

Yesterday's Crisis and Tomorrow's Schools: The 1954 Morals Inquiry and the Politics of Educational Reform

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Abstract:

A moral crisis generates much debate over the state of education, as people attempt to find answers to the perceived problem. In 1954 the Special Committee on Moral Delinquency in Children and Adolescents investigated education, and came to conclusions that were alarmist, reflecting disillusionment with the progressive reforms of the preceding twenty years. Now that the balance of power in compulsory education has shifted away from education professionals towards parents, through the mechanisms of decentralisation and school choice, the outcomes of a moral crisis for schools are potentially more serious. Schools must be responsive to parent concerns, but the experience of 1954 suggests that there was little to justify the high level of community paranoia aroused. Compounding this situation for schools is that crisis manufacture – the deliberate creation of distress over current conditions – has been used recently by various groups to achieve a wide acceptance of their, often radical, reform agendas. This has the potential to threaten innovative decision-making, which is at the heart of the Tomorrow's Schools ethos.

Schools in New Zealand have never been so vulnerable to public opinion. In an environment of consumer sovereignty many schools are competing for customers to preserve funding. With this in mind, what will now happen to schools when a moral crisis hits? This paper, using the hearings and Report of the 1954 *Special Committee on Moral Delinquency in Children and Adolescents*, as an historical case-study, examines some potential outcomes of a moral panic on schooling in New Zealand today.

The Morals Inquiry was ordered by the National Government in response to the widely held public fear that the youth of New Zealand were in a moral decline. The hearings show that during this time of moral crisis the school was a site of blame, but also a site of potential remedy against the social ills befalling society, and a gatekeeper against unwelcome aspects of popular culture.

In terms of education, the hearings covered the perceived negative results of progressive education reforms, the place of religion and moral education in schools, the problem of dull students, sex education, and coeducation. Some of the Committee's conclusions would certainly be questioned today, as they were at the time. The proceedings also highlighted the tensions between the professional education community, which largely defended contemporary developments, and a disunited but passionate and organised collection of parents, churches and religious education bodies, citizens' groups and some academics and educators.

Tomorrow's Schools has fundamentally altered the relationship between education professionals and policy makers, parents and the wider community. The Board of Trustees structure and school choice policies require schools to be flexible and responsive to community concerns and desires, for their own survival. However the hearings and report of 1954 show us that parent pressure and the mood of the people are not necessarily the best directors of educational innovation, particularly during a moral or educational crisis.

Adding to this pressure on schools is the reality that during the 1980s and 1990s, moral conservatives and right wing economic groups have forcefully, and at times successfully, promoted the notion that New Zealand education is in crisis or contributing to a wider crisis, in order to smooth the path for the widespread acceptance of their reform agendas. Their solutions to the crisis are often bound up in a conservative moral position or an economic market model, linked with pedagogical reform. Under these conditions of crisis manufacture and consumer sovereignty, educational innovation may suffer through hastily-conceived, centrally-driven policies, or alternatively, by determined parent pressure at the school level.

The 1954 Crisis

In 1954 New Zealand was in the grip of a panic over rising immoral teenage behaviour. In July, *The Dominion* reported on a sex scandal in Lower Hutt (the second in two years). It was claimed by police that 41

boys and 16 girls from the age of thirteen were involved in a series of promiscuous crimes including indecent assault, carnal knowledge and even mass orgies (Yska, 1993, p. 63). Around this time New Zealand was being saturated by a mixture of juvenile crime and revelations about dangerous new developments in popular culture. Some examples were the Parker-Hulme murder, the rise of youth gangs of bodgies (teenage boys) and widgees (teenage girls), the birth and export of rock and roll, American cinema, mindless comics and indecent pulp literature, immodest radio serials, and the proliferation of milk bars where youths hung out aimlessly. The media charted these stories extensively and produced sweeping headlines such as "Moral delinquency said to be wide spread" (*Truth*, 1954 in Yska, p. 68). Six days after coverage of events in the Hutt Valley, the National Government cabinet approved Prime Minister Holland's call for an investigation into "this grave social problem", and less than a month later the Special Committee on Moral Delinquency in Children and Adolescents began hearing submissions in Wellington (Yska, p. 68).

Moral panics themselves are a recurring phenomenon in society. Cohen, in *Folk Devils and Moral Panics* (1980) argues that they share a common pattern:

1. The emergence of a "problem" usually associated with negative influences on the young;
2. The development of community concern, usually fuelled (or orchestrated) by the media, and out of all proportion to the actual scale of the problem;
3. A political reaction, often culminating in hasty legislation aimed at tightening control over the cultural form that has aroused concern.

(Quoted in Lealand, 1989, p. 274).

Shuker & Openshaw (1991) suggest that moral panics result from a conflict between high and low culture, and are a middle-class reaction to popular culture (p. 105). The perceived dichotomies between high and low culture are numerous, and include those outlined in the table overleaf. Moral panics have been a feature of 20th century life in New Zealand, and many are striking in their similarity. So, for instance, in the 1930s there were fears about gangster movies, while in the 1980s, films such as *Rambo* were controversial. And as the 1960 Hastings Blossom Festival riot slipped from popular memory, the Queen Street Riot of 1984 created national concern, and led to an inquiry.

High Culture	Low Culture
Literature/classics	Thrillers, comics, trashy novels
Classical music	Popular music especially new styles
Educational	Non-educational, seditious
Cerebral	Emotional
Intellectual	Childish
Imaginative	Escapist
Difficult	Easy
Elitist	Populist/accessible
Structured	Informal
Non-commercial/ serious	Commercial

(Partly sourced from Lealand, 1989, p. 277).

Schools are particularly important institutions in times of moral panic for three reasons. First, they are regarded as a prime preserver of high culture against infiltration by low culture. They execute this responsibility by providing the "correct" alternatives in the curriculum, as well as regulating against certain manifestations of popular culture. An example of this regulation would be the banning of certain hairstyles or types of make-up. Secondly, in a more general sense, schools are seen as a vital tool for positive social transformation, and a place that offers a stable moral environment against the inconstant outside world. Openshaw concludes that this function of the school to transform society for the better is a strong and enduring myth in New Zealand education (1989, p. 40), perhaps due to the large public investment involved and the strong egalitarian aims of the first Labour government. The third point of significance for schools in a moral crisis is related to this ideal. Because of their perceived social responsibility, schools are accused of contributing to the problem through the curriculum, pupil management, teaching methods and the personalities of the teachers themselves. These school roles of protector, social transformer and villain all emerged strongly from the 1954 Morals Inquiry.

The Mazengarb Committee

The seven-member Committee began hearing oral submissions in Wellington on August 3, 1954. The chairman was Oswald Mazengarb (the report is often referred to as the Mazengarb Report), a 64 year-old lawyer and aspiring National Party politician. The other members were

chosen for their particular expertise in specific fields. Jim Leggat, principal of Christchurch Boys' High School, was the education specialist.

Criticism of progressive education became a dominant aspect of the hearings. The Committee had received written submissions against New Zealand's progressive reforms, but ironically, the visit on August 5 of the Director of Education, C. E. Beeby, passed without a single question by the committee, or specific comment by Beeby on the subject (*Folder 1*). Instead, the issue was precipitated by a concerned citizen – a retired teacher from Wanganui. After her visit, virtually no educator was seen before the committee without some questioning about the contentious area of progressive methods in New Zealand schools. According to this witness, progressive methods had wiped away standards of disciplined conduct, and the only discipline now deemed appropriate was self-discipline, which was unreliable. This was coupled with an extravagant but unchallenging curriculum:

In the primary and intermediate schools the day is crowded with arts and crafts, "free expression" periods, choirs, choral speaking, organised games, physical drill, play acting, puppet making, film strips, folk dancing, visits around town and countryside to places of interest, milk drinking, dentistry, radio programmes, road safety lectures, and plenty more. Homework is cut out, professional examination [The Proficiency Examination] abolished, emphasis on self-expression and a general atmosphere of "there's no need to make any effort, just do as you like." (*Folder 1*)

The educational results of this situation were that pupils could "... hardly express simple thoughts in writing, cannot apply themselves to quiet study, but they are very self-assured and can talk in their own jargon very brightly and shallowly" (*Folder 1*). Her criticism obviously drew a strong connection between progressive methods and the profile of a juvenile delinquent. For instance, a lack of homework in primary schools and intermediates was apparently leaving children hanging about the streets after school. More generally, modern education did not allow suppression or repression of natural tendencies, and moral law was now a personal decision made by considering the consequences of your actions on yourself only, not those around you. She and like-minded witnesses claimed that children were academically two years behind their pre-progressive counterparts, which was said to be of no concern to school inspectors, who just focused on the child being happy (*Folder 1*).

These thoughts were echoed regularly during the hearings by a variety of witnesses. Two catchwords of progressive education – freedom, and self expression – were held to be virtually synonymous with chaos and budding criminal activity. A professor from Auckland University remarked:

This notion of self expression can do a great deal of harm. Children appear to me to be leaving school, carrying into adult life the irresponsibilities that they have so frequently learned at school and ending in a police court. (*Folder 4*)

Another witness talked of the "lazy" child who was being taught a reduced syllabus which aimed to "... avoid discipline, to avoid the impact of hard work and anything in the nature of compulsion" (*Folder 3*). This lack of teacher-directed discipline was leading to "enforced idleness", and consequently a school leaver was unable to face hard work in the real world (*Folder 4*).

The criticism of schooling was not limited to progressive methods. Well-prepared religious education groups and individuals rallied against the godlessness of New Zealand schools.¹ Many wanted a review of the secular nature of New Zealand education and a deeper religious foundation to morality. "We claim to be a Christian country, and we can see no reason why a commission in this Dominion should bring down a secular report" (Associated Churches of Christ, *Folder 6*).

Progressive education was a target of some religious lobbyists as they raised the conflict between 20th century psychology and Christian morality. The National Director of Catholic Education, the Rev. Noel Gascoigne, pointed out that Dewey was an "utter disbeliever in God" (*Folder 3*), and Dewey's notion that morals were constantly reshaped over time was at odds with the unshifting nature of Christian law. Progressive interpretations of freedom and individuality were also seen as potentially unchristian:

We believe that while the individual should undoubtedly be educated to live as a *free* [italics added] person there is a grave danger present when this idea slides over into the conception of the individual as *independent* [italics added]. The fact is that man is a dependent creature, dependent at least upon other members of society, dependent also upon God and God's moral law. (General Assembly of Presbyterian Churches of New Zealand, *Folder 6*)

The apparent rise in teenage immorality was inevitably attributed to the secular state of public education:

When education is divorced from Christianity – as is the case in New Zealand under the present system – free, compulsory and secular – it does not seem really surprising that there is such a decline in morals. When we lose the knowledge of God and his law, such consequences would appear inevitable. (Catholic Youth Movement, *Folder 6*)

And:

As we frequently come into contact with the products of secular education we feel entitled to express our horror at widespread and complete ignorance about the simplest facts of Christian history and of the gospel story. (Catholic Youth Centre of Auckland, *Folder 6*)

Throughout the inquiry “dull students” came under the spotlight. It was virtually undisputed that the “duller” ones were the most likely to be of low moral character and troublesome, and the committee spent much time interpreting the IQ figures of various juvenile offenders, in an attempt to prove this correlation. With the compulsory school leaving age now set at fifteen and no Proficiency Examination before college entry, these students were regarded as a growing and destructive sub-culture in school. They were accused of exerting a bad moral influence on others and leading the high IQ pupils into trouble (*Folder 4*). One witness noted that the third form was “cluttered with the remnants of those from the primary schools who have been forced to go on to secondary school” (*Folder 4*), and the following exchange with a committee member highlights this perceived wastefulness:

Committee Member: In other words, if a girl wants to get out and be a seamstress what is the use of worrying her about what happens in South America...?

Witness: We are wasting good farmers and all sorts of people in spheres of life by that rule [i.e., the school leaving age].

(*Folder 4*)

The growth of coeducation in secondary schooling was also linked to sexual immorality, and witnesses offered an array of conclusions about its effects: “Boys and girls attending these schools are biologically men and women, but not with the judgment of men and women. When a rooster is placed in with the hens there will be trouble” (Police sergeant, *Folder 7*).

And the following:

One of the safeguards against sexual difficulties for boys is the inculcation of a high degree of respect for women. Boys should be trained to put women “on a pedestal”. Something of an atmosphere of mystery – not of ignorance – is not undesirable. It is not so easy to build this respect when the sexes are intermingled. It is broken down by familiarity. (Retired teacher, *Folder 8*)

Despite the intense criticism directed at schooling and its perceived association with juvenile delinquency, equally prevalent and passionate were the suggestions for ways schools could turn New Zealand youth away from immorality. This illustrates the second role of the school in a moral crisis, namely as a place to create desirable social transformation, whilst providing moral guidance and protection from society’s corrupt developments. A Hutt Valley secondary school principal produced statistics of his third form intake which revealed that 73 of the 313 entrants came from “abnormal homes”, defined as homes in which the mother was in paid employment, divorced, or in a second or subsequent marriage. These children, he said, faced neglect at home which was difficult to overcome at school:

We are of course fighting a losing battle in many cases in what we try to do at school in training these youngsters, because there is a different standard when they go home, and there is a different standard in public in many cases. (*Folder 1*)

A senior inspector of schools spoke of a “moral vacuum” in the community, and blamed parents for exposing children to unacceptable behaviour and immorality, including undesirable films, books and comics, and even wife-swapping. Accordingly, schools had an even greater moral role to play in this time of crisis (*Folder 2*).

Beeby, in his oral submission, agreed that moral standards were lower in the community than at school, and suggested that schools, parents, inspectors, the Health Department and other groups join together to create a code of standards for adolescents, which would include such guidelines as an appropriate staying out time at night. It was hoped this code would bring the standards of the community and school into alignment (*Folder 1*).

Supporters of progressive education both defended and promoted the moral benefits of modern methods. In something of a counter-offensive, A. E. Campbell, Chief Inspector of Primary Schools at the time, declared that self-discipline, better teacher/pupil relations,

a playful and happy school, and curriculum diversity all led to a higher morality in young people (*Folder 4*).

The Committee grappled with the perennially contentious issue of whether the schools should involve themselves in establishing guidelines for sexual morality through sex education classes. It was noted in their Report that some heads of schools had arranged for sex instruction in the wake of alarming news of increased sexual promiscuity (p. 7). No consensus of opinion emerged from the submissions, except that any instruction should stress the physical and moral dangers of pre-marital sexual relations and downplay the mechanics of sex. The Director of Catholic Social Services in Wellington summed up the widespread feeling of anxiety (which was not just confined to church groups) about sexual promiscuity in society: "I think the schools and other groups have to take emergency measures in our present state of society, measures which are therefore artificial and by no means the best" (*Folder 2*).

At a time when new popular culture items were rapidly entering New Zealand and gaining huge popularity with the young, schools were looked to, by both progressive and conservative educators, as an institution that could fight off the negative aspects of this invasion with positive measures and regulation. They alike expressed dismay at the shortage of new books that had come into school libraries after World War Two and the simultaneous rise of pulp fiction and comics. (*Folder 11*).² The school libraries were seen as a vital defence mechanism against low culture, and school staff witnesses expressed anger at the lack of central funding for new school libraries (*Folder 4*). It was suggested that rather than banning trash literature, the authorities could improve students' reading habits by stocking school libraries with a higher class of book (*Folder 1*). A submission from the Salvation Army criticised the apparent demotion of the Bible from a place of centrality in schools and its replacement with false doctrines:

I largely blame H. G. Wells who bowed the creator out of his own universe and substituted science, and G. B. Shaw, who told the students at Cambridge University that when Darwin kicked Jehovah out of the window the people of England rejoiced and held him as a hero. That kind of talk to youth creates the impression in their mind the Bible is a discarded book, we have no longer any use for it with its moral laws of ethical standards, and that is exactly what has happened. (*Folder 3*)

This expectation of the school library to be an arbiter of taste, which would ultimately involve some level of censorship, illustrates the seriousness of the school's gate-keeping role and its susceptibility to a wide range of public pressures.

There were underlying characteristics of the Committee hearings which contributed to conclusions made about the role of education in this crisis, in terms of where it was at fault, and equally what it could do. Notable were the well-organised contributions of conservative and Christian organisations. Written submissions had less than a month to be received and many from Christian education associations ran into tens of pages. The comparatively tiny amount of pro-active liberal lobbying came from just a few individuals, whilst the prominent educators of the time, including Campbell, Beeby, and G. W. Parkyn (Director of the New Zealand Council for Educational Research), in many cases had to defend the educational innovations of the last twenty years. Parkyn produced perhaps one of the most enduring statements, when mentioning the difficulty of defining a moral code for New Zealand:

If New Zealand itself could be shown by specific researchers to be broken up into all sorts of sub-communities with different moral codes within it, then it would be a risky assumption to assume that any of us could know from our own experience and feelings what were, in fact, the commonly accepted moral standards. (*Folder 1*)

However statements of this kind were rare, and the perceived gravity of the crisis ensured that the conservative position dominated. The Committee remained stubbornly pessimistic even though educators produced evidence and expert opinions which dismissed the existence of a rising level of immorality. For instance, C. E. Peek, Superintendent of the Child Welfare Division of the Department of Education, produced school statistics to show that juvenile delinquency had not actually increased since 1934 (*Folder 1*). His own senior field officers were very much divided as to whether immorality was increasing, with a strong majority saying that it had not, or they didn't know (*Folder 1*). Beeby reminded the Committee that there had always been a substream of youth experimenting in sex (*Folder 1*). Even the official crime figures used in the final Report do not seem alarming. For instance, reported rape cases increased from 11 in 1920 to 19 in 1953 with very inconsistent results from year to year (*Appendix A*, p. 69).³ However, the Committee sternly dismissed the alternative viewpoint that society was *not* in any

serious trouble. The Report cited world-wide evidence (mostly reprints of donated overseas newspaper clippings) to prove that there was an international wave of juvenile offending:

The subject cannot be dismissed in the light, airy way of these people who, without any adequate knowledge of the facts, have been saying that there is nothing new about the sexual misbehaviour of young people and that nothing can be done to improve matters. The situation is a serious one and something must be done. (p. 20)

There was a similar tension during the hearings between liberal intellectual opinion and the common sense of the ordinary New Zealander. Witnesses idealised the “good old days” in relation to education methods, and lamented the loss of traditional values such as hard work and discipline. There were attacks against the “radicals” in education policy-making, who had so willingly adopted progressive ideology, even against the wishes of the teachers:

Former Vice President, Auckland Teachers Training College: The last 17 years it has been part of my job to go around the Auckland schools and see the students [trainee teachers] at work. You would be surprised how universally they don't like this new thing. They have to do it.

Chairman: I can't understand how it arises. We have teachers who complain about it. We hear of inspectors who don't want it. A lot of people seem to be against it, and yet we don't know how it arises.

Former Vice President, Auckland Teachers Training College: I'm sure it comes from the Director and the Assistant Director of Education. (Folder 4)

One witness called the followers of new education “Deweyites” (Folder 1) and another said that progressive ideas had “intoxicated” the Education Department and some teachers (Folder 2). Chairman Mazengarb showed some hostility towards teachers: “May I say the more I see of children the less I think of teachers and adults” (Folder 1). The Rev. Gascoigne declared, “the revolt against Deweyism is under way in the United States and it is growing in momentum, and not before time”, to which Mazengarb replied, “you get the same wave in New Zealand, you know” (Folder 1).

Many critics wanted more involvement from parents, the community, and the emerging Parent Teacher Associations (PTAs) in reforming education techniques, implying that their knowledge and

common sense would be a foil to the extreme attitudes and untethered power of the education policy-making hierarchy.

The Mazengarb Report

The 70-page report was tabled in Parliament just one week after the hearings ended, with final editing being done by Mazengarb himself. Prime Minister Holland, eager to be seen to be acting forcefully for the public good in election year, declared immediately that “the government will not hesitate to take whatever action is called for” (*The Dominion*, 1954, Sept 22). In less than two weeks, there were three new Acts of Parliament – The Indecent Publications Amendment Act, The Child Welfare Amendment Act, and the Police Offences Act (making it illegal to sell contraceptives to under-16 year-olds). The Labour Opposition fully backed the Report's recommendations and subsequent Bills, which rather undermined Holland's ability to take the high ground on this issue (Yska, p. 79). On November 11, 1954 (just two days before election day) copies of the report began to be sent to all 300,000 homes receiving the family benefit (Yska, p. 81).

Although the Committee findings were conservative, alarmist and led to hasty changes in legislation, on the surface at least, education was not in the spotlight, and parents took much of the blame for the poor morality of their children.⁴

Progressive education featured as follows:

New Education

Several witnesses have claimed that the philosophy underlying the New Zealand education system is a predisposing cause of sexual delinquency, but in the absence of direct evidence, which is obviously difficult to obtain, such claims can only be an expression of personal opinion. Similarly, the terms “play way” and “free expression” have been quoted to show that traditional external disciplines have given way to a concentration on the development of the personality of the child – a development which could lead to licence. But as there are not sufficient comparative figures available for New Zealand, and as reports from overseas suggest that the pattern of immorality is a world wide one, the Committee is unable to reach a conclusion on this matter.

It does, however, feel justified in suggesting that nothing but benefit could come from representatives of the Department of Education attending meetings of Parent-Teacher and Home-and-School Associations to enable responsible and interested parents to

obtain a clearer understanding of modern educational aims before expressing their views. (p. 31)

This tepid verdict after such intense debate was no doubt partially due to divisions within the Committee, the noted lack of hard evidence and research, and the success of education officials such as A. E. Campbell in rebutting the complaints with optimistic reports about the course of New Zealand's progressive reforms. However, a closer look at the report reveals that criticisms of new education were made subtly elsewhere, such as in a gloomy conclusion about the excesses of psychological science, within a section titled "Moral Drift" :

A desire for scientific accuracy is understandable, a wish to understand the working of the human mind wholly commendable, but many people whose loose behaviour was instinctive, rather than inspired, now had apologists for their conduct. The moral drift had become moral chaos. (p. 47)

An attack on progressive child rearing followed in a section titled "Changing Times And Concepts":

"Self-Expression" in Children

Early this century psychologists said that the repressive influences of early discipline were stultifying to the development of the child. They advocated that the child's personality would mature better if uninhibited. This has been interpreted by many people to mean that you should not use corrective measures in the upbringing of children and that their natural impulses must not be suppressed. Some of these people have even thought it wrong to say "No" to a child.

People brought up this way have now become parents. It is difficult for them to adopt an attitude to their children which does not go to extremes either way. As a revolt against their own upbringing, they are either too firm in their control or too lax. Children brought up in both these ways have been featured in the case notes of delinquent children placed before the committee. (p. 49)

The intellectual community was accused of contributing to the Moral Drift:

There emerged, particularly in scientific and literary circles, the belief that there could be a code of morals entirely devoid of religious content. This intellectual standpoint helped to undermine the authority of the churches. (p. 46)

The Report was in favour of "alternative options" for senior primary and junior secondary pupils to leave before they were fifteen, confirming the opinion that dull students were both wasting their own time in school and corrupting the morality of others: "[They] through lack of ability or lack of interest are not deriving appreciable benefit from their further education, but are indeed unsettling and sometimes dangerous to other children" (p. 29).

Despite many witnesses favouring sex education in schools, the Committee recommended that in the first instance the home was the appropriate place for this. However, the schools were again seen as a moral backstop to a society not fulfilling its duties to children: "But where ignorance persists, through the failure of the natural agencies, the school should try, if a suitable person is available on the staff, or by the employment of a specialist, to remedy the omission" (p. 30).

The Committee concluded that New Zealand needed a "better spiritual basis" on which a "sound code of morals may be built" (p. 43). Since the codes of behaviour of the West were based on the Christian faith, a move away from this was a factor in the deterioration of morality (p. 43). Thus the Report recommended encouragement and development of the Nelson system of Bible instruction in primary schools (p. 44).

Many assumptions and recommendations had underlying implications for schools and for teaching, including comments about the place of women in the home, the morally repugnant notion of homosexuality, and the conclusion that Maoris were not adjusting well enough to living as Europeans (pp. 16, 18, 39). These assessments, spread to 300,000 homes, reinforced some foundations of social life that new generations were soon to challenge. More specifically, during a time of public paranoia, they contained certain conclusions about the acceptable role of schools. Education did not escape the witch hunt.

Tomorrow's Schools and Moral Panics

An essential aim of the *Tomorrow's Schools* reforms was to change the balance of power in the management of education by making school administration a partnership between parents, the school, and its wider community. Through the Board of Trustees and charter requirements, parents would have the representation and influence that the 1954 Morals Report had alluded to.

The Picot Report was critical of the way that education policy making was vulnerable to pressure group politics and went on to say

that it was the professional bodies (or provider groups) that had the upper hand in this system. The teacher unions [the New Zealand Educational Institute is specifically named] were offered as examples:

The groups representing providers are better organised and better financed than those representing consumers: inevitably the former have been better placed to play a role in policy making at the centre. Within this perspective, it is difficult for policy advisors to maintain a detached stance: there is a tendency for them to become significantly influenced by the interests of teachers and to lose sight of the interests of learners. (p. 24)

This echoes the sentiment of the Morals Inquiry, that professionals had too much power in policy making, and were aloof from the educational priorities of parents. This led to misunderstanding and poor decisions.

There is now good evidence that schools have become more responsive to parents and the community through increased consultation and communication. The *Today's Schools* project noted that:

- Meetings between school and community were more frequent;
- There was more awareness of the need, and effort made, to involve parents in the consultation process;
- Parents' views were sought more frequently;
- Parents were coming into the school in greater numbers;
- Newsletters and information to parents had increased.

(Harold, 1992, p. 17)

Despite this increased input, the schools' professionals have maintained their leading role in the delivery of education, by a mixture of legislation and parental deference. Wylie (1994) revealed that trustees in primary and intermediate schools had little interest in increasing their responsibilities (p. iii). Similarly, an Auckland study, *The Community-School Collaboration Project*, showed that traditional governance over the broad areas of: what is taught; how the curriculum is delivered; and to a slightly lesser extent, the setting of rules and discipline, was still in the hands of school staff, with the full blessing of the parents (Timperley, 1994, p. vi). Sullivan (1997) notes that Boards of Trustees have in general remained "supportive and respectful" of teaching staff, despite the changes in their relationship and an ideological redefinition of the role of the teacher (p. 14).

Because of the relationship between a school's roll and its funding, the issue of school zoning cannot be ignored when parental influence on educational decision-making is being considered. The *Smithfield Project* (Lauder et al., 1996) reveals that students from high-SES homes, in particular, are bypassing their "less-desirable" local schools, and that poorer schools are suffering from the effects of falling rolls. Fowler (1995) found that factors influencing school choice went beyond strictly educational concerns into areas such as school uniform and school prestige (pp. 111, 114). This is consistent with a concern raised by an OECD report: that school choice had the potential to stifle educational innovation, because new ideas might be misunderstood and opposed by parents. Instead, resources would end up being used to window-dress schools to attract new students (OECD, 1994, p. 15).

This new [or some would argue, increased] power to "vote with your child", which ultimately dictates individual school funding, means that schools, more than ever, need to make themselves attractive to parents. But parental priorities, particularly during a crisis, may be at odds with education innovation and excellence. In a time of deep crisis, schools may be pushed to extreme lengths in order to preserve and expand their rolls. Even against their better professional judgments, school staff may be persuaded to make "knee-jerk" decisions or suspend innovative programmes, not so much to be democratic, but simply to survive.

The Morals Inquiry of 1954 suggests that if you want to achieve radical reform, at some point the public has to be convinced that something is falling apart, and that your solution is desperately needed. In 1954, churches and conservative educators stepped in to say that modern methods were contributing to an erosion in acceptable morality, and in the 1980s and 1990s we have seen similar pressure from moral conservatives and neo-liberal economic reformers. Bates (1990) argues that the New Right have promoted an exaggerated, gloomy picture of New Zealand education to generate acceptance of their social and economic agenda:

The creation of an unsubstantiated panic over falling standards and illiteracy, fears of violence and the breakdown of discipline in schools, concern with the destruction of family values and religion by radical teachers, are exacerbated and used by the New Right to shift educational debate onto their own terrain. (p. 48)

A prime example is the book by a former Minister of Education, Merv Wellington, called appropriately *New Zealand Education In Crisis* (Wellington, 1985). It criticised the apparent power of left wing pressure groups, argued for the preservation of external assessment and the introduction of tougher standards, and desired a more patriotic and moral atmosphere in schools. He also updated the “basics versus frills” argument: “I am determined that more time should be given to schooling in the indispensable subjects, that is the basic subjects in the future” (pp. 59-60). In *A Nation at Risk*, produced by the National Party Opposition in 1987, the tactic of crisis was used from the very first line:

If there is one thing with which the vast majority of New Zealanders will agree, it is that our education system is in a mess. People want to know: How can young people leave school after years of learning, unable to read or write, count or communicate. (National Party, 1987, p. 2)

The document goes on to elaborate on the problems, and discuss how the principles of choice, competition, a business approach to governance, and increased teacher accountability will resolve this most severe crisis. Even Treasury, in its brief to the incoming Labour Government (1987), painted a picture of crisis, and its ideas about the cause are uncannily similar to those of the 1954 Report:

It should be emphasized that the lack of achievement and ill discipline in schools are not simply symptoms of an unresponsive state education system. These factors are also outcomes of deeper changes in society that impose considerable pressures directly on the system. The societal changes include family breakdown, often leading to poor parenting of, and behavioural problems in, children, and lack of parental support at home for what teachers are trying to do at school. Other influences would include the general loss of respect for elders, and for teachers in particular, in our fast changing and increasingly permissive society, and the effect of anti-social behaviour in television programmes and other media. (p. 16)

No-one is above using the notion of crisis to promote an agenda, from a reading programme seller, advertising on television, to the Government’s financial advisors.

Conclusion

It is a big jump in time and subject from talk of bodgies and widgies to yet another criticism of Treasury and the methods of the New Right. But

the 1954 Morals Inquiry warns us that in a time of moral crisis, schools will come under intense scrutiny. They will be blamed for contributing to the chaos while simultaneously being turned to for some kind of moral benchmark and intellectual bulwark against unwelcome aspects of popular culture. Even as this paper is being edited, the nation’s educators are once again pondering the state of values education in our schools, and the Prime Minister has called for a greater spiritual atmosphere in schools and a rethink of the secular status of public education. Social transformation therefore remains very much an objective of New Zealand schooling.

The crisis will raise tensions between liberal and conservative educators, with each group defending its own ideals and perhaps blaming the other. The professionals may face challenges from parents, the community, or special interest groups, and this criticism may be responded to at the central level through policy changes and legislation. *Tomorrow’s Schools* gives parents a strong and immediate opportunity to challenge the course of education in their own child’s school. This power is balanced by the legislated professional responsibilities of the principal and staff, operating within national guidelines. Pressure can be brought to bear, however, if parents are sufficiently motivated to challenge the educational atmosphere in a school. The Board of Trustees structure also gives pressure groups an additional forum for their agendas.

The more powerful complement to increased parental representation in school decision-making is New Zealand’s de-zoned school environment, which essentially gives parents (collectively) a large degree of control over school funding. In a time of crisis, parents will tend to act to protect the interests of their children, and schools may have to respond to parent demands to preserve their own funding. Educators who are supporters of school innovation will have to work harder to convince parents that their children are secure and receiving an excellent education. In addition, parents during a crisis may be more accepting of rapid, hasty and radical reforms if they perceive them to be the only answer. Today, parents have options and do not have to wait until the crisis blows over, as it did in 1954.

Reputation is more crucial to a school today than ever before. In 1954, one college was over-represented in the arrest statistics of the Lower Hutt sex scandal, and consequently its reputation suffered temporarily, but dramatically. In a decentralised environment, where even the government through the media will join a chorus of criticism

against a single school, the consequences are potentially more destructive and permanent.

Tomorrow's Schools has not stopped, and will not stop, the work of pressure groups exerting an influence at the education decision-making centre. Crisis manufacture through the media, and behind-the-scenes lobbying will continue to be a tactic for those planning reform. Unfortunately, education may suffer through this increasingly more sophisticated manipulation of public opinion. Pressure groups, through their crisis propaganda or misguided assumptions about an education system or society in crisis, still have the potential to precipitate hasty change at the central level. Additionally, there is now the risk that they can bring about the decline of individual schools which may refuse to compromise on their educational instincts and principles in order to reassure nervous parents. In this age of consumer sovereignty and crisis manufacture, schools and education generally have never been more vulnerable to the unpredictable reactions that will be generated when the next moral crisis appears.

Notes

1. At this time, religious education was being administered in primary schools and intermediates for thirty minutes a week by 2000 volunteers nationally. The programme, known as the "Nelson system" was coordinated by the New Zealand Council for Christian Education and provided religious instruction to 150,000 pupils in approximately 80% of primary schools (*Folder 5* and McGeorge & Snook, 1981, p. 25).
2. The war had caused a cardboard shortage as it was being prioritised for packing food – not binding books. Comics and trash novels were paper-backs so the shortage did not affect their production (*The Bookseller*, July 31, 1954).
3. The usefulness of sex crime statistics during this period is questionable given the culture of non-reporting of sexual crime. For instance, the Committee heard from the principal of a home for delinquent girls in Christchurch that many of her girls had been interfered with in the family home by their fathers or brothers, and that these crimes never got to court (*Folder 2*).
4. Criticism of progressive education did not diminish though, and re-appeared in the Currie Commission report of 1962:

Throughout the country there were critics of modern methods in education who feared that too little emphasis was being

placed on the drills and disciplines they felt to be necessary for proper progress in a pupil's studies....The commission desires to place on record here that, although it did indeed receive submissions which put these views strongly before it, the volume of evidence and opinion of this nature was not commensurate with the public discussion that had preceded it. (p. 4)

The Report defended modern methods against the same arguments raised in 1954, namely that free expression and self-discipline led to delinquency; "play-way" was non-educational; standards and the fundamental subject areas were being ignored; and that pupil achievement was dropping (pp. 19, 27, 28, 31, 32, 37).

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