

An experiment in educational efficiency: The New Zealand junior high and intermediate schooling movement

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Among the vast array of education policies that warrant further study in New Zealand can be found the doctrine of educational efficiency. Although it has yet to be examined comprehensively, this doctrine is of potential interest not only to historians of education but also to other educationists who seek to identify and examine those schooling policies that have captured the imagination of a succession of politicians, Ministers of Education, education officials and several other interest groups. All of these groups, at some stage in our educational history, have actively sought (and still frequently seek) to enhance the efficiency of primary and/or secondary schools, often based on the premise that these institutions must strive constantly to be more market responsive; that is, sensitive to the needs and demands of their respective 'stakeholders'. Their efforts, however, have generally been unsuccessful, representing what Roger Openshaw has labelled as 'unresolved struggles' over what various interest groups have previously regarded to be unproblematic and progressive schooling policies (Openshaw, 1995 :3).

Adherents to the doctrine of educational efficiency have identified the traditional structure of the schooling system as being the principal contributor to 'inefficiency'. They claimed that educational deficiencies can be traced to a schooling system that for too long

made inadequate provision for the educational, social, and vocational needs of an identifiable group of young people, namely, *adolescents*. Such provision was thought essential once greater numbers of students began to enter and remain within the system from early in the twentieth century (Lee, 1992 : 102-3). One 'solution' was to redefine and then reorganise post-primary schooling to enable pupils to complete their primary schooling at the end of Standard IV rather than Standard VI, and to study a modified curriculum in a new environment specially suited to adolescent boys and girls. A more accurate determination of these pupils' needs, interests, and aptitudes was possible, it was assumed, by persuading them to enrol in a new institution, a junior high school (or department). This was preferable to having many Standard VI school leavers enter a technical high or secondary school for a short duration only (Lee and Lee, 1996 : 146-7). Given the reality that secondary schools in particular derived their academic status and community standing from their longer term (examination based) programmes of study, supporters of junior high schooling declared that educational efficiency was not assured by encouraging most if not all Proficiency Certificate holders - those possessing a Standard VI qualification - to enter a secondary school. There was no guarantee, they maintained, that these students would remain at secondary school,



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or a technical high school, for the three or four years school principals deemed necessary for them to derive full benefit from their studies. By comparison, junior high schools (as three year institutions) were perceived as being able to offer special curricula for two broad groupings of adolescents; those who would leave a junior high school to enter either a secondary or technical high school, and those who intended to enter the workforce immediately after leaving their junior high school (Lee and Lee, 1996 : 146-8).

Debate about the 'efficiency' or otherwise of New Zealand schools, evident at least since the introduction of a national system of free, compulsory, and secular primary schooling in 1878, intensified whenever New Zealand experienced an economic depression and during periods of war (Openshaw et al., 1993 : 113-4). Prolonged deliberation took place over 'proper' citizenship instruction, the prospect of 'modernising' schools and their curricula to ensure better student preparation for direct entry to the workforce, and easing the transition from junior high to secondary or technical schools, as part of a wider discussion geared toward enhancing the efficiency of all schools. Efficient schooling, it was thought, would effectively contribute to the stability of New Zealand as a democratic society. According to this argument, each school was to play its part in attaining this objective, which was set alongside growing Ministerial and Department of Education support for differentiating the curriculum offerings of secondary, district high, and technical high schools during World War 1, but with a small, compulsory core curriculum common to all courses of study in place (Lee, 1991 : 93-188; Openshaw et al., 1993 : 113-9). This was, in large part, a response to frequent criticism, emanating from the Inspector-General of Schools, George Hogben and other prominent educationists, junior high schools (as three year institutions) were perceived as being able to offer special curricula

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from as early as 1900, that academic courses dominated secondary schools to the detriment of other programmes that were better suited to what was rapidly becoming a less homogeneous pupil intake. An additional difficulty was that few students, including those enrolled in academic courses, stayed at school for three or more years, an observation which not only added weight to Hogben's advocacy of a curriculum differentiation policy (Openshaw et al., 1993, 100-12) but also to later official agitation for the prompt introduction of the junior high school into the New Zealand schooling system, as a special purpose institution.

The Hanan and Parr years

The Minister of Education in the Mackenzie and National governments (1912-19), Josiah Hanan, shared Hogben's passion for curriculum reform. Hanan was similarly convinced that effective citizenship and efficient schooling ought to be priorities in education policy and practice. He firmly believed that "equal opportunities for all [pupils]" would be secured once greater space was available in all high school curricula for general education studies, via a prescribed common core curriculum (Hanan, 1916 : 4-7).

At this stage a new institution, the junior high school, had not been seriously contemplated. Hanan had simply assumed that efficient schooling was entirely possible within the existing schooling system, but only after careful modification. Underpinning his schooling philosophy was a belief in the existence of "certain common

human possibilities and needs", and a conviction that these had to be catered for, first through a general education curriculum, while individual differences in academic and practical aptitudes could be accommodated within an expanded range of post-primary courses (Hanan, 1916 : 4-7). The association Hanan drew between efficient schooling and the provision of a common core curriculum within a modern, progressive democratic nation was expressed as follows:

There is no justification for giving the good start, the broad vision, to a few and condemning too many to a narrow unenlightened existence. Not all will fully profit by this opportunity, but all will have a right to it; and the opportunity should be held open for a reasonable length of time, even though there are those who seem slow in taking advantage of it (p.4).

This particular conception of efficiency, as we might have expected, was soon to be contested. James Parr, the Massey government's controversial Minister of Education (1920-26), defined efficient post-primary schooling initially in terms of differentiated curricula rather than promoting a comprehensive general education curriculum common to all courses (Openshaw et al., 1993 : 140). Educators and the public alike were soon left in no doubt about Parr's intentions and expectations.

Almost immediately upon assuming office he declared his wish to give pupils "a first class secondary course either in high [secondary] or technical schools", designed to encourage more primary pupils to enter post-primary schools and remain there (Parr, 1920b : 585). Raising the school leaving age from 14 to 15 years by legislation was essential, Parr concluded, if pupils were to leave school "with much more efficient educational equipment" (Parr, 1921a: 4). The second aspect to school reform, Parr believed, was for government to acquire greater centralised control over post-

primary schooling so that institutional curriculum differentiation could then become a reality (McKenzie, 1987 : 4). Unfortunately for the Minister, the school leaving age could not be raised owing to the straitened economic conditions New Zealand faced in its post-war reconstruction (Parr, 1922a : 3). This constraint, nonetheless, did not deter Parr from voicing an opinion about how best to restructure post-primary education.

Despite his support for overhauling and modernising post-primary schooling once war ceased, Parr was not convinced at first that there was much commonality in the educational needs of early-leaving and long-term pupils (Parr, 1920a : 3-4). After acknowledging the financial difficulties which prevented him from raising the school leaving age, Parr then looked at the possibility of introducing pupils to the concept of a junior high school, a new institution which purported to offer “a specially adapted secondary course at an earlier age” (Parr, 1921a : 4). The objects of his concern were the many “insufficiently educated children” who left school early (Parr, 1921a : 10). Like Hanan, Parr maintained that schooling ought to be a “civilising” influence within any democratic country. He was confident that directing pupils toward an institution able to provide both ‘preparatory’ and ‘terminal’ instruction was entirely consistent with this objective. Greater efficiency was guaranteed, according to advocates of junior high schooling, because their ‘graduates’ would enter either technical high or secondary schools based on their performance in the junior school or leave, as the majority would, to enter the workforce (Lee, 1991 : 178-9).

Post-primary schooling reviewed

Parr was well aware that between 1915 and 1920 there had been a steady increase in the proportion of primary school leavers who had gained either a Proficiency (Standard VI) or Competency (a lower grade Stand-

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ard VI) Certificate, and who then proceeded directly to enter high schools (Lee, 1991: 179-80). This knowledge made him more definite about the merits of sorting pupils into discrete groups, based on the premise that efficient schooling ought to involve directing students to different courses suited to their perceived intellectual and practical (manual and technical) abilities (McKenzie, 1988 : 82-3). Furthermore, Parr concluded that only a small proportion of successful candidates in the Proficiency Examination would derive any benefit from studying an academic curriculum.

The Chief Inspector of Primary Schools, Theophilus Strong, agreed with his Minister. Strong maintained that the success of the New Zealand schooling system depended upon

...evolving some system by which pupils will be classified more in accordance with the level of their intelligence, and by which neither the bright pupil will be retarded nor the dull pupil discouraged (Strong, 1921: ii-iii).

The Chief Inspector’s main criticism of post-primary schools was that they took minimal account of both the wide variations in pupils’ “mental and physical calibre” and their likely employment. Parr and Strong both agreed that curriculum differentiation was essential for better pupil classification, but reluctantly conceded that the secondary departments of the district (rural) high schools presented a major obstacle to their thinking (Strong, 1921 : 111). As Lee and Lee (1997 : 186-95) and McKenzie et al. (1996 : 115-32) have shown, education officials expected these institutions to provide several courses at a time when most if not all communities

demanded that their schools emphasise academic instruction. In the case of district high schools, therefore, Parr and Strong came to understand that attempting to introduce a rigid curriculum differentiation policy was destined not to succeed.

An additional complication for the Minister and the Chief Inspector was the fact that the post-primary schooling market was a *voluntary* one. In other words, pupil attendance at technical high, district high (secondary departments) and secondary schools was not compulsory because the 1901 School Attendance Act specified 14 years of age as the school leaving age. This provision remained unchanged until 1944 (McKenzie et al., 1996 : 56). Parr and Strong were highly critical of the poor pupil retention rate evident in the majority of New Zealand high schools. Between 1920 and 1930, for example, the average length of stay for all pupils attending secondary schools was 2.7 years. By comparison, pupils who attended the secondary departments of district high schools stayed an average of only 2.1 years (Openshaw et al., 1993 : 142). Of concern, too, was the realisation that a substantial proportion of pupils left high schools during the tenure of their junior free places, that is, in either their Form 3 or Form 4 year, although a greater proportion of pupils were moving into the senior secondary school as a consequence of the deepening worldwide economic depression (Lee, 1991 : 189-96). Parr reasoned that once New Zealanders were told about the benefits of directing students in to alternative courses of instruction, in response to the “new army of pupils who were crowded into the high schools”, then efficiency could be enhanced because there would be popular support for making schooling more vocational (Parr, 1924 : 5).

Parr and junior high schools

With efficiency considerations to the fore, Parr sought independent ‘evidence’ to back the introduction of junior high schools into New Zealand. This was provided by two

reports presented to Parliament in 1921; by Frank Milner in October and Thomas Wells one month later. Both Milner and Wells examined the junior high schooling movement overseas - Milner inspected these institutions in the United States of America, and Wells reported on them both in the USA and Canada. Milner, the highly acclaimed Rector of Waitaki Boys' High School (Oamaru), confidently predicted that with these schools in place not only would "economic, civic and domestic efficiency" be improved but also "liberal and vocational studies" could then be incorporated into a compulsory core curriculum (Milner, 1921 : 3-4). The diagnosis of pupils' particular interests and aptitudes via intelligence testing, according to Milner, ought to determine their selection into one of

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five prescribed courses: Agricultural, Commercial, Domestic Science, Industrial-Mechanical, and Professional (Milner, 1921 : 3-7).

Wells' report was similarly complimentary of junior high schools in a North American setting. "The claims made on their behalf were fully justified", he wrote, because they targeted an adolescent audience, provided several vocationally-oriented ("shop") courses, and usefully "bridged the gap" between primary and post-primary schools (Wells, 1921 : 5, 7). In Wells' opinion these schools were more efficient than primary institutions simply because their curriculum allowed them "[to] provide better educational opportunity for a very large number of children" (Wells, 1921 : 5). Intelligence tests ("testing for mentality"), Wells also suggested, had a definite role to

play in maximising educational efficiency; they "afford the most satisfactory method of classifying school children...according to ability and individual need" (Wells, 1921 : 12).

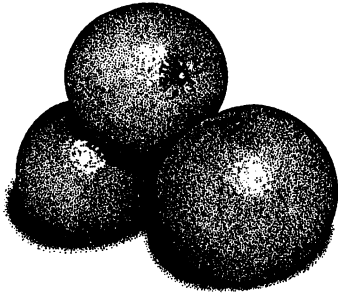
The release of the Milner and Wells reports provided Parr with the justification he needed to promptly legislate for the introduction of junior high schools. With this new institution in place the Minister believed that "a much more useful, well balanced and complete course [of instruction]" would then be possible, one ideally suited to the anticipated educational and vocational needs of children who would otherwise become short-term post-primary school pupils (Parr, 1922a : 30). As we might have expected, the Milner and Wells' recommendation that the allocation of pupils by junior high school teachers to courses not occur without some external, 'objective' validation (Milner, 1921 : 7; Wells, 1921 : 12) met with Parr's full approval. This new 'education science' was heralded as sufficiently accurate an indicator of human ability and potential to warrant the allocation of adolescents to various courses of study, based upon their psychometric test scores (Milner, 1921 : 4).

Parr was delighted to learn of firm support for his cause from high ranking Department of Education officers at a special Departmental Conference on Post-Primary Education held in March 1922 - notably from the Director of Education, John Caughley, the Superintendent of Technical Education, William La Trobe, and Theo Strong - as well as from the General Council of Education in June 1921 (Openshaw et al., 1993 : 142). The Council (an advisory body to the Department of Education) had taken special note of the preparatory role of junior high schools, and accordingly had favoured curriculum continuity between junior high schools and post-primary institutions. Parr was especially pleased to learn that the General Council had also advocated greater Departmental intervention in post-primary schooling (Caughley, 1922 : 5, 24).

Such intervention, the Minister believed, was absolutely necessary if junior high schools and post-primary institutions were to be aligned more closely. Moreover, Parr now appeared willing to accept the Council's recommendation that a compulsory common core curriculum be offered to every post-primary pupil in conjunction with a wide range of optional studies (Caughley, 1922 : 3-24). He thought that the provision of a general education curriculum ought not to discourage post-primary schools from devising a number of courses suited to the wide-ranging vocational and educational aspirations of their students. Parr had in mind the regulations governing junior high schools (1922), which prescribed a core curriculum common to all courses of instruction therein. He hoped that this legislation would also serve as the platform for offering general and pre vocational instruction in *post-primary* schools. With this curriculum philosophy in place, the Minister was confident that educational efficiency would be substantially enhanced (NZG, 1922 : 2389-90).

Criticism of junior high schools

Despite support for junior high schools from several senior education officials, the attitude of secondary school principals toward this new institution was predictably unenthusiastic (Openshaw et al., 1993 : 143). Criticism was directed mainly at the encroachment upon junior forms of secondary schools by the junior high school third form, and the concern that vocational instruction in the latter institutions could be assigned a higher priority than general or 'cultural' studies. One such critic was James Tibbs, the charismatic but conservative Headmaster of Auckland Grammar School, who quickly gained national prominence as a leading opponent of junior high schools (Caughley, 1922 : 20-1). He feared that the placement of junior high school pupils in discrete courses would occur at too early a stage in their



school career. Tibbs warned those educators present at the 1922 Education Department Conference that

Junior high school pupils in New Zealand will be run into the school machine as oranges into a sorter, the little ones dropping out through the proper hole into shop or office, the bigger ones rolling on till they tumble into college (Caughley, 1922 : 21).

Educational efficiency, he concluded, was *not improved* simply by inserting these new schools into the New Zealand education system, as Parr had assumed. Tibbs' clear preference was for a policy of delayed specialisation that was thought to be more effective in educating a young citizenry profitably for their future work and leisure. In this respect he suggested that New Zealand educators take careful note of British political debate about the undesirable consequences of promoting early specialisation within schools:

The British Labour Party recognises that such schools, in which the destiny of each child is fixed at an early age, denies to the majority the chance of becoming competent business or professional men, or captains of industry, and does not even produce broad-minded ordinary citizens (Caughley, 1922 : 21).

Tibbs' intention, in criticising junior high schools, was to present *secondary schools* as being the only institutions capable of offering their pupils "the benefit of humanistic teaching on the broadest possible basis" (Caughley, 1922 : 21). Mary Gibson, Principal of Christchurch Girls' High School, fully concurred

with her Auckland colleague. She had also considered the adverse effect of these institutions upon her school, and was especially worried by the prospect that junior high schools would operate in too many cases as terminal rather than preparatory institutions. Gibson understandably wanted her school to survive, indeed prosper, in what had become a highly competitive market place (Caughley, 1922 : 13-4). Support for her stance was readily discernible among secondary school governing authorities, who insisted that their schools' survival prospects would be seriously undermined if junior high school principals failed to ensure that their supplementary courses were fully compatible with existing offerings at post-primary schools (Thompson, 1922). If not, then teachers in the latter institutions would have to modify their curricula substantially. Not surprisingly, these high school boards sought to stress the role of junior high schools as 'feeders' to secondary schools, in preference to having them function predominantly as terminal institutions (NZSSBA, 1922).

Secondary school authorities perceived themselves to be under close public and Ministerial scrutiny throughout the 1920s (Condliffe, 1930 : 451). This was attributable not only to the arrival of junior high schools but also to Parr's frequent proclamations about 'reforming' secondary schools. High school governors wanted to avoid being seen as either hostile or indifferent to curricular reform, particularly with a Minister, notable for his forceful personality, who seized every opportunity to remind educationists and the public that short-stay pupils at secondary schools would gain nothing of "real value" from studying an academic curriculum (Parr, 1921b : 976). Post-primary authorities, as a result, faced the difficult task of trying to persuade Parr that curricular modifications were *already underway*, and that schools no longer put the great majority of their pupils "through the common

[academic] mould" (Parr, 1921b : 976). At the same time, however, Parr's wish to see junior high schools slot neatly and usefully into the existing schooling system had meant, both in regulations and in practice, that these schools could not function almost exclusively in a terminal capacity (NZG, 1922 : 2390; Beeby, 1938 : 13-31). In other words, while junior high schools had to prepare some students to enter industries and commerce directly after leaving school, the public also expected these institutions to educate pupils who would continue their studies at technical high and secondary schools (Parr, 1923 : 4).

General education and efficient schooling

The relationship between junior high schools and post-primary institutions had led more Department of Education officials to view 'general education' as being necessary for all students, largely independent of their perceived academic and practical aptitudes and their likely career destination (Lee, 1991 : 231-2). This was the schooling philosophy that Hanan had articulated, one that was also being promoted nearly a decade later by Frank Tate, the Director of Education in Victoria, Australia. In a 1925 report on New Zealand post-primary education, Tate declared that a general education curriculum was needed in junior high schools to counter the considerable pressure in some quarters for early curriculum specialisation and differentiation (segregation) based on pupils' future vocations. He concluded that "it is undemocratic to put an end too early to the common education that makes for common understanding and social solidarity, as against social stratification" (Tate, 1925 : 33). The Majority Committee of the Syllabus Revision (Lawson) Committee arrived at the same conclusion three years later, confident that such a curriculum "will offer to all [pupils] the same educational opportunities (Lawson, 1928 : 12-5). Efficient schooling, according to these commentators,

was dependent upon having a common core curriculum firmly in place.

In the midst of an economic depression, it is not surprising to discover that education debate focused even more sharply on enhancing school efficiency. The Bodkin Committee in 1930, for example, when considering "educational reorganisation", made a special point of stressing the unique contribution that junior high schools could (and purportedly did) make to the education of adolescent boys and girls. These schools should be fully supported, the Committee urged, because they allegedly bridged "the great chasm" existing between primary and post-primary schools, and improved the retention rate of pupils once they entered post-primary schools (thereby eliminating "wastage") (Bodkin, 1930 : 13, 24). Furthermore, these schools offered differentiated courses of study based upon pupils' perceived needs, capacities, and intended careers (Bodkin, 1930 : 24). The Committee recommended that teachers in these institutions place greater emphasis on exploratory courses which were specially designed to identify and foster pupils' practical and/or academic talents, regardless of whether they were "leavers" or "continuers" (Bodkin, 1930 : 24). Efficiency, in the Committee's view, was impossible to achieve with the "[present] elaborate system of post-primary schools...[which] fails to confer any corresponding benefit upon the children of one-half of their number", because of excessive "leakage" of pupils between primary and post-primary institutions (Bodkin, 1930 : 13).

Notwithstanding clear endorsement of the junior high schooling movement from the Bodkin Committee, there was some recognition that these institutions had been the subject of much controversy. To this end the Committee reported that *...a number of witnesses...more or less emphatically questioned the success and applicability [of junior high schools] to the needs of the*

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Dominion as a whole (Bodkin, 1930 : 14).

But such criticism was promptly dismissed by the Committee because it came from commentators who allegedly had "little, if any, personal knowledge [of junior high schools]", and who revealed, in the Committee's assessment, "a striking amount of misconception as to the true nature and working of these schools (Bodkin, 1930 : 14). By comparison, it was noted that "unanimous and enthusiastic [endorsement]" of junior high schools was forthcoming from those people who were "intimately associated" with them! (Bodkin, 1930 : 14). A comprehensive examination of the contribution of these institutions to the efficiency or otherwise of the New Zealand schooling system, therefore, was effectively stymied by the Bodkin Committee. Consequently, when William Armour, Headmaster of Wellington College, told the Committee that schooling would be made *less efficient* nationally by introducing more junior high schools and relying on those already established than by modifying secondary school curricula in the first instance, such criticism was promptly discounted. But in recommending that secondary schools in particular "widen their courses of instruction and enrich their curriculum to suit the varying needs of pupils" (Bodkin, 1930 : 21), Armour was merely echoing Parr's sentiment that such a reform was central to considerations of schooling efficiency.

Educational efficiency versus institutional autonomy

What the above account points to is the presence of competing perceptions of what counted as 'efficient' schooling, perceptions that were clearly determined by the institutional allegiances of the respective commentators. Each failed to acknowledge publicly, however, that 'efficiency' was not able to be determined with scientific or mathematical exactitude, because of its highly subjective nature. It was not uncommon, therefore, to find politicians and other spokespersons continuing to point to instances where inefficiencies were thought to be present, and making suggestions about how these could be resolved. Reaction was mostly prompt. A significant number of secondary school principals, for example, believed that Ministers of Education and Department of Education officials were determined to exert greater control over post-primary schools, under the familiar rubric of 'improving educational efficiency' (Bodkin, 1930 : 14; Education Gazette, 1929 : 209-10; McKenzie et al., 1990 : 30-1). These heads concluded that such control required an official policy of sustained and deliberate intervention, which had major consequences for their respective institutions, notably in curriculum planning and execution, and possibly pupil selection. Their clear preference was to initiate reform when and where it was thought necessary, without external pressure.

The release of the Bodkin Report in August 1930, it is reasonable to argue, failed to provide much, if any, reassurance to post-primary authorities that the autonomy they did possess - especially administrative autonomy - would remain free from further official scrutiny (Openshaw et al., 1993 : 157-8). Little was said in the report about post-primary curricula, however, other than recording explicit support for having "a common cultural foundation...[upon which] specialised vocational

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courses [ought to be erected]” (Bodkin, 1930 : 147-8). Junior high schools, the Committee concluded, should remain as three year institutions. But the worsening economic depression during the early 1930s leading to the release of the National Economy (Shirtcliffe) Commission Report in March 1932 (which urged immediate and far-reaching financial retrenchment), persuaded the Forbes Coalition government (1931-35) to pass legislation in December 1932 which reduced junior high schools to two year institutions. Efficient education, these politicians concluded, meant cost effective education (Lee and Lee, 1996 : 154).

Several politicians and officials readily accepted the need for financial restraint, in the belief that this would not militate against school reform. The Director of Education (1927-33), Theo Strong, and Robert Masters, Minister of Education (1931-34), can be counted among their number. Renaming the junior high schools ‘intermediates’, they argued, more accurately described their position in a schooling system within which an increasing proportion of students were entering either a secondary or a technical high school (Strong, 1927 : 48). Masters and Strong expected that intermediates would

eliminate the tendency for junior high schools to become terminal rather than preparatory institutions (Lee and Lee, 1996 : 152-3). Nevertheless, both ignored the fundamental problem that lay at the heart of the junior high and subsequently the intermediate schooling movement: the impossibility of reconciling the two conflicting objectives of encouraging *early specialisation* while also promoting the importance of having pupils engaging in *exploratory studies* within the curriculum. This philosophical debate led several contemporary commentators to remark that the junior high and intermediate school ‘experiment’ in New Zealand had not proved to be a resounding success (Lee and Lee, 1996 : 156).

The Labour government and intermediate schooling

A decade after their introduction the junior high schooling movement, notwithstanding the intermediate schooling initiative, had failed to convince many educators in particular and the public in general that these schools were fully deserving of a place within the schooling system. Furthermore, overseas commentators were now more inclined to record their misgivings about intermediate schools. To this end, a New Zealand historian Randal Burdon noted that during the 1930s,

Visitors to the Dominion, qualified to speak with authority, were apt to be critical of an organisation that had lost cohesion through having developed fortuitously according to the exigency of circumstances (Burdon, 1965 : 80).

Ad hoc initiatives were destined to fail, according to this argument, something that Peter Fraser, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Education in the first Labour government (1935-40), was acutely aware of.

Alert to mounting complaints about intermediate schooling, Fraser asked the recently established New Zealand Council for Educational Research (NZCER) in 1936 to

“evaluate” these institutions (Campbell, 1941 : 145). The resulting publication left readers in no doubt that the author, Clarence Beeby, the NZCER Director, was firmly wedded to the intermediate schooling concept (Murdoch, 1943 : 59). Nevertheless, he did concede that curriculum and organisational reform in these institutions was needed urgently. With this in place, Beeby confidently predicted that the educational, social and vocational efficiency of these institutions would then be raised (Beeby, 1938 : 209-12). In short, Beeby’s study sought to eliminate the controversy surrounding intermediate schools by justifying their place in the schooling system, and making policy recommendations which cemented intermediates firmly into position. But, as Arnold Campbell, Beeby’s successor as NZCER Director, noted, many communities continued to treat these schools with suspicion. Successful education reforms, Campbell suggested, depended upon convincing the public that “reorganisation was in any way desirable” (Campbell, 1941 : 142). This observation led him to conclude:

It would not be correct to say that opposition to [the] reorganisation [of the schooling system] has disappeared, or even that those who press for intermediate schools in their districts are always profoundly convinced of their educational advantages...(Campbell, 1941 : 147).

Campbell’s work revealed the different perceptions of policy makers, interest groups and communities about efficient schooling provision. The latter, not surprisingly, were forced to contemplate the consequences of official policy - either by acquiescence or resistance, communities could determine the degree to which policy would be translated into practice, and in what form. Theory and practice were not always congruent, as exemplified by John Murdoch’s contention that “faith in the intermediate school springs from theoretical considerations, not from any demonstrable

success in present working” (Murdoch, 1943 : 311). This conclusion, however, did not deter Rex Mason, Minister of Education in the Fraser ministry (1940-47), from declaring unconditional support for intermediate schooling. These institutions, the Minister confidently asserted in 1945, “are past the experimental stage”, and should therefore be extended “as quickly as circumstances permit” (Mason, 1945 : 30).

An educational settlement?

Mason’s stance, we suggest, represents an attempt to forge an educational settlement, defined by the British educational sociologist Gerald Grace as being “a new policy consensus [achieved] after a period of crisis and struggle” (Openshaw, 1995 : 10). But Roger Openshaw’s recent study of New Zealand post-primary schooling demonstrates convincingly that ‘settlements’ are not permanent. This fact, he suggests, should encourage historians of education and other commentators to re-examine the economic, educational, and socio-political agendas that have figured so prominently in New Zealand schooling.

The introduction of junior high and intermediate schools should be seen merely as an attempt to secure a new educational settlement, one based on their occupying a special role; to endeavour to improve the efficiency of those post-primary schools into which they fed, as well as maximising the educational experiences of short-stay pupils. Ongoing debate over intermediate and middle schooling, we believe, ought to alert New Zealanders to conflicting perceptions about what counts as efficient education, and how this could be either enhanced or at least retained (PPTA News, 1997 : 2; Euvac, 1997 : 3). Given the lengthy history of this debate, we think it highly likely that these institutions will be subject to as much public scrutiny in the later twentieth century and beyond as their antecedents experienced 75 years earlier.

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