

The Development of the New Zealand Primary School Curriculum 1877-1970. By J. L. Ewing. New Zealand Council for Educational Research, Wellington, 1970. 321 pp. N.Z. price: \$5.25.

THE TITLE of this book is misleading; it is not as is perhaps suggested simply an account of what has been taught in New Zealand primary schools since the Education Act of 1877 was implemented, but is rather a general history of primary education since the abolition of the provinces with a particular focus on the development of national syllabuses of instruction. Professor C. L. Bailey in his foreword to the book points out that this is the 'first full historical review of what our primary schools have been attempting to do and how they have tackled it'.

Because of his extensive experience of education in New Zealand Mr Ewing is particularly well qualified to write such a review. During his forty years in the teaching service, which he entered as a sole charge teacher in South Otago, Mr Ewing was witness to, and in the latter stage of his career as Chief Inspector of Primary Schools at least part-author of, major changes in many aspects of primary education. In the present study, a follow-on from an earlier book, *Origins of the Primary School Curriculum 1840-1878*, Mr Ewing attempts to show that most of those changes can best be understood and appreciated by a study of the changing curriculum. He makes his task easier for himself by adopting a very broad view of what can be included under 'curriculum'. 'I regard the curriculum', he writes in his preface, 'as a process rather than merely as a collection of subject syllabuses, and I have given more than passing attention to such matters as methods of teaching, discipline, school attendance, examinations and inspection, equipment, and the training and conditions of service of teachers, for in the broadest sense these are all aspects of the curriculum'.

Mr Ewing's story of the evolution of the New Zealand primary school begins with the attempts to implement the curriculum outlined in the 1877 Education Act, a curriculum described by Robert Lee, then inspector of schools for Wellington, as being 'more comprehensive and more ambitious in aim than any in the British Empire'.

The first third of the book deals with the efforts of Inspector-General of Schools W. J. Habens and his education board inspectors to put into practice, often in unpropitious circumstances, a curriculum which ranged over reading, writing, arithmetic, English grammar and composition, history and geography, elementary science and drawing object lessons and vocal music. In addition, girls were to be taught 'sewing and needlework and the principles of domestic economy' and boys military drill. By the beginning of this century the text shows the whole curriculum to have been clearly in need of overhaul. This was done by George Hogben who succeeded Habens as Inspector-General in 1899. In 1904 a new syllabus for primary schools was introduced written almost entirely by Hogben himself. Hogben, Mr Ewing stresses, was 'the dominant figure in education in New Zealand' during his sixteen-year term as Inspector-General. When he retired, the standing of primary schools in the community was high, there had been a marked improvement in attendance, the status of the teaching profession had been materially raised, and the primary teachers' organization, the New Zealand Educational Institute, with Hogben's encouragement, had become a confident, professional body.

To Hogben's retirement, and to war and post-war depression is attributed the slowing down of educational change in New Zealand. The author does not, however, suggest that the 1920s were a period of educational stagnation. Legal provision was made in 1920 to raise the school-leaving age to fifteen, and in 1922 junior high school regulations were gazetted. Curriculum revision was very much to the fore with, for the first time in the history of curriculum development in New Zealand, practising teachers being officially involved. But the great depression, coinciding as it did with the directorship of the illiberal T. B. Strong and the dominance of the Proficiency Examination, stifled further innovation. From this period of educational stagnation the New Zealand education service is seen not to emerge until the accession of the Labour Party to power in 1935 and, more particularly, until the appointment of C. E. Beeby as Director of Education in 1940.

Beeby, like Hogben, is clearly one of Mr Ewing's educational heroes. One regrets, therefore, that, with the detailed knowledge he has of Beeby's administration, he does not tell us more about Beeby as a strategist and reformer. He gives the Director full credit, of course, for the major revision he effected of the process of curriculum change, the introduction of so-called 'rolling revision', but denies us any insights into the inner life of the Department of Education in the 1950s when Beeby and the changes he had promoted in the nation's primary schools were very much the target not only of newspaper criticism but also, for a time, of ministerial criticism. Mr Ewing, who shows himself throughout the book to be a most kindly critic, merely remarks that Mr Algie, the Minister of Education concerned, was 'in doubt about some of the current trends in primary education'.

In his final brief chapter Mr Ewing summarises the major events in almost a century of curriculum development and analyses the forces both internal and external that have helped shape the present distinctive New Zealand primary school curriculum. One's appreciation of the changes which have taken place in primary education since 1877 is enhanced by the book's excellent illustrations — any work on New Zealand educational history is extremely difficult to illustrate — and by the appendices which include questions from teachers' examination papers in 1884, extracts from Hogben's 1904 syllabus and sample examination papers for proficiency and competency certificates.

The Development of the New Zealand Primary School Curriculum 1877-1970 is a notable contribution to our country's rather thin educational literature. It should be read not only by teachers and teachers-in-training but by all who would wish to be better informed about the process of social change in New Zealand.

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