

*Liberating Education: Reasserting the Value of
Philosophy and History in Teacher Education
Programmes*

DEB J HILL

d.hill@waikato.ac.nz

Dr Deb J. Hill teaches and researches politics and philosophy of education at the University of Waikato, Hamilton, New Zealand. Her other research interests include the ideas of Marx, Hegel, Althusser, Freire, and Foucault.

GREGORY LEE

g.lee@waikato.ac.nz

Professor Gregory Lee teaches and researches in the History of Education with special reference to Aotearoa/New Zealand. He has published widely in the area with a special focus on primary and post-primary schooling and institutional case studies.

Abstract:

The contemporary recasting of education as a marketable commodity and a formal, institutional activity has had serious consequences for scholars working as philosophers and historians of education. In our own experience, both forms of “reductionism” have made it increasingly difficult for us to argue for the retention of courses that sustain a broader linkage between education and the human condition within teacher education programmes. Because of the predominant misperception among many of our colleagues that what we do is actually extraneous to the “real business” of teaching teachers how to become “good educators,” our research activities have likewise been called into question. Historical and philosophical understandings no longer appear “relevant” to the needs of the institution—and even to the field itself. By outlining what we do within our own teaching practice, we illustrate how students’ exposure to the history and philosophy of education contributes powerfully to a better-informed and critically conscious teaching profession.

Contextualizing the Problem of Accommodation

The purpose of our paper is to highlight some of the problems we have encountered within our School of Education as staff working in philosophy and history of education respectively. Before doing so, however, it is necessary to provide some preliminary comments. What we want to also make clear at this point is that the problems we have experienced are not peculiar to our own institution—the School of Education at the University of Waikato. Unfortunately, they are symptomatic of the shortcomings we see in most New Zealand tertiary educational institutions.

Until relatively recently in New Zealand, Education Studies Departments were traditionally housed in the Arts and Humanities or Social Science faculty in one of the six provincial universities dotted throughout the country. Education was a recognised sub-discipline of History, Philosophy, Psychology and Sociology, and valued for its unique contribution to a broad range of issues relating to justice, human rights and freedom. By contrast, teacher training institutions—as they were known in those days—operated as stand-alone entities dedicated to the more “practical” enterprise of professional teacher training and curriculum delivery. This was a situation that predominated until the 1970s when higher rates of unemployment and a sluggish economy put pressure on the population to retrain or upskill. As a result of this greater competitive environment, various alliances were formed between the teachers’ colleges and the universities, heralding the move towards further enhancing teaching as a profession by making it a “degreed” vocation. It was then but a small step for the training establishments to adopt the nomenclature of “Colleges” or “Schools of Education” to signal these advances. By the end of 2007, all Colleges will have merged with the University in their respective region. Our own institution, the School of Education at the University of Waikato, underwent its merger in 1993. Both of us were former staff members of an Education Studies Department based in the Faculties of Arts and Social Sciences.

Another change that has impacted on the nature of New Zealand society since the 1980s—one that has had an enormous impact upon the universities in particular, and education in general—has been the embrace of neoliberal policy and practice. Underpinned by a return to a classical liberal philosophy that maintained the inherent worth of freedom in individual affairs, neoliberalism was also predicated on a naturalistic, Darwinian thesis of the inherent value of competition within a society. State intervention in human affairs needed to be kept to a minimum, according to this thesis, with the unlawful interference in the personal affairs of private citizens a touchstone of this philosophy. Of course, “citizenship” now meant something different too. Within the neoliberal regime, a loose contractual relationship of non-interference towards ones neighbours’ freedom replaced the previous “weightier” expectation that a duty of care or obligation existed towards a collective.

Both college and university mergers and the gradual implementation of a “free market” philosophy and management regime within the tertiary education sector worldwide are moves that have had an adverse effect on the Arts and Human Sciences in particular. As Australian commentators Elizabeth Bullen, Simon Robb and Jane Kenway (2004) have recently argued, in defence of arts and humanities courses within the academy more generally, all those disciplines chiefly concerned with “engaging the mind” and “fashioning the intellect” naturally fail the test of legitimacy when

measured against the narrowly pragmatic and commercially rigid criteria that have come to determine the value of knowledge. As suggested in their paper “‘Creative Destruction’: Knowledge Economy Policy and the Future of the Arts and Humanities in the Academy,” all tertiary sector providers have been forced to pay homage to a “knowledge economy” paradigm with devastating results for those in the Arts. Now that departments within most universities operate as “independent cost centres” with the expectation that they are financially viable units, the penalty for working in a field now perceived no longer “relevant” to students, has been departmental and staff retrenchment. In our own institution, for example, 50 jobs were lost in 2005, many of which came from departments within the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences. The one and only Art History specialist lost her job. Recent layoffs within the University of Auckland last year have markedly diminished the standing of English within that university’s offerings.

What these examples illustrate is how the positivistic and techno-economic nature of the existing concept of education has put the onus squarely on those working within the Arts and Humanities to continually justify the “value” of what they do. And here, “value” means “economically valuable”—a utilitarian and pragmatic form of measurement where the “extra value-addedness” of one’s discipline becomes the benchmark for its inclusion within the university’s offerings.

To take another contemporary example of what we call this problem of *accommodation*—that is, of this need to couch one’s arguments in the language of the dominant economic-rationalist discourse in order for them to be heard—we only have to look at the debate about global warming. A recent report commissioned by the British Treasury to look at the long-term financial implications of the problem hit the headlines recently. Known as the Stern Review—after Sir Nicholas Stern, a former chief economist with the World Bank—the October 2006 report pointed out the extremely dire *economic* consequences of governments continuing to ignore the problem of global warming (Her Majesty’s Treasury, 2006). Despite a decade of previous warnings having been made by scientists gravely concerned about the environmental and humanitarian effects of global warming on the ecology of the planet, here was a report that finally spoke to world leaders in a language that they could understand: the language of economics! Only by costing in dollar terms the probable impact to national economies of ignoring the problem of continuing carbon emissions have nations now been forced to take the issue seriously.

This problem of accommodation is the problem we want to signal in relation to our own research and teaching activities within the philosophy and history of education. It is especially troublesome because we experience not just this *one* dimension of accommodation—the need to advertise the *economic* merits of our sub-discipline in terms of the “transferable skills” each is seen to offer—but we also have to battle the *dominant schooling focus* of the institution which has resulted in “education” being equated solely with “classroom teaching” and “children’s schooling.” By implication, philosophy of education scholarship is constantly translated to a study of “classroom philosophies,” just as the history of education is predominantly thought of as “the historical study of schools and schooling.” Given that most curriculum specialists argue their own curriculum-based study examines “schooling traditions” and “classroom philosophies,” the question as to why further time and energy needs to be devoted to allegedly “repetitious” philosophy or history of education courses is

perpetually being raised among our colleagues—with whom we are seen to be “in competition” for students!

The competitive situation has certainly become exacerbated for us since 1999 when the Waikato School of Education decided it would no longer offer a four-year generic Bachelor of Education degree, choosing instead to convert the existing Diploma of Teaching into a three-year Bachelor of Teaching qualification. Largely legitimated as a response to the then-perceived threat by the government of the day to fund only a three-year teaching qualification, a move appealing to students who would correspondingly face a three-year rather than a four-year debt, the inevitable occurred. The change of nomenclature played into the hands of the old teachers' college staff who by far outnumbered the merged Arts and Humanities Education Studies refugees. Because former college staff occupied the top-level administrative positions within the School, the change heralded a perfect opportunity for programme co-ordinators to exclude any courses from the new degree that were not seen to deal directly with curriculum-related matters. Departmental restructuring accompanied this programming as well. Departments were to be organised around school-based curriculum subjects, with staff from the old Education Studies Department being split into two departments seen more in keeping with the predominant business of the School—teacher “education.”

Bullen and her colleagues wrote their article—as we have ours—because they felt that far more than their jobs were being compromised by the institutional changes they perceived. The benefits of an arts and humanities perspective on education has always been the insights it offers about what a society values and why. It allows us to think about our lives as a focal point for examining a myriad of overt and covert “educational” forces. Since this type of inquiry is as much concerned with who we might become as it is with who we already are, its key strength is to equip us with the necessary conceptual supports upon which we might base our collective and personal decision-making. Questions of social justice, human rights and constraints upon our freedom of thought and imagination are central to this inquiry. If a nation is to profess any degree of commitment to the concept of “democracy,” then such inquiry is vital for effective citizenship. The corollary (sadly) of the loss of this broader linkage between education and the human condition in teacher education programmes within New Zealand is that many supposedly “educational” programmes are blinded by their own conceptual shortcomings to the potentially humanizing and democratising aspect that defines education as a liberatory and onto-transformative discipline.

Perhaps the greatest irony of our own situation is that the problems we face within our institution provide us with the examples needed to illustrate the danger of the potential loss of broader philosophical and historical insights within the teaching profession. Discussion of the institutional censorship we experience provides us with the very “issues” we explore in one of the few Bachelor of Teaching offerings our department still maintains. This is a compulsory Part 2 course called “Social Issues in Aotearoa/New Zealand Education.” Backgrounding this problem of accommodation, to prompt our students to think of education in other than economic or schooling terms, is the elected strategy of “educational recovery” that informs our combined teaching endeavours. Here, we emphasize the merits of an alternative paradigm in which the benefits of a social and politically-oriented, critically-reflective standpoint are acknowledged in relation to a reinvigorated concept of a vibrant democratic society.

Education as a Culturally Determined Concept

Although we have been tertiary teachers for 15 and 26 years respectively, it is nonetheless still surprising that the majority of our students are oblivious to the way in which their existing thought patterns about education act to restrict their intellectual capacity for open inquiry into “educational issues.” Their own blindness to the way in which their mind is a product of a history of social and cultural sculpturing provides us with a natural starting point from which to introduce the idea that education is inevitably *a culturally determined concept*. As we discuss in our introductory sessions, a concept of education has already been assumed in their choice of a career as a teacher, just as it has already been assumed in their perception of education as a predominantly formal and institutional teaching-learning enterprise. It is through an initial examination of the normativity and resilience of these perceptions that we expose the power of language itself in the advancement or curtailment of critical inquiry. As a former colleague, Graham Oliver, argued in a 1998 paper written expressly to profile this issue, the problem is an *ideological* one. It is essentially the result of the way in which our reality has been shaped by a dominant economic and political logic that reinforces certain “good life” preferences. Two further readings develop this point. Karen Bohlin’s (2000) and Matthew Altman’s (2004) concerns echo Oliver’s and centre on the contemporary erosion of our capacity to choose what is “worthy,” independent of social sanctioning. The thrust of each of their essays, as outlined below, is that democratic citizenship is gravely undermined when the opportunity is withheld from individuals to question the very conceptualisation of education that serves as their telos. All three authors see philosophical thought as an indispensable prerequisite to genuine liberatory education.

The ideological reduction of education

Oliver describes the reduction of education to schooling within our everyday discourse and rationality as a “deep prejudice” that serves to undermine our broader thinking about education’s potential role in the making of humanity. As he argues, our entire social psyche is the product of an “education” that remains seriously under-theorized when our focus is restricted to an institutional world of schools and classrooms. Despite what appears to be concrete agreement that education is linked in a very real sense to questions about democracy and citizenship, Oliver warns that such ambitions will nonetheless become hamstrung by our prior beliefs about what both concepts mean to us in practical terms.

By way of illustrating this dilemma, if we all believe that the measure of a successful democracy can be gauged by the provision of universal access to formal learning institutions and quality programmes, our future contemplation of democracy and education will remain fettered by this a priori ideological conjunction. Accordingly, if we believe that more schooling provision necessarily equates to an expansion of what might be termed “the democratic impulse of society”, then we will subsequently be disinclined to speculate further about the nature of democracy itself. In other words, judging the measure of “democracy” by this simplistic empirical measure of democratic presence will negate any broader consideration of the concept.

As Oliver suggests, in Wittgensteinian fashion, the limits of our language *do* set the ideological limits to our worldview. As the above example demonstrates, our perception of the world is not merely the product of private and independent meaning-making but attests very powerfully to the socially constructed nature of our language and ideas. In relation to educational analysis, as Oliver's work highlights, we can only ever hope to engage in genuine educational discussion if we take as our central understanding the notion that "human agency" is itself always coloured by an array of discursive and extra-discursive prejudices. Only by adopting what is essentially a non-reverential attitude towards the verities of the present is it possible to detect the multiple forms of ideological governance that constitute our contemporary modes of rationality.

Oliver concludes that the history of "education"—inasmuch as we understand the term today—resembles more the practice of *indoctrination* than the genuine exercise of liberal values; if by "liberal" we understand the defence of the right of individuals to freely choose their own "worthy purpose." Such is the nature of the political and economic undercurrents that structure everyday thinking that the very idea of education being focused on activity chosen primarily to "nurture the soul" and to lead it beyond "life's external trappings" seems an altogether outmoded proposition (Bohlin, 2000).

In Oliver's view however, the measure of our commitment to democracy must be judged exclusively on the basis of whether our educational thinking is designed to foster self-consciously critical thought. As he sees it, and to paraphrase Dewey, unless the goal of educational purpose begins with the process of nurturing a capacity to reflect on whatever "hems the self in," any subsequent encouragement to exercise one's powers of good reasoning or practical wisdom will be doomed from the start. By implication, genuine educational initiatives can be distinguished from counterfeit purpose and practice only by the extent to which our conceptualisation of what is "educational" is first scrutinized in a self-consciously critical fashion.

Against indoctrination and the closure of the social mind

Complementing Oliver's thesis, Karen Bohlin (2000) reminds us that the aim of education in Socratic thought had always been the pursuit of self-criticality and personal transformation. Seen traditionally as a means to fortify a community against its own short-sighted culture and customs, Bohlin condemns today's education for our collective *incapacity* for such "against the grain" thought. She concurs with Oliver's observations that the self-gratuitous pursuit of wealth and power has come to dominate popular notions of "the good life" to the virtual exclusion of every other lifestyle aspiration. As Bohlin sees things, the loss of elasticity in our ability to determine our own vision of the good is symptomatic of a dangerous closure of the social mind. In this respect, Bohlin's barometer for detecting social closure is the inability of the present generation to contemplate an array of "good lives" because of their incommensurability with mainstream values. What disturbs her most about humanity's bid to govern itself has been the loss of substantive reflection consolidated in the economic-technical rationality characteristic of the age. Because economics and technology remain strenuously indifferent to the real nature of the demands they actually serve—the human demands of real human beings—she argues, in essence,

that we mistakenly equate “human potential” with “economic potential,” thinking that by attending to one, the requirements of the other are necessarily satisfied.

Directing her focus specifically towards higher education, Bohlin cites the dubious course advice offered by various enrolment advisors—including some of her colleagues—as the clearest evidence of this type of confusion. Bemoaning what could be construed as institutional support for the adoption of a state of unreflective passivity, she argues for a return to the central purpose of educational endeavour—a concern with the formation of our own ontology or what she terms the “schooling of desire.” Rather than putting the primary focus on career preparation or vocational training, Bohlin contends that humanity would be far better served if our teaching efforts were directed towards larger questions about the nature of human aspiration and the desirability ultimately of our vocationally-driven ambitions. In her view, students would then be in a much stronger position to commit themselves to a worthy set of goals, having first interrogated the types of satisfactions likely to accrue from their actual pursuit. Characterising our present-day mindset as one which allows people the freedom to choose, but not to *choose well*, the purpose of her article is to question the false economy of this educational myopia.

Philosophy as the practice of freedom

Matthew Altman also addresses these issues in his paper, “What’s the Use of Philosophy? Democratic Citizenship and the Direction of Higher Education.” Motivated to write his essay because of his disquiet about the market-driven accommodations that have severely undermined his discipline, he agrees with Bohlin that the value or worth of an enterprise should not be judged merely by its popularity. Because our desires are essentially blind to “worth,” we need to critically reflect on the nature of our preferences in order to establish the effect of our desires on who we might become. As Altman reminds us, philosophy is far more valuable than is generally portrayed by contemporary logic. Although the discipline has been largely reduced to a utilitarian subject in our own times, to him, its greatest value is to assist humanity in its quest to consider what it values most: to contemplate its contemporary identity in light of these broader goals and aspirations.

The point of philosophy is therefore not to consolidate students’ accommodation to the contemporary normative settlements of society but rather to provoke them to attain enough critical intellectual distance from these settlements to encourage a genuine spirit of self-scepticism. As Altman sees it, the starting point of educational inquiry must be the interrogation of existing normative representations of both education and knowledge. Recognising that their reduction to a commodity has had serious consequences for both teaching and learning, he argues that the purpose of philosophy must be to stimulate minds to consider the impoverishment of this type of thinking. His key concern is that students cannot be taught to assume the role of critic and conscience of society when the sole motivation for furthering their studies has been to foster their own personal and economic circumstances.

It is precisely the extent to which universities today have embraced a commercial function that Altman argues has led to the over-promotion of education as a “provision” and the under-promotion of its “onto-formative” character. Insisting throughout his paper that the educational relationship must be wholly respectful of the

moral nature of the enterprise that it professes to represent, Altman employs Paulo Freire's concept of "banking education" in his efforts to clarify the anomaly between the stated purpose of philosophers and their actual classroom practice. In his opinion, the prevalence of a predominantly technical orientation to the teaching of philosophy inspired by a market-driven interpretation of knowledge and learning has seriously militated against the very spirit of enquiry that has historically informed the discipline. He concludes his discussion by reiterating that this dangerous and non-interactive view of study and learning is more characteristic of an "ideology of oppression" than one of liberation.

Freire's education for "being"

At this point in our course, we offer students an assortment of readings that allow them to examine Paulo Freire's ideas directly (Freire, 1972a, 1972b, 1976, 1985, 1993, 1997, 1998a, 1998b; Freire & Macedo, 1987, 1993; Freire & Shor, 1987). The advantage of Freire's distinctive account of education is that it not only links education to the broader development of mankind's own "being" but it also harbours a sophisticated theory of power and its ideological and material manifestation. To Freire, education is an expressly "political" venture. This connection is a crucial one, given that the majority of our students have never considered education as a political activity. Once they begin to contemplate how their own life's choices are the product of "politics," then they can start to re-examine old and familiar ideas in a new and socially critical fashion. In particular, they begin to understand that our existing educational and cultural preferences are neither absolute nor given. This awareness promotes the corresponding message that culture is a human construction, subject to the possibility of challenge and change.

To explain this connection between "politics" and "education" in a condensed form, Freire views the way education is conceived as the product of a variety of political forces acting within society. Political, here, means "wholly man-made"—and therefore indicative of the ideological preferences and agendas of various human agents. However, ideas are not *just* "ideas." Rather, they are understandings that have become concretised by virtue of their influence on the formal and informal arrangements that structure a society. In this connection, viewing society and culture historically as a constructed entity can be referred to more generally as an "historical materialist" way of viewing the world. It is an outlook that allows us to better understand the socially manufactured nature of the human settlements that now endure. Because it allows us to regard our social strictures as the outcome of a political contest, it is a perspective that also invites us to comprehend the nature of this contest, and the depths to which these constructions extend.

Freire's understanding of the man-made nature of cultural and social construction, and the material power of the ideas we hold, opens up the ground that enables him to challenge a variety of dominant assumptions. In contradistinction to those on the Right who believe that humans are inherently competitive creatures—a belief that correspondingly serves to justify the unequal treatment of individuals and to defend today's market-based economics—Freire regards "competitiveness" as the product of behaviours encouraged by our social structures. With these same social structures responsible for the consolidation of the divisions and inequalities that subsequently arise, the purpose of education must be to uncover such distortions and to dispute the

“naturalised” nature of such claims. To Freire’s way of thinking, the very condition for our future life is wholly dependent upon our capacity to reject the fatalism implied by this type of deterministic thinking. In this regard, his historical materialist viewpoint fully informs his views on ontology: only to the extent that we are fully conscious of our ability to “make ourselves” and to “name” our world are we actually able to do so.

The implications of this thesis are significant. Once we begin to realise that our so-called individualistic and competitive character is actually the product of our own making—that is, when we recognise it as an ideological portrait of society articulated to conserve the existing privileges of a certain sector that of society and the inequalities of others—then space is opened up for a counter-cultural vision of progressive social reconciliation based on the inauguration of alternative ways of relating. Indeed, Freire’s concept of “being” authors a vision of intelligent co-operation among humans based on a thesis of a respect for personhood.

To explain this connection between being and morality, among all the species of the planet, Freire argues that it is only the human species that is unique in its ability to modify its desires and behaviours and to reflect upon the nature of its own humanity. In keeping with this line of argument, what the loss of this capacity for self-reflection means is nothing short of the loss of “humanity” itself. In other words, “self-consciousness” is a “marker” for humanity itself—meaning that if this “potential” for humans to “become” is never actualised, then we lose what we claim to be unique about “humanity” itself. Based on such assumptions, Freire conceptualises his vision of education as a deepening of humanity’s sense of its own powers of “being.” Although much more could be said about Freire’s views on “being” and “education,” all we want to signal here is that Freire’s work consolidates the concerns of the other authors. Of particular significance is the concern that the conventional usage of the term “education” has become nothing but a synonym for uncritical socialisation.

Moving from Freire’s critical analysis of schooling, the next component of the course encourages our students to consider the purpose of schooling within industrial societies. By developing an understanding of the role that formal schooling institutions were meant to play by their inception both globally and locally, we invite an assessment of the extent to which these purposes have worked either for or against the concept of education our previous authors have advocated.

Historical Studies in Education

The main focus for historians of education has been traditionally to explore and account for the establishment and growth of schools. This is in many ways hardly surprising, given the considerable personal and political faith invested over many generations in schools (regardless of the level) as institutions ostensibly dedicated to fostering the individual and collective development of those persons entrusted into their care. As the “deschoolers” demonstrated so persuasively in the 1960s and 1970s, such faith translated into an inability or reluctance on the part of many people closely associated with schools, both public and private, to view education in other than strictly institutional and administrative terms.

In our jointly taught course, students come to realise that once politicians and other interested parties began to identify schools organisations best able to promote certain ideologies—as they were doing increasingly from the late 19th century—they became firm converts to the cause of compulsory schooling (see, e.g., Campbell, 1941; McKenzie, Lee, & Lee, 1996). It was, of course, one thing for schools to be erected in a given community, into which youth might move for an indeterminate period, but quite another for *all* boys and girls to be required by law to enrol and remain at a school. The rationale for the latter scenario had to be broadly compelling. Because early debate focused on the best ways to prepare youth for their forthcoming citizenship as workers, neighbours, and homemakers, schools were seen increasingly as the best institutions to fulfil this role. There was no better place to introduce pupils to certain areas of knowledge sanctioned by the State and/or by a legally recognised education authority, thus preventing them from growing up “in absolute ignorance” and descending into “absolute brutishness” (*New Zealand Parliamentary Debates [NZPD]*, Vol. 24, 1877, p.32).

During debate on an Education Bill (1871) in the New Zealand House of Representatives, for example, some politicians—notably John Bathgate—declared that “it was much better to pay the schoolmaster than the gaoler” (*NZPD*, Vol.10, 1871, p.208). These types of sentiments tended to be widely echoed during the late 19th century because of a desire on the part of many statesmen to utilise the fledgling schooling system to educate youth en masse. Archives reveal a number of claims from various politicians to the effect that schooling the nation would ensure a broad measure of democracy would be safeguarded for the next generation (see, e.g., William Russell, *NZPD*, Vol. 25, 1877, p.207). To this end, the politician and former Colonial Secretary Daniel Pollen confidently told Parliament:

In a democratic community like this, the possibility of the maintenance of democratic institutions as they ought to be maintained depends upon the intelligence of the people, and it is in the interests of the state to provide that intelligence with the means of civilisation [through free and compulsory primary schooling]. (*NZPD*, Vol. 26, 1877, p.119)

The correlation between reducing illiteracy through primary schooling and minimising crime was accepted uncritically (*NZPD*, Vol.24, 1877, p.32), as was the belief that existing social class divisions would diminish if not disappear altogether once a common schooling system was operating (see, e.g., Mackey, 1967; McKenzie, 1975). Predictably, the political pressure to create a State-controlled, nationwide system of primary schooling rapidly gained momentum, as did the tendency for uniformity in schooling and its administration to become an end in itself (Mackey, 1967; Webb, 1937). Only a minority of commentators were willing to state publicly, as Leicester Webb subsequently noted, that “there is a point at which the very completeness and efficiency of the administrative machine becomes inimical to the true spirit of education” (1937, p.7). James Bonar was one of several politicians who remained convinced however that “uniformity in a system of education is as great an advantage as uniformity in a railway gauge” (*NZPD*, Vol.26, 1877, p.132).

George Grey, twice former Governor-General of New Zealand, adopted a more pragmatic and critical approach when appointed premier (Prime Minister) of New Zealand. His willingness to contemplate the daily lives of teachers and pupils under

the proposed State primary school system post-1877 led Grey to conclude that they were unlikely to flourish in such a regimented institutional environment:

[Under the 1877 Education Bill] there is an attempt to reduce learning to one dead level. There is to be one class of teachers, all trained in the same class imparting but one set of ideas, and their teaching is to be regulated according to the wishes of Inspectors who, also, are of one mould. A great evil will be done to the country by such a system. (*NZPD*, Vol. 25, 1877, p.233)

Schooling under Scrutiny

As explained to our students, such concerns did not call the *status* of schools into question—merely their *activities*. This was also true of the criticisms levelled at schools some 50 years later, for example, by a former Director of Education, John Caughley (1921-1927), and Frederick Bakewell, a retired senior primary school inspector. Caughley lamented the fact that for far too many pupils and teachers the primary school curriculum was “regarded as a list of necessary items of knowledge or training” and that the syllabus was “literally a collection like the stock-in-trade of a shop” (1928, p.37). In advocating a move away from “think[ing] in terms of subjects and courses and schools” (p.44) whenever education was (or is) being discussed, he urged teachers and other parties not to see youth as individuals to be experimented with and/or manipulated. Critical of the way boys and girls were treated like “elastic receptacle[s] into which and from which unlimited quantity and variety can be poured and extracted” (pp.37-38), Caughley upheld a view of the child as “a human personality with a destination of his [or her] own” (p.44). He was adamant that once teachers, school officials and other interested groups no longer saw a student as “a new specimen to be dealt with from divergent points of view by each operator who takes him [or her] into his [or her] laboratory” (p.44) then *education*, not instruction, would rightly gain ascendancy.

Although Caughley clearly understood that schools, teachers and pupils in late 19th and early 20th century New Zealand society were often busily engaged in activities that were not necessarily educational, he nonetheless did not support their wholesale abandonment. The same was true of Bakewell. Reflecting in retirement on his work as an inspector of schools for the Wellington education district, Bakewell likewise remarked on the frequency with which pupils were seen and treated as “lump[s] of clay to be forcibly moulded or rather pounded into the particular shape that might meet with the approval of the authorities of the time” (Bakewell, 1928, p.51). Several decades prior to the publication of Paulo Freire’s criticisms of the dominance of a “banking approach” to knowledge, learning and teaching, Bakewell was complaining about the tendency for examination success to be equated with high quality education. Arguing that “totally false ideals of education” (p.53) were created in the relentless pursuit of impressive examination results, Bakewell concluded that excessive uniformity—or “a monotonous level of attainment on certain special lines of knowledge” (p.53)—was the unfortunate but predictable consequence. He explained the phenomenon as follows:

All [pupils] had to go through the same mill. The foot was planed down to fit the boot. The fitting of square pegs into round holes was not the only evil of the system; worse evils...were the fitting of big pegs into small holes and the fitting of very small pegs into large ones. (p.53)

The “educational horizon,” Bakewell shrewdly observed, had been “narrowed to the limits of the class room” (p.53). Consequently, the chief legacy of the 1877 Education Act—legislation allegedly designed to “make further and better provision for the education of the [non-Maori] people in the Colony of New Zealand” (The Education Act, 1877, p.109)—was that “education” was framed unapologetically in formal schooling terms. As argued in the first part of this paper, the results of the wholesale adoption of this mode of thinking are not, and have not been, resoundingly positive.

Miseducation and the Cult of Efficiency

As the above account suggests, a major purpose of schooling was to divert youth away from unlawful or unproductive pursuits rather than to encourage their powers of criticality or counter-cultural thought. From the late 19th century, social role selection clearly became the dominant function of the school, which was regarded as the most obvious or “natural” vehicle to identify and develop “talent.” Because of this role, and the future benefits that strong academic performance at school offered to the more able students, parents were often prepared to curtail their more serious criticisms of schools in pursuit of this narrowly prescribed good life for their sons and daughters. Nevertheless, as the Minister of Education Rex Mason (1940-1946) reported, there was a high price to be paid for viewing schools in this way. The introduction and retention of a mass schooling model did *not* guarantee that children would always benefit from their schooling:

In the old [late 19th and 20th century] days, with enormous [primary school] classes, it was scarcely possible to do other than treat children in the mass, to aim the pedagogical blunderbuss at the so-called ‘average’ child, and hope that those who were not average were hit by a few of the flying facts (Mason, 1945, p.11).

Our students’ understanding of this dilemma is greatly assisted by David McKenzie’s (1975, 1983, 1997) research into New Zealand schools and credentialling, and that of Clarence Beeby (1956, 1984). Through an examination of this literature, they come to appreciate how and why schools have shaped, and continue to shape, students’ school and post-school lives positively or otherwise. McKenzie, for example, coined the phrase “the cult of efficiency and miseducation” (1997, p.47) in his study of school examinations to describe this relationship—a relationship characterized by doctrines of “scientific” assessment and managerialism, institutional efficiency and accountability within the schooling environment. Indeed, a host of policy documents released over the past two decades in New Zealand—The Ministry of Education’s *New Zealand Curriculum Framework* (1993), *Education for the 21st Century* (1994), and *Tertiary Education in New Zealand* (1998), and the Ministry of Commerce’s (1999) *Bright Future, 5 Steps Ahead—Making Ideas Work for New Zealand* (see, e.g., Lee, Hill, & Lee, 2004; Lee & Lee, 1999)—is testimony to the escalation of this modern-day cult. Notwithstanding several criticisms of this orientation (Gordon, 1997; Lee, O’Neill, & McKenzie, 2004; McKenzie, 1997; O’Neill, Clark, & Openshaw, 2004), the official rhetoric of “growing a knowledge economy” has found a receptive, uncritical audience in certain quarters, as the educational philosopher James Marshall (2000) has perceptively observed.

A timely (re)assessment of this type of rhetoric and its underlying premises is similarly engendered by reading Harold Benjamin's (1939) superb educational fable, the "Saber-Tooth Curriculum." Significant debates relating to a range of educational issues are canvassed through Benjamin's account of "the first great educational theorist and practitioner, New-Fist-Hammer-Maker" (p.185). These include the distinction between education and training; what can and ought not to count as "knowledge" and the reasons behind the selections made; the power and control sought and exercised by different interest groups seeking to retain traditions and practices or to critique and oppose them; and the creation and dissemination of educational myths. Each of these components is revisited in our "Social Issues in Aotearoa/ New Zealand" course by means of literature relating to the establishment and evolution of schools in New Zealand society. Students thus come to appreciate that schooling has never been free from controversy, and that dissenting views of "education" do *not* disappear automatically whenever access to schools is widened under the rubric of promoting equality of educational opportunity or a related policy initiative. As Benjamin rightly concluded, the competing claims of those whom he labelled "radicals" and "traditionalists" ("wise old men") will be articulated prior to and following social, environmental, and educational change (Benjamin, 1939, pp.190-191). As he freely conceded, such claims would always be subject to ongoing public scrutiny.

Additional weight is afforded to Benjamin's thesis by Arnold Campbell's (1941) and C. E. Beeby's (1984) accounts of the origins and longevity of a particular approach to "education" in 19th century New Zealand society. Campbell suggested that in their adherence to familiar, conservative, ways of thinking and acting, colonists privileged "cultural continuity...[over] practical adaptation" (1941, p.2). This orientation resulted in "the geographical principle of adaptation to a new environment" (p.6) being suspended for several generations, as Beeby (1984) also lamented. With mass elementary schooling often regarded as a cure-all for every social and economic problem from the late 19th century—particularly those attributed to an ignorant, unschooled citizenry—it was widely viewed as "an insurance against civil disorder" (Campbell, 1941, p. 10) and a means to prepare workers for their respective positions in an expanding workforce. Yet, despite these social and vocational roles, there was a definite limit to the State's professed generosity in the schooling domain throughout the 19th century, because Charles Bowen (the co-author of the 1877 Education Act) had *not* endorsed free *post-primary* schooling for the nation's youth in his 1877 legislation (*NZPD*, Vol.24, 1877, pp.32-37). Echoing this sentiment, John Mackey concluded that politicians in 1877 had "conceived of the function of the common school as an instrument for imparting merely the elements of literacy," in their general desire to enhance the "usefulness" of the burgeoning lower middle class (1967, p.284).

Schools, Citizenship Training, and the World of Work

That education has been concerned more with pupils' vocational preparation, economic contributions and citizenship training than with their personal, intellectual and other flourishing is also clearly in evidence when one explores New Zealand's "educational" past. Because pupil retention at New Zealand primary schools post-1877 had increased to an extent and at a rate not anticipated by the architects of the 1877 Act, parents and other groups began lobbying post-primary school authorities

and government to “open up” these fee-charging institutions—district high school secondary departments and technical high and secondary schools—to appropriately certificated youth (McKenzie, Lee, & Lee, 1996; Openshaw, Lee, & Lee, 1993). More schooling meant more opportunities and time for pupils to be groomed for the world of work and to receive the requisite amount of citizenship training. A “free place” post-primary schooling system was subsequently introduced between 1901 and 1905. Although the move to extend free schooling to the secondary level began in rural communities, chiefly because the bulk of New Zealand’s population was located in these districts, free places were eventually offered in urban centres.

The notion that schooling was an unconditional “good” was certainly a message that became reinforced in the civics textbooks approved for both primary and post-primary schools by the Department of Education. In one work, circulated to thousands of Form 3 and 4 (first- and second-year post-primary) pupils from the early 1920s the authors, Edward and Alan Mulgan, described the relationship between “education” and “good citizenship” in a young, socially and politically conservative democracy as follows:

[It] benefits the individual by giving him knowledge and mental and moral training, which make him a more efficient unit of the community and generally a better citizen...because the community is made up of a number of units, which act and react on one another. It also benefits the country as a whole by making its workmen (using the term to include all who work with hand or brain) more efficient and better able to compete with the workmen of other countries (Mulgan & Mulgan, 1922, pp.70-71).

Five years later, in another civics textbook for Form 3 and 4 pupils, Nellie Coad chose to adopt a more utilitarian and conformist stance to schools and schooling. She informed readers that “the real reason of the school” was to show all pupils “how to work and how to employ their leisure” (1927, p.9). In Coad’s opinion, boys and girls needed to show more gratitude for the excellent schooling they received and for the taxpayers’ generosity in ensuring they had free access to all that the New Zealand schooling system could offer them.

In spite of the pervasiveness of this instrumentalist approach to schools and their purpose, the Thomas Committee showed a clear softening of this orientation in their 1944 Report. Recommending that post-primary school authorities and teachers should revisit their activities and orientation to ensure they were properly educational in word and deed (Department of Education, 1944), the Committee prioritised “the full development of the adolescent as a person” (p.5) over preparing boys and girls for their future roles of “worker, neighbour, homemaker, and citizen” (p.5). Although the latter objective could never be completely ignored, the Committee nonetheless outlined their educational philosophy in more general terms, declaring:

All post-primary pupils, irrespective of their varying abilities and their varying occupational ambitions, [should] receive a generous and well balanced education... In practice both personal needs and social needs have all too often been pushed into the background, especially by economic pressures...the educative process has been restricted and distorted as the result of economic pressure, to the ultimate disadvantage not only of the individual, but of society also. (p.5)

Maintaining that for too long “attainments that can readily be marketed” (p.5)—school qualifications—had governed teachers’ and pupils’ lives to the detriment of “[those] personal and intellectual qualities that mark the live...student” (p.8), the committee declared that a change of direction was urgently needed. In this and other respects they had undoubtedly been influenced by the “liberal” views of the energetic Director of Education, C. E. Beeby (1940–1960). Seeking to emphasize the educational potential of schools rather than their well-known ability to coach students to pass high status public examinations in response to external demands, the Committee concluded that education differed from traditional schooling

...in such things as intellectual curiosity and receptivity for ideas, in tenacity and drive, in clarity and precision of thinking, in flexibility of mind, and capacity of adjustment to novel needs and situations...[and where people are not] denied experiences that are needed for full and healthy growth. (p.8)

While historical and sociological research clearly demonstrates that the Committee were rather optimistic in their thoughts and recommendations (see, e.g., Lee, Hill, & Lee, 2004; McKenzie, 1983; Nash, 1980; O’Neill, 2004; Openshaw, Lee, & Lee, 1993), their report nonetheless stimulated debate about school activities and their respective educational merit. Sadly, despite the Committee’s pleas that “educators” ought generally to adopt a more political, philosophical, and sociological perspective towards schooling, it would be accurate to say that a retreat from such questions has characterised the last sixty years of our educational “development.”

Evidence for this conclusion is not difficult to find. Given that the recently retired Secretary for Education, Howard Fancy, was an enthusiastic and long-term advocate of an outcomes-based approach to education, many of his statements reveal an unassailable faith in a quantitative schooling model that allowed accurate “objective” comparisons to be made between students’ attainments in different OECD countries (Fancy, 2004). Fancy’s policy statements reveal that the Ministry of Education saw no alternative but to specify in detail the skills, values, attitudes, and knowledge that students needed to live successfully in the present and future global society (see, e.g., Ministry of Education, 2002). That such statements were indispensable to high quality education was further presupposed. Sentiments such as these are captured openly in the Ministry of Education’s (2004) schooling strategy:

Schooling Strategy Goal—Excellence and equity of outcomes for all students:
To this end all students will leave school with the knowledge, skills, attitudes, values, and sense of identity they need to enrich their own lives and become contributors and leaders in a 21st century world (p.10).

What seems to have been ignored in most official discourse is the inevitable tendency for policymakers in an age of perceived and/or real “change” to privilege the tangible and pragmatic, and whatever is more easily measurable, over what can and ought to be considered educational (see, e.g., Lee & Lee, 1999; Marshall, 2000). In other words, a thesis of passive accommodation effectively militates against the possibility of educational restoration or recovery, with predictable consequences for Freirean or similar approaches to education. This was what Marshall meant when he wrote about “the subsumption of education” (2000, p.13) to external forces. It was also what

Christian Cole, a University of Sierra Leone academic, may have had in mind when he warned readers over 30 years ago:

[It is recognised that] society is going through a period of rapid changes propelled by advances in technology. The rapidity of change, pregnant as it is with the desire for an increase in material benefits, may tend to over-emphasize the utilitarian much more than other aspects of national [and personal] development. This dilemma carries with it the threat of dehumanisation....(1972, p.21)

Conclusion

It is against this background that we suggest to our students the reasons why they have found it so difficult throughout the course to think of education in other than schooling terms has been because of this continuing dominance of both a commodified and institutionalised concept of education throughout their own upbringing. As we also point out to them, given that such a definition has been consolidated in practice for such a long period throughout New Zealand's history, it is certainly by no means coincidental that their choice to be an "educator" has been cast narrowly in schooling terms. In our experience of teaching this course however, by prompting students to discuss the reasons why *they* have had so much trouble in considering education in a broader onto-formative manner, particularly during the first more philosophical section of the course, they come to a heightened sense of awareness of the legitimacy of these concerns.

It would not be an exaggeration to say that the typical response we initially elicit from our students is one of anger—anger that they have never before been challenged to interrogate these normative assumptions, and anger that the very institution in which one would expect this challenge to have occurred at the tertiary level has chosen the (easy) pathway of accommodation instead. Ironically, it is the students' own developing self-awareness of the nature of the intellectual struggle that they have experienced throughout the course which ultimately drives home to them the saliency of these ideas.

Note

The present paper is an updated version of a paper delivered in various venues within Australia, England, and Malta while on sabbatical in 2006.

References

- Altman, M. C. (2004). What's the use of philosophy? Democratic citizenship and the direction of higher education. *Educational Theory*, 54(2), 143-155.
- Bakewell, F. H. (1928). The child—Past and present treatment. In I. Davey (Ed.), *Fifty years of national education in New Zealand: 1878-1928* (pp.50-58). Auckland: Whitcombe & Tombs.
- Beeby, C. E. (1956). New Zealand—An example of secondary education without selection. *International Review of Education*, 2(4), 396-406.
- Beeby, C. E. (1984). A problem of secondary education unsolved worldwide. In G. McDonald & A. Campbell (Eds.), *Looking forward: Essays on the future of education in New Zealand* (pp.88-111). Wellington: Te Aro Press.
- Benjamin, H. (1939). Saber-tooth curriculum. In R. Hahn & D. Binda (Eds.). (1965). *Secondary education: Origins and directions* (pp.185-191). New York: Macmillan.
- Bohlin, K. E. (2001). Schooling of desire. *Journal of Education*, 182(2), 69-79.
- Bullen, E., Robb, S., & Kenway, J. (2004). "Creative destruction": Knowledge economy policy and the future of the arts and humanities in the academy. *Journal of Education Policy*, 19(1), 3-22.
- Campbell, A. E. (1941). *Educating New Zealand*. Wellington: Department of Internal Affairs.
- Caughley, J. (1928). The development of the curriculum. In I. Davey (Ed.), *Fifty years of national education in New Zealand: 1878-1928* (pp.36-45). Auckland: Whitcombe & Tombs.
- Clark, H. (2003, March). The transforming power of education. In Tertiary Education Commission, *Tertiary Reform Update* (p.2). Wellington: Tertiary Education Commission.
- Coad, N. E. (1927). *The dominion civics* (2nd ed.). Auckland: Whitcombe & Tombs.
- Cole, C. R. A. (1972). The teacher, new educational media, and the learning center. In World Confederation of Organizations of the Teaching Profession, *The teacher's changing role in the school of the future: A symposium of papers presented by WCOTP as a contribution to International Education Year* (pp.1-24). Beirut: World Confederation of Organizations of the Teaching Profession.
- Department of Education. (1944). *The post-primary school curriculum: Report of the committee appointed by the Minister of Education in November, 1942* (The Thomas Report). Wellington: Government Printer.
- Fancy, H. (1998). Overview. In Ministry of Education, *Strategic business plan: 1998-2001* (p.1). Wellington: Ministry of Education.
- Fancy, H. (2004, June). *Education reform: Reflections on New Zealand experience*. Paper presented to a symposium on Education and Change, Melbourne.

- Freire, P. (1972a). *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. Harmondsworth: Penguin.
- Freire, P. (1972b). *Cultural action for freedom*. Harmondsworth: Penguin.
- Freire, P. (1976). *Education: The practice of freedom*. London: Writers & Readers.
- Freire, P. (1985). *The politics of education*. London: Macmillan.
- Freire, P. (1993). Foreword. In P. McLaren & P. Leonard (Eds.), *Paulo Freire: A critical encounter* (pp.ix-xii). London: Routledge.
- Freire, P. (1997). *Pedagogy of the heart*. New York: Continuum.
- Freire, P. (1998a). *Teachers as cultural workers: Letters to those who dare teach*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.
- Freire, P. (1998b). *Politics and education*. Los Angeles: UCLA Latin American Center Publications.
- Freire, P., & Macedo, D. (1987). *Literacy: Reading the word and the world*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.
- Freire, P., & Macedo, D. (1993). *A dialogue with Paulo Freire*. In P. McLaren & P. Leonard (Eds.), *Paulo Freire: A critical encounter* (pp.169-176). London: Routledge.
- Freire, P., & Shor, I. (1987). *A pedagogy for liberation*. London: Macmillan.
- Gordon, L. (1997). Tomorrow's schools' today: School choice and the education quasi-market. In M. Olssen & K. Morris-Matthews (Eds.), *Education policy in New Zealand: The 1990s and beyond* (pp. 65-82). Palmerston North: Dunmore Press.
- Her Majesty's Treasury. (2006). Stern Review on the economics of climate change. Retrieved December 20, 2006, from http://www.hm-treasury.gov.uk/independent_reviews/stern_review_economics_climate_change/stern_review_report.cfm
- Lee, G. D., Hill, D. J., & Lee, H. F. (2004). The New Zealand curriculum framework: Something old, something new, something borrowed, something 'blue'. In A.-M. O'Neill, J. Clark, & R. Openshaw (Eds.), *Reshaping culture, knowledge and learning? Policy and content in the New Zealand curriculum framework* (Vol.1, pp.71-89). Palmerston North: Dunmore Press.
- Lee, G. D., & Lee, H. F. (1992). *Examinations and the New Zealand school curriculum: Past and present* (Delta Research Monograph No.12). Palmerston North: Massey University, Faculty of Education.
- Lee, G. D., & Lee, H. F. (1999). Bright future, five steps ahead—Making ideas work for New Zealand: A commentary. *Waikato Journal of Education*, 5, 153-164.
- Lee, H. F., O'Neill, A.-M., & McKenzie, D. (2004). "To market, to market..." The mirage of certainty: An outcomes-based curriculum. In A.-M. O'Neill, J. Clark, & R. Openshaw (Eds.), *Reshaping culture, knowledge and learning? Policy and content in the New Zealand curriculum framework* (Vol.1, pp.47-

- 70). Palmerston North: Dunmore Press.
- Mackey, J. (1967). *The making of a state education system: The passing of the New Zealand Education Act, 1877*. London: Geoffrey Chapman.
- Marshall, J. D. (2000). Bright futures and the knowledge society. In J. Marshall, E. Coxon, K. Jenkins, & A. Jones (Eds.), *Politics, policy, pedagogy: Education in Aotearoa/New Zealand* (pp.187-215). Palmerston North: Dunmore Press.
- Mason, H. G. R. (1945). *Education today and tomorrow* (2nd ed.). Wellington: Government Printer.
- McKenzie, D. (1997). The cult of efficiency and miseducation: Issues of assessment in New Zealand schools. In M.Olssen & K. Morris-Matthews (Eds.), *Education policy in New Zealand: The 1990s and beyond* (pp. 47-64). Palmerston North: Dunmore Press.
- McKenzie, D., Lee, H., & Lee, G. (1996). *Scholars or dollars? Selected historical case studies of opportunity costs in New Zealand education*. Palmerston North: Dunmore Press.
- McKenzie, J. D. S. (1975). The changing concept of equality in New Zealand education. *New Zealand Journal of Educational Studies*, 10(2), 93-110.
- McKenzie, J. D. S. (1983). Politics and school curricula. In W.J.D. Minogue (Ed.), *Adventures in curriculum* (pp.20-34). Sydney: Allen & Unwin.
- Ministry of Commerce. (1999). *Bright future, 5 steps ahead—Making ideas work for New Zealand*. Wellington: Author.
- Ministry of Education. (1993). *The New Zealand curriculum framework*. Wellington: Learning Media.
- Ministry of Education. (1994). *Education for the 21st century*. Wellington: Learning Media.
- Ministry of Education. (1998). *Tertiary education in New Zealand: Policy directions for the 21st century—White paper*. Wellington: Author.
- Ministry of Education. (2002). *Briefing for the incoming Minister of Education*. Wellington: Author.
- Ministry of Education. (2004). *Making a bigger difference for all students: Directions for a schooling strategy*. Wellington: Author.
- Mulgan, E. K., & Mulgan, A. E. (1922). *The New Zealand citizen: An elementary account of the citizen's rights and duties and the work of government*. Auckland: Whitcombe & Tombs.
- Nash, R. (1980). What are schools for? Three disclaimers on what we can expect from schools. In J. Grenfell & A. Meade (Eds.), *Is there life after school? Proceedings of the Association for the Study of Childhood seminar on the Implications of Unemployment for the Education of our Children* (pp.73-74). Wellington: Association for the Study of Childhood.

New Zealand Parliamentary Debates. (1871), Vol.10; (1877), Vol.24; (1877), Vol.25; (1877), Vol.26. Wellington: Government Printer.

Oliver, R. G. (1998). The ideological reduction of education. *Educational Philosophy and Theory*, 30(3), 299-302.

O'Neill, J. (2004). Change and constancy: Half a century of secondary schooling in New Zealand. *History of Education Review*, 33(1), 44-59.

Openshaw, R., Lee, G., & Lee, H. (1993). *Challenging the myths: Rethinking New Zealand's educational history*. Palmerston North: Dunmore Press.

The Education Act. (1877). In *Statutes of New Zealand: 1877*, No.21, pp.109-131. Wellington: Government Printer.

Webb, L. C. (1937). *The control of education in New Zealand*. Wellington: New Zealand Council for Educational Research.