

Looking back: Some legacies of the 1877 Education Act - Part 2

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In *Teachers and Curriculum* (2001) we chose to examine the curriculum policies and practices that specifically underpinned the 1877 Education Act. In so doing the overseas influences upon this legislation were noted, and the government's decision to prescribe the primary school curriculum at the national level was analysed. We reported that the great majority of late nineteenth century politicians firmly believed that the 1877 statute would ensure equality of educational opportunity for all the colony's youth, and that it would create a much-needed uniformity in curriculum content. However, it is noteworthy that this legislation related to non-Māori children only. Māori boys and girls were to be "educated" at separate Native (primary) schools, and were expected to study a different, less complex and more practical curriculum therein (McKenzie, Lee, & Lee, 1996, pp. 60-61), in the belief that their special needs would be well provided for through a differentiated schooling system (Openshaw, Lee, & Lee, 1993, pp. 44-49).

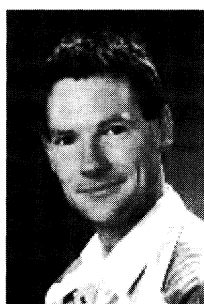
The introduction of the "Regulations Defining Standards of Education" in September 1878 (*New Zealand Gazette [NZG]*, 1878, pp. 1309-1312), coupled with the arrival of the standards examinations from mid-1879, provided the Department of Education with a means by which to gauge the performance of the nation's primary schools in general and the "efficiency" of individual teachers in particular. The results of the schools' annual standards examinations were widely publicised, discussed and compared. A direct examination-curriculum relationship was thus forged, albeit one that was severely criticised by William Habens (1878-1899) and George Hogben (1899-1915) as Inspectors-General of Schools. These officials came to appreciate that mere *instruction* rather than education was likely to result from the relentless pursuit of national primary school examination passes in late nineteenth century New Zealand society.

The Standards Examinations, 1878

There is abundant research evidence to suggest that the high-stakes testing regime introduced post-1878 rapidly exerted a stranglehold over ordinary primary schools (but not the Native schools) (Lee & Lee, 2000, pp. 63-70). As John Ewing has observed, "examination day became in the eyes of the pupils, teachers, and parents a kind of scholastic day of judgement" (1960, p. 101). The examination performance of pupils and schools became so important, both locally and nationally, that all classroom activity was directed toward pupils (and teachers) achieving as many passes as possible in the various standards examinations (*Appendices to the Journals of the House of Representatives [AJHR]*, E-1B, 1882, p. 16). This realisation led William Hodgson, a Nelson and Marlborough school inspector, to lament as early as 1882 that

The undoubting faith with which the majority of mankind will bow down before an idol of their own setting-up is simply astounding. The figures of an Inspector [the examination results] ... are almost universally accepted as though they gave a mathematical demonstration of the exact status of any given school (*AJHR*, E-1B, 1882, p. 16).

Within five years of their introduction the standards examination regulations had resulted in mechanical, highly prescriptive, formal teaching and learning methods that emphasised rote learning, supported, in many instances, by a harsh corporal punishment regime. Predictably, teachers and inspectors paid little attention to the wide range of individual differences in pupils' aptitudes, interests, and enthusiasm. The poor quality of many primary school teachers in the immediate post-1877 era, many of whom were untrained and ill-educated, was an additional complication (Ewing, 1960, pp. 87-110; Ewing, 1970, pp.47-62). It was thus understandable that such teachers



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would not challenge the public expectation that they should adhere closely to the various examination requirements, as a way of not only masking their own professional inadequacy but also assisting their career prospects. A typical nineteenth century primary school classroom, Ewing concluded, was a place “where both teacher and pupils were coarsened by the drive for artificial standards” (1960, p.107).

Two questions arise at this stage: what brought about the “drive” for examination results, and why were the standards deemed “artificial”? As this article makes clear, the answer to these questions necessarily involves a detailed analysis of the relationship between school qualifications, efficient “education” (instruction), “good teaching”, and enhanced personal, social, and vocational mobility for suitably qualified primary school leavers. Further analysis also reveals that this connection proved difficult, if not impossible, to sever once the primary school curriculum and the standards examinations became intertwined from 1879. Thereafter, it was highly improbable that one could exist independently of the other.

Indeed, so strong was this relationship that nearly 60 years were to elapse before the individual standard pass was eliminated entirely from primary schools, with the abolition of the Proficiency (Standard VI) examination in October 1936, effective from September 1937 (Ewing, 1960, pp.105, 110; Lee & Lee, 2000, pp.70-72). “Individual standard passes” referred to the situation whereby pupils passed examination subjects as individuals, not as a class or group (Lee & Lee, 2000, pp.67-72). In the intervening period, criticism of the stultifying effect of the standards examinations on the primary school curriculum, and on the learning and teaching that occurred within the nation’s classrooms, continued to be voiced in several quarters.

Examinations versus education

When Ewing labelled the standards “artificial” he was referring to their widespread utilisation as hard and fast, immutable measures of students’ actual “ability”, much as Hodgson had perceptively observed nearly 80 years earlier. They were also *artificial* in that the standards examinations were human constructs, whose authors had failed to consider “the realities of what could be achieved” (Ewing, 1960, p.109) in primary school classrooms staffed by inexperienced, occasionally incompetent, pupil teachers who frequently were confronted with a wide range of curriculum subjects, detailed subject prescriptions, and steadily increasing numbers of restless, easily distracted youth who now were required to attend school compulsorily (Ewing, 1960, pp.87-110; Ewing, 1970, pp.15-86; Lee & Lee, 2000, pp.65-69). The quantitative expansion of the New Zealand primary schooling system therefore could not be reconciled with qualitative considerations such as promoting children’s individual well-being and developing their aesthetic and emotional sensibilities. Echoing this sentiment Arnold Campbell wrote, with reference to nineteenth century primary schooling:

Far from taking as a starting point the interests and experience of the children themselves, it [the standards regulations] succeeded to an astonishing degree in isolating facts from any human context whatsoever (1941, p.83).

The literature on New Zealand’s educational history leads readers to conclude unequivocally that the “comprehensive and exacting” primary school programme (Campbell, 1941, p.75) severely and constantly taxed the energy, enthusiasm, and capacity of both teachers and pupils (*AJHR*, I-8A, 1930, p.6). The “race for percentages” that followed the introduction of the standards examination regulations in 1878 forced many teachers to “coach” large numbers of pupils nation wide in order to prepare them for these examinations. The situation only began to ease from the mid-1890s when the headmasters were permitted to examine and classify their own pupils for Standards 1 and 2 (1894) and Standards 3 to 5 (1899). However, the all-important Standard 6 Proficiency Examination remained firmly under the control of the education board inspectors (Ewing, 1960, p.105; Lee & Lee, 2000, p.67).

In order to create a positive impression for the visiting, examining inspector the nation’s primary school classrooms and school grounds were tidied and decorated extensively. Once the inspector had calculated the percentage of passes in each standard and had classified the pupils in the various standards for the next school year the results were then published in the local press for community scrutiny (Campbell, 1941, p.86; Ewing, 1970, pp.58-59). However, the practice of publishing such examination results did not pass without criticism. Campbell’s analysis of the pernicious standards examination system led him to declare that “it tended to turn inspectors into educational policemen and to reduce the teacher to the level of the hack examination coach” (1941, p.87).

The inspectors and the standards examinations

From the mid-1880s the primary school inspectors displayed a greater willingness to record their opinions formally (often at length) - complimentary or otherwise - about the standard examinations and the curriculum for their employing authority, the regional education board (Ewing, 1970, pp.10-15, 28-34; Lee & Lee, 2000, pp.64-69). The ever-perceptive Hawkes Bay Inspector, Henry Hill, for example, observed in 1884 that “much of the standard work in the [region’s] schools is prepared on a kind of examination-probability basis”, with the outcome being “great and lasting injury to both teachers and pupils” (*AJHR*, E-1B, 1884, p.8). His Southland and Wanganui counterparts, John Gammell and William Vereker-Bindon, recorded similar misgivings.

Gammell, for his part, was adamant that the great majority of students’ and teachers’ work that he had witnessed in his education district was “most meagre”, “most elementary in character”, and “imperfect in quality” (*AJHR*, E-1B, 1884, p.40). All too often, he noted bitterly, pupils failed the standards examinations because of “inefficient” teachers. The way forward, Gammell declared, lay in acknowledging that “the first essential to success in teaching is to know something, and to know it thoroughly” (p.42). Primary school teachers, he observed, often lacked “industry, energy and enthusiasm”, were ignorant about good teaching methods, and were devoid of

“scholarship” and personal accomplishments (pp.40, 42). Gammell posed the following rhetorical question: “we have got school buildings and school teachers: have we got education?” (p.40). The answer was obvious, he maintained, because the teachers themselves were seldom surprised or distressed when an inspector recorded “an almost unbroken series of failures on the part of the scholars” (p.40) in the various standards examinations. Gammell’s overarching assessment of the nation’s primary school system was that the “elaborate educational machinery” (p.40) erected between 1877 and 1879 was seriously deficient.

The following year, Vereker-Bindon, a newly-appointed inspector, recorded identical views and concerns when he observed that the standards examinations exerted their influence “in all subjects, all standards, and the majority of schools” (*AJHR*, E-1B, 1885, p.12). Pupils were encouraged by teachers to memorise material rather than to analyse and comprehend it. According to Vereker-Bindon, pupils were simply “forced like so many hot-house plants” (p.12) to regurgitate answers for examination purposes. Significantly, when pupils failed their annual examinations, the inspectors promptly identified the teachers’ lack of knowledge of the syllabus rather than the pupils’ stupidity or laziness as being the chief cause of their failure (p.7. See also *AJHR*, E-1 B, 1886, pp.12-18).

Remarks such as these became commonplace within a decade of the introduction of the 1877 Education Act and the 1878 standards regulations. The widespread publication of examination results in the press and official publications such as the *Appendices to the Journals of the House of Representatives* (*AJHR*) and the *New Zealand Official Yearbook* led successive Ministers of Education and the Inspector-General of Schools (Habens) to conclude that, generally speaking, the primary school curriculum was being delivered reasonably efficiently nationwide, and that the government was exercising due restraint in its expenditure on education. The fact remained, however, that there were serious underlying problems with the examination system that had been inserted so enthusiastically into the nation’s primary schools (McKenzie, 1975, pp.94-99).

Teachers and the standards examinations

The school inspectors had maintained that the great majority of teachers were ill equipped personally and professionally to cope with what they viewed as being unnecessarily onerous curriculum and examination requirements. Nevertheless, the nation’s teachers were required by law to deliver the primary school curriculum and to prepare their pupils for the appropriate examinations. In order to present themselves and their pupils in the most favourable light, many teachers began to “retard” those pupils whom they suspected would not perform well on examination day (Ewing, 1970, pp. 15-18; Lee & Lee, 2000, p. 68). Such pupils were not presented as candidates for the standards examinations in the belief that their impending disastrous performance would diminish a given school’s percentage of passes and thus threaten its status.

The inspectors were quick to recognise the growing tendency for young children to remain in the preparatory classes rather than being advanced through the standards. They made particular note of the fact that many boys and girls were deliberately being withheld from entering for the Standard 1 examination, although many had been at school for two or more years (Ewing, 1970, p.16; Lee & Lee, 2000, p.68). Given that “age promotion” was *not* a feature of the standards examination regulations, the cumulative effect of pupil retardation was that children left primary school at 13 years (under the 1877 Education Act and the 1894 School Attendance Act) or 14 years (under the 1901 School Attendance Act), having not passed any of the senior (Standards 4, 5 and 6) examinations (McKenzie, Lee, & Lee, 1996, pp.44-65). In short, pupils were not promoted through successive standards and examinations in the way that Habens in particular had anticipated they would (Ewing, 1970, pp.14-22).

The remedy, for Habens, lay in legislative intervention. In 1884, 1885, and 1891 the Inspector-General of Schools gazetted a series of regulations that amended the 1878 standards examination requirements. The outcome was that from 1884 *all* primary school pupils had to be examined, including those children who had not yet passed Standard 1. Furthermore, every child who passed a standard had to be presented for the next standard examination the following year (Ewing, 1970, pp.17-18). Ewing noted that the 1884-1885 regulations “activated the whole [primary] school” (1970, p.17), such that pupils tended not to linger in the junior standards and primers, although pupil retardation was not eliminated altogether. In an attempt to reduce pupil absenteeism on examination day, for the reasons outlined above, the 1885 regulations required inspectors to record pass rates based on the total school roll, rather than the number of candidates formally being examined (Ewing, 1970, p.17).

Nevertheless, it quickly became evident that the new policy could do little to change the reality that because the inspectors were employed by the boards of education and not the central Wellington-based Department of Education (prior to the 1914 Education Act), distinct, regional variations persisted regarding how they administered the regulations nationwide. Ewing described the situation thus: “the teachers discovered that the inspectors tempered the wind in different ways according to their dispositions” (1970, p.19). Consequently, in 1885, the New Zealand Educational Institute (NZEI) proposed that a solution to this problem lay with the creation of a centralised inspectorate. This reform, the Institute confidently predicted, would ensure greater uniformity and reliability in inspectorial judgement about the curriculum, examinations, and pupil classification (Ewing, 1970, pp.19-20; Roth, 1952, pp. 39-41).

Robert Stout and primary schooling

The NZEI also suggested that if certain, albeit minor, changes to the standards prescriptions were made, along with more subjects being examined on a “class” (whole group) rather than “individual” pupil basis, then primary teachers’ working lives (and, presumably, those of their charges) would become more satisfying and less stressful (Ewing, 1970, pp.19-20). Robert Stout, Minister of Education (1885-1887), listened attentively to the teachers’ concerns, arguably more so than

did Habens. Stout was adamant that regional variations in pupils' examination performance arose as a direct result of each inspector's "idiosyncrasy in the mode of performing his duties" (1886, p.18) coupled with the fact that no direct central control could be exerted legally over the work of the inspectors. To this end he warned the public (and fellow politicians) that the vagaries of the current system of inspection and examination meant that it was impossible to conclude that "a better [standard of] education is given in some districts rather than others" (p.18). Having outlined his position so unequivocally, Stout remained implacably opposed to making the inspectors Department of Education rather than education board employees, for the reason that the latter's "functions and responsibilities" (p.18) ought not to be diminished. The difficulty, however, that Stout readily acknowledged was that in the absence of inspectorial uniformity in examining practice it was "impossible to ascertain exactly, for purposes of comparison, the results of teaching in the various educational districts" (p.18).

Of special significance was Stout's insistence that the standards examinations had seriously hampered teachers' "individuality" (p.19). The Minister was particularly keen to prevent the primary school system from becoming dominated by "routine" and "cram" (p.18), and consequently advocated greater teacher freedom to deliver the curriculum. Stout's own observations had led him to conclude that "a mode of teaching congenial to the views of the inspectors" (p.18) was an all too familiar practice, although he fully expected "the cry of over-pressure" (p.5) on pupils to soon be mitigated by the recently amended (1886) standards regulations. These regulations had introduced Drawing as a new offering, changed Geography from an individual pass to a class subject in Standards 2 and 4, and converted History into a class subject (p.5. See also Ewing, 1970, p.24). Geography, however, remained an individual pass subject in Standards 3, 5, and 6. The new regulations also introduced three subject categories: "pass", "class", and "additional" subjects (Ewing, 1970, p. 24; *NZG*, 1886, pp.772-776), largely in response to the special organisational difficulties teachers encountered in the numerous "smaller country schools" (Stout, 1886, p.5) that dominated New Zealand's landscape. Teachers in these schools were inevitably required to prepare, in the one classroom, pupils for a wide range of standards examinations.

Habens and Hogben

The period 1885-1900 coincided with a succession of mostly minor, occasionally significant, changes being made to the primary school curriculum and the standards examinations. Furthermore, all of this occurred during a period of remarkable roll growth – 65,000 pupils enrolled in New Zealand primary schools in 1878 and that number had doubled by 1900 (Ewing, 1970, p.46). During this era fiscal and educational "efficiency" assumed special prominence, owing to the 1880-1895 economic depression (Butchers, 1932, pp.79-80). There was, for example, growing support among inspectors for education boards to be abolished and for the Department of Education to become their employer (*AJHR*, I-8, 1887, pp. 27-29; Ewing, 1970, p.31). On this issue (and others) the inspectors were joined by George Hogben, then President of the NZEI and one of three inspectors for the North Canterbury education district (Cumming & Cumming, 1978, p.140; Roth, 1952, pp.40-41). Hogben later became Inspector General of Schools in April 1899 following Habens' death. Nonetheless, a decade or so earlier, he had consistently criticised the "somewhat too bookish effect of much of the ...[primary school] syllabus" (*AJHR*, E-1B, 1889, p.45). The necessary syllabus amendments, Hogben opined, ought to be undertaken *after* consultation between the inspectors and the Inspector General of Schools had occurred; preferably at a formal, national conference of inspectors (p.45).

Syllabus reform under Hogben

Hogben was adamant that any syllabus revision process should lead to significant improvements in the overall quality of primary schooling. In 1884 he had urged legislative reform so as to liberate primary school teachers from the existing, overly prescriptive standards examination requirements. Were this reform to be put in

place Hogben envisaged that pupils' general intelligence, rather than their memory, would then be developed properly (Cumming & Cumming, 1978, p.140; Roth, 1952, pp.38-39). However, such a transition proved remarkably difficult to achieve, as Hogben was later to discover.

In the meantime the publication in 1888 of the Royal Commission (Cross) report on English and Welsh elementary schooling attracted considerable interest among New Zealand educators (Ewing, 1970, pp.34-40). Having recommended that significant changes be made to schooling practices, a Code of Regulations for Elementary Schools subsequently was issued in 1890 which broadened the existing curriculum and de-emphasised (but not eliminated) the role of external examinations (Cumming & Cumming, 1978, p.125; Ewing, 1970, p.35). Teachers in England and Wales were not only given greater authority to classify their own pupils based on the latter's accomplishments and aptitudes but also were encouraged to adjust the (extensive) curriculum to suit their school's physical location and their pupils' perceived abilities.

The New Zealand response was both simple and swift – the legislature amended the standards regulations on 12 October 1891 to permit head teachers to classify pupils in different classes according to their perceived ability and to group them where necessary (*NZG*, 1891, pp.1121-1134). Unlike the English Code, however, the standards examinations were not amended (Cumming & Cumming, 1978, pp.130-132; Ewing, 1970, p.38). Instead, Habens opted to inform teachers, via the regulations, that the existing examinations should be viewed positively by both teachers and pupils. To this end he wrote:

[Pupils] should be made to feel and understand that the inspector is not a severe and frowning critic bent on probing their ignorance and finding opportunity to put them to shame, but that he comes as a courteous and gentle friend, who will use his best skill to put them at their ease, and will invite them to give him proof of their diligence and let him see what progress they are making (*NZG*, 1891, p. 1121).

More importantly, perhaps, Habens observed an added dimension to the standards examinations - they could assist in the development of children's morality and character:

...[O]n examination day [boys and girls] should be taught to despise all showy tricks and arts of evasion, to show themselves frank and simple, and to avoid everything that is not in accordance with the strictest principles of honour.(NZG, 1891, p.1121).

Such declarations attest to Habens' reluctance, if not inability, to fully comprehend the inspectors' frequent criticisms, recorded for at least a decade, about the negative effect of the standards examinations on teaching and learning in New Zealand primary schools. This was hardly surprising, given Habens' steadfast refusal to convene a national conference of inspectors on the grounds that the inspectors might lobby collectively for more responsibility and power, thereby diminishing his own authority and control and the power of the central Department of Education (Ewing, 1970, p.42).

The first Conference of Inspectors, 1894

In February 1894 the nation's inspectors finally met together in Wellington (*AJHR*, E-1C, 1894), principally as a result of NZEI agitation and Department of Education intervention (Ewing, 1970, p.40). The 21 inspectors present recommended that head teachers be permitted to examine pupils in Standards 1 and 2, and that a code of instructions from the Minister of Education be developed to secure greater uniformity in inspectors' assessment of school work (Ewing, 1970, p.41). But the quest for uniformity in assessment practices, based on the observation that "grave disadvantages attend the existing system of testing the work of our schools mainly by means of standard passes" (*AJHR*, E-1C, 1894, p.19), did not persuade the inspectors that the standards examination system ought to be dispensed with altogether (pp. 4-5, 21-22). At this juncture, their overriding concern was to see "approximate uniformity of examination" (*AJHR*, E-1C, 1894, p.22) become the norm (Ewing, 1970, p.42; McKenzie, 1983, pp.24-25).

New regulations

Four months later (in June 1894), having carefully studied the recommendations of the 1894 Conference of Inspectors, the government introduced amended regulations that allowed head teachers to examine Standard 1 and 2 classes (*NZG*, 1894, p. 945). Although this legislative reform was significant for it signalled the Seddon government's recognition that teachers had the capacity to assess their own pupils' progress in the junior levels of primary schools, the fact remained that the teachers were not yet entrusted with the more important senior examinations. Five years later, on 16 December 1899, the inspectors finally relinquished control over the Standard 3-5 examinations (Lee & Lee, 2000, p.67; *NZG*, 1899, pp.2302-2314). This legislation, introduced during Hogben's first year as Inspector-General of Schools, took effect from 1 January 1900. Thereafter, the head teachers were authorised to examine pupils in all of the standards with the notable exception of the Standard 6 Proficiency Certificate classes.

Standard 6 Proficiency Examination under scrutiny

Notwithstanding these reforms, criticism of the illiberal effect of the standards examinations, particularly the Standard 6 Proficiency Examination, showed little sign of abating. Thirty years after the 1899 regulations had been implemented, the Bodkin Committee report concluded that the retention of the only external (Proficiency) examination had had an unfortunate outcome:

[It] became in its own turn the public criterion of the teachers' success or failure, and so came to dominate the elementary-school system in exactly the same way as the Matriculation Examination of the New Zealand University dominated the secondary schools (*AJHR*, I-8A, 1930, p.6).

Four years prior to the 1899 regulations Mark Cohen, the Chairman of the Otago Education Board (OEB), had vehemently criticised the standards examinations and urged their immediate abolition (Lee & Lee, 2000, p.82). At the same time the Otago Inspectors had stated that they also wished to see an end to the "mischievous" (p.82) system of individual examination passes. Their employer, the OEB, reached an identical conclusion. By 1899 the Board was calling for both the abolition of "the system of individual passes" in the standards examinations and "the system of standards" (p.82). Later that year a national Conference of Education Boards unanimously endorsed the OEB resolution (p.82). Clearly, by the close of the nineteenth century, there was deep and growing dissent over the retention of standards examinations in New Zealand primary schools.

The decision to retain the Standard 6 examination as the only external examination under full inspectorial control meant that Hogben's faith in primary teachers' professional competence was not unconditional. In short, the inspectors lost none of their former powers under the 1899 regulations for they still were able to audit teachers' and pupils' work at all levels of the primary school. For example, they had the authority to override head teachers' judgements by re-examining every pupil in a school at each and every standard, and reclassifying them according to their examination results if they suspected that a teacher's assessment was somehow suspect (*AJHR*, 1900, E-1, pp. ix-x; Ewing, 1970, p.96).

Ewing concluded that although the new regulations produced some gains for teachers, the powers retained by the inspectors ensured that the gains remained "largely illusory" (1970, p.97). In any event, Hogben sincerely believed that the inspectors' attitudes would determine the success or otherwise of the new regulations. He urged them to adopt a less formal approach to their work than that exhibited previously:

[T]he work of an inspector will be qualitative rather than quantitative: he will influence the character of the teaching instead of attempting to measure the amount of knowledge possessed by each individual child (Campbell, 1941, p.93).

Although the new Inspector-General had sought to create an "atmosphere of liberty" in which "true teaching [could] thrive" (*AJHR*, E-1, 1900, p.ix), there is abundant evidence to suggest that Hogben

fully appreciated that his 1899 regulations represented a compromise between the pragmatic and the ideal (Ewing, 1970, p.97; Openshaw, Lee, & Lee, 1993, p. 99; Roth, 1952, p87). The overarching reality was that well trained and well educated teachers were needed urgently (Cumming & Cumming, 1978, p. 134), to facilitate Hogben's vision of a new, allegedly more "flexible", approach to syllabus design and delivery (Ewing, 1970, pp.91-99; Openshaw, Lee, & Lee, 1993, pp.99-100).

Hogben and examinations

Hogben clearly understood that the nature and scope of New Zealand's primary schooling had been shaped by the presence of the standards examinations. It will be recalled that prior to becoming Inspector-General of Schools, Hogben was on record as being a staunch critic of the negative effects of external, written examinations upon teaching and learning (Openshaw, Lee, & Lee, 1993, p.97; Roth, 1952, pp.38-40, 63). In 1898, whilst Headmaster of the Timaru High School, for instance, he had declared that "every examination from without interferes to a certain extent with education" (Hogben, 1898). In the process of contrasting "education" with "instruction" - and concluding that *education* developed one's "faculty and power" whereas *instruction* involved merely "the imparting of knowledge" - Hogben wrote:

the best results can be got in a school only by allowing to the principal full liberty in the matter of text-books, organisation, and methods. The principal can allow that same liberty to individual teachers so far as is consistent with the proper conduct of the several classes (Hogben, 1898).

These comments were interpreted by inspectors and teachers as signalling the direction in which Hogben was seeking to steer primary and post primary schooling when he succeeded Habens as Inspector-General of Schools. This is scarcely surprising because Hogben had chosen to consult widely with the education boards, primary school committees, the NZEI and inspectors *prior* to and *after* the release of the 1899 regulations (Ewing, 1970, pp.93-97; Roth, 1952, pp.87, 100), thereby making his views known. Hogben was alert to the "new education" philosophy that was gaining momentum in the late nineteenth century in English-speaking countries (Ewing, 1970, pp.87-91), and was unapologetic in wishing to introduce several aspects of it into New Zealand primary (and post primary) schools. The new philosophy's emphasis on child-centred learning and teaching, linked to physical activity, practical work (including manual and technical arts and crafts), "realistic" and "creative" educational endeavour based on pupils' interests and aptitudes, and building closer home-school relationships, had immense appeal to Hogben (*AJHR*, E-1, 1899, pp.xvii-xviii; Ewing, 1970, pp.91-102; Roth, 1952, p. 88).

The Conference of Inspectors, 1901

Ewing has argued that "of all the problems that faced Hogben, curriculum revision was one of the most pressing" (1970, p. 93). Our own research also amply demonstrates that Hogben's curriculum "reform" activity proved highly contentious (McKenzie, Lee, & Lee, 1996, pp.118-120, 180-191; Openshaw, Lee, & Lee, 1993, pp.96-119). Nevertheless, Hogben clearly wanted to minimise the potential for misunderstandings to arise between teachers, inspectors, and himself. Accordingly, his opening address to the 1901 Conference of Inspectors left all attendees in no doubt about his intentions (Ewing, 1970, pp.97-99). Hogben wanted to abolish the individual standard pass and the standard certificate for all but Standard 6 (*AJHR*, E-1C, 1901, pp.2,4) - a recommendation that had the full backing of the NZEI (p.4) - and sought the inspectors' approval for this revision. This was granted (p.7).

The inspectors agreed that there should be a reduction in the number of subjects for rural schools, a division of the syllabus into two categories (compulsory and optional subjects), and the addition to Geography of nature study and observation related to the school's district (*AJHR*, E-1C, 1901, pp.5,7,12-13). Other, significant, recommendations were also recorded. The inspectors favoured the creation of a centralised inspectorate, an increase in the age of exemption from compulsory school attendance from 13 to 14 years, the

introduction of legislation to establish uniform staffing of schools nationwide, and the establishment of a colonial teachers' salary scale (Ewing, 1970, p.98).

Hogben acted promptly on these recommendations. For example, later that year (in October 1901) the Public-School Teachers' Salaries Act was passed. This statute established a national scale of salaries and staffing, and cemented into place a framework to make primary teaching a more desirable career choice. The Act gave the Department of Education greater power to make regulations, thereby reducing the authority of education boards (Butchers, 1932, p.115). Furthermore, Hogben had hoped that the 1901 legislation and subsequent intervention (e.g., the Teachers Superannuation Bill of 1902) would make it easier for teaching to be regarded more widely as an established and recognised profession. He envisaged that teachers' colleges would play a larger role in preparing future primary teachers and in enhancing the status of the vocation (*AJHR*, E-1C, 1904, p. 4; Butchers, 1932, pp.141-142). To this end Hogben reopened the Auckland and Wellington teachers' training colleges in 1906 (they had been closed in 1887), and reorganised the existing colleges in Christchurch and Dunedin (*AJHR*, I-8A, 1930, p.8; Cumming & Cumming, 1978, p.162; Roth, 1952, p.104). For nearly 20 years teacher training had been conducted mainly through the Dunedin college (*AJHR*, I-8A, 1930, p.8; Butchers, 1932, p.141), but it had been unable to cope with increasing enrolments as a consequence of greater pupil retention at primary school (Cumming & Cumming, 1978, p.134).

Hogben's legislation

From 1901 Hogben had set himself the daunting and time-consuming task of drafting a revised primary syllabus (McKenzie, 1983, pp.25-28). However, progress was delayed largely because of Hogben's extensive involvement in producing legislation governing national salary scales and staffing schedules (*AJHR*, E-1C, 1904, p.3), and the work associated with creating "free places" in the nation's district high and secondary schools (*AJHR*, E-12, 1901, pp.6-7; *AJHR*, E-1C, 1904, p.3; Ewing, 1970, p.99; Roth, 1952, pp.97-102, 112-118). In the intervening period speculation

mounted about the form and direction that the eagerly awaited syllabus would take. By early 1903 "a certain impatience" (Ewing, 1970, p.103) was readily apparent among primary teachers and inspectors especially, to the extent that in September the Minister of Education (Seddon) was requested to distribute the syllabus as a matter of urgency (*New Zealand Parliamentary Debates [NZPD]*, 1903, p.556).

Finally, in October 1903, Hogben presented his draft syllabus to the House of Representatives' Education Committee who authorised its immediate distribution to inspectors and primary teachers (Cumming & Cumming, 1978, p.154; Ewing, 1970, p.104; Roth, 1952, p.101). The syllabus, in booklet form, spanned 56 pages (Ewing, 1970, p.104), and was promptly labelled a complex, overly demanding document (Cumming & Cumming, 1978, p.155; Ewing, 1970, pp.104,108-113). Although intended to be operational from 1 January 1904 (*NZG*, 1904, pp.265-304), the "outcry of violent criticism" (Roth, 1952, p.101) by teachers and inspectors against the new syllabus persuaded Hogben to discuss it at length at a forthcoming (triennial) inspectors' conference (Ewing, 1970, p.111).

At that conference early in February 1904, Hogben responded to a variety of concerns. Critics alleged that the syllabus was unduly influenced by Hogben's own liking for mathematics, science, "natural" language teaching, and practical work; that it was unnecessarily comprehensive; and that it would overload teachers who were acknowledged to be struggling to meet the existing syllabus requirements (Ewing, 1970, pp.107, 109; Roth, 1952, p. 101). The Inspector-General of Schools told the inspectors that his syllabus was underpinned by the following educational philosophy:

The important point - and on this too much stress cannot be laid - is not the amount or number of things that are taught, but the spirit, character, and method of the teaching in relation to its purpose of developing the child's powers.... We believe that the "new education", as it is called, will make not only better workmen and better scholars, but better men and better citizens than the old education ever could produce (*AJHR*, E-1C, 1904, p.2).

Moreover, Hogben left the inspectors in no doubt that he personally viewed the new syllabus requirements as being both reasonable and manageable. Teachers in small schools, he reasoned, could deliver the syllabus effectively if it was interpreted properly, if they made linkages between the different subjects, and were willing to explore the greater freedom that the new syllabus ostensibly allowed (Ewing, 1970, p.112. See also *AJHR*, E-1, 1904, p.xiv).

Despite some inspectors' reservations there was firm support for Hogben's syllabus (Roth, 1952, p.102). Nevertheless, Hogben chose to make numerous amendments based on their reactions and that of the NZEI Executive, the latter having met in January 1904 (Ewing, 1970, pp.111-113). Three months later modified regulations were gazetted to take effect from 1 January 1905 (*NZG*, 1904, pp.1055-1095). Richard Seddon, the Minister of Education, warmly endorsed Hogben's work (*AJHR*, E-1C, 1904, p.5). In his annual report of 1904, Seddon wrote that "There is every hope that in future the New Zealand teacher will be less of an "informationist" and more of an educationist" (*AJHR*, E-1, 1904, p.xv). Hogben was similarly optimistic, having observed that teachers' willingness to support a "new" approach to primary teaching would determine the success or otherwise of the new syllabus (*AJHR*, E-1C, 1904, p.2). He concluded that "To the best teachers it [the 1904 syllabus] is evolution. To the others it is a sudden and complete revolution" (Cumming & Cumming, 1978, p.159).

Towards a new definition of "education"?

Approval from overseas educators helped to convince Hogben that he was proceeding along the correct educational path. Following his visit to New Zealand in 1904, the Director of Education for Victoria, Australia, Frank Tate, was especially complimentary about Hogben's work:

The New Zealand syllabus ... is permeated with the best of modern educational thought. There is throughout an attempt to import reality into school-work, to bring the teaching into closer contact with the outdoor life of the pupils, to throw overboard merely conventional information in favour of what will be genuinely interesting and serviceable. It demands rational methods by making use of the principle of interest, by cultivating the self-activity of the pupil, by aiming at developing his individuality and generating real mental power. It affords great scope for the immediate application of a knowledge of facts and of the principles underlying them. In a word, it gives a chance to realise a true definition of education (*AJHR*, E-14, 1904, p.10).

Later, local commentators also praised Hogben's new syllabus at length. John Caughley, the Director of Education (1921-1927), referred to "the entirely reformed syllabus" as being "perhaps the most notable milestone in the history of education in New Zealand since the foundation of the National System" (1928, p.39). Soon after, the Bodkin Committee's survey of New Zealand's educational history concluded that "in place of the formality and rigidity of the old system, [under the 1904 syllabus] its basis became one of freedom and adaptability to the realities of life" (*AJHR*, I-8A, 1930, p.7). Finally, in 1941, the Director of the New Zealand Council for Educational Research, Arnold Campbell, recorded the following verdict on Hogben's syllabus: "[it] is rightly considered a landmark in the history of New Zealand education" (p.95).

Nevertheless, as we shall see subsequently, the 1904 syllabus did *not* rapidly transform primary schooling from being regarded by teachers, pupils, and inspectors as generally formal and prescriptive. Formalism had long been a feature of teaching and learning in New Zealand schools and was not about to be abandoned overnight (Campbell, 1941, pp.97-98). The key weakness in Hogben's new scheme lay with the retention of the much-feared external Standard 6 Proficiency Examination (Ewing, 1970, pp.136-140; Openshaw, Lee, & Lee, 1993, pp.192-202). As the ever observant Campbell later surmised, the primary schools "[were] not transformed at once by new regulations and a new syllabus" (1941, p.96). Rather, they continued to function as "formal institutions dominated by a drive for measurable results" (p.96)

owing to the retention of the Proficiency Examination. Indeed, it was only after Proficiency was abolished in September 1937 that the curriculum "liberalisation" that Hogben had valued so highly began to evolve within the nation's primary school classrooms (Openshaw, Lee, & Lee, 1993, pp.192-202).

Finally, the blunt reality, seemingly forgotten in the race to introduce the new syllabus in 1904, is that innovation is always a time-consuming, challenging, and often traumatic process for teachers. Despite his best efforts, Hogben was forced to confront the reality that many teachers simply did not understand the new syllabus requirements and thus were unable to incorporate them into their classroom practice. While partly a consequence of teachers' inadequate training, knowledge, and education, it was also symptomatic of the fundamental incompatibility between the launch of Hogben's less prescriptive "modern" syllabus (Ewing, 1970, pp.116-120) and the maintenance of the external Proficiency Examination, widely regarded as being the hallmark of primary schooling (Openshaw, Lee, & Lee, 1993, pp.194-197). This paradoxical situation effectively militated against the smooth and successful translation of Hogben's syllabus from policy into practice beyond 1904 (Campbell, 1941, p.96; Ewing, 1970, pp.115-150; Roth, 1952, p.102). In point of fact, it undermined the impact of Hogben's syllabus reforms - and, in particular, his schooling philosophy - for the remainder of his tenure as Inspector General of Schools (Openshaw, Lee, & Lee, 1993, pp. 192-202).

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