

CALTEX ESSAY PRIZE WINNER

Schooling tomorrow's worker: trade union education in secondary schools

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The state of trade union education in three New Zealand secondary schools is described. The lacunae in this aspect of schooling for work is related to the wider economic structure and to how the needs of industry gain ascendancy over the needs of democracy in times of economic recession. Implications and directions are explored within a theoretical and empirical context.

Introduction

This study presents qualitative data about trade union education in three secondary schools in a large provincial city in the North Island and draws from research which the author carried out in 1986 utilizing grounded theory methodology.¹ The bulk of the data collected was used in a doctoral dissertation entitled *Schooling for work in New Zealand: A qualitative study of three schools* (Sultana, 1987). The schools are referred to under the pseudonym of All Girls' High, Co-Ed High and All Boys' College to indicate the nature of their student population. The latter, an integrated catholic school, catered for predominantly pakeha (caucasian) and middle-class males. As for the two state schools, All Girls' High had a particularly developed understanding of feminist issues as affecting secondary schooling, while Co-Ed High had made important strides in a bicultural direction

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¹ Grounded theory was developed by Glaser and Strauss (1967) and used in the study of New Zealand education by Battersby (1981) and Ramsay *et al.* (1983). The methodology enhances the generation of formal and substantive propositions "grounded" in qualitative data. For the propositions to become part of theory, they have to be substantiated by similar data which occurs frequently in the field. Thus, any excerpts quoted in this article are not "anecdotal" but are typical of others gathered from the three schools throughout 1986.

Observations and interviews were carried out in staffrooms, in the classrooms, at assemblies, parents' evenings, school camps, work exploration placements, and recreation programmes. The 151 lessons observed included social studies lessons, careers and transition education programmes, English, history and economics lessons as well as secretarial studies. Interviews were conducted individually and in groups of up to five with 370 students (187 female). Fifty teachers (23 female) were interviewed individually. It is important to note that despite the extent of the research, the data remains qualitative: the study can therefore only report what was observed in these three particular schools, and there is no claim for generalisability. However, readers can decide whether analysis and insights developed here are relevant to their own situations. The fact that the three schools studied were different in ethos and student population enhances the possibility that the analysis applies to other educational communities in New Zealand.

Establishing a theoretical context

The theoretical approach adopted in this research considers education as part of, and influenced by the wider structure. From this perspective, Giroux (1982) offers three important insights about schooling, namely that:

- (a) Schools cannot be analysed as institutions removed from the socio-economic context in which they are situated.
- (b) Schools are political sites involved in the construction and control of discourse, meaning, and subjectivities.
- (c) The common-sense values and beliefs that guide and structure educational practice are not *a priori* universals, but social constructions based on specific normative and political assumptions.

The three schools in this particular study are therefore related to a wider, fundamental context, namely the economic structure of society, defined by the organisation of production, the division of labour and levels of technology. Thus, the social relations of class, gender and ethnicity which characterise the present social order are seen to structure the processes of formal education, including the practices and consciousness of the participants.

Such a view links this account with other neo-Marxist and culturalist accounts of education,² where every aspect of schooling, whether it is its organisational structures, its particular ethos as expressed through rituals or its curricular structure and discourse, defines a mode for the production of ways of thinking that are fundamentally linked to specific interests within a concrete form of economic and social organisation. Central to this approach is the politicisation of the question of knowledge itself. Knowledge, and what counts as knowledge is seen as problematic and as a form of social control (see Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977). Authors within the so-called "new" sociology of education therefore examine the curriculum to find out which knowledge is given to and which is withheld from students. They also attempt to find out whether some forms of knowledge are made available exclusively to particular groups of students, or whether knowledge is

² This finds its expression in the works of authors in the "new" sociology of education tradition, chief among them being Apple (1979, 1982), Anyon (1980, 1981), Giroux (1983), Young (1971) and Whitty (1985). New Zealand exponents of this approach include Ramsay *et al.* (1983), Codd *et al.* (1985) and Jones (1986).

transmitted in cultural forms which make it accessible only to groups of students identifiable by their gender, ethnicity and/or class. In this article I will be looking only at one aspect of this complex problematic, namely whether a critical knowledge of trade unions is being given to students in the three schools studied.

The new vocationalism

If one accepts that schooling is related to the wider economic structure, it would follow that to a greater or lesser extent, movements and changes in the economy affect educational discourse and practices. In the United States for instance, Bowles and Gintis (1976) related the rise of mass schooling to new modes of production and suggested a "correspondence principle" between the two. Focusing on the form rather than the content of the educational encounter, Bowles and Gintis argued that the relations developed variously between teachers, administrators and students correspond to or mirror the relationships of the workplace. The fragmentation of the learning process, the students' lack of control over their own work, the attitudes required of them, and the extrinsic motivation via grades, all reflect the capitalist productive process. Schools therefore prepare young people for the social relations of production by imposing equivalent relations upon them from an early age.

The "correspondence principle" was eventually criticised for emphasising the structural integration of the institutions of capitalist society, and in so doing denied institutions such as schools any autonomy from the economic base. Later models which related schooling to work suggested that the processes were more complex and contradictory than the correspondence model suggested. Finn (1982) for instance has shown that it is historically incorrect to define the work schools do merely as producing "factory fodder", because education has been the object of other, sometimes contradictory demands. Thus, educational policy has had to deal with, among others, demands of parents, and those of working-class and other subordinate social groups.

This emphasis on contradictory demands forms the cornerstone of Carnoy and Levin's (1985) major thesis in their latest work where they demonstrate how education has to respond to pressures exerted by social movements. The authors build on the correspondence principle but suggest that the relationship between education and paid work is dialectical, composed of perpetual tension between two dynamics: the imperatives of capitalism on one hand and those of democracy on the other. Schools therefore respond to the needs of the capitalist workplace and to the values and expectations associated with the democratic rights of citizens. In any historical point in time, there is a tendency for one aspect of the duality to gain primacy at the expense of the other. Thus, when social movements are weak and business ideology strong, schools tend to strengthen their function of preparing and socialising pupils for paid work.

Because of the crisis in employment, various authors have identified "new" forms of educational discourse tilting the balance in favour of a business ideology in schools. The emergence of this emphasis on business ideology is often related to the so-called "Great Debate" in education (for a definitive account, see Whitty, 1985) which initiated in Britain, but had definite parallels not only in New Zealand (Nash, 1980) but elsewhere. Wiener (1981) suggests that it is useful to see the "Great Debate" as one of a succession of attempts by the industrial and business community to change the balance of the curriculum compromise in their favour.

The main assumption behind the "Great Debate" was a belief that the economy and full employment could be revived by improving vocational and technological education in

schools. Other elements included demands for greater standardisation of the curriculum to produce attempts to define and defend a core of "central" curriculum subjects. Carnoy and Levin (1985) and Apple (1986) among others have shown how this new direction affected the social and educational thrust of the 1950s and 1960s. Then the focus had been towards equality and other democratic ideals. The "Great Debate" however signalled a return-to-basics programme emphasising literacy and numeracy, and a movement away from progressive education to prepare students "better" for competition for a declining number of jobs. Thus, the supposedly peripheral subjects, or what their detractors often term the "frills", came under scrutiny and attack wherever the crisis in capital accumulation took place. Whitty (1985) gives an account of such critiques in the U.K., and Wexler et al. (1981) and Openshaw (1980), to name only two, describe similar attacks on the curriculum in the United States and New Zealand respectively.

A recent chapter of the "Great Debate" is an increasing emphasis to make schooling more responsive to the needs of industry, creating what various authors (Gleeson, 1984; Bates *et al.*, 1984; Dale, 1985) are calling the "new vocationalism". Gordon (1985) has identified some elements of the "new vocationalism" in New Zealand, especially as they underly the discourse of official documents such as those produced by Catherwood (1985) and Scott et al. (1985). This "new" educational discourse calls for a much closer link between schooling and work, and for the development of a specific type of worker, one who is more highly skilled, flexible, adaptable and compliant and who is at the same time "understanding" enough to patiently bear periods out of work.

Teachers and trade union education

The Task Force Report on Trade Union Education (1987, p.33) expressed a strong suspicion that for various reasons teachers are discouraged from educating about trade unions. The Report (p. 34) also notes "that it appears that throughout the secondary school curriculum there is an inbuilt bias towards a predominantly business oriented perspective on the economy and economic history." The first section of this article has suggested a theoretical framework for the understanding of this bias. In this section I first report some general conclusions related to this topic and arrived at from my larger study. I then present ethnographic data to suggest how the bias towards business rather than democratic interests prevails in the three schools studied.

I have shown in another context (Sultana, 1987) that teachers generally present students with a conservative picture of the world of work which is ideologically weighted towards the needs and criteria of employers. In this world, work is either very positive (self-fulfilling, professional work) or negative (factory work). In this particular world, it is normal and "common-sense"³ for work to be paid differentially and to be structured hierarchically. Employers are presented as benevolent beings who provide work and to whom employees owe not only their livelihood, but also their respect: after all, employees depend on employers' "mercy" to gain employment in times of economic depression. There is no analysis of the relations between employers and workers, workers and workers, and workers and their work. There is no understanding of what the employers' role is in the rise of mass unemployment, and specifically, youth unemployment, or an analysis of the conflict of interests between the employer class and the working and non-working classes. There is an inordinate emphasis on employers'

³ See Schutz's (1954) phenomenological theories about the power of "common-sense" assumptions in the construction of a world view.

rights with little mention of the rights of workers and, with a few exceptions, no critical appraisal of the conditions of work in New Zealand society as they apply to workers as a whole, and as they apply to groups identified by their race, gender, class and age.

There is moreover hardly a hint that this world of work is not "natural" and "God-given". Teachers do not present possible alternatives to work arrangements as they presently exist, so that students are not even aware of such progressive ideas as worker participation in decision-making and profit. Research carried out by Cathcart and Esland (1985) and Rees and Atkinson (1982) in the U.K. and by Lind-Brenkman (1983) in the U.S.A. and Gaskell (1986) in Canada shows that in these countries too, schools generally present an idealised view of industry, and the pedagogical materials presented by teachers generally enjoin students to foster an understanding (i.e. "acceptance") of the wealth creation process and a recognition that industrial growth, consumerism and new technology are synonymous with progress.

Here, I will pursue a discussion of the overt curriculum and how, in deciding that some knowledge be kept from students, schools and teachers are socialising tomorrow's workers into the type of functionaries appreciated and valued by employers. There are various forms of knowledge which the students are not made aware of. The focus here will be on trade union education.

The null curriculum in the three schools

Some authors have referred to the lack of the presentation of particular knowledge in schools as the "null" curriculum. They argue that the "null" curriculum is in fact crucial in the transmission of particular messages and the construction of particular meanings. Eisner (1985, p.97) argues that what is not taught may be as educationally significant as what is taught:

...because ignorance is not simply a neutral void; it has important effects on the kinds of options one is able to consider, the alternatives one can examine, and the perspectives from which one can view a situation or problem.

I would also argue that by not presenting critical information and knowledge, the school is, consciously or unconsciously, allowing other messages and meanings from other areas of the young people's lives (the family, the media, peer groups) to go unexamined and unchallenged (see Arnot, 1984).

This study confirms the Task Force's suspicion referred to above that trade union education is generally avoided by teachers. The topic is recommended in the social studies syllabus of secondary schools, but teachers rarely accept to teach the option. The ideal space for trade union education occurs in the fourth form, when social studies teachers spend an average of six lessons on a unit entitled variously "The world of work", "Careers", or "Beyond school". Here, teachers make use of the Department of Labour's "Looking ahead" (1986) series as a basic text to help students think about work. It is important to note that there is not a single reference to trade union movements in these booklets.

The subject of trade union education, when broached with teachers, provoked a hushed response. Comments like the following by the All Boys' Careers Adviser are typical of others made throughout the year:

"Trade unions are a hot potato in New Zealand. Not many teachers talk about them in class."⁴

A Co-Ed social studies teacher, observed for the duration of a unit on "Work" with a fourth form class, told the researcher:

Students haven't got any pictures of employers' exploitation of workers...A few of them who take history learn about the conditions of mines in England in the 1840s or about the clothing industry in England in the last century...but not really about the coalmines and towns in New Zealand in the early part of this century.

Various authors have noted such avoidance of controversial issues as a form of survival strategies to ensure the comfort of the teacher rather than educational ends (see Hargreaves and Woods, 1984). Other reasons besides avoidance of conflict in class became evident to explain teachers' reluctance to address the topic. Perhaps the most important one has to do with the class location of teachers and their identification with specific class interests. A social studies teacher from All Girls' High expressed this well:

I think that a lot of teachers keep away from teaching about unions because they are themselves personally ambivalent in their feelings towards them. If you said to a teacher "You belong to a trade union", they would be very hostile. It's a class thing to some extent...that if you are waged, or not especially well-qualified, you belong to a trade union, and if you are on a salary, and are reasonably well-paid, then you belong to an association.

Consequently, few teachers were found to have addressed union education in the schools studied. This was not through lack of resources. All three schools had trade union education kits published by the Department of Education (1983). All Boys' College particularly, as a catholic school, could have made use of an influential encyclical by Pope John Paul II entitled *Laborem Exercens* ("On Human Work", 1981) as an excellent resource.⁵ The Principal however admitted that many of the encyclical's progressive ideas could not filter through to the curriculum. He was aware that groups of catholics had appropriated ideas from the Church's social teachings, but felt that generally such groups were "*speaking in a language where you've got to be among the powerless to know what they are talking about*". For various reasons, therefore, union education fell into the "null curriculum". The underlying major reason for this serious lacuna can only be ideological.

There were exceptions to this total avoidance of dealing with trade unions. Such exceptions are important and are highlighted here because they show schools to be sites of struggle for meaning and over power relations. Guided by their personal philosophy and by their experience as workers, some teachers dared exercise their autonomy to pursue progressive ends rather than the reproduction of the social order. If this initiative appears to be weighted in favour of a particular ideology, it has to be remembered, as pointed out earlier in discussing the "null curriculum", that by *not* teaching about trade unions and its wider implications of working class histories in New Zealand, the "impartial" teacher is at his most ideological and at his most political. The "neutral" teacher abets a social order

⁴ Unless otherwise stated, all quotations are from the author's fieldnotes.

⁵ Baum (1982), among others, considers many of the new ideas in the encyclical as "*derived from a critical and creative dialogue with Marxism*" (p.3). Liberation theologians like Gutierrez in Lima (McGovern, 1984) used comic book versions of the encyclical to conscientise working and oppressed classes. In New Zealand, the Task Force on Trade Union Education (1987) notes that one of the most significant conceptual sources for their deliberations about work came from the encyclical, and praises it for valuing the involvement of workers in unions.

by his oppressive silence, a silence which transmits the *status quo*.⁶ Dewey (1916) expressed well the need for educators to make political and moral considerations a central aspect of their education and work when he distinguished between "education as a function of society" and "society as a function of education". Giroux and McLaren (1986, p.224) note:

Dewey's distinction reminds us that education can function either to create passive, risk-free citizens or to create a politicized citizenry educated to fight for various forms of public life informed by a concern for justice, happiness, and equality. Understood in these terms, schools can be public places where students learn the knowledge and skills necessary to live in a critical democracy.

The following sections present data to show why some teachers opted to address the topic of trade unions in class, and the reactions of students to the messages given. Teachers spoke about unions because of their own personal ideological understanding of issues, and because of their experience as workers.

Particular ideology

Of all the teachers observed and interviewed, only three social studies teachers addressed the topic of trade unions in class at any length. Two were from All Girls' High, and one from All Boys' College. Interview data reveals some of the reason for which these three particular teachers decided to do any trade union education at all. The All Boys' College teacher explained for instance:

I'm the secretary of the teachers' union at this branch, and...I'm not a great admirer of unions as such, because I think that the power that they wield, when it gets out of hand...as it does in New Zealand in many cases...it's not a very good thing...ehm...the reason why I taught it was because for me it was a topic which was important in social studies at that time, because it was when the Kawerau Paper Mills were shut down...and obviously this union thing was going to be a hot topic at home. If the mill shut down, then the unions were going to be slammed.

This teacher had ambivalent feelings towards unions. He expressed his concern to students, for instance, that some unions and their leaders were inspired by communism and wanted the downfall of the capitalist system. However, he was also concerned that parents and media would present negative views of unions, and felt that it was necessary to counterbalance those views with others so that students could develop informed rather than prejudiced attitudes.

At All Girls' High, a teacher dedicated three lessons to trade union education out of eleven social studies lessons on "Work". She justified this saying:

Well, there are some things that I think it is important that every student knows, and as far as I'm concerned, 99 per cent of them are going to end up in trade unions, and they should know a little about trade unionism, what a trade union can do for them, and also the historical background...because I think it's important they know why things have come about...I mean, they tend to think things are like stones, and have

⁶ Coventry and Waldegrave's (1987) account has recently shown who suffers and who gains by the maintenance of such a *status quo*. Their account of the "new poor" in this country shows that socio-economic ideologies and decisions oppress particular groups of people in New Zealand, groups identified by their gender, ethnicity and class location.

always been there. But there's always a reason why things have happened...and I think they should be aware that there are very good reasons for having trade unions, and also that trade unions can be helpful things in their lives.

Her lessons with fourth form students covered a definition of trade unionism as well as of various terms related to trade union activity, such as "closed shop", "delegate", "lockout", and "picket". She explained why people need unions in order to get "a fair deal":

Say you're sacked without justification...you can go to your union and say "I'm being victimised" or "I'm being unfairly picked on". That happens all the time...it happens at school. Some of the benefits unions get include money, of course.

The teacher also talked about unions as a recent development in people's working life, dating from the nineteenth century and the terrible conditions on the workplace during the Industrial Revolution. These examples belong to a far-away past and a far-away country, and therefore had little sense of immediacy for the students. Indeed, one of them said: "We talk about other countries' problems, but not our own!" It is however important to note that her three lessons represent a rare occasion where conditions of work and rights of workers were addressed in detail, and where workers were shown to be more than passive and obedient beings at the whim of employers' interests.

Ms. Woods, another teacher from All Girls' High, was the only teacher to deal with trade unionism as a unit in itself, spending much of the first school term on the subject. She spoke about different methods of production through the ages, showing the conditions of work bred from the Industrial Revolution. She concentrated on New Zealand examples of trade union activity and workers' efforts to obtain rights and good conditions of work. She presented her students with various case studies taken from New Zealand courts where unions helped workers who were unjustly treated by their employers. Students were given handouts regarding laws dealing with workers' jobs, pay, conditions, rights at work and negotiations between unions and employees. Her class discussed arguments for and against compulsory trade unionism, a hotly debated subject in New Zealand throughout 1986.

Ms. Woods gave special consideration to analysing why women have not generally featured highly in trade union affairs, but argued that it was in their interest to do so considering the discrimination against women in the labour force. She presented statistical proof showing that women who were as qualified as males got less pay. She gave definitions of various concepts used with reference to unions, and highlighted the fact that a woman, Sonja Davies, had been elected as the vice-President of the Federation of Labour in 1983.⁷

Any references to unions by other teachers were isolated, incidental comments, and nowhere as developed as in the instances described above. At Co-Ed High, the careers adviser expressed well the dilemma faced by teachers, a dilemma which is accentuated during an employment crisis. He felt that in stressing workers' rights in his career education programmes, he would be jeopardising students' chances for getting jobs. As he put it: "This is the bind. Do you go for the marketplace or do you change the marketplace?" He, like many teachers observed, limited himself to incidental references to trade unions, such as to suggest that students check with their future trade union

⁷ It is interesting to point out that in 1987, Ms. Woods was asked by her Head of Department to dedicate more time to other topics in the fourth form social studies syllabus at the expense of the trade union unit.

representative if they were getting the right pay. Interviews with students revealed that such incidental messages were lost, and did not stand out enough to be recalled. As we will see in later sections of this article, messages about unions were generally either missing or too brief to inform students thinking about the world of work.

Technical teachers

It was found that technical teachers, by virtue of their having been on the workforce outside the education system, were more ready than other teachers to talk about unions in class, and to do so in a positive way. This fact reinforces the proposition advanced earlier that teachers avoid talking about unions because of their class location and their particular relationship to a segmented labour market. A technical teacher from All Boys' College explained:

Well, I'm a carpenter...I've been involved in some monumental strikes, and I was off work for six weeks one time. I say in the classroom that if it wasn't for the unions, we'd still be back in our grandparents' time where you were sitting under a hedge waiting for the sun to come up to start work...and at half past ten in the morning the person employing you might say: "Well hurry...Get lost!" And that would be your luck for that day. And if it started to rain you'd carry on working, and when dark came, then you would go home...It's really the unions who have brought about a lot of social change, and they are quite reasonable in the main...So I promote them.

A Co-Ed High technical teacher felt very strongly about trade union education in schools. As future workers, students needed to know where to get protection "because there are some very unscrupulous employers around. We should tell them that. I think trade unionism should be in the curriculum. I'm sure it should." Only one of the five technical teachers interviewed felt he should not address the issue of trade unionism with students. Although causal explanations are difficult to justify, it is interesting to note that this particular teacher had, unlike the others, been an employer rather than an employee before he became a teacher.

Trade union representatives

Messages were also given by trade union representatives. It is important to note that while employers were often invited to put forward their views to students in all three schools, trade union representatives were only invited once to Co-Ed and All Girls' High respectively to address students at a school-leavers' seminar at the very end of the year. They were not invited to All Boys' College. At the former two schools, the representatives were extended an invitation following initiatives taken on the one hand by Mr. Haigh and on the other by Ms. Woods, both of whom were active trade union members.

At Co-Ed High, the two union representatives described their roles. It is interesting that both felt the need to defend their activities from general prejudice. One said:

I'm a trade unionist. Some people see us as ogres, strikers...I've been in this work for seventeen years, and all I've done is work for better conditions of employment, against sexual harassment, for better salaries, for equal pay for equal work, for equal opportunities...which is important in relation to women and ethnic groups.

The union representatives also spoke about the fact that streamlining, privatisation, multinational enterprises and mergers of companies were making workers redundant and without a livelihood:

This gives employers the possibility to employ people at the lowest possible rates. The school leaver's rate of pay has been reduced because of unemployment...Employers can always find a person who will accept lower than award rate, and if you go to a union, the employer will find a way of getting rid of you. You're left on your own without union support.

They showed how the employer class was getting wealthier in New Zealand, and the workers were getting poorer, and this poverty was also induced by right-wing governments and politicians who had convinced people that the way out of the crisis was to cut back on public services. Such policies were leading to "private wealth and public squalor". They therefore urged students to become union members, and referred to young people's experiences in the casual work force and how their rights were often trampled on.

Some employers tell their employees they can't belong to a union if they are under eighteen years of age. That's rubbish. You need to be in a union, especially because employers are often firing young workers before they turn eighteen so they don't have to pay a senior wage.

Despite messages in favour of workers' rights, students were generally sympathetic to the employer's point of view expressed later in the day. At one point, a student stood up and told the union representatives: "If you keep pushing wages up, businesses will fold!" Students also revealed their ignorance of the conflicting interests on the labour force by asking such questions as: "Will employers tell us about unions?...How and where to join?"

Following the talk by the trade union representatives, the researcher interviewed various groups of students. The interviews revealed that the majority of them had not understood what the unionists had been talking about when they mentioned "multinationals", "privatisation", "right-wing politicians", or "streamlining the industry". The vocabulary was new to them, since such issues had never been addressed in class.

The above section has shown processes at work in the three schools studied to show how and why specific decisions about what to teach and what to leave untaught were taken. By revealing processes, possibilities for transformation were highlighted, not only for the three schools in question, but for other schools where similar dynamics take place. The degree of autonomy which New Zealand teachers, and specifically social studies teachers, enjoy presents them with the responsibility of choice between conservative and progressive teaching. The next section looks at student reactions to both the lack of trade union education, and their attitudes to unions.

Students and trade unions

Interviews and observations revealed that students felt that messages about unions and about the conditions of work were generally few and far between. One fifth form student from All Girls' High expressed powerfully her perception of these gaps:

Unions are like a secret...you only learn about them when you leave school. It's a non-talked about thing. We all know it's there, you know...The trade unions, the people that help you if you get stuck in your job...it's like a big secret and you don't get to know the secret until you leave school.

Fifth formers from All Boys' College said:

Simon: *Teachers are telling us how to do our job...but the bits in between, like unions and that sort of stuff, I wouldn't know what they were about.*

Bob: *Neither would I! We don't know whether they're good or a nuisance. It's mostly what you hear from T.V. and that sort of stuff...what your mates think of work and their experience.*

While students generally said that teachers did not address the question of trade unionism, some identified specific teachers as exceptions to the rule. As we have noted earlier, Ms. Woods stood out as being different. A group of sixth formers from All Girls' High recalled her lessons from two years earlier:

R.S.: *Do teachers talk about what it is like to work, and problems that can arise...and things like the role of trade unions?*

All: *No...I can't say they do...*

Janice: *We talked about trade unions in social studies, with Ms. Woods...but she's with the Labour government.*

Angel: *Lots of teachers talk about what employers want.*

Val: *Ms. Woods was exactly the opposite. She talked more about what people want...and she was really anti-employer. She stands out, that teacher.*

Students' acceptance of/resistance to messages about trade unions

Students here contradicted themselves in the sense that they felt that teachers should address the issue of trade unionism, but on the other hand, strongly resisted any teacher who spoke in favour of unions. Ms. Woods, the only teacher observed who talked at any length and depth about unions was identified as a Labour Party supporter, and judged to be political and partisan in the classroom. Instances which provoked anti-union feeling among students in 1986 were the Kawerau mill and the teachers' pay claim stop-work.

Students were unsympathetic towards the unions for various reasons, the strongest being that to them, unions represented a threat to rather than a safeguarding of future livelihood. In considering occupations, many students checked whether the particular job they were interested in had an active and militant union. If that was the case, then they lost interest in the job. Three fifth form boys from Co-Ed High said for instance:

Pete: *I wouldn't join a union...not when you hear about things like Kawerau and Glenbrook Steel.*

Andrew: *If I went out to a job, and I'd have a choice of joining a union, I'd try to find out more about the union, because you find that most unions, you never hear of them...They never go on strike. But you get ones like the Pulp and Paper union, and engineering unions, and they're all striking. So you really just find out if your union strikes a lot. You find out what reputation they've got.*

Pete: *Because you see things like at Kawerau...it only takes ten people out of two thousand to say: "Oh...We're not getting enough money!" And the union says: "Oh!*

Strike!" ...and there's all these other guys who want to work, and who have families to feed, and then they're out for two months, with no money.

Greg: *They just strike for more money! It's greed!*

Anti-union feelings were often expressed strongly by students both inside and outside the classroom. The following interview with a group of four seventh formers from All Boys' College illustrates their attitudes well:

R.S.: *How do you feel about trade unions?*

Dean: *They're communists, and they suck!*

Cliff: *And all their leaders are Poms...That's what hacks me off the most...They come here because they've stuffed up their own country, and they're now trying to re-arrange ours for us!*

Dean: *I'm a New Zealander, and if a Pom was running my union, I'd say "Bugger you!" I think that voluntary unionism is the best thing that ever happened in New Zealand...now it's getting to be compulsory membership.*

R.S.: *What's the point of having unions?*

Martin: *To protect the worker...That was the original idea...But in the end it's become a radical organisation that's all the time stirring....and with unrelated stuff.*

Dean: *Especially with the pulp and paper workers at Kawerau...crikey! I think that's the best thing that happened in industrial relations for a while...except the wharf strikes and the army had to be called in...That's another good thing. They had about twelve strikes in a year at Kawerau, and they were losing a couple of millions in a week at one stage...So they just closed it down, and now the unions are all going "aie...aie...aie..." They're really pleading to get back.*

Wong: *I think unions used to have a purpose, but I think they're just out-dated now. They're just stirrers. They were good when work conditions were bad, when it was like a sweat house.*

While such strong anti-union feelings often serve to justify teachers' reluctance to address the issue in class, the excerpt also illustrates how students construct their own understanding of phenomena, basing that construction on what they hear at home and in the common-sense assumptions and prejudices current in their immediate environment. Non-messages from the school are therefore, by their very absence, effective in maintaining stereotyped and prejudicial attitudes and beliefs which are not opened to critical examination. The question remains: can and should schools and teachers become involved in the wider structures and struggles that trade unions represent?

Schooling as a site for trade union education

A discussion of the role of schooling in transforming attitudes and in educating students to approach critically rather than passively adopt the world as it stands requires the appreciation of the way schooling functions to support a system. As I suggested earlier, New Zealand education in many ways corresponds to the practices of the capitalist workplace. Knowledge is not only fragmented, but there is an alienation between the mind and the hand, with definite importance and status attributed to the former. There is ample research evidence to suggest that students, especially those who are from the

working class, are alienated from the processes of schooling. This alienation in itself critically restricts the effectiveness of schooling, so that for education to become transformative, it would seem that the site of schooling itself has to be transformed. While students recalled the progressive messages which some teachers gave, they felt they could not apply these insights to their real life situations because school, and what happened within it, were divorced from real life anyway. A group of working class fifth and sixth form students from All Girls' High spoke about the bad conditions of work they experienced as check-out operators at a supermarket, and though a few who had had Ms. Woods recalled her messages about unions, they felt that

...you don't really take much notice, because it's just school work...it's not real...you sort of just learn your stuff...you learn what you have to know for a test and that...and it sort of goes in one ear and out the other...I don't think you take anything in until you leave school and actually experience everything. I've learned more in a few months at the supermarket than the three years I've learned at school.

Similarly a senior student from Co-Ed High said:

Schools revolve around teaching kids from books...it doesn't teach you anything about what's happening outside...not at all...you might have the brief...ehm...personal talk from a teacher...it might come out then...but not in a class...in social studies perhaps, but they still take it out of a book. You don't get to see a real personal view, and actually talk without a book. You're still writing and writing and stuff like that...it's still a set-down plan for the teacher for the year...you might stumble on it while you're doing Japan, or something like that...but once you get out of the classroom, it's just gone...that was book work, you know...if it was more practical, and you actually sat down and talked about it, and everyone had an input, in would be much better...but everyone reads and writes, and you leave class and everything is forgotten.

Such excerpts show that words divorced from action, the abstract divorced from an experiential application, in other words what passes as everyday pedagogy is in itself an obstruction to real learning. Thus, while trade union education has transformative potential in that it acknowledges and affirms the histories of the oppressed in New Zealand, its critical messages are constrained by the structures of conservative schooling. Such constraints however do not deny the fact that union education represents a solitary space in the secondary school curriculum where workers' histories are valued and their rights affirmed at a time when workers are having to surrender hard-won ground in the face of threats of redundancy and unemployment. Trade union education is moreover a potential site for creating solidarity between different groups (identified by their class, gender and ethnic membership) for a unified voice claiming equity and justice. In other words, trade union education carries with it the possibility of enhancing class consciousness and class struggle.

The critical educators

In education there has emerged a group of authors who are offering valuable insights to teachers and schools committed to transforming conservative schooling to a site where the needs of democracy take precedence over the needs of industry. Giroux (1983, 1985), a prolific writer from this perspective, argues for a view of public education that takes as its starting point, not the privatistic, technical, and narrow economic interests that currently define the debate on public education, but the relationship of schools to the demands of active forms of community life. Schools are therefore to be seen as places that prepare people for a democracy, and not simply the workplace. Such an approach rallies itself against the new vocationalism described earlier, whose agenda for schools is to produce

what Cathcart and Esland (1985) have called the "compliant-creative" workers needed by modern industry.

Within the critical perspective too, the liberal humanism of the 1950s and 1960s is not to be replaced by a version of social and economic Darwinism where enterprise and the possession of skills for "technological capability" are the dominant values. Rather, critical educators advocate the need for schools to examine the "what" and the "how" of the curriculum with an emphasis on demystifying academic study and providing knowledge for all students which would enable them to negotiate and change the economic, social and political systems which affect their lives. Rather than dismantling the gains made by the liberal humanism of the previous decades, this perspective builds on and extends this humanism into the social sphere. It requires not only an understanding of work and of the ideas of our culture as essential, but also the idea of power. Students come to understand how power is used in society, both in the arrangements of economic processes and also in the arrangement of everyday social life itself (ideology).

From such a perspective, Simon (1983) turns the "new vocationalism" on its head. Instead of teaching *for* work, Simon advocates that schools present "adult life", "society", the "real world", the "world or work" not as taken-for-granted realities but as the subject of inquiry, where the world is continually being produced and reproduced by the actions of men and women, and often, as Marx said, on terms not of their own making. Simon (1983, p.238) thus argues:

If the realities of the workplace are indeed sets of social relations defined through power and in support of particular interests, to present them as if they were naturally occurring phenomena, historically neutral and obviously necessary, is to mystify people and to act to render them powerless. By helping people solely to adapt to "what is", you help to maintain what is.

In New Zealand, one exponent of this "critical education" perspective is Korndorffer (1986) who argues for an education which puts knowledge and power over their own learning into young people's hands, an education which supplies young people "with the hammer of a materialist understanding of their world and its history that would enable *them* to work together to change that world." (p. 140). While education is only one, and compared to the economic base, secondary site for transforming society into a more equitable place, it has a role to play in forming the consciousness of young people who are, after all, carrying most of the burden of the crisis in capital accumulation (see Ramsay and Sultana, 1985).

A number of steps need to be taken if New Zealand education is to respond to progressive and transformative agendas rather than ones which reproduce embedded social injustices. At one level, the hierarchical, alienating structures and pedagogy of "educational" systems which school youngsters into the compliant citizens so necessary for industry need to be addressed. The only way people can learn to be active citizens in a true democracy is by *practicing* democratic skills in a democratic environment. Given the reformist rather than revolutionary spirit in educational circles, where tinkering (e.g. add-on programmes like transition education, *taha Maori*, etc.) rather than radical change is the rule, it is probably more realistic to suggest additions to the curriculum as it stands. In this regard, there is no doubt to my mind that trade union education should be made a compulsory element of the secondary school curriculum. However, for this curricular venture to be at all successful, the subject has to be a requirement of teacher training and followed up by in-service work, for too often teachers are requested to address issues and topics which they have been ill-prepared for. Teachers therefore have to be afforded the time and the resources necessary for the venture to succeed.

Perhaps a major observation to be made from the larger study from which this article is developed is that New Zealand teachers (and students) have low levels of political literacy. If they learn to perceive the conflict of interests that characterises the division of labour in capitalism, where specific groups - identifiable by their class, gender and ethnicity - are consistently denied access to resources, status, decision-making and self-determination - then the outstanding opportunity exists for the politicisation of the educators of this country. Perhaps nothing is more important in the quest for democracy, equity and social justice than a politically aware generation.

Conclusion

In this article, the act of teaching about trade unions has been located within a wider context, a context in which teachers play the role of intellectuals. I make a distinction between teachers as "conventional intellectuals" (where they teach about unions, for instance, because they recognise the topic as an element of a body of knowledge), as "oppressive intellectuals" (when they choose not to teach areas of knowledge out of fear of rocking a *status quo* which works in their favour) and "transformative intellectuals". Here I use Giroux and McLaren's (1986, p.226) definition:

Transformative intellectuals are not merely concerned with empowerment in the conventional sense, that is, with giving students the knowledge and skills they will need to gain access to some traditional measure of economic and social mobility in the capitalist marketplace. Rather, for transformative intellectuals, the issue of teaching and learning is linked to the more political goal of educating students to take risks and to struggle within ongoing relations of power in order to alter the oppressive conditions in which life is lived.

The point of this article has been that teachers are "intellectuals", even when their role is a structured silence about specific issues. It is up to them to verify whether they are acting as oppressive or transformative intellectuals as described in the typology above. "Neutral" they never are

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