RE - INTERPRETING OUR EDUCATIONAL PAST: AN OVERVIEW OF RECENT RESEARCH IN THE HISTORY OF NEW ZEALAND EDUCATION

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In 1932, Butchers produced what one contemporary described as; "....an exhaustive and highly accurate survey of the history of education in the Dominions". [1] Since then, several texts have become available. Some of these are general surveys, others are more specialised, the orientation ranging from wholly historical, to partially historical. [2] History of education writing in New Zealand, therefore, is not a new phenomenon. It has, however, been rather late in developing a critical perspective. Even after North American researchers such as M.B. Katz, S. Bowles and H. Gintis [3] published influential critiques of schooling, a New Zealand history of education text could still claim of education policy, without evident embarrassment, that "...mistakes have been made, there have been differences of opinion and changes of policy, but always men in authority have acted with the best of intentions". [4]

This comparatively delayed onset of debate in education history is probably due to two principal factors. First, there has been considerable professional isolation. This has been perpetuated by a geographical isolation in which 'the tyranny of distance' has resulted in limited international contacts, even with Australia. Within New Zealand isolation is also a function of numbers. For New Zealand historians of education would smile at jibes about holding conferences in phone booths. An Australian New Zealand History of Education Society poll of research interests among its members provoked a mere half dozen replies, whilst a list of financial members from the same institution indicated only nine members in New Zealand (1985). Numbers however, are only part of the problem. Traditionally, historians of education, even where their own backgrounds have varied, have largely worked within the confines of a single field of study. Even traditional political history, let along emergent social history, has tended to have a limited influence. The phenomenon of historians and sociologists exchanging ideas and concepts in fields such as cultural studies is a comparatively recent one. A significant fruit of this latter will be the wider dissemination of hitherto inaccessible thesis research findings.

The second factor which has inhibited debate in history of education is both social and political. With the exception of Scotland, perhaps no country has so profoundly enshrined an egalitarian myth within its education system as has New Zealand. Fraser's 1939 statement "that

every person, whatever his level of academic ability, whether he be rich or poor, whether he live in town or country, has a right, as a citizen, to a free education of the kind to which he is best fitted, and to the fullest extent of his powers"[5], has been translated into self-congratulatory official educational rhetoric. As such, it has cast a long shadow over history of education writing in New Zealand. Despite the recent assaults made on that myth by such writers as Nash[6] and Codd et al [7], there has been little evidence to suggest that education policy debate has heeded the message. Given this situation, it is understandable though not, perhaps, wholly excusable, that historians of education have rarely advanced structural critiques of the system they work in.

Nevertheless, in recent years, history of education writing in New Zealand has begun to change. In 1979, following the publication of History of State Education in New Zealand, an NZARE paper by Shuker argued the case for a revisionist perspective in New Zealand education history[8]. The timing of this paper was emphasised by a series of articles in the New Zealand Journal of History by prominent New Zealand historians principally engaged in reinterpreting the Liberal Period.[9] During the late 1970s and early 1980s, further stimulation for education historians was to come from such scholars as Tennant[10], E. Olssen[11] and Freeman-Moir[12], who added fresh perspectives to our knowledge of women's history, working class and economic history. In a forthcoming book edited by David McKenzie and myself, a chapter by Sue Middleton illustrates the utility of sociological and anthropological concepts in women's history. Middleton argues that the experiences of many New Zealand women who attended school after World War Two illustrates the shaping, indeed the constraining of individuals through the social context of dominant expectations regarding female behaviour. By employing oral history techniques[13], itself something of an innovation in New Zealand history of education writing, Middleton is able to demonstrate how women have often experienced contradictions and a sense of marginality that has helped shape their later lives.

Jan Rodger's paper in the same volume, likewise, is concerned with women. In her case, the focus is on the hitherto neglected area of nursing education and the impact upon nurses, of contemporary attitudes towards women. Rodgers traces the influence of ethics such as duty, obedience and subordination on the development of nursing education in New Zealand during the late nineteenth century. In so doing, she demonstrates that these early years were indeed crucial in the structuring of the nursing profession up till the present day.

The recent (1984) debate between McKenzie and M. Olssen[14], indicates the extent to which history of education research has absorbed the critical research developments of the last few years. To some extent the McKenzie/Olssen debate, through its focus on issues such as apriori assumptions in historical writing, the 'continuity' of education, and the extent to which particular groups have gained access to schools, illustrates a cleavage between moderate and radical revisionism, a process which had occurred earlier in the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom and Australia. An encouraging sign, is the way historians of education in New Zealand are beginning to address hitherto unresolved issues. In the forthcoming McKenzie/Openshaw book, no less than four writers[15] Rollo Arnold, Ian McLaren, David McKenzie and

Howard Lee, examine and attempt to explain the development of certain educational policies with particular emphasis on the Liberal period. In this sense they are complementary studies. Arnold examines the position of women in the New Zealand teaching service from 1877-1920, a hitherto neglected area of research. His findings are of considerable interest in that they indicate the relative success of the campaign for equal pay, which culminated in the single salary scale of 1905. He also points out, however, that a more developed social history of women is required in order to explain why these gains were not sustained and in particular, why a separate salary scale was re-introduced during the 1920s - an apparently retrograde step.

McLaren analyses the fluctuating demand for secondary education in late nineteenth century New Zealand. In particular, he notes the growth of antipathy towards endowed schools at the turn of the century, and how the politicians, apparently convinced of the utility of providing increased public access to secondary education, introduced the free place system (1902). This measure, he contends, illustrates how the country as a whole accepted the consequences of democracy in education. McKenzie on the other hand, although he concentrates on a broadly similar period, focuses on the growth of school credentialling from its origins in the primary school. He goes on to conclude that the existing conservatism of New Zealand secondary schools, even after their adoption of the free place system, owed a good deal to the wordly demands of a public by now thoroughly familiar with the market value of examination qualifications. This new interest on the part of education historians in factors outside the education system is likewise evident in Lee's paper on the Junior Civil Service examination during the early twentieth century. Lee is able to further postulate that significant reforms in examinations are often initiated, not by 'informed' criticism from within the system, but rather by changes occurring outside education, principally within the employment market which supplies the 'manifest' function for particular examinations.

New Zealand history of education writing is also reflecting overseas trends in that more consideration is being given to the responses and the initiatives of hitherto inarticulate groups of educational consumers. Shuker's Educating the Workers goes some distance towards answering hitherto unspoken questions.[15] Likewise, the work of such researchers as Barrington [16] and Arnold[17] illustrates this process at work from somewhat different perspectives. To some extent historians of education are heeding McKenzie's timely warning that historians have too often ignored, not just 'the classroom,' but the dynamics of the teaching-learning process itself.

Ironically perhaps, as New Zealand history of education continues along a process of self-discovery, education history elsewhere has become rather less controversial, and less concerned with broader issues. J. Donald Wilson, for instance, has recently speculated that 'the air of smugness' detectable among Canadian education historians might well reflect "...the period of stasis the Canadian historical profession finds itself in".[19] By contrast, the situation in Australia is more volatile. The current debate over the futility or otherwise, of current reform within capitalist societies remains intense, particularly in South Australia.[20]

Assuming that the process of critical inquiry continues to be a feature of history of education writing in New Zealand, and that the field does not lapse almost immediately into stasism (i.e. The counter-revolution before the revolution), there are some cautionary points to be made. First, whilst not ceasing to be aware of wider ideological and historiographical issues, education historians should continue to collect new evidence, and to interpret this evidence according to what it appears to illustrate, even if the result is sometimes not clear-cut.[21] Second, we must avoid the temptation to apply a sort of 'rise-and-triumph' model to our own field, viewing it as in some way 'progressive'. It is tempting to rank research along a continuum, from radical revisionism (more desirable, advanced), through moderate revisionism (more desirable, advanced), through moderate revisionism, to theory-less (therefore undesirable, less advanced) history. While historians must be aware of the ideological assumptions which underlie their work, education history writing in New Zealand requires a diversity of approaches and styles. In McKenzie/Openshaw, Kay Matthews gives us a revealing portrait of Henry Hill, one of New Zealand's better known late nineteenth century school inspectors. Her insights into the arduous life of the frontier inspector are both perceptive and colourful. Further, they provide a useful corrective to simply viewing education as a system, per se, at the expense of the individuals who operated in often discouraging local conditions, and achieved significant results.

A third caution concerns the type of evidence we use, as historians of education, together with the weighting we give certain types of evidence where there are conflicting accounts. Education history in New Zealand has traditionally over-emphasised the 'official' face of education. Revisionist historians have, to a large extent, perpetuated this bias. At least one writer, drawing heavily on the School Journal for much of his material has alleged that prior to 1930 "... a whole generation at least received an ideological indoctrination which is supposed to be characteristic to totalitarian regimes"[22] McKenzie has aptly warned that the "...process of learning and teaching must...be one which is allowed to be not only unique in events, but also to have outcomes that might act in a countervailing manner to policies which seek to influence the school from external sources".[23] A more specific problem is the weighting education historians give to certain pieces of evidence. For instance, in order to illustrate official zeal in inculcating patriotism to occasionally reluctant children and their families, I once noted the Maoriland Workers contention that a girl had been 'flogged' for refusing to sing Three Cheers for the Red, White and Blue at school. Such evidence, whilst significant, remains contentious without collaboration from other sources. In this particular case a National Education editorial was to term the Maoriland Worker report as "...either a deliberate fabrication or a gross distortion of some trifling incident".[24] Who do we believe, and on what grounds?

Fourth, it is very evident that the debate over objectives and outcomes of past education policies has centred around the longstanding New Zealand pre-occupation with schooling as a mechanism of social reform and economic development. Joel Spring,[25] in the United States and Bob Petersen,[26] in Australia, have pointed out that in both these countries, this type of bias unnecessarily compromised concern with

individual development. For example in New Zealand, alternative schooling has often fared badly at the hands of state school administrators and teachers. In addition, it has been neglected by historians of education as being either unimportant to the development of the larger system, or else elitist in character. Recently, Betsey Conway and I have examined the underlying causes of the failure of the Montessori method in the Wanganui Board district during the 1912-24 period. Such an examination has revealed more about the pre-occupations of the state education system, than about alleged shortcomings in Montessori. For instance, it has become clear that Montessori ideals were adapted rather that adopted. Enthusiastic New Zealand observers of the Blackfriars Infant School in Sydney, New South Wales stressed in their reports, the quiet industry of the children, their discipline, the efficiency of instruction in number, reading and writing, the ease by which teachers would be able to construct their own Montessori apparatus. For the education department, the boards and many inspectors, the key factors in the acceptance of Montessori in the initial stages were its apparent promotion of decent citizens, at a moderate cost. When these objectives foundered amidst semi-trained teachers, working in isolated rural schools, Montessori ideals were deemed likewise to have failed, and Montessori was quietly forgotten by early post-World War One educators in a new world of intelligence testing and educational progressivism.

Last, just as historians of education have been preoccupied with the socio-economic aspects of education, so too have we opted for a rather narrow definition of what constitutes education. As well as formal schooling, education is informal. Roy Shuker and I have recently begun to research the hitherto neglected area of youth and popular culture.[27] Especially prior to the advent of television, comics and films were major components of imported popular culture. By examining the reactions of a wide range of individuals, community groups, departmental reports and legislators to comics and films which were believed to have an adverse impact on youth, it is possible to gain a deeper understanding of prevailing conceptions of childhood and youth morality. We argue that, at certain times in our history, the reaction to comics and films have represented a form of moral panic; a periodic compaign against an identified evil, amplified by the media and out of all proportion to the issues involved. In turn such an analysis, if correct, tells us a good deal about New Zealand society and its structure - with important consequences for our notions about the function of education both in the past and today.

To summarize, historians of education are now perceiving that the field offers opportunities for a greater depth and breadth of understanding than hitherto believed possible. Despite some unresolved problems and dangers they are aware of the crucial role history plays in the understanding of the present. Gary McCulloch summarises the potentiality and the fragility of the position we now find ourselves in when he writes:

In one sense, our view of educational history...should respond to the 'darkening vision' of New Zealand society and politics in the 1970s and 1980s. Thus, as we extend the account offered by Cumming and others beyond the school and Board and into the many different aspects of education in all phases of life and society, and update it to include recent developments, we will at the same time transform our history to embrace conflict as well as harmony, intractable tensions no less than progress. We will accept that education...has probably helped to maintain, and sometimes to intensify, social divisions as well as acting to break them down. We will concede that the perspectives of disadvantaged groups will not be the same as, often cannot be reconciled with, those of the 'successes' of the system; that the view from Otara is different to the view from Epsom. On the other hand we should not be blind to the ideologies, myths and perceptions that have tended more often than not to bind the community together.[28]

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Notes

1. A. G. Butchers, The Education System. A Concise History of the New Zealand Education System, National Printing Company: Auckland, 1932. Preface by Harry Atmore, Minister of Education, vi.

2. See, C. Webb, The Control of Education in New Zealand, N.Z.C.E.R: Wellington 1937; J.L. Ewing, The Origins of the New Zealand Primary School Curriculum, 1840-1877, Wellington: NZCER, 1960, and Development of the New Zealand Primary School Curriculum, 1977-1970, Wellington: NZCER, 1970; F.W. Mitchell, New Zealand Education Today, Wellington: Reed, 1968; UNESCO, Compulsory Education in New Zealand, Paris: UNESCO, 1972; J.C. Dakin, Compulsory Education in New Zealand, Newton Abbot: David and Charles, 1973. I.A. McLaren, Education in a Small Democracy: New Zealand. World Education Series: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1974.

3. See M.B. Katz, Class, Bureaucracy and Schools: The Illusion of Educational Change in America, Praeger: New York, 1971; S. Bowles and H. Gintis, Schooling in Capitalist America: Educational Reform and the Contradictions of Economic Life, Basic Books: New York, 1976.

4. I. Cumming and A. Cumming, History of State Education in New Zealand, 1840-1975, Pitmans Pacific Books: Wellington 1978, p. 330.

5. Cited in McLaren, Education in a Small Democracy, p. 3

6. See R. Nash, "Schools Can't Make Jobs: Structural Unemployment and the Schools", New Zealand Journal of Education Studies, vol. 16, No. 1 (1981): 1-14; and R. Nash, Schools Can't Make Jobs, Dunmore Press. Palmerston North, 1983.

7. See J. Codd, R. Harker and R. Nash, Political Issues in New Zealand Education, Dunmore Press: Palmerston North, 1985.

8. R. Shuker. "New Zealand's Educational History, A Revisionist Perspective?" A paper presented at the First National Conference of the New Zealand Association for Research in Education, Victoria University, Wellington, 7-10 December, 1979. See also Delta 27 (November 1980): 38-47 A modified version of this paper is "Research Paradigms, Methodology and Cultural Reproduction", Delta 29, (November, 1981): 29-37.

   See also R. Shuker, The One Best System. Palmerston North: Dunmore Press, 1987.

9. See especially, W.H. Oliver, "Social Welfare: Social Justice or Social Efficiency?" New Zealand Journal of History, vol. 13, (April 1979): 25-33.

10. See for instance, M. Tennant, "Natural Direction, The New Zealand Movement for Sexual Differentiation in Education during the Early Twentieth Century", New Zealand Journal of Educational Studies, vol 12, no. 2 142-153.

11. See in particular, E. Olssen, "Towards a New Society", in The Oxford History of New Zealand, edited by W.H. Oliver, with B.R. Williams, Oxford University Press: Wellington, 1981.

12. D.J. Freeman-Moir, "Employable and quiet: The political economy of human mis-development". New Zealand Journal of Educational Studies, vol. 16, no. 1 (1981): 15-25.

13. Here, one should also note. A. Else et al, Listen to the Teacher. An Oral History of Women who taught in New Zealand c. 1925-1945, Society for Research on Women in New Zealand (Inc): Palmerston North, 1986.

14. D. McKenzie, "Ideology and History of Education in New Zealand", New Zealand Journal of Educational Studies, vol. 19, no. 1 (1984): 2-9 and M. Olssen, "Ideology and History of Education in New Zealand. A Response", New Zealand Journal of Educational Studies, vol 19, no. 1, (1984): 10-14.

15. R. Shuker, Educating the Workers? A History of the Worker's Education Association in New Zealand, Dunmore Press: Palmerston North, 1984.

16. J.M. Barrington, and T.H. Beaglehole, Maori Schools in a Changing Society, NZCER, Wellington, 1974.

17. R. Arnold, The Farthest Promised Land - English Villagers New Zealand Immigrants of the 1870s, Victoria University Press: Wellington, 1981.

18. McKenzie, "Ideology and History of Education in New Zealand", pp 6 - 7.

19. J. Donald Wilson, "From Social Control to Family Strategies: Some observations on Recent Trends in Canadian Educational History", History of Education Review, vol. 13, no. 1. (1984): 1-13.

20. See for instance, the work of Pavla Millar and others, at Flinders University, South Australia, and more recently, at Melbourne University. Note also, the controversial critiques of Marxist and neo-Marxist interpretations by G. Partington, and others. For one view of the consequences of the Australian educational debate, see G. Dow. "Family History and Educational History: Towards an Integration", Historical Studies, Vol. 21, (April 1985): 421-432.

21. See for instance, the discussion concerning upswings in patriotic fervour in R. Openshaw, "Decision at Waihi: New Zealand's Flag-Saluting Case of 1941 and its Present Day Significance", New Zealand Journal of Educational Studies, vol. 19, no. 2. (1984): 149-150. An instructive contrast in interpreting similar data is provided by R. Openshaw, "A Spirit of Bolshevism: The Weitzel Case of 1921 and its impact on the New Zealand Education System", Political Science, vol. 33, no. 2 (1981): 127-139; and L. Gordon and R. Openshaw, "The Social Significance of Flag Raising in Schools", Delta 34, (July 1984): 55-62

22. P. Malone, "The British Empire and the Imperial Ideology", New Zealand Journal of History, 7 (April 1973): 27.

23. McKenzie, "Ideology and History of Education", p. 7

24. National Education, 1921, Editorial, vol. 2, no. 8, pp260-261.

25. J. Spring, The Sorting Machine: National Educational Policy Since 1945.

26. B. Petersen, "The Montessorians - M.M. Simpson and L. de Lissa, in Pioneers of Australian Education, vol. 3, edited by C. Turner, Sydney: University of Sydney Press, 1983.

27. See R. Openshaw and R. Shuker, "Worthless and Indecent Literature. Comics and Moral Panic in early post-war New Zealand". (Forthcoming in History of Education Review): and R. Shuker and R. Openshaw, "Forcing Houses of Sexual Precocity and Criminal Tendencies". New Zealand Youth and the Silent Movies. (Forthcoming in New Zealand Journal of Educational Studies).

28. G. McCulloch, "Towards a Social History of Education in Auckland". Paper presented to the annual conference of the NZ Association for Research in Education, Hamilton, November 1986, p. 12.