

## Educational Reform in New Zealand and the Depowering of the Teacher: A Case Study

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### Abstract

Educational reform in New Zealand was initially greeted optimistically. Lauder and Yee (1987) suggest New Zealand provides an example of an alternative paradigm where there is some room for negotiation between the state and teachers' organisations as an alternative to the state as the servant of capital model. This article, based on a case study of teacher interviews, suggests that proletarianisation of the teacher is taking place and that the effect of some of the reforms is to emphasise the dichotomy between the state and the educational worker, those who wield power and those who have their power removed or reduced.

### Introduction

In this paper, I am going to argue that the position of teacher as a trusted professional has been severely undermined by Tomorrow's Schools, and further, that as a result of intensification, teachers are being subverted from their true purpose of teaching children to excessive involvement in the administration of education. The present emphases on efficiency, accountability and market competition suggest that education is a commodity and that parents and children are consumers of the products of a business which is managed by a principal and staffed by teachers. Although effective planning, budgeting and staff development are useful strategies, and although Tomorrow's Schools has brought about some positive changes, there have been consequences for teachers which are ascertainable only by dialogue with them. It is these which I intend to present here.

### Scholarship

In their article, "Are Teachers being Proletarianised?" (1987), Lauder and Yee address the argument that teachers are being proletarianised, i.e. that they are becoming like assembly line workers in the classroom rather than acting as professionals with control over what they do. Lauder and Yee agree that this is intrinsic to a social phenomenon in which divisions are institutionalised and given life in areas of policy as well as in areas of implementation:

"Society as a whole is more and more splitting up into two great hostile camps, into two great classes directly facing each other; Bourgeoisie and Proletariat." (Ozga and Lawn 1981 p 124)

However, while Lauder and Yee agree that this split does occur, they argue that the classical stance of the state as the servant of capital as expressed by Harris (1982) is not necessarily appropriate to events in New Zealand throughout the 1980s, and instead posit an alternative paradigm in which "the state's relationship to capital can be seen as one which allows for negotiation and political initiative" (Lauder and Yee, p 60). Such a paradigm allows greater scope for political action as opposed to economic dictatorship to

affect the workplace, and in the area of education they cite two cases which, as they say, "put flesh on the bones" of their model.

The polarisation which Ozga and Lawn refer to and which Lauder and Yee recognise becomes, in their terms, a manifestation of a deskilling process which diminishes the professional role of teachers and makes them easier to control and cheaper to pay for :

". . . the catalyst for the polarisation of society is proletarianisation, which in turn is a result of capital's drive to accumulation. According to this view, capital breaks down the tasks of the skilled craftsperson and turns them into the routine and repetitive operations of the machine minder. This aids the accumulation process because it is cheaper to use machines to produce than it is skilled human beings and, of course, capital has control over machines in a way it does not over labour. But the consequence for labour is that the autonomy associated with skilled craftwork is replaced by the tyranny of the conveyor belt. For the . . . authors this process applies as much to state workers and in particular teachers, as it does to others" (Lauder and Yee, p 58).

The terminology of this analysis is thus 'deskilling', 'depowering' or 'proletarianisation', which are more or less synonymous but which have slight differences of emphasis. The process of proletarianisation takes essentially two forms . In the first instance, it is through the "loss of control over the content and process of teaching through the advent of the new technologies of curriculum packaging"(ibid p 59).(Michael Apple's keynote address presented at the 1990 AARE conference in Sydney effectively addresses this issue. See Proceedings of the 1990 AARE Conference., forthcoming.)

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The other form of teacher depowering and the area of concern for this article is administrative depowering via increased accountability, loss of autonomy and job security, and decrease of real income.

The question that Lauder and Yee raise in their paper is "whether these processes of teacher proletarianisation are as inevitable as the literature tends to suggest"(p 59). They argue that the literature provides a deterministic account of this process since it adheres to Harris's model (1982) of the state as the servant of capital. If in fact their alternative paradigm is appropriate, then state intervention may be less deterministic. They cite the example of the Fourth Labour Government resisting New Right economic policies of the Treasury (1987):

"While it has been suggested that economic crisis is a catalyst to the proletarianisation of state 'professional' employees the present Labour party's policies suggest that the state doesn't have to mimic capital in this respect; that a degree of insulation is possible" (ibid p 68).

Unfortunately, the optimism of this statement cannot be sustained in 1990 as

this "degree of insulation" for education proved to be only temporary.

In this paper, I argue that although Lauder and Yee's model may be supported by the examples they cite in 1987, the hidden agenda of the late 1980s and 1990 has clearly been an economic rather than a social one, although it has been couched in the palliative language of liberal concern. And if the opinions expressed in my case study were found to be representative for teachers throughout the country, I would go so far as to suggest that a better example of the state as servant to capital would be hard to find. (An exception to this process and one which conforms to the Lauder and Yee model has possibly been the negotiating powers of the combined university community where the AUT and the university administrators successfully resisted some of the changes initiated by the government in a similar fashion to the PPTA examples to which Lauder and Yee refer.)

Wylie in *The Impact of Tomorrow's Schools in Primary Schools and Intermediates: 1989 Survey Report* suggests that all is not well with teachers as far as their new roles under Tomorrow's Schools is concerned. In her survey of teachers' opinions about the implementation of Tomorrow's Schools, it was particularly interesting to note that of the 414 teachers who responded, only 5% made positive comments:

Table 63

Teachers' views of the implementation of Tomorrow's Schools

View	%
Far too fast	29
Funding inadequate	27
Misleading /confusing information	23
Too much pressure on staff	17
Concern about fair appointments being made	13
Expecting too much from trustees/community	10
Negative comment on parent involvement	08
Teacher morale low	08
Paperwork taking classroom/student time	07
Postive comment on implementation	05

(Wylie, p 89)

In order to investigate Wylie's findings further and to explore some of the issues of proletarianisation in greater depth, I decided to develop an open-

ended questionnaire and go into four primary schools and interview teachers.

### The Case Study

The field work for my case study was carried out in four primary schools in the greater Wellington area. I interviewed eight teachers and one principal. I interviewed three teachers each from the junior and upper school and two from the middle school. Five women and three men were interviewed.

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Both schools involved in the study went up to form 2. All interviews were conducted in the months of October and November 1990.

### Accountability and the Role of the Teacher

"The role hasn't changed so much as the implications. You know, the way you are now accountable to the public. And I find that there are far more stroppy questions asked of teachers, as in for example someone on the board of trustees saying, 'I heard you were sick yesterday. How come you were driving through [a Wellington suburb is named]?', as if to say, 'I am employing you. If you are going to be sick, you have to be in bed'. And that is the most extreme example of the kinds of things I'm talking about".

The teacher who related this incident also indicated that the stance implied a lack of trust in teachers which makes the job more difficult.

A further account which underlines one of the negative aspects of the role of the board of trustees was similarly Orwellian:

"They now have less trust in our natural abilities and beliefs and teaching abilities. We now feel as if someone has their finger on us because it is their job".

The teachers I spoke to generally agreed that accountability was not a bad thing in itself, but that the degree to which this tenet was carried out had the potential of misdirecting the focus within schools:

"I find that I've been so much bogged down. I'm almost assessing the way the students walk into a room. I've got piles and piles of all of these things which I can say: 'Yes, so-and-so has increased in the ability to do this or feels better about that or has achieved this level'. But I'm not changing the

way I teach, I'm just having to spend more time making these observations....Teachers are being forced to be more aware of tons of what is often trivia . . . That has to be streamlined or teachers need to be told what's important and what isn't. Everything from reading through to PE is being assessed . . . everybody's ability and fitness has to be assessed so many times in such-and-such a way".

"It's weakened my position in terms of the way I feel. I think that teachers have always been in a position in society below where they should be, so they see themselves in a deflated way in relation to the rest of society".

"If you go by pay rates, and status and so on . . . Tomorrow's Schools hasn't helped. The whole idea of being accountable in some way to the local parents is undermining. There is a connotation there that they can check you out and make comments about you. People make comments now about my teaching that I wouldn't make to any other person. I wouldn't say to my doctor: 'Are you sure you're doing the right thing there? Do you think you should do this?' "

The response from the small group of teachers that I interviewed was that their ability as trained professionals was being questioned, which was reflected in their inappropriately low social status. Although they wished to fulfill the intentions of Tomorrow's Schools , i.e. to be accountable and to be effective teachers, they still wished to retain or recover their professional status and the recognition of it within society.

A positive face of accountability and what is commonly referred to as community involvement in education is that a teacher can do much to impress if he or she is prepared to market their programme effectively:

"I think that we are given this opportunity through Tomorrow's Schools to show that we are setting aims , outcomes and objectives, and then to show through reporting that we are achieving them. At our school we say at the beginning of the year, 'This is our programme, these are all the things we do', and then at the end of the year we have an open day and can say: 'Here are the results' ".

However, the drawback of this presentation, continuity and accountability is that the work involved can become infinite. This particular informant suggested that teachers were being asked to do extra things, and then to justify themselves by doing even more things, and then to give an account of what was done, much as a business manager would produce a profit sheet or a sales and marketing report.

"A lot of what is done is because we feel that parents can only make comments and judgements about

the school if they're involved inside the school and if they have information about it. If that process is working then that should strengthen the school and then we can say we've got a very good school because we've seen this and this. But it's all up to us. It's another onus on the teacher to show what they've been doing and what they've achieved".

#### Teachers' Workloads

A consequence of all the t-crossing and i-dotting of evaluation and marketing, which is what the liberal-sounding but bureaucratic-creating process of accountability involves, is that there is a huge amount of extra loading for teachers:

"I don't know that accountability has affected anything ....except what I can do in my spare time, and I resent that. I'd like strict hours so you say 'Right, this is overtime', or 'this is my job and that isn't', or 'I need to be released to do that if you want it done'- like taking a water polo team, because if you do, there must be tradeoffs".

"My family life has suffered. I've got a log of hours I've spent in term one and I averaged 56 a week for ten weeks and because I have 4 younger children I have a period between after school and seven o'clock when I spend a lot of time with my family. A lot of hours between 8 and eleven at night, especially Monday to Wednesday and Sundays, I also had to work, and that's an awful lot of time that I didn't spend before. I've taught in schools before and managed to do it all between 7:30 and 4:00, or whatever."

Most of the teachers seemed to accept their greater workload stoically, but it was easy to see they were not very pleased about it on the one hand while obviously feeling powerless to do anything about it on the other .

There was also concern among teachers that principals and teachers had decided to leave teaching because of this increased load:

"I do know people who have retired because of the workload, especially principals. And there has also been a lot of negative talk about what sort of future and prospects we've got and I think it's like any job situation. The pressure goes on and you're expected to work very long hours. I don't think we're terribly well paid and if someone comes along and offers you something else(you take it)."

At one school, the principal set a standard of long hours that the teachers felt they should emulate. One teacher talked about her principal's load:

"I see them (being) more hassled. They've suddenly got a lot more that's been

dropped on them. It depends on what sort of principal you've got . I mean there are some principals who I've taught under who have not really involved themselves with the school. They've been tucked away in an office, and one might glimpse them at the head of a staff meeting or wandering around talking to parents at a parents' thing, but they've never really become involved in the school. Then there are principals who have been involved who come into the classrooms, who give you ten ,twenty minutes talking to the children, sitting down reading a story to them. It's these ones that I'm thinking about. It's these ones I see suddenly don't have that time . They've got so much on that they don't really have that time to be part of the school, so they've actually become more and more a figurehead, that unknown person".

What was also clear was that there are tensions that were not apparent prior to Tomorrow's Schools.. The traditional boundaries and frameworks within which teachers have worked have been greatly expanded. This has happened without discussion or negotiation. Teachers have been told directly to take on a whole new range of duties such as budgeting and accounting, and other duties have been foisted on them indirectly such as the need to keep records and measurements of everything imaginable for which they may feel accountable.

#### Teachers and Principals

What appears to have happened in the schools in which I interviewed teachers is that the principals have had to spend a great deal of extra time in administrative work in order to fulfil their new roles as managers, but they have also been supported by their staff and are trying not to treat their teachers any differently than previously. Because of Tomorrow's Schools, they have to write everything down and evaluate everything, but they were in some cases doing similar things before but with less documentation.

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There was a feeling at one of the schools that they would succeed as a school with or without Tomorrow's Schools because of the positive attitude of the teachers and the support that they got from and gave to the principal. Efficiency and accountability were translated in positive terms.

Rather than constant stressful teaching evaluation, the process had become one geared to staff development and was in fact in line with what this principal was developing, i.e. a clear set of guidelines for all of the teachers at the school at a micro and macro level:

"Not all that I've done in relation to appraisal is to do with Tomorrow's Schools . It can be a performance thing, where a report was done once a year on performance -this isn't a measurement. Teachers have been used to this form for sometime- they're not necessarily all positive about it, but it's done and everyone is used to it. The job description is more formal than it was before.

Weekly supervisions occur for data reporting and objective statements, rather than evaluative statements, for example the teaching of reading. I try to pull together all the things that go on as supervision, and I've done that for 10 or 12 years. It's a bit more formal now because of the appraisal, and at some stage in the past I haven't written it down, but I might have said it to the person involved. In our school, we gear appraisal to development - we want

feedback in certain areas. In the course of getting that feedback, a lot of other information emerges as well that can be honed into development rather than feedback".

The principal, rather than feeling in a position of power, felt very aware of his accountability:

"I'm more accountable now. It's like a sandwich. The top is the Board (of Trustees). The bottom is the school. And in the middle is the principal and board chairperson".

There was some concern among the teachers to whom I spoke that, because of workload, the principal would lose contact with the pupils of the school so that when, for instance, a teacher was discussing a problem relating to one particular child, the principal could fail to have personal knowledge of the child. This would make it difficult for the principal to offer personal and objective advice, or to intervene.

The other side to this is that the principal loses the status of colleague and fellow-teacher and becomes an administrator and manager, and the teacher /principal relationship becomes one of manager/ worker.

One teacher underlined the importance of the principal's role as a teacher leading by example, a person with vision:

"I think it's very important in a school that you've got somebody with some sort of vision, a commitment, because I think principals are very important. They really do set the tone and have to be looking towards that whole development area".

And the fear is that as a "chief executive", principals take on roles that increase their status while decreasing that of the classroom teacher. When asked about the new role of the principal as manager, one teacher replied:

"I know lots of people feel uncomfortable with it. I think it's fine while everything's going well, but to have somebody supposedly there to lead you and help you develop professionally but also to be there to rap you over the knuckles is a dual role which does not sit very nicely and I certainly would not like to take it on. I don't like the idea of removing the principal from being head of the teaching team, and setting an example, to the administrative role where you ... can in fact be the person who hires and fires.

I think that can be very difficult and it leads to people currying favours which I think is unfortunate. I mean, we are very lucky here in that we haven't had any problems like that, but I know that some principals have said they find that role difficult to have, to wear two hats... I think that previously the

principal's job was very much to support their staff. Even if you think people have failings, it's your job to try and do something about it as the head of a team, to try and help that person constructively, not be sitting in judgement".

This teacher saw the Education Boards and the school inspectors as previously having this role, and in fact it seems apparent that the dual role of the principal in relation to running the school, and the consequent dual relationship with both staff and pupils (which at its worst could swamp a school and at

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its best had to be fought all the time) is rather like that described by Ozga and Lawn (1981). Because there is an evident confusion between the educative role of schooling and the market model of education, polarisation is clearly a potential state in any school, which is symbolised by the 'two hats' of the principal and the latent gap between principal and staff and/or principal and pupils under the new regime.

There was also an expression of concern for the new power that principals had in relation to the probation of new teachers:

"If you're a young teacher and you don't agree with something that's happening in your school and you know that the principal's the person who will say if you'll be registered or not, then it is very hard to make waves. When you're on the bottom of the ladder and you are new in a school, you have to be fairly strong to speak out if you need to, so I think that it's important that young teachers have somebody, that there's some sort of network set up, but that's disappeared, because that used to be the role of the inspectorate".

One of the principals was very concerned that he'd always been a "hands-on" principal, that he'd made it his job to get around and spend lots of time in the class, so that he knew the pupils of his school and could always refer to them with first-hand knowledge. He regretted that this was no longer possible under Tomorrow's Schools: before Tomorrow's Schools he spent about 80% of his time in the school and 20% on administration, and this was now reversed.

## Discussion

What in fact was recommended by Tomorrow's Schools that affects teachers in such a way that it has the potential to proletarianise them? A fundamental concept that relates to teachers is the recommendation that schools will be run as a partnership between the professionals (the teachers) and the community (the parents) on the one hand, and between the community and the government on the other hand. The "mechanism for such a partnership will be a board of trustees" (Tomorrow's Schools, p 1).

The language is in this context the liberal vocabulary of social cohesion and

reciprocity, resting as it does on the terms 'partnership' and 'sharing'. However, another tone emerges in section 1.1.20: " The board of trustees is the legal employer of teachers and as such will be responsible for instituting procedures of teacher appraisal and discipline".

The dichotomy between the soft touchy-feely language of a liberal bureaucracy espousing certain ideals and the strictly legalistic language of accountability is clear, and it can be argued that it is the same dichotomy which occurs in the implementation and manifestation of Tomorrow's Schools. It is a dichotomy in which one group (with power) faces and may oppose another group (supplying a service), much like that described by Ozga and Lawn (1981).

A structural barrier to true partnership is the make-up of the basis of the partnership - the board of trustees . If one were thinking in terms of a true partnership then it would seem appropriate that the governing of the schools be shared "between the professionals and the particular community". Instead, the board of trustees is made up of five elected parents, the principal , and one staff member . In the case of secondary schools one student is elected by pupils. Up to four other people can be co-opted, including one person who is a practising teacher. Teachers or the principal are not allowed to be chairpersons and "apart from the teacher representative, no other employee of the board will be chairperson of the board" (1.1.37).

What Tomorrow's Schools also attempted to do was to set the principal and selected teachers apart from the rest of the staff by creating a quasi-business situation whereby they were employed in "executive " positions under contract. This move has been resisted but nonetheless it was an intention of the government and it reveals some of the tone of the recommendations.

In addition to these potentially divisive structures, the government has created a Teachers' Registration Board (TRB). When professional bodies are set up, such as the Law Society or the Medical Council, it is by the members for their own benefit. Instead, the Teachers' Registration Board was set up by the government without negotiation or even consultation with the teachers. It was imposed from the outside.

What is particularly interesting is that the notion of partnership is already a politically approved and

correct-sounding concept, associated as it is with the strong bargaining position the Treaty of Waitangi gives to Maori people as they stand in partnership with the Pakeha /European. If the partnership in education is between professionals and the community, then it should entail an equal sharing between the the two partners . That is the philosophical stance, but the translation into practice does not in fact result in equality but in the creation of a hierarchical structure where the power lies with the community and the teachers are in fact not partners but employees of the board of trustees, i.e. the community, the parents. Also, whereas previously the

principal was the head of the teaching team - not an equal on the one hand, but not apart on the other - now the principal was to be in the business model, a manager.

Teachers have had a set of circumstances foisted on to them by the state . They have not had a say in determining these circumstances, have not bargained or negotiated with the state and have in effect had no voice. It is a good example of centre-periphery decision-making which is, in fact, the opposite of what the government promised when it talked about devolving power, or giving power to the periphery.

The state has given both principals and teachers more jobs to do that take them a long way beyond the legal 37 1/2 hour work week and they are given no recognition or recompense for this .They have also been pushed into a hierarchical type of management mould, and away from the collegial approach that has historically been favoured in New Zealand, i.e. rather than having bosses, New Zealanders have seen themselves as working on a consensus basis, suppressing tall poppies and preventing individuals from having too much power or recognition .

As one teacher suggested, it is not the principle or the amount of accountability that is the sore point, it is the implication that teachers cannot, in fact, be trusted . They are thus denied their professionalism and the imposition of accountability on them is symbolic and designed to control and deny power. It is also the case that the TRB was forced on teachers by the state, again another controlling mechanism that was not previously there, without negotiation or even consultation. The next move by the new government (and in fact National Party policy) will probably be to remove compulsory unionism .This will have the long-term effect of drastically weakening the strength and solidarity Lauder and Yee speak of when they describe the exceptional situation shown in relation to the Post Primary Teachers' Association in their case study. By "making the unions compete in the market place", the aim is evidently to divide teachers and reduce their professional status. At the moment, teachers' workloads are so demanding that they are not in a strong enough position to be able clearly to think issues through, let alone to organise themselves into some sort of cohesive and protective movement. They can probably be compared to somebody who witnessed a mugging in broad daylight in the inner city, with the whole thing happening so fast that because they did not act quickly enough at the time they don't feel in retrospect that they have the right to comment .

Lauder and Yee (1987) argue that there are grounds to support their paradigm, but shortly after their article appeared, the Labour Government did in fact take up the recommendations of the Treasury and the negotiability and flexibility to which these authors referred ceased to be very apparent.

Teachers after Tomorrow's Schools are in a weaker position than they were when Lauder and Yee wrote their article. The state seems to be the faithful servant of capital once more, and flexibility and negotiation have gone out the window. The present economic crisis is being used largely as a justification for the proliferation of aims to achieve accountability, efficiency, and pragmatism. Education has thus become a commodity, something to be used to prepare people for the labour market, and the soothing language of idealism and community involvement has been trotted out to anaesthetise a whole country into accepting

the concepts of economic forces and the transformation of areas of social policy into the domain of business and marketing.(See Grace 1990 for an excellent analysis of the education as commodity / public good debate.)

Teachers are not in themselves opposed to accountability or community involvement. Rather, they are opposed to the lack of consultation that has occurred in the change in their roles, and to the disregard for their years of professional experience. For a government with a rhetoric of community involvement, of placing decisions closest to their point of origin, of consensus decision-making, implementation of education reform fell far short of what they preached.

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