

BOOK REVIEW

Challenging the Myths: Rethinking New Zealand's Educational History, by Roger Openshaw, Greg Lee, Howard Lee. Palmerston North, Dunmore Press, 1993

The authors of *Challenging the Myths* set out to write a comprehensive text about New Zealand's educational history. This book will certainly provide welcome relief from the tedium of Cumming and Cumming's (1978) *History of State Education in New Zealand* and many of the chapters will indeed prove useful reading for academic coursework.

The authors have set themselves a huge task; to write a 'general comprehensive text' and to 'fill in gaps' which they considered to be missing from the New Zealand educational historiography. What the authors have accomplished is to bring together, in one book, an overview of some of the issues raised in the past with an attempt to include many periods of New Zealand educational history.

The book covers education from 1814 with the arrival of missionaries for the Church Missionary Society to the early 1990s with the arrival of Tomorrow's Schools, the government agenda for radical changes to the administration of the public education system in New Zealand. There are chapters on the 1877 Education Act, the Hogben era, curriculum development and reform, examinations and credentialing, Maori education, gender and religion in relation to state funding.

Openshaw, Lee and Lee, are at their best when focusing on their respective areas of research interest as illustrated in the chapters on patriotism, curriculum, secondary schooling and credentialing. These sections are long overdue additions to our educational history.

If we were to use this book as a text for teaching about history of New Zealand education we would want to raise questions about its historiography. Overall, we believe it presents a new version of liberal historiography.

This variation is more sophisticated than prior liberal historiography because it consciously discusses social theory and attempts to include groups and issues that were marginal for so long in educational history. Yet in the process it continues to privilege the official document as the historian's essential source, the introduction of centralised state schooling for pakeha as the real beginning of educational history, the school as the proper site of education, and the concerns of policymakers and administrators as the main site of concern for historians. Through this process the experiences of Maori, women and 'others' remain on the periphery. And through this the theoretical challenges made by Maori and feminist academics remain concealed. To the readers at least, the 'challenge' the authors are offering is one which attempts to wrest any authority 'revisionist' voices might have achieved in the past decade, and to reconstitute the educational agenda on a terrain of liberal notions of historical normality.

An essential part of this process is cleansing the text of the taint of social theory. Given the challenge issued to liberal historiography by revisionists it is no longer possible (or at least, it is not wise) to ignore social theory completely. To construct a liberal history in the 1990s therefore requires some delicate manoeuvring. In *Challenging the Myths* this is managed in the first instance by discussing social theory then failing to locate themselves within any particular framework(s). What appears to remain then is, in the second instance, 'the'/ definitive/real history which tells it 'as it was'. But what actually remains is an obscured theoretical framework. The concluding chapter illustrates the problems this poses as clearly as the treatment of Maori and women.

Maori Education

In setting out to critically examine the historiography of Maori education the authors comment that the depiction of traditional Maori education by today's Maori educators 'may tell us more about the writers ... than it does about pre-European educational practices'. A similar claim might be made of these authors in relation to *their* account of Maori education. They seem less concerned with shedding further light on the history of Maori education than with establishing demarcation lines between the roles of 'historians' and 'educationists' and, in this context, staking out a claim for 'historians' to be regarded as the sole providers of the valid interpretation of that history. 'Historians' and 'educationists', they indicate, are clearly separate species with 'educationists' reading mainstream history only selectively and, furthermore, having 'a different agenda from historians' (although we are never told exactly what the historians' agenda is). It is not to dispute the validity of some of their criticisms of some current writing on Maori education by 'educationists' to observed that the authors themselves have been highly selective of the works they set out to criticise. What does this tell us about *their* agenda? While the writers argue that the radical critique falls short of offering a satisfactory analysis of the mission school period, their own 'atheoretical' stance offers nothing in advance of that.

Most of the discussion of Maori education itself is to be found in Chapters Three and Four. This discussion relies heavily on secondary sources, its main value being that it brings together material from a wide range of previously published works. In this the book will be a useful source of information on the details of particular events in the history of Maori education. The authors earlier argue, quite rightly, that future research into native schools would benefit from taking cognisance of Stephen Ball's key points on colonial schooling, including the fact that the history of such schooling was 'marked by contestation between rival social and political groups'. Yet they themselves make little or no effort to contextualize the educational events they discuss within the dynamics of the economic and political relations of Maori and Pakeha. Thus while they discuss details of state provisions made for the education of Maori, . the reasons behind those provisions are barely explored. The authors fail to consider the implications for the social relations of Maori and Pakeha of educational policies *for* Maori being devised and implemented *by* Pakeha.

These chapters are entitled 'The Politics of Maori Education' but the politics discussed within them are mostly those within the education system itself, not those that involve the education system in relation to the dynamics of the wider society. The discussion of the Hunn Report is a case in point. The authors focus on the detail of its recommendations in regard to Maori education and the integration policy it promoted, but they make no effort to take account of the significance of the report in relation to the social conditions prevailing at the time it was made. They ignore, for instance, that it was published by a department which at that time was seeking to address the demands of the urban labour market by actively recruiting Maori from rural areas. (The promotion of the integration policy at that particular time cannot be separated from the concern for 'race relations' in the bringing together of Maori and Pakeha within the labour force). The argument that sociological analyses of education have been 'overly economic' is hardly licence for totally ignoring economic and wider social factors in any historical analysis of education.

The authors' own biases, selective approach to the literature on Maori education, and failure to locate schooling within the context of wider social relations, is most evident in their approach to Maori educational under-achievement and its relationship to social class. They sweep aside the history of Maori subjection to a practical vocationally-oriented curriculum with the assertion that 'it would be wrong to assume that it applied only to Maori'. 'Since non-Maori children can also be educationally disadvantaged', they argue, 'the central question becomes not why are Maori disadvantaged but why is anyone?' In contrast to their previous stance, the authors now embrace an 'economic' analysis representing Maori educational underachievement of Maori as no more nor less than a social-class issue. While the underachievement of Maori is undoubtedly linked to the fact that most of them are located within the working class or unemployed, the writers choose not

to acknowledge the role of the education system, in conjunction with the activities of other state institutions such as the Maori Land Court, in *actively seeking* to produce this outcome. There is a difference between the cementing of the social status of working class children through schooling and the employment of education policies rationalized by racial ideologies to deliberately reduce the political and economic effectiveness of a whole ethnic group. The authors of *Challenging the Myths* actually cite some of these policies in their account and their third chapter begins with a quote from an 1862 school inspector's report (represented, mistakenly, as a report of the Department of Education) which supports such policies. However because they have chosen not to examine the role of Maori education policy within the context of the dynamics of the social relations of Maori and Pakeha, the authors have spared themselves the need to discern those differences.

Girls and Women's Education

Feminist educational history has come a long way since the 1970s when studies began to appear in the area of women's educational history, but, as Openshaw, Lee and Lee suggest, in the main they were of the contributory type concentrating on sexual differentiation within the curriculum, the status of women teachers and women's participation in tertiary education. By the late 1980s, however, a number of feminist scholars had begun to document a wider range of women's educational experiences in New Zealand utilising a variety of historical categories of analyses. What is particularly disappointing about the treatment of women/ gender/girls/female (used interchangeably at different times throughout *Challenging the Myths*) is that many of the current issues of debate are not aired. For example, Maori feminist academics such as Ngahua Te Awekotuku, Linda Tuhiwai Smith and Kathie Irwin have examined the marginalisation of Maori women's education and argue that "by constituting Maori women as 'other', Pakeha feminists can 'colonise' and render invisible Maori women's educational experiences, activities and perspectives". (Middleton and Jones (1992) (eds.) *Women and Education in Aotearoa 2*. Wellington: Bridget Williams Books, p.xi). In many ways, this is exactly what these three male authors have done to 'women' in their book; constituted them as 'other' in the book's shortest chapter and "attempted to give some specific consideration to the impact of formal education on girls at various times" (p. 255).

The chapter 'Female Pupils, Female teachers: Gender and the writing of educational history' is particularly frustrating. While an attempt is made to document some, but certainly not all, the writings in this area, there is no attempt to analyse the changing nature of feminist educational history or come to grips with any of the important theoretical debates. The reader is left with the impression that the authors ran out of material and that as a 'filler' exhorted to look to overseas writers for how better to research and write in this area. For example, instead of analysing the important contributions made by a few New Zealand feminist educational historians who have demonstrated how well New Zealand women are at capturing their own history, the authors look to overseas trends in feminist history more widely and suggest a future path. Indeed, the notion that overseas writers have much to offer the future of feminist educational history in New Zealand comes through very strongly. At the same time, there is no acknowledgement of the validity of indigenous theorising and its potential within feminist educational history.

Educational Reforms

The concluding chapter seeks to address the most recent educational reforms in New Zealand. The major challenge it issues is against sociological writers, who have indeed - as the author(s) claim - dominated the field. In particular it argues that the 'liberal left' has failed to impact upon the educational debate, and lays much of the blame with the ahistorical nature of academic sociological debate. A burning question that is neither asked nor addressed is where then were the historians during the first few tumultuous years of this debate? Where have they been ever since? And why did the one historical work that did emerge in this period lie neglected by sociologists? Therein, we

would argue, lies the rub; the difficulty here was with the tensions between a theoretically underdeveloped historical approach and sociological approaches. What is most significant about this is that the tensions between the historical and sociological approaches which the author(s) allude to are reproduced in the text rather than examined closely.

Those sociologists who contributed to the New Zealand debate generally drew on various neo-Marxist theories of the state because for them the issue of educational restructuring could only be understood in terms of broader restructuring of the state and economy in a period marked by a global fiscal crisis and a crisis of legitimation. McCulloch's discussion of historical conservative forces reduced the issue to a 'historical tradition' which had always been evident but needed explanation because it exerted an influence at this point in time. *Challenging the Myths* picks up McCulloch's point about 'conservative lobby groups' and expands this to (claim to) look at 'lobby groups' more generally (but sociologists of education in particular). But by shifting the framework to one of 'lobby groups', the author(s) are themselves constructing a particular theoretical stance on the state - one of pluralism. Pluralist and neo-Marxist views of the state are not only very different, but are incompatible because of their basic tenets. The prior, for instance, privileges human agency and sees the state as an arena in which everyone can compete on equal terms, whereas the latter privileges structuralism and sees the state as a site which ultimately protects the interest of capital. Like McCulloch though, the author(s) fail to identify their own theoretical stance and hence what it is that they are actually criticising the sociological debate for. Essentially this criticism is about differences between theoretical stances and what these differences mean when we are trying to talk about educational change.

Relatedly, the author(s) do not provide a very coherent overview of the sociological works in question. To be frank the author(s) demonstrate a general lack of understanding about the sociological literature. In the discussion on Gordon's research and Codd et al., for example, he/they go so far as to completely miss Gordon's point (which was born out, in any event, in Lockwood Smith's statements when he introduced the trial scheme of bulkfunding teachers' salaries). Similarly, this same discussion does not indicate their general point - which is that while state restructuring of education claimed to be about decentralisation, in actuality it is about strengthening the centralist state. The author(s) continue by missing the most fundamental point made by the sociological literature on the relationship between educational restructuring and a crisis of legitimation. In a nutshell this is that state-economy-educational restructuring was necessary because education as a site of redistributive justice was not seen to be working (witness all of the research on Maori education) and that the economy was failing (witness unemployment, national deficits, etc.). The issue was how to regenerate a healthy capitalist economy while appearing to be 'just' and acting for the 'public' good; this is the crisis of legitimation facing all welfarist states in the late twentieth century. Thus (for neo-Marxists) it is not an issue of 'conspiracy' but of structural contradictions and how these are mediated.

Mediation by the state, or 'the solution' (not only in New Zealand but in other western countries), has been to utilise research by 'left' sociologists to argue that the welfare state does not work and that restructuring the social world along market principles would provide better mechanisms for meeting the public good. (Which explains why there was such an emphasis on Maori education in the Picot Report). Sociological analysis of those educational structures that have been put in place, and the arguments used by the state to do so, actually provide some of the 'hard empirical evidence' that the author(s) claim is absent! Overall though, to suggest there is a need for analysis of motives is to miss the sociological point - the 'motive' is the crisis of legitimation itself. To suggest there is also a need for analysis of divergent views is to shift the theoretical platform from (structuralist) neo-Marxism to pluralism.

Our concern with this text is not with some of the points it makes. In fact, to keep the focus on the last chapter, we heartily agree that historians do need to engage with sociologists to help shape our collective understandings of educational change. And we fully support the argument that 'left'

educators need to be held accountable on their own terms. We also agree that the main way for historians to facilitate this in relation to recent change in New Zealand (and other western countries) is through a closer scrutiny of 'the New Right'. But where we depart from neo/liberal history is that we would urge historians to let go of (positivistic) allusions of purity and do this in theoretically informed ways.

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