

Marshall—Making Wittgenstein Smile

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Abstract

In the 1980s and 1990s the discipline of philosophy of education had an impact on schooling and the public service in New Zealand because of the contracted work of James Marshall and Michael Peters. This personal reflection by Robert Shaw is a tribute to James Marshall and provides insight into the relationship between Ministry officials, the community, and educational researchers.

Keywords: educational research, philosophy of education, decision-making skills, Maori education, school assessment, te reo Maori.

Here I set out a personal account of my work with Jim Marshall and Michael Peters and I admit to some prejudices that I hold as a manager of government development projects. Comments are made about the New Zealand Government's contract research programme and Marshall's contribution to national education policy through research.

The State Services Commission

I was seconded to the New Zealand State Services Commission (the organisation that employs all central government employees) to manage the public service's response to new official information legislation. The legislation was enacted in 1982 but I did not arrive until 1984 when concern about the legislation had passed. Hence, there was money tagged 'decision-making at the top of the public service' and I had to spend it. On Pukerua Bay beach I decided to teach ethics to chief executives and change their behaviour. I also decided I would persuade Jim Marshall to work on the project.

Why did I ask Marshall, at that time a senior lecturer at the University of Auckland, to work on the development of a model of decision making, trials of its teaching, and an evaluation of learning? First, the combination of disciplinary skills was vaguely as required: ethics, adult education, teaching/learning, and evaluation. Second, for years I had been trying to have philosophers of education more involved in policy research. This I had been doing in my role as the manager of the Department of Education's research programme (New Zealand Department of Education, 1982; 1990). Third, I had always found Jim easy to deal with from the

time I was his student. Fourth, and most important by far, I believed he would have credibility with senior officials.

I sat in Jim's tiny office and he asked if I would mind having Michael Peters involved because Michael needed the money. If there were other reasons, I cannot remember them.

Marshall was a public servant before he was an academic. He rose through the ranks in a very conservative part of the civil service, the British navy. Perhaps that was why he was invariably understanding when the public service constricted me, information had to be provided immediately, we had to placate the Minister of Education, or budgets had to be held. Nothing is more important when you contract academics.

The academic literature records the project, so I am excused the task of describing it (Shaw, 1983; Shaw, 1985; Marshall & Peters, 1986; Peters, Marshall & Shaw, 1986). What became clear to me as we worked through nine trial courses, each with six participants presenting half-day case studies based on actual decision-making in their organizations, was Jim Marshall's dedication to duty. He read every page of every case study and wrote down all the dialogue with his fountain pen. I successfully defended the Marshall-Peters report to my colleagues because the theory was clear, the report's limitations were set out, and each conclusion was substantiated by evidence in a massive appendix. In addition to the main report, there were academic papers that began to work on concepts that were to become important in later practical work. The course produced has been presented by several people, all of whom were trained as a part of the original project. The Open Polytechnic of New Zealand funded further research on the model of decision-making in 1999 (Shaw & Burns, 1999). It proved to be robust although the terminology needed updating to take account of the fashion of risk. I have yet to find another course that teaches officials how to implement policy, although courses on how to develop policy are common.

The Department of Education

I did not know what to do. In Maori terms his behaviour was acceptable, even proper, certainly welcomed, but this may jeopardise the project's immediate goals, which meant the project itself would collapse, and it could kill his reputation with the civil service. I did care about his reputation as a friend, but I was also conscious of other effects regarding my reputation and the delicate interplay of the civil service and academics that were contracted as advisors. The situation related to one of those philosophers whom I wanted included in the government's contract research programme, and who now was leading a major evaluation, at a time when only research with numbers seemed acceptable in head office.

It was the late 1980s and the décor was 1960s. Heavy motel style furniture, patterns that would not show stains, polished dark and sometimes light woodwork, low ceiling, and heavy commercial drapes, all a bit oppressive. Large bright square lights built into the ceiling, it was hot, and it was about 6 or 7 p.m. The room was full of people, most of them with brown faces, and the Pakeha looked very noticeable.

Obvious because they were white, but obvious because they dressed formally and represented power. Apart from Jim Marshall and Michael Peters that is, for they were in a separate category.

Jim was making a plea for more money for Maori education, for the reform of the education system, and for a better acceptance of Maori values. Unfortunately, he was a little unsteady on his feet.

I moved over, trying to be inconspicuous, put my arm around Jim, and we lurched between tables and left to go into a bedroom. We sat on the bed, in this small room. Tears down his face, later tears down mine, as we considered the situation and its causes. (I regret I did not take longer at that time, but felt it was important to get back to the *hui*. At least I now know that instinct was wrong for three different reasons.) We spoke of cultural traditions, love, wives, children, commitment, power and peoples and of the real purpose of being an academic. The questions of who am I, what do I stand for, and commitments that go beyond the contract and the role. 'Robert, I had always thought that ...' he said many times. This catharsis (to use a word Jim liked) had been building for at least a year. Looking back I can see its origins—the Maori struggle, the deeper understanding of cultures that the Maori brought with them, thoughtful and articulate people, and the enormous ability of Maori to accept people regardless of their failings.

Jim Marshall, whom I thought of as a New Zealand Englishman, had emotionally connected to Maori culture. The moment it all broke through was a critical one for our project: we were being visited by officials, our purpose being to convince them of the worth of what we were doing and to ask them for money. Jim in his asking became passionate and then abusive. Alcohol was part of the mix but not a particularly significant part in my view then or now. The senior official was Lyall Perris who went on to become the chief executive of the Ministry of Education before he retired to become an Anglican Minister.

The events described were at the last of three Burma Lodge *Hui* (Burma Lodge was a conference centre in Johnsonville, Wellington). They were a part of the project that became known as *Te Reo O Te Tai Tokerau*, although that was but the concluding part of the whole project. Again, I am excused from describing the project because it is in the literature (Peters & Marshall, 1988; Marshall & Peters, 1989; Marshall & Peters, 1989; Peters & Marshall, 1989; Peters, Para & Marshall, 1989; Peters, Para & Marshall, 1989).

When a team works closely together it is hard to identify individual contributions and so it is difficult for me to identify what was contributed by Jim Marshall, Michael Peters, Robert Shaw, Dave Para, Monte Ohia, Vervise McCausland, John Matthews, and about 24 other secondary school teachers of Maori, Maori elders and students from throughout New Zealand.

When I designed the project, I thought about the problem of centre/periphery, central control/local control, head office/district office, government/community. The money and power of decision-making always reside overwhelmingly with the central authority. Yet, programmes that do not accord with the values at the periphery will be undermined, intentionally or unintentionally, and you have to have motivated people. How can central agencies release the power of decision and

money, when they have accountability requirements and are locked into legal and institutional constraints? But, the most significant consideration is that the ability of the periphery to innovate is very limited unless a central control agency provides resources and opportunity. (I had first faced this question when I designed and contracted the evaluation for Prime Minister Robert Muldoon's Committee on Gangs projects.) My solution was to employ evaluators, who were really to be 'honest brokers' or arbitrators, voices of reason, standing separate from the community and head office and thus forming a triangle. My notion was any two together could move the third. Remember, the problem cut both ways: the community needed to convince the government, but the government also needed to convince the community.

Where does the project manager stand in this? You have to be a Jesuit. You are in the world, but you pursue your own goals. You have to want to construct something yourself. When Marshall and Peters wrote on empowerment and the role of the evaluator as educator, those papers stayed in my desk drawer for years, although I thought they could have said more on the position of the official in the hierarchy (Marshall & Peters, 1985; Marshall & Peters, 1986). Subsequently, over the last decade, the official's moral responsibility has become a topic in the literature of public agency decision-making.

Rory O'Connor, Assistant Secretary (Tertiary Education) gave me the brief for this project. He said the Minister of Education was concerned about the number of complaints he received about the School Certificate examination subject Maori (School Certificate was a national norm-referenced examination where most students took 5 subjects; the subject Maori was a small subject with about 2,000 candidates a year). O'Connor and I agreed the problem was 'complex' (meaning unlikely to be meaningfully addressed) because it involved Maori culture and associated sensitivities, *te reo* Maori, examinations, and a norm-referenced system that was in effect an intelligence test that disadvantaged both lower socio-economic level students and culturally different students.

With Monte Ohia, I convened meetings with the teachers of Maori from throughout the country to identify the problems and produce a development proposal. The first task was to take an 80% written/20% oral examination and make the oral component 80%. The challenge of this was to get the oral assessment accurate. The second task was to take the subject Maori out of norm-referenced examination system and to report on levels of achievement with special certificates for the candidates. The third task was to have the oral assessment done on *marae* and thus to involve the whole Maori community in the assessment of candidates. Looking back it is easy to see the logic of it all, but at the time we had to find our way and convince others. Marshall and Peters were involved in the project through the three tasks. I can remember Jim saying to me 'I do not know anything about School Certificate' but I cannot remember my reply. Peters had been a secondary school teacher, so I suppose that helped.

The problem when you pursue your own goals from within the civil service is that you need to be sure you are right. New Zealand is a small country and a determined individual well placed can actually alter national policy.

Policy development carries a responsibility and that is one of the reasons I needed Marshall and Peters—to provide assurance on the goals. It is said that one of the problems with public administration is that no one is morally or legally responsible because so many individuals are involved in the construction of a new policy (sometimes called the ‘many hands’ problem). Sometimes in New Zealand in the 1980s, the opposite was true. The official was left alone to decide and act. A Director-General of Education once remarked ‘Robert’s projects cost little money, involve a cast of thousands, address major issues, and always worry me and the Minister of Education excessively’. Well, Mr. Director-General, they were not my projects—they were a team effort.

What I find interesting was the way that the goals were developed and the practical problems were solved. The language of argument between us was the language of the philosophy of science. It was analogy and metaphor—Wittgenstein, Popper and Toulmin contributed.

Something of the Maori perspective on the project appears in a paper prepared for the New Zealand Council of Educational Research (Shaw & Ohia, 1988). It seeks to bridge the gulf between the Maori world and the Pakeha bureaucracy and begins with a tentative ‘guiding statement’ by Paki Para:

Consideration as an official guiding statement for the project:

Te Taitokerau—Te Hiku o te Ika nui a Maui
Ko to reo he mana—he wehi—he ihi—he wairua
whangaia a tatou tamariki mokopuna i te taonga tupuna nei
Kia tupu ake ratou i roto i te korowai o te reo a o tatou matua tupuna.
Ko te timatatanga of te kauri rangatira
Ko te kakano nohinohi.

People of the North the tail of Maui’s Great Fish
 Your language is pride-prestige-power-spirit
 Nourish our children with this sacred treasure of our ancestors.
 The beginning of the majestic kauri
 Is the humble (tiny) seed. (p. 1)

Then Ohia and Shaw continue:

In 1986, when the project was first considered, there was recognition of the need for participants to understand their own role, to understand the role of others and to assist others to maintain those roles. Whilst our team might appear at New Zealand Council for Educational Research’s conference as one group we are three separate interest groups, with distinct and often different responsibilities. We are united in our concern for both Maori children and *Te Reo*. Nevertheless, we operate from different bases—power and influence are derived from different sources, and accountability structure and issues are different. We are:

- the community,
- the evaluators,
- the department.

As members of these three groups we each have different roles to fulfill. At the same time we are also citizens, with some understanding of, and emotional involvement with, the needs of our country. Questions of role definition make demands upon our own integrity, and our willingness to accept the constraints under which others must operate. (pp. 2–3)

The paper also lists the conclusions drawn by Monte Ohia and myself regarding what we learnt from the project. It would be inappropriate to revise them now:

The history of *Te Reo O Te Taitokerau*, from the perspective of departmental development officers, suggests the following principles of project management:

- a) Complex problems which involve the community are best resolved by an iterative model of evolutionary decision-making. The essence of this approach to policy development is that concepts are developed and they are subject to scrutiny in appropriate forums. This results in good decision-making with commitment to ideas, and in turn ensures practical outcomes.
- b) Useful progress can result from a department's undertaking policy development as a series of smaller steps. Evolutionary approach is often more rapid than the more extensive, embracing review of policy.
- c) Within the department, procedures need to be established to enable knowledge of the project to be brought into focus whenever it can contribute to policy-making.
- d) Funding for implementation stages, should the project be successful, needs to be planned for in advance.
- e) The department's leadership role in this approach to policy development largely relates to two matters: (i) fostering the development of new concepts to address problems, and (ii) the obtaining of commitment of participants to both the broad policy objectives and the specific actions necessary to operate the project.
- f) Officials wishing to operate a programme which involves community responsibility can begin by reviewing the exact parameters of the department's responsibility as set down by statute.
- g) When attempting to involve the community in a project, positive steps must be taken to balance the power structures.
- h) Evaluators can be established to play a professional political role in project development. They are useful as advocates for arguments, which they consider to be sound, both in the community and in the department.
- i) All effects, both within the department as well as in the community, should be taken into account before judging the worth of a project such as *Te Reo O Te Taitokerau*.

These principles are indicative of the values held by some officials. They are also suggestive of a particular relationship between community—department—evaluators. We hope that they may further discussion of both the project *Te Reo O Te Taitokerau* and management theory. (pp. 6–7)

Education is littered with projects that work well, perhaps are recorded, and then are abandoned, or corrupted, or subsumed by other things. So it was with our work on School Certificate Maori.

When the Department of Education was restructured into a Ministry and a Qualifications Authority, I was appointed to the Ministry and told to work out if Government should fund *kura kaupapa* Maori (schools teaching only in the Maori language). The assessment of School Certificate Maori was found to be expensive, if I remember rightly \$40 a candidate, compared with less than a dollar for subjects like English, and the officials that replaced us began their own projects.

However, Marshall and Peters had recorded much more of the project in reports to the Department, and in published academic papers, than is usual. Theoretical and practical experience met. Maori teachers pursued degrees; other projects in education were started by the teachers of Maori who had worked with us; school principals, Ministers of the Crown, and other government officials approached us to discuss their proposals; and enduring friendships were made between Maori and Pakeha. I remember two Maori teachers, both about 50 years of age, saying of Marshall and Peters that they were the first Pakeha to really listen to them and understand them. It is a considerable tribute.

Policy, Development Projects, and Research

There were other projects that we worked on together for the Ministry of Education, Ministry of Research, Science and Technology, and the Wellington Regional Council. Let me provide a few reflections on the whole experience.

When agencies of state have money with the tag 'evaluation' they advertise for evaluators and expect 'impartiality'. In the two projects described above I did not advertise. I selected the evaluators, using one main criterion. I needed people who would be totally committed to making the projects a success. The quality of the goals required nothing less.

I am convinced that good academic skills, and an academic background, are essential in any practical educational development project. Academic work is a tool, not an end in itself. Marshall, to me, always saw it that way.

Marshall's writing on Maori can demonstrate the sympathy that comes only from real experience (Peters & Marshall, 1988; Marshall, 1991). He sometimes grasps opportunities to do things in a manner consistent with Maori culture and consistent with the values that were so stark at Burma Lodge. He begins one paper with an account of how he relates personally to the topic and seeks to find the sympathetic compromise or synthesis (Marshall, 1999).

When the emotional base drives Marshall the result is powerful. Consider his attempt to advance the practical problem of sovereignty for Maori:

But in order to get two different language users to agree on how to use a term like 'sovereignty' in a different manner, there must be some concept of self and the other that permits an interchange which is not power laden, manipulative, and dependent upon some notion of language use

which is either universal and liberal (Rorty), or that of the scientific community (Dewey), or that of a community of (competent) language users (Habermas). It must recognize difference explicitly, but also recognize a form of communality. Thus, language is not mine but shared and one is initiated into it without it being imposed, or at least imposed so that it is closed off ... (1999)

This paragraph is a part of an academic paper. But, consider how a policy analyst could put this paragraph to work. It begs to be used. The author is as important as the words—he has credibility as a New Zealander, credibility with a significant number of Maori, and credibility through the appointment at Auckland University. In the fast, personal, intuitive world of policy, the person counts as much as the text.

Academics who see their positions as an opportunity to contribute to the country impress me. In the 1970's and 1980's empirical studies received most of the research funding and people asked, what could a philosopher do to assist education? The ability of philosophers to contribute to the country seemed quite limited. Marshall proved one thing for his discipline—philosophers should be included in governments' social science research programmes. He established the worth of the philosophy of education in both the work for the State Services Commission and the work on Maori education. And, incidentally, he may have made Wittgenstein smile.

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