

The limits and possibilities of education

Roger Dale

Education Department, University of Auckland, Auckland, New Zealand

ABSTRACT

The crucial, distinctive and necessary requirement of universities to act as the conscience and critic of society presses nowhere more immediately than in Departments of Education. They above all must practise as well as preach that message. They have a duty to remind society of its educational promises and to monitor how effectively those promises are being fulfilled, for the fundamental purpose of Departments of Education must be to improve the practice as well as the theory of education. Frequently this involves them in seeking to interpret, extend and give more substance to those promises. And this role has become more important than ever, in this country at this time.

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The crucial, distinctive and necessary requirement of universities to act as the conscience and critic of society presses nowhere more immediately than in Departments of Education. They above all must practise as well as preach that message. They have a duty to remind society of its educational promises and to monitor how effectively those promises are being fulfilled, for the fundamental purpose of Departments of Education must be to improve the practice as well as the theory of education. Frequently this involves them in seeking to interpret, extend and give more substance to those promises. And this role has become more important than ever, in this country at this time. Though few things are yet entirely calm and settled in the turbulent wake of the changes to the education system introduced in this Parliament, one thing that is clear is that most sources of independent advice and criticism to the schools on the one hand and to the Minister of Education on the other have been stopped up. Such key institutions of what has been called society's ozone layer mediating between central government and the population as Area Education Boards, or the education inspectorate with some formal independence from central government have disappeared. Indeed, in the absence of details of the Education Amendment Bill to be presented to parliament next month, it may be premature to recognise and to seek to examine the implications of this enhanced critical role for University Education Departments.

You will doubtless already have noticed my shifting between talking of education as an institution and the role of university Education Departments. The ambiguity in the-title of this lecture is, in fact, deliberate.

As I have just stated, a fundamental purpose of Education Departments in Universities must be to improve educational practice. This does not mean, of course, that the 'relevance' of everything we do must be immediately evident. It does though, I think, mean that we should be able to indicate in what ways our teaching and research might eventually contribute to the improvement of

educational practice, whether that be relatively direct, for instance, by achieving better understanding of learning processes in schools, or relatively indirect, by providing disinterested analyses of the condition of education, or of proposals to reform it.

However, it is not enough for us merely to carry out such work, or even to publicize it effectively for it to have an impact. There are at least two major reasons why the work of Education Departments has not been as influential on educational practice as it might be (I am not prepared to countenance here the possibility of a third - that such work is intrinsically useless!). The reason most commonly heard, perhaps, is that Education Departments are out of touch with what goes on in the schools. Isolated in our ivory towers, and myopically groping towards yet more arcane and bathetic theoretical pronouncements, we are historical anomalies, who know little and care less about the real world of educational practice. Though this is a caricature of a caricature, I suspect it is unlikely that there is anyone here this evening who has not heard - or maybe even uttered - such judgements. It would be foolish of me to deny that there may, sometimes, be some truth in these claims. I have certainly had colleagues who would dispute that their fundamental purpose had anything to do with educational practice, except incidentally and unwittingly.

But though it is much more prominent, this explanation of the 'under-achievement' of Education departments is not the most important. Rather, its very prominence obscures the more important reason - and it is this, rather than their teasing or needling quality, that makes the 'ivory tower comments so irritating. Much of the rest of what I have to say will be concerned with trying to elucidate that other reason, and suggesting how it might be countered, but I should spell it out briefly at this point. Essentially, I shall be arguing that an essential prerequisite of Education Departments having an effect on educational practice is that any change or reform their analyses suggest or imply should be of a kind that it is in the power of the relevant level of the educational service to bring about. Hence, an essential preliminary to educational improvement or reform is an understanding of the contexts - primarily the economic and the political - within which an education system is operating, and of the historical and social conditions in which schools operate. Without such a recognition we are in danger of disregarding the most important single statement ever made for the social sciences - 'Men make their own history, but not in circumstances of their own choosing'.¹ When either education academics or education practitioners neglect the second half of that quotation, the consequences are mutual recriminations - airy fairy academics, narrow and limited teachers - and a massive waste of energy in the pursuit of the chimera of supra-social education. It is the assumption, above all, that it is possible to separate human beings' ability to control their individual and collective destinies from the social contexts within which they are embedded that leads to Education Departments being dismissed as irrelevant - and to their contributing to that dismissal. It also, and much, much, more importantly contributes to schools and teachers being dismissed as failures.

I want now to elaborate a little on the origins, the bearers and the supports of that broad view of education that treats its possibilities as boundless and its contexts and conditions as irrelevant. But since this lecture is in some sense if not a manifesto then an agenda for the work of at least those parts of Education Departments concerned with its social contexts and effects, it is important to make its orientation a little more explicit. The basic distinction I want to make here draws on the work of the Canadian political scientist, Robert W. Cox. Cox states that all theory is for someone and for some purpose. They can, he says, serve two distinct purposes, what he calls problem solving theory and critical theory. Problem solving theory takes the world as it finds it, with the prevailing social and power relationships and the institutions into which they are organized, as the given framework for action. The general aim of problem-solving is to make these relationships and institutions work smoothly by dealing effectively with particular sources of trouble. Since the general pattern of institutions and relationships is not called into question, particular problems can be considered in relation to the specialized areas of activity in which they arise.

Critical theory is critical in the sense that it stands apart from the prevailing order of the world and asks how that order came about. Critical theory, unlike problem-solving theory, does not take institutions and social and power relations for granted but calls them into question by concerning itself with their origins and how and whether they might be in the process of changing. It is directed towards an appraisal of the very framework for action, or problematic, which problem solving theory accepts as its parameters. Critical theory is directed to the social and political complex as a whole rather than to the separate parts.²

It will be clear from what I have already said that I believe we should adopt a critical rather than a problem solving perspective, above all at a time, when there are so few bodies to act as critics and so many facilitated as solvers of whatever problems are officially defined as the most important.

The origins of what might be called the 'redemptive' view of education may be seen in the Enlightenment. Education as an institution has held a central place in what has come to be called the project of modernity. On the one hand, it might almost be seen as both the dominant symbol and the dominant strategy for that mastery of nature and of society through rationality that has characterized the project of modernity from its origins in the Enlightenment. On the other hand, education has been a keystone of attempts to extend the benefits of progress to whole populations, indeed to the whole of humanity. It came to stand for the possibility of individual and collective improvement, individual and collective emancipation.

If we take these assumptions seriously the possibilities for education are limitless. However there are difficulties with this broad and noble conception of the possibilities of education that are intrinsic to it; they are what makes it, ultimately, utopian. There are two important reasons for this. First, those conceptions are, in the end, not only noble, but vapid. Because of their very timelessness and their lack of firm roots in any economic, social and political reality, they lack substance and become little more than slogans. They are, in both the common sense and technical senses of the word, idealistic. Like exotic birds' eggs they become objects of display whose continuing value and attractiveness depends on their substance being sucked from them. Some of you may be fearful, as I am, that such a process may have already begun with some of the features that adorn and soften the harsher aspects of the current education reforms. So, we see the traditional myth of equality conceptually transformed into the very much weaker concept of equity (a difference whose magnitude is concealed I suspect, by phonological similarity) and we see the guarantees of the Treaty of Waitangi eased into the principles of the Treaty of Waitangi.

The second reason for the ineffectiveness of the utopian conceptions of the possibilities of education is that far from being of a piece they are frequently mutually contradictory. This is hardly surprising, given the complex and contradictory nature of the social production of things and of people, but it is rarely acknowledged. Societies are faced simultaneously with pressures to growth and to containment, to progress and to stability; without both they collapse. And the contradictory implications of the pursuit of growth and the need to contain the excesses it generates can only provide fragmented and contradictory requirements of education systems. Education is not a single panacea; maybe the best it can hope for is to be an effective combination of Valium and Benzedrine.

In any case, the practical implications of that combination constitute the third reason for the ineluctable failure to realize the Utopian hopes for education. This is that, as I suggested earlier, the scope of education is neither infinite, nor easily adjusted. By the scope of education I mean both what it is considered desirable and possible for an education system to achieve. It may be that far from being able to fulfil all possibilities, education systems may not be able to fulfil any of them, because they are not problems amenable to solution by educational means. Different countries have very different conceptions of the scope of education. For instance, is the pastoral care of pupils' education's responsibility? Should education systems prepare pupils directly for work? Should they be obliged to bring about greater gender equality? It is not just between different countries but between different government departments in the same country that we find different conceptions of the scope of education. For instance, in a study of a major vocational education initiative in Britain,

I found the two bodies involved, LEAs and MSC, holding quite different conceptions of the scope of education, and that the programme could best be understood as a hybrid outcome of those two conceptions.³

The main bearer of the redemptive view of education has been political expediency. Keeping alive the hope that education can solve all problems has been a major investment for politicians of all stripes. There is no social problem, it seems, that is not solvable by education. We could, I am sure, find scores of appropriate words to fill the gap in the following sentence 'While obviously short term measures are necessary to limit it, the problem of BLANK can only be solved in the long term by education, by getting the schools involved in teaching children about it'. Such visions of the possibilities of education appear a considerable flight of fancy when we compare them with the reality of continuing major social inequality in and through education, class sizes of 35, Access programmes - to say nothing of NEQA. Nevertheless, expectations of education do not diminish; we find it easy to regard such things as aberrations, as deflections from education's real purpose. Though we may fear that the motives and the purposes behind much education policy and practice have more to do with political expediency than with the noble aims I implied a moment ago, it is still to education that society has been quick to turn for long term solutions. That is to say, education remains at least the symbol of humanity's ability to solve the social problems generated by its search for material growth, and attests to the possibility of rational technical remedies for all social ills. And, of course, the shortness of the journey from redeemer to scapegoat is as much a relief for politicians as it is a burden for educators.

But, and this is my third point on the reasons for the continuing appeal of the redemptive project, that is a burden and a danger that educators have, as much for reasons of collective self interest as of professional self confidence, embraced rather than rejected. The response to even the more extreme expectations of education on the part of those working in it, has very much more often been 'give us the tools and we'll do the job' than 'you must be joking!'. Indeed, the major tensions between those funding the education service and those working within it have centred very much more on the adequacy of the resources to tackle the task, than on the appropriateness of the task itself.

Education systems have then been, and continue to be, confronted with an agenda that it is impossible for them to fulfil. The possibilities that it contains are not realistic. A key consequence of this is that schools are bound to 'fail'. And that some fundamental reasons for this failure are due to inappropriate and unrealisable conceptions of the possibilities of education is of little solace to the schools and teachers who are consequently pilloried. It is of little more concern to retrenching and economically harassed governments, pleased to be able not only to shift blame but also to have a justification for reorganizing the education system to reduce the power of those working within it and to exercise more stringent controls over cost. But it is and it should be a matter of the greatest possible concern to educationalists, and especially to sociologists of education whose job it is to know these things. One of the more uncomfortable paradoxes of the recent educational reform process in New Zealand lay in the adoption by the New Zealand Treasury in its advice to the current government when it entered office in 1987 of the critiques of the education system's failure to achieve some of its major social goals made by sociologists of education, and their enlistment in the service of a project many of the authors would find quite inimical.⁴ I want now to try to move to a response to that paradox that goes beyond rueful head shaking, and in attempting to explain and explode it, to lay down the outlines of a programme for the sociology of education that is based on a more realistic recognition of the limits and possibilities of education. One difficulty is that, in spite of the accepted shortcomings I have just outlined, much of the sociology of education has implicitly but effectively, taken the project of social redemption/ emancipation through universal provision as a central normative guideline; that is to say that it has taken a utopian view of the possibilities of education, and concentrated its energies on identifying obstacles to the attainment of that unproblematic and unexamined goal. In its early post war history sociologists of education seemed to offer some substance to those possibilities through their isolation of the link between social class

and educational opportunity and the way that this link was perpetuated and strengthened by a socially divided education system. Unify the education system, and you will equalize opportunities seemed to be the message. In other words the solution lay in making provision truly universal. But even with a unified system of compulsory education, educational outcomes remained stubbornly differentiated on social class lines. A succession of explanations have been offered. Some have concentrated on the different capacities children bring to school. Others have looked at how the outcomes of schooling are socially evaluated. Yet others have focused on the process of schooling itself, seeing it not as a form of redressing the various kind of social inequalities that children bring to school, but of reproducing them, of reinforcing them, and of legitimating them through making it appear that their causes are individual and not social. The universal emancipatory project of education remained unrealized, according to these approaches, firstly because of the teachers' and other education professionals' failure to recognise that education is, like all other social institutions, a social construction and that all that is required to transform it is for it to be differently socially constructed - a view labelled with exquisite accuracy, if not elegance, 'naive possibilitarianism'. Then it was recognised that it was not possible to reconstruct social institutions at will, because certain powerful groups and social forces had interests in keeping them as they were. The most powerful of these was the capitalist system itself, which had certain key functions it required education to fill, and which modified utopian possibilities in a most severe manner. The problem with their view, though, was that it was not clear how this capitalist system conveyed its requirements to the education system and ensured that they were met - at which point, enter the State. It was the State acting to a greater or lesser degree on behalf of capitalism that set the limits to possibilities of education. And most recently, the State's incipient partial withdrawal from the provision of education, has been seen to remove the final veil covering the modesty of the market and reveal it as having been fundamentally and all along, the force that obstructed and denied the utopian possibilities of education.

Of course, this is a parody of what I and my colleagues and friends have been earnestly working away at throughout our academic careers. And it is no part of my purpose here tonight to bite the hand that has fed me. Indeed, it would be equally possible to point to the achievements of each of those various approaches and to demonstrate how they have enhanced our understanding of education.

But, fundamental to them has been the view that education can and should be universally emancipatory with the consequent aim of identifying and overcoming obstacles to the realization of that noble possibility.

In this view, much of the sociology of education of the past 20 years might be seen as exhibiting a loyal but misguided attachment to a rather simplified interpretation of Gramsci's famous dictum 'pessimism of the intellect, optimism of the will'. The 'intellect' met in full the criteria of what Boucheir has called 'pessimistic functionalism' by arguing that the world is as it is because it is designed to serve 'the interests of the powerful' in 'the interests of the system'.⁵ But this pessimism and the optimism were symbiotic. The pessimism arose from a failure to fulfil a set of possibilities that could only be seen as possibilities that derived from an optimism of the will that denied its essential basis, what Lipeitz calls 'the Living Soul of Marxism, the concrete analysis of concrete situations'.⁶

This set of approaches within the sociology of education also created a tendency to depreciate the importance of what actually happens in schools and the education system at large. They came to be regarded merely as neutral conduits for the transmission of the major themes of society. In this view, schools are only the witting or unwitting agents of social reproduction, and the best we can hope for from them, and encourage them to do, is to 'resist' in various ways their role in social reproduction. The excessive concentration on how far schools could modify processes they could never transform has involved a narrowing of perspective that shut out the other things that schools do, including many of those that are of most importance to their various clients, customers and

consumers. The sociology of education may, that is, be in danger of contributing to its own irrelevance.

How can we forestall that prospect and release and redirect the potential that we know is there? I think that what is required first of all is a much more explicit recognition of how restricted the possibilities of education are. All those forces and interests that I have identified supporting the extensive view of the possibilities of education will, I suspect, continue to do so. Though there will be continuing disputes about the practical - essentially financial - limits to education, it will remain in the interest of none of these groups to question that what they want from it, education can deliver.

But if there has been little change in what is expected of education, there has been over the past 15 years or so, a major shift in confidence in the education system's ability to meet those expectations. For two decades after World War II education held a place in the sun. It received steadily increasing support from the State, with very few strings attached. There was little systematic effort at directing it, or even making it accountable to those who funded it. None of those things is now the case. Education is as likely to be pilloried as to be praised, to be starved as to be indulged, to be seen as a tool rather than as a pet, to be policed rather than left to its own devices. It has become, not so much a *different* ball game but a leaner and meaner business.

It has required a degree of ingenuity to retain this leaner and meaner business in harness with expanded views of the possibility of education. The trick - one devised by ancient Austrians and taken on by teenage scribblers in the Treasuries of the Western world - has been, of course, to reinstate in its full individualist glory our old and very ambiguous friend, equality of opportunity here scarcely to be distinguished from the basic legal equality shared by all citizens. Society becomes nothing more than a collection of individuals, indistinguishable from each other for all practical purposes - i.e. as 'players' in the market. That inequality is rapidly generated by this system is not disputed by those who promote it. For Hayek, for instance, inequality is the price to be paid for growth. It ensures that while differentials between people may increase, everyone will eventually be better off; capitalism is like a moving column with some at the front and some at the rear but everyone moving forward.⁷ Now you may think as I do that that is a somewhat misleading image. Maybe the major flaw in it is that it assumes that all the marchers are healthy and employed, probably male, probably white, and probably born with at least some social advantage - and it is not too difficult to see that certain groups have already dropped off the back of the column and become permanently disconnected from it.

The point of mentioning this fashionable 'New Right' response, currently so popular with politicians and policy makers, is not so much to examine it in detail as to use it to introduce the issue that Ralf Dahrendorf has identified as the modern social conflict. This is the conflict between, or the balance to be struck between, entitlements and provision, or citizenship and wealth. He illustrates the distinction by means of what he calls the Martinez paradox.⁸ Martinez was the Minister of Trade when Dahrendorf visited Nicaragua in 1986. When Dahrendorf questioned him about the scarcity of goods on the shelves, Martinez responded that before the Revolution, the shops of Managua had been as well stocked as those of Miami, but almost no-one had been able to buy anything; now everyone could afford what was there. In Dahrendorf's terms provision had been reduced, but entitlements had been increased. It is the distinction between people's access to things and what is actually there for them to desire. The point of introducing this distinction is not to show that Hayek's approach is that maximising provision depends on unequal entitlement, and that neither should be interfered with by the State. Nor is it to show that egalitarians draw entirely opposite conclusions. It is rather to begin to approach the issue of the limits and possibilities of education from a slightly different angle from that I have suggested is currently not serving us very well. For talking about provisions rather than possibilities forces us to think much more closely how they might be, literally, provided. And talking about entitlements enables us to get away from the zero sum game of universalism.

These are not revolutionary, or even radically transformed or strikingly novel issues for people interested in education policy to ask. They are, indeed, very similar to a list I drew up several years ago for a different purpose. That tentative agenda of issues for sociology of education suggested four key ways of analyzing education's problems or 'failures'. First, was it something education could do - and I think I have gone into that quite sufficiently already. Second, would 'they' let you do it? Third, did the available resources and conditions promote or retard what was sought? And fourth, what would it look like if it were successful. That is to say the key questions were about power and the scope and the pattern of education - and appraising them through concepts of entitlements and provision refines and points them more precisely.

But has education policy been based on the dominance of a single form of provision and a single basis of entitlement? It hasn't always felt like that. A good part of the effort of sociologists of education has gone into establishing that the curriculum is a particular selection from available knowledge, and that moreover it is a selection very much more in tune with the culture of the powerful in society than of the powerless. Some subjects have very high prestige, some very low. Pupils are divided into streams on the basis of their 'ability', and this also determines what they will be taught. In the end, though, what we had did remain essentially a single form of provision. This was because it was, to some extent, formally and informally policed by central government and agencies in the knowledge-defining business, like universities - and their blessing and sanction persuaded the customers of the relative value of different curriculum offerings. It was not formally a case of different curricula for different groups, but access to different sectors of the same universe. There was not a separate curriculum for the working class or girls or Maori but particular sectors of the curriculum into which they were channelled. So the curriculum should be seen as a single form of provision, in the end, because though students experienced it differently, those differences lay in a single stratified form of provision rather than in a plurality of alternative forms of provision.

It was a similar story in the case of entitlements. Formal equality of opportunity, essentially interpreted as equality of access was the basis of educational entitlements. The criterion for allocation of entitlements was 'ability', a characteristic that it was originally thought truly differentiated people from each other on the basis of something 'natural' and specific to them, and excluded thereby the possibility of entitlements being allocated on the basis of privilege, power or wealth. Of course, 'pure' ability soon became another chimera: it can't be proved to exist and no measures of its surrogates have been, or can be, 'culture free'. But this has not caused it to be displaced as the criterion for education's entitlements. Rather, attempts have been made to identify and redress through 'positive discrimination' some of its more obvious - and more politically threatening - shortcomings.

We have seen the same process at work in both the provision of, and entitlements to, education. It has been one where education policy and education reform are directed towards the maintenance of a particular balance between provision and entitlements that is broadly acceptable to the social forces most directly or effectively involved. In this country, as in most others of the OECD that it takes as its criterion reference group, the basis of that balance has been the welfare state settlement struck in the turbulent decade between the late 30s and late 40s. Striking and maintaining a balance between a single, albeit stratified, provision and a single criterion of entitlements dominated education policy until little more than 5 years ago, though that domination had been under threat and crumbling for some time before that. (Incidentally, I should make it clear that I am talking here about state provision. The issue of private education, fascinating though its implications are - and will increasingly become, I suspect: for analyzing the balance between provision and entitlements in education, is too complex an issue for me to tackle this evening).

It is not of course that there were no education reforms between the mid 40s and the mid 80s. There were, many of them. Almost without exception, however, they were aimed at maintaining, fine tuning or marginally altering the existing provision/entitlements balance. When inequalities came to light, they were addressed, and attended to. 'Better' and 'fairer' tests of ability were devised.

There was positive discrimination in favour of groups who could be seen to be 'underachieving'. Where the curriculum, or particular subjects, were shown to favour boys over girls' efforts were made to overcome this.

But though these, and many other issues like them, were addressed by education reform, they were never redressed by them.

There are three reasons for this. The first was that they were intrinsic to the system. They were in a sense produced by the system, or, rather, by the agreement on a particular balance of provisions and entitlements. That is to say, even if reform efforts had been entirely successful, the most they could have achieved would have been to restore the individual or groups involved to where they started. The reforms accepted and assumed the norms contained in the prevailing balance - so if that were inequitable, nothing education reform could do would change it. Removing selection at 11 + in England did nothing to change the proportion of those who 'succeeded' in education. Not even the one area where some significant outcomes from the reforms can be identified, the increasing proportion of women in higher education, has done much to increase the overall percentage of women in the higher controlling echelons of industry, commerce, public service, teaching - and, of course, of universities.

There are two issues here that it is crucial for Education Departments to investigate and understand if their work is to be effective. The first is, as I said a few minutes ago, 'is it something education can do?' I think I have said enough earlier in this lecture to indicate the unfortunate consequences of assuming that the answer to that question is obvious, and it is raised again by the failure of education reform to address social inequality. We need to know, possibly on the basis of comparative study, what the effect of education reforms have been on the wider social structure. What comparative evidence we have is not encouraging. Both the most systematic attempt to use education as a tool of social engineering, and the most thorough analyses of education reform have come from Sweden. They suggest a rather gloomy picture, with existing social divisions little affected by education.

The second question I suggested was 'will they let you do it?' This relates much more closely to the provisions/entitlements balance that is dominant at any particular time and that may be open to both scrutiny and change. It is the stuff of the politics of education, what we mean - or what I mean - when we use that term. Looking at the politics of education as a 'settlement', a policy balance emerging from a balance of social forces, does enable us to direct our efforts more accurately and more effectively. It should clarify for us who "they" are in 'will 'they' let you do it' - a particularly intriguing question in New Zealand - and one that it seems many of the 'theys' themselves might like to be answered. That question, incidentally, is the one where I find the greatest difference between England and New Zealand. In England it is very much more difficult to find out who 'they' are and how education policy comes to be made - while the question 'will they let you do it' has been largely replaced, certainly for University Education Departments, by 'what are they going to tell you to do'. Having seen the really dire effects of that policy on not just the morale but the quality of work of University Education Departments in England, I was especially fearful that something like it would result from the Education Amendment Bill currently before Parliament here. I was greatly heartened to hear last Friday that amendments were being proposed to that Bill that may remove its more threatening clauses. What was equally striking was the way in which I heard them - from the mouth of the Chairperson of the Select Committee on the Bill, who had offered to attend a meeting of the local AUT committee to explain the changes even before they became public. This would not, I think, have happened in quite that way in England.

I mentioned a few minutes ago that there were three reasons why any imbalances of opportunity could not be redressed. If the first was a political one, the second is rather more technical. Very briefly, it is that it was either not possible to identify the group 'at risk' with sufficient precision for any 'treatment' to be effective, or it was not possible to devise a sufficiently powerful treatment for the group identified - or more commonly perhaps, both these things. On the one

hand, it is rarely the case that every member of the group 'at risk' - be it ethnic, gender, locality, age-based, or whatever - suffers as much and in the same way from unequal access, or treatment, or success. Consequently a great deal of reform effort is dissipated. On the other hand, the treatments are affected in the same way; devising treatments that are effective for all members of an underachieving group may be even more difficult than identifying them. This is so, of course, at the individual level, because individuals differ. But it is even more true when whole groups display a common 'failing', where what unites their members is more prominent than what distinguishes them from each other, because this alters the nature of the problem. For the norm to which all are equally able to aspire is not of course, in any sense, a neutral norm. It does not sit indifferently above the social, ethnic, gender and class differences that characterize all societies. It takes sides in those conflicts - or rather, it is taken over by sides in those conflicts, and reflects a particular set of cultural values and assumptions.

Schooling as we know it originally grew up to cater for boys from particular social backgrounds, and it is still the set of assumptions based on the characteristics and 'needs' of bright white middle class boys that provides the underlying code of school and classroom practice. This either transforms the problem of 'appropriate treatments' into a more profound example of a problem education cannot hope to redress, or it involves a change in both provision and entitlement, as well as the balance between them to overcome it.

The third reason that reforming education within the welfare state balance of provision/entitlements could not work, was that, like other social services, and especially the health service, there was potentially no end to the demands for resources it would produce. Policy would be led by the demand for, not the supply of, services. The criterion of a good policy would be how many of these demands could be met rather than how they could be reduced and shaped to fit the resources available. Ironically, this was due almost as much to its failure as to anything else - as long as the reform agenda remained, and the reform response was ineffective (as I've argued much of it was bound to be), there would be a consistent case for demanding more resources, and no principled reason for refusing them. As long as the money kept coming in, the show could be kept on the road. But when it stopped - as it did, quite literally, following Britain's membership of the EEC, the oil panics of the 1970s, the Great Crash, changes in export prices and so on, - things had to change.

Which brings us pretty much up to date. What I want to do in the remainder of this lecture is to look at some possible solutions to the problems caused by the money stopping. In doing that I will be addressing the third and fourth questions on my list - What do the available resources make possible and what do they limit, and what might a successful policy look like. But first we need to consider the possible forms the collapse of the welfare state settlement might take, and their implications for my first two questions.

The two most likely political responses to that collapse would appear to be the maintenance of the existing provision/ entitlements balance, but in a considerably scaled down form, and a radical revision of that balance to prioritize provision - i.e. the neo-liberal market solution, or perhaps most likely some combination of the two.

In the pure market dream the questions of whether something could or should be done by education, or whether the education system would be permitted or encouraged to do it would be settled by the market and not by the state. There would be no 'they'. We would all be 'theys' making our preferences and judgements known by our behaviour in the market. If the market showed it wanted education to do something, it would be done; if not, not.

This dream, or nightmare, seems unlikely to come to pass. For one thing I suspect that the question of how to deal with hundreds of thousands of children and teenagers no longer required to attend school would very rapidly be seen as much too important to be left to the market; this is already evident from the large number of 'schemes' that usually have training in their title but whose main objective seems to be the effective 'storage' of potentially troublesome groups - to keep them

off the streets and off the unemployment register, and with luck to keep them available for work when there is no work available for them.

A somewhat more likely, though still rather distant, method of 'marketising' education is through some form of voucher scheme, with parents being given education vouchers that they can exchange for the particular combination of education services that suits them best. However, voucher schemes are both intrinsically and administratively complicated, to the extent that there has so far been no successful attempt to install them in a state education system.

The most likely way that education might be marketized, it seems to me, is through deliberate encouragement of the stratification of educational institutions into 'market' and 'minimum' types. This would be achieved on the basis of parents' willingness and ability to pay for one of a range of educational 'choices' that would be made available to them in addition to the standard fare available to all. This standard fare would gradually be reduced to an almost residual level and be taken up only by those without the money or sense to do better for their children. In Dahrendorf's terms there would be a radical change in the balance of provisions and entitlements, with a hefty tilt in the direction of the former, and a severe curtailment of the basis of entitlements.

The other, and more likely, responses to the collapse of the welfare state would involve a scaling down of provision, with selectivity and targeting replacing universal benefits. In this way, it could be - it is - argued, state expenditure on welfare can be reduced without any damage or suffering being caused the worst off. This is a superficially attractive and sensible- response to a difficult problem, but on closer examination it proves to have rather less to offer. This is because selectivity does not really overcome the problems of universal benefits. It does not mean that there will suddenly be enough money for at least those targeted to be able to enjoy the substance of their formally equal rights. We do not have to unduly cynical to guess that selective benefits will be kept as close to the minimum as were universal ones. Nor does selectivity mean that the problems of middle class capture of welfare state benefits will be wholly avoided. For instance it has been shown in a study of the Assisted Places Scheme in the U.K. - a scheme set up to subsidize the fees of children from poor homes whose parents expressed a wish for them to attend private schools - that a significant number of the parents receiving such assistance had themselves been to fee paying schools and/or were in professional occupations.⁹ Beyond this, selective benefits can easily lead to their recipients being stigmatized (except, curiously, in the case of higher education!), especially if they are given in kind. However the most important reason that selectivity cannot overcome the problems of universalism is that it does nothing to change the nature of the institutions that are part of the problem. Selective benefits, or positive discrimination, do not, as I argued earlier, change the rules of equality. They do not change the basis of entitlements. Indeed they may even reduce the level of entitlements and of provision by such strategies as mainstreaming, where those previously deemed to require separate provision are brought into mainstream provision. Mainstreaming was originally proposed from the best of motives, to prevent the isolation of the disabled or the different, and to open up for them the opportunities enjoyed by the majority of the population. And it can be very effective for instance I have in one of my classes a very able young man who suffers from cerebral palsy and would almost certainly never have got anywhere near a university had it not been for this mainstreaming policy. The difficulty with the policy, though, is that it can so easily be seen as and become merely, or mainly, a means of cutting costs; if this is correct we may see more and more groups 'mainstreamed' without adequate attention being paid to their continuing different needs.

It is important to emphasise the continuing nature of these differences, for one of the effects of mainstreaming may be to deny major forms of group difference, by reducing all differences to individual differences. Here, racial and gender equality, for instance, become strictly matters of individual actions, of striving, merit and deserved achievement on the one hand; and of intentional discrimination against specific individuals on the other. Group differences cannot be addressed from this perspective, because they are not recognised. There is already some evidence that mainstreaming is being used in this way in respect of gender equality in Australian universities,¹⁰

and I am sure no one in this room will have failed to hear its echoes in some proposed changes to Maori education, even though they may not have been formulated explicitly as 'mainstreaming'.

Selectivity represents then an attempt to maintain the existing entitlements/ provision balance at a lower level. It leads to further demand for 'value for money' - with which motherhood concept, like excellence, who can quibble - but with value increasingly defined as individual consumer satisfaction.

How then, may we respond to these two scenarios, which as I have outlined them, appear to offer little more than a choice of evils. Three possible responses are Acquiescence, Accommodation and Alternatives. I will not consider acquiescence further, because whether or not it is desirable there is no possibility of it happening. No such changes have been ever merely acquiesced in by any part of the education service. Very much the most common response has been some form of accommodation to them. Educators have become adept at finding and working within the spaces in reforms that they do not welcome but nevertheless feel constrained to live with. And there is no doubt that some of these accommodations have been most effective. The TVEI, for instance which I referred to earlier, was set up with the intention of introducing a much more substantial technical and vocational presence in British secondary education. At its announcement, both its selectivity and its instrumental bias caused deep tremors of apprehension to run through secondary schools and led to a very large minority of education authorities boycotting the scheme. Yet by the end of its pilot phase, TVEI had become the most effective stimulus to professional, school based, curriculum development the system had ever seen.

However, there are distinct limits to what can be achieved through such strategies and maybe also to their desirability. They have been trenchantly set out by Ken Jones a radical English teacher:

... educationists are adept at finding 'spaces' to work in. They eye each centralizing government initiative at first with horror, fury and awe, as a juggernaut which will surely crush those few remaining shoots of autonomous, grassroots creativity in the system. After a time, the awe lessens; denunciation diminishes from an angry shouting to an occasional murmur. There begins a period of calculation. How can this juggernaut, which obviously is not going to go away, be worked with? How can its more unfortunate extremes be modified? And also, perhaps - base thought, arising from the depths of disillusionment with reform - to what extent might there be something in this juggernaut after all? Might not its programme, suitable tempered, answer the problems of curriculum and underachievement that have persisted for so long? Criticism is now replaced by a policy of judicious involvement: the scheme has been accepted as inevitable, and the issue is now to make it work in a way which is congruent with prevailing practice. Thus, damage can be limited, the best of the new absorbed, and continuity preserved.

Such is the way of the world as the more sanguine voices of reform describe it. Such also are the fears of those who think that the 'educational establishment' is only accepting change so that, ultimately, things will remain the same, with the same kinds of people in control. There is some truth in both opinions. What they miss is the extent of the adaptation to government policy which is the price that a strategy of judicious involvement pays. Continually - in order to maintain some influence - giving ground on issues of principle, the institutions that have sustained reform have become incapable of setting out ideas that could sustain an alternative agenda.¹¹

Thus, though we must accept that accommodation is likely to be the best that we can achieve, we should never lose sight of its limitations or its consequences.

Finally, let me consider two alternatives. The first is suggested by the Australian sociologist of education, R.W. Connell. He proposes what he calls the inversion of hegemony. As he put it:

The mainstream curriculum is hegemonic within the educational system in the sense that it marginalizes other ways of organizing knowledge, is integrated with the structure of organizational power, and occupies the high cultural ground where learning ought to be. Its position in the education system is bolstered by its close connection with teachers' professionalism and self-conceptions, though also undermined to the extent that it comes to be recognized as a major source of teachers' occupational problems in mass schooling. The

mainstream curriculum is hegemonic in the society at large in the sense that it is part of the cultural and practical underpinning of the ascendancy of particular social groups -specifically, capitalists and professionals, men, Anglos.

To move beyond relativism and the strategy of alternatives, without buying the definition of knowledge in the dominant curriculum that condemns excluded groups to continuing marginalization is to embark on a strategy of inverting hegemony. This strategy accepts the need for a program of common learnings but not the basis on which it is currently constructed. It seeks an organization of content and method which builds on the experience of the disadvantaged but attempts to generalize it to the 'whole system, rather than confining it to a section. It thus seeks a practical reconstruction of the system which will yield relative advantage to the groups currently disadvantaged. It attempts to turn a defensive, compensatory strategy into a proactive, universalizing strategy.¹²

This seems to me to come up against very serious difficulties of the 'will they let you do it' - i.e. political, kind, even though Connell claims it would be intellectually better as well as socially more just than the current programmes. What it involves is a major transformation of provision, but no departure from the principle of universalism. Everyone would have formal access to the same curriculum, just as they do now. The difference would be that its nature and values would be inverted. It would, though, still be stratified, albeit on a different basis, rather than differentiated. It would not recognise relevant differences. Though it may well be more socially just, and intellectually superior, it would replace one universal message system with another, albeit more nuanced, similar system.

The second alternative is best exemplified by a very important educational innovation in New Zealand. It seeks to generalize from the work and assumptions of those Maori educators who have not only recognised all that I have been saying this evening but have developed responses to it. The Kohanga Reo and Kura Kaupapa Maori initiatives, which use Maori language and Maori pedagogy, are the embodiment of what seems to me to be the most promising alternative to the educational problems currently facing not just New Zealand but many other parts of the 'developed' world. They insist both that differences exist, and that responding to those differences need not infringe the principles of equality. They are based on the idea that there need not be single forms of provision, and that differentiating provision is at least as likely as stratifying it to bring about parity of achievement and of esteem.

Both the Kohanga Reo and Kura Kaupapa Maori reflect the recognition that the existing education system was seriously harming not just the educational achievement of Maori children, but the whole of Maori culture. The education system was undermining their own culture and offering nothing in its place. In essence, Maori culture, along with individual Maori, was being mainstreamed. Universalism denied the possibility of different provision. Any enhancement of entitlements - and it is questionable if this can be said to have happened - merely improved access to a provision that was already serving the Maori people badly.

What makes it essential to differentiate provision, and how the Maori case is special, has been very well caught by Elizabeth Rata (and can I say what a pleasure it is to quote from an article written by a current student in the Department). She writes:

From the beginning the Komiti has resisted attempts to describe Kura Kaupapa Maori as simply another type of school juxtaposed with schools based on religious or educational beliefs. Catholicism will continue in the world whether or not a Catholic school exists in New Zealand. Schools based upon the Steiner principle would also exist somewhere in the world without a New Zealand presence. Kura Kaupapa Maori is not simply another type of schooling option. It is the only schooling option that can guarantee the survival of the Maori language. This characteristic places Kura Kaupapa Maori in a category all of its own and in a unique relationship with the State.¹³

For those involved in setting up the Kura Kaupapa Maori, the question is it something education can do? seemed easy to answer if not to act on - it was something only education could do. The manoeuvres, machinations and negotiations over 'getting them to let you do it' would require a

thesis to describe in the detail they need and deserve (and I hope they will make such a thesis). That the existing context and available conditions and resources retarded rather than encouraged the reform was self-evident. They were why it was necessary, and what was required was an appreciation of how existing conditions and resources could be converted and others incorporated. And finally, there was a very clear vision of the outcome.

What can we learn from this outstanding and significant achievement? Very briefly, I think it encapsulates almost all of what I was saying earlier about the dangers of the sophisticated possibilitarianism of the universal emancipatory project for education. In particular, it highlights the difficulties that have come to be associated with the concept of equality. This country's education has been more explicitly informed by the idea of equality than any others'. Our prevailing conceptions of the limits and possibilities of education are deeply rooted within that idea. However, I fear that there is a serious danger that the concept of equality has become debased. There are two main reasons for suggesting this. On the one hand, it has come, illegitimately but irresistibly to connote similarity and uniformity and requiring that all differences be eradicated or standardized or ignored.

On the other hand it has suffered a facile reduction to 'equity'.¹⁴ Equity is a quality rather than a condition. In principle, it might be used to justify any distinction since it requires only that the distinction be made fairly, i.e. it has nothing to say about outcomes. It has too deep associations with those legal discourses that produce that minimum, most restrictive definition of equality that informs neo-liberal thought.

I fear the concept of equality, because it has been debased and sucked dry of content, may have become inadequate to capture the ideal that is contained within the movement I have just briefly referred to. In its place I suggest we consider the concept of parity. Parity not only captures all of what we value in 'equality', but adds to it the crucial additional meaning - 'the basis of equivalence'. Achieving parity is how we describe making currencies commensurable. That is to say, it connotes diversity rather than uniformity - and it does this without sacrificing 'the condition of being equal in power, ability, achievement or excellence'.

Parity is not tarnished by associations with either uniformity or equity. It implies both recognition of difference and equal outcomes - and these I suggest, we should adopt as the twin poles to guide us as we continue to probe the limits and possibilities of education.

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11. Ken Jones, (1988). *Right Turn: The Conservative Revolution in Education*, London: Hutchinson, p84.
12. R.W. Connell, (1989). 'Curriculum Politics, Hegemony and Strategies of Social Change' in Henry Giroux and Roger Simon (eds.). *Popular Culture, Schooling and Everyday Life*, Granby, Mass: Bergin and Garvey, 124-5.
13. Elizabeth Rata, (1989). 'Kura Kaupapa Maori'. *PPTA Journal*, 30-32.
14. Since this lecture was delivered Andrew Sharp's book *Justice and the Maori* has been published by Oxford University Press. Sharp develops the approach I have adopted to 'equity' much more fully than I have here, especially in the section entitled 'The Cloudy Rhetoric of Equity' (pp215-26).