

Reflections on the early years of ACCESS 1982-1991

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“The aim of *Access* is to provide a forum where current educational concerns—theoretical and practical—can be expressed and critical discussion promoted” (Access, 1982: ii). With these broad, yet somewhat limited objectives, the founding editors, Jim Marshall and Colin Lankshear, set out their stall in a brief foreword to the first issue of the first volume published in 1982. They pronounced themselves to be dissatisfied with some of the limitations frequently associated with specialist approaches, such as analytic philosophy of education, and with specialist journals generated by these approaches. However, they continued, “we are unable to specify a precise editorial policy for *Access*” (Access, 1982: ii). Perhaps, they added, the content of the first issue would capture their idea for the journal, but they welcomed suggestions from readers and contributors for future direction, and invited proposals for guest editorship from “anyone with a vision encompassing a complete issue”.

This was not, on the face of it, the most stirring call for change that ever sparked the founding of a new journal. Yet it was a highly significant departure in the context of the time, and in its own modest way it reflected profound stirrings in education, society and politics in New Zealand and the wider world. Over the course of its first decade it responded to these developments and began to work out a clearer and fuller rationale and its own distinctive identity. For the first six volumes, until 1987, it maintained a subtitle of “Contemporary themes in educational inquiry”. A landmark special issue in 1988, constituting the full volume seven, marked the publication of the Picot Report on educational administration (Picot, 1988), under the banner of “Picot and beyond”. Volumes eight to ten, from 1989 to 1991, which Professor Roger Dale and I edited, carried the new subtitle of “Critical perspectives on education policy”.

It was in September 1983 that I first set foot in Auckland. I had been appointed to a lectureship in education at the University of Auckland, with special reference to the history of education and comparative education. Jim Marshall and Colin Lankshear sent me warm messages by airmail urging me to accept, and it was Jim and Colin who turned up at the airport to welcome me to Auckland after I took it up. New Zealand in the early 1980s was to all appearances a conservative and provincial backwater. In terms of politics, the National Party had gained power in 1975, and its leader, Robert Muldoon, was prime minister. Culturally, the country still seemed, in the oft-used phrase, more English than the English, although there were many signs also of American influence. It was dominated by rugby and by sheep farming. It was one of the most economically protected countries in the western world, the shops closed for the weekend, and public houses still bore the marks of the six o’clock swill.

Nevertheless, New Zealand was on the cusp of change. A tour of New Zealand by the South African rugby team in 1981 had led to widespread demonstrations. There was a sharpened sense of social division, which cast doubt on New Zealand’s cherished traditions of egalitarianism and fairness. At the same time, the rights of women attracted increasing attention, while the claims of Māoridom and the deprivations of urbanised Māori became key issues that demanded urgent

redress. The bombing of the Greenpeace ship the *Rainbow Warrior* in Auckland harbour by French agents in 1984 was a totemic indication that New Zealand could no longer hope to be left undisturbed by the rest of the world. New Zealand's education system was also showing signs of strain. Muldoon's Minister of Education, Merv Wellington, may well have seen himself as being on a moral crusade to hold back the forces of change with an uncompromisingly right-wing set of policies that outraged many, but these forces were indeed irresistible. The election of a Labour government under David Lange, also in 1984, opened the way to reform, wherever it might lead.

Education departments in New Zealand universities were in many ways in a good position to respond to this changing situation. They were well established within a broadly liberal tradition of higher education. The education department at the University of Auckland was part of the Faculty of Arts and taught hundreds of students every year for the Bachelor of Arts degree as well as having a popular Masters programme and large numbers of doctoral students. It was based in an old wooden listed building at the edge of the campus next to the history department and close to Wynyard Street, where the new university marae was built and opened soon after my arrival. Teacher training took place separately at Auckland Teachers' College. There was a tradition of educational studies and research based in the disciplines, broadly along the English model (McCulloch, 2013 in press). At Auckland, psychology was the dominant discipline in the education department, and indeed Jim Marshall was later to recall that when he had arrived in 1973 he was one of three out of the fifteen members of academic staff in the department who either could not or would not teach in the general area of educational psychology (Marshall, 1990: 19). The professors, Tony McNaughton and Marie Clay, were coming towards the final stages of their careers.

Jim Marshall and Colin Lankshear were both philosophers with interesting and distinctive approaches that were receptive to the emerging challenges of the time. Jim, himself from England, was critical of the analytical tradition of the philosophy of education that had been established in the 1960s by Paul Hirst and Richard Peters at the Institute of Education London. Colin, originally from the South Island of New Zealand, had recently published his first book, *Freedom and Education* (Lankshear, 1982), which was based on his PhD thesis. He was attracted to the ideas of Australian philosophers such as Jim Walker and Kevin Harris, and collaborated with Jim in the founding of *Access* in the hope that, as he explained in an article published in *Access* in 1984, it might "hasten the emergence of a viable post-analytic philosophy of education" (Lankshear, 1984: 38). At the same time, he turned towards Freirean ideals of praxis, and began to formulate his ideas about functional and critical literacy that were to establish his international reputation later in the decade.

In its first few years *Access* clearly took its cue from its founders and was mainly concerned with philosophical issues. This provided something of a niche for the journal in comparison with other academic journals concerned with education. The national New Zealand journal was the *New Zealand Journal of Educational Studies*, established since the 1960s and published twice a year by the New Zealand Council for Educational Research. If this provided scope for a wide range of research in education, the opportunity to develop more radical perspectives on politics and culture was already being taken by the education department of Massey University. A generation of leading scholars including Ivan Snook, John Codd, Richard Harker and Roy Nash had taken Massey to the forefront of critical scholarship on education in New Zealand, a position that was consolidated partly through their own journals. *Delta* was Massey's house journal, published since the 1970s and tending to focus on methodology and questions of politics. A newer journal also emanating from Massey was *Sites*, which described itself as "a journal for radical perspectives on culture". This was produced by the New Zealand Cultural Studies Working Group, based at Massey University, and a number of members of the education department such as Liz Gordon, Richard Harker, Roy Shuker, John Codd and Graeme Bassett were active contributors to this.

Alongside these other publications, then, *Access* began tentatively to construct a distinctive approach grounded initially in philosophy. Its format was as modest as its avowed aims: an A5 size, with yellow cardboard for its front and back covers (red cardboard for some reason for its second

issue of 1982), the whole held together at the side by black taping, with a tiny typeface, published twice a year, as it always said with a note of optimism, in July and November. The contents of the first issue in 1982 were a fairly eclectic mix. The first article was a theoretical piece on rationality and gender by Linda Nicholson of the State University of New York. The second was another theoretical article, on ideology in educational theory, contributed by Ivan Snook of Massey University. Third was an article that addressed the new tensions around education, "Fighting the cuts in education" by David Bedggood from the sociology department at Auckland. The fourth, by Ed Brandon of the University of West Indies, was a philosophical discussion of radical children. Finally, there was an interesting and wide-ranging paper on education and equality by Eric Braithwaite, a Marxist sociologist of education based in the education department at Auckland, who combined a depth of learning with an understanding of history and philosophy, no less than sociology.

The second of the two issues published in the first volume was again mainly philosophical with a leavening of sociology and politics. Kevin Harris, Colin Evers, Jim Walker and R.M. Robinson, all based in New South Wales in Australia, provided the philosophical content. The other two papers, by Richard Harker and Tipene O'Regan, explored the problems of Māori education, and in particular the cultural interface of Māori and Pakeha. Two book reviews were also included in this issue, which further signalled the preoccupations of the new journal. The first, by Joseph Diorio of the University of Otago, was a review of Kevin Harris's recent book, *Teachers and Classes*. The second, a review of Michael Matthews' *The Marxist Theory of Schooling*, marked Michael Peters' debut for the journal and emphasised the implications of Matthews' work in helping to challenge the tradition of analytic philosophy (Peters, 1982).

The journal maintained this general pattern over the following few volumes. Interesting papers were published by leading philosophers of education such as Colin Evers, Martin Simons, Jim Walker, Denis Phillips, and Felicity Haynes, and the principal target continued to be the London school of analytic philosophy of education (for example Walker, 1984). In this way the journal helped to consolidate a network of scholars with a strong international dimension but with a base in Auckland, linked closely to the Philosophy of Education Society of Australasia (PESA). The journal's advisory editorial panel, extended in 1985 to include Brian Haig, Kevin Harris, Robert Mackie, Denis Phillips, Ivan Snook, Jim Walker and John Watt, with Michael Peters as the book reviews editor, confirmed this dominant emphasis.

By 1987, however, *Access* was taking a distinct turn towards policy, signalled in a new editors' foreword that declared interest in "future issues based around issues of education policy" (*Access*, 1987: ii). This was a definite response to educational reforms that were being enacted in many countries, including Britain, the United States and Australia as well as New Zealand. In the United States, under Ronald Reagan as President, what Ira Shor described as "culture wars" were well under way, with the nature of schooling a key contested arena (Shor, 1986). In Britain, Kenneth Baker took over as education secretary in 1986, embarking on far-reaching proposals for fundamental reforms in the education system, which became imminent when Margaret Thatcher's Conservative party won its third successive general election victory in 1987. An international pattern has emerged by this time that right-wing parties of government were engaging in aggressive policies designed to challenge the systems of schooling that had developed over the past forty years in favour of a market-oriented approach that was supposed to improve standards and hold schools and teachers more closely to account by parents and the public. Often described as the "New Right" (Chitty, 1989), this movement was readily apparent in New Zealand also, and when David Lange's Labour government gained a second term in 1987, further reforms appeared likely.

In my own case, the parallels between New Zealand and Britain were particularly evident. In September 1987, I began a nine-month period of sabbatical leave and spent this in Britain. During this time, Baker's plans for educational reform came to fruition as he pushed through an Education Reform Act that was to be the key legislation underpinning Conservative education policies of the 1980s and 1990s. When I returned to Auckland in May 1988, Lange's government was already well

under way with its own plans for reform with Lange acting as his own Minister of Education as well as being Prime Minister. In April, the Picot report, *Administering for Excellence*, was published, recommending the end of the Department of Education, regional educational boards and local boards of governors and calling instead for a new system of educational administration (Picot, 1988). By August, the government had responded with *Tomorrow's Schools*, endorsing most of the proposals of the Picot taskforce (Lange, 1988; Openshaw, 2009).

In this rapidly changing context, *Access* completed its turn towards critical study of education policies with its seventh volume in 1988, which it gave over completely to a special issue entitled "Picot and beyond". This issue was edited by a newly formed education policy group, which included significant recent additions to the Auckland education department staff, such as Alison Jones, Derek Hodson, and Graham and Linda Smith. Eric Braithwaite took the lead in editing the special issue, and this offered a wide range of critical perspectives on the Picot report and the current direction of New Zealand education. It was clearly in the spirit of the new editorial statement of the journal, which now aimed "to encourage critical analysis of how issues of ethnicity, social class and gender are addressed, and could be addressed, in education policy; of why it is that policy innovation so rarely brings about fundamental or structural change" (*Access*, 1988: ii). It also reflected other internal developments in the education department. With the retirements of both Tony McNaughton and Marie Clay within a year of each other, new professorships were advertised which would clearly have a strong bearing on the future direction of the department. Jim Marshall was appointed to a chair having already been made head of department, and Roger Dale, a leading sociologist of education also from England, was appointed to the other chair to strengthen further what had become within a short time a strong interdisciplinary team in education policy studies. This shift in direction indeed belied Auckland's previously strong emphasis on psychology, and promised to make a significant contribution to the field in New Zealand as a whole.

The following three volumes took this new approach forward. The style of the journal was now revised, as it changed from A5 to a more substantial A4 size with a new bicultural front design that Graham Smith helped to construct. The subtitle for the journal changed also, to "Critical perspectives in education policy". I became the general editor for the eighth volume in 1989, and shared this role with Roger Dale for the two subsequent volumes. Māori education continued to develop a strong profile in the journal, for example in 1989 with several papers devoted to the Kura Kaupapa Māori and Māori language policies. I introduced the first issue for 1990 with an appeal "to develop real alternatives to the policies that are currently being imposed, and strategies by which to mitigate the most invidious effects of these policies" (McCulloch, 1990: 1). In this same issue, Roger Dale and Jim Marshall published their professorial inaugural lectures. Roger took this opportunity to explore "The limits and opportunities of education", from his lecture presented on 28 June 1990 (Dale, 1990). Jim followed with his lecture on "Educational research and higher education", which had been presented two weeks after Roger's, on 12 July (Marshall, 1990). Both emphasised the importance of educational research that was not only theoretical but also critical in nature.

This was perhaps the culmination of the first generation of *Access* as a publication, a decade that had witnessed the journal's early tentative steps in its search for a fresh theoretical direction, which in turn had been strongly influenced by increasingly urgent policy concerns. In 1991 I said farewell to Auckland as I returned to England, having been appointed to a chair in educational research at Lancaster University. My eight years in Auckland had been an education in every sense of the word, and laid the foundations for my approach to the study and teaching of education. *Access* was at the heart of this approach. It challenged the orthodoxies that had been set within the discipline of philosophy, and even today it is intriguing that it is not included in the extensive international journal holdings of the Institute of Education in London. As it widened its horizons, it began to glimpse the opportunities and challenges facing education, and to interrogate these with some confidence and authority. Thirty years after the founding of *Access*, now ACCESS, it is right for

us to reflect on the hopes and aspirations that it represented then, and on which we can continue to build.

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