

THE LEGITIMATION CRISIS AND ITS IMPACT ON EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH IN AUSTRALIA

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This paper will argue that:

1. The concept of Legitimation Crisis¹ illuminates certain aspects of the current social, economic, and educational situation in Australia.
2. The Legitimation Crisis directly affects the system of education and this in turn impacts on educational research and development.
3. In an attempt to overcome the crisis of legitimation in Australian education, certain lines of research and development will be encouraged and supported.

The arguments advanced in the paper are in a general sense empirical; they are both descriptions of current trends, and predictions about what will happen in the area of research and development over the next few years. While the fit between the theory, the evidence and the predictions are not of the more limited but tightly constructed kind sometimes found in educational research, the paper outlines a broad test which may be applied over the next few years to Habermas's theory of the Legitimation Crisis; drawing from it implied lines of development for educational research and development.

The Nature of the Legitimation Crisis

The Crisis of Legitimation as developed by Jurgen Habermas, begins by rejecting a mechanical and inevitable Marxist model of capitalist development, leading after the full development of capitalism to a revolution and the establishment of a dictatorship of the proletariat. The theory assumes the existence of a quasi independent State sector, which although intimately related to the economic sector, has somewhat different interests and responsibilities within the larger society. The State, according to Habermas, cannot be conceived as simply a committee of the ruling class. A Legitimation Crisis is historically situated. That is, it is a development that will occur at a particular time and under particular circumstances:

"A Legitimation Crisis can be predicted only if expectations that cannot be fulfilled either with the available quantitative value or generally, with rewards conforming to the system are systematically produced. A Legitimation Crisis then must be based on a motivation crisis, that is, a discrepancy between the need for motives declared by the State, the educational system, and the occupational system on the one hand, and the motivation supplied by the socio-cultural system on the other."²

For Habermas's theory motivation becomes all important, and the crisis in education can only be overcome by an increase in the supply of motivation which in turn legitimises the activities of the education system. Australia with its large and powerful State sector, and with its large and powerful State education systems, seems an appropriate society in which to look for evidence of a legitimation crisis. What is being argued here in terms of a crisis, is unlikely to be solved by a change in

Government. Although not denying that there might be significant differences between Liberal and Labour Governments, it is still the case that Labour management of the educational system is quite similar to that of Liberal. Consider the following, taken from a major policy statement by Senator John Button, the opposition spokesman on education:

"Within Australia at the moment I perceive three problems confronting those wishing to increase resources given to education. These are, the problem of youth unemployment, the difficulty of defining a common culture, and deriving an acceptable consensus about educational ends and means within this common culture, and the lack of a readily identifiable relationship between educational expenditure and perceived needs ... If the electorate is to agree to even present levels of expenditure on education, it must see these as being linked to national aims. I believe that these aims must be to produce a socially cohesive society ... A socially cohesive society is one where there are readily understood and attainable avenues of advancement, where there are socially recognised means of settling disputation between groups, and where all feel they have a stake in the society and that the government will intervene to protect the most vulnerable and unfortunate."

Senator Button continues that:

"To make our educational institutions more flexible to meet manpower projections and requirements to ensure proper rewards are available to the trained, it will not assist the social cohesion of our society if the socially recognised nexus between length of training and expected rewards break down."³

Such a statement on education differs not at all from current emphasis and the general policy advanced by the Liberals.

Embodied in the above, and central to the notion of providing motivation in contemporary society, is the concept of achievement ideology. In all Western societies, the notion that social rewards should be distributed on the basis of individual achievement is important. The pre-condition for this is some kind of equal opportunity to participate in a competitive situation that is regulated so as to neutralise external influences. Since World War II in Australia and elsewhere, this achievement ideology has been translated into a version which substitutes occupational success mediated through formal schooling. This version of the achievement ideology can be credible only if certain conditions are met. There would have to be equal opportunity for admissions to higher education, non-discriminatory standards of evaluation or performances in school, a compatible and linked development of both the educational and the occupational systems. While it is quite clear that in Australia as well as the United States, Canada and Britain, opportunity for admission to secondary and tertiary education have increased, it is also clear that recently the educational system is becoming increasingly independent of changes in the occupational system. The relationship between formal schooling and occupational success is breaking down and some have argued is becoming altogether problematic. The much discussed problem of youth unemployment

is simply evidence of the break-down in this link between education and career advancement. The arguable, but probably existent oversupply of teachers, lawyers and doctors, make clear that the problem is not simply one of unemployment for those who have received the minimum of secondary education, the "school leavers".

The economy of Australia has changed dramatically over the last decade. Internationally Australia is becoming increasingly integrated into the world economy. Australia is also becoming an increasing source of raw materials for the United States, Japan and Europe, while remaining a market for manufactured goods from those nations. The Australian economy is dependent on foreign capital, and is vulnerable to foreign decisions about the location of investments, plant construction, and so on. All of these have produced significant changes in the educational system.

The educational establishment in Australia is clearly aware of this, as witness the great number of conferences devoted to topics like: "Education and the World of Work". The recent Australian College of Education Conference in Perth is evidence of this awareness and the concerns about legitimization ideology which educational leaders in Australia clearly exhibit. For example, in one of the major papers delivered at that Conference, Professor P W Musgrave offered the following:

"One of the crucial contemporary cultural problems facing schools in these circumstances, is how to ensure a real measure of commitment to some version of our present economic, and inevitably because of the nature of the critique, political system, whilst at the same time indicating to students what no rational being can ignore, that major changes are needed to meet the present dysfunctions of our economy. This problem may be re-phrased in terms of how, and indeed whether, the schools can ensure the formation of a critical spirit, that enables future citizens to keep up pressures for change at the same time as they meet the admitted demands to keep the economy operating to support the present standard of life."⁴

Australian education shows little evidence of attempts to develop the critical spirit which Professor Musgrave refers to, and moreover is having considerable difficulty in fostering the other need, loyalty to the current economic and political system in Australia. The dilemma for the State sector and the centre of the Legitimation Crisis is that at the very time when education is becoming untied from the economy, and individual predictions of life chances, for both working and middle-class youth are breaking down, there is an even greater need to develop ideological support for the society and its systems including education. Since it can no longer deliver the goods of career development, or even good jobs for many, its legitimization function must become more important. It is ideologically necessary to encourage members of the society and particularly young people to act as if the society was functioning smoothly and providing the pay-offs which are promised. The current government attempt, through the advertising campaign "Project Australia", is a rather desperate attempt to generate this ideological support.

The sciences, especially in their applied form, and technology are seen as the solutions to the problems evident in the economy, and manifest in the failure of the linkage between the educational

system and the economy. New and advanced developments in technology are seen as a solution to the problem in which they can be also seen as a contributing factor. That is, technological development is changing the nature of work, reducing labour costs, and de-skilling what were previously highly skilled occupations. All of these are acknowledged, and yet the solution is simply seen as the application of more and more technology. Nowhere is this more clearly seen than in the area of educational research and development. The emphasis on applied research, on various limited forms of evaluation, the use of computers in instructional materials development, can be seen as, among other things, a device for increasing the ability of the administrative sector to control the educational process. That is, these limited and technologically oriented developments can be easily absorbed into the administrative system by being identified as scientific. They are then removed from the area of political and moral debate. What is, after all, scientifically based, is not subject to political or moral argument. This, of course, is a general problem for applied social research and occurs in other parts of the State sector, i.e. delivery of the health care system, welfare, care for the aged and State aspects of child care systems.

In spite of minority movements supporting concepts like "back to the basics", there is little likelihood that the educational system will strip itself of the increased responsibilities which it has assumed over the past decades. If anything, more responsibility may well be given to it. The "problem" of new Australians whose first language is not English, the need for eliminating sexism as well as other forms of prejudice, and the arguments about the need for better and increased career guidance within the school system, all suggest that the educational system will not reduce its area of responsibilities. Career Guidance is an interesting example of the development of an educational support group directly related to the break-down of the link between formal schooling and employment. Career guidance is expanding as a profession at the very time that there are fewer careers into which young people can be guided. It must then be seen as part of the ideological support system and an attempt by the State sector to increase levels of motivation.

If the preceding general outline of the relationship between the State, the economy and the schools has some validity, then educational research and development will be affected by this crisis, as will all other aspects of the educational system. In an attempt to respond to the Crisis, certain kinds of research and development are being called for, and will be supported.

In the report to the Schools Commission, by the Committee on Multi-Cultural Education, recommendations are put forward which seem designed to fulfill the function of dealing with the Legitimation Crisis in education. The Committee recommends for example, that the Educational Research and Development Committee⁵ should "continue to give priority to research in areas related to education for a multi-cultural society". They recommend an additional amount of \$100,000 over the next two years. While a good deal of lip-service is paid to the need for supporting

the continued existence of a variety of cultures within Australia, the effect of the proposed recommendations would be to bring the youngsters from non-English speaking backgrounds, quickly and efficiently into the larger Australian society. In terms of legitimation, this is important since the non-English speaking language communities in Australia provide one of the largest pools of, as yet, non-rationalised, socio-cultural value systems in Australia. Indeed these cultures represent a position from which a criticism of the rational bureaucratic society could be mounted. The quicker and more efficiently youngsters from these cultures are socialised into the bureaucratic society the better. Another reason for concern with ethnic groups in Australia is of course their over-representation in the working-class, that is, there is an even stronger need to convince and motivate the youngsters from non-English speaking backgrounds to participate in the educational system, since they are the very groups which are least likely to benefit from it. For these two reasons, then, one can predict that there will be some increased funding for research on more effective ways to bring into the managed system, the children of the recent Australian immigrants.

An on-going and already existing area of research and development which should, if the foregoing analysis is correct, receive additional support, is the area of curriculum development and research. The establishment of the Curriculum Development Centre and the ideological value for the State of having standard curriculum content is obvious. A national core curriculum, whatever its educational merits, would certainly have the effect of bringing the study of the culture under political and administrative control. Michael Pusey describes quite accurately one method by which the Curriculum Development Centre attempts to do this:

"The developers begin by eliciting descriptions, demonstrations and explanations of the teaching practices of one or several teachers working in a particular situation. Then these practices are abstracted from the particular people and the particular contexts in which they were originally situated, and first observed, translated into materials and methods and then transformed into packages or routines which are trialed, evaluated and then adopted. The usual hidden priority and the implicit criterion of selection which guides every step of the process is the replicability of the practice in different situations, i.e. its potential usefulness and portability as an administrative resource, or as one theorist puts it, its potential for eventual incorporation as a stabled part of the organisational structure, and a part of the regular routing of the system. And so, development is really a process of formalisation which converts educational practice into administrative structure." ⁶

Perhaps one should look here at what might be seen as a counter-development. In Victoria there has been much discussion about school-based curriculum. Admittedly to the extent that it develops, it will reduce the direct control by the State over the content of the curriculum. There are two questions which need to be asked about the school-based curriculum movement, firstly

to what extent is it, in fact, a real development? One might look at the experience in the United States where with very weak State Education Departments and a considerable amount of local school-district input into curriculum development, it is still true that a youngster can move from New York to California and enter school with very little loss or gain and in fact very little difference in the curriculum. Secondly, as long as there is something like the HSC, some form of Leaving examination, will not State control of the curriculum be assured? The Victorian Institute for Secondary Education (VISE), while possessing a confused mandate to modify and reduce the force of examinations, seems rather more bent on improving the system and making in a sense more subtle, the administrative control exerted through final leaving school examinations.

In spite of "School-Based Curriculum" and VISE, one can expect to see increased support for curriculum development and research designed to develop a core curriculum for Australian schools.

It is anticipated that the State should initiate attempts to reduce the level of criticism focussed on the educational system, that is, assuming a minimal understanding of the need for responding to Crisis, the current "rubbishing" of Australian education should decline. One interpretation of the Williams Report is that it represents the first stage in this decline of criticism. Many expected that the Williams Report might blame the educational system for problems in the economy. This did not occur, and in fact, the general structure and function of education in Australia was explicitly defended by Williams.

More support will be forthcoming for writing, research and development projects which strengthen the separate functions of each educational sub-system, that is, University, College of Advanced Education, TAFE, Secondary, Technical, Primary and Pre-School. The reason for supporting these divisions is that the knowledge needed to ask questions about the nature of the entire educational system can be ruled out. The cry becomes more money for TAFE, rather than what is the relationship between education in general and the economic system.

Support will be forthcoming for research which looks at ways to develop the self-image of students, particularly those from working-class and disadvantaged backgrounds. This research will examine ways in which the schools and other social agencies can assist in enhancing this self-image, but will not examine the relationship between that self-image and the socio-economic structure of the society.

Whether or not the developments outlined above eventuate (perhaps 1984 would be a good year in which to check on them), a larger question still remains. Can the Crisis of Legitimation be managed and if so, for how long? It seems unlikely that educational research and development, however focussed

can be of much use for other than the short term. Habermas argues that: "the patterns of priorities that Galbraith analysed from the point of view of 'private wealth versus public poverty' result from a class structure that is usually kept latent. In the final analysis this class structure is the source of the legitimation deficit."⁷ If this is true the solution to the legitimation crisis lies well outside the confines of the educational system and outside the limits of this paper as well.

1. See Legitimation Crisis by Jurgen Habermas, Beacon Press, Boston, 1975
2. ibid., pp. 74-75
3. "Putting Education on a Course of Survival", The Age, Tuesday 11 September 1979, p. 27, Senator John Button.
4. "Contemporary Schooling, Competence and Commitment to Work", by P W Musgrave, The Australian College of Education, 20th Annual Conference, Education and the World of Work - Lead Speakers Papers, p.8.
5. "Education for a Multicultural Society", Report of the Committee on Multicultural Education Schools Commission, Canberra, February 1979.
6. "The Legitimation of State Education Systems", by Michael Pusey. Paper delivered at Sociological Association of Australia and New Zealand Conference, Canberra, July 1979, p.11.
7. Habermas, op.cit., p. 73.