as ever, many unofficial industrial actions, which delayed and held back any advancement towards modernisation.

Just as a point of interest: I have not mentioned women in any way either in the teaching profession, in the pre-printing industry or trades union. There literally were no women apprentices or trainees until the 1980's and then only very few in film make-up and planning. That situation would obviously transfer to the teaching colleges so there were no women teachers and likewise be applied to the unions.

There were no Catholics at all, neither men nor women, employed in Northern Ireland and no Protestant women. Regarding the Trades Union as a whole, I would imagine that up to 1980's there would be very few women in skilled positions requiring long periods of training - apprenticeships. It not thought worthwhile, by print house owners, to employ women who might leave the industry after expensive training.

After passing my teaching certificate, I went on immediately to read Education at Garnett, Teacher Training College. At the same time, I took the entrance exam for the Associate of Preceptors. I do not know whether these certifications helped but I applied for a vacant Lecturer 2 position. Thankfully, I was offered the place, which took me into the next incremental salary scale.

Margaret Thatcher and the Conservative Party elected into office after the Winter of Discontent - when James Callaghan, Labour Government had been in power. There had been a desperate monetary crisis in 1976 and very high unemployment. Wage controls and spending cuts were the line taken by the Labour party to affect control. It was obvious that trade-union power had to be reduced. The new government spoke of 'planning for the future' and 'controlling the unions'. De-industrialisation was a fact and news of further closures a daily event.

The strength of the printing unions was very noticeable at the London College of Printing. There was every reason why it should be. It argued, rightly, that Technical Institutes tended to be backward, in a technological sense, what was current in industry. Their main task was to train and teach fundamentals. It was rare for such institutions to develop industrial advances. It certainly was so in the printing industry. Newspaper workers, by tradition, were the militant unionists. They were in positions of power in the College, which dictated where the resources lay. The Letterpress Department and to some extent Gravure saw what was happening in the industry and to secure their position planned. That meant they would plan their department to take onboard the new methods of working which necessitated the use of film, the assembly/planning of film onto foil and film processing - the need for darkrooms. This they did successfully, instigating new planning courses for apprentices and trainees whilst altering their teaching programmes.

All Higher and Further Education Colleges have within their structure a hierarchy. Each of the specialisms catered for in these establishments also have a validity of their own. Schools, departments and sections are the complex structure of educational establishments - they operate in a hierarchical structure. Their position is not permanent but fluctuates as industry and commerce changes. Unfortunately, they are always slightly behind the time taking longer to alter their internal arrangements. The Governing Body, Principal and Heads of Study should monitor world trends to make the establishment relevant and forward thinking. The government, industry and current educational preferences influence these factors. Publications that back up that research and other matters also have an importance. These published papers increase their validity if printed in overseas journals.

These three factors: research, publications and government led educational preferences decide on the direction those funds are distributed. The sums influenced by an ever-changing landscape of wars, elections, personalities etc. Fads, biased thinking and personal preferences play their part too.