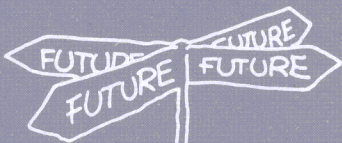


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# TOWARDS THE YEAR 2000 IN EDUCATION

A discussion paper by  
W. L. RENWICK



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W.L. RENWICK

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## TOWARDS THE YEAR 2000 IN EDUCATION

A prudent person, invited to imagine the tasks and possibilities of education twentyfive years ahead, will have his own hedge against that future. Let it be said at once, therefore, that, so far, at least, educational futurology has had a very indifferent track record. Discussion about the future of education, no less than discussion of what should be done in the here and now, is saturated with value assumptions. This is right and proper, and it is inescapable. Futurologists thus find themselves in a quandary that historians have long been familiar with. Consciously or unconsciously, historians interpret the past in the light of the present: futurologists, not knowing what is around the corner, pass the future through the sieve of the present. The value of gazing at the crystal ball of education is therefore likely to be in what it says about the emerging present. By identifying trends, issues and possibilities, and by imagining their interplay in some future configuration, a number of questions are immediately raised: Is the analysis of the present correct? If it seems to be more or less correct, does the dynamic of development assumed in the prediction seem to be right? If the analysis is wrong, is it simply a matter of getting some facts right, or are its fundamental biases - its value assumptions - wrong? If some agreement can be reached on our educational condition now, is the future that seems to be immanent in the present a future which, in educational terms, one would wish to see? In other words, whether discussion of education is about its present or its possible future condition, argument will centre on the present and what ought to be done now to give greater effect to the values that different people will seek to realise through educational activities of one kind or another.

All predictions take a great deal for granted. In a short piece it is not possible to touch on more than a few possible implications of one set of assumptions. In what follows, I assume that the New Zealand economy will continue to be dependent and our future prosperity precarious - the result of a continuing difficulty of staying in our overseas export markets and getting into new ones. I assume that New Zealanders will still aspire to be grouped among the advanced industrialised nations (even if on one of the lower ranks) and that they will have the will to do what is necessary to realise this aspiration. I assume further, therefore,

that, as a nation, we shall have to live on our wits even more in the future than we have in the past. We will become more evidently a Pacific-Asian country and this will require New Zealanders to broaden their cultural horizons, not only towards Polynesia but towards the cultures and languages of Japan, China, Indonesia, Malaysia, and Hispanic America. In the service of these assumptions, education will be at least as important a tool of national development in the next 25 years as it has been at any time in the past.

There will be a growing demand for education. This growing demand will not be for compulsory education. On present indications there will be a lessened demand for primary and secondary education. The latest projections of the Department of Statistics (medium assumptions) predict that between 1977 and 2001 the number of people 0-19 will decline from 1.22 m (39% of the population) to 1.14 m (30%). The number of people over the age of 19 will increase from 1.92 m (61%) to 2.63 m (70%). The additional demand will be for education, training, retraining and refreshment at the post-secondary level of the system. It will be fuelled from several sources: technological; vocational, as a result of changes in the specification of jobs; personal, as a result of changing demands, needs, and interests; and social and civic, as a result of changes in society itself that will make for new requirements in the way individual citizens respond to their circumstances. Much of the learning that will fall under these headings will be of the kind that will call for short, periodic commitments to the learning of something new - short courses, weekend schools, evening classes, and self-instructional courses of various kinds. The demand for such courses will, however, become much more widely diffused throughout our society: proportionately more adults, under more aspects of their experience, at more points in their life will need to add to what they know and can do, and will need to revise their attitudes. This last point is important. The predication of a growing demand for post-secondary education does not rest only on grounds of technological change. It rests no less on social, cultural and moral change.

Some of the fundamental institutions of our society - family, sex-role, relationships with cultural minorities, relationships in the work place - are changing. The more that these move away from traditional relationships, the more will it become necessary for the members of a changing society to learn new responses.



These changes, moreover, will be inter-related in their effects. The move towards greater equality of women is having profound effects on the structure and functions of families, and on other institutions for the care and education of young children. Greater participation in the work force by women increases the pressure for institutionalised alternatives to the mother in the home as the regular caretaker of babies and young children. Greater economic independence on the part of women carries with it also the possibility (long availed by men) of emancipation from marital or family relationships that are felt to be constraining or dehumanising; and the availability of alternative forms of child-care will increase the attractiveness of this option.

The percentage of the population identifying culturally as Maori or Pacific Island will increase, particularly in the North Island. Through intermarriage the number of New Zealanders who come to have a direct experience of Maori cultural influences will also grow. Other cultural minorities can be expected to take active steps to ensure that their contribution to the larger New Zealand community is acknowledged, fostered, and respected. If New Zealand in 2000 AD is to have a peaceful harmonious society, profound changes of attitude and significant improvements in the effectiveness of educational activity directed to that end will be required in the interim.

Changes in the workplace also create new tasks for education and training. That point no longer needs to be laboured. But what if, for the least well-qualified members of society, regular, paid employment ceases to be a real prospect? The expectation of regular paid employment is a fundamental value of Pakeha society. It is a basic assumption of all organised educational efforts directed at children during their years of compulsory schooling. If the social realities were to change for the less than able, the unqualified, and the under-privileged members of the population, far-reaching changes in educational aims and in socially approved educational activities would be required. The only capital that most New Zealanders ever have is the educational capital they build up as they move through the education system. Should more attention be given, then, to the children in the system at risk to failure and low attainment so that, when they leave school, they are better equipped to hold down a job. But if, as many people now fear, there will not be employment for them at the end of their schooling

does this suggest that a more fundamental reappraisal of educational objectives is called for? And what about the schooling of those at the other end of the scale, whose abilities it will be important to develop if the country is to live by its wits?

Other questions abound. The possibilities of technology have, during the last quarter of a century, offered panaceas to optimists and nightmares to pessimists. There have been predictions that one technological breakthrough after another will produce the educational revolution. Radio, television, programmed instruction, and computer assisted instruction have all, at some time, been presented in this light. We still await the revolution. It is easy to remain sceptical in the light of the record of dashed hopes. Mass production, technological advances, computerisation, and miniaturisation have, in their turn, led to equally regular predictions of more leisure with less work for all or of long-term unemployment for growing numbers of the population. In the light of present knowledge it is not possible to cast a horoscope for education in New Zealand as it might be affected by any of these technological changes. All we have is a vague intuition that they should be taken more seriously in educational planning than they have been.

The Commission for the Future, in terms of its mission, might well wish to commission some research and development studies that would seek to discover to what extent, in New Zealand conditions, computer-assisted instruction has a useful contribution to make. It might also wish to commission research on the future impact of technological advances on tasks which, until the present, have provided employment opportunities for people with very limited attainments on the personal, financial, and social consequences for these people of any drying-up of their employment opportunities.

No one can predict how these interacting social, technical, and industrial processes will work themselves out during the remainder of the century. Essentially, however, the great debates of the present day are about the various values that ought to be uppermost in peoples' minds when they make decisions which, at whatever level of generality, will influence the lives of individuals and, cumulatively, the future movement of our society. The one prediction that can be made, however, is that none of these institutional changes - all with profound effects for society and for what public education should attempt to do in the name of society -



is capable of solutions that will claim the willing assent of all or even a majority of New Zealanders. Our society is already changing under the influence of aspirations and value allegiances which are enthusiastically supported by some and as vigorously deplored by other members of the New Zealand society. These signs of ethical pluralism - of which the acknowledgment of cultural diversity is one, albeit an important one - will continue to manifest themselves. Education will be looked to increasingly as an instrument of group assertion as well as a means of personal development.

A fundamental question of social policy will thus be the extent to which public education should attempt to maintain the sense of an overriding New Zealand identity in the consciousness of people who, from preference, or the pull of group affiliation, or the pressure of circumstances may find that the allegiances that mean most to them are shared by some minority that feels itself less than fairly treated by society as a whole: the sisterhood, the army of those who are not well enough educated to hold down a job, the under-privileged, cultural or ethnic minorities, or those who, from choice, have opted for some form of alternative life-style. Present indications are that the dominant, Pakeha ethos we have known - centred on the nuclear family, the subordination of women, hard work, and a determination to get on - will be challenged by other, different styles of living, some of them chosen, others forced on to individuals by circumstances, and by no means all of them compatible with each other.

The conflicting aspirations arising from these changes have already begun to focus on the educational objectives that State primary and secondary schools should be serving in the name of society. The arguments now taking place over what should be taught, how it should be taught, and the attitudes and values that should be fostered, will continue. Unless the economy picks up, and all young people can be assured of the earlier, normal expectation of employment, these arguments will intensify. But the debate will continue even if the economic imperatives are removed: it is fuelled primarily not by concerns about employment but by aspirations to shape the future of New Zealand in the way various bodies of organised opinion would like to see it.

The State system of education will have great difficulty coping with unresolved conflict about educational objectives. State schools are

in an important sense synthetic institutions. They exist to serve purposes in the name of the larger New Zealand community. In the course of the last century, their changing educational mission has been determined on the basis of general public agreement. Where, as in the cases of religion and sex, there was no clear agreement in the larger community, the subject has been excluded from officially prescribed curricula. Clearly, however, the option of exclusion is one that many members of the New Zealand public are having difficulty in accepting. They see the schools as places that cannot be sealed off from other influences on the lives of young people. They believe the schools should pit their influence on the side of right living. But the problem is that the range of views on what it is that constitutes right living is so wide that local communities will have great and continuing difficulty in agreeing on what they mean by right living and how their schools should give practical educational expression to their views.

There are two broad tendencies already evident in the way that the New Zealand community is coping with disagreement and conflict over the objectives of State education. Both of these tendencies are likely to strengthen. It is coming to be acknowledged that, in the context of broadly agreed national guidelines, local communities should be more closely and continuously engaged in consultation about the curriculum to be followed in their schools. This requires new forms of consultative machinery to be created in local school communities. It raises questions of how, when educational objectives are being decided, the public interest, as expressed through local consultative forums, can be related to a long-standing professional responsibility. It also poses large questions of personal competence and professional technique. New Zealanders are not noted for their ability to resolve conflicts in face-to-face situations. If, however, parents and members of local communities are to be given a stake in decisions affecting what will be taught to their children in the local State schools, and if, as seems likely, there is more than one body of local opinion on fundamental questions, then all parties to those local discussions will need to be helped to become skilled in recognising and resolving conflicts of opinion and outlook. This will become a task of adult education and of professional education.

The other tendency is for parents to seek alternatives within the State system or outside it. Some members of the New Zealand community



have traditionally exercised their right to have their children educated in private schools. The Conditional Integration of Private Schools Act, 1975, has changed, in important respects, the relationships that the State is prepared to have with private schools, subject to certain conditions. This Act has come into being primarily to find a way by which the State could bring private schools in the State system and, in doing so, contribute more fully to the costs of schools which maintain a religious affiliation. But the Act is not limited only to schools whose "special character" arises from their religious affiliation. There are other signs that parents, either as individuals or as organised groups, are becoming aware that there could be alternatives to what is available to them for the education of their children at their local school. There has traditionally been a degree of scope, subject to the availability of accommodation, for parents to exercise some choice of State school, particularly of secondary school. My impression is that parents are becoming more aware of differences between schools, a growing number become uneasy if they believe that the school where their children are enrolled is doing a less than satisfactory job, and a small but, I think, growing number, faced with this situation, will actively search for an alternative. Enrolment in a private school, at the parents' expense, is one option. Though not greatly exercised in the past, because of the costs involved and the egalitarian nature of family incomes in this country, we cannot assume that the future will in this respect be like the past. If, as may be happening, family incomes are beginning to spread out, if there are economic groups in the New Zealand society with more disposable incomes, and if, as seems certain, the education of children and young people will continue to be seen to be important by these people, it can be expected that there will be a continuing and perhaps growing number of parents who, if they are dissatisfied with what the local State school has to offer, will have the money to buy an education for their children more to their liking. More likely, however, than this evidence of financial choice, is the possibility of groups of like-minded people exerting their political influence to have the State system changed to provide them with something more to their liking. In New Zealand this has already found expression in the moves to establish alternative schools with the State system. Four Avenues in Christchurch and the Auckland Metropolitan School are two responses to these initiatives. Other moves, less publicised, have resulted in the establishment, within some State

secondary schools, of alternative forms of organisation that are intended to deal more effectively with the educational needs of particular students. In some other countries, the search for alternatives has led to some experimentation with "educational vouchers" in an attempt to give parents greater control over the education of their children. Educational vouchers are, I believe, less a solution than a symptom of the point I am making: in a society where there will be growing diversity in the values that parents will seek to have fostered in the education of their children, and in a society where, because they are themselves better educated, parents will find ways of making common cause to achieve ends that are important to them, we must expect that the State education system will be under continuing pressure to respond flexibly to the diverse aspirations of parent communities and the differing educational needs of children and young people.

There will also be a growing demand for education resulting from self-initiated activity. This will not be a new phenomenon but an intensification of a known one. Participation in educational services is habit forming. The more education people have the more likely are they to value it and seek more of it. The historic tendency for more members of the New Zealand community to have a higher level of education will continue. This will of itself generate further demands for more educational services.

There is a relationship between levels of education and the expectations that people have of controlling their own further educational activities. The higher the level of education, the more does a person expect to participate in the direction of what he himself chooses to learn. As personal levels of education rise, therefore, there will be increasing pressures for approaches to learning that will stress the autonomy of the learner. This will have important implications for educational institutions. Voluntary organisations - associations of like-minded people banded together for some agreed common purpose - will increase and an increasing number of these will encompass educational objectives that relate in some way to the lives of their members. Neighbourhood committees, local art groups, local history societies, environmental protection committees, and a wide range of service clubs are some examples of such voluntary associations. On present indications, these associations will increasingly want to control their educational activities in the interests of their members. They will look less to



existing educational institutions to provide a service and more to their own resources to generate their own educational activities, assisted as required by educational and by other institutions and agencies. There is a slowly-dawning awareness - something that is sensed by people rather than being spelt out - that education is not a neutral, value-free activity. In taking a service from an outside institution, any particular association of people will want to feel assured that what is taught is presented from a standpoint that is consistent with its own. The well-known reluctance of trades unions to take educational services for their members from educational institutions thought to be biased against the aspirations of the trade union movement is one example. We can, I believe, expect more voluntary associations in future to want to encompass, so that they can influence, if not control, the educational activities that will be organised for their members.

Education as an institutionalised public activity will thus become more diffused. Boundaries which used to be clear-cut between schools and other educational institutions, on the one hand, and all the other institutions of society, on the other, will continue to become less clear-cut. Boundaries between education, welfare, recreational and cultural activities are breaking down. Education in some institutionalised form has a part to play in them all. Boundaries between teachers and taught are becoming less clear. Boundaries between the professional province of teachers and others in the community with educational roles to play are becoming confused. These raise three fundamental questions that will during the next 25 years have to be addressed: the form of the organisation and administration of education; the nature of professional activity in education and the relationship of professionals to others in the provision of educational services; and the development of networks of information, advice and guidance in a system that will become more diverse and diffused, allowing the possibility of greater initiative but carrying the danger of massive confusion.

W.L. Renwick

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