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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://networkkonnet.wordpress.com>

Attack! 112 In which Pooh looks for a 21st Century Education Part 2

In Part 1, Piglet and Pooh wondered about something called a *21st Century Education*; Pooh said he'd found it but, in being asked what it was like, ignored the question, evincing more interest in the honey pot his head was in.

Except as a chronological expression, 21st century education is nothing special, remaining part of a continuity that, despite considerable twisting and turning, remains just that, a continuity; the technological disruption predicted for that chronological expression being just a further example of ideological disruption that is always there or near in the sensitive and value-laden area of school education.

In Part 1, I described how those who talked most about the 21st century education were ideological groupings (political, technology, business, and academic) who wanted to control the present of school education to control the future; even more, I suspect, to control the future to control the present.

This posting is also about an ideological disruption, in this case, though, an holistic one, the intention being to control the past to control the present. I'm not too fussed about the future, believing that getting the present 'right' is sufficient preparation for that. This last based on the idea that because we are dealing with human nature, the behavioural characteristics schools have to contend with remain much the same, with differences in schooling coming from differences in ends. The argument in this posting is that holistic and democratic ends are the way to get the present right as against technologically-focused, hierarchical, and control ones.

I disagree with the hierarchical and anti-democratic purposes inherent in the ideology of *Tomorrow's Schools* and want to disrupt that by returning to the power-sharing values portrayed in 'The First Two Years at School', a 1950 National Film Unit production for the Department of Education, and available now on YouTube (in Part 3 the link will be provided and the film discussed in detail).

The film will look at classroom practices with particular attention to the values expressed not just for the classes involved but for the education system. It was funded by the government to explain its education policies to teachers, parents, the community, and the media. The values expressed became organising ones for schools at the time; they are child-centred, equitable, communal, and democratic. Over subsequent years, culminating in *Tomorrow's Schools*, those values were ignored, weakened, misunderstood, misrepresented by values that were individualistic, hierarchical, and control-seeking to the detriment of primary school education.

This posting will demonstrate that the values expressed in the film, though consistently under duress, still survived and still survive in classrooms – and are as relevant today as ever.

The main message from the film is that a school education system in a democratic society does better when the production of knowledge is shared throughout the system, in other words, the cult of the academic expert is absent and the dominance of education bureaucracies diminished. In those

circumstances, I see the government, after consultation, setting out the guiding principles in the form of an expression of values, then inviting teachers to translate those into curriculum and classroom practice. This is what the First Labour Government provided under Michael Joseph Savage with Peter Fraser as minister of education (also later prime minister) and Clarence Beeby as director of education (from 1940) – and the Fourth under David Lange took away.

The First Labour government set out the value ends, provided a framework of support with resources and advisory support (especially in the arts), but did not presume to direct teachers how to go about those value ends. That is the present I would like re-established. I believe it is the best for children, the best way to get the best from teachers, and the best way to support a democratic society.

It is the cult of the academic expert co-opted by governments for control purposes that is now the most undermining characteristic of modern education. Colleges and schools of education have ‘experts’ for part of the story but few for the whole. The idea of teaching being required to be evidence-based is the most damaging myth of modern schooling and the one, as parents seek a more satisfactory education for their children, most likely to lead to the breakup of public education.

Appointments to colleges and schools of education should be made according the needs of teachers and children and encompass all kinds of knowledges from classroom to academia, not the rating needs of universities.

My particular argument is to consolidate and develop the position of teacher-produced knowledge which has its own process of establishing validity, for instance, recognised longevity of success. In Part 4 of this series, just such examples of success will be provided. Teacher-produced knowledge has been trampled on, derided, ignored, and made largely forgotten by those wielding academic evidence-based knowledge of the sort allowed into the system by a neoliberal-based government, but it has persisted

Fraser was frustrated that more teachers did not take the opportunity to explore the freedom available but the values did strike; the difficulty was that in the times that followed there was antagonism by the media and conservative politicians and what had struck had to grow and develop in an increasingly unfavourable environment.

There was also some parental resistance. Indeed, the beginning of the film had a parent doubting the kinds of ideas children were bringing from school to home. The media and conservative politicians called it ‘playway’ so it is understandable some parents took up the theme. But as a message of freedom it held sway in primary school education as an ideal to form the basis for a golden period in New Zealand that still glisters today.

The film, I believe for tactical and defensive reasons, takes clear aim at the junior rooms, though Fraser was forthright in wanting the principles to characterise the system. The values expressed and the freedom made available was picked up by some remarkable women who, on the whole, concentrated on their children and did not court publicity. In return, the junior part of the school was often seen as something apart, as something special that could be left to the stj (senior teacher of junior classes).

Before we consider the film, a number of matters need to be referred to. The narrator refers to education from a variety of classrooms being used. But the main classrooms used in the film have children almost entirely pakeha. This was not discrimination or oversight; the film was made before the Maori migration to cities. I went to New Lynn School in West Auckland and can’t recall any Maori child there at all. When, however, the film went to a country school almost entirely Maori, the decision was made to have children doing outside things, which had that gardening stereotype to it (and indeed, had the children actually gardening as one part of it); the children also went on a nature ramble to a river; but what the teacher did with that is not shown. The point I would like to make is that the kind of holistic, informal education depicted in the pakeha-orientated city schools used in the

film would have been just as wonderful with and for Maori children (yes – I know along with particular Maori cultural elements added).

When I went recently to a conference on Elwyn Richardson and his teaching at Oruaiti School in the 1950s, a number of his pupils were there and they exalted his teaching – nearly all were Maori.

The other matter that might jar was the gender aspect. The universal ‘he’ and ‘him’ was used (just once I think); more significantly was the gender stereotyping the children brought from home to their free time play in the classroom.

The books the children read and had read to them were European-centred; Sylvia Ashton-Warner responded to that and so did other teachers but New Zealand-centred books did not become widespread for another decade.

The percentage of children who had attended pre-school education would have been smaller and those who did would very likely have had a less rich experience than available today. (We should keep in mind, though, that Beatrice Beeby, wife of the director of education, Clarence Beeby, was one of the founders of the playcentre movement which established its first playcentre in 1941.) You will note that classroom practices depicted in the film would seem to have picked up nicely from where children were likely to have been.

And to reiterate the four main aims of these postings were to demonstrate:

- The holistic classroom continuity from the 1950s to the present day
- How century-bound conceptions of education are harmful and invalid
- The way values were used to organise the system, leaving teachers to devise classroom practices in response
- The origins, power, and authenticity of teacher-developed knowledge.

Now one autumn morning when the wind had blown all the leaves off the trees in the night, and was trying to blow the branches off, Pooh and Piglet were sitting in the Thoughtful Spot and wondering.

‘I think I’ll try to catch a *Good Education* today,’ announced Pooh.

‘What does a *Good Education* look like?’ asked Piglet.

‘Don’t know.’

‘But I’ll let you know when I catch one,’ replied Pooh blithely.



Continued in Part 3

