BOOK REVIEWS

TEACHERS AND CURRICULUM DECISION-MAKING

CLIVE MCGEE

Palmerston North: Dunmore Press, 1997. 348 pp.

The title of Clive McGee's book "Teachers and Curriculum Decision-Making" was a persuasive invitation to explore further as I am a primary teacher and graduate student with a particular interest in the role of teachers in curriculum. It has been my experience that all too many curriculum texts focus overly on issues of curriculum theory, while practical concerns are relegated to perhaps one brief chapter, if included at all. At the other end of the spectrum, there are curriculum texts which are practical guides aimed at helping teachers construct effective classroom programmes. This division reflects the slowly changing belief that the realm of curriculum theory is not connected to curriculum practice, or in other words, the day to day realities of classroom life. However, McGee avoids such a distinction in his book, weaving together the practical and theoretical facets of curriculum, grounding the former, and giving life to the latter.

The eleven chapters that make up this book cover an expansive gamut of curriculum related issues. The coverage within each of these chapters is broad in that McGee draws on an inordinate amount of past research. However, the primary focus throughout the book is on the role of teachers and schools within the curriculum field. In this way, McGee presents the readers with a plethora of curriculum related issues, yet connects the whole together to present the reader with a expansive 'landscape' of curriculum in which the central figure is the teacher.

A further factor which links the chapters of this book is the model of curriculum development that McGee introduces in chapter two, and elaborates in consecutive chapters. The basis of this model is that teachers have to make curriculum decisions relating to situational analysis, curriculum intentions, curriculum content, learning and teaching experiences, together with evaluation and assessment. McGee then draws out the consequences of this model for curriculum leadership, teacher development, curriculum change and curriculum planning.

For me, it is the clear style in which this text is written that is the most endearing aspect of this book. Furthermore, McGee consistently supports his assertions with reference to relevant literature, as well as concrete everyday examples that both teachers and education students will be able to relate to. While the size of the text may provide some challenge for the near sighted amongst us, the addition of diverting illustrations throughout this book is certainly a positive feature.

Some readers may be dismayed to note that there are no summaries at the end of the chapters, although lecturers using this book as a course text may well feel the opposite! In place of a summary, McGee has included a series of reflections at the conclusion of each chapter. These reflections are really a summary in themselves, because they invite the reader to deliberate on the main

issues raised in the chapter. Not only does McGee invite cogitation through these reflections, he also acknowledges the worth of the reader's own experiences, inviting them to compare their own personal conceptions of curriculum, with the ideas raised in the chapter.

McGee has drawn on a plethora of both international and New Zealand research in order to present the reader with this comprehensive picture of curriculum. In this way, McGee provides a much needed resource for those working in the educational field in New Zealand, although there are just as many aspects of the book which make it relevant for the international market. While I am sure that this is a text that will appear on many reading lists of many educational courses at New Zealand tertiary institutions, I hope that teachers will also read this book, for it is very relevant to their practice and development as educational professionals.

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AN INTRODUCTION TO LANGUAGE AND LEARNING

MARIE EMMITT, JOHN POLLOCK WITH LIBBY LIMBRICK, (New Zealand Edition)
Auckland: Oxford University Press, 1996. 230 pp.

The first Australian edition of this book, by Marie Emmitt (Professor and Head of the School of Social and Cultural Studies in Education at Deakin University) and John Pollock (formerly Associate Professor in Language and Literacy and Head of the Department of Industry Education at the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology) was published in 1991. Libby Limbrick (Head of the Centre for Language and Languages at the Auckland College of Education) has been coopted to help adapt the Australian text for New Zealand audiences.

So who is this book's audience and what does it want to offer its readers? As the 'Foreword' indicates, the book is aimed at '...teachers in training and practising teachers in any context who want to re-evaluate their understanding of language.' The book's overall aim is '...to enhance your understanding of the nature and function of language and language-learning in order to assist your decision-making in the classroom.'

Reflective of this two-fold structure is the book's structure. The first two parts of this 230-page book (eight chapters), deal with 'Language and Culture', and 'Linguistics and Language Structure'. The third part of the book (three chapters) deals with 'Language and Learning'.

Moreover, at the chapter level, the text helpfully (from the busy teacher's point of view) breaks down its material into small sections. Each chapter begins with a clear series of statements of key understandings and concludes with a 'Summary', a section entitled 'Implications for teaching' and a set of references. Each chapter section is further accompanied by a teacher-directed set of questions, discussion starters and activities. Set out in this way, the book is a handy instrument for professional development.

In reviewing this book, we have been inevitably drawn into a comparison with the Learning Media text, *Exploring Language: A Handbook for Teachers,* developed via an NZATE contract to the Ministry by a team including Elizabeth Gordon (principally), Sheena Hervey and Ewen Holstein. If busy teachers have to choose, which book should they begin with?

We would contend that *An Introduction to Language and Learning* never quite manages to free itself from its Australian origins. In crucial respects, it remains a 'roo in sheep's clothing. One of the key decisions Elizabeth Gordon had to make in writing the 'Grammar Toolbox' section of *Exploring Language* was*which* grammar to use as the basis for description and terminology. She opted for a rather eclectic version of what might be called the British school, on the basis that it would build most comfortably on what New Zealand teachers were already familiar with.

The Oxford book, even in its New Zealand guise, has retained an allegiance (hardly surprising given its Deakin associations) to Hallidayan systemic functional grammar. This grammar is used widely but not universally by teachers and educators in Australia. (Most recently, it is the grammatical approach adopted by the Australian Association for the Teaching of English's inservice package, *Teaching About Language: Learning About Language.*)

The trouble is, although it has its adherents, systemic functional grammar is little used in New Zealand. A New Zealand edition of Emmitt and Pollock's original book really should have acknowledged the choice for a descriptive grammar that was taken with respect to the Ministry's own production, particularly given the fact that a book distributed in bulk, free to every school in New Zealand is fairly strong advocacy for an orthodox grammatical position though Gordon herself would be the last person on earth to see her choice of a grammar as sacrosanct.

So, to sum up, New Zealand teachers may well be bewildered by their first encounter with systemic functional grammar in *An Introduction to Language and Learning,* especially since they have not been cued to expect it. However, if they persevere (we suspect many will skip these chapters), they will see why its adherents favour it as a tool for the critical analysis of language.

By way of comparison, we would point out that the New Zealand English gets around six paragraphs in the Oxford book and a whole chapter in *Exploring Language.* However, lest such a blunt statement be seen too readily as implying a criticism, we should return to a consideration of the overall shape of each book.

Exploring Language is a rather piecemeal document, with some wonderful parts and a degree of lopsidedness in the whole. To some extent, it suffers from its developers' deliberate policy of seeing their production as complementing other Learning Media productions such as *Dancing With the Pen* and *The Learner as a Reader.* Consequently, secondary English teachers are not as well served by it. It contains wonderful sections on New Zealand English, grammar and oral language, a rather skimpy section on written language and a compendium-like section on so-called visual language.

The principal shortcoming of *Exploring Language* is its failure to address language issues on the level of text. The issue is raised briefly in the chapter on 'Written Language', while issues of critical literacy, such as the cultural

embeddedness of meanings, are lightly touched on in the 'Visual Language' chapter.

What *An Introduction to Language and Learning* does offer (and it is reflected in its structure) is an emphasis on reading, in the sense of meaning-making from texts, as bound up in the bigger picture of a text's relationship to its context of situation and context of culture. The place of language in its relationship to culture has an entire three-chapter section. New Zealand teachers seeking insights into 'critical literacy' will find much of value in this section.

Certainly, the third and final part of the book on 'Language and Learning' stresses the need for teachers to develop a theory on language and learning related to social contexts and educational issues. The authors believe that it is the professional role of a teacher to ask questions and decide what counts as evidence in how children learn and acquire language. Behaviourist, cognitivist and interactionist views are critically appraised which provide different perspectives on past and present research about the different theories that have been used to explain young children's learning. Some New Zealand research is cited.

One of the central themes advocated is that language reflects and helps shape culture. Too often it is assumed that children who come from 'non-mainstream' backgrounds are at risk. This section puts to rest the 'deficit' myths about such children and proposes ways of seeing the strengths they bring to the classroom. The authors emphasise the importance of culture, background and experience in shaping an individual's language. They propose that an interactive environment can serve as a basis for exploring aspects of cultural diversity and the many social and environmental influences on children's language and learning.

We would agree that cultural and language differences can emerge particularly upon school entry when there may be a mismatch between the literacy practices of home and school. While all children seem to be successful language learners out of school, the same cannot be said about their progress at school. The task of the teacher is to negotiate between the culture of the home and the culture of the school. In this respect, the account makes particular reference to the recent literacy research of Stuart McNaughton (1995).

The discussion on second language learning, while brief, is valuable. It deals with a range of factors that influence the learning of a second language including neurological, cognitive and affective. Teachers are given brief pointers on the processes involved in second-language learning and some implications for teaching.

The book's summary chapter stresses the need for teachers to incorporate critical literacy perspectives and not merely to focus on the teaching of skills. The position taken relates back to the opening chapters of the book where language is seen as bound up in the cultural context of the learner. This view wants to see children as problem-solvers and thinkers who develop and refine their learning strategies in a supportive whole language environment.

However, with respect to the book's treatment of whole-text issues, we continue to have some reservations. We would contend that the book's treatment of such terms as 'language function' and 'language purposes' is apt to confuse the two. Moreover, the discussion of these terms in a separate chapter from the treatment of genre is an unfortunate disjunction.

The book's main discussion of the term 'genre' occurs in a chapter entitled 'Discourse Analysis/Text Linguistics'. The writers admit the problematical nature of the term and, in fact, offer two definitions: a product ('the overall structuring of a text') and a process. The way in which the term genre is used draws heavily on the so-called Australian 'Genre' school and, in particular, the writings of Jim Martin. We would want to raise questions about the way in which this school employs the term and, in particular, the way it defines texts as either 'narrative' or 'factual' and appears to derive generic categories from certain structural features of texts. We would want to draw attention to other ways of thinking about genre, especially in relationship to such terms as 'language mode' and 'language function.' [See Andrews (1993), Freedman and Medway (1994), Locke (1996)]

Our other reservation with respect to the chapter on discourse analysis is its failure to extend the definition of 'discourse' and 'discourse analysis' to include a focus on diction as well as syntax and structure, and to therefore suggest a range of tools for helping students identify, resist and critique the range of ideological positions that are embedded in both texts and discourses as defined by such critical literacy theorists as Colin Lankshear and James Gee. There seems to be a curious disjunction between the approach to language in this chapter, and the approach so promisingly adopted in the first section of the book.

Finally, in a number of editorial infelicities, there is an unfortunate sense of this book having been produced in haste. At the risk of sounding picky, we would draw attention to the careless use or non-use of commas (These wordings appeared on the same page: 'In the example above the word "cat" is a symbol for a particular type of furry animal.' and '...transmitted and received for a specific, purpose, in relation to the shared world of the users.'), inadequate proof-reading, misuse of hyphens ('Thus the speech of a high school-educated New Zealand person...') and poor layout (The useful outline of Halliday and Hasan's system for analysing text cohesion -- not for the terminologically challenged -- is rendered almost unintelligible by the poor use of bullets.).

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SCHOLARS OR DOLLARS? SELECTED HISTORICAL CASE STUDIES OF OPPORTUNITY COSTS IN NEW ZEALAND EDUCATION

D. MCKENZIE, H. LEE AND G. LEE
Palmerston North: Dunmore Press, 1996. 229 pp.

This compact book, written by three well known and highly respect New Zealand historians of education, presents a series of eight selected historical case studies. Based partly on existing research, but also incorporating substantial ongoing research by the authors, the studies range across the 1877-1945 era. The topics covered include: compulsory school attendance; kindergarten and pre-school education; district high schools, secondary education for Māori; and the rise and fall of the old School Certificate Examination.

The material is thoroughly researched and clearly presented. Nevertheless, a major strength of the book is that the authors have opted to articulate a theory which serves to link what otherwise might have become a series of interesting but somewhat disparate case studies. This is especially timely given that, until relatively recently, much New Zealand education history has tended to over-emphasise the state's coercive powers over educational consumers. Whilst not denying the reality of structural forces, the theory presented in this book has the merit of focusing more squarely on these often neglected consumers and the impact they can have on the educational services provided.

As the authors observe, education has never been actually free, despite rhetoric to the contrary. In particular, educational services can be shown to carry an 'opportunity cost'. The authors define this as, "... the direct cost of educational services to individuals plus the income earning or other 'desired good' opportunities which are immediately forgone in order that the services of institutionalised schooling, beyond those which are universally required by law, are purchased by individuals, or their families or other support groups..." (p. 27). One outcome of this is that earnings in the marketplace are deliberately forgone in order that the consumer can take advantages of educational services. During the nineteenth century, this opportunity cost was particularly high for struggling rural families. Yet throughout the twentieth century, the authors argue, that cost has remained substantial.

Thus far, few would probably wish to disagree. The authors, however, go much further in arguing that consumer choice has also had a considerable impact on the types of educational services provided.

Throughout the history of New Zealand education the growth in educational services has taken place in what the authors term, "... a context of a hard choice among competing priorities for consumer preference" (p. 27). It is this aspect of the thesis that enables the authors not only to challenge much 'received wisdom' concerning our historical past, but also to pose significant questions for contemporary educators, even though the case studies presented do not directly deal with the post-1945 education system. To take but one example, the chapter on curriculum contestation and secondary education for Māori leads the reader to the conclusion that the jury is still out concerning recent Māori educational initiatives, and that the matter will finally be decided, not by the rhetoric

surrounding them, but by the success the new schools have in enabling their clients to compete successfully with other types of school in the labour market.

Despite this, some readers will be disappointed that there are no post-1945 case studies presented. The inclusion of such material might well have enabled the authors to address a wider audience. Perhaps there is room for a second volume. This would be especially relevant given that the authors suggest at one point that the post-1980 situation has seen a further shift in the consumer-provider balance. Opportunity costs have arguably gone down, given the relative lack of lucrative employment opportunities for youth in particular, but on the other hand the actual opportunity for youth to gain economic independence is now more restricted and dependence lasts for a far greater period of time than has ever been the case before. One result is that individuals with a greater amount of cultural capital, who are therefore more likely make intelligent educational choices, are accordingly advantaged. Another is that those providers who choose to offer services geared to a more selective entry population will be increasingly favoured.

This is both a readable and provocative volume. It strengthens the growing corpus of New Zealand history of education literature which is neither wholly revisionist nor wholly traditional, but which draws equally on the strength of both traditions. I hope that it will be widely read both for the material it contains and for its contentions, thoroughly grounded as these are in the data provided.

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(reprinted with permission from *History of Education Review* Volume 26, No. 1, 1997)

TEACHERS TALK TEACHING 1915-1995: EARLY CHILDHOOD, SCHOOLS AND TEACHERS' COLLEGES

SUE MIDDLETON AND HELEN MAY
Palmerston North: Dunmore Press, 1997. 380 pp. $49.95

This is one of the best books on New Zealand education I have read. First, the teachers' voices tell the story - hardship between the wars, the growing educational excitement, the move towards greater equality of opportunity, the recent reforms. It is a story of dedication, enthusiasm, excitement and frustration. Second, as is to be expected, as Middleton and May are two of our most respected educational thinkers, the analysis of these events is thought-provoking, catches the flavour of the times, and gives an excellent overview and backdrop to the individual voices.

My school education was Britishcentric - a strong sense of imperial duty. "Where Britain goes we go. Where she stands we stand." During my teaching years we moved through an era of New Zealand nationalism, Norm Kirk at Waitangi. Now we live in a global village. This book chronicles, through individual experience, these changes.

When I was young most of us were destined to be factory or farm fodder or targeted for a limited range of professions, so school sorted us into streams for later life - a drafting race system very wasteful of talent which still lingers as a model. Reading about how a master had a row of canes which he showed his pupils, how only the prefects were allowed to use the front steps, brought back a flood of memories from my own school days.

Reading such recollections reminds one of how far we have come. Some who request a return to a so-called golden era of education hanker for a Raj system - a classical education befitting one to be a gentleman ruling coolies. My vote is for democracy - warts and all. So is this book's. It is about the growing empowerment of the profession.

There were memories, too, of my own teaching and department days. Membership of the stimulating National English Syllabus Committee (NESC) was one such, as were the staffroom and PTA arguments over "playway" (in the interview in this book Beeby says this is a term he never used) and "new maths".

Not surprisingly the book is very strong on early childhood education culminating with the Before Five reforms, for which it gives David Lange credit (often unacknowledged). Quite clearly the quotations and analysis make the educative connection between the preschool and school years all too often overlooked by the policy makers.

Another reason I liked the book was for its atmosphere of hope, its trust in people, its valuing of participation, and its belief in education. On the last page a teacher is quoted: "I think that children are far more involved in decision-making and evaluating what they can do and what they are achieving. I think children have a greater opportunity to be involved in the overall life of the school and this is because each school now is a little community on its own."

Maybe in a few years' time there will be a similar book about the empowerment of the community through the school as a learning centre in its midst.

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