[Lauder, H. (1993). Leading Article: 1992, Après La Lutte? *New Zealand Annual Review of Education*, 2, 1-5]

Leading Article: 1992, Après La Lutte?

HUGH LAUDER

As the smoke cleared away from the battlefield during the truce of Christmas 1992, a degree of clarity began to emerge about the state of education in New Zealand. After four years of struggle it became apparent that however the outstanding issues were resolved in 1993 there would a legacy of problems, largely but not wholly, associated with those reforms that sought to turn education into a market and knowledge into a commodity. Not all the reforms were tarnished by the market brush. Some, like the development of the national curriculum, appeared to be serendipitous, while others like government support for more Kura Kaupapa Schools betokened a degree of tolerance and understanding not, hitherto, associated with recent educational policymaking. Yet others, were clearly glossed by market policies but betokened the deeper trends of post-industrial society – the rise in tertiary enrolments for example. 1993 is, of course, a key year, for an election at least allows the possibility of taking stock of the current direction of educational policy. Equally importantly, it is women's suffrage year and many of the educational problems that now confront us are ones women, in one way or another, will ultimately have to cope with.

What, then, are the problems that will confront us between now and the end of the century – unless new educational directions are struck? Let us begin with the more obvious ones and more or less from the beginning: formal education is not the place where education begins – it begins in the home and in the community and neither is in good shape in Aotearoa/New Zealand. Market societies tend to be highly unstable. As Marx once put it, in such societies "all that is sold melts into air". However, it is a paradox of such societies that in order to produce a well educated workforce the social fabric of society, including education, has to be protected from market forces. Knowledge may be turned into profit in adulthood but in the best of worlds it is born of love.

In the past decade of neo-liberal policies we have seen a marked rise in poverty,[1] crime and family break-up. These are not the conditions to create the collective intelligence or the educational performance that Aotearoa/New Zealand needs for the twenty-first century. Of course, not all social ills can be laid at the door of neo-liberal policies. What is certain, however, is that this government has exacerbated the problem of poverty. As Kevin Phillips (1990) has noted, in his striking work on America, neo-liberal policies there, as in other Anglophone-dominated societies, have clearly taken from the poor and given to the rich. That is also the impact here. More poignantly and outrageously, in America it is the children and their caregivers, usually women, who have suffered the most.

The reconstruction of the social fabric needs to be tackled on many fronts, and education has an important role to play, albeit a limited one. Education cannot compensate for society, that much thirty years of research has told us, but it can make a significant contribution, beginning with good quality early childhood education. This is not a problem that can be addressed by the limited initiative of Parents as First Teachers, for what we are talking about here, in some cases, is the collapse of communities. Market policies in education will add to the polarisation of society. Again consider America: not all systems in America are marketised but they are highly decentralised within a context in which over the Reagan years, the federal government retreated from support of the system, particularly at the tertiary level. As Robert Reich (1991) has observed, this is the first generation of Americans since the war which will be less educated than the last. It is also easy to point to the inequities in the system that epitomise this decline in educational achievement. For example, there are major disparities in the funding of education. In Clinton's state of Arkansas the average teacher salary is $20,000 while in Bush's home state of Connecticut, rather than his adopted state of Texas, the average salary is $32,000. There is no mechanism in place in New Zealand to prevent such disparities emerging under a fully bulk funded system – that is the logic of a market system. The problem is that more potentially promising policies like those of the Achievement Initiative are likely to be vitiated by poverty and inequities in funding. Michael Apple (1992), in giving the John Dewey Lecture at the American Education Research Conference had this to say:

> When the fiscal crisis in most of our urban areas is so severe that classes are being held in gymnasiums and hallways, when many

> schools do not have enough funds to keep open for the full 180 days a year, when buildings are literally disintegrating before our very eyes, when in some cities three classrooms must share one set of textbooks at the elementary level ... it is a flight of fantasy to assume that more standardized testing and national curriculum guidelines are the answer.

A similar point can be made about the Kura Kaupapa schools. There is, of course, a legitimate question as to whether they will be funded adequately but there is a further issue which concerns the majority of Maori students. These students are likely to be among those who find themselves at the sharp end of consumer "choice" in schools with declining rolls and morale as a result of bulk funding. There is provision for schools with a significant proportion of working class students. But the provision and strategy to remedy their "disadvantage" is pitiful when compared with, for example, the resources and sophisticated thinking underlying the educational priority area programme in the UK in the early seventies.

The fundamental issue for the remainder of this century in education as in social policy will be that of defeating poverty. This is not just a question of social justice, it is also one of sound economics. If the claim that knowledge and skill are the keys to competitive advantage has any credence, then poverty stands as an economic blight because it represents a wastage of talent. To put it in the current jargon: excellence and equity cannot be seen as antithetical. In economically successful nations they will represent two sides of the same coin. If the issue of extreme poverty is to be addressed in education it will inevitably mean greater central support for the worst hit communities and regions.

But it will be a different kind of central control from that now being exercised, and that control is considerable. Indeed, as Roger Dale and Joce Jesson argue in their paper it is illusory to believe that in key policy matters decentralisation has occurred at all. Dale and Jesson do much to correct the view that the key architect of the current system of education is the Treasury. In a detailed analysis they show how central the State Services Commission has been in creating the present system. But they also note that the SSC has neither the educational expertise nor the vision to support the role it has been assigned. Rather it seems to have been driven by obsessions about teacher capture. What the Nineties require above all is wisdom and vision. While the control departments continue to exercise their current grip on educational policy we will certainly not get wisdom, and the vision will be one

based on the politics of cynicism. The point is that neither of the major control agencies recruits staff who have the combination of educational practice and extensive research experience to make the kind of balanced judgements that are required.

There are other problems that will require solutions, once the final shots have been fired. Despite all the rhetoric, we are further away from an adequate system of accountability than we have ever been. Whatever else is to be said about Picot, it did have a series of mechanisms which made the education system accountable at various levels. But many of these now figure in the roll call of dead concepts. The charter, for all practical purposes, has gone. The Education Review Office is so frequently downsized that it is hard to know what role it can or should play. In this it has been the plaything of theorists amongst whom the most extreme neo-liberals have denied the necessity for any form of accountability except "choice". But we began to learn in 1992 that choice is a problematic idea and that there will be some parents who will be asking who is doing the choosing: the schools or the parents or some invisible amorphous centralised agency? We also learned in 1992, that choice as a genuine element in democratic accountability no longer figured as instanced by the bulk funding of senior school positions against the wishes of teachers and parents. And as Liz Gordon shows in her paper, central government attempted to wash its hands of the problem of truancy – one it had exacerbated through the process of marketisation. So, as in the health system, the largest problem in education remains: how to gain proper democratic accountability from governments which seek to distance themselves from issues of vital national importance.

The agenda so far, is enough to exercise the wisdom and imagination of any policy-maker and of course, this doesn't begin to broach the problems at the tertiary level. It is tempting to say that they are best left until 1994 when we can see whether election year finally heralds the end of the crisis and the initiation of a new settlement. (Those who might have forgotten how sensible policies can be introduced into education without rancour should read Jim Collinge's paper on Sweden). However, such flights of optimism should be tempered by realism; there have been fundamental changes in the global political/economic structures[2] which make a return to a genuinely comprehensive state system of education difficult. Difficult but not impossible. Peter Katzenstein (1987) has argued convincingly that the most competitive small advanced economies, like Austria, have achieved their success by keeping their economies open and flexible

while compensating their people for the risks involved with strong social welfare policies. It is in these countries that social justice and economic efficiency are likely to meet on common ground – and to mutual advantage.

Notes

1. With respect to poverty see Essen and Wedge (1982) and Duncan and Rodgers (1991). For research on the impact of family trauma on children see Kiernan (1992).

2. See Reich (1991) and, for the relevance of his analysis to education, Lauder in *New Zealand Annual Review of Education,* 1:1991.

References

Apple, M. The Politics of Official Knowledge: Does A National Curriculum Make Sense? The John Dewey Lecture, American Educational Research Association Conference, San Francisco, 1992.

Duncan, G. & Rodgers, W. "Has Children's Poverty Become More Persistent?" *American Sociological Review, 19,* 1991.

Essen, J. & Wedge, P. *Continuities in Childhood Disadvantage*, London: Heinemann, 1982.

Katzenstein, Peter J. *Policy and politics in West Germany: the growth of a semi-sovereign state,* Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1987.

Kiernan, K. The Impact of Family Disruption in Childhood, *Population Studies, 46,* 1992.

Phillips, K. *The Politics of Rich and Poor*, New York: Random House, 1990.

Reich, R. *The Work of Nations*, London: Simon & Schuster, 1991.

The author

Hugh Lauder is the Professor of Education at Victoria University of Wellington. In 1992 he was appointed Dean of the newly-formed Faculty of Education. His research interests include educational policy and the political economy of education.