

Kei hea tatau e ahu ana?: Which way in Education?

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ABSTRACT

1 October 1989 marked the beginning of a new era in state schooling in New Zealand. We would argue that the reforms are based on the necessity to create new ideological bases on which to legitimate and facilitate a series of fundamental shifts in educational philosophy and in the provision of education. Our first task is to provide a quick background to the current reforms. While a variety of factors underpinning present reforms in education can be isolated and explored we intend to only comment briefly on three influences not always readily acknowledged by those promoting the reforms: the conservative backlash of liberal education policies of the 1960s and early 1970s; the rise and persistence of unemployment; and the effectiveness of critiques on liberal schooling.

'Hikohiko te uira' The lightning flashes
'Papa te whaititiri. ...' The thunder claps
'I kanapu i te Rangī. ...' Covering the sky
'Ru ana te whenua. e' The ground trembles
'He aha tera?

(from Kura Tiwaka; Ngati Porou haka)

Some of those involved in the changes which education is currently undergoing, most notably the former Prime Minister and Minister of Education David Lange, take the position that the restructuring of state education represents a vision not seen since Michael Joseph Savage's social reforms of the 1930s. On the other hand many observers take a contrary stance which argues that what we are currently witnessing in education are the death throes of a state structure that has been ordered to self-destruct while the state avows no knowledge or accountability of either the event or its consequences. Either way, 1 October 1989 marked the beginning of a new era in state schooling in New Zealand. We would argue that the reforms are based on the necessity to create new ideological bases on which to legitimate and facilitate a series of fundamental shifts in educational philosophy and in the provision of education.

The Tauparapara or introductory metaphor used to preface this address is doubly significant. On the one hand it suggests that despite the awesome display of grandeur and power of the lightning, the thunder and the earthquake, people have still endured. On the other hand, it portends the tension between the relative powerlessness of the individual and the wider structural forces in society over which the individual may have little or no control. Both of these meanings can be related to issues raised in this article. The themes of a 'grand illusion' and of 'structural power relations' can be shown to be most evident when we look beneath the surface explanations of current education reforms.

Our first task is to provide a quick background to the current reforms. While a variety of factors underpinning present reforms in education can be isolated and explored we intend to only comment briefly on three influences not always readily acknowledged by those promoting the reforms: the conservative backlash of liberal education policies of the 1960s and early 1970s; the rise and persistence of unemployment; and the effectiveness of critiques on liberal schooling.

The New Zealand reforms can be shown to closely resemble those changes already underway (and in some cases already dispensed with) in Great Britain and in the United States. The conservative and neoconservative (or New right) trends in education can be traced historically to a backlash against the liberalism of the 1960s and early 1970s; a reaction against 'flower-power' politics. In Britain in 1976 for example, and somewhat ironically, the then Labour Prime Minister James Callaghan launched a critique of education in a speech made at Ruskin College. In a wide ranging speech which was to become the beginning of what is commonly known as the Great Debate, Callaghan challenged the liberal curriculum questioned teacher competency and called for the reform of the National Examination System. These points were readily taken aboard by the Thatcher Conservative Government which came to power in 1979.

Since then, reforms in each of the sectors criticised by Callaghan have been systematically addressed by the Conservatives. The culmination of the British reforms was the Education Reform Act of 1988. The salient point here is foreshadowed by McCulloch's (1988) warning when commenting on Callaghan's apparently 'innocent' role in stimulating the Conservatives' restructuring of the education system:

in retrospect the major significance of Callaghan's intervention and of the Great Debate was a prelude to and legitimation of Thatcher's later reforms. It may well be that the good intentions of the current initiative in New Zealand will take us in a similar direction. (ACCESS p11 1988)

In the United States as well, conservative politicians such as Richard Nixon, under pressure from Anti-Vietnam protests (which were centred mainly in the Universities), attacked liberal education with particular focus upon declining educational standards. In New Zealand similar criticisms were made to discredit liberal education and the New Right rhetoric of 'standards', 'excellence', 'basics' and 'accountability' became more prominent.

In Britain, the United States and here in New Zealand, a common denominator has been the high levels of persistent unemployment. Attempts to both adequately interrupt and explain this situation have led to the questioning of the role of education. The increasing pressures put on the welfare State by rising unemployment have usually been explained by victim blaming scenarios which locate the problem for unemployment both among the unemployed themselves and within the failure of the education system. In this sense unemployment may be seen as being caused by the lack of necessary skills or by being 'dumb', or that the education system is administratively deficient, teacher deficient, or curriculum deficient. While a relationship between employment and schooling is acknowledged other significant factors can be shown to contribute to unemployment. In blaming education we may be simply distracting attention away from the 'real' contributing factors.

Other feasible and perhaps deeper structural explanations of why unemployment might persist have been largely ignored. These include for example, the lack of jobs available, economic recession or structured unemployment due to capitalistic expediency. This last explanation has been suggested as an alternative explanation by Bedggood (1988), who argues that:

the crisis facing the bourgeoisie in this country is one of insufficient profits caused not by excessive costs but by an inability to increase the rate of exploitation of wage labour to compete successfully and survive. (ACCESS p67.1988)

In New Zealand high levels of unemployment have created a burden upon the State economy in a variety of ways, including through having to pay welfare benefits. This situation stands in direct

contradiction to the ideology of the free market, where money spent needs to show an appropriate return; that is, an absolute emphasis upon the 'value for money' syndrome.

A third influence underpinning current educational reform has been the effectiveness of radical and Marxist (and to a lesser extent conservative) critical analyses of liberal education. The failure of schooling and education as an equalising force has been highlighted by these critics who have argued a contrary position, that the outcome of schooling was more likely to be inequality rather than the liberal notion of equality. However, it seems that in concentrating mostly on the critical analyses and not so much on providing alternative strategies, radical and Marxist critics (for the time being at least) have been upstaged by the New right and conservatives who have moved to accept, and indeed entrench inequality as being an appropriate, natural and unavoidable outcome of education. In this sense they appear to have captured the high ground within the debate. As such the emphasis given to natural giftedness (biological explanations) and individual talent (the meritocratic principle) within the free market philosophies cuts across the important influence of the socialised contexts of Race, Gender and Class.

In attempting more fully to understand New Zealand educational reform, we need to comprehend that these changes are to some extent 'global'; that they are the outcome of a number of contributing social factors; that educational reform may not be necessarily 'good' as of right; and that to understand where we may be going we need to be aware of where we have been.

The restructuring of education in New Zealand has necessitated a struggle for control over ideology; a contestation between 'new' and 'old' competing ideologies. In moving the general population to accept the new changes and the new ideologies, the old ideologies have had to be systematically rearranged or dismantled. For example, the old ideology of centralised power in education has had to be replaced by the new ideology of devolution of power to the local community. This 'changing of the guard' has been assisted by the creation of an illusion. Parents and local communities have been sold the belief that under the restructuring they will gain more power. In actual terms there has been a devolving of increased responsibility to the local community and a corresponding increase in the power of the State into a more streamlined and efficient Ministry of Education. In general a good deal of illusion and sleight of hand has been entered into by the Government seeking popular support and endorsement for the reforms. That they have been successful in this endeavour is evident in the many individuals who have hegemonically received these new messages, that is they have taken aboard these new ideologies as the 'common sense' explanation of the new order of education despite the fact that such change may be detrimental to their own interests.

We want to further expand upon some of these ideological contestations. The Government has developed a set of ideologies designed to undermine the existing order and thereby promote the need for change. These ideologies have attacked teacher credibility and teacher efficiency. They have called into question the role of the teacher unions who have been accused of holding undue influence in education. Teachers have been also accused of being over paid and under worked (Report of the Treasury to the Incoming Government 1987). Ideologies have been developed to undermine the curriculum as being irrelevant, biased towards the liberal subjects and failing to adequately teach the basics. Ideologies embracing parental dissatisfaction such as zoning restrictions, access to schools, influence over the curriculum and teachers have also been promulgated (Curriculum Review 1987).

Yet another set of ideologies related to initiating change has been evolved, for example existing administrative structures have been labelled as being too bureaucratic and top heavy. This position sustains the present trend towards the decentralisation of administration. Arguably the new structures are every bit as complicated as the previous structures, and in many instances we have merely seen the reorganisation of existing impediments, such as the reappointment of the same personnel to positions within the new hierarchy. The ideology of the devolution of power to the local community is an illusion. The parents' power is diminished by several factors, for example,

school charters are for the most part non-negotiable and parent input will be very limited and in general, meaningful decision making will remain with the Ministry and not parents. Another ideology has been built around teacher accountabilities and teacher performance levels. Teachers' employment tenure has become less secure with a preference now being expressed for contracts. (This is the subject of contestation between the Government and the secondary teachers union at the moment). The attacks on teacher credibility have served to undermine teacher goodwill and failed to recognise the many positive features of New Zealand teachers who have been generally described by one leading world educationalist as being among the most dedicated and effective classroom practitioners in the world (Personal Communication, Cazden 1987).

State education reformers have set about constructing new ideologies and undermining the old ones in a highly managed and systematic way. From the carefully constructed television launching of the Picot report to the cleverly planned advertising campaign foreshadowing 'Tomorrow's Schools'; from the various experts invited to take speaking tours of New Zealand (including Britain's Secretary of State for Education, Kenneth Baker) to the private consultants (for example Caldwell and Spinks) engaged by the Government to promote the changes to teacher and parent groups; from the personal advocacy of the Prime Minister (intent on preventing the Nga Tapuwae debacle ever happening again) to the generally uncritical media more concerned to explain the workings of the new system than engaging in critical analysis. Throughout all of these changes Gramsci's notion of hegemony has been important in facilitating the reforms. Ideology has been a fundamental contributor in the introduction of the new changes. It has been imperative that the public believe that the changes are of benefit and to their advantage. Securing the general acquiescence of the public has in many respects been a triumph for the Government reform team, although beneath the media hype the fundamental unpopularity of the reforms may be seen in successive opinion polls and in the protests over schools funding.

If ideological contestation has been fundamental to the implementation of the reforms and to Encouraging acceptance on the part of those being reformed, the real test of the efficiency of the reforms will be in the extent to which those currently disadvantaged within education will have their 'lot' improved. A key consideration here is the dimension of power relations. Will minority interest groups such as Maori be able to mediate the context of dominant and subordinate power relations any more successfully than they have in the past in order to have their needs met more meaningfully? Arguably the most significant crisis existing within education at present relates to the education of Maori, and it is this 'yardstick' we now turn to in order to measure and assess the current changes across the broad spectrum of New Zealand education.

One of the lessons our own history should have taught us is that we can not claim new territory and build new structures and assume that there was nothing and no one there before. In order to predict the course education will follow we have to accept that that course will be shaped by our history and by our existing conditions. Schools, institutions and communities which are poorly resourced today will be poorly resourced tomorrow. Throwing extra funding at them denies the history of under-resourcing which exists in many schools and in many communities, for example the resource of parent expertise, parent knowledge and parent wealth. These schools may have the opportunity to choose which resources they purchase but those choices will be determined on the basis of existing needs, and those needs have come out of the context and conditions in which schools are currently located. Alison Jones and Colin Lankshear have already shown the huge differences which exist in terms of the resources and access to resources which schools have at the moment. Those differences are largely determined by the predominant race and class location of the school. Hence schools which can call upon the expertise and wealth of their parent population will continue to be well resourced. Furthermore many of the resources they need they will not have to purchase or at worst they will acquire them at cheaper rates, whether it be computer programmes or professional expertise, for example (Jones/Lankshear. ACCESS 7.88).

The injustice of it is not simply that schools will exist in communities which have more expertise or wealth than others but that the differences will continue to be perceived as being the fault of the poor or the Maori or 'those people' who live in 'that community or suburb'. The mistakes they make will be publicised as affirmation of the community's stupidity, its lack of caring or hard work. The occasional success from a community labelled as disadvantaged will be used to rub in the noses of other such communities who have made a mess of things. The more schools are seen to 'fail', the more pressures will be put on parents, on teachers and on students. These pressures will result in more rigidity in the curriculum, in the styles of teaching and in the aspects of social control, such as school discipline. Parents will continue to try, teachers will continue to teach, children will continue to fail. The more this scenario is played out the more it will affirm the perceptions of those who 'have done well', and the more that happens the greater the chances are of those perceptions turning into deeply held beliefs and sets of actions and practices which will continue to perpetuate the situation.

We say this because this is what we have had and this is what we still have, in terms of our entrenched beliefs and practices about and towards those who are seen as 'failures'. We have had an education system which has sorted students out into those who succeed and those who fail and we have constructed a society which denigrates those who fail and which continues to heap scorn, ridicule and humiliation upon them as we hold up to the world our advanced social policies and mumble at home about sharing our taxes with dole-bludgers, beneficiaries and Maori 'radicals'. Will the restructuring of education make failure 'go-away'? Will the restructuring of education make our society less obsessed with failure? Will the restructuring of education alleviate or control the divisions which already exist in society? We can answer those questions by posing another set of questions. What are the measures the community currently uses to assess a school's performance and to make comparisons across schools? Are those measurement devices likely to remain as they are or will the demand be for standardised measurement to be introduced throughout the broad spectrum of schooling? Will the prime purpose of measurement be to assist teachers in developing programmes or assist parents in making choices about 'good' and 'bad' schools? We would suggest that as it is difficult to measure such qualities as 'good citizenship' or 'good cross-cultural relationships' or a 'caring nature' we will continue to have judgements being made about young New Zealanders on the basis of their performances in tests and the ability of their parents to assist them. The winners of the system will continue to hold power and will justify their positions in society as being due to hard work, good schools and a sound education which they CHOSE.

This may all sound like a depressing scenario and not dissimilar to what we have already. However there are some signs which seem to indicate that some communities and schools have achieved things they were unable to before simply by being prodded and without the assistance of changes in the Education Act or in changes in regulations. Probably the single most effective strategy used by the Government to nurse through the changes has been its advertising campaign to attract parents to stand for the Board of Trustees. In many schools there was a reported record number of parents expressing interest in getting involved in school management. However of greater significance is the number of parents who were simply presenting themselves to teachers with offers of assistance or with inquiries about their children's work. Many of these parents were 'new' to the school in the sense that they have never previously engaged in any discussion with teachers other than at officially designated times such as 'report nights'.

The message which said to parents that schools were 'safe places' for them as well as their children, also may seem rather trivial to those who have had successful experiences in such places, but we cannot underestimate the generations of potential parents for whom school was an unhappy, uninviting and disempowering place. Nor can we underestimate the power of teachers and schools to maintain a distance or indeed a deep chasm between themselves and the community through quite explicit policies such as parents wanting to see the teacher 'must see the Principal first', and more often through the subtle practices of how schools function on a day to day basis. Maori people have been complaining about it for years; the cold office, the stressed school secretary, the Principal playing power games behind his desk. In fact we would be so bold as to

suggest that it was because of the Maori critique of schooling that the relationship between schools and their communities was addressed so explicitly in the restructuring of primary and secondary education.

So, while others may have viewed the advertisements for the Boards of Trustees cynically because of their highlighting of the role played by a Maori woman (Ngaire, she was called) and by the presence also of a Maori man it was a public statement that needs to be said over and over and then followed through with real action to a people who have had to struggle to claim a place in education on their own terms. The changes in State education do not mean that the struggle is over, simply that at this point in time we have passed 'GO'.

It is worthwhile commenting at this point on the apparent elevation of the Treaty of Waitangi from a simple historical document into a policy on social and educational development which is expected to underpin the policy and practice of all educational institutions. Schools are currently engaged in the task of formulating charters, the formal contract between the parents, the schools and the State. Of all the issues which schools will have to face in the future the one which is causing a persistent political problem for the Government concerns the Treaty. As institutions are confronted with its presence not just in the rhetoric of policy but in the black and white print of the charter document they are being forced to face an unpleasant truth: the Treaty of Waitangi has reached out across time and a history of denial and there it is amongst all the changes which will take New Zealand into the 21st century. The hue and cry, the anger and outbursts, the confusion and uncomfotability which have been heard from schools across the country have provided one of the few examples of public resistance to the entire process of educational change. There has generally been a widespread and passive acceptance of all the changes taking place. The occasional voices which have suggested that these changes represent an attack on teachers, or that these changes are driven by the desire to absolve the State of responsibility for education and more importantly for spending any money on education, have been lost on people who have simply capitulated to the critique and have been willing to accept any changes under the guise of efficiency EXCEPT FOR the changes which relate to the provisions of equity generally and of the Treaty of Waitangi specifically. It is the one critical issue which has not been marketed professionally; no advertisements, no special television programmes, no training programmes, no private consultants. The Treaty has instead been explained either by existing Departmental officers whose own knowledge and position regarding the Treaty is in many cases weak (and who were having to explain a raft of changes which affected their very livelihoods) or by community resources, mostly Maori who have had to bear the brunt of the frustrations of school communities who are finding it difficult to come to terms with. It seems clear that the presence of the Treaty of Waitangi in the Charter has caused enough of an outrage for there to be some significant modifications in the way institutions are being asked to consider it. All the changes which are occurring are part of an organised master plan in which many of these changes are non-negotiable. It would appear that of all the major policy points the one which is negotiable and which has been left to the 'market' to determine is in fact the Treaty. History has shown the vote market to be incredibly hostile to what is frequently perceived as Maori 'demands'. Yet again Maori aspirations will be put to the vote so that everyone can have a say on Maori issues. A democratic process which allows the dominant group in society to have a wider range of choice and influence, while subordinate groups are expected to believe that they too have the same choices and the same potential to influence not only wider policies but the cultural life blood of a powerful and dominant culture.

One of the measures which will be used to assess the success or failure of the restructuring of education is whether the new structures will be able to deliver the promise of equity for Maori, for women and for Pacific Island groups. As many of these changes have been linked to the restructuring of the economy and are only part of the whole deal, the measures of success or failure will be linked inextricably to employment. As our economy is dependent on a world economy we may prepare our students, get them all dressed up and waiting expectantly for a future which is ultimately dependent on others. For Maori people however there will be some other measures

which will be applied. In the past education has had an active role as a process for the assimilation of our culture. Will these changes interrupt that process? When the Picot Report which was the first signal, of the thinking which lay behind the Government policy was first made public we were extremely sceptical of the changes envisaged being able to deliver any thing significantly different for Maori. Subsequent submissions have meant that we now look with some optimism to the introduction of the legislation for the reform of education which may hold the opportunity for children to learn and be taught totally through the language of our ancestors and within a structure which is designed to ensure that it will be a successful experience. That is what we hope for; the establishment of Kura Kaupapa Maori (Maori immersion schooling) which will cater for those children who have gained fluency in Maori through Kohanga Reo (Maori language nurseries).

Our interpretation of the Treaty is that our very rangatiratanga depends on our access to an education which authenticates our culture and from which our children can move into the wider world as - to use the concept of Paulo Freire - 'fully human', authentic people in a society which values them. Obviously we believe that there are qualities and values which our children must possess before they even present themselves to the work market. That does not deny the validity of other mainstream, if you like, schooling. Nor does it deny that our children will need skills in English language or other ways of doing things. Kura Kaupapa Maori starts off by making the fact that one is Maori the norm, it is nonproblematic, our children don't have to explain it, justify it or defend it. They can get on with the business of learning with their rangatiratanga intact. We would probably argue that in Kura Kaupapa Maori we have the potential to produce not just bilingual children but trilingual children with the flexible skills and cross-cultural competencies which have a relevance beyond the shores of Aotearoa.

If the restructuring process is committed to the notions of parental choice, institutional responsiveness to the community, equity and the Treaty of Waitangi then we should see some legislation which enables new directions, new forms of schooling and new choices for communities. At the present time in Maori education those new directions have been conceptualised and implemented outside present State structures. It should also follow that this potential will exist not just at primary and secondary education level but at tertiary level as well. The bottom line for Maori people who have worked in Kura Kaupapa Maori is that these schools will continue anyway, regardless of whether legislation is enacted which makes it part of the choices which people who have come through Kohanga Reo in particular will have when they consider the kind of schooling they wish for their children.

As mentioned earlier we have simply passed 'GO' and the possibility that we will be sent back is something our past experiences have taught us to be mindful of. However the momentum which has built up in terms of the changing expectations which Maori people have of education will be a difficult one to interrupt. Te Kohanga Reo (the Maori language 'nest') is a significant milestone in those changing expectations. While designed to interrupt the continuing loss of our language it has opened up a new vision of the educational future for our children. While not all parents will choose to send their children on to a Kura Kaupapa Maori, the fact that they may in fact have a choice within the state system, will represent an important change in educational policy.

While primary and secondary education have made significant attempts to respond to the changing relationship between Maori people and schooling the one sector which is struggling is tertiary. Such things as 'initiatives' or 'innovations' in the education offered at this level, particularly for Maori, but also for a range of interest groups, are rare. Control over the definition of what constitutes 'real' knowledge separates Universities from other tertiary institutions. It is a position of privilege and of control. While Universities have argued for the right to remain as the 'critic and conscience of society' we must admit to some scepticism. What conscience have Universities shown historically for Maori, or for any other subordinate group in society? Social policy and some significant changes in the way our society operates are not reflected in the way most Universities function. Equal opportunity for all groups in society should have underpinned university structures

some decades ago if they took their role as the critic and conscience of society seriously. What we have had however are University structures which have regarded some groups in society such as women and Maori, as being the objects of their research, in ways which have come to be revealed as being offensive and abusive. We would expect more from a conscience of society.

Of all the sectors in education we would consider tertiary the most powerful, the most entrenched, and the most ill-prepared for change. For Maori people the choices remain as being either attempting to change the current tertiary structures through a process which has taken us years to do at the primary and secondary level or move outside these structures and get on with what we want to do. In the past this has generally meant putting up with add-on, low status courses designed to make Maori people fit in and feel good about and essentially hostile setting. It has taken time and a struggle to move beyond that and into the area of constructing courses and a curriculum which is designed around the knowledge base and needs of Maori people. We have had to work both inside and outside existing structures to make any real impact. Kohanga Reo and Kura Kaupapa Maori are examples of initiatives which have begun outside state educational structures. Taha Maori programmes and bilingual units began within the structures. It has literally taken decades to achieve. It is probable that under the new state system, Maori people will be able to create and maintain our own tertiary centres, however that does not mean that existing institutions can remain unchanged. Contrary to many peoples' beliefs that we want to become entirely absorbed in separate development, we also want to be here, in these places, with you. We want the best and that seems to us to be a fair enough expectation, for anyone.

Currently, University students are leading the public resistance to changes at tertiary level which for many of them will spell the end of an opportunity to seek and receive a higher education. The fundamental change which will affect that opportunity is not just a price tag but a structural change which will see no 'going back' to a time when education at tertiary level was reasonably affordable. The commitment by Government to 'equity' at this level is a commitment in words but not in spending. We feel concern for the impact this will have, particularly on Maori students. Many of the students we see now will not be back, they can barely survive as it is. Many of the students we see now who we would want to carry on into post-graduate studies are already thinking about jobs for November. Many of the students we see now who are mature women will not return for an opportunity many have waited for years and years. The current mess in which the whole issue of student fees is placed has already had a profound impact on the expectations and aspirations of many current and many potential students.

British examples would seem to indicate that it is not just the students however who will be radically affected by the changes. The shift in educational policies at tertiary level have resulted in a similar attack on the curriculum and on teachers in this sector. It is not, an accidental phenomenon that the United States is developing a resurgence in interest in such subjects as the classics, or philosophy, as they pick up British teachers in these fields. English academics are feeling the squeeze of 'market forces' and State policies which are making the task of being a critic let alone a conscience extremely risky. Once again what we have to examine when we analyse the changes is the potential of the new structures to eventually work against the interests of those who value the role education plays as a force to liberate our minds and to search for ways of revealing the mysteries of the human condition. Once these structures are in place it will be too late. Being responsive to the community has a double meaning; 'the community which is people' and 'the community which is the market place'. Those meanings stand in direct contradiction to each other.

Which way then are we heading in education? We are heading into an era in which education may no longer be a co-operative enterprise. Our institutions will be blown into the wind and will be expected to pick up the right current in order to fulfil the contractual commitments to the State and meet the demands of the market place. Each institution may have the potential to fly high and freely but the power of wider forces to restrict that potential will always be present. So when the lightning flashes, the thunder claps and the earth shudders we remain, but we are vulnerable.

Note

This article is a revised version of an address delivered as a Winter Lecture, University of Auckland, 3 August 1989.

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