
EDITORIAL INTRODUCTION

In his address to the Secondary Principals' Association in April 1989, the Minister of Education, Mr David Lange, strongly defended the educational reforms that he had proposed through *Tomorrow's Schools*. The initiatives based on that policy statement were, he declared, 'about the State remaining the principal funder of compulsory education ... , about fairness ... , about a partnership between parents, teachers and Government for the better education of every young person in our country.' He was unapologetic about the rapidity of the reform process: 'Of course there have been teething troubles. There will probably be some more. But experience suggests, these will happen regardless of the pace of reform.' Indeed, he concluded his address with scathing comments directed at critics of his plans, accusing them of seeking to protect their own interests: 'Those who ask for a slowing down need to have their motives examined very closely. What is their real aim? To divert or prevent the reform because of their vested interest or privileged position.' His own commitment to a public education system had not been helped he added darkly, by 'the running commentary of criticism from those who should know better'.¹

What are we to make of such comments? First, and most apparent, there is a clear determination to press ahead with what Mr Lange himself has described as 'the biggest change in education administration this century',² whatever opposition or criticisms might be expressed. Also evident, and sustaining this resolve, is a barely suppressed intolerance of dissent and even of critical discussion, or pessimism, or caution. The formidable resources at the disposal of the State are being pressed into service in an attempt to portray the current reforms as popular, fair, and equitable, and critics of the reforms as biased, privileged, or narrowminded.

It is in fact far from clear that critics of the current policies have been proven incorrect. The special edition of *Access* produced in September 1988 provided a searching analysis of the proposals of the Picot report from a wide range of perspectives.³ It raised many issues of concern for the future of New Zealand schooling - not in relation to what Mr Lange calls 'teething troubles', but for children and for society as a whole in the years to come once the policy is in place. These concerns are no less valid today, and may well be vindicated in time to come. It still seems entirely possible that the *Tomorrow's Schools* reforms will increase rather than diminish the power of the State, will maintain rather than reduce social inequality, and will further politicise the education system rather than take it outside political debate.

And yet even if these reforms are as beneficial as the Minister of Education would like us to believe, there remains an important place for independent and informed discussion of education policy in all its many aspects. Especially at a time of rapid change such as the present, we cannot afford such debate to be stifled or intimidated. Over the longer term it may be very important as a contribution to the education policies of the future. There is also a need for this kind of debate to be conducted in a more considered and open, and a less breathless and reactive, way than is possible within the confines of urgent submissions to official committees. This journal therefore seeks to provide a forum where a range of critical perspectives on the role, character, scope and effects of educational policy can be expressed and developed.

The current issue vividly reflects these intentions. It includes several contributions relating to Maori language policy in education. Linda Tuhiwai Smith discusses historical, cultural and, political factors that explain the neglect and decline of the Maori language. Michael Peters, David Para and James Marshall investigate a major contemporary initiative to promote oral Maori, within the continuing opposed constraints of the School Certificate examination, at Tai Tokerau, and support

its further development. Graham Smith introduces two key documents, by Pita Sharples and by the Komiti O Nga Kura Kaupapa Maori O Tamaki Makaurau, that help to explain the growth and implications of Kura Kaupapa Maori schooling. We also turn our sights outwards, to the character and effects of the Education Reform Act of 1988 in Mrs Thatcher's Britain, through the critical discussion of John Evans and Brian Davies. And we venture into the heartlands of the school curriculum, likely to attract much attention in this journal in the years ahead, as Peter Smith examines the problems and the potential role of art: education in the schools.

Notes

1. Rt. Hon. David Lange, speech to Secondary Principals Association, Palmerston North, 21 April 1989.
2. David Lange, press statement, 12 June 1989, 'Release of the working party reports'.
3. *Access*, vol. 7 (1988), 'Picot and beyond'.

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