

Culture, history and change: Aspects of education

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ABSTRACT

In New Zealand's rapidly changing society, the character and role of education seem likely to require major adjustments both to meet the new demands of the 1990s and the twenty-first century, and to redress the disparities created by past policies and neglect. Towards this end a critical assessment of the institutions, characteristics and relationships of education as it has developed over the past century and a half is surely a prerequisite. Potentially of major importance as part of this general process is a 'new wave' of educational history, conceived not in the traditional way of charting the growth and progress of educational institutions towards an enlightened present, but as a means of assessing the changing relations between New Zealand society and education in its broadest sense. Such a study should be significant for our understanding of education, culture, and New Zealand history, with some bearing also upon future educational policy. It involves a reassessment of the character of educational research no less than active engagement in the scholarship of sociologists and cultural historians.

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Three closely related aspects of education seem especially relevant to this reassessment of New Zealand's social and educational history: education as culture, education as history, and educational change. The first of these aspects, education as culture, concerns the cultural transmission of values and interests through formal schooling and other more informal agencies of education. It includes analysis of the role of family, community and church, of libraries, youth groups and publishers, as well as of schools and schooling, with the purpose of trying to understand and appraise education in terms of what Bernard Bailyn called 'the entire process by which a culture transmits itself across the generations'.¹ One would here be endeavouring to develop a strong parallel with E.P. Thompson's view of social class, as 'a social and cultural formation, arising from processes which can

only be studied as they work themselves out over a considerable historical period'.² Raymond Williams, in *The Long Revolution*, sees education itself in a broadly similar way, as expressing, 'consciously and unconsciously, the wider organisation of a culture and a society', arguing moreover that the content of education, 'which is subject to great historical variation' expresses 'certain basic elements in the culture, what is thought of as "an education" being in fact a particular selection, a particular set of emphases and omissions'.³

Attempts to define the New Zealand 'culture' have tended to emphasise the growth of a sense of nationhood, from M.H. Holcroft's fine essay of 1940 to Sir Keith Sinclair's recent *A Destiny Apart*.⁴ In the last few years there has begun to develop some discussion of the role of education in terms of New Zealand culture. Tony Simpson, for example, has explored the relationship between 'Information, culture and power' as part of a sustained critique of the dominant egalitarian mythology of New Zealand.⁵ A fascinating tableau of the clash between different kinds of culture, oral and literate, represented by the Treaty of Waitangi has been drawn by D.F. McKenzie.⁶ We also have a comparative analysis of Maori and aboriginal education which examines how culture, 'the symbolic system which incorporates the rules that govern how an individual interprets his or her environment',⁷ is recreated in each new generation. The potential for further studies of 'education as culture' in New Zealand is clearly substantial.

The same is surely true of our second category, education as history: that is to say, education interpreted as sets of values and institutions created and developed for distinct social and historical purposes, and with discrete historical consequences.⁸ Over the past thirty years the importance of education as an aspect of history tout court has been accepted and documented in several countries. In Britain, for instance, Brian Simon has argued, that the proper place of education is 'not merely as an adjunct to the historical process but as one of the chief factors conditioning men's (sic) outlook and aspirations, attitudes to which express clearly current beliefs about the human condition and the direction of social advance'.⁹ Introducing a major collection of essays on the history of education in France, the historian Donald N. Baker notes portentously:

Obviously, the history of education in a modern Western society touches on most of the central issues of modern history - the formation of the nation-state, the ascendancy of national language and culture, regional reactions to centralisation and homogenization, technological development, economic growth, social mobility, class relations, the formation of governing elites, relations between young and old and between men and women, etc. Nearly every significant theme can be seen refracted through the history of education systems.¹⁰

In the United States, too, Jurgen Herbst has felt able to celebrate the fact that 'We have incorporated educational developments into the mainstream of American historiography'.¹¹ It has been suggested that the notion of 'education as history' has vital implications for both education and history as areas of inquiry. Thus Joan Simon argues not only that placing education historically is an 'essential' way of establishing it as 'a legitimate field of study,' but also that the educational process is 'the core of history' since 'social achievements are stored in an external, exoteric form and must be mastered by each generation'.¹²

There are important indications that this theme is now being taken up and developed in the New Zealand context. Rather later than elsewhere,¹³ historians of education in New Zealand are beginning to consider their research as being 'part of the wider study of the history of society, social history broadly interpreted'.¹⁴ In particular one would mention here the recent work of such historians as David McKenzie, Roy Shuker, Roger Openshaw and Colin McGeorge.¹⁵ Two major new works should give additional impetus in this regard. The first, Roy Shuker's *The One Best System*, seeks to provide a 'revisionist' history of state education in New Zealand that locates its role as an agency of 'cultural hegemony'. The second is a collection of essays edited by McKenzie and Openshaw, devoted to 're-interpreting the educational Past'.¹⁶

The third aspect of education relevant to this discussion is that of educational change - the character of and processes involved in change in education, in relation to wider social and cultural

changes. Analysis within this sphere has focused on the ways in which education is contested and shaped by conflicting interests and ideologies, and on the various motives and purposes behind change, in order to explain and define the relationship between education and society either in general terms or in a given context. Karabel and Halsey for instance point out that in the 'social reproduction models adopted by many marxist theorists, 'the process seems to work so smoothly and is based upon such an imposing system of domination that one must wonder how it is that educational change ever takes place'. They contend that the notion of 'contradiction' has been added to that of 'correspondence' explicitly in order to confront this problem.¹⁷ Henry Giroux has also drawn attention to the difficulties of conceptualising change within reproduction theory, leading him to develop an elaborate theory of 'resistance' that will both allow and promote change in education and society:

In short, the basis for a new radical pedagogy must be drawn from a theoretically sophisticated understanding of how power, resistance, and human agency can become central elements in the struggle for critical thinking and learning. Schools will not change society, but we can create in them pockets of resistance that provide pedagogical models for new forms of learning and social relations - forms which can be used in other spheres more directly involved in the struggle for a new morality and view of social justice.¹⁸

In a highly sophisticated explanation of change in a particular historical context, early nineteenth-century Britain, Brian Simon has stressed that although educational provision at this time was strongly influenced by the interests of the governing class it nonetheless promoted substantial and unforeseen change: 'a changed consciousness, resulting from new circumstances and new forms of activity, profoundly influenced social development'.¹⁹ Such analyses illuminate educational and social change in a way that transcends simple 'evolutionary' and 'social control' models. They also lend a particular perspective to discussion of contemporary and future educational change.

There has been relatively little work of this type that sheds light on the character and processes of educational change in New Zealand. Perhaps the most promising development here is the collection of essays edited by Codd, Harker and Nash under the title *Political Issues in New Zealand Education*, in which several authors attempt to come to terms with this kind of issue in relation to particular problems and contexts. Peter Ramsay takes notice of 'experimenting' on the part of some New Zealand teachers which might constitute 'a first step towards a broader programme of structural change'.²⁰ The editors boast, rather bravely, that 'we know how the system works and we know what policies are required to check its effects in reproducing the limiting structures of class, race and gender'.²¹ Issues are shown to be contested, human agency is emphasised. Even so explanations of and suggestions for change tend to be overshadowed and weakened by the book's dominant concern with the oppressive, reproductive character of education in New Zealand:

The attentive reader will be left in no doubt that state schooling in this country is an inherently political instrument for social and cultural reproduction which has developed a variety of modes whereby dominant social fractions exercise their power through what Gramsci called hegemony.²²

There remains considerable scope for further analysis of educational change and its social and political relationships.

It is easy to see, at least in general terms, that these three aspects of education are intimately related to each other: detailed study of one demands an understanding of the others. It seems also that there is already growing interest in each of these aspects in the New Zealand context. But much more attention to all three dimensions and their interactions is still needed if we are to contribute in a critical way to contemporary debate on the future of education and society in New Zealand. One says all this in spite of knowing that such a major reorientation of educational studies goes completely against the grain of educational research as it has consolidated itself over the past fifty years or so. Karabel and Halsey noted a decade ago that in Europe and America, 'Over the last generation educational research has come from the humblest margins of the social sciences to occupy a central position in sociology, as well as to receive considerable attention from economists,

historians, and anthropologists.²³ It would be difficult to apply such a judgement to New Zealand. Educational research in New Zealand has been dominated by ahistorical, empirical, scientific views of education, with educational psychology strongly entrenched. This still appears to be generally true in the 1980s. According to Raymond Adams,

Critical self-analysis has not yet become an acceptable tradition in education - partly because psychology, not noticeably self-critical, has been dominant and partly because the necessary self-confidence is lacking. Positivism is more readily accepted than would be the case in Britain or wherever epistemological debate is active... Accordingly, what is defined as research tends to be in the positivist tradition, quantitative, technocratic and reportedly "value free".²⁴

It seems likely that educational researchers will need to overcome these tendencies if they are to explore in any profound sense the aspects of education which have hitherto been so neglected.

This special issue of *Access* is intended as a modest contribution towards new and critical study of these neglected aspects of education. Roger Openshaw, co-editor with David McKenzie of *Reinterpreting The Educational Past*, reflects upon the changing character of educational history which has presaged its increased importance in contemporary and theoretical debates. Roy Shuker, attuned as usual to the links between history, sociology and theory, reports on two case studies in 'popular culture and moral panic', drawing comparisons and contrasts between the 1930s and the 1980s, and seeking to identify the social and cultural implications of educational processes in their broadest sense. Last, Gary McCulloch investigates some general themes in education in urban Auckland, and explores the relationship between current arrangements and the processes of change.

Notes

1. Bernard Bailyn, *Education The Forming Of American Society: Needs and Opportunities For Study* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1960), 14.
2. E.P. Thompson, *The Making Of The English Working Class* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1968 edn), 11.
3. Raymond Williams, *The Long Revolution* (London: Chatto and Windus 1961), 125.
4. M. H. Holcroft, *The Deepening Stream* (Christchurch: Caxton Press 1940); Keith Sinclair, *A Destiny Apart: New Zealand's Search For National Identity* (Wellington: Allen and Unwin, 1986). See also Keith Sinclair, *The Native Born: The Origins of New Zealand Nationalism* (Massey memorial lecture, 1986).
5. Tony Simpson, *A Vision Betrayed: The Decline of Democracy In New Zealand* (Auckland: Hodder and Stoughton, 1984), Chapter 7.
6. D.F. McKenzie, *Oral Culture Literacy And Print In Early New Zealand: The Treaty of Waitangi* (Wellington: Victoria University Press, 1985).
7. Richard Harker, K.R. McConnochie, *Education As Cultural Artifact: Studies in Maori and Aboriginal Education* (Palmerston North: Press, 1985).
8. See Harold Silver, *Education As History: Interpreting 19th And 20th Century Education* (London: Methuen, 1983) for further discussions of this notion.
9. Brian Simon, 'The history of education,' in J.W. Tibble (ed.), *The Study Of Education* (London: RKP, 1966), 93.
10. Donald N. Baker, 'Foreword', in D.N. Baker, Patrick J. Harrigan (eds.), *The Making of Frenchmen: Current Directions In The History of Education In France, 1679 - 1979* (Waterloo Ontario: Historical Reflections Press, 1980).
11. Jurgen Herbst, 'Beyond the debate over revisionism: three educational pasts writ large', in *History Of Education Quarterly*, 20/2 (1980), 131.
12. Joan Simon, 'The history of education in Past And Present', in *Oxford Review Of Education*, 3/1 (1977), 71.

13. See Gary McCulloch, *Education In The Forming Of New Zealand Society: Needs And Opportunities For Study* (NZARE monograph No. 1, 1986) on aspects of educational history in New Zealand and overseas.
14. Asa Briggs, 'The study of the history of education', in *History Of Education*, 1/1 (1972), 5.
15. See e.g. David McKenzie, *Education And Social Structure: Essays In The History Of New Zealand Education* (Dunedin: New Zealand College of Education, 1982); Roy Shuker, *Educating The Workers? A History Of The Workers' Educational Association In New Zealand* (Palmerston North: Dunmore Press, 1984); Roger Openshaw, 'Lilliput under siege: New Zealand society and its schools during the "Red Scare", 1919 - 1922', in *History Of Education Quarterly*, 20/4 (1960), 403- 24; Colin McGeorge, 'Hear our voices we entreat: schools and the "colonial twang", 1680 - 1930', in *New Zealand Journal of History*, 18/1 (1984), 3 - 18.
16. Roy Shuker, *The One Best System? A Revisionist History Of State Education In New Zealand* Palmerston North: Dunmore Press, 1987); David McKenzie, Roger Openshaw (eds.), *Re-interpreting The Educational Past* (Wellington: NZCER, 1987).
17. Jerome Karabel, A.H. Halsey, 'Educational research: a review and an interpretation', in J. Karabel, A.H. Halsey (eds.), *Power And Ideology In Education* (New York: OUP 1977), 40-41.
18. Henry A. Giroux, 'Theories of reproduction and resistance in the new sociology of education: a critical analysis', in *Harvard Educational Review*, 53/3 (1983), 293.
19. Brian Simon, 'Can education change society?', in his *Does Education Matter?* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1985), 22.
20. Peter Ramsay, 'The domestication of teachers: a case of social control', in John Codd, Richard Harker, Roy Nash (eds.), *Political Issues In New Zealand Education* (Palmerston North : Dunmore Press 1985), 118.
21. *Ibid.*, 18.
22. *Ibid.*, 10.
23. Karabel and Halsey, *op. cit.*, 1.
24. Raymond Adams, 'Educational research in New Zealand', in John Nisbet (ed.), *World Yearbook Of Education 1985: Research, Policy And Practice* (London, Kogan Paul/New York, Nichols: 1985). 153.