

Changes in teacher ideologies



Summarise & discuss: Sullivan, K. (1997). They've opened Pandora's Box: Educational reform, the new right and teachers' ideologies. In M. Olssen & K. Morris Matthews. (Eds.), Education policy in New Zealand (pp. 254-261). Palmerston North, New Zealand: Dunmore Press. (extracts) From page 254: Education Reform and Competing Ideologies

Within the extract under investigation, Sullivan is building a case to legitimise his theory that Teachers' fundamental professional and ideological principals and intentions are just as important as what and how they teach.

In order to clarify his point he provides a model for defining what exactly the concept of an ideology in isolation involves and in the context of educational theories. In his argument he persuades the reader to accept that an ideology is a pre-conceived notion of what humans and in this context in particular teachers are programmed to consider appropriate and exceptional; that an ideology is an individual belief system which can alter politically but not necessarily physically. During the time this piece was written a number of educational reforms were taking place in New Zealand and teacher's roles were having to adapt accordingly, with the school authorities and boards of trustees exacting greater control over them as employees. Consequently losing them a great deal of freedom within their teaching positions. The extract under discussion proposes that the traditional ideology adopted by most teachers is a humanist approach to life and working with children and adults in a learning capacity. That this humanist ideal is fundamental to their character and instinctive responsibility as a teacher, or as Sullivan conveys 'their ideology is largely intuitive and implied, based on some important but usually unstated assumptions'. He then goes on to list these assumptions in

detail and proposes the notion that they have deep rooted understandings of how their own role functions under the auspices of the government and the traditional understanding of what they have always meant to mean education in its original context. The rationale for presenting this understanding is in relation to the writer's broader argument relating to the New Right movement in New Zealand politics which has implemented new educational reforms in antithesis to this humanist ideology. Holistically Sullivan's overall understanding and opinion of how teachers are adapting is by way of building themselves a new ideology which remains humanist but is also applying a resistance and reinforced method of working practice in response to the government's new line and legislation. However Sullivan's theories are not merely a personal observation, the outcomes of his conclusions have emerged from empirical data that he collated from interviews undertaken with fifty primary and intermediate school teachers employed in the Greater Wellington area of New Zealand.

The new Education system in New Zealand adheres to an ideology which is essentially anti-humanist and the article is written at a time when the country had been dominated by New Right ideologies. These were in stark contrast to the humanist and liberal ideas that dominated Education in the decades before. The article quotes the progressive Educational pioneer John Dewey. He adhered to the opinion that only constant good is change for the good. Dewey did not measure levels of success based on standards, rather against human inspiration and passion (Tiles, 1990). And it is these measures of standards that Sullivan is critical of in his paper.

This is emphasized further in Sullivan's study *Teachers Standards and Professionalism* where he suggests that teachers have become pawns in the movement to implement right wing ideology across the country, criticising the new management approach to learning which appears to operate more as a business enterprise. How teachers have lost their authority to parents who dictate the way in which they now function.

The modern philosophy of the New Right can be attributed to the breakdown of the original ideals of the Welfare State, reflected not only in New Zealand but in many countries around the world who adopted these principles during and following the outcomes of the Second World War. In particular with the English Government during the 1980's and the new Conservative driven Education Reform Act of 1988. (Lingard et al, 1993)

This new devolved system in New Zealand moved from a centralized arrangement to a structure whereby schools now take responsibility for their own governance and management. The country's Ministry of education which was established under the 1989 Education Act takes forward the following aims and objectives:

- provides education policy advice to the Minister of Education and the Government;
- purchases services on behalf of the Crown;
- allocates funding and resources to schools and early childhood education providers;
- oversees the implementation of approved education policies;
- manages special education services;

- collects and processes education statistics and information;

and

- monitors the effectiveness of the education system as a whole

with

‘ Separate education agencies hav(ing) national responsibilities for qualifications and quality assurance’.

Additionally most education providers operate independently from Government and are rather controlled by boards of trustees or elected councils.

Sourced from: [http://www.minedu.govt.](http://www.minedu.govt.nz/educationSectors/InternationalEducation/ForInternationalStudentsAndParents/NewZealandEducationSystemAnOverview/Central_Agencies_and_Providers_A_Devolved_System.aspx)

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[Central_Agencies_and_Providers_A_Devolved_System.aspx](http://www.minedu.govt.nz/educationSectors/InternationalEducation/ForInternationalStudentsAndParents/NewZealandEducationSystemAnOverview/Central_Agencies_and_Providers_A_Devolved_System.aspx), Date accessed 16/10/08

Teachers have consequently needed to adapt and find a new position for themselves as basic blue-collar working classroom teachers in a non-democratic environment. As such this has forced them to build new relationships and alliances with Boards of Trustees and amongst civil society. (Gordon, 1992)

To discuss the context of this new change in thinking across New Zealand it has not merely acted in response to the UK government but has primarily acted on the issues that occurred during the 1970's and 80's when the country was witness to significant problems relating to trade, business, the <https://assignbuster.com/changes-in-teacher-ideologies/>

balance of power and a dwindling economy. It was these concerns that paved the way for changes to the education system as a means of improving the national standards of the workforce and employment opportunities.

(Perris, 1998)

The New Right philosophy brings with it a complete list of ideals that include the necessity to implement order, reinstate traditional values, social hierarchy and family responsibility. (Dale and Ozga, taken from Lingard et al, 1993)

In addition there is a strong emphasis on the relationship between power and knowledge, including a set of educational benchmarks to achieve forward New Right thinking. These predominantly include:

1. That education should be structured in a way that enables parental influence to succeed over quality
2. Education should be provided within a diverse range of institutions, to which admission is based on selection
3. Provision of Education should be accountable to the parents, by way of the appraisal of teachers and through the frequent testing of students and teachers, with the right of publication of these results.(Bell and Gilbert, 1996)

Prior to this New Right trend vision which sought to improve schools on the basis of poor economies, gaps in the workforce and ill preparation of young people for the workplace, all curriculum development was governed by the Curriculum Division of the Department of Education and was reviewed regularly with ‘ input from subject committees, the Department of Education,

teacher groups, training colleges and independent schools. Later included university teachers....' This philosophy carried on into the 1950's with a curriculum which was developed and delivered by educators who were considered the most authoritative to do so. (Davis, 2007)

This was in line with the traditional concepts established during the 1877 Act which adhered to the National Public School system, with native New Zealand schools falling under the control of the Department of Education and Public Schools ministered by Education Boards. Therefore from 1879 there were two systems of state schools running alongside each other. It was the intention then to eventually integrate the teaching of native and 'new' residents to the country, although this was never successfully achieved. The state took control of Education in New Zealand in 1877, adopting a policy which epitomized neutrality. Even the teaching of religion was prohibited. (Bell and Gilbert, 1996). A new Education Act was taken forward in 1914 which sought primarily to consolidate all those strategies of the 1877 legislation and to make further developments to benefit Secondary Education and administration. This was followed up with 43 further amendments until A Commission on Education was conducted in 1962 recommending improvements to teaching salaries, curriculum development, teacher training and the need to reduce class sizes. The proceeding 1964 Education Act failed however to implement any of these recommended changes and merely reinforced the previous statutes. (McClaren, 1974) The Curriculum Division which had been so progressive following the Second World War and into the 1950's closed in 1989, with the politics of the New Right now dominating the future for educational reform across the country.

Much of what had been established during the 1877 Act ' An Act to make provision for the further Education of the people of New Zealand' (McClaren, 1974) was torn apart in 1989 and reinforced with an Education Amendment Act in 1990 and four further amendments the following year.

Interestingly in McClaren's *Education in a small Democracy* he emphasizes the negative aspects of Government control throughout this long period of history and the excessive amount of education administration structures that existed, which served to create an often bureaucratic and ineffectual Education system. For example he quotes ' In 1972 25, 000 laymen were working sometimes at cross purposes in the interests of separate, largely isolated sectors of the education system, their energies more often devoted to the improvement of lavatories than to the advancement of learning.'

It is an interesting contrasting theory to that of Sullivan who blames the new market ethos for undermining the ability and capacity of teachers to carry out their role effectively as essentially humanist, bureaucratic actors working for the fundamental ' social good' of the child and society as a whole.

Considering the business culture of the New Right to be affecting the ideologies inherent in teachers and their philosophy to react against anti-humanist thinking. Sullivan insinuates in his paper ' Educational reform, the New Right and teachers' ideologies' that teachers are essentially being forced to work against the best interests of the child and instead are having to accommodate the economics and politics being addressed by the parents, Boards of Trustees and civic bodies that they are now accountable to. *The Guide to Print Culture in Aotearoa* tells us that The Education Act 1877 existed to provide free, compulsory and secular education and standardized

reading systems. The emphasis of the curriculum stressed reading and writing and children were graded according to their ability measured by six standards. The reading texts were predominantly moral tales that were written for the benefit of British council schools and upheld strong values and morals and were 'directed towards civic and moral duty' all those considerations that are taken into account by the New Right ideology and yet quite clearly existed in the annals of the original 1877 agenda.

Over a century of government control is obviously going to affect the way in which a country adapts to new measures of educational implementation and as Sullivan addresses; it is not necessarily a complete change for teaching staff that is necessary in order to work to a new ideology, but rather a need to maintain their own individual ideologies, whilst adjusting to the New Right agenda. However it is apparent that many of the original ideals of the 1877 Act and those that were adhered to and reinforced decades after are themselves questionable. Schools were segregated and their still remained everyday problems amongst the teaching profession. Department of Education Inspectors' reports citing the methods and most significant problems and complaints made by teachers was the lack of reading books and materials for the children to work with. Sourced from http://www.nzetc.org/tm/scholarly/tei-GriBook-_div3-N12E47.html, Date accessed 16/10/08

This is not a problem in today's public Education system. It could also be argued that for such a great number of years for a country to experience no other alternative to state intervention and control it seems obvious that problems will occur with the 'deep-seated assumptions' that Sullivan refers to in the teaching profession in terms of their ideologies. Teachers should be <https://assignbuster.com/changes-in-teacher-ideologies/>

acknowledged for their knowledge and skills for understanding how to deliver learning programmes and prepare children for the wider world but in addition to taking on board the legislation they are operating within as well as remembering that the child is the most important factor. Davis philosophically refers to this aptly in his paper *Whose Education Is It Anyway?* '...As it says in a quote on a school staff room wall: ' No one ever got taller through being measured'.

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