CHOICE, DIVERSITY AND THE ROLE OF GOVERNMENT IN EDUCATION

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Abstract

We are studying the movement for choice and diversity in education in several countries. Whereas choice has been associated with parental and student rights, markets and efficiency; we are equally concerned with diversity, which we link with experiment, innovation and quality. In this paper we report on part of the wider project considering New South Wales as an example of wider trends. Choice is only one issue where views of the role of government have changed, on left and right. It was fashionable in the 1960s and 1970s for some left educational reformers to be critical of the hegemonic "ideological state apparatus", that earlier concern about the state has dissipated now that the 'new right' has made "choice" and markets" buzzwords in educational policy. For many former reformers, it seems that the state is no longer part of the problem but part of the solution while the reverse, at least the level of rhetoric, is the case for pro-marketeers. We argue this point, not over the content of policy (economic rationalism or corporate managerialism) but over who exercises power and how. In the Australian context the role of the state, often with union support, has become so far-reaching that many instances of so-called choice and market reform have not increased choice or diversity at all. We conclude that a more
appropriate general role for government is as provider of resources and regulator in the interests of equity and justice.

The centralised role of the state in education policy has altered little since the middle of the nineteenth century and the legislation of public education provision. Most policy reform schemes devised in Anglo-American and European nations recently still rely on the state structuring of markets though in an apparent attempt to use the state to remove the power of the state, its bureaucracy and allied agencies such as unions. This includes reforms intended to expand choice of school. To resolve this policy paradox we argue for alternative procedures within which "choice" becomes a matter of choosing between real options in an altered relationship between the school, the family and the state.

LOOKING BACK

Since the inception of government schools in Australia, the general outcome of educational policy has been socially, economically, politically and racially divisive (Crump, 1994). Current but longstanding inequities derive from classrooms where students and teachers continue to have little control over the advantage or disadvantage they experience. Little wonder then that a recent OECD Report, School: A Matter of Choice, found "that some of the most enthusiastic pro-marketeers are poor" (The Economist, 7 May 1994, p. 78). If their optimism is falsely based, as we believe can be demonstrated, there have been deceptive policies on choice (at best "misleading"; at worst "ideological mischief": Ball, 1993, p. 234) for which those responsible should be accountable.

Discrepancy between the intended and actual practice of public education, however, is not something new to "the poor". As Apelt and Lingard (1991, pp. 6-9) demonstrate, the crude equality of educational provision that emerged from the formative years of Australian colonial society was not only authoritarian and inflexible but also strongly favoured the interests of white, middle class, English-speaking and academically able males. Barcan's (1994) historical review of the nature of state control of education in Australia from 1820 shows that things changed little over the next hundred years. While the nature of the control of schooling has varied in the course of this history, the nature of the reproduction function has not. "Sink schools" are not an invention of current reforms.
Skilbeck (1982; cited in Hughes 1993, p. 17) illustrates how a 1970s left ideological critique argued that schools develop selected minorities at the expense of the masses, develop unequal access and opportunity, prepare students for class-determined roles, provide vocational training for the masses versus liberal education for the elites, encourage competitive individualism and reinforce capitalist hegemony nationally and internationally. The evident functions, based on numerous research findings (for example, Roper, 1971; Sharp and Green, 1975; Dale et al. 1976; Willis, 1977; Sarup, 1978, Entwhistle, 1978; Harris, 1979; Cameron, O'Neill, Wilson, 1983; Apple and Weiss, 1983; Connell et al. 1983), confirmed that schools neglect particular groups (ethnic minorities, girls, non-academic), do not challenge social inequality, induct students into a quasi-academic culture, create a socio-cultural lag, compromise cooperation through competition and employ democratic structures only as a minor function.

It is thus illogical and anachronistic to blame recent school choice policies for contemporary identification of these long-term features of education systems. Despite the attempts of a century of formal state-controlled education:

Inequities in the distribution of resources, opportunities and responsibilities, often sanctioned by the predominating hierarchical structures of social organisation, have not only continued but assumed more virulent forms. (Lucas, 1972, p. 377).

Comprehensive school structures are sometimes viewed somewhat nostalgically as a past to which we should return. Yet comprehensive structures developed from the mid-sixties did not mean comprehensive curriculum. These structures forced mixed groupings into the same school site then accentuated diversions from the norm rather than broadened definitions of what is "normal". There can be little justification for compulsion in education when it not only compels attendance but also imposes a world view that is to be learnt, studied and examined but which is only one imperfect construction of social history.

Further, there is real doubt that in Australia, the UK, and also Sweden for example, policy intentions for comprehensive schooling were ever realised. Even in the early 1980s, Ball (1984, p. 1-17) described comprehensives in the UK as in crisis and as an idea that not only had a difficult birth (Hargreaves' metaphor, 1961, p. 161) but one that was subject to "a continuing process of weakening and undermining" so that
the "survival of the comprehensive system, such that it is, remains in doubt". This analysis decisively predates the 1988 Education Reform Act for England and Wales that wrought havoc on many English schools. Whereas the strengths of the comprehensive ideal lay in its advocacy of diversity of modes of study, curriculum development and assessment practices, its weakness lay in the inability to translate these strengths into achievements.

Reynolds, Sullivan and Murgatroyd (1987, pp. 106-29) similarly list the failures of the comprehensive idea in the UK, but use case studies to reassert a vision of the authentic comprehensive school system. This authenticity was lacking in New South Wales (NSW) from the start with the government school system throughout the 1970s and 1980s retaining, alongside new coeducational comprehensive schools, numerically more elite academically selective schools (primary and secondary) than in non-government school sectors, as well as retaining single sex schools and, as noted above, a curriculum biased by class, gender, race and ethnicity. These inconsistencies, and the obvious flaws they reveal in a centralised public policy process, provided fertile ground for those inside and outside the system, who sought more far-reaching and fundamental change.

This is not to say that the comprehensive ideal is not worth pursuing. But it is mistaken now to claim that comprehensives "worked" as the basis for opposing "choice" schemes when the evidence is clear that not only did comprehensives not function effectively internally (genuinely re-distributing access to knowledge) but they also failed to deliver the level of socio-economic change asked of them, such as broadening the range of social class of tertiary students or opening up otherwise monopolised career options.

CHOICE AS POLICY OPTIONS

This history of half-hearted, partial implementation of comprehensive education mirrors the history of school choice policy. The choice of school option was seen as one penetrating aspect of broad change. The only available alternative to public school choice was a flawed traditional model that maintained compulsion, blamed the victims of institutional inertia and incompetence and imposed bureaucratic "solutions" that should be unacceptable in a contemporary democracy. Top-down solutions, supported by billions of dollars of funding, miserably failed to enforce, for example, non-sexist practices in
schools or more effective teaching. There are two main reasons for this: top-down interventionist strategies are flawed as a policy vehicle (Ham and Hill, 1983) and, there is local resistance and interpretation of imposed policy which weakens the power of government intentions (Ball, 1990; Crump, 1993a; Berg, 1993). The realisation of policy assumptions in a top-down model is highly problematic, and not only in education.

It is important to remember that there has always been the option of public school choice for those who can afford to choose where they live. In many instances, this option is more expensive than another option, paying non-government school fees. Those who can afford neither to move nor pay fees have had no choice if they are unhappy with the designated school. In NSW, "choice" has been designed since 1989 around the expansion of government selective schools, the specialisation of secondary schools into areas such as technology and performing arts, senior studies and the declaration of centres of excellence. More than half of all government secondary schools in NSW have been granted or sought such a profile in the context of open enrolment. The possibility of choosing between these options, however, is an illusion for the majority of students and their families and the outcomes of dezonning and diversity of provision are patchy and ambiguous.

A strong case can be made that "choice of school" policy has failed in NSW (Crump, 1995). Whatever the intentions of the policy shift towards dezonning, the subsequent history suggests that the reform was followed through by the government and its instrumentalities in an equivocal and ambiguous way. Either subsequent decision-makers did not foresee the consequences of partial and poorly resourced implementation or were self-deceived, believing that what was being done was appropriate. Alternatively, it is possible to argue that there was insincerity on the part of politicians who, seeking popular support without risk, were rhetorically in favour of choice but had no intention of radically altering school enrolment processes, fearing the same backlash as produced by other recent reforms. Likewise education department and union bureaucrats, more used to cumulative, incremental reform, not wanting to lose control over centralised processes and structures, may have impeded the move to better outcomes. They have not, indeed, lost control.

By 1994, those families wishing or forced to keep their children within the public system find it remains unresponsive to community expectations and unnecessarily restrictive in curriculum, teaching and
learning styles and community involvement. Glenn has argued (1989, p. 295), in the American case, that before choice schemes there was too much diversity, in quality and in real opportunities offered, between rich and poor communities and even from school to school in the same district. The same could reasonably be argued for NSW. The problem is not whether to have diversity and choice but to create an environment conducive to positive options for diversity within public education.

THE DECEPTIVENESS OF CHOICE POLICY

Choice policy is deceptive because the NSW government, the NSW Department of School Education (NSWDSE) and the major unions continue to define and dominate the construction of the education market imposing legal and political constraints. At the school level, while formally there has been de-zoning, admission to schools is limited in other ways. Many schools have waiting lists once out-of-zone places are filled, often well before the academic year begins. Principals are known to ask for two forms of identification to verify local address for families seeking entry and the old school zone maps, officially non-existent, can be seen on office walls and are often used more rigorously than before.

The lack of broader reform to school resourcing (more flexible staffing arrangements, the supply of additional resources and so on) can force school executives into this unjust gate-keeping. The NSWDSE places specific restrictions on the number of entry classes schools are allowed to form as well as imposing other resource and capital restrictions. It would seem ludicrous to set up a system of diversity but then severely restrict access to schools by bureaucratic notions that emphasising sameness. These impediments apply after families have solved well-documented problems such as transport, before-and-after school care and other family re-organisation. Thus "choice" in NSW is highly curtailed and inhibitably structured. As a result, the options for choice are just as firmly as ever reliant upon the affordability of housing.

Additionally, while staffing of government schools has been localised in theory, teachers have rejected this policy and appointments remain the prerogative of the NSWDSE, in association with union policy. This prevents schools from developing, through greater control over the selection of staff, a culture appropriate to their desired profile. A distinctive and coherent culture is critical to the construction of a genuine educational option for students and their families. Policy
failure here is significant because it prevents the definition of an educational and pedagogic choice, or at least prevents the fulfilment of the promise of such a choice. Additionally, choice has been "introduced" in a way that makes parents the choosers, not students. Children thus lack rights over participation in an activity that is compulsory for most of their childhood and that shapes the course of their adult life.

Thus, despite allocating the responsibility for school choice to parents and families, schools continue to serve their function of structuring and stratifying society. The increasing vocationalisation of the curriculum is exacerbating class difference through focussing on children and schools perceived to be attracted to this option [expected to rise from 16% of student to 40% by the year 2000 (Susskind and Guilliatt, 1994, p. 1). This makes even more unjust the designation by the state of school placement, locking children into locations of disadvantage and despair.

CHOICE THROUGH FOREIGN WINDOWS

Much of this scenario is repeated, sometimes more oppressively, in England and Wales. The work of the Centre for Educational Studies (CES) at Kings' College, London (Stephen Ball, Richard Bowe, Sharon Gewirtz and Ann Gold) is theoretically sophisticated, methodologically exploratory and credible in the depth and breadth of issues addressed and data collected. Ball and his colleagues repeatedly demonstrate the difficulty for those in the Òcontext of practiceÓ to make sense of what the policy means, intends and delivers. The focus in England is more on the notion of parental choice, as parents were the target for the Thatcherite project throughout the 1980s. Early work by the CES team identified three categories of family in the market: privileged, frustrated and disconnected. The stories they present are powerful depictions of a class system in operation and the centrifugal forces generated by a narrowing of social expectations about the role of education. Key findings (Gewirtz, Bowe and Ball, 1994, pp. 8–9) are:

1. The market is a middle-class mode of social engagement;
2. Parental choice of school is class and race informed;
3. Schools are increasingly oriented toward meeting the perceived demands of middle-class parents; and,
4. The cumulative impact of findings 1, 2, 3 is the
de-comprehensivisation of secondary schooling.

This realisation of social advantage in education is more marked in England than in NSW because NSW did not adopt central elements of the 1988 Reform Act such as opting out, assisted places and the national curriculum. Nor were preconditions common between England and NSW: for example, the effective and diverse impact of Local Education Authorities in England, weakened by the 1988 Act, had no parallel in the extensively centralised NSW system. More recent work, which looks at the relationship between cultural, political and economic change (Bowe, Gewirtz and Ball, 1994), highlights the complexity and inter-relatedness of choice-making, political and socio-cultural change which have led to new relationships between the home and school. This is a landscape of new constructions and unappealing ones at that.

However, the CES project recognises that parental desire for choice is a response to pre-existing inequitable provision (Gewirtz et al., 1994, p. 15). The CES group sees the possibility of regulating markets in ways which encourage a more equitable outcome on a needs-based definition of equity; though they prefer regulation, commitment and flair in a context of comprehensive student intake. Yet we have shown that, irrespective of its philosophical and pedagogical attractiveness, this remains an equally problematic solution. On the other hand, we share with the CES team a rejection of highly regulated curriculum, of strategies that ignore student need, of quantitative determination on school achievement and of devices of exclusion.

SUCCESS AND FAILURE

Despite the omnipresence of government in public schooling, there are instances and moments where school communities have taken the policy-makers at their word. In England, Ball paints these cases as flagship institutions that are unrepresentative and privileged. He argues:

... there will always be constraints upon the possibilities of leadership that emanate from outside the institution. In the UK we have exchanged one set of constraints, stemming from the school/LEA relationship, for a different set ... What we have is essentially a coercive, disciplinary system rather than a professional, developmental one. ... What is needed now is not good intentions at the school level to make the best of a bad job, but rather a new beginning, an open
and sustained rethinking of school control. (Ball, 1983, p. 234).

Glenn describes the experience in the USA:

... there are many fine teachers in schools in which they are treated as low-level government employees, and sometimes they can create a little community of learning and growth. Now and then an especially gifted principal can nurture that spirit in an entire school, while fending off the effects of a bureaucratic environment. These are exceptions that should be celebrated, but they receive little support from the present system of government-controlled schooling. (Glenn, 1994, p. 49).

In NSW the 1989-90 reforms attempted to introduce "school-centred education". After a period of hard work and struggle, there are cases where this led to more vibrant school communities of teaching staff, and of teachers, parents and students (Crump, 1993a). The credit for those successes that have emerged, however, is appropriated often and promptly by politicians and union officials who opposed their introduction and employed the Òdiscourse of derisionÓ to caricature and ridicule, through simplistic slogans and divisive rhetoric, parents and teachers who supported the reforms at the time of early introduction (see The Sydney Morning HeraldÓs series "Our Schools", 15 -19 August 1994). This was not fair nor ethical, nor an effective and useful strategy to counter the derision from the Right.

The reasons the Metherell reforms to school management, curriculum and choice "failed" are numerous, complex and interrelated. Primarily, they did not go far enough in redefining the role of the state and in re-expressing the voices of competing interests over educational policy (these voices competing within as well as between various vested bodies). Metherell attempted to move decision-making from the bureaucracy into government ("ministerialisation") through the Ministry and Cabinet, supported by new legislation. As the problems of Ministerial government are the same as those for centralist bureaucracy, however, the bureaucracy of the Ministry has taken on the same features as the bureaucracy of the department. There are endemic problems in the delivery of education which need more than countervailing government through more closely supervised ministerial administration. We would argue that the system does not change without dramatic organisational re-design. In the conclusions to this paper we support Glenn's (1994, p. 49) analysis that what is required is more than the increased administrative efficiency through decentralising
While Metherell attempted to circumvent dominant voices such as the NSWTF, for example, and to communicate more directly with teachers, this strategy was perhaps naive. It backfired, giving the NSWTF a high profile as the wronged party. Given the NSWTF’s political opposition to the new government there was little likelihood of genuine dialogue from either side. The NSWDSE was almost equally opposed to the educational policies of the new government, leaving Metherell with few allies and thus little alternative to forcing change. In the end, he did this in the face of sometimes violent public opposition and without support from many of his Cabinet colleagues. Yet, at the time of his resignation from the Ministry, there were key elements in place which, despite expected modifications, remain the cornerstone of NSW education policy (The Scott Reports on management reforms, The Carrick Report on government education, the curriculum statement Excellence and Equity, The Education Act of 1990, Schools 2000 and the Teacher Education Action Plan released later).

Notwithstanding this analysis, it is reasonable to accept Berg's (1990) suggestion that the state is a weaker player in the educational game than it likes to admit. In NSW it can be argued (Crump, 1993a, pp. 88-90) that while the policy goals of politicians were to establish a decentralised market-oriented organisation, and this became the espoused policy of the government and the NSWDSE, the policy-in-use at NSWDSE executive level was a centralised market orientation, while policy outcomes spread through a decentralised-centralised continuum depending on the extent to which the executive's policy was recontextualised or faithfully implemented at individual school sites, school clusters or regional levels. Only the extreme elements of the New Right advocated abandonment of the responsibility for education to individuals and of course the government school system is still administered by a central bureaucracy. While the size of the bureaucracy initially diminished, its actual powers increased significantly; and its numbers have burgeoned so that not everyone will fit back in to the old head office when it is reoccupied soon. But, because teachers resist, contest and ignore what they judge to be the worst features of imposed reforms (progressive and conservative), policy-in-use becomes an amalgam of new demands and old practices.

Here was an enormous "opportunity cost": lost possibilities that will not come around again for a long time. It is increasingly being recognised that many of Metherell's initiatives expressed unrealised reform intentions of progressive educators on issues such as
school-based decision-making, the subject of extensive commonwealth funding for innovation in schools in the seventies (Andrews, 1978); and alternative profiles for schools, mostly attempted through similarly Commonwealth supported school-based curriculum development in the eighties. Perhaps not surprisingly, the NSWTF had long been an opponent of school-based curriculum development and also had trouble envisaging school-based decision-making given its own hierarchical organisational structures that remain unreconstructed despite resolutions of its own Annual Conference, such as those of 1991. (Anderson, 1993, p.1, identifies a similar, earlier, coup by union and department bureaucrats in 1988 against increased parent and community participation in decision-making).

There are lessons from history here as well. McGowan (1985, 107, 113) illustrates the demise of the Entrance High School initiatives which informed the McGowan Report (1981) recommendations for changing NSW government schools. For McGowan these initiatives were "caught between the two rigidly conservative organisations which have in concert frozen educational change in New South Wales: the Department of Education and its mirror-image the NSW Teachers Federation". There is no space here to detail the role of the other main powerful official voice, that of the Federation of Parents and Citizens Associations. But if one detaches the emotion and confrontation of that period, what is left could have been the impetus for better sharing of common perspectives and, thus, better agreement over common solutions.

THE CIRCLES STAY CLOSED

Instead, the circles stay closed. It is not uncommon now to hear academics, education bureaucrats, teacher union officials and even politicians assert that, though there has been some need for revision following the period of reform in the late eighties, they do not advocate returning to pre-reform organisational and curricular strategies. This is an assertion that carries little risk of electoral damage. For example, while there was a flurry of reform in NSW in 1989-90, including structural changes which had the potential to lead to a reformulation of the culture of teaching, this period was short lived and now, "'tis true, the wheel is come full circle": the NSWDSE aims to move back into its Head Office in Bridge Street by Christmas 1994, the NSWDSE and the NSW Teachers' Federation once again favour centralised policy making (the 1993 Enterprise Agreement being the clearest example of failure to consult their respective employees/union membership), the curriculum is almost fully recentralised, staffing
arrangements are a redtape nightmare for schools, dezonings and associated strategies are effectively stymied yet the guise is maintained in a policy of deception (Crump, 1995) and local school management is in a straight jacket (Crump, 1993b).

We acknowledge, of course, that much of the above occurred due to formidable constraints. There are conceptual tools available to analyse such occurrences and ascertain the nature of the constraints and their consequences. Argyris and Schon (1974) have developed the notion of a theory of action. Theories of action include espoused theories, which are what actors say they believe; and theories-in-use, which may be inferred from observations or records of actors’ behaviour (Argyris and Schon, 1978). Robinson (1993) has further developed this in a model of problem-based methodology while elsewhere. Crump (1992, 1993c) has advocated a set of pragmatist principles to outline a collaborative procedure for policy development and research very close to that outlined by Robinson. Walker (1994) has applied the pragmatist principles and Robinson’s problem-based methodology to policy analysis and development.

Our concern in making use of these tools, for the purposes of this paper, is to draw attention to the way a policy problem is identified in an espoused theory, including an espoused set of constraints. For example, it could be argued that in the story of recent educational policy in NSW, the difference between the espoused policy and the policy-in-use was due to the constraints informing the latter: time, state finance and Realpolitik. Yet the key decision-makers may not even see a gap between espoused policy and policy-in-use, or see no need to explain such a gap. And perhaps they need not. Even though most of reform areas noted above are stated in legislation and are mandatory, however, there is little evidence in NSW that there were conscious and conscientious attempts to implement the espoused policy. It could be that there were direct and successful attempts to circumvent the government’s espoused policy. If so, there is reason to seek public accountability and explanation.

The negotiation of the 1993 Enterprise Agreement between the NSWDSE and the NSWTF was "achieved" with minimal consultation and discussion so that, one year later, many teachers realise that they have little idea of what their union signed on their behalf. Throughout 1994 there has been simmering anger in schools as the full implications of this agreement, particularly in the area of curriculum, filter down. The agreement was signed, in great haste, as one overriding agreement for
all classrooms teachers. This was against the original intent of more locally-focused enterprise agreements and in striking contrast to the separate agreement signed for a small number of bureaucrats at Chief Education Officer level.

Prima facie, one might expect, from a pragmatist position on policy development, applause for the achievement of negotiated agreement between two oppositional bureaucracies. In this case, however, our applause is muted as the decision did not reflect the interests of broad groupings of teachers as much as those of two establishment elites celebrating a realignment of their power and privilege. There were, and still are, alternatives for industrial organisation that neither the NSWDES nor the NSWTF will consider owing to the constraining narrowness of their self-imposed and self-serving definition of the policy problem. The strength of this realignment was notable and remarked on in the press following a lengthy period of stern warnings from the NSWTF leadership to the Labour Opposition leader, Bob Carr, that he was out of touch with education issues. Ironically, when the political fortunes of the Opposition Australian Labour Party improved in September 1994 following their win in the Parramatta by-election, the NSWDES-NSWTF rapprochement fell apart in a dramatic shift back to confrontation, with teachers going on strike in November 1994 over salaries. This led to banner headlines about the return to "war" between the NSWDES and NSWTF with the NSWTF President openly stating his intention to bring down the government at the election [in March 1995] and the Minister's response to withdraw the collection of union fees through departmental facilities (Scott, M. and Lewis, J., 1994, p.1; p.6) in order to deprive the NSWTF of funds. Ironically, at this time, the NSWTF executive suffered the embarrassment of their own staff being out on strike!

Our analysis is supported by a recent "scathing resignation letter" from Dr. Brian Scott, a principal designer of the reforms, written frankly and fulsomely in the expectation that it was confidential. Scott is reported to have claimed "we have the Gilbertian farce of the department's troops, having marched away to the top of the hill, coming marching home again" (Morris and Scott, 1994, p. 2). Other reports of the confidential letter (e.g. The Sydney Morning Herald editorial, 24 October, 1994) quote Dr Scott as stating "There has been a perceptible backsliding to centralised control in 1994" and "If the department moves back into the Bridge Street Building (the old Head Office) it will send exactly the wrong signal to the education system at large. It will be seen as a re-emergence of the counter-culture of bureaucrats,
and this will threaten some of the gains of Schools Renewal”.

The miseducative state is in the ascendant (indeed it never did relinquish power) while, as Connolly (1988, p. 175) puts it, established political alternatives, foster "in visible ways ... a politics of discipline and destructiveness"

How can the state be in the ascendant if the ideology behind the reforms was to rationalise government functions through ending state monopoly over public services? In economic theory markets are supposed to generate a context for choice between competing products that, in turn, encourages higher quality products. The economic growth of Western democracies since the Industrial Revolution in the Nineteenth Century is claimed to rest on this model. While the notion of consumers as choosers is appealing, this type of choice is largely illusory, and intended to be so. In education or the supermarket, hidden relationships mask a lack of competition and consumer sovereignty.

Nor do governments appear genuine in their stated intention to hand over education to private sector producers who set out to meet individual wants, goals and values. Even though political talk is about market-style reforms, government expectations for controlling what happens in schools are increasing rather than abating. Much of what happens in education systems cannot be achieved by governments in other institutions. Our concern with this phenomenon, as we have said, is not with the content of these policies but with the location and exercise of power in education decision-making. As the OECD Report notes, governments which continue to dominate the educational market are reluctant to abandon central planning (The Economist, 7 May 1994, p. 78). Lawton (1993, p. 118) observes how "not only is the (UK) education system more centralised than ever before, but the politicisation of the advisory committees has produced concern about loss of legitimacy" leading to a what Rosenhead calls "retreat from reason". This is a retreat into circles closed to competing interests, voices and ideas.

CHOICE, DIVERSITY AND THE ROLE OF GOVERNMENT

Our critique of choice policy and its implementation in NSW suggests that centralised policy making on matters of educational substance is unlikely to promote or even, in policy-in-use, to value the creation of a range of opportunities for students and families in finding and forming an educational program which suits their needs and interests. The title of our paper is important in this context: choice is not worth much unless there is a diversity of options from which to choose.
Our espousal of choice of educational program as a value and as a goal for policy, however, is not based solely on a theory of democratic rights in education. For diversity is important, equally, from epistemological, pedagogical, curricular and organisational points of view. This is because educational improvement depends, as Dewey pointed out some time ago, on experiment and discovery. Educational experiment, to have realistic application, needs to occur in real life situations. In the nature of the case, experiment means changing actual educational situations, and creating diversity. We are therefore advocating choice and diversity as twin values in the provision of quality of education as well as effective and just distribution of educational opportunities. These twins are also in the interests of all: as we learn, through experiment, how to do things better, we make discoveries which can benefit everyone; as we increase the range of genuine options, we enable individuals to experiment with ways of learning, with curricula and educational environments. This pragmatic experimentalism is at the heart of the progressive tradition, and is the most powerful philosophical argument in favour of educational choice.

We wish to stress that school choice is but one form of educational choice. Choice between schools, inter-school choice, or choice between educational organisational units, is an important part of any experimentalist educational policy. But by itself it will not likely be very effective. Witness schools, as appears to be happening in England, competing simply as virtually identical curricular outlets with the focus on quantified outcomes in the form of test results. This is choice, certainly; choice between alternative vehicles to take one to exactly the same destination and using essentially the same kind of structure to do so; like the choice between a Falcon and a Commodore, or if you wish to add the frills of style and status, between a BMW and a Porsche. The vehicle you choose, of course, will determine who is prepared to travel with you, but it won't essentially alter the nature of the experience nor make it likely that new and enlightening experiences come your way.

Tautologically, new experiences are discovered by those who experience them; in education, by learners and teachers. For the process of discovery to be promoted, it is learners and teachers who need to be freed, resourced and supported to diversify and enrich our educational experience. In a democratic society, it is the role of government to free, resource and support them. From the point of view of rights,
everyone should be equally free, resourced and supported by government. From an epistemological point of view, similarly, everyone should be equally treated, since the question of where discoveries and breakthroughs are likely to come cannot be predetermined or narrowed to any one individual or social group. Again, ethics, politics and epistemology support equity in choice, and diversity.

This brings us back to the role of central government. We have argued that the failure of the NSW reforms has been characterised by ministerial opportunism and bureaucratic suffocation. Let us consider the latter problem first. We are not against bureaucracy as a system for implementing clear, limited and fairly mechanical directives. We are arguing that educational policy is not suitable for development and implementation in this way. The case against bureaucracies is well known and expounded in many places. Burnheim, for example, puts it quite powerfully, and is worth quoting at length:

Simply because they work with a limited and entrenched repertoire of things they can do bureaucracies are highly inflexible. The range of policy choices they can articulate is constricted by the sort of information they gather, the sort of failures or needs to which they normally respond and the sort of outputs that they are equipped to produce. They inhibit novel understanding, choice and action. The longer the chain of command the greater the distortion in the message that reaches the other end as at each level it is interpreted and translated into more specific terms and filtered by the bias, inertia and myopia prevalent at that level. The more the chains of command fan out the less likely are the interpretations put on the original directive to result in a set of specific activities that are even consistent, let alone integrated with each other. While the bureaucracy may monitor its own output, it will record that information in quantitative terms that have little regard to quality. The picture that is transmitted back up the line is almost always extremely misleading and very much filtered. The bureaucracy is almost always both incompetent and poorly motivated to assess the impact of its output on the needs and problems the output was intended to deal with. At the same time it is highly resistant to the use of other means to assess its performance. (Burnheim, 1986, p. 55.)

The point about bureaucracy, therefore, is to minimise it and not to
expect it to solve problems nor meet needs for which it is an unsuitable method. We are arguing that so far as education is concerned, except for general structures of resource allocation and maintenance of justice, bureaucracy is unsuitable method for the development and implementation of policy.

Similarly, the ministerialisation of educational policy, commendable though the motives of some ministers may be, is unlikely to produce educationally, socially, and even economically progressive outcomes - even on conventional capitalist criteria. The conditions for success of the career politician in the party system, the gross restrictions on rational planning imposed by the electoral cycle and the superficialities and venalities of media-driven decision making mean that no profound and far reaching educational improvement is likely to spring from ministerially derived policy. This is so virtually regardless of the content of the policy or the theory or ideology informing it. This is hard news for educational reformers intent on using the state (ministers and bureaucracy) or even its "mirror image" the unions as the means to achieve progressive ends.

The point of engaging with the state, and of becoming part of its decision making orbit, or even processes, is to influence structures and practices of policy development and decision making by working to have power relocated in sites of professional practice and community participation. Many holding operations as well as positive initiatives are necessary in this struggle, including genuine attempts to assist bureaucrats and ministers with the problems they face in the system as it now is. If this approach had been taken, on the part of the educational profession and the community, when Terry Metherell was attempting his reforms, the outcome would have been very different.

Central government is good at, and necessary for, the establishment of broad structures for which society as a whole must accept responsibility. One such structure in urgent need of establishment is professional autonomy, responsibility and accountability for educators at all levels. The people who must take direct responsibility for the quality of education in our classrooms are classroom teachers. To do this they need community support and adequate resourcing, as well as appropriate training and professional development. It is from these practitioners, and the professional education community of which they are a part, including researchers and educational leaders at school and local (and functional) levels, that innovation and diversity will come.
Similarly, it is from the educational community, including students and their families, that sound judgements as to policy directions will come. Just as neither Ministers nor bureaucracies are likely themselves to produce innovations and meet the needs of individuals and particular groups, so they are unlikely to be able to pick those who can and will do so. They are poor at such decisions. What politicians and bureaucracies can do is provide the structures and resources within which professional educators, students, families and members of the community can live their educational lives, in much the same way as the function law is to provide a sanctioned, regulative system within which social and economic life can occur peacefully and equitably.

Not that this is the end of government. It is the end of the role of the state, but government, or governance, as our American friends like to call it, must continue at professional and community levels. Here is where the most significant substantive educational decisions, about curriculum, pedagogy and school management should occur. Professional politicians and bureaucrats, or the agents who make up "the state" have the responsibility to support professional and community processes, not to usurp them, as has been happening around the world over the past decade and a half. For us now to move away from this situation, the profession and the community need to take collective action to secure the basis for choice and diversity and to foster experiments in achieving them. Ways in which this has been, is being and might be done are addressed elsewhere in our project.

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