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Societal change and its impact on education: presentations to the WAIER seminar 1980

Bruce Haynes (Ed.)

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SOCIETAL CHANGE AND ITS IMPACT ON EDUCATION: PRESENTATIONS TO THE WAIER SEMINAR 1980

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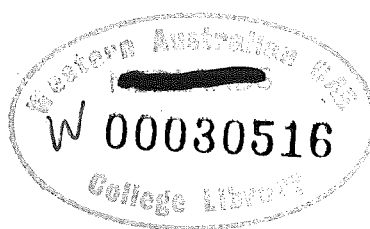
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Edited by
BRUCE HAYNES

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SOCIETAL CHANGE AND ITS IMPACT ON EDUCATION: PRESENTATIONS TO THE WAIER SEMINAR 1980

Edited by

Bruce Haynes

Introduction

On the evening of 5 August 1980 the WAIER held a seminar on Societal Change and its Impact on Education. This seminar was an opportunity for members to develop a Western Australian perspective on the issues to be raised at the ACER's Golden Jubilee Year Invitational Conference held on 28-29 August 1980. The conference papers were published in Peter Karmel (Ed.). *Education, Change and Society*. Melbourne. ACER: 1981. The presentations to the WAIER seminar are made available here because, while covering similar issues to the conference papers, the issues remain significant and are presented in a distinctive and condensed form.

The purpose of the ACER conference was to focus attention on the interaction between economic, demographic, political and social change and the education system. Karmel (1981, p.viii) stated that "In any period of change, the traditional roles of major social institutions come into question, and education is not immune from such a re-examination. The process of examining the interaction between education and changes in the wider society can be viewed as comprising four inter-related stages:

- a consideration of the traditional role of education in society;
- an identification of the types of changes which society is likely to experience;
- an examination of the likely 'impact' of social change upon education;
- a reconsideration of the form and function of education in the light of change in society."

The purpose of the WAIER seminar was to give members an opportunity to discuss the lead papers produced by Brian Crittenden, Don Aitkin, Sir Bruce Williams and Jean Blackburn for the ACER conference. Workshops on these papers were chaired by Denis Goodrum, Bruce Haynes, Mike Lee and Derek Tomlinson. After dinner, Max Angus chaired a general session at which presentations were given by Jean Blackburn,

Brian Hill and Doug Jecks. These presentations, together with a paper distributed to the workshop lead by Bruce Haynes, are published here.

Jean Blackburn surveyed the four ACER papers and raised the following issues:

1. future of spending on education
2. degree of independence of education
3. relation between school and the family
4. curriculum
5. school retention rates
6. restructuring facilities for post-compulsory secondary education
7. cultural relativity
8. public-private education
9. decreased demand for higher education.

Brian Hill concentrated his attention on Jean Blackburn's contribution, in particular on the issues of voluntary services, community colleges, community involvement and concepts of work. He did "chance his arm" in his plea for a concept of education based on a particular view of human nature.

Doug Jecks restricted his comments to two aspects of his ACER paper, that is, local control and education outside the schooling system.

General discussion followed the presentations and a number of issues were raised. In responding to a question, Jean Blackburn emphasised that schools have 'overplayed the notion that we are all masters and mistresses of our own fates and that if only we work hard enough and we are clever enough it would be alright for us.' Instead she wanted 'to help people understand the extent to which fates are common and, because they are common, can only be attacked in a collective way.' She concluded that 'if we believe, as educators, that education is something about the use of knowledge in the liberation of human beings then we have to place much more emphasis on these things that are common among people.'

The second question in general discussion raised the issue of society setting limits on the amount of money to be used 'to create opportunities for certain minority groups or certain handicapped individuals.' Brian Hill noted that 'This is one of the reasons why, in any suitable

situation for the foreseeable future, we want to try to get more voluntary effort because that is a new source of funding.'

Jean Blackburn noted a reference to technology in one of the workshop discussions and a speaker from the audience claimed

'that important structural changes in education could arise as a result of the application of technology There are numerous tapes, computers and so forth and students will be able to plan, with the help of their teachers, their own courses and they will be able to teach themselves. The end result might be a greater degree of self-reliance, self-discipline and again the self as a perceiving being Technology is a change in society and, therefore, an impact on education.'

A second speaker supported this view by saying

'to change the structure of schools may produce a group of children who have a remarkably different attitude to authority figures, to the authority of knowledge and how they are to behave in the community. Decisions about structural changes should not be made on pedagogic reasons alone, that is, for reasons that the information can be got over a bit easier, for there are also considerations about the nature of the person which the system is trying to produce.'

Doug Jecks stated that 'one of the issues this conference ought to look at is "this educational wasteland" where a lot of kids just go down. It is really a question of facing up to the fact that, if recurrent education is going to be more than a slogan, you actually mean it for a kid who does leave at 14, should leave at 14, and who really wants to come back when he is 24. We should not necessarily insist on the legal requirement that he be at school till he is 18. I took the broad message of Jean's paper as this question of what type of continuing education or post-school experience is appropriate.'

Jean Blackburn raised the issue of the value of schooling and said

'The mass of kids see no point in it all because it does not relate to anything they know about and they see it as something out there which does not affect how they think. It is partly a methodological challenge, but it is also a challenge about knowledge, who has it, how it is generated and how valid it is.'

Colin Cook spoke from the audience 'You say high school students should

study because university graduates get about 2½ times the salary of ordinary workers. But the kids today can see that was true in the past but not true in the future. To go to the university for a law degree is a waste of three years because they are unemployed and not getting the salary.' Jean Blackburn replied "I think that is right. However, it is still the case that people who are better qualified get jobs above people who are not, even though they may not get the sort of jobs that they want.' Doug Jecks said 'Karmel said unemployment among tertiary level graduates is 3½% whereas the same age group in society has an unemployment rate of 8½%. I am not sure of the morality of saying to people you ought to stay at school because you are going to get a 2½ times payoff However, it is not the tertiary level where this is significant, it is the kids who are 13 or 14 who don't believe in the value of schooling. Their mums and dads are wondering if it is worthwhile keeping them at school, whether it is worth the earnings foregone and the family sacrifices.'

In response to a question from the audience about whether industry can take over more educational responsibility, Jean Blackburn said 'No, in fact the trend is going in exactly the opposite direction. The trend in Australia is to push costs of training back on to the public sector and out of the private sector.'

Derek Tomlinson said

'It does seem to me a wasteful deployment of resources to send a man (man embraces woman in the English tradition) through twelve years of schooling, three years of university to get a degree which qualifies him beyond his level of employability.'

Jean Blackburn commented 'People will do it because they like doing that sort of thing. It doesn't cost any more than keeping them on the dole.' Brian Hill observed that 'One of the things I keep in mind is my experience in an American university studying alongside students who were there because the babysitting function had extended even into the second year of College. They were doing time even at that late stage and just to keep them in rather than on the dole seems to be no solution.' Jean Blackburn replied 'The surveys in the Canberra secondary colleges show a very much more positive attitude. The experience in Tasmania is the same. It seems possible to devise a form of schooling at that level that kids enjoy We know from teaching kids at that age they are interested in getting wider frameworks to reflect upon themselves, their experience and what they stand for The sort of structures we think

about have got to be a lot more radical than any we have yet conceived, both in their interpretations of what work is and the combinations of study and work. If we could get out of these discussions some determination to try and explore some of those structures I would regard that as a very valuable conclusion.'

The discussion in the workshops and the general session did not focus on any distinctive Western Australian concerns. There was no consideration of the differences in economic structure, demographic patterns or social developments between Western Australia and other states such as Victoria. It is possible that the different reliance on mining and manufacture in Western Australia and Victoria could produce different pressures on educational systems. It is possible that the different ethnic mix in these states could produce different attitudes towards multiculturalism. As these kinds of distinctive issues were not considered to be significant, insofar as they were not discussed at the seminar, so a general response was written by Bruce Haynes on behalf of the WAIER. This response is included in Karmel (1981, pp.176-179).

MAX ANGUS

1980 is the 50th anniversary of the foundation of the Australian Council for Educational Research. As you probably are aware the Institute for Educational Research is constitutionally associated with the Australian Council for Educational Research. Their origins coincide and given the very significant year in the ACER's life, the Western Australian Institute, wishes to contribute in some way to the Council. The Council itself has undertaken a number of activities this year. The first was an invitational seminar on testing and assessment which drew to ACER forty or so experts in the measurement field across Australia and around the world to talk about new developments in measurement and testing. Testing and measurement being the critical components of the ACER programme. The second aspect of the ACER celebration was to hold an invitational conference on the impact of societal change on education. This was a topic that was chosen after some considerable deliberation by the ACER Council. It was agreed that this was an appropriate way to celebrate and to acknowledge the ACER and its contribution to Australian education over this period. ACER decided that 90 persons only would attend and that attendance would be by invitation only. There are a few Western Australians attending. Two West Australians are representing the Institute for Educational Research. They are Denis Goodrum and Mike Lee who are group leaders today. In addition, I am a member of the Australian Council for Educational Research in my capacity as the WAIER's delegate I'll be attending the Council. Doug Jecks, one of our speakers tonight, is formally contributing to the proceedings of the conference. At this conference there are significant figures in international education and Australian education who will be attending. The chairman of proceedings is Professor Peter Karmel. The proceedings will be published and it will form, the ACER hopes, a seminal document in Australian education. ACER was particularly pleased to see the State Institutes take up and contribute to the national conference, the group which has organised this evening's exercise will summarise this evening's contribution so that it can be contributed to the ACER conference.

So, in effect then, this is merely a mini conference to the national conference and I hope that it serves a purpose not only in educating us all here but contributing to ACER proceedings. Now, with all that said, I would like to introduce the first of our speakers tonight — it is Jean Blackburn. Jean has come especially from Adelaide to speak to this

conference and anybody who makes that trip from time to time knows that it is at some personal cost in time and effort to do so. Jean has spoken to other groups more or less on this topic around Australia and, as you know, is the author of one of the papers contributing to the ACER proceedings. In case you don't know — I suspect most of us to know Jean Blackburn by name — Jean has been a member of the Interim Committee of the Schools Commission, a foundation full-time Commissioner of the Schools Commission from 1973 and who has just terminated this period as a Commissioner just a short while ago. During that period as one of the four full-time Commissioners she has had a major influence on the direction of Australian education. She has been a champion of numbers of causes and interests, particularly with the disadvantaged schools programme which I know owes a lot to Jean and her efforts. The topic of women and girls is also another one of Jean's particularly keen interests. She has had other interests as well but I am not going to go into these, except to say she has been a very significant figure with her contribution to Australian education and it is my very great pleasure to introduce her tonight.

JEAN BLACKBURN

I find it rather difficult to attempt what I feel is my job, and that is I hope to wade my way through the four papers and try to bring together what I think are the issues raised. I don't think that the issues raised are wildly divergent. That is an interesting thing in itself and that reassures me somewhat. Although some issues are dealt with across the papers, they each express different and sometimes strongly conflicting points of view.

There are two important contributions that a group like this can make to the 50th anniversary discussions. The first is to raise issues of significance which are not raised by the papers. The other is to confront the issues as presented. I am unable to regard the papers as anything more solemn than a springboard for discussion and that is what the papers were really meant to provide. They were meant to provoke people to think about issues in the future of Australian education, perhaps to reach some consensus about what the major issues were, and how they might effectively be tackled in the 1980's.

I am going to pass fairly quickly over the first issue which was raised by all the papers, that is, the amount of money made available for the various levels of education. I think that there is not very much disagreement about what the papers say about that.

There are also demographic issues. The 5—19 year old age group is now, and is going to be in the foreseeable future, a much less significant sector of the population than it has been over the last 30 years. (So people like me are going to come into their own. I have copped the right age group for once.) Public policies are going to be directed towards people in the workforce (or those desiring to be in the workforce and excluded from it) and with people who have reached the end of their paid working life. So there are those demographic factors which will influence the future scale of educational spending.

There is considerable public disillusionment with education, which I think all the papers have dealt with. There is, in addition, a disillusionment about the individual payoffs from education on this point. However, I found a most interesting table in the Williams paper which did show conclusively that people who say there is not a payoff in education

are talking through their hats. I found that table very interesting also as it shows that as the scale of higher education has doubled, as it has over recent times, the relative returns to higher education are declining somewhat. Nevertheless, when one looks at the average income of graduates, particularly as they get older, which amounts to something just from memory, like two and a half times the national average, the payoff for higher education is clear. On the other hand the average wage of people who have low school attainment amounts, from memory, to something like 67% of the average wage. So one sees the financial advantage of higher education today. I have argued in my paper, that to some degree the reaction to move away from higher education is misguided from the point of view of individual benefits from education.

But there is even greater disillusionment about the social advantages. I think all the papers have gone into that. All of them have made roughly the same point that we did hope that a more equally educated society would be a more equal society and that has not turned out to be the case. The credential escalation is a zero sum proposition, as advantaged sections of the population raise their threshold of education, the more privileged go on to Ph.D's and so confirm their comparative advantage. That has certainly been the trend over all O.E.C.D. countries.

The third element in the future of educational spending and levels of provision is what I would call a new conservatism, which Aitken talks about at some length. The move away, in more industrially advanced countries, from the idea of the welfare state to the notion that people can more effectively dispose of their own incomes than governments can. A movement, I might say, that I deplore. However, both Aitken and I challenge that point of view. I do not believe that there is any necessary connection between the expenditure on education and the size of the particular age group. That is entirely a decision of social priorities made by the population. I believe that, from the point of view of social protection, the society will have no alternative but to increase its expenditure on education over the coming period. Let us not get too carried away by how great that increase has been, although Crittenden cites an astronomical figure about what the increase has been. You will note also in the Williams paper that the qualitative improvement has been something of the order of 25% over 39 years which is not all that terrifyingly great. Aitken points to the idea, and my papers supports that too, that we are likely to see, over the coming period a much greater

participation of older people in education and more part-time students than we have had in the past. I hope this will have drastic influences on the process and nature of higher education. From the point of view of social protection we have no alternative but to invest a great deal more money and effort into these groups in society which have traditionally had low educational participation and achievement. The whole society is going to be in a fairly desperate state if those people are left behind, because the possibilities which are opened up by the falling working hours over lifetime and by technology are closed off if we have a significant group of the population whose competency is so low that they are declared unable to participate in economic life. So that is the first of the issues.

I do not believe any of the papers have dealt with the effect of this contracting education funding on the education system itself, yet, that is certainly a point that has been raised at both of the groups I have been with this evening.

The second set of issues is to do with the degree of independence of the education system from other social developments and agencies and that was certainly raised here in both the groups. The writers of the papers, of course, take very different views about that. I do take a rather optimistic view in the paper I wrote, though I do not believe that education does or can lead the society. I also disagree strongly with Crittenden's idea that there is a thing called education which is a conceptual notion in people's heads which is unchanging since Plato which is somehow or other transmuted into a different social situation. I do not believe that the education system has the independence that is sometimes hopefully and sometimes malignantly attributed to it. Nor do I agree with some people who presently seem to think of it as being the agent of the State in the simple reproduction of the social order. I think it has more independence than that but, I think that the testing out the degrees of such independence is one of the issues which faces us in the future. I would argue quite strongly that the education system has been predicated too strongly on the idea of individual benefits. How one feels about that tends to predetermine how one feels about the future of education. I agree with Bruner that the human rights case is now what he calls "issues of species survival" and I agree with his description. If one does hold that view of the future and believes that such issues as man's potential for destroying the world, the gap between the standard of living of the

third world and the industrially advanced countries, the future of energy, and so on constitute problems which we now have the power to deal with if we have the will, then one takes a different view about what the potentialities for education in a society might be.

Bruner makes that point very strongly in his book, "The Relevance of Education". He talks about the fact that it may be more important to teach in schools the ways to mobilise what we know in the pursuit of solving the problems which are inescapably in front of us than to talk, as Crittenden does, about the passing on of an intellectual heritage which in some ways is in a social vacuum. I certainly would stand more with Bruner than Crittenden about this. But that is one of the important issues that was raised by all the papers, that is, the degree of independence of the education system from a general social development and whether it is possible for an independent role to be played by the schools.

The third issue is the relation between schooling and the family. There are strong differences about that issue. From what I have heard here today, some of us believe that we should not bring into the school those those things which are not its business. For instance our schools should not be concerned with such things as emotional security, and social development and so on, for these are properly the business of the family. That is, the school should function fairly independently of the notion of social values and social prejudice. I strongly support the view, of course, that this is impossible. Personal growth is the result of life experience. That experience is in the heads and emotions and so on of both the students and the teachers as they enter the schools and there is no way of excluding those things from school. I take the more positive view and think that issues of major social importance ought to be confronted more positively by the schools, particularly when social influences are acting in ways which limit the potential of the particular group. I take that view quite strongly.

The fourth separate issue is the curriculum. First there is the justification of the content of the curriculum. Who has this responsibility and on what grounds are they justified? Secondly there is a fairly strong distinction between Crittenden's paper and my own. It is the different views about what intellectual means. Crittenden equates the academic as an intellectual; and he believes that in the process of passing on the intellectual culture we are passing on what scholars have found out, how artists have

the strongest amount of feeling and so on. I do not take entirely that view. I believe that the whole human race has intellectual potential and that it cannot avoid being so, because a part of being human is to reflect on who we are and how we got to be like that and what other way could we be. Most human beings indulge in that sort of reflection. They also apply practical reasons for the things that they do. So I do not see a great gulf between actions and intellect or between the academic and the intellectual. I feel that people who do things in a rational way, drawing on knowledge to do those things, are exhibiting the intellectual activities and it is a social con trick to say that it is undertaken only by intellectuals and that the intellectual culture is only the culture which comes through them. Then the third sort of issue that is raised under those curriculum questions is the question of local or central control; and common core. I do not think there is a big gulf between Crittenden's position and my own as there may appear on the surface. I do believe that, because our children have been born at this time in this particular sort of society, there are understandings between them and to which they all have a right of access. I am speaking more particularly about the variety of means through which they may gain access or learn. That is a question of cognition about how people learn and what is the relationship between learning and school. It is not therefore entirely a question about knowledge at all; but about ways of learning also. I think we in education have spent so much effort in measuring people and sorting them out that we know very little about cognition. That is the most important thing to know. What we believe about cognition has a very important influence on what we believe the curriculum content should be. I am particularly interested for instance in the work of Professor Collis in the University of Tasmania who has produced evidence, which is fairly strongly substantiated elsewhere, that most students over their full compulsory schooling are basically concrete thinkers. That they work from experience and from particular to the abstract and not the other way around. Unless we take that into account we shall be sadly awry in talking about the kind of knowledge which is appropriate to them and the methods which are used in teaching. The question of what should be common and the degree to which there should be adaptation to different social circumstances are major issues. The others are about broader social questions and I think that there is agreement between us about those issues. What are the justifications of content? Is there a proper distinction between it and what is meant by the intellectual culture? Who decides what it is? What are the means by which the young people might be introduced to it? Then there is the problem of the

local versus central theme; and to what extent we now need to push what is common. We had a quite interesting discussion in the group I was in before dinner thinking about whether the issues in that regard are perhaps somewhat different in Western Australia from Victoria, which is a perspective from which Crittenden writes and a perspective which, I believe, has strongly influenced me. I still see all the best and all the worst in Australian schools in Victoria but you may feel that these are not the burning issues in Western Australia.

The fifth issue raised in one way or another by all the papers, is whether we should encourage higher school retention. Crittenden obviously believes that we should not. That proposition, of course, derives from his particular view of education, which involves a decision that all people are not suited to it, and that, at a certain stage, it would be better to find some other institution for perhaps the majority of children. I argue that we have no alternative but to encourage higher school retention. I contrast the comparatively very low retention rates in Australian schools compared with those in industrially advanced societies. Our retention rates are, in my view, related to our British tradition and our notion that practical people do not need theory. As they are going to do things, they might as well get out and do them and they do not need school.

Thinking is a different activity from doing, that is a proposition which I do not support, but which is certainly stronger in the British tradition and I think very strongly part of our education policies too. I also argue in favour of higher retention rates because I believe there is nowhere else for the youth to go and I believe it to be one of the most contentious issues that we ought to be thinking about when thinking about the future. I am very saddened that there is nowhere else for youth to go. I would prefer it if they could leave school when they felt they wanted to and fight their way around for a while and come back if they wanted to when they felt they wanted to. Unfortunately, the economic circumstances now and in the foreseeable future are not such that makes that possible for the whole of the age group which is now leaving at age 15. So I do not see any alternative but to encourage higher retention and to have the kind of secondary schooling in which more students can find satisfaction.

The sixth issue is the issue of the restructuring educational facilities for those in the post-compulsory secondary years. Crittenden comes to

a point which suggests a position not very unlike the one that I have taken. That is, there may be a case now for making some sharp differentiation between the period of compulsory and post-compulsory schooling and setting up senior secondary schooling in separate institutions. A study commissioned by the Schools Commission shows very strong support for that proposition but the thing that bedevils that in Australia are structural questions which we need to look at very seriously. These include the separation of vocational from general education, the different departments which in most states govern technical education and the great difficulty of bringing those together. In spite of the fact that I have slammed the transition policy as a sort of sidekick in my paper, I do believe that important things are happening through the school-work transition programme because some of those issues are being addressed under it, such as, how can we combine something which is broadly vocational with something that is at the same time liberating and expanding in those post-compulsory secondary years? That programme certainly is giving some impetus to that sort of development throughout Australia which I regard as very good because it is one of the things that has bedevilled us. I object to the notion that they are to be regarded as alternative courses, for it is saying that 16% of the school population which goes on directly to higher education defines who the rest of the population are. I object to the notion that those courses are alternative courses and that the majority of the population would be found in that stream. The problem about those courses is that they now lead nowhere, that they do not give any usable qualifications, they do not give a leg into something more vocational which most of the kids taking them really want. I think we have to look more broadly afield and think of systems such as the Swedish which offer at post-compulsory secondary level 23 different orientations of courses, all of which have some vocational payoff. You note from what I said in my papers that I regard this as the greatest problem. Crittenden also reports the notion that this is the stage of greatest difficulty in thinking about what provisions should be made. I felt that Crittenden was also suggesting that it was somewhat in that direction that we have to go, that we have to differentiate between compulsory and post-compulsory secondary schooling and set those older students more adult, more liberating, more responsible kinds of organisation.

Another issue which arises in Aitkin's paper and Crittenden's and in mine is the issue of cultural relativity. I regard that as one of the most important political issues also facing the Australian education system. The issue of

cultural relativity, which Aitkin raises as an issue of the political clout of ethnic minority groups, is looked at by Crittenden from a somewhat different perspective. I would not say that all cultures are equally valid. I think that the question "are we to say all cultures are equally valid?" is a very difficult question which we have not got our minds around at all. It is not a question for Crittenden because Crittenden knows the answer although he does not tell us what it is in his paper. I find the question very difficult and I think that it is one that we do have to come to terms with because, if we go unthinkingly down the road of cultural relativity, I think we have to say it is clear that ethnicity is not the only form of cultural difference in the society. That social class is a form of cultural difference, that to a degree belief and location and sex are forms of cultural difference and that people are subject to different experiences and influences as they grow up in those different settings. If we go too uncritically down that road we give up the possibility of objective knowledge. I would join Crittenden in what he says about that. I feel that to give up the possibility of objective knowledge about how the world really was, irrespective of how you perceive it and I perceive it and they perceived, would be to slide back slowly into the cave. Objective knowledge is what the whole of scientific advance is based upon, what our advances in knowledge have been based upon. That is not to say that people do not look at what might be called objective facts with very different interpretations. You know there is a great disillusionment with the public system of education. Look how people are sliding over into private schools. It is fairly valuable to come straight back and ask how many kids, what kids, try and find out why, than just to keep on badgering on the 'tis, 'tish't, 'tis, sort of thing. I believe that it is very important to hang onto the possibility of objective knowledge about the world to which we can refer at least some limited propositions for falsification. It is important in the area of cultural relativity and that comes back also to the issue of the common curriculum. I think that we do have to assume that a society, which does not break out in violence, is not possible without some common culture and some common presumptions. Now whether one wants to call these value positions or whatever I do not really care. I think there is a lot of contention put in about that but if there are no common presumptions in society we do not really have any basis for rational argument. Most of the things that we argue about in public policy are interpretations of things that we have accepted as words like equality, liberty and non-discrimination and all the rest of it. But if we were not agreed in the first place that there is something good about

those things there is not any way we could talk at all. I have to say that I am an absolutist to the extent that I do believe that by and large democratic institutions which are very loose keep open the possibility of peaceful change in society. An important assumption, which the society has to have in common, is that there are certain things we do not countenance or believe in, such as training in methods of violence as a means of bringing about social change and so on. We do have certain presumptions which unite us. I am not able to say that because Fascists or Muslims or whatever believes that certain things are right, that makes them right. But that is no justification of my position. The point I am really basically making is that this is one of the issues which does arise in all the papers. Now that we have recognised a thing called social and cultural and ethnic diversity and pluralism and all of that stuff, how are we going to deal with it? Are we going to pursue the line of throwing the baby out with the bath water and all walling ourselves in our individual beliefs so that they are totally protected from challenge. Are we going to talk about education for the kind of society in which we all have some notion of what the social realities facing other people in that society are? That is a quite different interpretation of multi-culturalism from the idea of religious and ethnic or whatnot separatism.

Then there is the issue raised by Aitkin and to some degree by Crittenden, (unfortunately not by me because I took very seriously the limitations on the length of the paper) is the public-private dimension. I believe that is an issue for the future. I see it in somewhat different terms from Aitkin who still sees it as the state aid controversy. I believe the state aid controversy is buried. I am sad about that myself but I believe it is. I do not like it in its sectarian form. I believe that it is a non-issue, that neither of the major political parties will countenance conditions being placed on public aid to subsidised schools. Much as I personally deplore it, I believe that for political reasons they will not and that the situation is not likely to change. I see the boot being on the other foot in that I think that we, and indeed the whole of the society are confused about what it is that is special about public education. That is the thing to which we ought to be giving our attention. That, as individual schools within public systems become more autonomous, perhaps less strongly so in some states than in others, it tends to suggest that education is not the eternal thing Plato spoke about. It is not that eternal thing at all but it is what people in their various locations deem it to be. It is how they can use accumulated knowledge to help those kids

growing up in that position to be more powerful in influencing their own lives as well as other lives of the democratic society of which they are members. But there are problems, because I do not believe these are just structural problems about who should decide what and things of that sort. I think that there are problems about what is public about public systems that need to be solved as we move towards that more autonomous school which should be influenced more strongly by its parents and local community and adapted to certain standards of life of the kids who attend it. All of which I believe it should be because then that is their cognition. I believe new inputs which do not make any impact upon the structures that are already there and make no impression at all are totally useless.

I could go back and pay a tribute to Crittenden because I agree totally with what he says about multicultural relativism. That is the position that if education has a stance towards cultures and subcultures it is critical to interact with them all, both with the dominant and the subs. I agree totally with him. But we are perhaps in a dilemma now. In the coming decade there is going to be an issue about what the public system is, what is public about it and what it is that distinguishes it from subsidised or non-government system. I think that has a lot of very important implications. The issues about choice and diversity are not just issues about equality, which I believe they are and which Crittenden clearly believes they are too, but they are also issues about what is public about the public system. I think that is the thing we are going to be confronted with increasingly. Certainly in the United States the argument that education is for individual benefit has now become very strong as a result of various social programmes and the legal positions. People are saying "well if it is for individuals why can't individuals decide best what it should be for them?", and that the result of that is a really quite serious move towards the disintegration of the public system in the United States. I believe that Aitkin is right in raising the public-private as an important issue for the coming period but I personally believe that he has raised it in the wrong terms. The issue is that the onus of the system has become rather on the boot of public education; and, for those of us who are involved in public education, to think what is special about that and what is involved in public schooling.

The final issue which all of the papers mention is the lowering demand. The decreased demand for higher education and the lack of faith in it, and one has to say totally philistine, anti-intellectual reaction to it in

some quarters. All the papers raise that issue. I think that my paper is the only one that raised issues about the structure and direction of higher education. I believe very strongly that if that anti-intellectual fire in society is not to be fanned up to really high levels then it is necessary for higher education to demonstrate its concern and its ability to contribute to public issues. "Something needs to be done to stir educational theorists who are sitting in back rooms, say: 'On the one hand (a) on the other hand (b). It's all too difficult for mortals like me.'" I believe that in too many cases the division between theorists and practitioners in education is totally unjustified. This division is found in a number of other fields too and it is a particular attribute of British societies. One of the things that certainly impressed me greatly in the United States is the way in which American academics are really very seriously involved in trying to work through what it is possible and practical and good to do in our public education. We see very little of it in Australia. Instead we see too much of the destructive attitude in persons who make a stand about issues with the notion that "the whole thing is too difficult, they don't understand how complex it is." I have been around schools in Australia, and I have visited over the last 18 months a very large number of secondary schools, and I have to say that it is the best practitioners who are streets ahead of Australian theorists in education. I have not given a typical and impartial survey of issues raised by these papers. I have tried to distill from them what seems to me ten issues that were fairly prominent across them although the reaction to those issues will be interesting to me.

BRIAN HILL

I'll come out of the woodwork anytime to hear Jean Blackburn speak because I treasure her clarity of utterance, her creativity of suggestion and her concern for people and for particular groups of people who are disadvantaged. Before I start to comment on some of the things that she has raised in her paper, I'll just making glancing comments on the other three resource papers that we were equipped with for this Seminar.

Comments on the Source Papers

With regards to Professor Williams' paper, it seems to me that we had here a demonstration of a social scientist at work in a way which I find helpful but at some points distasteful. He provides us with a number of correlations between educational phenomena and socio-economic phenomena but is not very keen to demonstrate causation as to which comes first, chicken or egg; whether educational change is causally efficacious in the social order or merely the creature of the social order. I think it is rather important for people to chance their arm on this one when they have such economic vision as Professor Williams. When writers shirk this task, one is left with the feeling that education is of interest to us as a social instrument but does not have an intrinsic rationale. All the view is from the outside, how it fits into the network of socio-economic relationships, and I think that is unfortunate. I think it is part of the spurious objectivity that many social scientists strive for. It makes it difficult to see the hidden agenda of value judgments and assumptions that they personally hold to, the conservatism or radicalism which is embedded in their conceptual framework but is disguised by social-scientific language.

In relation to the paper by Aitken, I take the point that he has made about the conservatism of society, the likelihood that macro-conditions in society will be relatively stable in the foreseeable future. Granting that point for the moment, it seems to me that we should turn our attention entirely to ensuring that it is not stable at the school and local community interface. This is a point at which things can be done that will have an enduring effect and may become then the seed experiments for larger social operations. Actually, I don't want to accept his conservative story totally but to argue that, if we are working at a micro level, eventually the things we are doing may achieve the qualitative changes in society's views of education because some lighthouse experiments have shown what can be done.

With respect to Crittenden's paper, I was frustrated that a fellow philosopher, despite the fact that he effectively showed that other people had not justified the value judgements they were building into their various reports and enquiries, did not chance his arm in offering at least the sketch of a value position that would be serviceable to public education in the future. But I was glad that he brought up the point that many of the questions we are trying to answer depend on our developing and agreeing upon a view of human consciousness, indeed a view of what Jean spoke of as being human. Now until these sorts of issues are brought out into the light and are made the subject of debate between scholars instead of being tucked under the bed, we will continue to deal with issues short of their fundamental level. Is human consciousness something we value or is it something we consider to be so socially determined that we need not place much emphasis on the individual curiosity and creativity of the child? Is the child a cognitive animal or does he have other capacities together make up the kind of organisms that we are trying to help develop? These questions, too, have to be asked. They are dreadful questions. They have plagued us for centuries. Yet, without answers to them we slip easily into instrumental views of education which short-change the rights and dignity of the individual. Crittenden also made some remarks about the nature of education. He distinguished between a general idea of education and a more specific, if you like, a more professionalised idea of education as being something that is heavily cognitive and knowledge-oriented. Now I see him borrowing this from some of the recent literature in philosophy of education and it perturbs me because it is a very short jump then from the view that we are only talking about this rather narrow concept of education to saying that the schools have a very limited task, while at the same time putting all our educational eggs into that one basket.

Voluntary Services

We now come to the comments that I want to make about Jean's points made both in the paper and at this rostrum. Firstly, I think that Jean is concentrating very much on the school and on other schooling institutions, admittedly at the higher level. I am fearful that we might be tempted to imagine that higher school retention is inevitable and that we **must** work within the framework of that kind of institution we refer to as school, which has very particular characteristics that differentiate it from other institutions in the community. But there are some tasks the

school cannot do as well as some other kinds of institutions in the community, and I think particularly of voluntary youth services, which are an interface between school and work. They are the Cinderellas of the modern youth scene, and are neglected when people are talking about transition schemes operated by industries or through schools. Voluntary services don't receive much acknowledgement. This neglect is being remedied in some cases by voluntary groups taking the initiative to apply for the grants that are available, say, under the transition programme in this state. I think something that might be contributed to the national discussion later in this year is the model of the youth education officer serving as a bridging person in the high school between the school and the community; not just by way of helping youngsters to move out into the community, but by keeping in touch and dissolving the rather artificial lines that are drawn between the life of the child at school and the life of the child in the community or in the workforce. So I would hope that when we talk about education, we retain a broad enough concept of education to see that formal education as such, schooling as such, is a subset of the larger task and that we are going to lend our support to arguments for the bolstering of voluntary youth services.

Community Colleges

Secondly, Jean mentioned the desirability of secondary colleges at the local level being seen as an important medium in their own right operating multi-level courses and multi-level instruction so that young people can plug in at the point of need. This verges on the American model of the community college. I would agree with her that this offers great promise and thank her for the suggestion. I think we are facing what may be termed the brontosaurial problem: namely, the teaching profession and the institutions in which the teaching profession clads itself, within which its promotional avenues are defined. There is a formidable cultural lag in our profession. Those of us who are academic are at least as much to blame as those who are working at the school-face for our reluctance to perceive our structures as means towards other greater ends rather than as ends in themselves.

Community Involvement

The third point, which is another aspect of restructuring, is the suggestion that Jean has made of the desirability for regionalisation in education and

more emphasis on decision-making in the community. I welcome this as a device to break down the monolithic professional bloc which so often inhibits the sort of discussion which would bring about change. Mind you, if we are going to talk this way and if we are going to be genuine about our desire for regionalisation, then we are going to have to theorise, and not just use fine words, about the way in which the lay person and the professional person will interact, at what level decisions by one party or the other are appropriately made. We will need to practise spelling out the terms of reference for the various bodies on which these two groups meet, so that people are clear about the delegation of power that has taken place and won't engage in fruitless hour-long arguments about whether they have the right to make such-and-such a decision or not.

This also I think has portent for solving, or at least going some way to alleviating, the problem of cultural relativity. For, as Jean has said, the purposes of education are not to be defined eternally but in relation to particular users of the schooling facilities. Where the professionals come in, as stewards of the profession of formal education, is in conveying accumulated knowledge, being the people who can provide the resources to pass it on in the framework of a democratic society, marrying this function with the purposes described by the sponsoring local community of the school, rather than in trying imperialistically to do all the prescribing ourselves, and making all the normative judgements.

Education for Humanness

Lastly, it seems to me that what I have been saying adds up to the claim that our concept of education is based upon a view of human nature. We must develop that view, see how far we can go professionally in laying down some of the parameters whilst recognising that the rest must come from the participating community. At the least, as a profession, it's in our interest to get beyond that fashionable and, as Jean has said, British view of education as something focussing very much on the intellectual, academic side of development, characterised by the claim that we are educating for critical rationality. That is, as I see it, half the story. I speak as a committed person, for it seems to me that people also build into their concept of education the expectation that they are developing persons to fit into the community as well as exercising rationality. If our emphasis is upon the need to assist the development both of rationality and of a commitment to community, then we will be rescued from two

errors. One error is that of being individualistic and selfish because one does not have a commitment to the community. The other error is that of being so committed to community in an indoctrinated way that we are not able to stand back from it and see what is wrong with it. That is why I say it must be a double-barrelled view of education. Maybe if we had this view and developed it within the profession for a start, then this would go some way to restoring the professional commitment of teachers who find that they get support from nobody when they want to be serious and concerned about their job because all that anybody looks at is academic results.

DOUG JECKS

In December 1980 I was asked whether I would be one of six reactors to the four major papers. Quite frankly, my first inclination was to say no because I wondered how I would have time to do it. Then I saw that the letter was from Peter Karmel in his capacity as Chairman of the ACER, and, as he is also Chairman of the Tertiary Education Commission I thought – well – I won't say no. I am glad I didn't.

In due course I received the four papers and spent about a month reading them and pondering topics to which I could react; in the end I had a list of nineteen. Obviously I could not react to nineteen topics so I reduced the list to ten, in writing the paper I further reduced the list to six and I intend to read my comments on two of these tonight.

The first of the six topics on which I commented related to the general area of support for education, contrasting 1970 with 1980. Second, I looked at some of the administrative problems which occurred in a time of very limited growth, or even decline. Third, I considered the issue of local control of education. In truth, Crittenden rather disappointed me when I read the first part of his paper and I found myself labouring through material that I had often read before. At this point I wondered why he had started off on how our overseas critics have seen us in the past. When I came to the end of his paper I felt I owed him some apology. Fourth, I considered the glibly repeated slogan of "recurrent education". At the same time I considered the concept of a new type of educational institution in the Australian setting. Fifth, I considered the role of the Australian Schools Commission. Finally, I commented briefly on the need for an adequate data base in Australian education. I did this not because I felt that most things in education could be quantified but because I believed that there were some things which would be quantified and that it was better to argue from the "basic arithmetic" than merely to make assertions.

Tonight I intend to look at two of these six topics. First, I am going to discuss that often trodden path of local control. In some ways I find this rather a dull area, but in other ways it has important implications for those who talk about greater power and authority (spending power and staffing power) at the local school or region level. Second, I intend to have a look at the general area of recurrent education. In doing so I

intend to talk about Professor Harold Clark who is now some 80 years of age. He is an Englishman. When I first knew him he was Professor of Economics at Columbia University in New York City. In the early sixties he advanced the view that the major task of education (up to two-thirds of all education in the United States) was being carried on outside the formal school system comprising the universities, colleges, secondary schools, primary schools and kindergartens. Even now, this is rather an unorthodox view. Certainly, in the early sixties it was one which was heard with some derision by many of the students who attended his classes. However, he produced the arithmetic to show that his thesis had a substantial basis. He argued that the traditional school system was not coping with educational needs in the United States, and because of this another system had been developed and was still evolving. At first sight most of us may tend not to believe such an argument because we happen to be part of the formal system and may not like to hear that the formal system may not be coping as well as it could. As a reactor I saw my first task as one of flowing some cross-currents across what the major papers were saying and trying to bring to the surface some of the associated issues.

Towards Local Control?

Crittenden notes that the central education departments have slackened their hold on the school system and that in various reports there has been support for the devolution of responsibility from the central system to individual schools. He notes associated problems and quotes from School Commission reports to indicate these problems are well recognised. In any discussion of the organisation and administration of education in Australia it is impossible to avoid the centralisation versus decentralisation or some intermediate step.

In Australia one key problem is that the central department provides all the funds and other resources. Earlier critics contrasted the Australian system with the pattern of local control and of local taxation to which they were accustomed overseas. It is very important to understand the close relationship of funding and control. In fact some could argue that, as the central government is providing the money, the central government and its bureaucracy have a wholly legitimate right to control all of the particular units it funds.

One of the strengths claimed for local control and taxation is that the local community can be more responsive to the needs of its particular school; that is, if a community wishes to develop a programme in vocational education or Japanese then it might choose to tax itself more heavily to achieve these ends. On the other hand, in a tax revolt situation, the local community might choose to reduce the direct school taxes paid and cut the programme. Some of those who have argued for local control of Australian schools have tended to ignore the fact that in both North America and the United Kingdom it is the members of the local community who pay.

During the past 25 years this situation has changed. The central governments both in North America and the United Kingdom have contributed in increasing proportions to local school budgets. Even so there is a residual local taxation effort. My purpose is not to argue the advantages or disadvantages of either local control or centralised control. Rather I am seeking to point out that it is not possible to draw direct parallels between local school systems overseas and centralised government school systems in Australia.

In 1960, Davies, a political scientist, had this to say about the Australian system of government, and I quote:

There is, as it were, a natural tilt of the board in Australia against decentralisation . . . The characteristic political form in the countryside is not the local committee of management, but the deputation: the Country Party is merely its apogee. There has always been in the Australian country dweller, and not only in the country dweller, a decided preference for awaiting his turn with the bureaucracy rather than making their own pace by voluntary effort. This is of course . . . as well as one . . . of the futility of the local government system but one does well to recognise that nine times out of ten the local demand is for equal treatment or uniform provision rather than let us handle this ourselves in our own way. The paradox in the Australian situation is, of course, the fact that the better the State administration performs the less will popular grievances tend to spill over into (. . .) demands for decentralisation. Educationists may well be right in thinking that affluence may bring out behaviour in local communities that poverty and hardship could not. One hopes they are, but we should appreciate the fundamental novelty of such participation in Australian political life.

Local control has at least two essential elements. One is that there is a local budget where spending depends on local decisions. Another is that there is local control of staffing. In Australia the professionals may claim, and I suppose would claim, that they should control this element at the local level. However, much of the argument is towards granting control to the local community. In the Australian setting it would be foolish to ignore the early inherent clash between local professionals and local communities. Crittenden sums up:

The Schools Commission is surely correct when it claims that "the development of a proper balance between the freedom of the individual schools and the political responsibility of those who have authority in the system as a whole is among the most important tasks facing public education." In working at this task we should not take the scale of the systemic level for granted.

Aitken notes that Australian education is run by governments, and I suggest that any devolution of funds and control to the local level will be purely a political decision. Some may argue that the powerful bureaucracies will automatically oppose devolution and that ministers and governments will not want to hand over any element of control which they have now. Others may argue that there has already been a devolution to the local community or local school. In considering this second argument, it is important to realise that a large organisation can decentralise in a particular way, merely by establishing branches where the officers of each branch see their first loyalty to the central organisation, follow the central rule book, follow the central policies, follow the central regulations, and consider themselves birds-of-passage who sooner or later will move either to the head office of the central organisation or to another of its regional branches.

If any real measure of decentralisation occurs with local control of spending significant amounts of money, it will be a major break with past policy. If local control of curriculum is to develop further, there is a need, as Crittenden has well highlighted, to clarify particular points of policy and procedure.

The Wider Educational System

I feel that the most telling comment in Blackburn's paper was a statement

that read something like: It is an indictment that apprentices who can install air conditioning in high-rise buildings should have learned that they are not very intelligent people and that essentially after ten years at school this is what they know: that they are the non-academics and they're not too bright.

Now I found this an interesting sort of comment and I would like to come back now to Clark. Clark played it a different way. In the mid 60's he claimed that it was inaccurate to suppose that the traditional system in the United States — Early Childhood Education, primary, secondary, college and university — was any longer coping adequately with the educational needs of the American society. He argued that a more significant research effort was taking part outside the traditional college and university system (a heresy, surely) and that the research budget, manpower and effort of such firms as IBM, Bell Telephone and Du Pont, and of some United States government agencies, dwarfed the same resources and work in tertiary institutions.

Clark published four books — *Classrooms in the Factory* (1958) *Classrooms in the Stores* (1963), *Classrooms in the Military* (1964), and *Classrooms on Main Street* (1966). He pointed out that in 1964 the American Armed Forces on any given day had up to one million persons in class, ranking from the rank of General down to the newest recruit. He presented data to show that a major educational effort was taking place outside the traditional system. He was in the forefront of those who, from about 1950 onwards, argued that any adequate 20th century system would have at its heart the fact that in technologically advanced societies and economies education would continue throughout a person's lifetime and would not be restricted to the traditional system which dealt mainly with persons with academic capacity aged 20 years and below. Clark argued that the traditional high school system was focussed on the intellectually able and that too often too many students found the programme to be an educational wasteland.

He showed in 1964 there was a tertiary system comprising some 2,000 colleges and universities in the United States, but that there were some 35,000 post-school institutions which carried on significant and substantial educational programmes. He claimed that two-thirds of all education in the United States was moving through channels other than the usual primary-secondary-college and university system. While much of this

related to adult and continuing education of the so-called average Joe, Clark cautioned those working in the tertiary system not to assume that they were superior and pointed out that, in his opinion, the most advanced teaching and research in fields such as chemistry, mathematics and physics probably took place in firms like IBM, Bell Telephone or Du Pont.

In fact, in relation to Du Pont, he pointed out that they employed some 2,300 PhD's in chemistry, while at Columbia University there were 20 PhD's in chemistry teaching as professors, and that these 2,300 people taught among themselves the most recent knowledge that they had developed or were developing.

He really gave the universities and colleges the back of his hand. In fact, he had given the back of his hand to the whole traditional system. In short, Clark argued that there was a large and effective alternative post-school educational system operating in the United States which had developed largely because the traditional system had not coped with satisfying real needs.

I doubt if any of you really believe what Clark said. It made possibly the biggest impact on me almost of any course I did with any professor while I was a doctoral student. He was a man who seemed to overstate the position and then to come in and say, "Here is the data." That was his style of presentation and I for one was impressed that he did have the sort of basic arithmetic that Blackburn talks about. If you want to sustain an argument you need some basic arithmetic to support it.

COMMENTS ON CRITTENDEN'S PAPER: A LEAD PAPER FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

Bruce Haynes

Introduction

This paper is not a summary of Crittenden, nor is it a detailed critique of part on the whole of his paper. Rather, what is offered here is an extension of some aspects of Crittenden's paper and an indication of some areas, that Crittenden did not cover in his lengthy discussion, which seem to merit consideration.

Crittenden examines the theoretical assumptions underlying recent developments in Australian education because most of the theoretical positions adopted in the past two decades will continue to be influential in the debate on future educational policy. Crittenden emphasises the area of secondary education in the main section of his paper and he says:

One justification for emphasising the secondary school is that, because of the changes of recent decades, this stage more than any other in the whole system of formal education has been beset by complex questions about the proper nature of its educational work and the purposes it should serve as a social institution. In the final section of this paper I shall bring together a number of general issues to which I believe we need to give more careful attention if we are to make progress towards a more coherent and adequate theory of education.

Crittenden seems to be concerned to increase the role of educational values in educational policy making and he urges that more systematic research on the bases of educational theory is needed.

In the following section of this paper I shall comment on several features of Crittenden's paper. In the third section I shall raise a query about the title of the ACER conference as it seems to reflect an attitude that could inhibit adequate discussion of important issues. In the fourth section some comments are made as an extension of Crittenden's call for research and a brief indication of the kind of work that may be of use is given in section five.

Comments on Crittenden's Paper

While accepting that secondary education has faced the most serious questions about its viability as an institution and this has been reflected in questioning its proper nature and purposes it may only be that this is a matter of visibility. If the consumer is not happy with the product then the problems are likely to be publicly aired and the producers worried. If students no longer stay on at secondary school in increasing numbers and if employers, for reasons related to education or not, are unhappy with job applicants from schools then the problems of secondary schooling can be highly visible. However, I suspect that equally complex questions about the nature of the educational work and purposes of primary schooling arise from recent developments in the process and setting, viz. open education and open area schools. Perhaps the issues are not seen to be so pressing in primary schooling because of the failure of either of these developments to make a significant impact. The other aspect raised by Crittenden's emphasis on secondary education is the significance of the move, as begun in W.A., to think of schooling as K-12 or K-10+2. If curriculum design is seen in this way then worries about the nature and purpose of the end of the process will be taken to be just as significant for all of the preceeding stages.

The general issues Crittenden surveys in his final section are summed up in a quote from the Schools Commission

extended choice and variety may exacerbate inequality and may conflict with other values such as cohesiveness which the public school system ideally represents.

Devolution of authority to provide extended choice and encouragement of diversity to accommodate many different cultural perspectives cannot be fully realized without undermining the prized goals of equality and social cohesion. Crittenden argues that a balance between these values must be struck if educational policies are to be consistent and be justifiable. His call for research is made in order to reduce the existing confusion and move towards a justifiable balance.

While the call for research is supported later in this paper, it is worth bearing in mind that the educational system is presently confused not only in what value choices are to be made and how they are to be implemented but also, given some notion of devolution of authority, who is

to make policy decisions. For those with a blueprint for change it is sensible to attempt a total change at one time. For the rest it does not make sense to change everything at once but rather to keep some fixed point of reference from which to make limited, incremental changes. What Crittenden has not done in his final section is to point out the assumptions which are not believed to be confused and serve as the basis from which educators manage to make partial sense of their enterprise and its daily activities. Perhaps the theory contained in the Reports surveyed in the earlier section gets as close as is practicable at present to a statement of the agreed assumptions underlying Australian education practice.

Schools and Their Responsible Impact on Societal Change

The theme of the ACER invitational conference seems to be an endorsement of the trend in educational thought, noted by Crittenden, that "begins with an examination of significant changes in contemporary society and suggests some consequences for the practice of education," Even where this examination is supplemented by psychological, political and educational consequences for the practice and purpose of schools, the matter of responsibility seems to have been overlooked.

Those educators involved in providing schooling have a responsibility for their actions that is not diminished by the acceptance that schools "can only play a limited part" in bringing about social change. Educators try to change individuals for the better while conserving the individual's desirable attributes and, in so doing, help to change society for the better. Schools, as educational institutions, respond to what is in society and seek to enhance that which ought to be continued. Schools also attend to what is changing in society so that the change may either be facilitated or redirected. Schools both conserve what is desirable, and promote desirable social change, albeit slowly and over a broad front.

Educators and schools, as educational institutions, have a responsibility for the normative stand taken in carrying out their activities. To take this stand is to say, in effect, "We believe the students to have characteristics P and society to be X and we undertake the educational program in schools to produce students with the more desirable characteristics Q for a better society that is Y". This is normative in that it depends upon the values held in order to determine what is desirable. Just as "there are several fundamentally different, incompatible ways of inter-

preting the nature of education" so too are there several fundamentally different, incompatible systematic normative stands that can be taken in educational practice. To act on the basis of a particular normative stand requires justification. In justifying educational activities, use is made of educational theory and sometimes, as in the reports cited by Crittenden, some of the theory is stated and can be scrutinized.

The problem with concentrating on societal change and its impact on education is that due recognition may not be given to the responsibility educators have to justify their activities, to the theory which informs their activities, or to the assumptions underlying their theory. Where education in schools is seen to be a response to societal forces (rather than being responsive) then educators may not recognise their responsibility for normative commitment. If consideration is also given to the school's impact on societal change and educators justify their activities then at least they can be (somewhat like Mr. Richard Nixon) responsible but not to blame.

Provided that the relation between schools and societal change is seen as operating in both directions then the issues relevant to schooling can be placed in a more appropriate context. In particular, it should be seen that "as with the needs of society, there is no simple logical track from a statement about the needs of persons to a conclusion about what the nature of their education should be". Crittenden points to the importance of considering educational values in relation to determining the purposes, as well as the processes, of educational institutions. What Crittenden does not emphasize is the normative commitment of educators in acting on one of the sets of educational values and balancing those values and the other non-educational values when making professional judgements. Recognition of this commitment heightens awareness of the significance of the theoretical assumptions underlying recent developments of Australian education.

By way of example of the responsibility of educators for their commitment to a normative stand, we may consider Crittenden's concluding statement on core curriculum

Perhaps the most satisfactory way of examining the issue of a core curriculum is to focus on what values, knowledge, dispositions, and so on need to be developed as common ground sufficient both for the cohesion of the society as a whole and the pro-

tection of the diverse cultural groups within it. Respect for differing values and traditions and the conduct of a civilized debate between conflicting interpretations of the public good depend on an underlying agreement about values and procedures. The content of this agreement might form the central focus of a common core curriculum of social education. The first step towards such a curriculum would be to examine the state of the underlying consensus within the Australian society.

This first step is an empirical investigation of the underlying consensus but the second step would be to set out alternatives for deliberation. For example, if attitudes towards racial discrimination were found not to form part of the consensus then an alternative is to achieve consensus on this issue and there are further alternatives as to what values might be agreed on in this area. The third step is for educators to commit themselves to a normative stand to seek to achieve the desired social consensus. This kind of commitment has been made overtly by educators in the past as can be seen in the W.A. Education Department's *The Small Schools' Curriculum* (1926, p.200).

History teaching in the primary school should aim at giving the child an intelligent appreciation of the outline of the story of our race, of the elements from which it has been blended, of the manner in which it has grown up and expanded, of the relation of our branch of the race to the other portions of the Empire, and of the relation of the British race as a whole to other nations. The story of the struggle for freedom and the growth of British liberties and institutions will naturally lead to the rights and duties of the citizens of today. Admiration of the achievements of the British race in peace as well as in war should lead to a broad patriotism and a real sense of our kinship with the other portions of the Empire. Some idea should be given of the obligation that rests upon us to guard and maintain the rights and the liberties which our forefathers won, and of the responsibility of a race that governs so large a portion of the world and controls the destinies of so many other peoples.

While all the values noted here may no longer form part of the central focus of a common core curriculum of social education in Australia, educators should recognise their commitment to some successor of these

values. Educators' awareness of their responsibility may be enhanced by recognition of the two-way relation between society and schools. Awareness could be further increased and commitment better informed if research on this aspect of educational policy was pursued systematically and incorporated into the professional life of educators.

Research and Educational Theory

Crittenden's paper examines the main underlying assumptions of educators coping with the rapid expansion of the system in the past three decades. While policy makers have attended to matters of materials resources, Crittenden states that what requires urgent attention are "the guiding assumptions about the nature of education and the role of various institutions and practices in achieving educational objectives."

Crittenden concludes by asserting that "What we urgently need is more systematic work on the theoretical bases of our public policies in education".

Crittenden comments on the role of the Schools Commission in "exploring the guiding theoretical framework of public policy and encouraging a more informed critical debate in society generally". While he wants this role of the Schools Commission strengthened, he is critical of its achievements to date for he uses terms such as 'derivative', 'eclectic', 'incomplete' and 'confused'.

While accepting that the Schools Commission has encouraged debate and, to a lesser extent, explored educational theory (as distinct from using it), it seems that other bodies are more suited and directly responsible for meeting Crittenden's call for systematic work on the theoretical bases. ACER seems set to move in this direction. Education Research and Development Committee could support a concerted call for this systematic basic research. If the post-secondary co-ordinating bodies at state level were to become involved in research funding they could provide a means of dealing with middle-level funding proposals for research on theoretical bases of educational policy. Tertiary institutions could facilitate such research by recognising its importance when making appointments and decisions on in house research funding. Various professional bodies might promote basic research by their members on policy related issues. Bodies such as state educational department research branches, Curriculum

Development Centre and Schools Commission could point to the areas of basic research they perceive as important for the decisions they are making, or commission research in areas of importance. Other bodies, such as Australian College of Education and West Australian Institute for Educational Research, could serve as forums where calls for basic research are debated and the resulting research reviewed.

The assumptions underlying these organisational suggestions for support for systematic research on the theoretical bases of our public policies in education are that (1) a sound theory is relevant to good decision making, and (2) systematic work on basic research will improve the theoretical assumptions available for Australian educators. Crittenden's critique of recent developments in Australian education shows how decisions have been based on theoretical assumptions. The adequacy of some of the assumptions are questioned, for example, those relating to educational purposes, the role of schools, and the notion of equality of educational opportunity. Further, Crittenden claims, inadequate arguments are provided in recent reports to show why the policies they recommend should be accepted. Systematic work on theoretical bases could be directed towards refining the assumptions and specifying the arguments required for sound theoretical justification of educational policies.

An Example: Relevance

An example of an assumption underlying Australian education which seems to be in need of systematic research is that of relevance. Along with the assumptions that schools should be both cheap and efficient, the assumption that the curriculum offered should be, in some respect, relevant has a long and somewhat honourable history. Teaching the 4 R's in the nineteenth century schools was justified on grounds of relevance, as have been the long succession of desirable additions to the curriculum of Australian schools. However, much of what is taught in schools is not now seen by students, teachers or the community as relevant. Some complaints are heard that the relevant parts of the curriculum are being so poorly taught, or learned, as to call into question the worth of the schooling now being provided. Educational policy formation and informed critical debate would be aided by some clarity in the use of 'relevant' and some assistance in formulating appropriate arguments regarding the relevance of curriculum.

To show that academic study of history is relevant for secondary school students is something that many have found quite difficult. To use Broudy's (1977, pp. 9–10) terms the relicative and applicative uses of history are extremely limited and therefore such a study is deemed to be irrelevant for secondary school students. Few people, other than on quiz shows, have to repeat what they once learned in history classes and, despite popular sayings, few people apply the lessons of the past in solving new problems (at least, not the history lessons). The relevance of studying history, as much else in school, may depend upon the interpretive and associative uses in shaping the way the person sees the world, what they hold to be valuable, and how they respond to what they take to be problems. These logical and nonlogical uses of knowledge are important in deciding what is relevant in the curriculum for they are central in producing what is commonly called an educated person.

For a system of schooling which includes education among its desiderata, as well as such things as socialisation, preparation for vocation and baby-sitting, some systematic work on the notion of 'relevance' and the kinds of arguments required to support or criticise claims of relevance would be of considerable practical value. Such work would also be of use in determining the relevance of the liberal arts aspects of curriculum for vocational preparation (c.f. Gilmour, P. and Lansbury, R. (1978, p. 207).

Summary

In this paper I have claimed:

1. Given Crittenden's concern with the nature and purposes of education and schooling, the issues he raises in the context of secondary schooling have counterparts in primary schooling;
2. That Crittenden's call for research to make progress towards a more coherent and adequate theory of education in a situation marked by wideranging confusion is a call that should be seen in the light that many practitioners still have sufficient agreed assumptions as to provide a partially workable theory;
3. The relation between society and schools is two-way and recognition of this helps awareness of the normative stand taken by educators;
4. To take a normative stand requires justification informed by theory;
5. Sound theory is relevant to good decision making;
6. Systematic work on basic research will improve theoretical assump-



tions in education;

7. Various bodies in Australia can facilitate basic research in education;
8. Basic research, such as Broudy's on uses of knowledge, when related to educational assumptions about relevance can improve educational theory and practical decisions.

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