

THE EMANUEL SCHOOL - A Brief Introduction to Its Foundation (Dr) David Cohen

As Associate Professor of Education at Macquarie University, I was regarded by many community members as one of the progressive and practically oriented staff members in Australian universities in the fields of Education in the period between 1968 and 1990. As a result, I often received telephone calls for assistance and advice about new ground-breaking enterprises in Education.

One fine day in mid-1982, the telephone rang in my Macquarie University office. The caller identified himself: "You might not know me, but I am Rabbi Brian Fox of the Temple Emanuel, Woollahra. I was told that you are experienced in opening new schools. I would like you to meet with me to discuss the feasibility of establishing a Temple-related Jewish day school."

I saw this request as an opportunity to be involved in another innovative educational activity. Hence, an appointment was duly arranged to visit with Rabbi Fox in his synagogue office. Present also at this initial meeting was Professor Sol Encel from the University of New South Wales. His expertise included demography. Professor Encel provided a report, which assured Rabbi Fox that there were sufficient school-age Jewish children in the eastern suburbs to make the idea of a Jewish day school viable. Professor Encel subsequently withdrew from further involvement.

Rabbi Fox asked me to outline to him the factors and programs which led to the successful establishment of two of my several other offspring - first, of Masada College, and then, slightly later, of Currumbena School (which was a parent co-operative secular progressive day-school in the Lane Cove area of Sydney). He told me that he and a few of his congregants saw the need for a Jewish day school to run from levels Prep to Year Three. "How feasible would that be?" he inquired.

In my opinion, it was feasible, but revealed a lack of confidence. I explained that it would be so much better to strive for the full range of schooling, from Prep to Year 12 (HSC). Rabbi Fox said that my concept represented a challenge to me, if I were willing to remain involved. I accepted the challenge with pleasure and very little hesitation.

Meeting initially often with Rabbi Fox at his home, often in company of his wife Dr Dale Fox, and then with the interim Temple Emanuel School Board and its chairperson Mr. Ted Waxman soon afterwards, I explained to them how the school could begin as a Prep to Year Three day school and then expand one year at a time until it reached Years K to 12. A few parents who had been

willing to entrust their children for Prep to Year Three (four years) of schooling, were initially horrified at the thought of an as-yet non-existent school taking the children right through the full 13 years of schooling. Persuasion took months of continual patient, calm explanation from me, often creating conflict between me and other board members who were hostile initially to the idea of such a 13-year day school.

Slowly, however, attrition of opposition occurred and the interim Temple Emanuel School Board agreed unanimously to the school charter which I personally wrote and proposed to them for adoption. Once this was achieved, the door opened to the appointment of the foundation principal and staff of the school. I established and became chairperson of the Appointments Committee and duly advertised for the foundation staff. We received a splendid response to the advertisement, attracting applicants from most states of Australia. Interview times were arranged initially for the position of principal. I and members of my committee personally screened, interviewed and selected from a highly qualified range of applicants. The initial appointment of principal was offered to and accepted by Mr Tom Wiedenman. He then joined the Appointments Committee and participated in the selection of the foundation teaching staff.

Meetings for prospective parents were held and enrolments began to come in steadily. I was entrusted with the task of developing a draft curriculum for approval by the New South Wales Department of Education. Since I had held the position of NSW Director of Studies (Curriculum & Assessment) in 1980-81, I was thoroughly conversant with the requirements of the Department and was able to marry my knowledge and experience with the unique demands of this project. The principal and teachers later adapted and prepared the final version of the curriculum I had outlined. This document was printed and distributed to parents of prospective pupils.

In 1983, a new era began with feelings of joy and satisfaction. The opening of The Emanuel School took place, initially occupying the religion classrooms at the Temple. However, it was realised that the growth in numbers would soon outstrip the facilities available at the Temple and thanks to community generosity, the school was fortunate enough in 1984 to be able to purchase its present location in Randwick.