Knowing How to 'Just Do It': The Politics of Professional Development for Teachers

John O'Neill

This paper examines official discourses of teachers' learning and their preferred role in curriculum making with specific reference to the *Know How 2* professional development resource for technology education (Ministry of Education, 1997). The resource presents a narrowly ideological view of the curriculum as enterprise technology and of technology teaching as the faithful and unquestioning implementation of official curriculum policy. Thus the processes of discouraging a critically informed analysis of official curricula in pre-service education are 'naturally' extended to the domain of practice in the schoolhouse.

Introduction

This paper is based on several basic beliefs and assumptions. First, teaching is inherently political work involving individual and collective judgements about what is worth teaching, why and how. Teaching cannot in this sense be reduced to a supposedly value-neutral set of objective, taken-for-granted, common-sense practices. Second, teachers' work is a site of political struggle over what teachers should do in the classroom and how this is to be controlled. Third, the curriculum, that is content, pedagogy and assessment, lies at the heart of the political struggle over the control of teachers' work. Fourth, as Kliebard (1986) has shown, discourses around teachers' work and the curriculum are not static. They shift and change over time as various groupings within wider society achieve temporary ascendancy and advance their economic, social and political ideologies through the medium of compulsory schooling. Fifth, dominant groups seek to advance their educational agendas not through brute force but persuasion, in effect by securing the assent of a sufficient fraction of the wider population. In the context of this paper, this involves persuading teachers or at least a reasonable proportion of teachers, that the official curriculum being advanced simply makes good sense. Finally, teachers are not sponges that simply absorb the concepts, ideologies, languages and practices that are advocated in official education policy texts, including gazetted curriculum documents. They read policy according to the knowledge, dispositions and powers of analysis that they have acquired through their life experiences, pre-service education and occupational socialisation. These too may be seen as part of what Giddens (1979) sees as the essential (and, therefore, progressive) social processes of 'structuration', the struggle between broader social structures and ideologies on the one hand and, on the other hand, the exercise of individual agency. In this sense, it is not sufficient for dominant groups to control what occurs in pre-service education. Control over in-service and professional development, and the specific education policy texts these often address, is just as important for those who would determine what teachers do.

The major difficulty in contemporary teacher education programmes (both pre-service and in-service) is that discussion around these issues of purpose and agency has over time simply been marginalised, silenced and excised from what have increasingly in recent years become instrumental, functional approaches to the 'making' of teachers and curriculum. The tragedy is that this has occurred with the complicity, active support or simply resigned acceptance of many teacher educators. The real difficulty for the minority of critically minded teacher educators who remain is the realisation that the cultural barbarians, or bankers as Freire (1972) would put it, are not just outside the gates of the universities and colleges of education but are also inside among their colleagues. As a result, teachers rarely have access to counter-discourses that challenge official discourses of teaching, and explain how the curriculum and teachers' work are politicised and linked in complex yet enduring ways to the historical, political, economic and social ideologies and agendas of those dominant groups who have the power to speak.

The purpose of this paper is to show how many of the practices alluded to above have been played out in the context of one professional development resource for New Zealand teachers: *Towards Teaching Technology, Know How 2* (Ministry of Education, 1997).

Business enterprise, appropriate technology and the official technology curriculum

> Under neo-liberalism, all 'forms of conduct' are to be made available for the national economic strategy, as it is 'capable of explaining all human behaviour' (Fitzsimons, 1999: 140).

According to neo-liberal theory, all human behaviour may be understood in terms of economics. Further, economic conceptions of human behaviour embrace the notion of self-maximisation through personal enterprise. Central to the neo-liberal project at the level of national politics therefore is the inculcation and legitimation of an enterprise 'culture' and 'competition' in order to optimise national economic performance. A considerable number of scholarly analyses have traced the origins and effects of the neo-liberal structural adjustment programme in New Zealand since 1984 (e.g. Peters and Marshall, 1996; Eagle and de Bruin, 2000; Olssen, Codd and O'Neill, 2004); there is no need to revisit those here. Suffice to say that neo-liberal forms have permeated the processes of education policy and text production across all sectors, and in all areas of activity, from the bulk funding of early childhood centres to the creation of a marketplace in pre-service teacher education. From 1990, the curriculum has been central to the political and ideological project of developing an enterprise culture.

In 1991, soon after his appointment as Minister of Education, Dr Lockwood Smith articulated National's vision for the curriculum as a central plank in the development of this enterprise culture, in the document *Education Policy: Investing in people, our greatest asset:*

> Over recent years the word 'competition' has disappeared from the vocabulary of educationalists. Yet the world is a competitive place. Our standard of living as a nation now depends on our competing successfully in the international environment. We do our young people a grave disservice if we shield them from that reality and if the curriculum ignores it. … The imperatives of the modern world require a new culture of enterprise and competition in our curriculum (Smith, 1991: 2).

In addition to a general policy emphasis on benchmark standards of achievement at student, classroom, school and system level, Smith pursued the concept of a 'new' curriculum area that would act expressly as a conduit for the ideological project of creating a competitive enterprise generation. At this time, 'technology' curricula were also being developed in other Western countries bent on increasing their competitiveness in the global marketplace. When the gazetted New Zealand curriculum document appeared in 1995, *Technology in the New Zealand Curriculum*, its provenance was alluded to by the then Secretary of Education, Dr Maris O'Rourke in her Foreword:

> The Minister of Education requested the development of the technology curriculum in 1991, as a part of a broad initiative aimed at improving student achievement. The development process initially involved a policy development phase which included scrutiny of technology education developments occurring in many other countries. This was followed, in 1993, by the development of a draft statement which was circulated to schools and interested groups for comment and discussion. This final version takes into account the many responses that were received to the draft statement, as well as experience from school trials and the pilot teacher development programmes (O'Rourke, 1995, no pagination).

There are, for obvious reasons, two major omissions from this statement: first, that the 'new' technology curriculum supplanted traditional craft-based technology education curricula. Moreover, it was also based on a narrow and historically impoverished conception of the purposes of technology; and,

second, that the consultation, trial and pilot phases of curriculum development were carefully controlled from the centre. The involvement of teachers in curriculum policy development was orchestrated, in that teachers were seen merely as a stakeholder group to be consulted and no longer in their historical role as "central actors" (see O'Neill, 2001) in curriculum policy development.

Contemporary technology curricula in several countries have reified the activities of 'problem-solving' and 'design' according to a utilitarian criterion of 'fitness-for-purpose'. Individually, there is nothing remarkable about these aspects of technology. However, bringing them together under the mantra of 'enterprise' as both the means *and* ends of curriculum, without any underlying sense of moral and social purpose for technology education, has tended to shape conceptions of what technology is, in quite narrow, ahistorical ways. In contrast, John Olson (1997: 386) has used the example of the development of traditional salt extraction methods by women in Sierra Leone to argue that technology education must be integral to the processes of enhancing everyday life. In this regard, "making … is not a design process – it is socially embedded in a way of life".

Olson's basic point is that contemporary technology curricula are founded on patriarchal, science-based technologies, not anthropological, sociological and historical analyses. If the importance of technology to culture were dominant, much of what currently passes for technology education would wither:

> Rather than be guided by stereotypical images of male-dominated and science-based technologies as the form of technological capability we seek, we would see that technology, now and before, has had a broader base in culture. ... Having appreciated this we can see that the task of technology education takes us deeply into our culture and *its* technological constituents: there is more than technique in this process (Olson, 1997: 386).

In New Zealand's version of the technology curriculum there is evidence of a similarly narrow constructions of what technology and its constituent learning processes are about. For example, O'Neill and Jolley (1996/1997) document the shift from the former home economics curriculum to the current strand of food technology. Their analysis of this is worth quoting at some length:

> The predominant emphasis on food as a technology takes it out of the domestic sphere and locates it in the realm of commercial production: commercial processing, manufacture and marketing techniques. There are very few *hands on* examples presented for preparing food and/or direct references to food ... The traditional focus in working with food in home economics centred around learning through doing the various methods of its preparation and cooking. Students learnt about nutritional composition and balance in the preparation of economical, nutritious and appealing 'everyday' food from basic ingredients. We believe these curriculum changes are representative of more than changes in consumption and production patterns. They are indicative of a number of discursive strands or orientations which originate in the dynamics of structural adjustment and the fostering of the conception of 'enterprise' (O'Neill and Jolley, 1996/97: 237).

This is precisely the slippage that occurs in the video segment, 'A Food Technology Unit of Work at Bucklands Beach Intermediate School', which appears in both the original *Know How* e-TV programme and the *Know How 2* professional development resource produced by the Ministry of Education in 1997. In this model lesson, students design, trial, package and market a pasta-based school snack as if it were a mini-business commercial enterprise. The model for the cooking and presentation of food is provided through a visit to the local Valentine's restaurant and the idea of a craft-based preparation of food, for home consumption in the domestic arena, is nowhere to be seen.

Now we should not get carried away here. The New Zealand technology curriculum does not exclude broader readings of the nature and purposes of technology and does not forbid engagement with these issues – teachers have a well-developed habit of resisting doctrinaire prescriptions that do not fit with

their existing beliefs and ideologies. Critical readings of technology are, however, marginalised in the documents and consequently teachers are discouraged from adopting more critical approaches in their practice. The interest for us lies, then, in how these processes of marginalisation and discouragement take place.

To gain acceptance, a curriculum document must have appeal to teachers and appear to be consistent with their educational agenda. In the case of technology, we might speculate that anything which presented as undiluted enterprise dogma would be rejected by teachers as a group, many of whom day in day out see the damaging and indirect effects of economic reforms on children's life chances. The gazetted curriculum document does contain statements which allude to a broader conception of technology and the location of this within a social context:

> Technology is a creative, purposeful activity aimed at meeting needs and opportunities through the development of products, systems or environments. Knowledge, skills and resources are combined to solve practical problems. Technological practice takes place within, and is influenced by, social contexts (Ministry of Education, 1995: 6).

When Olson (1997) argued that the processes and artifacts of technology were constitutive of the culture in which they were developed, he too was emphasising the fundamental importance of the links between technology and society. This is also recognised in the New Zealand technology curriculum document where 'Technology and Society' is a designated strand running throughout. In the gazetted document, the importance of this 'Strand C' is explicated as follows:

> Understanding the nature of the relationship between technology and society is vital to technological practice. Technological developments arise from within society. No technology is 'value-free'; needs arise from a variety of causes and perceptions, and the ways they are addressed depend on a complex set of relationships in society, the resources that are available, the priorities that society holds, and the culture, beliefs and values that influence decision-making in that society. Decisions about technological innovation are governed by this complex balance of factors, and groups or individuals may have markedly different attitudes towards particular technological practice. While the external impacts of technology are examined, the characteristics of the people and the social and physical environment that gave rise to the developments are sometimes overlooked (Ministry of Education, 1995: 41).

Prophetic words indeed! Now, it has to be noted that many of the right educational noises are being made here. For example, one of the stated purposes of Strand C is to explore the ways beliefs, values and ethics of individuals and groups influence technology (Ministry of Education, 1995: 41). The bitter irony of course is that the beliefs, values and ethics of the proponents of enterprise technology, and neo-liberal views of the purposes of education, are ring-fenced and placed beyond any potential scrutiny by teachers and their students. Between the gazetting of the official curriculum document, in 1995, and the publication of the official professional development resource to accompany it, further and more worrying slippage had taken place in official definitions of what counts as 'good technology practice'. In his Foreword to the *Guide Book for Facilitators* for *Know How 2*, the new Secretary of Education and former Treasury apparatchik, Howard Fancy made little mention of the social aspects of technology education. Instead, he concentrated his message explicitly on the agenda that Lockwood Smith had set out six years earlier:

> New Zealand faces the challenge of developing the level of technological innovation required to succeed in a global economy. Increasingly the technologies that are competitive internationally are based on knowledge. It is now recognised that productivity and economic growth are driven by the application of knowledge. This recognition has led to a new focus on how information and learning in technology contribute to a nation's economic performance (Fancy, 1997, no pagination).

I may be wrong, but I suspect that few New Zealand school teachers would be overly concerned with the extent to which their classroom teaching in technology contributed to the nation's economic performance. So, if such a purpose is to be pursued successfully in classrooms then either some delicate sleight of hand is needed or considerable effort made to persuade teachers that a neo-liberal, enterprise conception of technology is educationally and ethically defensible. In *Towards Teaching Technology: Know How 2* (1997) it is clearly the former strategy that is adopted. This professional development resource contains numerous videoed case studies and commentaries but from my analysis, *none* appeared to engage with issues of values, ethics and beliefs required from Strand C at anything other than the most perfunctory level. This is in contravention, at the very least, of the spirit of the gazetted document which states (Ministry of Education, 1995:10) that "In practice, most units of work in technology will include objectives from all three" of the strands. To paraphrase one secondary school principal in an extract from one of the video case studies, 'don't think about the technology curriculum, just do it!'. This injunction summarises well the basic approach taken to technology curriculum implementation in the professional development resource, one in which the teacher is seen as a mere technician, not an artisan or professional at work.

Discourses of teaching and professional development

> Many of the education reforms appear to reduce teachers to the status of low level employees or civil servants whose main function is to implement reforms decided by experts in the upper levels of state and educational bureaucracies (Aronowitz and Giroux, 1993: 33).

As far as curriculum is concerned this was as true of New Zealand in the 1990s as it was in America. At the heart of curriculum policy development, under the National government, lay a process of deliberative proletarianisation, wherein the conception of curriculum policy was separated from its execution or implementation. As Apple (1986) has cogently noted, the only real decision-making intentionally left to teachers in this process is the solution of technical problems that have proved intractable to those who have developed the policy far from the classroom. At one level this is an accurate assessment, at another it is too deterministic. Teachers do successfully resist the imposition of unwanted and externally imposed policy but only when they have sufficient intellectual, occupational and cultural resources to do so (which is precisely why critical theory and the attributes and dispositions it encourages must form a major part of teacher education programmes). For much of the second half of the twentieth century official discourses of teaching in New Zealand did encourage and facilitate the active participation of (some) teachers in curriculum policy development. Since 1990, however, the dominant official discourse has been that of the teacher as proficient assessor of students' learning, where learning is construed simply as progress against national benchmark standards of attainment (O'Neill, 2001). In this, the official curriculum is taken as given, and the teacher becomes a classroom technician.

Assumptions about the role of the teacher and the nature of the curriculum greatly inform the design and delivery of professional development programmes.

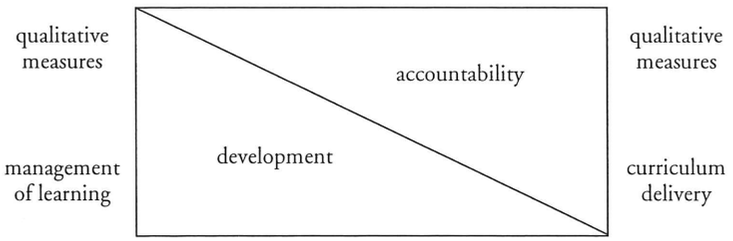

Figure 14.2 The purposes of professional development
(O'Neill, 1994: 289)

As the diagram shows, formal professional development activities can be seen by their designers as the opportunity to facilitate broader teacher learning, with all the questioning and experimentation this implies, or to ensure that the curriculum document is being delivered competently. Also this is usually a 'sliding scale', rather than an 'either-or' judgement involving subtleties of planning and approach.

In contrast, the basic purpose of *Know How 2* (1997) is to ensure unequivocally that teachers deliver the gazetted document, not question it. *Know How 2*, like much official professional development for curriculum implementation adopts a hierarchical 'Chinese whispers' approach in which, typically, the programme designers or 'consultants' train the 'facilitators' who in turn train 'lead teachers' in schools who then train other teachers. This approach is crude and linear and is ignorant of the complexities of how teachers learn to teach with the support of others from outside their classroom (Galton, 1996). The distinctive feature of *Know How 2* is that the often unstated assumptions that underpin such programmes and contracts appear in black and white because the programme comprises a guide book for facilitators, a book of support material to facilitate school or cluster based training sessions, and a series of videos containing mostly case studies of various aspects of the technology curriculum being implemented by eager and compliant teachers. *Know How 2* does not invite close scrutiny of the curriculum, nor does it acknowledge that what is being presented in the videotaped material and accompanying booklets is a highly selective and incomplete representation of the official curriculum document. The intention appears to be to get teachers' 'planning' and 'doing' the curriculum (much like students are expected to 'design' and 'manufacture' technology) and to avoid, at all costs, the provision of a safe learning 'space' in which teachers and facilitators might usefully come to grips with its underlying assumptions, and the consequences of these for teachers' existing values and dispositions.

Don't think about it – just do it

This instrumental, anti-intellectual, anti-theoretical and anti-reflexive teaching philosophy is most clearly illustrated in the matrix below taken from the *Guide Book for Facilitators* (Ministry of Education, 1997: 11).

Which group below most nearly corresponds to your situation?	Introduction	**Section 1** Staff development	**Section 2** School-wide implementation	**Section 3** Classroom implementation	**Section 4** Community awareness	**Section 5** Individual reading and viewing
Teachers responsible for professional development or leading staff in technology	Read	Read thoroughly	Skim read	Read	Read	Read and view
Teachers responsible for introducing technology to BOT's or parents, or raising community awareness	Read	Skim read	Read	Skim read	Read	Read and view as much as time permits
Teachers responsible for planning the implementation of technology across the school	Read	Read	Read	Read thoroughly	Skim read	Read and view as much as time permits

Thus the instructions for facilitators, and the implications for teachers, are quite clear: read, view and discuss only as much as time, and the timetable for planning and implementation, 'permit'. This is not a professional development resource that encourages learning but one that subordinates genuine teacher learning to the requirements of a schedule or plan for curriculum implementation. Again – just do it! The commentary on the matrix above claims that with this resource, " facilitators can guide teachers towards a sound understanding of technology and help them to plan and implement technology education in their school" (Ministry of Education, 1997: 11). What the commentary omits to point out, of course, is that a very one-eyed view of technology is being offered.

Conclusion

The model of professional development (like the conception of technology education) that is presented in *Know How 2* has all the subtlety and finesse of a French Tickler. However, as experience has shown time and again, in order to help them implement changes in curriculum content, pedagogy and/or assessment practices, teachers need 'romancing', in effect to be wooed at cognitive, affective, dispositional and emotional levels of their practice, and not merely offered crude, culturally inappropriate technological aids to the development of their practice. Unfortunately the acritical nature of too many teacher education programmes leaves teachers prey to the sales patter that accompanies the kinds of artificial aids to occupational performance, which are so patently evident in *Know How 2*.

More seriously, the model of professional development and teacher education that underpins this set of materials constitutes a serious attack on the 'folkways', or accustomed patterns of talk and work (Olson, 1992), through which teachers learn to develop their practice in ways that are appropriate to the culturally embedded and historically grounded processes of teaching. Teachers develop through critical and reflexive engagement with the values and beliefs that underpin their day to day actions and the responses of students to these. Those who seek to impose technicist veneers on teachers' 'folkways' are equally ignorant of the inappropriateness of neo-liberal forms of business enterprise to technology education. As a slogan, 'Just do it!' may encourage more image-conscious consumers to purchase expensive sports apparel but it certainly adds nothing to the educative process for children and teachers in schools.

References

Apple, M. (1986). *Teachers and Texts: A political economy of class and gender relations in education*. London: Routledge.
Aronowitz, S. & Giroux, H. (1993). *Education Still Under Siege*. Second edition. Westport, CN.: Bergin & Garvey.
Eagle, L. & de Bruin, A. (2000). Ideological and Theoretical Underpinnings of the New Zealand Education Reforms. *Access: Critical Perspectives on Communication, Cultural & Policy Studies, 19* (1), 1-18.
Fancy, H. (1997). Foreword. In Ministry of Education, *Towards Teaching Technology: Know How 2: Guide book for facilitators*. Wellington: Learning Media.
Fitzsimons, P. (1999). The New Zealand Qualifications Authority Takes the Credit for Education. *Journal of Education Policy, 14* (2), 139-150.
Freire, P. (1972). *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. Harmondsworth, UK: Penguin.
Galton, M. (1996). Teaching, Learning and the Co-ordinator. In J. O'Neill & N. Kitson (Eds). *Effective Curriculum Management: Co-ordinating learning in the primary school* (pp. 11-19). London: Routledge.
Giddens, A. (1979). *Central Problems in Social Theory*. London: MacMillan.
Kliebard, H. (1986). *Changing Course: American curriculum reform in the 20th century*. New York: Teachers College Press.
Ministry of Education (1995). *Technology in the New Zealand Curriculum*. Wellington: Learning Media.
Ministry of Education (1997). *Towards Teaching Technology: Know how 2*. Wellington: Learning Media (various materials).
Olson, J. (1992). *Understanding Teaching*. Buckingham: Open University Press.
Olson, J. (1997). OP-ED Technology in the School Curriculum: The moral dimensions of making things. *Journal of Curriculum Studies, 29* (4), 383-390.
Olssen, M., Codd, J. & O'Neill, A-M. (2004). *Education Policy: Globalization, citizenship & democracy*. London: Sage.

O'Neill, A-M. & Jolley, S. (1996/97). Privatising Curriculum: Constructing consumer society. The technology curriculum: the politics of food – women's work? To high tec or oblivion. *Delta: Policy and Practice in Education, 48* (2) & *49* (1), 221-248.

O'Neill, J. (1994). Managing Professional Development. In T. Bush & J. West-Burnham (Eds.), *The Principles of Educational Management* (pp. 285-308). London: Longman.

O'Neill, J. (2001). Performance Management in New Zealand. In J. West-Burnham, J. O'Neill & I. Bradbury (Eds.), *Performance Management in Schools* (pp. 173-189). London: Pearson Education.

O'Rourke, M. (1995). Foreword. In Ministry of Education, *Technology in the New Zealand Curriculum*. Wellington: Learning Media.

Peters, M. & Marshall, J. (1996). *Individualism and Community: Education and social policy in the postmodern condition*. London: Falmer.

Smith, L. (1991). *Education Policy. Investing in people, our greatest asset*. Wellington: Government of New Zealand.