

INTRODUCTION TO SPECIAL EDITION

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INITIAL TEACHER EDUCATION AND THE NEW ZEALAND CURRICULUM

This special issue of the *Waikato Journal of Education* arose from a symposium held at The University of Waikato in June, 2009. The symposium, *Initial Teacher Education and the New Zealand Curriculum—Te Marautanga o Aotearoa Symposium*, was attended by delegates from all major initial teacher education (ITE) providers in New Zealand. ITE refers to pre-service teacher education, that is, programmes that prepare student teachers to become beginning teachers. Curriculum includes the school and the ITE curriculum.

The official programme for the symposium stated that the aims were to provide

1. Opportunities for delegates to share emerging practice and research related to initial teacher education and the *New Zealand Curriculum* (Ministry of Education, 2007);
2. A forum to critically and creatively examine current practices; and
3. A vehicle to inform programme review and development to meet the needs of teachers and students.

The timing of the symposium coincided with major developments in both ITE and curriculum. In the last few years there have been further mergers between colleges of education and universities so that all former stand-alone teachers' colleges have now been merged with universities. In effect, nearly all (90 percent) of the ITE in New Zealand is carried out in universities, and colleges of education have been incorporated into university structures and systems of employment and operation. External accountability for university-based ITE programmes is now in the hands of The New Zealand Teachers Council. The universities have their own system of accountability and monitoring of ITE through the Committee on University Academic Programmes (CUAP, a sub-committee of the New Zealand Vice-Chancellors' Committee). CUAP considers academic matters across the university system including inter-university course approval and moderation procedures, and gives advice and comment on academic developments. The New Zealand Teachers Council sets the requirements for approval and reapproval of initial teacher education programmes (New Zealand Teachers Council, 2008), and has developed and mandated graduating teacher standards for ITE graduates which influence the design of the content of ITE programmes. These recent changes towards greater external scrutiny of ITE curriculum content is in contrast to the more flexible and autonomous situation in ITE introduced from 1990 in the Education Amendment Act.

Another recent development in ITE is a search for the best ways to teach student teachers. The university context that nearly all teacher educators now find

themselves in has caused a re-think of how to deliver teacher education. Class sizes for particular teaching purposes, time spent in face-to-face classes in relation to independent student–teacher study and the use of ICT are examples of issues being explored. Renewed attention has been given to the best ways of connecting with schools over learning experiences for ITE students. While the New Zealand Teachers Council standards provide guidelines, there are necessary local-level decisions about the structure of time spent in schools and centres, the learning activities promoted and levels and effectiveness of links between ITE educators and teachers in schools and early childhood centres. Assessment of student teacher learning is another ongoing issue, particularly in relation to consistency and validity.

The symposium was also timely in regard to developments in school curriculum. The existing national curriculum (Ministry of Education, 1993) was recently revised (Ministry of Education, 2007) with an expectation by the government that the revision would be fully implemented from 2010. Reacting to the revision is a major undertaking for schools. The challenge for teachers is to understand the central curriculum document *The New Zealand Curriculum* (Ministry of Education, 2007), design effective classroom programmes by using imagination and flexibility, and to change teaching and learning approaches. There are many examples of attempts in schools to do these things in the *New Zealand Education Gazette* and the Ministry of Education website *Curriculum Online*. Collectively, the examples show that in a number of schools there is a climate of experimentation and exploration of the possibilities in a national curriculum that opens the way for innovation and flexible responses to student learning needs and preferences. Of course, curriculum pressures occur in the senior secondary years to conform with the New Zealand national assessment requirements for the National Certificate of Educational Achievement (NCEA), a matter that we will not consider here.

For teacher educators, the revised school curriculum means changes in the curriculum of ITE. These two spheres of development—ITE and school curriculum—present opportunities for improved connectedness between them. It seems self-evident that student teachers would be better prepared for teaching if their teachers were aware of school-based curriculum development and vice versa. However, awareness itself is not enough, for practices also need to change. It has been argued that ITE teachers have greater positive impacts if they are up-to-date with school developments and model school (as well as tertiary) teaching approaches and practices to their students (Loughran, 2004). Furthermore, it can be argued that ITE educators who are engaged in research-related teaching should be leaders in curriculum innovation. However, innovation is only possible if there is room for it; an overcrowded ITE would make it difficult.

The papers in this collection represent a diverse range of activities in ITE and curriculum. The first paper by Clive McGee, Bronwen Cowie and Beverley Cooper (The University of Waikato) surveys some of the major developments in ITE curriculum in recent decades. It draws attention to the influences upon ITE curriculum that include changes to the school and early childhood curriculum and changes in pedagogy and teacher and student learning. It argues that in responding

to these influences ITE educators are faced with reconciling tensions between the right to exercise university autonomy (where nearly all ITE is now carried out) in designing programmes and the responsibilities external agencies carry for teacher quality, such as the New Zealand Teachers Council. The paper makes a case for greater interaction between ITE and schools to develop better understanding of the curriculum of the other sector, and even to look for ways for ITE and schools to collaborate over curriculum.

One of the challenges in curriculum is to select appropriate knowledge for students—teacher education or school—to learn. It is a problematic challenge, for conceptions of knowledge are changing and teachers need to know more about knowledge construction and learning. Vanessa Andreotti, Amosa Fa’aoi and Margaret Giroux report on a research project funded by the Teaching and Learning Research Initiative. It investigated the shifts in conceptualization of knowledge and learning and how they are interpreted within different knowledge domains by teacher educators, and how these shifts impact upon the educators’ interpretation of the national school curriculum. They looked at the characteristics of initiatives to shift student teacher thinking and whether the shifts impacted upon their interpretations of the national curriculum. They track the interesting “thinking journey” of a student teacher as he reacts to knowledge and learning in an ITE course, and shifts his thinking while enduring discomfort along the way.

With the arrival of the revised New Zealand national curriculum (Ministry of Education, 2007) schools and ITE providers have been taking steps to understand the philosophical and theoretical content of the “front half” of the *New Zealand curriculum* (NZC). Philippa Hunter, Paul Keown and Jill Wynyard have investigated one part of this “front half”, namely *key competencies* that replaces the essential skills of the previous curriculum. They see each key competency as a cluster of skills and abilities. Their paper reports on a research project to see how student teachers identified key competencies in social science ITE courses and how engagement with thinking about them influenced their thinking about future social sciences teaching and learning. The student teachers were given tasks of incorporating key competencies into lesson plans; to narrow the focus, students were asked to include just one competency in a lesson. The results of these attempts showed that student came to realize that interrelatedness of key competencies; nevertheless, a focus on one competency lead to a deeper understanding of it.

In a similar way, another paper that explores the “front half” of the NZC, is by Judy Bailey, Marilyn Blakeney-Williams, Wendy Carss, Bronwen Cowie, Ngarewa Hawera and Marilyn Taylor, and looks at language and literacy, and mathematics education. These authors were part of a team that collaborated with the social science authors above. Their findings show that student teachers found it very challenging—in the short time available—to understand concepts and incorporate them into planning and teaching. These authors worked with the authors of the above paper (Hunter, Keown and Wynyard) and there have been valuable insights about student teacher learning from these teacher educators looking across three curriculum areas.

Inquiry learning has a long history in education and schooling and scholars like John Dewey and Jerome Bruner have considerably influenced New Zealand

curriculum (even though many teachers may be unaware of this). The revised NZC introduced the term *teaching as inquiry* that is close to what many teacher educators would recognize as *reflective practice*. Sue Bridges and Fiona Gilmore have studied the two uses of inquiry and report on what they might mean for ITE and school curriculum. They provide a valuable analysis of the two forms of inquiry set in the context of two ITE courses.

The next paper by Kirsten Petrie is related to inquiry, beginning with her awareness that teacher educators recruited from secondary schools to teach primary ITE curriculum courses do not necessarily understand the complexities of implementing curriculum, and teaching and learning in primary schools. In an autobiographical case study, Kirsten—a former secondary teacher of physical education and health—gives a detailed account of her experiences when she taught for six weeks in a primary school. Her reflections reveal important issues about factors that contribute to effective teaching of student teachers in ITE.

From time we hear criticisms that some ITE curriculum lacks theoretical rigour, especially in relation to professional courses that focus upon pedagogy. Jane McChesney discusses the need for teacher educators to develop a shared discourse in their teaching of professional courses and outlines two concepts that help achieve this goal: approximation and decomposition. She explains how these concepts provide shared language about practice that teacher educators can use with their student teachers and the concepts can also be used to convey important messages to people outside ITE.

A paper by Vicki Carpenter addresses the important issue of how ITE can contribute to a supply of teachers who can successfully teach in low ses schools that also often have majorities of Māori and/or Pasifika students. Vicki reports on an ITE course she ran that was based upon the theoretical and practical ideas of Paulo Freire and included a field study to schools and a marae in the far north. She presents an analysis of the course using data from the course students. Steven Sexton's paper is related to the goal of producing teachers who understand Te Ao Māori (a Māori world view). Action research was used in a study of how a course based upon Te Ao impacted on the formation of the teacher role identity of final year bachelor of teaching student teachers.

Effective pedagogy is also the topic for a paper by Jill Paris, Adair Polson-Genge and Brenda Shanks. They investigated whether the statement on effective teaching in NZC was reflected in their teaching in ITE. Although their sample was small, there are valuable insights on the influences upon student teachers' philosophy and practices; and the study will lead to further research.

Technology was a new learning area in the new curriculum of the 1990s and has been revised in the recent NZC. Brent Mawson's paper is a report of primary and secondary student teachers' perceptions of their readiness and capability to teach technology as beginning teachers. Data were collected by questionnaire and interviews. The timing of the research was of interest, for it was at a time of overlap between two technology curriculum versions.

In a number of the papers in this collection there are concerns about quality of ITE content and teaching and learning processes. Kerry Earl's paper takes a detailed look at how an ITE teaching team reviewed a professional practice course

(paper). The review focused upon influences in curriculum development that have caused the teaching team to make changes to the paper's content; and how student teachers' viewpoints, or voice, could be more prominent. Key competencies in the NZC are discussed in some detail in relation to paper content.

These papers cover a variety of topics in ITE and school curriculum and the authors come from a range of institutions. It is to be hoped that they may lead to further related research and scholarship on curriculum and to collaborative research involving larger samples where this provides a more telling evidence base.

It is also to be hoped that these papers will influence policy making on ITE curriculum; at the very least to suggest ideas for avenues of research in aspects of ITE and school curriculum that are not covered in this publication.

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