

BOOK REVIEW

C.E. Beeby, *Assessment of Indonesian Education: A Guide in Planning*.

Wellington: New Zealand Council for Educational Research in association with Oxford University Press, 1979, 349pp.

Dr C.E. Beeby needs no introduction to the peoples of the South Pacific. Between 1940 and 1960, as Director of Education in New Zealand, he was responsible for educational development in Western Samoa, the Cook Islands and the Tokelaus. Since then he has been one of the foremost authorities on educational planning and administration in Third World countries. As recently as September, 1981, he visited Fiji and also spoke at a seminar in Apia on regional cooperation in teacher education. Moreover, it was in Western Samoa in 1945, that, to quote his own words, his career as an 'international education busybody' began.

Between 1967 and 1972 he worked as a Ford Foundation consultant to the Indonesian Government on its *National Assessment of Education Project*. The subject of this review, his latest book, is based on the findings of that study and his reflections on its broader significance. The book's rather belated appearance in 1979 was due mainly to the fact that it was virtually rewritten after the dramatic rise in oil prices in 1973-74.

At first glance the title of the book might discourage the Pacific reader. Indeed, the author is known to have had some misgivings about the eventual wording. Moreover, it might well be asked why one should choose to review the book in 1982 for a journal principally concerned with education in the South Pacific. The answer lies in the second half of the book's title — *A Guide in Planning*. Most of the data on Indonesian education on which the book is based is now dated and of little more than academic interest to Pacific educators but the book was never intended to be solely about education in Indonesia. What is of far more lasting and universal significance for educators everywhere is what the author has to say about why money alone does not solve the major qualitative problems in education and why schools are so resistant to change. Indonesia provides the context for a case study but it is important to re-emphasize that this is not a book solely about education in Indonesia. What Beeby has to say is relevant to education systems throughout the Pacific and ought to be compulsory reading for all educational administrators, teachers and lay people associated with the management of schools.

Greatly enhanced oil revenues in the early 1970s enabled the Indonesian Government to make substantial increases in the development budget for

education. This meant that a far greater emphasis could be placed on improving the quality as well as the quantity of schooling. But this raised the important question of what money can and cannot buy in the qualitative improvement of teaching and learning. Consideration of this issue provides the central theme of Beeby's study. He suggests that there are two principal barriers to the qualitative improvement of schooling — material needs which money can overcome and 'a subtle group of restraints not immediately responsive to rapid injections of finance.' At the time of independence, Indonesia espoused lofty educational ideals but the gap is often wide between them and what goes on in the ordinary classroom when the door is closed and the teacher is left alone with forty or more children, a blackboard and a few old textbooks.

The Indonesian project was designed to assess the education system's potential for growth, or its capacity for change to meet new demands. Beeby's analysis of this provides an extension of his now celebrated theory of the stages of growth, as outlined in his earlier work, *The Quality of Education in Developing Countries*.¹ More money can obviously facilitate change, but what teachers teach and how they teach seems to depend primarily on a complex array of psychological and administrative factors — what Beeby terms, the subtle group of restraints. For example, money can be used to replace bare, crowded and overworked school buildings, but it does not, by itself, alter the long-term effect on teachers of working in such conditions. The habits, attitudes and methods of work encouraged — or even imposed — by poor material facilities do not necessarily disappear when the physical conditions are improved. Likewise, with books. Money can provide them but it cannot determine how they will be used. How different should new textbooks be from the old? If students are to be taught to think for themselves they need texts which will help to develop such skills but a teacher who has not been taught to search out facts for himself or to think about them independently can scarcely be expected to use new books effectively in training others in these difficult skills. Moreover, it takes energy, courage and strong motivation to desert the habits of a lifetime for methods that tempt a class to come alive. Changes in the behaviour of teacher and taught, do indeed, as Beeby asserts, lie far beyond the touch of a mere Midas.

It is Beeby's capacity to feel the pulse rate of an education system that makes his writing especially significant. He once remarked to the reviewer that anyone wishing to reform schooling had to have an intuitive feel for the capacity of the schools to respond effectively. It was no use demanding more of the teachers than they could cope with both intellectually

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and at the practical level in the classroom. Considerations of this sort, based on a lifetime's experience, have contributed to his belief that successful educational planning and administration (he draws no sharp distinction) is very much an art — something caught as much as taught.

The Indonesian study is divided into three parts. The first provides a brief background to the country and its schools. The second outlines the main findings of the project, while the third part examines the aims of education in Indonesia and future strategy for qualitative change. In part two, which amounts to about two-thirds of the book, Beeby examines a wide range of factors in relation to their impact on the quality of education. These include the shortages of buildings, equipment and books — 'of all the problems which make it difficult for teachers to break through to more meaningful methods of teaching, the lack of books is the most urgent,' methods of teaching and the state of the teaching profession — 'many teachers in all school systems are *not* ready and eager for change,' professional leadership and supervision — 'the transition from centralized control to local initiative is far from simple,' incentives for teachers, the unity of the education system, examinations — 'there is no more immediate incentive for teachers to modify their methods of teaching, and students their methods of learning, than gradually to decrease the proportion of examination questions that can be passed by glibly memorizing notes and increasing the number which demand real thinking,' teacher-training and the curriculum — 'the educational aims of officials may be quite different from those of parents and little is changed simply by rewriting the syllabus of instruction.' The flow of students through the school system and the educational demands of the consumers of education are similarly analysed along with the structure of the school system and the administrative framework of education. Part three examines in detail, the often conflicting aims of education in developing countries and the relationship between politics and educational planning.

As with all Beeby's writing, the presentation is well-structured and a model of clear concise prose. The format of the book, and especially the distinctive batik design on the dust-jacket, is also a tribute to the consistently high standards of production maintained by the New Zealand Council for Educational Research.

As one reviewer remarked shortly after the book was published, 'there is so much of value in the book. Just please read it. You will enjoy it and profit from it.'²

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1. Beeby, C.E *The Quality of Education in Developing Countries*. Harvard University Press. Cambridge, Mass. 1966.
2. T. Neville Postlethwaite, *Australian Journal of Education*, 3, 1979, p. 316.