School enterprise bargaining and the need for qualitative research: some reflections from Australia

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Abstract
The traditional system of industrial relations in Australia has emphasised arbitrated decisions by central tribunals in order to achieve uniform wage increases without any consideration being given to productivity. Since the late 1980s, there has been a move towards negotiation at the enterprise level. Legislative reforms have occurred at both federal and state levels which present opportunities for individual enterprises to negotiate agreements defining terms and conditions considered to be most appropriate for their circumstances. One major area where this development, popularly known as enterprise bargaining, is impacting, is that of education. Focuses on the phenomenon by: considering some of the literature on the theoretical and conceptual dimensions of the underlying notion of “bargaining”; outlining the general policy context within which enterprise bargaining has been taking place in Australia; presenting an overview of the emerging research base on award restructuring and enterprise-based bargaining; outlining the need for research aimed at understanding participants' perceptions of enterprise bargaining and of their experiences of the bargaining process; examining a major approach to engaging in such research, namely, the micro-political approach.

Introduction
The development of the enterprise-bargaining approach to industrial relations within education in Australia should be of interest not only to the educational community in that country but internationally. It is possible, for example, that the approach will allow education systems and individual schools to re-examine conventional ideas about the nature of teachers’ work and conditions. In particular, opportunities could be created not only for the rethinking of substantive issues such as the career structure of teaching, professional development and teacher evaluation, but also for enabling teachers to contribute to the shaping of related policy through more participatory frameworks in schools. At the same time, however, if enterprise bargaining is to eventuate in an educational community which is positively disposed towards improving the quality of teaching and learning, it is vital that the process be undertaken in a manner that is sensitive to the needs and perceptions of the various stakeholders. This invites the development of a comprehensive research agenda which seeks to enhance our present rudimentary understanding of the phenomenon of enterprise bargaining. The following paper is offered as one contribution to the groundwork which needs to be undertaken in order to facilitate the development of such a research agenda in Australia. In particular, it emphasises the need for research aimed at understanding participants’ perceptions of enterprise bargaining and of their experiences of the bargaining process at the school-site level.

An outline of the theoretical and conceptual dimensions of bargaining
Theories of “bargaining” have tended to concentrate on organisations where exchanges have been formalised by explicit procedures (Hoyle, 1986, p. 131). As such, schools have received little attention because they have not traditionally provided a context where this activity occurs so openly. Nevertheless, the literature on labour-management collective bargaining has generated theoretical insights which could be useful in educational research (McKersie and Hunter, 1973; Walton and McKersie, 1965). In particular, Walton and McKersie (1965) make the distinction between “distributive” bargaining and “integrative” bargaining. As they see it, competitive behaviour which is intended to influence the division of limited resources leads to pure conflict and characterises distributive bargaining. In other words, one person’s gain is a loss to another. In contrast, activities such as problem solving, that increase the joint gain available to the negotiating parties, is termed integrative bargaining.

Walton and McKersie (1965) concede that the distinction between distributive and integrative bargaining is, in practice, a loose one. Within most bargaining situations there will be aspects of both distributive and integrative approaches, and attempts to classify bargaining situations can only be made according to degree. Walton and McKersie (1965) also refer to “intra-organisational bargaining”. A according to this notion, different parties within a bargaining organisation may disagree on priorities assigned to various objectives, tactics and strategies adopted and the relationship which should be established with the other party. Therefore, chief negotiators not only encounter pressure from their “opponents” but also from sources within their own organisation or constituency. The necessity for chief negotiators to reconcile interests within the group in order to achieve consensus often creates another dimension to the dynamics of interaction.

In addition to Walton and McKersie’s seminal theory of labour negotiations, Fisher and Ury (1981) have offered a prescriptive framework for the consideration of bargaining concepts originally developed by the “Harvard Negotiation Project” in 1981. Bargaining over positions, they contend, tends to lock negotiators into those positions and the exercise deteriates into a contest of wills. Instead, they advocate an approach referred to as “principled negotiation” which is based on four points: “people”, or separating the people from the problem; “interests”, meaning that the focus should be placed on interests and
not positions; “options”, relating to the variety of possibilities that are required before making decisions; and finally, “criteria”, or the insistence that the result be predicated on some objective standard (Fisher et al., 1991, p. 11). The adoption of these points, it is contended, presents negotiators with the main mechanism for pursuing collaborative bargaining, a generic term for the "win-win" approach which has been employed by an expanding number of educational districts and unions in the USA (Kerchner and Koprich, 1993, p. 19).

The typology of bargaining defined by the research undertaken in the field of labour management collective bargaining, as well as the model for negotiation developed by Fisher and Ury (1981a), can help to illuminate and clarify practice. However, they are limited as a theoretical basis for research on the process of enterprise bargaining at the school level for three principal reasons. First, they are deficient because of their exclusive focus on the formal, explicit manifestation of bargaining and their failure to recognize the more tacit dimensions of the interaction. Secondly, as a corollary of the emphasis put on explicit bargaining, there has been a neglect of the school context because it has not traditionally been the location of such activity (Hoyle, 1996). Finally, there is no consideration of the political interaction associated with the bargaining process.

In an effort to fill the void in the conventional literature, the theoretical work of Bacharach and Lawler (1980) attempted to develop a closer connection between the fields of collective bargaining and organizations. According to Bacharach and Lawler (1980), the major deficiency of perspectives which have emerged from the structural analysis of organizations is their failure to acknowledge the power politics involved in coalitional bargaining. In particular, they regard Walton and McKersie's (1965) approach as inadequate on the grounds that there is very little mention of power. Furthermore, the approach focuses exclusively on labour management bargaining and is, thus, too specific in its analysis. Consequently, Bacharach and Lawler (1980) formulated a theory of bargaining relationships and bargaining tactics which is relevant to the power struggle and conflict which, they argue, form the basis of relations within any organization. More specifically, "power, coalitions, and bargaining constitute the three basic themes of their theoretical treatise on organisational politics" (Bacharach and Lawler, 1980, p. xi). They define bargaining as "the give and take that occurs when two or more independent parties experience a conflict of interest" (p. 108). It is thereby considered to represent the action component of conflict.

Bacharach and Lawler's (1980) identification of what they describe as the mode of bargaining, or the tacit-explicit dimension of the bargaining relationship is also instructive. Explicit bargaining is specified as "the conscious manifestation of bargaining" (p. 112) and is conceptualized by the exchange of offers and counter-offers which is designed to find a mutually acceptable solution to the conflict. An explicit bargaining context is characterised by relatively open lines of communication, a recognition that the relationship is a bargaining one, and consent to consider compromise. In contrast, tacit bargaining occurs when communication lines have been obstructed by the parties and the bargaining relationship may not even be recognised for what it is. Under these circumstances there are few explicit offers and counter-offers, but rather a more subtle employment of tactics aimed to outmanoeuvre and manipulate. Tacit bargaining, according to Bacharach and Lawler (1980), often precedes, and is transformed into, explicit bargaining. Furthermore, the essence of bargaining is regarded as tactical action and is depicted as an information manipulation game in which deception and bluff are critical ingredients.

So far, considerations have centred on the theoretical and conceptual literature on bargaining. However, there is also an emerging empirical research base on the value of adopting a bargaining approach in industrial relations. Before considering this research base, however, a brief outline of the policy context is appropriate. The concentration is on the Australian policy context since this is the only country in which an enterprise bargaining approach has been adopted for determining teachers' terms and conditions and work. However, some comparative points of reference are made throughout.

The policy context

The nature of teachers' work is changing throughout much of the world. Concurrently, the nature of the contractual agreements between teachers and their employers are also changing. Much of the impetus for changes in these contractual agreements is related to a desire to ensure greater accountability, greater efficiency and effectiveness on the part of teachers, and a more productive system of schooling overall. In the UK, various developments, including the introduction of locally managed schools, have had a bearing on teachers' work and conditions. In the
USA, as the next section of this paper demonstrates, certain educational districts, most notably in California, have introduced "educational trust agreements" which allow for an expanded and more complex view of teachers' working conditions. Australia reflects these general trends but in a unique manner through the introduction of what is known as "enterprise bargaining". This is based on a decentralised system of industrial relations which presents opportunities for employers and employees to negotiate terms and conditions of work according to perceived contextual needs.

One way of making sense of the move towards enterprise bargaining in the educational domain in Australia is to see it as part of the greater movement towards the restructuring of education internationally. On this, Harman (1991) claims that, at least in OECD countries, it is possible to identify broad directions in which the restructuring efforts are heading:

- Restructuring efforts appear to be part of an attempt to make the management of education more efficient, more accountable, and more responsive to government policies, to introduce corporate management approaches from the business sector, to devolve responsibility to regions and schools, and to place much greater emphasis on educational outputs (p. 3).

He concludes by saying that the market metaphor has been increasingly adopted. This metaphor embraces the notion of education as a service to be purchased, as opposed to education being viewed as a "public good".

At the same time, it would be misleading to argue that economic forces, no matter how great, are the only ones underpinning current restructuring in Australia. For example, the focus on improving the quality of teachers and teaching (Dawkins, 1988) is also significant. Federal reports such as Teacher Quality: An Issues Paper (Schools Council, 1989), and Australia's Teachers - an Agenda for the Next Decade (Schools Council, 1990), articulated the concerns which had surfaced during the 1980s about teaching as an occupation and commented on the widespread view that the morale and standing of the teaching profession were declining. This development was attributed to the quality of entrants, the unattractiveness of teaching as a career, the work life and practice of teachers, and the inadequacy of existing mechanisms for recognising and rewarding the quality of teaching in terms of career paths and status (Ingvarson, 1994, p. 161). These, of course, are concerns not unique to Australia; rather they have been raised throughout a great number of OECD countries over the last decade.

Traditionally, in Australia, teachers' terms and conditions of work are set out according to an industrial award issued by an industrial tribunal and applying to all employees within a particular sector of the education system. Awards were also binding on all employers and were legally enforceable. Negotiations dealing with award claims were conducted between the relevant union and the employer. Where no agreement was reached between the parties the case was put before the industrial tribunal for conciliation and arbitration.

As Angus (1991, p. 78) has observed, according to this arrangement teachers expected that salary increases would be linked to rises in the cost of living and that relativities with other occupations would be observed.

The move away from this procedure has to be seen in the light of the Federal Labor Government's commitment to micro-economic change and the initiation of award restructuring as a means of improving productivity by upgrading the skills of the Australian workforce as a whole. Against this background, education became associated more and more with the need to develop a society with a highly competent workforce responsive to the demands made by changing patterns of work and to the need for Australia to be economically competitive in the international market. In the case of schools, this involves improving the skills of their major resource, teachers, and providing them with a better work environment. This reflects the international trend emphasising the importance of teacher professionalism and empowerment. Caldwell and Spinks (1988), for example, noted that in the USA, reports by the Carnegie Forum on Education and the Economy (1986) and the Holmes Group (1986) advocated the goal of making schools better places for teachers in which to work and to learn.

When award restructuring was considered initially in Australia, it was viewed as having the potential to have a powerful impact on the way in which school systems would implement educational reform (Angus, 1991, p. 81). In January 1989, a national benchmark rate was established which asserted that teachers' work and qualifications were substantially the same throughout Australia and so, therefore, should be salaries (Durbridge, 1991). The following year the Federal Industrial Relations Commission, the nation's industrial relations court, ratified the introduction of the Advanced Skills Teacher classification (AST) to recognise exemplary teaching and provide a new classroom-based career structure which would progress from level one to level three (Chadbourne and Ingvarson, 1991).
This new classification bears strong resemblance to the notion of “Super Teacher” currently being mooted in the UK. 

Early in 1991, the Federal Government also initiated a National Project on the Quality of Teaching and Learning. Its main purpose was to provide a forum for co-operative work involving government and private employers, education unions, the Australian Council of Trade Unions (ACTU), and the Federal Government (Durbridge, 1991, p. 89). In further pursuit of opportunities for flexibility, increased productivity, and work quality enhancement, the ACTU and the Federal Government agreed that the next logical step was towards enterprise-based bargaining. Although the Industrial Relations Commission was initially concerned that the parties were not sufficiently mature to handle genuine enterprise bargaining (Niland, 1994, p. 14), it endorsed the concept in the October 1991 Wage Case decision. As a result, a central agreement entitled The Accord Mark V1, negotiated prior to the March 1993 federal election, continued the decentralisation of wages and work conditions. Shaw (1995, p. 3) has pointed out that this period witnessed a dramatic change in the focus of industrial relations legislation which culminated in the Industrial Relations Reform Act of 1993. Previously, the focus of industrial relations was exclusively on awards, but now the legislation emphasised agreements. The rationale behind the new Act was expressed clearly by the then Federal Minister of Industrial Relations, Laurie Brereton:

Under this system of enterprise bargaining, the parties involved will have a greater responsibility for determining the outcome of their agreements. The changes in industrial relations will open the way for Australian workplaces to meet the challenge of being more productive and internationally competitive (Niland, 1994, p. 17).

This development, the Minister claimed, represented a further step in the continuing reforms that the Federal Labor Government had introduced over the past decade.

With the encouragement of the Federal Industrial Relations Commission, the principles of enterprise bargaining and enterprise agreements have also been endorsed by state jurisdictions where provisions have been made to provide formal frameworks detailing the proper processes and structures required. For example, in Western Australia, this development manifested itself in the Workplace Agreements Bill, 1993. Put simply, the legislation provided for the creation of comprehensive workplace agreements encompassing all aspects of the employment relationship negotiated between individual employees and the employer. Its overarching importance has been the injection of “productivity thinking” into the “education industry” and the endorsement of the notion of an association between reform, productivity, and pay (Angus, 1991, p. 84). This perspective has been further reinforced by means of legislation supporting the principle of agreements negotiated at the workplace either in conjunction with or completely replacing the relevant award.

The existence of legislation, however, is not sufficient to overcome the fear of the unknown that may be felt by schools embarking on the process of enterprise bargaining. Furthermore, this fear is likely to be accentuated by the absence of a knowledge base to provide practitioners with theoretical insights. Unfortunately, in this regard, the enterprise bargaining literature pertaining specifically to the education sector is at a formative stage and, as yet, no theoretical or analytical framework has emerged. Therefore, however, value in considering the types of approaches which have been adopted towards bargaining in other contexts. The next section of this paper addresses this by outlining some of the theoretical and conceptual dimensions of bargaining. It is then followed by a section which considers the small but emerging empirical research base on award restructuring and enterprise-based bargaining.

So far, considerations have centred on the theoretical and conceptual literature on bargaining, and on the policy context. However, there is also an emerging empirical research base on the value of adopting a bargaining approach in industrial relations. While, as the next section demonstrates, very little of the research which has been undertaken has been within the education sector, there is great scope for addressing this deficit.

The emerging literature on award restructuring and enterprise-based bargaining

Shaw (1995, p. 11) has concluded that there is widespread support for the view that enterprise bargaining offers opportunities for “flexibility, increased productivity and work quality enhancement”. He also asserts that there may be further benefits such as “greater consultation between management and employees, and a cooperative culture at the workplace, involving wider scope for employee participation in decision-making processes”. Similarly, Niland (1994, p. 17) argues that while enterprise bargaining is not yet the norm, those who are seeking to establish genuine enterprise agreements are breaking “new ground” and will enjoy the
benefits sooner than those who delay. He considers that the undertaking to implement more efficient and flexible arrangements at the workplace is irreversible because of economic pressures, but it is also in the interests of management and staff within a particular enterprise.

At the same time, serious doubts have been expressed about certain elements of enterprise bargaining. On this, Shaw (1995, p. 11) highlights the vulnerability of certain sections of the workforce, especially at times of high unemployment, to reduced earnings and reduced conditions of employment. The danger of this occurring, it is alleged, is heightened by the superior bargaining power of employers. Focusing on the health industry, Gardner (1994) has presented a salutary warning to nurses about the reluctance of health managers to surrender their "management prerogative" in the pursuit of an enterprise agreement. In other words, managers have been slow to accept that genuine bargaining depends on an open and collaborative relationship with employees and entails a willingness to share information relevant to matters of negotiation which may traditionally have been the exclusive property of management. Bramble (1993, p. 3) takes a more extreme position, stating that enterprise bargaining "is a massive fraud, perpetrated against Australian workers. It means sacrifice, lower wages, fewer jobs and worse working conditions".

It would seem, therefore, that prevailing attitudes towards enterprise bargaining as a whole are somewhat equivocal. Although it is acknowledged that benefits may be derived from a more co-operative workplace culture, serious doubts exist as to whether bargaining can ever take place from equal positions of power. There is also considerable uncertainty about the final outcome of enterprise bargaining in the education sector. On this, it is instructive to draw attention to the notion of the "educational trust agreement" (Kerchner and Koppich, 1993, 1996; Streshly and DeMitchell, 1994). Such agreements have been evolving in a number of school districts throughout California and allow for an expanded and more complex view of working conditions in education (Streshly and DeMitchell, 1994, p. 96). Put simply, an educational trust agreement represents a legally binding bilateral accord existing outside of the collectively bargained contract and is negotiated between the union and management. Whereas collective bargaining continues to deal with the substantive issues of conditions of employment, the trust agreement revolves to a greater extent around such professional areas of concern as peer review, professional development, and school site collaborative management and decision making (Kerchner and Koppich, 1993, p. 20).

Kerchner and Caufman (1993, p. 18) have identified three main effects of trust agreements in California. First, trust agreements involve new assumptions about who benefits from labour management interactions; the formulation of trust agreements is consequently characterised by an absence of self-interest on the part of teachers. Secondly, trust agreements involve different notions of bargaining from those traditionally prevailing; rather than bargaining from positions, participants in negotiations for a trust agreement represent a principle or a problem and adopt a more open approach. This model was originally developed by the Harvard Negotiation Project (Fisher and Ury, 1981b), the purpose being to reshape bargaining from a "win-lose" proposition to a process of mutual advantage in which each side "wins" by means of principled compromise (Kerchner and Koppich, 1993). Third, negotiations in pursuit of trust agreements are not concerned about a "win-lose" distribution of fixed resources, but attempt to use bargaining for mutual gain.

The efficacy of trust agreements, however, depends heavily upon the emergence of "professional unionism" which is required "to balance teachers' legitimate self-interests with the larger interests of teaching as an occupation and education as an institution" (Kerchner and Caufman, 1993, p. 19). The basic tenets of emerging professional unionism have been stipulated by Koppich (1993, p. 194) as being composed of joint custody of reform, union management collaboration, and concern for the public interest. Joint custody of reform entails an acceptance on the part of both management and union of shared responsibility for the change process; union management collaboration refers to the main impetus propelling negotiations from the adversarial to the co-operative attempt to resolve mutually identified educational issues; and concern for the public interest involves a recognition by the union of the importance of balancing public good with teacher self-interest.

The notion of professional unionism is contrasted with the more traditional version of "industrial unionism" which assumes that a division exists between labour and management. According to this model, the union pursues "the economic and day-to-day work concerns of the employees", while "management establishes policy and makes operational decisions" (Kerchner and Koppich, 1993, p. 17). It is this implicit separation of interests, so it is claimed, that provides the
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Foundation of adversarial labour management relations and limits the scope of negotiated agreements. Indeed, Ayers (1992, p. 18) contends that the industrial style of unionism has “constrained teachers within a blue collar framework with its exclusive focus on wages and benefits rather than issues of curriculum, instruction and evaluation”. Consequently, it is deemed axiomatic that this model cannot support the expansion of teachers’ professional roles.

It will be some time yet before we get a clear picture as to whether or not enterprise bargaining in Australia will eventuate in an expansion of teachers’ professional roles. What does seem clear, however, is that the trend towards this mode of industrial relations within education will continue throughout the country. While acknowledging the fact that developments in education in Australia vary from state to state, the situation in Western Australia goes some way towards illustrating the experience of enterprise bargaining throughout the country. In 1997, several non-government schools in Western Australia had enterprise agreements registered by the Western Australian Industrial Commission. The agreements were of two types. The first type refers to the collective enterprise agreement concluded by the Western Australian Catholic Schools’ sector. The second type refers to the single enterprise agreement adopted by all other independent schools in the state.

Western Australian schools, having made the decision to seek a single enterprise agreement, had at their disposal some suggestions relating to the formal mechanisms of the process of negotiation. This information was provided by the Memorandum of Agreement co-signed by the employers’ organisation, the Association of Independent Schools of Western Australia (AISWA) and the Independent Schoolteachers’ Union, the Independent Schools Salaried Officers’ Association (ISSOA) in May 1994. The Memorandum committed both organisations to the process of enterprise bargaining at the individual school level without obliging either party to form an enterprise agreement. In order to achieve desired outcomes the Memorandum advocated the establishment of a committee comprising equal representation of employers and employees as determined by agreement between the staff and the employer. It was advised that the employee representation should include a union school representative (where one exists) and the others should be elected by a ballot of employees. The process of negotiation should allow industrial representation of both AISWA and the ISSOA if requested by either party. There were also recommendations relating to preliminary training, time release to enable the holding of meetings, and the reporting procedure.

Although this framework established a practical basis for undertaking enterprise bargaining, it did not, in itself, prepare the school for dealing with the highly complex processes of interaction which necessarily constitute a negotiating situation. Indeed, it may even be contended that it is the very complexity of the phenomenon, as encountered for the first time, which makes it impossible for a school to know in advance what to expect and how to deal with it. Hence, according to this perspective, no model of a prescriptive and normative nature can be applied to the situation because of the conditions of dynamic complexity that characterise enterprise bargaining. Therefore, a need for participants to recognise that unpredictability is an integral part of the process and will require a constant adjustment and revision of practice. As Stacey has put it (1992, p. 1), “Route and destination must be discovered through the journey itself in order to travel to new lands ... the key to success lies in the creative activity of making new maps”. Therefore, if Western Australian independent schools, like schools elsewhere, are to respond to the challenge of enterprise bargaining with confidence and competence, there is a necessity for research to illuminate the actual experiences which are occurring at the school-site level to assist in the charting of new territory. This point will now be taken up in the next section in more detail, with particular reference to the need to understand participants’ perceptions of enterprise bargaining and of their experiences of the bargaining process.

The need to understand participants’ perceptions of enterprise bargaining and of their experiences of the bargaining process

The emphasis that research has placed on explicit procedures of bargaining and negotiation has meant that schools have received scant attention because they have not traditionally provided a context where this kind of activity has occurred openly (Hoyle, 1986, p. 131). Related research which has been applied to areas other than the education sector is also deficient in providing an adequate foundation for understanding the phenomenon. The research undertaken into negotiations, for example, has tended not to reveal what Fells (1995a, p. 268) has described as “the cut and thrust of the ‘real world’ of
negotiations”; a critique which complements Strauss’s recommendation (1978, p. 11) that there is a need for research to consider the views of “actors” as they enter and affect the negotiations.

The need for research to uncover the beliefs, values, perspectives and motivations of the participants in the bargaining process at the school level, is made more apparent when the particular circumstances which surround enterprise bargaining are considered. First, the complete novelty of the phenomenon as it applies to schools, prompts an investigation of participants’ perspectives within a context of change and uncertainty. Indeed, as Fullan has postulated (1993), new ways of doing things in schools create an initial period of ambiguity which will inevitably affect the interpretations that are made of the phenomenon by the participants. A second circumstance is the notion of co-operation between employer and employee which underpins the process of enterprise bargaining in order to reach agreement. The desirability of this relationship is often evident in the rhetoric of the legislation which emphasises the capacity of new workplace conditions “to enable better cooperation and communication, between the two parties” (Western Australia, Parliament, 1993). Notwithstanding such rhetoric, however, the co-operative dimension of the bargaining process will ultimately be defined by the interpretations of the individuals involved. Circumstances at the school level could be such that an impediment is placed in the path of achieving enhanced cooperation.

The education sector has, in fact, been slow to accept the new culture of industrial relations. As Angus has argued (1991, pp. 78-9), teachers in Australia have found the notion of improving productivity within an “industry” difficult to grasp as it applies to education. Indeed, many have regarded the economic objectives of workplace reform as an affront to their professionalism (Angus, 1991). In this regard, teachers are particularly suspicious of the instrumental notions of schooling which have been embraced by the changes introduced into the industrial relations forum, as well as the requirement that education should become more productive (Angus, 1991). Set against a background of scepticism, if not outright hostility, it may be the case that enterprise-based bargaining is not readily countenanced, which means that a school embarking on the process is likely to encounter difficulties from the outset. This factor in itself invites speculation as to how agreement can be reached according to a system of enterprise-based bargaining.

Another factor which could present an impediment to the co-operative basis of an agreement is a reluctance on the part of employers to reassess their position within an industrial relations environment predisposed on a need for “good faith” bargaining with employees. It seems likely that the efficacy of the bargaining process at the school will hinge, to some extent, on the willingness of management to accept more open and collaborative relationships with teachers than might have previously existed. If, however, an employing authority seeks to preserve its traditional “management prerogative” to manage a school’s affairs without interference, this attitude is likely to create a barrier to the kind of co-operation which is envisaged in the process of reaching an agreement. Similarly, a refusal to disclose crucial financial or other information may not further the cause of co-operation as espoused by the rhetoric (Gardner, 1994).

A third dimension of enterprise bargaining in schools which may be strongly influenced by participants’ interpretations is the rationale that is adopted for seeking an agreement. This observation relates to whether bargaining for an enterprise agreement within a school is motivated by a genuine desire to improve the quality of work life for teachers as a means of increasing the productivity of teaching and learning, or whether utilitarian and economic considerations take precedence. In this regard, the role of the union also needs to be taken into account. Kerchner and Caufman (1993, p. 19) use the term “professional unionism” to describe a teaching association which “balances teachers’ legitimate self-interests with the larger interests of teaching as an occupation and education as an institution”. This model contrasts with “industrial unionism” which is designed to “protect teachers from the whims of managerial and political behaviour and to advance teachers’ interests”. Professional unionism, Kerchner and Caufman (1993, p. 19) claim, provides a more promising basis for collaborative school reform.

In essence, these considerations relate to whether personnel in schools have the “industrial maturity” (Niland, 1994, p. 23) to negotiate agreements at the workplace. In contrast to the traditional tribunal process in which responsibility for determining work conditions rests with a third party, enterprise bargaining operates on the premise that both the employer and employee want to negotiate because there is a perception that this is the best route to follow. Both parties, therefore,
have, at least in theory, the industrial maturity to communicate on a voluntary basis in order to negotiate the best conditions for each group so that a workable deal can be secured that is respected and adhered to by employer and employee.

Niland (1994) does not elaborate on the definitions of enterprise bargaining held by participants that are necessary in order to accomplish industrial maturity. Nevertheless, it is evident that individuals will embark on bargaining for an enterprise agreement with different perspectives of the situation. These perspectives may have been influenced by such factors as values, ideologies, choices, goals, interests, expertise, history, motivation, and interpretation (Blase, 1991, p. 3). The affirmation of an agreement will, therefore, be dependent on the social process of interaction by which competing definitions of the situation are continuously being exchanged. Contiguous with this view is the belief that enterprise bargaining is too complex a phenomenon to be considered as consisting simply of a structure of rules, regulations and procedures.

It is evident, therefore, that the circumstances surrounding enterprise-based negotiations are likely to influence the perceptions that participants adopt towards the phenomenon. If enterprise bargaining is to be regarded as a practicable method of changing teachers’ work for the benefit of the teachers as well as the school as a whole, it is imperative that an understanding is gained of bargaining as a social process. A variety of research approaches suggest themselves for this purpose. A research agenda using quantitative research methods could be developed with data being examined in terms of preformulated hypotheses about the phenomenon in question and either confirmed or rejected. To this end, data could be collected through surveys, structured interviews, and questionnaires, using a large sample. However, while such an approach may be appropriate for comprehending phenomena involving routinised behaviour (Hammersley, 1989), it would be unlikely to provide insight into the complex and dynamic nature of the process of human interaction. If enterprise bargaining is to be understood as a process in the most holistic sense, research is required which, in Peshkin’s words (1993, p. 28), “gets to the bottom of things, dwells on complexity, and brings us very close to the phenomena we seek to illuminate”. However, an investigation of such a nature must also be located within a theoretical perspective. As the next section of this paper demonstrates, the micro-political approach holds out much promise in this regard.

The micro-political perspective

At the heart of Mangham’s (1979) perspective on organisational behaviour is the idea that social life is derived from the process of interaction which, in turn, is seen primarily as a political encounter. The emphasis on “political encounter” is because when interaction takes place between individuals or groups there is usually some kind of benefit to be gained. Hence, it is asserted that the political realm of an organisation is “the struggle of reasonable men [sic] to have what they consider to be right and proper prevail” (p. xii). Political behaviour, according to this understanding, is not an insidious activity but a consequence of interaction predicated on a desire to achieve particular goals.

Underlying Mangham’s (1979) depiction of organisational behaviour is the notion that people have the capacity to manipulate consciously their own behaviour as well as that of others, and that many fully utilise that capacity, for whatever purpose. This perspective entails an acceptance that people do cooperate and exhibit altruistic considerations in their dealings with others, but there is also recognition of the fact that people compete in order to achieve ends at the expense of another party. A realistic understanding of organisations, therefore, requires an acknowledgement that all dimensions of humanity are significant in determining the conduct of an enterprise. Organisations, for Mangham (1979), may be viewed as micro-political arenas where assorted individuals, groups, coalitions and alliances, act in pursuit of their own sets of goals and objectives. According to this perspective, the activity of an organisation is the product of interaction and is not defined by “automatic machine-like interdependencies nor strongly influenced by principles of development nor homostatic systems, but is the direct result of the power and skill of the proponents and opponents of the action in question” (p. 17). Mangham claims that this micro-political perspective can be used as a guide to action in a diversity of organisational settings (1979, p. 18), but he makes no direct reference to schools.

The legitimacy of micro-politics in the more specific context of educational management and schools was formally acknowledged at a conference on “The Politics of Educational Improvement” held at the University of Bristol in 1981 (Pratt, 1982). Here the traditional model of organisational behaviour, with its stress on formal roles and channels of communication, was tempered by another view stipulating that as the political dimension of organisations was both inevitable and
The micro-political perspective, has both relevance and potential application for an investigation of the process of enterprise bargaining at the school level. Desirable, research should be seeking both to articulate the phenomenon more clearly and to build on it. In other words, the political process needed to be revealed and accepted as a vehicle for change and educational improvement (Pratt, 1982).

This exhortation to promote a systematic study of the micro-politics of educational organisations was satisfied to some degree through the work of Ball (1987). In an attempt to rectify what he considered to be the inadequacy of functional theories in illuminating the way in which schools operate, Ball applied a micro-political perspective to the organisation of schools. He asserted that schools are, in fact, sites of ideological struggle as demonstrated by their “structural looseness”. Although acknowledging the possibility of consensus, Ball contended that schools are primarily “arenas of competition and contest over material advantage and vested interest. Careers, resources, status and influence are at stake in the conflicts between segments, coalitions and alliances” (p. 279). It is, therefore, these processes which need to be explored so as to cultivate a more pragmatic and critical analysis of organisational activity than the abstract structural theories can offer.

Notwithstanding the considerable influence that Ball’s political theory of school organisation has had in the field, it has received some criticism on the grounds that the approach puts too much emphasis on the political processes of power, conflict, and domination at the expense of the co-operative activity that is also purported to occur in schools (Burlingame, 1988; Townshend, 1990). This perceived weakness in Ball’s work is addressed by Blase (1989; 1991), another prominent micro-political theorist. He reiterates the value of the micro-political perspective as a means of understanding life in schools, viewing it as a way of revealing the fundamentals of human behaviour and purpose. However, in contrast to Ball’s position, Blase’s definition of micro-politics also embraces the political processes that can be identified with co-operative relationships. Indeed, Blase (1991, p. 251) regrets the fact that, in his opinion, most studies of school level micro-politics neglect the positive and co-operative face of political interaction. The recognition that the resolution of differences may be an outcome of political processes requires that his depiction of micro-politics is more circumspect in nature: Micro-politics is about power and how people use it to influence others and protect themselves. It is about conflict and how people compete with each other to get what they want. It is about cooperation and how people build support among themselves to achieve their ends. 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 (1991, p. 1).

This kind of activity, Mangham (1987) argues, is the product of interaction which is at the heart of micro-political behaviour and may be understood in terms of symbolic interaction.

The assumptions underpinning the theory of symbolic interaction constitute an epistemological foundation informing the micro-political characterisation of the activities of organisational life, including that of schools. Of the many exponents of “micro-politics” (Ball, 1987; Blase, 1991; Hoyle, 1986; Mangham, 1979), Mangham (1979, 1987) has devoted most attention to the meta-theoretical assumptions of the perspective, and particularly its foundation in the interpretive research approach entitled “symbolic interaction”. This approach is based on the assumption that human behaviour is a dynamic phenomenon involving a process by which the individual creates his or her own world. According to this depiction, the individual is “continuously anticipating, monitoring, and justifying his [sic] actions to himself and others” (Mangham, 1979, p. 27). Viewed in this way, the individual is the basic interpreting and acting unit and should therefore be seen as an active initiator within a given situation. Indeed, all situations are ultimately created and sustained by the interpretations and actions of the individuals involved. This lays the basis for how people perceive and interact with others and helps to determine the orientation of their conduct. As Woods (1992) points out, for smooth interaction to occur it is necessary that all interpret situations in the same way; a requirement that has clear micro-political implications.

The micro-political perspective, therefore, has both relevance and potential application for an investigation of the process of enterprise bargaining at the school level. Indeed, an adaptation of Blase’s (1991, p. 249) framework for future research can be used to further demonstrate the value of micro-politics as a conceptual vehicle for gaining a holistic understanding of the phenomenon. As an issue, enterprise bargaining at the school level is appropriate, particularly if it is envisaged as an example of shared governance. The degree of co-operation which is a prerequisite for progress to be made toward an enterprise agreement automatically entails different relationships between the administration and teachers, as well as new roles for individuals such as the principal or teacher negotiator. Furthermore, enterprise
bargaining inevitably involves processes such as leadership, decision making, communication and goal setting, as well as structures such as coalition formation and hierarchy, all of which provide a context that cannot be divorced from a micro-political perspective. In addition, Blase (1991, p. 249) contends that intensive case studies designed "to explore relationships between and among processes and structures" may be particularly fruitful in generating descriptive and theoretical understandings. Consequently, it is desirable that a study of the process of enterprise bargaining at the school level should take cognizance of the micro-political perspective.

Blase's suggestion that future research in education should accommodate a micro-political perspective, and consider the use of intensive case studies which focus on process, concurs with recent developments that have arisen in the analysis of organisational management and industrial relations. Dawson (1994), for example, has recognised that organisations operate according to complex and dynamic processes and he has devised a "processual" approach to the study of change. For this purpose, he identifies three major determinants of change. First, there is the "context", meaning the history and culture of an organisation and the environment in which it operates. Second, the "substance" is stipulated, which relates to the content and scale of the change phenomenon. Third, there is an acknowledgement of the "politics of change", which is used to refer to the power and politics of decision making surrounding the process of organisational change. This framework, it is contended, enables an analysis of the dynamics of change by identifying and explaining the factors which shape outcomes during the process of organisational transition.

It is the contention of this paper that such an approach is also particularly suited to developing studies of enterprise bargaining. Further more, such studies could also have implications for bodies of theoretical literature outside the education domain. For example, they could contribute to the substantial body of literature on industrial relations and, in particular, to an understanding of the process of negotiation as it occurs in a changing environment of industrial relations; a subject which Fells (1995b, p. 218) states has been given little or no attention within industrial relations research in Australia. Studies could also serve to elaborate on the role of representatives in negotiations; another matter which Fells (1995b, p. 233) believes requires further attention. This consideration assumes greater significance when it is acknowledged that the continued decentralisation of the industrial relations system to the workplace is likely to heighten the involvement of "lay" representatives in negotiations with the employer at the enterprise level.

Conclusions

From considerations so far, the inchoate condition of the knowledge base relating to enterprise bargaining in schools should be clear. It is apparent that uncertainty and confusion exists within the education sector about the capacity of this new industrial instrument to reform schools and the roles of educators in those schools. It is also evident that virtually nothing is known about how those schools which have embarked on the process of enterprise bargaining have dealt with such unaccustomed circumstances. There is, in fact, very little literature pertaining specifically to school-based enterprise bargaining. The theoretical work that has emanated from labour management collective bargaining may help to sharpen description but is limited as a basis for informing a related study in schools. Bargaining theory has tended to focus on organisational contexts where management and unions bargain, and has not included schools. It has also tended to concentrate on the explicit dimension of bargaining and has, thereby, understated the political complexity of such a process. Hence, the validity of micro-politics which is a realistic depiction of the internal dynamics of organisational life and has already been convincingly applied to studies of schools (Ball, 1987; Blase, 1989, 1991; Blase and Anderson, 1995; Gronn, 1988). It is appropriate that an investigation of a phenomenon like enterprise bargaining should acknowledge a micro-political perspective in order to assist in highlighting the fundamentals of human behaviour and purpose which are brought to bear on the situation. As ones (1987, p. 23) has so cogently put it, an understanding of the complex processes undertaken by individuals and groups in organisations should not necessarily be formulated according to neat, linear, "rational-objective" activity, but may be informed by the untidy, cyclical, often highly charged and political conduct of such experiences.

This, however, is not to overlook the need for studies on enterprise bargaining to be undertaken from a variety of research perspectives. Empirical studies of a quantitative nature are required. For example, surveys that can produce factual and attitudinal data yielding
generalisations about what employers, trade union officials and employee negotiators do and think in relation to enterprise bargaining are necessary. Policy studies are also necessary. There is a need for more analysis about the overall policy context within which enterprise bargaining is taking place in order to make explicit its purposes, emphases and functions. Additionally, it would be instructive to undertake policy analyses of industrial tribunal decisions and agreements. This kind of research would help to ascertain what has actually been achieved by enterprise bargaining in terms of reforming the educational workplace. Finally, there is a need for studies of a more philosophical nature. In particular, the ethical implications of enterprise bargaining need to be examined. According to Riley (1992, p. 145), new practices in industrial relations are aimed at replacing an adversarial culture with a co-operative, problem-solving and educative culture. This is predicated on the belief that schools are “moral cultures”. Research is therefore invited which seeks to define the moral leadership capable of promoting the sorts of relationships within a school which facilitate a genuinely collaborative pursuit of shared goals.

It would be foolish to overlook the need for a variety of studies of the types outlined above and based on different methodological perspectives. Nevertheless, the need for qualitative studies seems the most pressing at this juncture, and particularly studies based on the micro-political perspective. It now remains for others to take up the challenge and aim to meet this need.

References
School enterprise bargaining and the need for qualitative research: some reflections from Australia