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IDEOLOGY VERSUS PRACTICALITY:

A CASE STUDY IN RURAL EDUCATION

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Education at
Massey University.

TERESA BALL
1988

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2020

ABSTRACT

This case study attempts to provide a historical account of the first twenty five years of Feilding Agricultural High School. This coincided with the Principalship of L.J.Wild. The School curricula was sexually differentiated and chiefly aimed at providing courses which prepared rural boys and girls for their future vocations as Farmers and Farmers' wives.

During the period 1922-1946, a polarity of expectations was apparent in post-primary education. The producers of rural education were endeavouring to foster knowledge thought appropriate to rural consumers. However, rural consumers were demanding an academic knowledge unrelated to rural life as it conferred social and educational advantages. Whilst Wild deplored the hegemony of the academic tradition, he was compelled to reproduce it. If he had not compromised between demands for a successful agricultural course made by the Department of Education and those for an academic course from the parents of his pupils, Feilding Agricultural High School would not have survived its first three years. Wild early realised that if he was to serve the Feilding community effectively, he would have to offer a multilateral and comprehensive form of education.

This research has been undertaken from a historical perspective.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I should like to express my gratitude to the many friends and colleagues who have offered moral support during the execution of this research. Roger Openshaw has offered valuable guidance, assistance and constructive criticism. Barry Kerr, the Principal of Feilding Agricultural High School, has made the project possible by his cooperation and by allowing me access to files, school magazines and unpublished documents. Merle Garden and her daughter for their valuable work in feeding the word processor. Most of all, I should like to thank Sarah and Matthew for dispensing innumerable cups of tea and support, and Ralph, my husband and best friend, without whom I would never have completed the work.

CONTENTS

ABSTRACT.....	(ii)
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	(iii)
INTRODUCTION	1
1. EVENTS LEADING TO THE CREATION OF FEILDING AGRICULTURAL HIGH SCHOOL..	5
2. THE ESTABLISHMENT OF FEILDING AGRICULTURAL HIGH SCHOOL	28
3. EDUCATION OF THE FARMER	49
4. EDUCATION OF THE FARMER'S WIFE	82
5. COMMEMORATION DAY AND SELECTED ADDRESSES	111
6. SELF - GOVERNMENT: A MICROCOSM OF DEMOCRACY	127
7. THE COMMUNITY CENTRE	141
8. CONCLUSION	154
BIBLIOGRAPHY	168
TABLES:	
1a. Number of Boys Participating in Feilding Agricultural High School Courses, 1925 -1943	74
1b. Number of Boys Participating in Feilding Agricultural High School Courses, 1925 - 1943	74
2. Composition of Female Workforce - Selected Occupations, 1901 -1936..	94
3a. Number of Girls Participating in Feilding Agricultural High School Courses, 1925 - 1943	98
3b. Number of Girls Participating in Feilding Agricultural High School Courses, 1925- 1943	98
4. Feilding Households Represented on Community Centre Roll	149

INTRODUCTION

Valuable insights into contemporary ideology and State educational machinery can be revealed by analysing a school's history. In a minor way, this study has attempted to add such an insight. The particular case study presented here is that of a rural technical high school. Feilding Agricultural High School was created in 1922 amidst high hopes of implementing a predominantly agricultural curriculum. However, along with other small-town technical schools established at the same time, it was obliged to develop a multilateral course in order to respond to the demands of a local clientele. It thus provides a vivid illustration of how a school's success is dependent upon correctly assessing the educational, cultural and social context in which it exists. Failure to do this frequently leads to threats of withholding support and resources in order to ensure conformity. Feilding Agricultural High School would not have survived its first three years had it not conformed, to some degree, to the external, conflicting pressures made upon it.

At the time of the School's establishment, New Zealand's economy was predominantly rural, dependent for its economic survival upon its successful export of primary produce. It would therefore be natural to suppose that a large component of State education would be agricultural in nature. However, despite being advocated by prominent agriculturists and educationalists, this was not the case. Academic knowledge was commonly regarded as the only legitimate form of knowledge and was consequently accorded high status by New Zealand society. This led to sharply differential views upon what constitutes the most useful knowledge for specific social and gender groups. Whilst this dichotomy between high status and low status knowledge is present in most Western based educational systems, nowhere is it more evident than in the history of agricultural and domestic education.

This research examines the Education of the male Farmer and the Education of the Farmer's Wife. Chapters Three and Four are therefore the most important. In these two chapters the economic, cultural, educational and social reasons advocated for rural education are analysed. Their analysis raises some major themes which constantly recur throughout the history of New Zealand education.

Amongst the economic reasons advanced for transmitting a specifically rural education were those chiefly directed at firmly securing the economic base of the country by improving national efficiency. It was thought that this could not be achieved without implementing associated measures aiming at controlling the urban drift. Applied educational measures were thought to be effective in conserving and strengthening the rural population. Cultural reasons for educating the farmer and his wife were aimed at upholding the Rural Ideal. Country areas were regarded as healthy, clean and wholesome, in contrast to the rapidly expanding urban areas which became associated with crime, and poverty and cramped, unsanitary living conditions. Rural education was thought to foster a specific world view and imbibe the necessary values of the dignity of rural labour. Social functions of rural education involved the effective imposition of social and moral control over this specific section of the community. Strategies employed to achieve this ranged from 'character training' to inducing a desire for law and order. Rural education was also

believed to have intrinsic educational qualities, especially if it was of a locally relevant nature and provided a useful vocational function. The Feilding Agricultural High School curriculum was directed at providing courses which would produce a successful farmer and a successful farmer's wife.

As schools can be regarded as agents for transmitting the desired cultural and social norms of current society, it has been necessary to devote the first chapter to setting the context for the School. As the School wished to become an agricultural institution, a brief history of agricultural education has also been undertaken.

Chapter Two focusses more directly on the creation and consolidation of the new School and the development of its philosophy. The period in question (1922 - 1946) also coincided with the Principalship of L.J. Wild, and he actively participated in the evolution of several distinguishing features of the School. Amongst these were the Self - Government System, the Community Centre, Commemoration Day traditions, the Young Farmers' Club, the introduction of the School Farm and its associated Residential Hostels. The first three of these features form the basis of discussion for Chapters Five, Six and Seven, whilst the last two are explained fully in Chapter Three. Most of the School's objectives reveal a concern for the formation of 'character', and are aimed at the development of leadership skills, loyalty, and corporate spirit. They became evident in most of the School's customs, traditions, and sporting and cultural activities. The ideals of democracy and training for citizenship became increasingly important to the School during the Thirties. Also during this time, there was an increased preoccupation with international political issues.

The concluding chapter reviews the major tensions existing between academic and vocational education. It also includes reference to the differential allocation of knowledge by the controllers of knowledge and indicates the subsequent lack of acceptance by the consumers. The latter demanding an education that facilitated social and geographical mobility. This increasingly involved the school in a credentialling function specialising in the production of a portable commodity and which usually took the form of a certificate of academic attainment. This was used indiscriminately by the employment sector.

This period of the early School's history was a very interesting one and many present day social patterns were initiated during these years. Despite the rapid population growth, an increasingly sophisticated communication and transport network led to a unification of the country. Migration into the urban areas precipitated the expansion of the secondary and tertiary industrial sectors and led to the development of a new middle class. Modernisation of the government and its administrative infrastructure proceeded apace and the majority of the population gave evidence of their growing political awareness by exercising their franchise rights. Land settlement patterns became intensified and farms became smaller, and the introduction of refrigeration and pasture control resulted in the growth of the dairy and fat lamb trade.

By the 1920's, an increasingly sharp divergence in lifestyle and world-view had emerged between the urban and the rural population. This resulted in different political, cultural and social affiliations. The benefits of individual and national efficiency were extolled and there was post-War

concern with loyalty and patriotism which was best illustrated by outward expressions of the love of God, King, Country and Empire.

In the Thirties sectional interests became more partisan and more articulate and Unions, such as the Farmers Union, made the needs and aspirations of the country's primary producers heard. Trade Unions in the towns and cities also flourished and became more militant. The welfare system that had been initiated by Liberal Government reforms was continued by the Labour Government. Throughout these years, New Zealand remained a nation whose main income depended heavily upon overseas trade and borrowing. This meant that the implementation of Government policies depended heavily upon international economic fluctuations. The Labour Party was established and managed to gain a rural foothold by abandoning its land nationalisation policies and offering guaranteed prices for farm produce. This, together with its concept of developing a Social Welfare State based on the Keynesian theory of economics attracted the support of most sectors of the community. Its educational philosophy advocated equality of educational provision for all, regardless of social class, race, gender or creed. This embracing of an egalitarian ethic ensured further widespread affiliation. The years during and immediately preceding the Second World War brought an increased preoccupation with the democratic ideal. Fear of extremist political policies and propaganda promoted a move towards post-primary education for the mass of New Zealand citizens.

All these factors contributed towards the establishment of an increasingly complex society which influenced the development of future social trends. No school could remain untouched by such rapid developments, and Feilding Agricultural High School was no exception.

This is not an informal, intimate history of the development of Feilding Agricultural High School. Such a history has already been provided by the excellent accounts authored by local historian and former teacher of Feilding Agricultural High School, B.L. Evans. Descriptions of personalities, prominent characters and memories of important events could not be attempted by an 'outsider'. Rather, this research is directed at exploring some of the forces which shaped the development of agricultural education and domestic education, with particular reference to the diffusion of ideology with practicality, during the first 25 years of Feilding Agricultural High School.

DEFINITION OF TERMS

'Rural Education'- is used to describe that education given to rural boys and girls which aimed at preparing them for their future rural occupations. In the present context, it will be confined to agricultural education for boys and domestic education for girls. The majority of the school population resided in the rural township and the surrounding Counties. The majority of the agricultural course boys came from remote rural areas all over New Zealand. Rural education at this time was sexually differentiated. At Feilding Agricultural High School, during this period, one girl participated in the agricultural course and no boys enrolled in the domestic course.

'Domestic Education'- is defined in detail in Chapter Four. Briefly, it refers to those curricula subjects directed at the preparation of girls for wifehood and motherhood. The addition of horticulture, poultry-keeping and bee-keeping ensured a fitting preparation for the wife of a farmer.

'Agricultural Education'- was directed at those boys wishing to become farmers or enter businesses directly concerned with the agricultural and pastoral industries. In the case of Feilding Agricultural High School, it included subjects such as animal husbandry, field husbandry, farm management, animal physiology, genetics and nutrition, wool classing, farm crafts, metalwork and woodwork. These included practical and theoretical components and much work was undertaken in conjunction with the School Farm. In the early years of the School, the agricultural course comprised of English, arithmetic, drawing, chemistry, botany, zoology and physics as applied to agriculture.

'Academic Education'- refers to the Matriculation course that was designed at directing pupils towards a professional (rather than a farming or a commercial) career. It was intended to be a four year course and it consisted of English, French, maths, history, geography, natural science for boys and home science for girls.

'Cultural Education'- is also frequently mentioned. This refers specifically to Wild's definition which includes curricula and non-curricula subjects and activities which aim at the improvement of the mind and the refinement of 'manners'. These involve subjects such as music, the Fine Arts, literature, the debating society, plays, concerts, etc.

'Commercial Education'- A three-fold course was initially envisaged by Wild, this consisted of a boys' agricultural course, an academic course, and a domestic course for the girls. However, Wild added a commercial course as a result of local demand. This consisted of English, arithmetic, history, geography, French, shorthand, typewriting, book-keeping, business methods and home science.