Reforming New Zealand Secondary Education
SECONDARY EDUCATION IN A CHANGING WORLD

Series editors: Barry M. Franklin and Gary McCulloch

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The Picot Report and the Road to Radical Reform
By Roger Openshaw
(2009)
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Among the educational issues affecting policymakers, public officials, and citizens in modern, democratic, and industrial societies, none has been more contentious than the role of secondary schooling. In establishing the Secondary Education in a Changing World series with Palgrave Macmillan, our intent is to provide a venue for scholars in different national settings to explore critical and controversial issues surrounding secondary education. We envision our series as a place for the airing and hopefully the resolution of these controversial issues.

More than a century has elapsed since Emile Durkheim argued the importance of studying secondary education as a unity, rather than in relation to the wide range of subjects and the division of pedagogical labor of which it was composed. Only thus, he insisted, would it be possible to have the ends and aims of secondary education constantly in view. The failure to do so accounted for a great deal of the difficulty with which secondary education was faced. First, it meant that secondary education was “intellectually disorientated,” between “a past which is dying and a future which is still undecided,” and as a result “lacks the vigor and vitality which it once possessed” (Durkheim 1938/1977, p. 8). Second, the institutions of secondary education were not understood adequately in relation to their past, which was “the soil which nourished them and gave them their present meaning, and apart from which they cannot be examined without a great deal of impoverishment and distortion” (p. 10). And third, it was difficult for secondary school teachers, who were responsible for putting policy reforms into practice, to understand the nature of the problems and issues that prompted them.

In the early years of the twenty-first century, Durkheim’s strictures still have resonance. The intellectual disorientation of secondary education is more evident than ever as it is caught up in successive waves of policy changes. The connections between the present and the past have become increasingly hard to trace and untangle. Moreover, the distance between policymakers on the one hand and the practitioners on the other has rarely seemed as immense as it is today. The key mission of the current series of
books is, in the spirit of Durkheim, to address these underlying dilemmas of secondary education and to play a part in resolving them.

Roger Openshaw’s study, Reforming New Zealand Secondary Education: The Picot Report and the Road to Radical Reform, traces in detail the radical reforms proposed in New Zealand by the Picot Report, Administering for Excellence, in 1987, and implemented the following year. It documents the gathering impetus for change in the education system over the previous thirty years arising from a range of political and social developments. It investigates the influences on the Picot Report from the Treasury and neoliberal pressure groups, and also from educators and others who were concerned to promote greater social equity and improve the achievement of underperforming schools and pupils. It shows the efforts made by the then Labour government under David Lange to sell the reforms to educators and the wider public, including the unprecedented use made of a public relations firm to support its communications strategy. It follows the implementation of the reforms, and the compromises that were involved in this over the years that followed. Finally, it assesses the impact of the reforms on education in New Zealand over the past twenty years and into the present. In all of this, it seeks to evaluate the rival claims of the protagonists in a debate over education that was at the heart of New Zealand’s political and social struggles in the turbulent years of Lange’s Labour government.

New Zealand’s educational reforms were closely related to the worldwide movement for policy change, including fundamental reforms put in place in the United States, the United Kingdom, and elsewhere. This book makes an important contribution to an understanding of the global movement for educational reform in these years. Yet New Zealand’s reforms were also distinctive in many ways, and Openshaw’s account draws out these specificities very clearly. For example, the educational reforms in New Zealand, unlike those in many other countries, placed a key emphasis on community issues and ideals. Advocates for the indigenous Māori community also played a significant role in determining the character of these reforms. The changes that arose were to affect all areas of education in New Zealand, not only secondary education. Yet Openshaw also shows that in many respects the source of the complaints that led to the Picot report lay with the secondary schools, and that it was to affect them and their teachers and pupils in fundamental ways that continue to this day.

Openshaw’s book analyzes a very large amount of documentary evidence of the reforms that has never been researched or published in any previous account. These allow him to demonstrate the Picot committee’s aim to begin with what it called a “blank page” approach, on which it tried to erect a new administrative structure that would be more efficient and effective than the old system which had been in existence for over a
hundred years. He is also able to expose to critical scrutiny the myths that grew up around Picot from across the political spectrum. His analysis will be essential reading not only for historians and educators, but also for policy analysts and students of politics—and not only in New Zealand, but wherever educational reforms have been tried and often failed over the past generation.

Reforming New Zealand Secondary Education is the seventh volume to be published in our series. It continues and develops further our key project of promoting an enhanced understanding of the international and indeed global context within which secondary education has developed. It also pursues the theme of policy reform that has been prominent throughout, and with it the issue of how far such reform has provided a coherent basis for how secondary education will be understood and practiced in the twenty-first century. As we see the trajectory of the series advancing during the next few years, we hope to support further work that brings these broad and fundamental concerns to studies in secondary education.

Barry Franklin and Gary McCulloch
Series Co-editors

Reference

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Note: The text conforms to U.S. spelling and conventions throughout, except in the case of direct quotations, which have been left in the original spelling, UK or U.S. as the case may be.
Abbreviations

AAFH  State Services Commission Files
AALR  Treasury Files
AAWW  David Lange Papers
AAZY  Departmental Residual Management Files Unit
ABEP  Department of Education and Ministry of Education Head Office Files
ABRP  Wanganui Office of Te Puni Kokiri
ACEP  Advisory Council on Educational Planning
APEC  Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation
asTTle  Assessment Tools for Teaching and Learning
BAAA  Northern Regional Office
BCDQ  Regional Department of Education Residual Management Unit Files
BoT   Board of Trustees
CARE  Citizens Association for Racial Equality
CDA   Critical Discourse Analysis
CDU   Curriculum Development Unit
CEIS  Community Education Initiative Scheme
CEO   Chief Executive Officer
COPE  Committee of Officials on Public Expenditure
CPA   Concerned Parents Association
EDC   Educational Development Conference
ERO   Education Review Office
FFS   A Computer Forecasting System
GNP   Gross National Product
IEA   Institute of Economic Affairs
MACOS United States–developed social studies programme
MoE   Ministry of Education
MP    Member of Parliament
NACME National Advisory Committee on Māori Education
NCEA  National Certificate of Educational Achievement
NCEA  National Certificate of Achievement
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<th>Abbreviation</th>
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<tr>
<td>NDC</td>
<td>National Development Council</td>
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<td>NZCER</td>
<td>New Zealand Council for Educational Research</td>
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<td>NZCF</td>
<td>New Zealand Curriculum Framework</td>
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<td>NZQA</td>
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<td>OECD</td>
<td>Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development</td>
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<td>State Services Commission</td>
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