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Welcome to **ATTACK!** a two-page occasional publication. Most of **ATTACK!** will be concerned with the holistic curriculum which, if acted on, is a fundamental way to undermine the present undemocratic education system. Don't be discouraged if opportunities to teach holistically are limited, do your best, be a guardian, and act as a witness to this culturally significant and inspiring way of teaching and learning. **ATTACK!** is a partner to <https://networkonnet.wordpress.com>

Attack! 86 Principals: a programme for you to introduce just to establish there is another way

From the late-30s, as befitted a participatory education system, the contribution to the content and values of the curriculum came from both ends of the education system – the classroom and the centre; while there was often tension between these two forces, a way of proceeding on the basis of reasonable trust was usually maintained. An important buffer and conduit between the two was the department in the districts which, in having a fair amount of independence, was able to give schools reassurance and some protection while overseeing central demands and pressures. The curriculum was based on the pragmatic philosophy, drawing on our education cultural past, that is the holistic, Beeby, Dewey, Richardson, Ashton-Warner, and qualitative academics like Snook and Jim Marshall (and for our purposes the kinds of ideas in the booklets describing the classrooms of Sue Bradly and Chris Graham) – for education in an open democracy. All levels of the education system, from regulation, to oversight, to professional advice, to the nature of the curriculum, provided a considerable degree of freedom, within broad aims, for schools to develop what and how they taught.

Since the early '90s, the curriculum has, with ever increasing intensity, come from the centre, conveying the content and values of the curriculum, a measurement-focused one, based on the positivist philosophy, drawing on experts in the form of quantitative academics like R.S. Peters and Hattie and those explaining business models – for education for a neoliberal democracy. All parts of the education system, from regulation, to centralised bureaucratic oversight, to professional advice, to the objective-based curriculum content, were organised to place considerable restraint on teacher freedom.

One development sums up the contrast: In 1989, when Tomorrow's Schools was introduced, the ostensible purpose was that schools, within broad aims, would have considerable freedom to function in ways agreed with their communities. In 1991, however, the education review office under new leadership became insistent on teachers working to narrow, centrally-set measurable objectives. By 2016, that has evolved to the requirement of anyone offering professional advice to schools to be licensed by the central bureaucracy.

To be real in opposing the *Tomorrow's Schools* education system and what it has become (though it always has been what it has become just more so), a counter curriculum and system needs to be argued, and what is argued will be the holistic, the education philosophy that is part of our cultural heritage.

In this series we are working towards demonstrating that the two booklets, the one by Sue Bradly, the other by Chris Graham, are high examples of holistic philosophy in action. These booklets are being mainly put forward not as end but as demonstrating there is another way, another way of thinking about the curriculum.

When I had the booklets printed, a large number I sent to people in the bureaucracies and academia, and the others I put on sale for schools. As I knew would happen, the sales to schools were forlorn. I was not taken aback. Principals are the gatekeepers for what gets through to teachers, especially anything alternative. Even many of the principals who write to me and encourage me to keep battling have a thought process that works in favour of the status quo: teachers are battling to do their best, feeling pretty beset, so what is the use of unsettling them with curriculum ideas that won't be allowed anyway.

But where does that get us? Where is it all heading? Is the present direction inevitable? Is our education history to be series of behaviours showing us to be complicit in extinguishing our past to live someone else's future?

I am not asking of principals that they directly confront education directions; just let their teachers know there is another and better way – and perhaps here and there, one or two of those better ways might be squirrelled in.

The relative failure of our education system becomes obvious at NCEA as we see a large number of children without the skills and even more importantly the flexible thinking abilities and motivation to provide them with genuine choices. This is not a secondary school failure, it is a whole of system one.

One of the ways to understand the Parata years – its way of proceeding and its dismal conclusion, is to understand the erroneous number belief that Parata brought to her portfolio, an erroneous number belief held by many other non-educationists like Parata – but also a belief given some support by devious academics like Hattie.

Parata continually used the number of 18% in calculating the effect of poverty on academic achievement. It was one of the many numbers Hattie brought forward. That number is demonstrably wrong, the virtually unchallenged number, produced by gold star New Zealand research, duplicated by the OECD, is 70%. We are not talking about the effect on achievement of a handful of tests of a narrow nature over a restricted time but rich learning of a ranging nature over an extended time.

Neoliberal and anti-public school people with power over education have held tenaciously to the low number because a high one would point directly to the need for more money, much more money, being spent on the education of children from poorer families and on improving the social environment of those families. A double-whammy funding shift, neoliberals haven't and never will countenance.

The low number has been held right through the *Tomorrow's School* years to devastating effect.

The 18 percenters in the education system might just have been making an honest mistake but you should note it was a mistake that moved them towards more power and that caused a seismic shift to the advantage of the neoliberal philosophy and its controllers and placeholders.

The best you could say is that it was a kind of constructed carelessness.

So here we have in Parata, a Maori big noter, pitilessly putting down any argument contrary to the 18% argument and, as a result, directly exploiting and failing the children of her own people.

We are now moving closer to her resignation. A few months ago she had a staffer go selectively through the OECD report to avoid the 70% number and to misread the number as being 18 percent. When challenged in the House Parata prevaricated in the sing-songy way she does, simulating her leader, and held to the 18 percent. Oh how clever, what a big laugh it all was! When later she was accused of lying, the Speaker allowed her to prevaricate once again.

Then came her resignation.

Take in the significance of the following.

In the *NZ Herald* article reporting on her resignation there was a comment from her, completely out-of-place in one sense, but laden with significance in another:

'I still believe the effect of the environment is being greatly overstated.'

The two significant points: By implication she was admitting that there had been some understating by her of the effect of poverty on learning achievement; but even more significantly her failure with Maori children had a lot to do with her resignation.

I would like to take this chance for us to act more decisively in promoting the holistic curriculum, to establish an appreciation that there is another way, and perhaps to advance one or two ideas to advance on.

The programme in the week or two ahead:

- First, I would like you to buy some of the booklets (\$10.00 each ksmythe@wave.co.nz). I know they are on the **Attack!** site but they are easier to work from as booklets, even if it is by just having the pair on hand.
- For ten years in the '90s I went round New Zealand many times, to every nook and cranny, hopping in my car and taking courses at small and large schools and hotels and halls. The topic for the course was a threshold timetable – it works on the idea of change in a holistic curriculum being on a continuum, and the threshold curriculum providing choices about where to begin and when the programme settles, ideas to take it further. This threshold timetable I talked about to thousands of teachers, and to Sue and Chris amongst them, will be presented in four parts.
- Following that I will be writing about the pragmatic philosophy, the academic philosophy that embraces us, is our philosophy, as against the positivist philosophy which has its uses, but in being the philosophy of certainty and experts, is not so inclusive of us.

I can hear you groaning but to learn about these two philosophies will be enlightening – I can assure you.

Other parts of the sequence will follow.

