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Book Reviews

To the Fullest Extent of his Powers: C.E. Beeby's Life in Education

NOELINE ALCORN

Wellington: Victoria University Press, 1999. 416pp.

Some years ago when I was working at NZCER Noeline Alcorn told me that C.E. Beeby had agreed that she should write his biography. He was at that time in his eighties. Beeby, who had an office at NZCER, then told me that Noeline Alcorn was going to write his biography. Both seemed delighted with the arrangement. *To the Fullest Extent of his Powers* is the result.

When Alcorn began her work Beeby had already begun to think about writing a book of his own, one which would explore the development of the idea of equality of opportunity. This work, *The Biography of an Idea*, was published in 1992. Beeby's approach was to trace the development of the idea in his own thinking and practice and to seek its origins in the experiences of his own life. Alcorn's "many hours of reminiscence" with Beeby often produced content which later appeared both in Beeby's work and the present one. However, Alcorn's book is broader in scope and covers in far greater detail Beeby's life after he had ceased to be Director of Education.

Had this work been delayed until fifty years after Beeby's death it would no doubt have been different. It would have lacked Beeby's own interpretations of events. It would have contained no reports of interviews with those who had worked with Beeby, a number of whom died while the work was in progress. Alcorn kept in touch with Beeby to the end of his long life and was able to show him a draft of her text. He died in 1998 shortly before his 96th birthday.

Beeby was born in Leeds in 1902 and given the name Clarence which he always hated. He replaced it with "Beeb" and he would have been appalled at the rash of "Clarences" which appeared in his obituaries. When he was four his family moved to New Zealand as assisted immigrants and in later life he often referred to himself as a Yorkshireman.

Alcorn describes the bright child, physically small, who developed a strong sense of intellectual competition. At school he was a keen debater. He formed enduring friendships wherever he went. He met Walter Harris, his lifelong friend, at training college.

An early talent for public speaking, his power to win over an audience, and his ability to share ideas in a public setting became major assets in both his New Zealand and his international careers. Students at Canterbury College remembered his flamboyance as a lecturer, members of the teaching profession his style and wit, and international figures his authority. Alcorn records an anecdote about a Chinese delegate to an international gathering who had been observed writing in a notebook and had later confessed that he had been recording the sayings of Chairman Beeby. His power to charm an audience was something he valued dearly and as he grew older the possibility that he would not be able to rise to an occasion with an appropriate speech made him deeply anxious.

Although Beeby began to study law and was in his youth a lay preacher in the Methodist church these ventures were left behind when he decided to train as a teacher and, inspired by the charismatic James Shelley, first New Zealand Professor of Education, studied psychology and education at Canterbury

University College. Beeby earned his doctorate in psychology in the UK. He did not take up school teaching but became a lecturer in psychology at Canterbury. By the early 1930s there was a strong possibility that he would be appointed to a chair in philosophy but instead he was appointed executive officer, later director, of the New Zealand Council for Educational Research which was being established with Carnegie money. He was an ideal choice of founding director because he combined the capacity to see the New Zealand education system as a whole and he had an analytic interest in how it got that way. His personal qualities generated confidence in the Carnegie sponsors and attracted scholars such as John Beaglehole to write some of the Council's early monographs.

Beeby's ability to use speech for explanation and persuasion was paralleled by his ability to write. His private correspondence, examples of which are reproduced in this book, are full of wit and flattery. He was a committed detector of the oxymoron. In his public correspondence he displayed a style which was equally graceful and erudite despite its performative intent.

While Alcorn's work focuses on education it is equally a portrait of a New Zealand public servant. A recent "Insight" programme on National Radio offered opinions on the public service in "the old days". My overwhelming impression was that in the old days no one could lift a finger without filling in a wad of forms, that public servants wore walk shorts to the office and that it was impossible for heads of departments to make changes. I wondered whether the speakers had ever heard of C.E. Beeby and, if they had, how they would have explained his ability to reform New Zealand's education system in the post-war years. I cannot pronounce on the walk shorts and Beeby certainly recognised the absurdity of many bureaucratic rules. He wiped the requirement that to get a new pencil one had to hand in the butt of the old. In the early years of his time as director Beeby had the political support of the Labour Government. But he later worked under Ronald Algie, a National Minister of Education. Beeby did not at first have an easy relationship with him following National's success in the 1949 election. National had come into office committed to curbing the power of the public service and to eliminating disloyalty. In education the charge was falling standards and declining morals. Beeby, however, was able to forge both a working and a personal relationship with his minister and continued to with widespread changes in education. Renwick's (1992) portrait of a reforming director gives an administrator's insight into this period of Beeby's life.

Beeby had a strong sense of propriety. Alcorn records an episode when it had been announced that the widely respected Walter Scott, was to join the Department of Education. Before he took up his position Scott had been asked to speak on the issue of educating "brighter" children at a Home and School and Parent Teacher Associations gathering and, in the course of dealing with this subject, Scott had commented that few teachers were equipped for the task and that they were not themselves independent thinkers. This was followed by quite accurate remarks about the entrants to teachers colleges. Beeby cancelled Walter Scott's appointment giving Scott as his reason that Scott lacked discretion and a sense of judgement.

Alcorn sums up Beeby's qualities as follows:

His genius was as an administrator. An articulate spokesman, he remained intent on working out the why and how of educational change. Beeby was not an original theorist, nor did he develop the progressive or egalitarian theories he tried to implement in the school

system. His intelligence was analytic, his creativity directed to implementation and action.

Monte Holcroft spoke of Beeby's "quick intelligence and steady realism". When he finished his term with UNESCO a written tribute praised Beeby's friendliness, his quick wit and love of absurdity, his complete lack of pomposity, and his frankness and courage. Alcorn comments that Beeby for his part endured pomposity, arrogance and ignorance on a grand scale.

During his time in association with UNESCO he was able to exercise his genius for implementation without the taunts of play way and Beebyism which plagued him in New Zealand. Beeby enjoyed the power he could exercise in a bureaucratic setting. At UNESCO he probably got pleasure from "trying to establish a balance between mindless bureaucracy and lack of systems". However, he also encountered irritants such as international prose, consisting of convoluted and mysterious recommendations, generally put together by a secretariat, which emerged from international deliberative assemblies. When Alcorn interviewed George Parkyn who had been the New Zealand delegate to the Eleventh International Conference on Public Education held in Geneva in 1948, he told her that he had later complained to Beeby that delegates simply read aloud papers which had already been circulated and then when it came to reporting for a session on the school psychologist, the head of the International Bureau of Education, at that time Jean Piaget, attempted to present his own propositions unchanged as the recommendations of the conference. Beeby comforted Parkyn by referring to "his pragmatic colonial mind that expects words to mean something in terms of action, rather than to be merely exercised as in some branch of aesthetics".

From 1960-63, as part of the New Zealand Colombo Plan in Indonesia, I was able to observe aid projects in a complex developing country. There was goodwill on the part of local representatives of donor countries but not much appreciation of cultural difference or any obvious theory of how to achieve change.

I read with appreciation Alcorn's account of the 10 years Beeby spent on an assessment of Indonesian education. I will try to give a summary but do read Alcorn's account yourself. The Ford Foundation had been approached in 1968 by the Indonesian Minister of Education to assist with the prosecution of an assessment of the nation's education system as the basis for future planning. The Ford Foundation's initial offer was to "provide help for two years: support for foreign consultants, honoraria for allowing local educators to devote time to the project, and other assistance with books, equipment and travel". Beeby accepted the invitation of the Ford Foundation to become involved. The task of assessing the education system of a country as vast and complex as Indonesia's was one that excited Beeby and one senses his determination to produce something from it. He kept up his work for UNESCO, traveled back and forth to Indonesia, wrote his analyses in New Zealand and looked after his sick wife. Alcorn describes the progress of this project in documentary style recounting step by step the changes in Indonesian politics, the problem of ensuring that poorly paid public servants would have sufficient time to work on the data gathering necessary for the assessment and the fear of the sponsors that the Indonesians would opt for a major expansion which the country could not afford.

Indonesia has extensive oil supplies and after the project had been set up "the oil shocks of the early 1970s boosted the fortunes of the Indonesians but straitened the circumstances of potential donor groups including the Ford

Foundation". There was a change of Minister in 1973. Independent of the assessment the Indonesians produced a white paper setting out proposals for major changes in the structure of the school system. What did this mean for the Ford Foundation report which Beeby was trying to put together? In collaboration with the senior education administrator in charge of the Indonesian side of the assessment, Beeby pushed forward with the report but now it would have to be an assessment of the assessment. He produced a manuscript written, as usual, with clarity and insight. It was published in 1979 by NZCER under the title *Assessment of Indonesian Education: A Guide to Planning*. Unfortunately it did not appear to have a market.

Alcorn's account of this part of Beeby's career would make a splendid case study for anyone interested in development planning or comparative education; anyone with an interest in the efforts of funding agencies in developing countries and the difficulty of changing direction once contractual arrangements have been signed.

C.E. Beeby's contribution to New Zealand was recognised in 1987 when he was made one of the five initial members of the Order of New Zealand. The Order is limited to 20 living members.

The book includes a list of Beeby's own writings. There are some errors in the spelling of names and I could not work out the principle upon which the index items had been selected. Aside from that I have nothing but praise for this detailed, scholarly and interesting book. I strongly recommend it to anyone interested in Beeby himself, in the administration of education in New Zealand, in the development of UNESCO, or in efforts to improve education in developing countries.

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Re-Making Teaching: Ideology, Policy and Practice

JOHN SMYTH AND GEOFFREY SHACKLOCK, 1998
 Routledge: 240 pp.

Re-making Teaching continues a thorough and provocative line of inquiry that John Smyth has pursued in recent years. His depth of critical analysis has been supported boldly by the research skills of Geoffrey Shacklock, culminating in a profound representation of teachers' struggles that have been almost ignored while the education system has been virtually held at gun-point by the forces of business and economics. Although such forces are often distant and have amassed since the eighties, the authors point out that teachers continue to be affected by them. It is their argument that the degree of impact demands an examination of

how teachers are being affected. Smyth and Shacklock then present eight chapters that build sequentially and present a lucid depiction of the economic forces that have established unsound reforms that have had a significant effect on teachers at the chalk face. They have used the Advanced Skills Teachers (ASTs) or expert teachers' initiative as an Australian exemplar or vehicle for the wide ranging restructuring that is occurring in education at a global level. To illustrate the impact of change, Smyth and Shacklock have sought the voices of teachers to gauge their response to economic strategies and how they have responded to, or resisted, such change.

Following their initial thoughts on the theme of the book and the framework that was established, the authors allocate the next six chapters to the interplay between the big issues that are affecting teachers' work and the micro issues that influence them at an individual level. This contrast provides an effective balance between theory associated with the "big picture" and result illustrated through the voices of teachers at a contextual level.

Chapter Two outlines the research dimension of the project. It also explores and describes the contemporary world of teaching. More specifically, Smyth and Shacklock focus on the economic forces that have influenced policy and associated discourses within education. Their underlying argument is the manner in which schools are being directed as extensions of industry and commerce marked by the aims and practices of business. This perspective is then situated at a global level. Their concern of such a trend focuses on the social implications of globalisation, particularly the shift in the nature and security of jobs. Economic forces are driving restructuring of education which in turn, influence teachers' work. The authors conclude the scene-setting aspect of the text by positioning themselves in relation to this issue. The authors argue "we are distressed about the expunging and the progressive depletion of educative values and purposes out of schooling by mean-spirited politicians and their technocratically-minded erstwhistle policy advisors" (p.27). Their argument for this book is the need to critically analyse how power and privilege influence schooling. Moreover the book is situated at the nexus of educational policy and how such policy is "experienced, interpreted, and redefined by teachers"(p. 29).

In the successive chapters Smyth and Shacklock discuss how teaching is being reconstructed, where the claims for school reform are coming from, the establishment of the "preferred teacher" couched within economic terms, and how the voices of teachers have been absent while such demands on the nature of teaching are being remade. The authors highlight the competing ideologies evidenced through alternative discourses that illustrate the complexity of teaching today. The stage is presented upon which a fascinating illustration of the struggle between teachers' worlds and economic policy are played out.

In their concluding chapter Smyth and Shacklock point out that what is happening in Australia is indicative of educational change at an international level. Their case study of the Advanced Skills Teacher Scheme illustrates the connection between ideology, policy and practice and associated effects on a reshaped world of teaching. The authors do a fine job of illustrating how such connections occur. The middle chapters build on one another to create a spiral of issue-impact-analysis-outcome. The reader is introduced to a heuristic of "palimset" - a Greek term for the writing over something that has been erased. Smyth and Shacklock use this term effectively to illustrate how economic forces impact on the "indigenous culture of teachers' work" (p.201).

This text draws from an extensive base of literature. It frames contemporary material on an international scale. *Re-making Teaching* has broad appeal as a text for educators, particularly those who are interested in educational policy. It deserves consideration as a graduate text for education policy because of its accessibility and rich balance of theory and evidenced-based examples. The authors are to be congratulated on the way this text has been structured.

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Being Reflexive in Critical Educational and Social Research

GEOFFREY SHACKLOCK AND JOHN SMYTH (EDS.), 1998
London: Falmer Press.

In this highly contemporary collection, Shacklock and Smyth bring together a diverse group of educational researchers to comment on two of the most contentious issues facing researchers today: the nature of truth and reality, and the researchers' place in her/his own work. Following recent movements within the social sciences and humanities such as Feminism, Cultural Studies, Postmodernism, and Poststructuralism, the notion of the researcher as an objective observer who reports neutrally on the events she/he has witnessed has been discarded. Scholars such as Norman Denzin (Sociology), Kenneth Gergen (Psychology), and Edward Bruner (Anthropology) have made us all aware of how our own subjectivity impacts on our research. With this book we hear detailed accounts from educational researchers' personal experiences of the research act. Avoiding any type of confessional tone, the essays assembled here are interesting, insightful, and thought-provoking. Shacklock and Smyth have done an outstanding job at holding the contributors to a tight brief so that we can see some of the ways in which the researcher is present in her/his text. The result is a very readable collection that links the theoretical discourse of socially critical educational research to its methodological imperative.

Some of the issues discussed in this book within a context of educational settings as broad as Physical Education, Urban Education, and School Administration include how ethics, gender, race, validity, voice, and empowerment impact on researchers' versions of reality. In this way, this volume provides inspiration for practicing educational scholars to reflect on their own research practices and processes, which in my opinion can only make our studies more honest and open about the ways we come to understand education. I strongly recommend this book to any educational researcher or graduate student in education; for if nothing else it demystifies the research act as an objective isolated event and exhibits how our biases should be discussed not hidden.

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