

BOOK REVIEW

Sharks and splashes: The future of education and employment, Edited by G. R. Hawke,
Wellington: Institute of Policy Studies

A contestable solution

This little book (102 pages) is made up of three lectures delivered by Sir Christopher Ball, a British authority on higher education, who was brought to New Zealand in 1991 by the Auckland Technical Institute Foundation. Also included are commentaries from various well-known New Zealanders, including Graham Crocombe of the Porter Project, some leading lights in the business world (including Brian Picot), Lockwood Smith and Phil Goff representing (ex) Ministers of Education, and Penny Fenwick and Geraldine McDonald as the 'token educators'.

It is very difficult for me to respond to Ball's lectures in terms of his theory of society and education because, as I will argue, he actually offers a viewpoint with what I believe are fundamental contradictions within it. That is, I believe that to fulfil some aspects of his suggested educational policies would necessarily negate other parts. This raised a problem for me as reviewer because the other alternative, to respond to him purely in my role as 'person/woman/educator' would simply replace the tyranny of his views with that of my own.

What I have decided to do in this review is to examine each of Ball's lectures in turn, summarising their major points and offering a brief comment on each. Then I will point out those contradictions I alluded to above, which occur particularly between the first and third lectures. One other aspect of this book should not be neglected, that is, the commentaries of the New Zealand 'experts'. It is these that, more than anything Ball argues, reveal the essentially contested and political nature of the schooling system, higher education and the so-called relationship between education and the labour market. I found these responses to fall into two categories. The first group were simply opportunistic, aiming to mould Ball's words to their own political perspective. The second group attempted, although very politely, to challenge some of Ball's ideas from the New Zealand context. The final part of this review thus examines the competing discourses of a number of the commentators and draws conclusions from these about the use of Ball's visit to New Zealand for the furthering of particular political strategies for education in this country.

The first essay will be familiar to most readers in both Western and Asian societies, in its theme, scope and conclusions. It is all about skills, technological- change and the future shape of industry. To summarise, the argument goes something like this: Because of the growth of new technologies, unskilled manual labour is being rapidly eroded in every sector of the labour market. The army of unskilled workers need to be replaced with workers who have the broad skills base to cope with and adapt creatively to future changes in work practices, which will be caused by the ever increasing rate of technological change. The changes in particular job specifications are being paralleled by a more profound change in the organisation of work, from the Fordist production line hierarchies of the past to a post-Fordist future of worker determination of quality, based on the fact that brain-power will be not constituted solely in management but at every level of the organisation.

The educational implications of all this are obvious: we must train brains for the future or, in Ball's terms: learning pays. The upshot of the argument for Ball is that there is a need for a new partnership to develop between education and industry: 'only by cooperating and working together in a true partnership can the challenges facing both employers and teachers be met and resolved' (p. 3). The partnership will have a single purpose, and this introduces the major theme of the second

part of Ball's lecture: wealth creation. Effective training, he argues, benefits the nation (he cites the GDP of West Germany and Japan), the .company (a list of British-based multi-nationals is provided) and the individual (and here he recites international evidence of the effects of social disadvantage and early school leaving on employment opportunities).

Ball is not merely what we used to call a human capital theorist. He also discussed both the 'civilising' and 'empowering' effects of education, and notes that education contributes to health and happiness; a view certainly missing from the 'commodification' arguments so prevalent within certain state agencies in New Zealand today. But, by returning to the theme of education and employment continually, Ball makes it clear that it is this relationship which is of primary importance when considering education.

A section on development in Thailand is of particular interest in this regard. He recounts that the economic 'success' of this nation is based on seven factors: cheap money, ready access to markets, deregulation, a strong infrastructure, cheap labour, well motivated workers and a highly skilled workforce. He notes that:

Thailand has achieved five out of these seven desirable conditions for economic success. Its leaders believe that they must-now improve the infrastructure and enhance the skills and knowledge of their workforce. (p. 6)

It appears that Ball totally disregards the fact that nations can have either a high wage, high skill economy, or a low wage, low skill economy, but that the concept of a low wage, high skill economy is far more problematic. Indeed, the general argument of the post-Fordists is usually based on the view that skilled labour will be able to appropriate a larger share of the profits if they work through high wages. Given the essentially dependent status of Thailand in relation to multi-national corporations it is easy to see how cheap labour is essential, but in my mind this renders problematic the Thai programme of upskilling; cheap labour is cheap simply because it is unskilled and essentially disposable. The new partnership of education and industry is thus (to put it crudely) based on the common interest of the two sectors in brains. Ball asserts that industry has a lot to teach education. In general, though, it is how education should change to meet industry's needs that interests him. He identifies five areas of post-compulsory education that need to be examined. Access to education, a theme he takes up in the third lecture, is the first of these:

Since 1985 the old idea that places should be made available for those who are qualified and willing has been superseded by the ideal that courses should be provided for all who are able to benefit from them and who wish to do so. (p. 10)

I will return to this point later. The second issue is the provision of lifelong learning; obviously necessary (in his view) given the accelerating changes in technology. The third area is the curriculum, especially "personal and transferable skills, information technology and (above all) the challenge of the 'incomplete syllabus'". The fourth area is the processes of learning and teaching. Ball reveals himself to be an enthusiast of the Open University and distance learning techniques. Finally, he examines resources. How can all these changes be achieved given the limited public funding available? Ball advocates a form of targeted funding for higher education; a claim that will be familiar to readers of Access.

I will deal only briefly with the second lecture. It is here that he develops the argument for open access to higher education. In supporting open access, he argues that it is the institutions themselves, especially universities, who provide the main barriers to such access. Citing staff: student ratios that will be the envy of all polytechnic and university staff in New Zealand, Ball argues that British institutions have had productivity gains, but that further gains are both possible and necessary (even up to the level of a 1 :20 ratio!). Essentially, these institutions must become more efficient, use better techniques of teaching and learning and bring down the price of education.

I only want to comment on one other aspect of this essay, which is Ball's argument that there is no necessary connection between teaching and research within universities, and that, in fact, this

model prevents the kind of mass access model that he supports. He recommends that either research becomes a specialised activity undertaken by some people within institutions or (and this is the model he prefers) a number of British universities (12-15) remain research universities, whilst the rest become teaching institutions only.

Essentially, then, he (correctly) asserts the problem of access to education as one of supply rather than demand, and argues that it is institutions that have to respond to the demand. In the third essay he expands on this, arguing for a fundamental re-organisation of higher education so that it becomes less like 'Grand Opera', and more like 'orange juice'; i.e. available to everyone.

This third essay is an impassioned argument for open access to higher education. Stripped of the context of economic development that characterised the first essay, his arguments are far more attractive. I read this essay within the context of a situation where every major Arts Department at the University of Canterbury has imposed a limitation on entry on first year courses for 1992, which will effectively close access to some students: they will be allowed to enter university but may not be admitted to any courses! This situation is, of course, the result of many years of strict funding controls by the state which have failed to fund the enormous growth in numbers wishing to enter university. Canterbury's overall staff: student ratio is now 1: 17.5, and entry limitations are the result of staff themselves deciding that this level should not be greatly exceeded. However, I find myself partially agreeing with Ball that institutions could deal with higher student numbers by adopting different teaching practices, although I reject the separation of teaching and research as a solution, my main reason being that this would inevitably separate undergraduate and post-graduate students and thus set up new elitisms in what is an already almost unbearably elitist system. Also, if we are to have 'mass' higher education then we will need 'mass' research to keep pace with the diversity of knowledge, interests and issues affecting what will be a far more diverse student population.

I see Ball as a traditional systems theorist, trying to work out how system A fits with system B, with little or no interest in, or concern with, the social context in which systems are spawned. If learning pays, then more learning pays more and, presumably, mass learning pays masses. He really has no concept of the structural inequalities of the national and international capitalist context: that multi-nationals go to Thailand because the labour is cheap, the money is cheap and there is little protection of labour or environment; that the unskilled lose out on jobs because they are at the end of the queue and demand isn't that high; that education is structured as it is because it was set up centrally to sort and select people for unequal futures. I have only touched on a major contradiction in his argument: the view that mass higher education can be produced only by charging higher fees (this contradiction is, of course, familiar to New Zealanders; both Labour and National governments have based policies on it). It simply does not occur to Ball that the structural inequalities of the 'market' are in any sense at odds with the claimed expansion of equal opportunities as an outcome of mass higher education.

Briefly on the commentators. It is interesting to note how each carried in with them their own political views of education, and carried these same views right out again, apparently reinforced by Ball!

Crocombe (of the Porter Project) reinforced the need for links between education and industry, but concentrating on the need to develop not only a competitive economy but also "an adaptable set of shared values" (p. 15) to support it. Given the struggles to gain some kind of bicultural diversity in New Zealand over the past few years, this view is as naive on social issues as Ball's own.

Two of the women made valuable arguments against Ball's views. Susan Lojkin of the Commerce Commission reinforced Ball's comments on lifelong learning but, in one of the few criticisms of his arguments, in this book, noted that 'learning pays' provides an over-material conception of the benefits of education. Geraldine McDonald points out that if there is to be a partnership between education and industry, then industry must provide the jobs for these

educated people. She also points out that 'technology' is often viewed as being for men, not for women, and recounts some of the problems women have in technological areas.

John Fernyhough, however, took from Ball a pure market view of education, which is not surprising given his own neo-liberal perspective. His support of the Business Roundtable, and his assertion that there are "no free rides" (p. 22) mark out his belief in education as a commodity; one built, moreover to support the needs of capital. Dunford McDonald (Mitsubishi New Zealand) takes a similar view, also arguing that "industry and commerce" must tell educators "what (the) standards should be". Similarly, Owen Jennings of Federated Farmers emphasises the themes of competition, bulk funding, improving the quality of education and the development of: "A business culture based on enterprise" (p. 36). My view of these business people is that if they are truly representative of the private sector of the economy then education should have as little to do with that sector as possible.

Three other commentaries are worthy of note. One is Brian Picot's amusing comment, given his position as a former Director of a supermarket chain, that we need to develop 'educational supermarkets'. Picot as CEO of the Ministry of Education, perhaps? Lockwood Smith's contribution essentially restated Government policy where it agreed with Ball's arguments, but (readers will be pleased to know) he rejected out of hand the idea of the separation of teaching from research in universities. Phil Goff raised three issues: how to achieve equality of opportunity; what is the appropriate balance between state and private funding of higher education; and what kind of assessment do we need in schools. Ball did not have very clear answers on any of the issues.

Despite my criticisms of Ball's arguments, I believe that this book is worth reading simply for the affirmation of open entry to higher education throughout life. This is something that Britain has not had and is apparently striving for. It is something that New Zealand has had, has not recognised the value of, has been devalued partially because of the selection practices and inequalities of the schooling system, and is now losing due to a combination of supply-side economic policies and increasing demand for places.

However, as Ball notes, the price of open entry in the current political climate would be higher fees, and fee assistance targeted by parental income on a differential basis. Those of us who believe in open entry to university, but oppose fee targeting, are faced with having to work harder, see staff: student ratios rise ever higher and higher, and thus sacrifice our research and quality for quantity. Ball has a solution to the problem of providing open access, but I do not believe it is the right one. We must wait, it seems, until the tide of politics turns before this issue can be satisfactorily resolved.

Liz Gordon

The Quality Management of Lifelong Learning

One could not help but be charmed by Sir Christopher Ball's warmth, urbanity and wit. Style, however never overshadowed substance. In his lectures and responses to commentaries Sir Christopher adhered to a rigorous logic based on his grasp of international economic and political realities, enhanced by a keen understanding of human and social problems.

What relevance does his analysis of the future of education and employment have for New Zealand? I want to respond to this question under the banner of life-long learning focusing on changes in the relationship between education and employment, the retraining imperative, work organisation and notions of quality management systems.

Education and Industry: Changing Perceptions

The suspicion with which much of higher education used to, and in some cases still does, view the world of employment, business and industry, is to a certain extent understandable, resting as it does on a tradition of autonomy, fear of interference, and poor or misunderstood labour market signals. This guarded attitude has generally not been prevalent among "vocational" professions such as engineering and medicine, and in the polytechnic sector. There has been a gradual bridging of the cultural gaps between academic and vocational, knowledge and skills, theory and practice, education and industry. This has been induced by an increasing and worldwide recognition of causal links between skill development and economic growth: learning pays. All economic activities require and involve up-to-date skills, knowledge, technologies, equipment. Not only are high-level knowledge and technical competencies clearly a strategic resource for the pursuit of economic and social progress at a macro level, they are also needed and used in everyday living.

At the same time there are fundamental changes in administrative and funding regimes for the education and training systems. New legislative, structural and qualification frameworks are being implemented.

The changes of course are by no means unique to New Zealand. Sir Christopher's international perspective is a timely reminder that our institutions and workplaces are part of the international marketplace.

Australian Professor Bill Ford came to similar conclusions at the 1990 New Directions industry conference: integration between the worlds of learning and earning can, with other factors, bring about the workplace reform needed to make Australia the "smart country".

All countries that wish to retain- or gain a competitive edge through a skilled and qualified workforce need to cast a wider net in education participation and retention rates and aim for higher levels of skills and qualifications. We are moving towards a situation in which most skilled staff and the bulk of coming generations will be receiving post-secondary education and training, which will be considered a prerequisite rather than a passport to employment.

So giving young people a usable, marketable qualification and access to a career pathway is becoming a primary social responsibility of post secondary education and training.

The Re-training Imperative: Who Pays?

On their own these principles of accessibility and usefulness call for more closely defined and dynamic partnerships between education and industry. They are given added weight by the knowledge that about three quarters of the workforce of the first few years of the twenty first century are already in the workforce, or at least outside of the formal education system.

There is a retraining and continuous learning imperative here. It is clear that if New Zealand companies want to provide high quality, innovative goods and services to demanding customers they have to be in the business of education. Put another way, many of New Zealand's employers are, or will be, facing in their own companies an education crisis comparable with the one many complain of in schools and other institutions. Education and industry are indeed partners in the same enterprise. It makes sense, then, to develop these partnerships in an integrated, symbiotic way, recognising mutual needs and expectations in terms of research work, learning programmes for industrial personnel, work experience for students, skill and training profiles in demand nationally and regionally. A multiplicity of partnerships limited only by one's imagination could be envisaged.

The lifelong learning imperative comes with costs for industry. Sir Christopher and one of his commentators talk briefly about voluntary versus compulsory funding arrangements for industry training. The arguments for and against have been canvassed for the last twenty five years or so.

A tri-partite Government working party in 1989 rejected outright funding initiatives based on compulsion or coercion. These included taxation or levies on a national basis and a minimum expenditure requirement on individual firms. The unanimous view of the working party was that such approaches were likely to be counter-productive, as well as being at variance with other initiatives in the fiscal, economic and labour market fields. The Hawke report itself expressed scepticism about the effectiveness of such levies: "It is difficult to believe that the imposition of compulsory levies on reluctant employers will generate a positive approach to education and training."

A training survey conducted at the same time by the Employers Federation showed that 80% of the 1600 firms surveyed were opposed to compulsory training levies or payroll taxes for training. Most preferred a user pays approach, retaining control of their own training decisions according to the needs of their business.

The survey somewhat took the wind out of the Government's sails in terms of perceived levels of employer funding of training. What it showed was that total employer expenditure on training exceeded by 29% the entire public purse funding for polytechnics. The fact that 2.15% of firms' payroll on average is devoted to training goes largely unrecognised and little credit is given for it in official circles.

No amount of compulsion will alter the fact that training is but one of many investments which a company chooses to make for its survival and growth. Those companies in which skill development is integrated into the business objectives and business plan, applies to all employees, is costed, monitored and evaluated against business goals, are companies who understand that training is a costed investment with short and long term goals.

These are the companies more likely to be national and internationally competitive and in a position to take advantage of an economic upturn. Enlightened self interest is the name of the game.

I am sceptical about Sir Christopher's predictions on compulsory training levies in the United Kingdom. The first eighteen months' operation of the Australian Training Guarantee, which demands that employers prove they have spent a minimum of 1 % of payroll on legislatively defined training or pay that amount as a fine, has indeed proved the Parkinsonian Law that "claimed expenditure on training expands to the set figure". It has moreover produced some imaginative accounting and reporting, has not necessarily raised either training quantity or quality, and has produced some enormous overheads and bureaucratic procedures for distribution of the (reported) \$A 11 m available for redistribution.

The Workplace and Quality

Early in his first lecture Sir Christopher succinctly dismisses the notion of a small leadership elite. He quite rightly emphasises here and elsewhere the fundamental importance to competitive economies of a highly and broadly educated workforce. His arguments rather put paid to the conspiracy theory, current in some academic circles, which tries to blame perceived limitations on student intake (through higher fees, restricted course entry and so on) on what some see as a requirement for a smaller number of highly educated decision makers - an elite sitting at the top of a power pyramid.

This view is alien to most in industry where flatter management structures place new responsibilities and decision making powers in the hands of operational staff; where work is organised in self managing teams with less emphasis on demarcation of role and status and more emphasis on integration and cooperation; where work teams can be responsible for the product or service from start to finish. The result is productivity increases, on-job innovation and employee

motivation. This is a win-win situation for everyone, somewhat removed from the picture of a powerful elite making heavy handed, top-down decisions.

What of course has to be the prime motivating factor for all companies is the notion of quality. International quality assurance standards are being demanded by more and more of New Zealand's customers world wide as a condition of tender, purchase and supply.

Quality in industrial terms is no conceptual minefield. It is objective, international and fashioned by the specifications of the customer. There are international quality standards for products and services which in summary define mainly under the headings of conformance to specification and fitness for purpose. Sir Christopher recognises implications for education when he says (p. 43): "Quality and excellence will need to be redefined in terms of added value and fitness for purpose". His view of quality, however, rests on process rather than outcomes (p. 48). But quality, whether in industry or education, not only has to be built into the process, it also has to be controlled or measured at the end of it. In other words if quality outcomes are those that conform to customer specifications and show fitness for purpose they are predicated upon appropriate integration of quality assurance, quality control and quality audit - a total quality management system. The globalisation and competitiveness of international economies means that customer requirements for quality provision become more sharply focused - in education and training as much as in any other industry.

There are on many fronts clear links between the worlds of education and employment which call for closer, more dynamic and innovative partnerships between education and industry. In linking these worlds Sir Christopher has reemphasised for New Zealanders the lifelong learning imperative from a realistic international perspective.

Marilyn Davies

Will We Profit from the Prophet?

I found this a difficult book to review - there were many 'motherhood and apple-pie' observations from Ball; there were introductions and commentaries from industry, commerce and politicians and there is a reflective retrospective from the editor, Gary Hawke. Interspersed with the commentaries were responses from Ball which again made good sense - at least they sounded good and I suppose that is a major difficulty - how to separate the message from an extremely polished delivery style. Those fortunate enough to attend lectures or seminars by Ball were fulsome in praise for his carefully crafted presentations even if much of his message was not new. What is his thesis then? And more importantly, how will the tertiary education community respond to the issues Ball raises?

Ball's recent writings, as a Fellow with the Royal Society for the encouragement of Arts, Manufacturers and Commerce (RSA), are encapsulated in the titles of his various reports. His latest, "Learning Pays: The Role of Post Compulsory Education and Training" provides the backbone for much of the material presented in the series of lectures contained in this publication. Indeed, his notion "that learning and the development of human potential are the highest priorities for underdeveloped, developed and redeveloped nations" (p. 8) would probably gain support from all in education. Interestingly, he links this notion with an expansion of learning opportunities that "will require the reform of our systems of education and training" (ibid.). I would surmise this latter issue will cause more debate.

Does Learning Pay?

The theme of *learning* that runs through the lectures and discussion is well worth exploration. Ball makes many claims for learning. It "pays the individual" (p. 9) (an argument Treasury seems keen to

support), it "civilises" (p. 10), it "empowers" by creating choice (p. 10), and, of course, it is an important characteristic in determining national economic success. Ball focuses, and received much support from the commentators on his addresses, on the issue of "lifelong learning". He cogently argues that initial learning is not enough - that in a rapidly changing world "we all need updating remedial education to fill the gaps, and opportunities to extend or broaden our learning" (p. 11).

This thesis could well be considered by those in tertiary education who are seeking to extend the duration of current courses. Is it not better to have a commitment to a lifelong learning than to place trust in an initial, soon out-of-date education? The role of tertiary education in meeting such a challenge is also worth much consideration. He raises the question of whether too much of our current focus is on the initial training of school leavers.

Who Should Have Access to Learning?

Quite clearly, Ball seeks a greater participation in higher education for "all who are able to benefit" (p. 10). He precisely attacks the notion of the U.K. norm-referenced entry standards (pp. 66-68) as one that has been designed to limit rather than encourage entry to higher education. It is worthy of note we have developed a parallel system in New Zealand - and we have. public and political criticism for low participation rates. We have had in recent years in New Zealand many more 'mature' students returning to or entering study at tertiary levels. Hawke in his commentary (p. 94) raises the question of whether there should be a Study Right policy distinction between school-leavers and mature students. It seems insufficient to argue that a student loan scheme will overcome such discrimination.

Who Should Pay for Access?

Once Ball accepted the argument that there is a limit on public funding for tertiary education, it is not really surprising he argues for a targeting of public funds so that "they really do reach the people who need them" - the "underprivileged middle-classes". His support for an element of these users-who-can-afford-it pay won support from most commentators. It must be remembered though, he is arguing from a system which has quite limited access - not one that has, as in New Zealand, had much more open access. This open access now seems likely to change with maxima on funded places.

The question of whether user-pays learning does really pay is addressed by Hughes and Lauder. They suggest there is a wastage of talent which will be "exacerbated as a result of [current] reforms" (Hughes and Lauder, 1991, p. 5).

How Should Learning Occur?

A number of timely issues are raised relating to the processes of learning and modes of teaching. Ball addresses issues of distance learning, "education for capability" (the RSA has produced a number of papers on the capability movement) and the uses of educational technology such as interactive video as possible approaches to raising "productivity in education". Many of our existing practices such as the "three-term year", the "3-year (full-time) honours degree", the "inseparable nature of teaching and research", and the "student: staff ratio" are debated. Ball's notion that there is a "research-premium which adds 30% to 40% to the costs of educating students brings to mind one of Hawke's observations in his 1988 report. Ball's arguments that all degree-granting institutions need not be devoted to, and funded for, fundamental research and higher education is unlikely to win favour in many university quarters in New Zealand, but Hinchcliffe, in his foreword, suggests Ball has, indeed, "shattered the belief that degree-level teaching depends on fundamental research,

arguing that the good teacher must keep up-to-date with new developments" (p. i). Hawke (pp. 97-8) provides a further elaboration of Ball's viewpoint.

What Should we Learn?

Concerns about the curriculum for tertiary education underpin much of Ball's lectures. He argues for a redefinition of a "good general education, and a concern with personal and transferable skills, information technology" and the challenge of the "incomplete syllabus" (p. 12). To develop these new directions we could, he suggests, develop new categories of "explanatory sciences", "effective sciences", "service disciplines" and "value disciplines" (p. 74). He suggests "good courses" will raise, in differing proportions, elements of all four sets of disciplines.

If we attempt such a restructuring, and involve industrialists and business people, we will, he suggests, begin to develop a user-led system where "student demand and employment need" take their place alongside "academic judgements of rigour to determine both the content and standards of courses" (p. 75).

Will we Profit?

There is little doubt Ball has attempted to shift the debate from much of the simplistic "greater participation is needed" to the need for radical reform of the tertiary education and training system. If we want our education to develop people who have "learned how to learn, individually and with others, and whose confidence and hopes are unimpaired" (p. 75), we will have to address his thoughts on reform. His arguments that specific skills and knowledge have dominated the generic skills (such as analysis, evaluation and creativity) are worthy of serious discussion. For, in a rapidly changing world, the generic skills are never redundant and may be the essential skills in developing a learning society. Much of our recent discussion in New Zealand has been focused on issues of Study Right, access and participation. Surely we should begin to debate the purpose of our tertiary education and to consider the implications of learning for life. The constant changes of government policy in recent years has created an inordinate focus on administration aspects. It seems timely to debate the purpose of education and this collection of lectures and commentaries will provide a sound start to address the issues of the future of education and employment in New Zealand.

References

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Dennis McGrath

An Important Message

I was able to read this entire book in one sitting, admittedly on a wet Sunday morning. This is a measure of its quality. It has the elegance of simple ideas connected into an economical expression of what one has always known but has never said. The connections are the key. They lead to sudden revelations with the excitement of revolution. It is an impressively direct argument for change. And rather than merely "manage change" it is about "management for change".

The core statement of Ball's position is that:

our existing system of selective post-compulsory education, relying on qualification for access and norm-referenced testing, and founded on the fallacy of a sufficient initial education provided predominantly from public funds, is the main impediment to what should be trying to do under the heading of lifelong learning. If we truly want lifelong learning, I believe we must dismantle and restructure our system of education. Reform is impossible. Only radical restructuring will work.

This is talking primarily about power. Knowledge as power. Our existing system is about the creation of an elite. This pattern is common throughout history. Perhaps its most powerful example is the mandarin class of pre-revolutionary China. And its other clear manifestation is the history of universities throughout the ages. As Ball points out, the history and current practice of higher education is about the careful maintenance of power.

Another fascinating connection Ball draws is between elitist power and sufficient initial education. Those who pass with high honours in the gallop past the exam post are inducted into the elite. Consequently, as knowledge has grown, the initial grab-bag of initial education has also grown larger. Degrees have grown to five or six years. The curriculum has become chocked. What is desperately needed is to break this connection and unshackle the curriculum. This amounts to breaking the hold of knowledge. As T. S. Eliot, (another weaver of webs we have always known) says: 'the difference between the wise man and the fool is that the wise man knows he doesn't know'.

There are key myths which are an essential disguise for the power of the educated elite. "Academic freedom" and "free and open debate" are two. While they express something of absolute value, like all absolute values they have been used to distort and suppress alternatives. There are also key words in higher education like *Research* which resonate with mystical meaning for the initiates, but which for the rest of humanity simply mean what many of us do all the time. And there are the rituals, the gowns, graduation, titles, and pecking orders within faculties. There are probably fewer clear paradigms of power than higher education institutions.

Ball illustrates this superbly:

For many young people, education is like an obstacle race which you are allowed to run in until you trip over, and then that is the end of you. I well remember the first time I came across that academic judgement, 'I am afraid he got a rather weak First'. I realised then that it did not matter what you did, failure was always there, lurking in the system. We have a system of education which is designed more to identify shortcomings than to produce success.

Because education unlocks so much in life it has been used to guard the privileged. But economic survival for New Zealand will not be about a well educated elite directing the masses to produce. This is outmoded hierarchical Taylorist model of production. Now New Zealand has to utilise all its human resources, including women, Maori and the disabled. But in case we go group mad or gender reductionist, it is also about realising the potential in every single individual. Our minimum potential is no longer good enough. We cannot simply be a primary producing country. We must add value. To do that we must shift the emphasis of physical capital investment to human capital investment. This calls for a different set of rules, a different morality.

One of the underlying themes of Ball's books is therefore to change the culture. To do this the signals and incentives must be put in place.

As Ball notes:

At its heart is the question of whether higher education and universities are essentially different and separate from the rest of education or are (as I believe) merely an important part of one seamless robe. On the one hand stand those who see universities as places of mystery, sustained by a priestly class, selective in admission, impractical, unworldly; on the other, those who assert the principles of accessibility and usefulness.

This is an important message.

Alan Barker