

## Union education and citizenship: Educating the educators?

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### ABSTRACT

The opportunity for union education provided in New Zealand under the Employment Relations Act has also given an opportunity for teachers in secondary schools to engage in a more meaningful citizenship education. As New Zealand moves from a Keynesian Welfare state towards a more Schumpeterian Workfare state in a globalised economy, there is a need for a critical teacher programme to assist secondary school teachers to engage meaningfully with students' real life experiences of *learning to labour*, to understand their employment rights and gain confidence in their collective skills.

The paper is written from a Freirean viewpoint in seeking to encourage education for learners which is liberatory and empowering (Freire and Horton, 1991). What Freire advocates is an education that seeks through dialogue to encourage all learners to challenge and change the world, not to merely adapt themselves uncritically to it. The content and purpose of such education is the collective responsibility of the students and teachers who, through their dialoguing and actions, seek political as well as economic and personal empowerment. The programmes developed in such an educational model will support and complement other social struggles. While teachers can use some Freirean methods to encourage debate and dialogue, using these methods to challenge the social and economic contexts is one of the most difficult areas to adapt actively in what I call 'the teacher's *pedagogical kit*'. Yet there is possibility. It comes through developing a critical citizenship education. According to the National Curriculum document, *Social Studies in the New Zealand Curriculum*: "social studies education aims to enable students to participate in a changing society as informed, confident, and responsible citizens" (Ministry of Education, 1997: 8).

This aim of citizenship education often gets missed in the creation of relevant social studies classroom curriculum. My argument is that union education should form an important part of any meaningful citizenship education for all students. This will become even more important as the capitalist state moves from Keynesian Welfare form to a more Schumpeterian Workfare one (Jessop, 2002), a society in which paid work provides almost all the requirements for the life world. The education policy makers are beginning to recognise this transition to an employment-linked society that is sometimes promoted as the knowledge society.

In 1998 the National Administration Guidelines (NAG) were amended by the Minister of Education to formalise the responsibility of all secondary schools to provide appropriate career information and guidance for their students. The guideline stated that schools should:

provide appropriate career information and guidance for all students in year 7 and above, with a particular emphasis on specific career guidance for those students who, have been identified by

the school as being at risk of leaving school unprepared for the transition to the workplace or further education/training (Ministry of Education, 2004, National Administration Guidelines, NAG 1, vi).

In Freirean pedagogy the critique of social and economic structures, including those of the employment area, is linked with collective action. The Freirean focus on action however creates an uncomfortable situation for schools, as it raises significant questions for teachers about schools' roles in maintaining the existing economic and political social order. The use of appropriate programmes for career guidance could occur through an action oriented union education in which students find and organise their own ways to act.

### **Union education as citizenship education**

Much union education traces part of its intellectual genealogy or *whakapapa* to a marriage between informal education in unions, and popular, folk and community education, such as advocated by Freire or Myles Horton at his Highlander Centre (Freire and Horton, 1991). Many of these education models incorporate ideas first advanced by Saul Alinsky (1946, 1971) in the late 1930s as "Community Organising". For radical educators, education is a process of helping people to make sense of their situation and then assisting them to organise collectively to change it. The continuing aim of all radical educators is to provide this accessible, critical, citizenship education to support collective social change (Qesson and Newman, 2004).

In 1999, David Kerr, as part of the International Review of Curriculum and Assessment Frameworks Project (INCA) undertook an international review of citizenship education in schools. Definition of citizenship education is an umbrella one, which encompassed the "preparation of young people for all their roles and responsibilities as citizens" and he extended this further to include "the role of education (through schooling, teaching and learning) in that preparatory process" (Kerr, 1999: 2). In this, he includes terms such as civics, social sciences, social studies, world studies, society, studies of society, life skills and moral education. That broad definition provides some useful grist to the critiques that are needed, if we want to help students to look critically at the economy, at the world of work and at their own roles within it. While there is recognition of considering the economy and the world of work in citizenship education, I would argue that there is also a further need to examine the concept of labour as *the fictive commodity*, which drives the creation of added economic value in any capitalist society. This is the area that involves real union education (Taylor, 2001).

### **The Labour-Capital relationship is not equal**

The employment relationship occurs when the buyer of labour (the employer) meets the seller of labour (the worker) in a market exchange. Union education programmes start from the assumption that labour power operates as a *fictive commodity* (Marx, 1887) in that what is sold in an employment relationship is only of fictional equality. Offe (1985) provides the useful reminder that labour power is a *fictive commodity* for several reasons. It is not produced in response to market signals and it cannot be held back from the market for strategic purposes without some other non-market means of subsistence. There is more incentive for the seller of labour to enter the relationship in order to live, than there is for the need of employers to acquire labour power. In other words, in a capitalist system if you do not work, you do not get money, and without money you cannot eat, and if you cannot eat you will eventually die. Along with these innate power imbalances, the capitalist relationship is also different from other forms of market exchange. The employer as the buyer of the commodity has bought some unit of labour power when a person is employed. But the seller (still being attached to it) retains some control over how much of the commodity (the labour power) the employer as purchaser may actually consume. Worker and employer are therefore continually

engaged in an ongoing, often unconscious, negotiation over what exchange means: just what it is, and how much of it the worker should do for their pay (see Offe, 1985: 14-25).

The outcome of each negotiation is largely determined by how much market power a worker has been able to construct, given their relative social and political power. In other words, those who have skills or knowledge in higher demand in the market can demand more rewards. Because this power differential plays such a key part in the employment relationship, some balancing of power needs to occur to enable any sort of fair process to follow. The Employment Relations Act 2002 (ERA) sees this as the function of collective bargaining to agreement by the unions and employers. Such balancing of power becomes particularly important for the relationship between young workers and their prospective employers. This balancing of power comes mainly with the development of both collective strength and knowledge of the workers' rights and responsibilities, through an existing collective employment agreement wherever possible. The understanding of this requirement for power balance is enhanced through union education.

The complex assumptions about capitalism, work and the employment relationship do need to be unpacked for young workers. Such assumptions underpin most of the other concepts in employment relations like fair pay, responsibilities, expectations and rights. While it is accepted that there could be business-oriented education in schools usually from the viewpoint of employers, the other side of the interest relationship is rarely advanced.

Extra funding is now available to support the transition from school to the world of work. During 2004, the New Zealand Government announced funding of a \$56.9 million package of new and expanded initiatives as part of the National Budget 2004 to provide all 15 to 19 year olds with what has been labelled "a kick start to their working lives" (Maharey, Press Release, 14 May 2004).

The announced budget package comprised the following:

- The establishment of a new transitions service for young people leaving school to be piloted in 14 communities by 2007 (starting with 5 communities in 2005).
- A two-year Designing Careers pilot programme in 75 schools with all Year 10 students preparing an individual learning and career plan with assistance from their parents, careers advisor and form teacher. Year 11, 12 and 13 students at the pilot schools at risk of not making a successful transition from school will also participate in the programme.
- Expansion of the Gateway programme to all decile 6 schools by 2008. Gateway enables senior secondary students to begin structured workplace learning while still at school. Gateway is currently available at 126 schools (4,000 students) and when fully expanded will be available to 269 schools (13,000 students).
- An additional 500 Modern Apprenticeships taking the number of places available to 8,000 by June 2006.
- Providing increased support for STAR (Secondary Tertiary Alignment Resource) programmes at high schools. STAR funded programmes include work-based or tertiary type study and training. Five positions will be established at colleges of education, with national supported provided by the Ministry of Education, to better coordinate and support these STAR programmes in schools.
- A three-year pilot programme to evaluate whether extending the Training Incentive Allowance (TIA) to teenage parents would encourage them to remain in, or return to education. The pilot programme will provide access to the TIA for 200 teenage parents (Maharey Press Release, 14 May 2004).

The education sector as well as the union movement applauded these developments. Both groups were pleased that the Labour Government was at last delivering on the original 2000

election promise to working people. The budget announcements in education also signalled the blurring of the boundary between tertiary education and secondary schooling.

Alas, there was a lack in many areas. It appears that the policy programmes do not demonstrate any real understanding of students' life after school hours. Anecdotal reports from teachers in secondary school programmes, those in the tertiary initiatives and various transition research projects already in schools all indicate this important gap. The programme developers reported that their programmes do not consider either the experiences or the real life education of students at secondary schools who are actually *already* in the labour force. The young people already in work are actually a living resource for teachers who are considering these new initiatives. These young people have already begun their working life. They are experiencing the reality of working and studying and, usually, are contributing to the family. These young people are examples of the emerging flexible labour market of the postmodern capitalist economy suggested by David Harvey:

There has been a sea-change in cultural as well as in political-economic practices since around 1972. This sea-change is bound up with the emergence of new dominant ways in which we experience space and time ... and a new round of 'time-space compression' in the organization of capitalism. But these changes, when set against the basic rules of capitalistic accumulation, appear more as shifts in surface appearance rather than as signs of the emergence of some entirely new post capitalist or even post industrial society (Harvey, 1989: vii).

These young people's experiences of work and employment illustrate Bob Jessop's similar argument that the capitalist state is changing its form, moving from a Fordist Keynesian Welfare state towards a Schumpeterian Competitive Workfare version (Jessop, 2002). This emerging form of state is predicated on an assumption that it is knowledge attached to flexible labour that is the most important tradeable commodity, with discussion about 'knowledge societies', and 'knowledge waves' gathering momentum.

Bearing in mind both Freirean pedagogy and citizenship education discussed above, we need to recognise that students in work are gaining an economic sense of the world, they are making judgments about it, contributing to their families and creating their own identity through it. What they are missing is the critical, dialogic education needed in order to develop power to change their own lives. Without this, their own power as students and their education is constrained.

The implementation of the New Zealand government initiatives raises certain questions for teacher education programmes that unions have already been asking. How is the reality of working lives communicated to and with young people? More particularly for this discussion is the question: how are young workers, including those who are also still at school, being supported in their challenges of working life?

Trade unions' underpinning goal is to achieve an inclusive democracy for politically informed and participating working families. The achievement of this goal requires teacher educators of secondary teachers to understand just what unions mean about the effective education of their members and their families (Jesson and Newman, 2004). Ideally, there will be some form of union education as part of all programmes for the preparation of secondary teachers. However at the very least union education should form part of the teacher inservice needed for the transition programmes.

Union education has never been included in any real form in teacher education either for the existing career education or for ongoing vocational guidance programmes in secondary schools. All these programmes, including those targeted by the new Government initiatives, focus uncritically on the transition from school to work, and provide information about becoming a 'good worker'. Furthermore in most of these programmes working life is portrayed as the post-secondary school activity, meaning both post-compulsory education and fulltime paid employment as an adult. All of this implies that there is somehow a seamless transition from school to work and that the experience of working is something that happens after you leave secondary school (for a somewhat opposing view see Vaughan and Kenneally, 2003).

The additional government resources will be focused specifically on this transition from secondary school to either further training or to work in paid employment. This suggests that the ultimate purpose of secondary schooling is achieved in a job, as the student follows a traditional job pathway. Yet a four-year longitudinal research study conducted by the team of Karen Vaughan and Rose Hipkins and others for the New Zealand Council of Educational Research (NZCER) has already found that the trend for more and more young people is to opt for the postponement of their careers or else to change their minds several times about their study, work experience or career options. This phenomenon of changing minds is recognised internationally and is being called "milling and churning" (Hipkins *et al.*, 2004: 1). So it is clear that we need to consider the needs of the number of young people who are starting their working life while they are still at school.

### Working students or still at school working?

How large is the pool of young part-time and full-time workers, who are still at school? This remains an unclear question. To date the New Zealand statistics generated from the five yearly censuses do not seem to have considered these flexible work and school options. The New Zealand Government Statistics Department provided a table for this research from the 2001 census, which indicated numbers for those attending or studying for 20 hours or more per week, either at school or at any other educational facility. This data identified that 42,606 young people aged 15-18 years had worked for pay or profit in the 7 days prior to Sunday 4 March 2001 (see Table One).

	Employed fulltime and studying more than 20hrs				Employed part time studying more than 20hrs				Total # Working aged 15-19	NZ Pop. aged 15-19
Age	15	16	17	18	15	16	17	18		
No.	483	771	921	1047	9786	12681	11631	5,286	42606	213159
Total NZ population in 2001 census was 3,737,277										

Table One: NZ population 2001, 15-18 yrs studying more than 20 hours a week and working for wages or profit.

The groups of 15 to 18 year old young people who indicated on the census return that they were working were found in an extensive range of industries and occupations. While it is probable that not all were at secondary school they had all indicated in the return that they were working and studying more than 20 hours per week. (In the Statistics Department data, full-time work is defined as people working 30 or more hours per week. Part-time work is defined as those people working 1-29 hours per week.)

Yet while many teachers are aware that some of their students are also working, it appears that their school programmes do not recognise the reality of this part of their own students' lives. In particular there is silence in the school programmes for both career education and transition programmes about the role or function that unions could play for these young people who are currently working. And there is very little research into the experiences of working that these young people have.

In 2001, as part of a Department of Labour supported project for the New Zealand Council of Trade Unions (Jesson, 2001) I conducted interviews and focus group meetings with 20 different union officials in Auckland, Wellington, Rotorua and Palmerston North, who were interested in union education. These officials indicated that their unions had real concerns for many young people. Most of the working school students that union organisers 'came across' were not easily unionised and had often been engaged as temporary or casual workers in the retail and service sector, the sex industry, the hospitality trade, and the labouring area (Jesson, 2001: Field notes). These industries were those that had been hardest hit by the de-unionisation effect of the New Zealand 1990 Employment Contracts Act (ECA): the agriculture and horticulture sectors,

supermarket and retail area, the entertainment industry, the hotel and hospitality trade, the construction industry and the general labouring arena (Jesson, 2001: Field notes). The experiences and beliefs of these unionists are supported by data from the New Zealand 2001 Census. (Statistics NZ, <http://www.stats.govt.nz/>).

According to these union officials, working school students are often in situations that were perceived by them or their families to be safe, but they had a poor understanding of occupational health and safety matters, often had minimum employment rights, and sometimes very poor working conditions. The power relationships that existed for these people appeared to multiply the usual boss-worker power differential with the one of age. In such, these young people did not feel secure asking questions, asserting their rights or negotiating either their rates of pay or the details of their employment conditions. There was a recognised need for in-school union education (Youth Union Movement, YUM: pers. comm.).

### **The provision of union education**

So how can teachers start involving their students in a real dialogue on working life as a positive and possible Freirean contribution to citizenship education? I argue that the place to begin is for teacher educators to enable pre-service teachers to start with their own experiences: i.e. what students at tertiary level and at school level are experiencing now in their working life.

There are some resources available to assist those engaging with this form of union education. Under the ERA, the Department of Labour's Employment Relations Service provided some funding to assist with the development of employment-relations education courses for educators. The development team for this project included social studies teachers, union educators and teacher union staff (NZCTU, 2002: 2). Two modules were developed: the first entitled *Union Speakers in Secondary Schools, Tertiary Education and Community Groups* aims to increase the ability of participants to provide effective education about unions and employment relationships by increasing both their own knowledge not only of employment matters but also of the importance of Freirean educational pedagogy. The follow up module entitled *Organising Young Workers*, aimed to assist young workers in playing a more active role in the employment relationship and help them participate in union affairs. A video called *Respect! Young Workers and Unions* (NZCTU, 2002) was produced to accompany these courses and provides some scenarios for educators to facilitate dialogic conversations with their students.

Through the Post Primary Teacher Association (PPTA), the New Zealand secondary teachers union, the video and accompanying material went to every secondary school in 2002. However, an initial phone call of a number of secondary teachers in Auckland demonstrated that the delivery of the resource material seems to have suffered the fate of much resource development: that is, apart from a very small number of schools, the resource pack appeared unknown to them. This seems to suggest that it is sitting in the staff resource room waiting for some motivated and enthusiastic teachers to take it into their programme.

The PPTA intends to extend their own Employment Relations Education programme beyond the immediate education for their already existing members to include the provision of union education training for those working in career education. They will promote the two small modules that have been developed by the Council of Trade Unions. The aim is to work with motivated and enthusiastic teachers in schools other than their own.

Motivated and enthusiastic teachers appear to be the key to getting any quick change. This highlights the need for teacher education programmes to assist secondary school teachers to engage meaningfully with students' real life experiences of working, while they are still at school, to help them understand their employment rights and to gain confidence in their own collective skills.

There is an important need to get knowledgeable, motivated and enthusiastic teacher educators to actively support an enhanced programme of citizenship education that promotes an active union education programme. Otherwise, the idea that young people could be actively critiquing the Schumpeterian Workfare State in context of the globalised economy in which they are growing up will remain merely a dream. Furthermore, the already-working young people who are still at school, will continue to go to work each day after school without the real and necessary knowledge they need to exercise any control over their own lives.

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