

## **Implementing Innovation and systemic change in education: the achievement of C.E. Beeby**

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**Noeline Alcorn**

**University of Waikato**

C.E Beeby, who died last year at the age of 95, dominated the New Zealand educational scene as Director of Education between 1940 and 1960, during which time he was responsible for shifting the overall direction of the system. He made his international mark as the inaugural Director General for Education at UNESCO and through continuing contact with that and other international bodies, where again his focus was on change to improve education and enhance what happened in classrooms. After his retirement as Director of Education in 1960 he spent a further 25 years as a scholar-consultant in a range of international situations and wrote extensively, reflecting on his own experience and the new science of educational planning.

Writers on change and development (Fullan 1991), Hargreaves, A. 1997, Hargreaves D. (1994, Kanter 1989) suggest that successful implementation of change depends on overall sense of purpose and vision, the ability of leadership to communicate this sense of purpose to others and engage them, a climate of respect for those implementing change, strategies for action, and the capacity to seize opportunities. Such theories have developed from research into institutional behaviour, entrepreneurial success or individual case studies. Beeby's theories of educational change were likewise rooted in reflection on practice on a systemic scale in education.

This paper examines something of Beeby's own practice in New Zealand as well as his theoretical conclusions, and contrasts his developed theories with recent attempts to implement systemic reform in New Zealand education, suggesting that his key ideas appear to have been rejected and little understood by politicians and bureaucrats.

### **Beeby as practical change agent**

When Beeby became Director of Education in New Zealand in 1940 he was charged with the task of implementing a state sanctioned revolution in education. The Labour Government, elected in 1935, was committed to the democratisation of education and to curriculum reform. Peter Fraser, as Minister of Education, had abolished the proficiency examination which had acted as a barrier to secondary schooling. He informed the distinguished international visitors touring New Zealand as part of the New Education Fellowship Conference in 1937 that he was seeking a person of talent to implement further change and reform. A year later he appointed Beeby as Assistant Director. He would succeed to the top job after a further year.

One of Beeby's first tasks was to articulate and make his own the ideas that Fraser had championed. When asked to rewrite the Ministerial statement for the 1939 Annual Report of

the Department of Education, he penned a statement which has been much quoted since. It is a succinct summary of Fraser's belief in and commitment to liberal education for all citizens, broad enough to ensure widespread acceptance and specific enough to provide a foal and focus for the next thirty years. It would be his task to turn the vision into reality.

The Government's objective, broadly expressed, is that every person, whatever his level of academic ability, whether he be rich or poor, whether he live in town or country, has a right as a citizen to a free education of the kind for which he is best fitted and to the fullest extent of his powers. So far is this from being a mere pious platitude that the full acceptance of the principle will involve the reorientation of the education system . . . It is not enough to provide more places in schools of the older academic type that were devised originally for the education of the gifted few. Schools that are to cater for the whole population must offer courses that are as rich and varied as are the needs and abilities of the children who enter them. (AJHR, E1, 1939, p. 2)

David McKenzie (1990, p.47) titled an article on Beeby's career "Ideas are necessary but not sufficient." Beeby's genius was as an administrator. He was not an original theorist, nor did he develop the progressive and egalitarian theories he was to try to implement. Having defined the what, he was intent on working out the why and how of educational change. His intelligence was analytic, his creativity directed to implementation and action. In addition, as a modern man trained in the science of psychology, conviction without logic was suspect. As he once wrote in a letter to politician John A Lee:

The ultimate aims in education are not given by reason, but by a feeling in the pit of one's stomach. Sooner or later in life, one must say, for no very obvious reason, "I believe in X," and never challenge it again. But when it comes to deciding on the means towards X, give me reason. (Beeby, 1938)

Effective administrators Beeby was fond of saying, have an overdeveloped sense of the possible. He might also have added that they need patience and luck. Beeby's initial reforms depended both on Fraser's support and continued wartime prosperity. Nor can administrative leaders effect change by fiat. Their success depends on working with and through other people, achieving the trust and cooperation of staff, political masters, colleagues, those with opposing viewpoints. Nor is change necessarily rapid. It took him fifteen years to implement major changes to the teachers' grading system.

Two immediate and pressing tasks were to convince teachers that the Department was on their side and to ensure that government policies were understood. In addition to his analytic and reasoning abilities Beeby had highly developed skills in communication. He also possessed what Howard Gardner (1983, p. 239) called "interpersonal intelligence", a capacity to read the intentions and desires of others and influence them to act in particular ways. Beeby took every possible opportunity to talk with, write to and meet with educational groups. His gift of assessing the mood of a gathering, disarming criticism by admitting shortcomings in his Department's practices and empathising with concerns and frustrations, while it came naturally, was also carefully cultivated. Though he could be caustic about lack of performance in private and face to face, he was always scrupulously careful to be supportive in public of the work of teachers and lay administrators.

Curriculum reform was key. Beeby proceeded differently in the primary and secondary sectors. In the first, liberalisation had been occurring incrementally since the beginning of the century as principals took over from inspectors responsibility for promoting children from one standard to the next. New and freer methods had long been championed, especially in the junior school. Beeby was aware that many teachers found the new freedom daunting and

was anxious that the role of the Department of Education should be to provide professional leadership. A system of rolling revision of the primary curriculum was designed to ease pressure on schools by ensuring that teachers were not faced with making too many changes at once. Large numbers of teachers were involved in the consultation and trialing that ensued. Concurrently the Department seconded experienced teachers to the School Publications Branch to produce texts and handbooks of practical suggestions for schools. By 1944 Beeby had seized on a suggestion made at a national conference to establish a teachers refresher course committee and later appointed an officer for inservice education. He also was aware of the power of demonstration and experiential learning. An embryo scheme to introduce craft activities in the Hutt Valley later expanded in to a system of itinerant art specialists to help schools.

Curriculum change in the primary service had been initiated quickly; it built on existing practice in a service whose teachers were accustomed to Departmental leadership. Beeby found changes to the secondary sector more difficult. The need for change was obvious: international experts such as Isaac Kandell and William Boyd in 1937 had joined earlier critics in pointing to the narrowness of the secondary curriculum and the dominance of external examinations, particularly university entrance. Raising the leaving age to 15, as Fraser promised, would increase pressures on schools to widen the range of their provision. The direction in which the Labour Government wished to go had been clearly signalled. Beeby was expected to develop a curriculum to meet the needs of all future citizens for a broad generous education and then implement it in a system comprising diverse kinds of secondary schools under different and local administrative control.

How to implement this change was one of Beeby's trickiest administrative problems. While at NZCER he had characterised the traditional liberal curriculum as one designed for the privileged and leisured (1938, p. 6) but recognised that widening it would not be easy as parents saw it as the means of success. In 1942 he persuaded the Minister to set up a Consultative Committee on the Post Primary Curriculum, chaired by William Thomas, who had been a humane principal of Timaru Boys High School. Beeby set the committee clear guidelines in his memorandum to members.

The Department is anxious to maintain high academic standards for the scholarly but even this end must not be allowed to interfere with the school's main function of giving a full and realistic education to fit the bulk of the population, culturally and economically, for the world of today. The Department would, however, welcome the committee's advice on the best methods of combining these two functions in the one institution. (Beeby, 1943, p.2)

He pointed out that the introduction of accrediting for university entrance in 1941 would allow a reorientation of the secondary school around the pupil who is to finish his formal education there rather than around the future undergraduate.

The subsequent Thomas Committee report (1944) supported comprehensive high schools which would teach a common core curriculum, including art, music and physical education for the first two years. It was, however, sensitive to the prized autonomy of the secondary schools.

Our general view is that State as trustee for the community has the duty to insist on certain minimum requirements and to encourage progressive developments, but that it exceeds the it functions if it tries to impose a cut and dried philosophy on schools or to control curriculum in any detail. Hence

much of what we say consists of suggestions to teachers. (Thomas, 1944, p. 1)

The line between professional assistance and interference was a fine one. Beeby's instincts were to outline policy and the reasons for it, then give teachers freedom to implement it. Thus, though the core curriculum directions remained largely unchanged into the 1970s the department took a low key role. But perhaps he and his Department failed to appreciate fully the real and practical difficulties faced by conservative and uncertain school principals and senior secondary staff thrust into providing new subjects and developing new methods to meet the needs of non-traditional pupils of varying levels of ability. The new core subject of social studies, for instance, was attacked and misunderstood but beyond two national inservice courses in January 1945 the Department provide little direct assistance. The next such courses were not held until 1959. Beeby's absence overseas in 1948-9 and his necessary preoccupation with building classrooms and finding teachers to cope with unprecedented roll growth in the 1950s must also have contributed. Reflecting at the end of his life he wrote:

I learnt that, if the reform is one involving both the purpose and the practice of teaching, the rate of change has to be measured in decades rather than in years, and the further one goes up through the school system the slower change becomes. (Beeby, 1990, p. 199)

Beeby also fought hard to alter the annual grading exercise for teachers which consumed time inspectors could well spend on advisory work. He argued that abolition would enhance teacher freedom and creativity and allow the best teachers to move faster. He saw grading as unprofessional and divisive, the greatest single barrier between teachers and administrators. The system was illogical and contradictory: holding back the most able teachers and making those who performed satisfactorily feel failures as they reached their ceiling. It also showed an unjustified faith in the power of numerical assessment of complex performance. His rationality was not enough however. In spite of teacher organisations' repeated claims for greater professional status his initial step of replacing annual with biennial visits was fiercely opposed. . While the Department was not willing to sacrifice the principle it was willing to make concessions to in order to allay teacher's fears and misgivings. Beeby displayed considerable negotiating skill. He managed to reach agreement for a trial of his scheme while maintaining the goodwill of the opposition by acknowledging their feelings and promising further consultation and evaluation. But the long and difficult job of effecting real and radical change in the grading of teachers must have strengthened Beeby's conviction that the conservatism of teachers was a major factor to overcome in effecting systemic change.

An administrator who wants to achieve reform must be a realist. While Beeby made changes to the structure of the Department of Education, itself no easy feat given the public service rules under which he operated, he did not follow through on Fraser's projected reform to the administrative control of the school system, judging that it would prejudice his the curriculum reforms, introduced at a time when the country was still coping with war and rehabilitation. While at NZCER he had written of the local boards that "if they have lost most of their power to do anything positive they have by no means lost their power to prevent anyone else doing it . . . Ministers of Education have preferred to lead rather than to drive them." (Beeby, 1937, p. 5) By 1944 he was defending the system as achieving a workable if not ideal balance in spite of apparent clumsiness. As a result he was forced to work with what a later Director General Bill Renwick referred to as a creaky system. But Beeby argued "advances in education cannot be produced by regulations or administrative fiat, but only by the efforts of gifted teachers working within a system that gives them freedom, inspiration, and the

opportunity to had their skills on to others less able to break new ground for themselves. " (Beeby, 1944, p. 91)

His involvement with UNESCO and with Pacific education after 1945 taught Beeby the important lesson that solutions effective in one setting may have quite different results in others and thus that policy borrowing without careful consideration of the local context is problematic. Village teachers in Samoa, with little education themselves, were not able to implement the classroom practices he championed in New Zealand. The needs of the country and the slender resources available also caused him to prioritise the education of future leaders before the universal extension of secondary education. There were similar lessons in a range of other countries.

### **Beeby's Theories of Educational Planning and Implementing Change**

Following his retirement from the Department in 1960 Beeby served three years as New Zealand ambassador in Paris where he was involved with the beginnings of the International Institute for Educational Planning (IIEP) as well as serving on the Executive Board of UNESCO. He then moved to Harvard University, ostensibly to develop, test and write about his theories of education quality and change. In the event he never undertook the experimental work he had dreamed of in Africa but he was able to read and discuss widely and reflect on his extensive experience. Educational planning, he found, was often considered the domain of the economists and manpower planners. His practical bent made Beeby scornful of theorists who constructed models without administrative experience. He knew that it was comparatively easy to expand the spread of education improving the quality of what happened inside classrooms was problematic and difficult. Some economists favoured using large numbers of low paid, poorly educated and unqualified teachers. Beeby believed that failure to achieve productivity increases if such strategies were adopted was due not just to the natural conservatism of the teachers. Rather they lacked the confidence that could come only from knowledge and understanding.

Just as those who develop theories of change within institutions need comparative data so do those who seek to explain systemic change. Beeb's administrative experience by this time was far broader than New Zealand. His trips to the Pacific had enabled him to see at first hand the problems of poor and undeveloped countries with few resources, and few knowledgable teachers. His time at UNESCO had widened this focus further. He had continued to serve the organisation as it advised on and evaluated adult literacy programmes developed by governments in a number of poorer or less developed countries. He knew at first hand the practical difficulties of implementing change when there were few resources, particularly resources of trained teachers with sufficient education and knowledge to do more than replicate their own lessons. He understood, too, the problems of differing parental, political and cultural expectations over the outcomes of schooling.

He outlined his thinking in *The Quality of Education in Developing Countries*, published by HUP in 1966. Until the end of World War II, he claimed, few administrators had been aware of systems other than their own. The discovery of world wide illiteracy problems was mind boggling. National and international administrators had addressed the massive issues. "But we were too deeply absorbed in solving practical problems to have time to draw the lessons from our own findings or to encompass the old and the new in a fresh body of theory; we were so busy saving souls that we neglected our theology." (Beeby, 1966, p.2) It was time to revisit that theology.

As a long serving and loyal public servant Beeby was adamant that ultimately the decisions in educational planning and reform were political ones. He was acutely aware of the tensions and dilemmas faced by politicians anxious to increase access to education, forced to make

choices which would directly affect the lives of children and their parents, as well as the country's economic needs.

If educational administration consisted in a choice between the good and the bad, it would be relatively simple, but the determining of priorities between ends, all of them good, demands skill, wisdom and human compassion . . . Educational planning – which is in large measure the fixing of priorities for spending limited resources of money and skills – is more important than ever before, but also more difficult. We have learnt new techniques and skills in planning, but the tensions behind every choice are nearer to the surface and the most vital decisions take place under the fierce light of public opinion. (Beeby, 1966b, p. 2)

He put forward three principles generated from his experience:

- \* Good education costs money and spreading funds too widely may result in education not worthy of the name;
- \* the supply of qualified teachers is crucial;
- \* the rate of expansion of schooling must be related to the extent to which graduates at each level can be used by the community.

He also insisted that educational reform is a continuous process. " There is no such thing as the one best way and no final reform. This is not an easy idea to get across in any school system." (Ibid, p. 18)

In 1966 Beeby worked with Philip Coombs, Director of IIEP, to organise an international conference on educational planning in Paris which brought together a group of prominent scholars from diverse fields to engage in genuine dialogue on the qualitative aspects of educational planning. In a paper he wrote for the publication summarising the meeting Beeby (1969) assumed the persona of a mythical Minister beset by pressure groups in his own country. His Minister had found the conference enabled him to understand the difference between quality of product and quality of process and to realise the importance of value added by the school process. He was able to distinguish demands for quality as seen from within the system (internal quality) and quality viewed as fitness for the society it serves. To do so he had to ponder the differences between productivist, democratic and humanistic ideals in assessing quality. Noting Raymond Aron's contention that in many countries the ideal of the educated man was still heavily dominated by the concept of the gentleman of leisure" (p. 61) he asserted that it did not follow that so called theoretical or general knowledge is better at all levels for developing human personality than more limited or practical knowledge.

Beeby's theories of educational planning at systemic level maintained a key role for educational administrators of experience. While the interests of economists in the field of education was welcome in drawing attention to the importance of education it must not exclude those with professional expertise. The educator's role was to fight for the interests of education, keep the manpower experts informed as to the practicality of the demands on the system for graduates at varying levels, and point out the consequences of alternative plans such as the length and cost of implementation. The rights of those to be educated must be safeguarded. The educator on a planning team was the only man there whose professional duty it is to think first of the rights of the child. He must also be aware of cultural imperatives which might be more important to educational leaders in developing countries than economic development.

One of the barriers to systemic change in education of which Beeby had first hand experience was educational conservatism. It was also an issue which frustrated the economists. Beeby insisted that the issue was a complex one that could not be easily solved. Curriculum change was often frustrated by the conservatism of parents who wanted their children to have the benefit of subjects that appeared to have enabled earlier generations of students to get on. He never forgot his own discomfort in the small Maori community of Te Araroa, New Zealand, when elders demanded that their children should learn Latin, pointing out that it had been part of his own academic training. The difficulty he had experienced in New Zealand in persuading parents of the value of advanced technical rather than academic education later saw repeated in Libya, India and Indonesia. The high cost of qualitative change was also significant especially to politicians since "good education costs more than bad." Major developments had a long lead time, difficult for politicians facing electoral deadlines. Blaming teachers for conservatism was also problematic. Teachers were the product of the system in which they themselves had been educated. Teaching was an profession in which setting clear goals was not easy because of conflicting community expectations. The range of ability and knowledge among teachers was also an issue, particularly in developing countries. Challenging the economists view that new technologies (the sum of all techniques of all kinds used by the teacher) were the answer he noted that new technologies in general might make teaching more effective but not easier. Rather they would demand more effort and greater understanding on the part of teachers struggling to integrate the new with the old. Our experience in introducing online teaching would suggest that this is absolutely true.

### **Recent Systemic Change in New Zealand**

New Zealand education has been through massive change in the last decade. A recent conference held at Waikato University, entitled *A Decade of Reform in New Zealand Education? Where to Now?* brought together a group of invited speakers to address aspects of the changes. Some of the common concerns arising from the conference, and articulated in the consequent monograph, (Thrupp, 1999) arose from what speakers saw as the taking over of educational planning by those who had little understanding of ethos of New Zealand education, little concern for the individuals in the classroom, and little respect for teachers. Underlying the changes has been a belief by politicians and policy analysts in the efficacy of the marketplace to deliver equity, efficiency and excellence in the education system. Schools and tertiary institutions have been encouraged to compete rather than cooperate. The influence of Treasury has been marked. Its briefing papers to the incoming government (1987) claimed that educational policies had failed: centralised planning was leading to mediocrity rather than excellence. The answer lay in giving parents and individuals freedom to make rational choices about education to enhance their economic well being.

The subsequent Picot Task Force, charged with examining educational administration in New Zealand, produced its report *Educating for Excellence* in 1988. Its recommendations for greater decentralisation of decision making were implemented on October 1, 1989, when Education Boards were abolished in favour of self managing schools. In 1990 the tertiary sector underwent massive administrative change also, ostensibly to allow institutions more autonomy and to break the university monopoly of degree granting. For the purposes of this paper, however, the most significant change was the demise of the old education department, accused of being sprawling, bureaucratic and captured by education professionals, and its replacement by a policy oriented Ministry, an Education Review Office, and the New Zealand Qualifications Authority.

A fundamental tenet of Beeby's administrative practice was that change in education cannot be effective without the active involvement of the professionals who work as teachers. Curriculum change, for example, will only be effective if teachers are convinced to believe in

the new directions and provided with support to implement it. He argued that too little curriculum research had focussed on the nature of the teacher, especially average or below average teachers, though the nature of the learner and of the subject had received a great deal of attention. "There is one thing that distinguishes teaching from all other professions, except perhaps the Church—no change in practice, no change in the curriculum has any meaning unless the teacher understands and accepts it." (Beeby, 1969, p. 154) More research was needed, more pooling of experience and sharing of results. Educational brokers, "sensitive to quality in education and skilled in unobtrusively helping others to achieve it" (Ibid, p. 159) were crucial.

In contrast, during the 1990s educators have been seen by many planners as the problem rather than as part of the solution. Picot, it is true, was positive about teachers. At the launch of his report he blamed outmoded systems, insisting that people who had to implement them were good. Since then a culture of blame has developed, (Thrupp, 1997). Robertson (1999, p. 123) argues that "professionalism was viewed as self-interest and potentially opportunistic." She claims the new policy makers believed teachers need to be "managed" to stifle provider capture, promote organisational change, and limit the scope for the exercise of professional judgement and discretion. Codd (1999, p. 45) asserts that "in the pursuit of greater accountability, government policies have produced systems of managerial surveillance and control that have fostered within educational institutions a culture in which trust is no longer to be the foundation of professional ethics" .

Raising quality in education is not a new idea. Nor is the sensible contention that a variety of stakeholders are must be involved in educational decision making. But during the 1990s professional input into this process has been suspect and stifled. This was presaged in 1986 when a Parliamentary Select Committee on Education and Science, concerned that some students were leaving school unqualified and alienated by failure, claimed that too little was being done to bring unsatisfactory teachers to account or to listen to the disquiet of parents. Members of the committee were convinced that the influence of the education professionals needed curbing. The Treasury papers (1987) referred to provider capture. The ongoing debate about teaching standards has tended to marginalise teacher organisations and other professional groups. Indeed the recent assertion of the Chief Review Officer that Boards of Trustees should determine professional standards reduces teachers to the role of ciphers.

Treasury's belief in the efficacy of marketisation to increase efficiency , eliminate waste and raise quality has had a major influence on policy makers. This is particularly obvious in the tertiary sector, where per student funding has decreased markedly over the decade and massive increases in student fees have resulted. Links between teaching and research have been weakened with cutbacks in research component funding. The Government's White Paper on Tertiary Education claimed world leadership for equity in tertiary education. All enrolled students would attract funding though the amount of that funding would depend on the numbers enrolling. While the government can point to increased overall spending their belief in marketisation and the power of rational decision making by students has led to proliferation of providers, programmes and qualifications without the capital investment or longer term strategic planning . Any institutional concerns about the effect of these developments on educational quality have been dismissed as poor management. Beeby's contentions that good education always costs more than bad, that spreading funds too widely often results in education not worthy of the name, and that the rate of expansion should be related to the capacity of the community to absorb the graduates effectively are timely reminders of the dangers of current policies and assumptions.

There are signs of hope in recent policy announcements, some of them prompted by the imminent general election. There appears to be some official realisation that the extremes of marketisation in education are counter productive. Consultation on changes to allow schools

greater administrative flexibility, including the possibility of sharing administrative services and planning is welcome. Compromise has been reached on a qualifications structure, on an assessment process, and on a new scheme for teacher professional development. Work continues on the shape of a possible professional body for teachers.

## Conclusion

Beeby's strengths as an educational change agent and theorist were his ability to both articulate a vision and to implement it. If he never doubted the overall purpose and value of this vision he was also pragmatic. He served under and was valued by five ministers of education and two directors general of UNESCO. He understood that genuine change is rarely rapid though he could act swiftly to seize the moment when it arose. He knew from experience that parents are not rational in their ambition for their children and pointed out the problems this creates for planners. He never doubted the centrality of the teaching profession in education nor the need for administrators, planners and policy makers to support teachers through change, not to blame them. In insisting on quality as the aim of educational planning he was never blind to the need for adequate resourcing. He also insisted on the absolute need for the educational administrator to assert the needs of the students in policy and planning debates. The voices of educators as well as economists and financial planners are crucial. When he delivered the Radford Memorial Lecture at a joint AARE/NZARE conference in Christchurch in 1987 he reiterated his plea for more research in the generalisation of educational change. He also contrasted the long term thinking needed to effect such change with the necessarily short term focus of most politicians with their eye on the next election. Few of them last a single decade and most of them want to be remembered for effecting change. The only way for a country to develop a consistent sense of direction is what he termed an educational myth. This must be consistent with deep public aspiration, be unattainable for at least a generation, and provide an overarching sense of purpose for planners and consumers. Whether such a big ideal is possible in the cynical end of century, globalised and post-modern world we inhabit is a moot point. But the idea that education is merely about competitive economic advantage is too small an idea to inspire those who teach and learn in the nation's classrooms at any level. Those who have tried to revolutionise New Zealand education on the big bang theory, to exclude professionals from the policy arena, to insist on low-trust accountability measures and to define education as a private and instrumental good might do well to study his thinking.

Correspondence: Noeline Alcorn (alcorn@waikato.ac.nz)

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