

EDUCATION IS NOT A HAMBURGER

BOB MEYENN

JUDITH PARKER

CHARLES STURT UNIVERSITY

Paper Presented at the Australian Association for  
Research in Education Annual Conference  
Gold Coast University

November 199

TO SIT ON COMMITTEES

They were bright metal once, souls aflame,  
smelling something rotten in the state,  
ardent to set it right. They began bravely,  
with banners, songs; they sought the dreadful summit

but were led into committees, where dead words  
hang in the conditioned air like ash  
and settle slowly on the carpet, the causes  
they came to serve are never on the papers,  
and drifts of information glaze their brains.

Soon, however, they learn the real agenda.  
They become adept: the pointed phrase precisely  
placed; the inside knowledge to parry an  
opponent's thrust; the twist, the swift diversion.

They savour the cerebral excitement  
of a hit. So the play becomes the thing,  
and later, when he hands the drinks around,  
They cannot remember why it was they joined,  
or what they meant to do about the king.

MARGERY HOURIHAN

1

## Introduction

Social and Political movements throughout the 1980's have been increasingly impelled by the forces of economic rationalism and corporate managerialism. These imperatives have had a significant impact on the debate about the aims, purposes and organisation of education.

The paper is in two parts: Part I examines the characteristics of formula economics and corporate managerialism and their impact on education; Part II uses functional grammar as a framework for discussing the language that proponents of formula economics and corporate managerialism choose in recruiting staff to implement their educational policies.

## PART I

### Formula Economics

The research of Pusey (1991) has demonstrated the pervasiveness of economic rationalism and formula economics in the determination of Australian public policy.

In discussing the educational background of the Senior Executive services in key

federal government departments, he comments that there is an over representation of personnel with backgrounds in economics, accountancy and business. He contrasts this

with the picture in many other comparable O.E.C.D. countries where the normal requirements for high civil service positions is still a superior liberal education...or an education in the law. (Pusey, 1991: 59)

Pusey also argues that the typical, and influential public servants, particularly in the most important departments like the Treasury, are disproportionately male, educated in Australia's most expensive private schools and come from privileged socio-economic backgrounds. For these public servants he argues there is no sense of the traditional 'noblesse oblige' indeed "they are likely to have the most anti-social policy attitudes". (Pusey, 1991: 5)

2

He goes on to explain why the stars of the formula economists, as he calls them, are in the ascendency. Given the structural changes in the 1980's to the bureaucracy, the perceived parlous state of the Australian economy, their ability to articulate simple and expeditious solutions to complex problems has been warmly embraced.

Further, their form of public service has also meant that the 'wise men of the tribe' have been displaced if not systematically ousted. This, Pusey suggests, has led to the creation of "an insulating distance that protects the political administration system" (Pusey, 1991: 12) from other ideologies and influences. In other words, they have become the exclusive peddlers of advice to the government on a variety of social issues that have profound implications for the lives of ordinary Australians.

## Characteristics of Economic Rationalism

Economic rationalism, put simply, is the belief that markets are better at allocating resources than planners. Rationalists embrace such policies as currency flotation, financial deregulation, tax reforms (fringe benefits tax, capital gains tax, etc.) and oppose subsidies, regulation and industry protection. Rationalists agree that market failure can occur and while intervention by government and planners is sometimes necessary, it should be minimal.

Economic rationalism has a number of other key features:

- a commitment to more individual initiative and responsibility;
- less state provision;
- an emphasis upon efficiency rather than social justice or equity and
- public policy dominated by business ideology (Pusey, 1991).

## Corporate Managerialism

Corporate managerialism is the organisational tool of economic rationalism. Among its characteristics are:

- strategies to achieve best value from limited resources;
  - achievement of economic rather than social goals;
- 3
- management and efficiency as an end in itself (Bates, 1990);
  - public policy objectives couched in terms of economic goals (Yeatman, 1991);
  - centralisation of control in key areas;
  - decentralisation of control in less significant areas;
  - deregulation of the labor force;
  - increasing emphasis on accountability particularly through the use of performance indicators and incentives and
  - short term goals at the expense of long term planning.

## Implications for Education

The 1980's has seen dramatic changes to the organisation of education in Australia as well as much of the western world. These changes have been accompanied by low

teacher morale and an increased emphasis on the efficiency of management and structures. Many of these changes have been driven and dominated by the economic imperatives embedded in corporate managerialism.

But, education is simply not a hamburger; it is a complex social and intellectual process. Making hamburgers is concerned with making a profit for the owner/s of a corporation. They are cheap products manufactured to a formula and the formula assures us that the hamburger in Boston is the same as the one in Hong Kong or Surfers Paradise. They are uniform: they all look alike and they contain the same ingredients. They are mild and bland, and if they don't do you any good, they probably won't do you any harm either. They are produced under factory like conditions by workers who have very little say in the managerial practices and policy making decisions of the organisation. The emphasis in the organisation of work practices is on speed, efficiency, cutting costs, producing instant satisfaction for the customer and a high return for the shareholder.

Unfortunately, economic rationalists often seem to equate educating a child with making a hamburger. Such a view reveals, of course, their paucity of understanding of the interplay of social, intellectual and emotional factors that inform the education process. Businesses are about making profits; education is infinitely more complex. As Nietzsche warned:

4

Once education is seen as something which provides profit then that which provides profit will soon be confused with education.

Current directions of education in N.S.W. and other Australian states see schools increasingly as small businesses. In applying corporate management theory and practice to the operation of schools, principals are cast in the role of

branch managers,  
their effectiveness measured by their efficiency and ability to manage a  
devolved  
budget. Sharan Burrow, Vice President of the N.S.W. Teachers Federation  
comments (21/11/1991) that "N.S.W. must decide if it wants a school system  
or 2,200  
small businesses".

Interestingly, that whilst schools are seen as small businesses, they are  
also seen as  
components of a corporate enterprise where the principal carries out the  
policy of the  
managing director and the board. (Less significant decisions can, of  
course, be made  
by the branch manager.) Like all good branch managers s/he is expected to  
manage  
scarce resources and hence often becomes the focus of dissatisfaction for  
the  
community and the staff. The central authority is immuned by distance from  
the  
effect of their decisions. In other words, the professional collegial  
relationship  
between principal and staff is changed to one of employer and employee.  
(Yeatman,  
1991: 2)

A feature of the reform of educational organisation and structure in many  
Australian  
states, New Zealand (Hearn, 1991) and Canada (Kuehn, 1991), has been  
devolution  
of responsibility to schools. This is often heralded as an initiative  
that gives schools  
democracy, choice and flexibility. However, this is not always the case  
because the  
decisions about the curriculum are increasingly centralised. This takes  
from the  
school and teachers control over the core of education. The consequences  
of this  
affect how teachers teach and their relationship with students.

Writers like Wilenski 1986, Lingard 1989, Kuehn 1991, argue that commitment  
to  
issues of equity and social justice is more problematic in a devolved  
system. The  
pursuit of the economic rationalist goals of efficiency and effectiveness  
can often  
become ends in themselves rather than the means by which social justice and  
equity  
can be realized for all people:

There is an inherent contradiction in the idea of social justice within a devolved system for the former implies, indeed requires a system for wide and universalist commitment while the notion of self managing schools implies a diversity of provision. (Lingard, 1991: 3)

Within a devolved system resourcing formulas tend to apply and because the goals of social justice and equity are more difficult to measure, and often more expensive to implement, they are not so amenable to the application of such formulas:

...pursuit of equity may stop at the school door. Once inside, resources are allocated according to priorities based on needs as viewed by school personnel. (Kuehn, 1991: 7)

Because the school is expected to do more with less, this is not surprising. As the Schools Council so clearly points out, the percentage of GDP spent on education has decreased during the 1980's. At the same time, however, the number of students has increased; particularly towards the end of the decade as the success of state and federal policies has led to a significant increase in the retention rate of pupils in the post compulsory years. As well as schools doing more with less this pressure has also resulted in teacher salaries falling behind cost of living increases (Schools Council, 1990).

When schools are regarded as part of a corporate business structure, it is likely that the individual contribution and interests of teachers will be subjugated to the goals of the corporation which are inevitably driven by economic imperatives. The changed role of the principal emphasises a managerial rather than a leadership function. This profoundly affects the relationship of principal and staff. In the recent restructuring in N.S.W., emphasis was placed on managerial rather than professional experience in selecting its senior executive service. (King, 1991: 9; also see Appendix 1). Foggo (1991) argues that this preoccupation with corporate managerialism will appear to

work because it ignores:

6

the complex realities of the educational processes, the cultures of schools, the structures of system, (and) the needs and concerns of the community. (1991: 2)

Pusey's (1991) comments on the young economic rationalist replacing the 'wise old men of the tribe' are pertinent to the restructuring of the N.S.W. Department of School Education. Currently the most senior officers of the N.S.W. Department of School Education have very little background and experience in the N.S.W. school system.

King (1991: 7) indicates this can have profound implications for the system:

Much of the culture of an organisation and its history can be conveniently accessed through the memories of its long-serving senior officers. Cutting away the bureaucratic elders, as it were, destroys the precious cultural history of the organisation like a Cultural Revolutionary expunging of the past. With the loss of this cultural capital in the Department of School Education has come a heightened uncertainty about new directions. In this sense, a knowledge of origins is necessary for understanding the relevance of the present.

The developments of the 1980's have also led to a decline in the morale and status of teachers. This issue has been carefully documented by the O.E.C.D. (1990) in its volume *The Teacher Today*.

Another apparent feature of the economic rationalists' approach to education, is the notion that teaching is something that almost any educated person with the necessary desire can perform. This view is an inevitable consequence of having personnel in the very senior positions in the education bureaucracies who have little or no experience of teaching or the education process. Such a view manifests itself in a number of ways, most obviously in proposals for 'alternative pathways' into

teaching

(Directions and Strategies (1990); Kemp, (1991)). These, it should be stressed, are not alternative pathways into teacher education (this has been an encouraging feature of entrants into teacher education programmes in the last decade) but into teaching.

7

Examples from the private schools are often cited here to illustrate this point where apparently successful teaching has occurred by staff who do not have traditional teaching qualifications.

These proposals present a fundamental challenge to the professionalism of teaching.

It denies that teaching is a profession with specialized knowledge and skills, based on a period of specialized professional preparation. Very often these proposals, which strike at the core of teachers' professionalism, are accompanied by a stated desire to uplift the morale and status of teachers. Given this obvious contradiction, it is not surprising that teachers are sceptical about alternative pathways; they do not see similar proposals for alternative pathways into the other professions of medicine, engineering, law, for example.

The preoccupation in N.S.W. with the implementation of the reforms proposed by

Carrick, Excellence and Equity and Scott, have in many ways meant that no real debate of significance has been conducted on the fundamental purposes of education and the role of the state in educational provision. The state and national debate has simply assumed that the purposes of education and schooling are to provide a better educated workforce.

Having arrived at this point in Australia, in a curious way it seems logical that the next step is towards the education policies proposed by Kemp of a free market voucher system of educational provision similar to that proposed by the

Sexton  
Report in New Zealand.

## PART II

In this part of the paper we want to attempt an analysis of a number of pieces of text using the approach of Halliday (1978) outlined in his book *An Introduction to Functional Grammar* (1985) where he argues that a linguistic system is a social semiotic, a system through which cultural values and ideological stances are reflected in the semantic choices of the language. That is:

8

in its most general significance a text is a sociological event, a semiotic encounter through which the meanings that constitute the social system are exchanged. (Halliday, 1978: 139)

In late 1989, the N.S.W. government advertised a number of positions in its newly created Senior Executive Service (See Appendix 1). In so doing the government made abundantly clear its educational philosophy, an essential component of which was a commitment to corporate managerialism:

Before looking more closely at one of these advertisements, we want to consider two statements:

Margaret manages the school

Margaret leads the school

in order to show the different relationships between "Margaret" and "the school" signalled by the choice of "managed" and "leads".

Margaret managed the school is a dispositive clause; that is; the actor, Margaret, is doing something to the affected goal, the school. The semantic choices instantiated in the grammatical structure of this apparently simple four word statement, indicate a particular kind of relationship between Margaret and the school; a

relationship  
indicative of a particular view of the world.

If we then explore the relationship between Margaret lead and the school in the second statement, we can say, in linguistic terms that the statement is a creative clause. This means that Margaret is the initiator and the school is the medium; that is, the school is in an active relationship with Margaret.

When we choose to use the verb to lead rather than the verb to manage we signal a substantially different attitude between the participants, the processes and the goals.

When the grammatical system allows us to describe one clause as "dispositive" and another as "creative" we begin to understand the underlying values encoded in the

9

statements. Language is more than a means of communication; it is the fundamental means whereby we perceive reality.

To return to the advertisements: they are for Senior Management Positions. The text under the first sub-heading, Education and Youth Affairs Portfolio, outlines the characteristics of effective senior managers. If we accept that different kinds of relationships are signaled through the semantic choices we make, then it is interesting that managers is foregrounded linguistically in this text. The only reference anywhere in the text to leaders comes in the form of leadership skills in the second paragraph. It is also instructive that the clause before the second sub-heading, Department of Education, is the lack of professional education experience should not constrain people from applying (for senior management positions in the Department of School Education).

The first statement under the second sub-heading, Department of Education, is:

The government has initiated a program of major change in School Education, designed to provide high quality education to

students by revitalising management and delivery of services with the goals of excellence and equity.

The first clause is:

the government has initiated a program of major change in school education

and the semantic choices indicate that the government is the actor in initiating programs. The second clause [which is] designed to provide high quality education to students is one showing the relationship between programs and students. These programs are abstractions and the relational clause makes the beneficiary of these programs, students. In other words, the human element is denied. The semantic choice has been made to use an abstraction rather than a person as the actor. It is also noteworthy that students are alluded to twice in the entire text. Such choices cause us to ask what this demonstrates of the authors' world view.

10

One of the positions advertised is for a Deputy Director-General (Education Programs and Planning). The lead verbs in each of the statements that make up this advertisement are managers, co-ordinates and monitors and develops and in each case they are in dispositive clauses that delineate particular relationships between the processes and the participants: something is done to the participants. The managerial prerogative of control is embedded in the authors' semantic choices.

However, not all advertisements for educational managers are realized like those of the state government in November 1989. For instance, let us consider the following advertisements for outstanding people to work in a university centre, in Sydney (See Appendix II). The purpose of this centre is to "establish a major presence ... in the heart of Sydney"; a presence comprising the University of Wollongong and New England, Charles Sturt University and the Illawarra Technology Corporation.

The statement we wish to explore is:

To make the new University Centre work we are looking for three outstanding people who share our excitement about, and vision for, the success of the project.

The statement is rendered explicitly personal in tenor, through the use of we as the actor. This dialogic tenor is extended through the choice of the pronoun who which is then the actor of the next clause where our is used as the modifier of excitement. The lead word in the first clause is people, the purpose of are looking for is real people not an abstraction.

Interestingly we who are doing the looking are placed in a subordinate position to those who are being looked for. Thus, the personal, almost intimate tenor, is further realized and given even more strength with the choice of you in prominent positions in the statements under Centre Manager and Promotions Officer.

To use Halliday's term, these texts are sociological events: giving us information about our culture through the semantic choices instantiated in the grammar of our language. We believe that examining the specific details of the language in which authors' choose to encode their ideas, attitudes and ideologies is illuminating. We

11

have briefly, and perhaps even simplistically, ventured along the labyrinthine paths of Halliday's functional grammar, even so, this has proved to be more than a gentle saunter.

## CONCLUSION

The imperatives of economic rationalism and corporate managerialism have informed the restructuring of education in Australia, and most of the western world, for the last decade. This restructuring has profound implications for the traditional role of the state in providing education for all children and for the roles of principals and

teachers in the schools. In order to understand the magnitude of the changes, a careful exegesis of the language of the debate should be continued because language is the most important system through which cultural values and ideological stances are reflected.

12

## REFERENCES

- Bates, Richard. (1991) "Schooling the Future." Paper presented at the N.S.W.T.F. Conference, Sydney, March.
- Blonsky, M. (1980) *On Signs: A Semiotics Reader*. Oxford, Basil Blackwell.
- Foggo, Di. (1991) Introductory Remarks at N.S.W.T.F. Conference, Sydney, March.
- Kemp, David. (1991) "Education and Change in a Changing World." Address to National Conference of Australian Council of Deans of Education. Canberra, October.
- Halliday, M.A.K. (1978) *Language as a Social Semiotic*. London, Edward Arnold.
- Halliday, M.A.K. (1980) *An Introduction to Functional Grammar*. London, Edward Arnold.
- Hearn, Shona. (1991) Paper presented at the N.S.W.T.F. Conference, Sydney, March.
- King, Ray. (1991) "The New Managers of Education: A Crisis of Confidence." Wagga Wagga, Charles Sturt University.
- King, Ray. (1991) "Schools Renewal - Another Cultural Revolution", Wagga Wagga, Charles Sturt University.
- Kuehn, Larry. (1991) "Resourcing and Corporate Managerialism: The Canadian Experience." Paper presented at N.S.W.T.F. Conference, Sydney, March.
- Lingard, Bob. (1991) "Corporate Managerialism and the Restructuring of Schools. Towards a Critical Response." Paper presented at N.S.W.T.F. Conference,

Sydney, March.

O.E.C.D. (1990) *The Teacher Today. Tasks, Conditions, Policies.* Paris,  
O.E.C.D.

Pusey, Michael. (1991) *Economic Rationalism in Canberra.* Cambridge  
University  
Press, Cambridge.

Schools Council. (1990) *Australia's Teachers: An Agenda for the Next  
Decade.*  
Canberra, A.G.P.S.

Scott, Brian. (1990) *School Centred Education.* Sydney.

13

Wilenski, P. (1986) *Public Power and Public Administration.* Sydney, Hale  
and  
Iremonger.

Yeatman. (1991) "Corporate Managerialism: An Over- view." Paper  
presented at  
N.S.W.T.F. Conference, Sydney, March.

We acknowledge the help of our critical friends, Joan Phillip and Denis  
Breen.