

Editorial: The Mantle Falls

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The mantle falls. The founding editor and driving force behind the establishment of the *New Zealand Annual Review of Education*, Hugo Manson, responsible for guiding the journal through its first four years with amazing energy and determination, has now relinquished the task.

But in spite of the change at the helm (to vary the metaphor), the thrust of the Review will not change from its original conception. The need for critical policy analysis remains, and if anything, grows more pressing as polarisation in matters educational within the New Zealand community increases. It is, therefore, entirely appropriate that the Education Department in the Victoria University of Wellington, a city accommodating the administrative and political centre of New Zealand, should publish a journal reviewing major policy issues in the country.

There are ten specially-commissioned articles in this issue, each subject to active peer review prior to publication, and each dealing with an important policy matter which has become current during 1995. The review is a vehicle for staff of the Education Department itself to express their views, but a significant number of articles come from outside the university. There are of course many other policy issues which might have been covered, but work pressures on potential authors and space limitations dictated that they will have to wait until a future issue.

The Review contains a very substantial reference section, giving it a distinctive place among similar publications from other tertiary education departments. This section contains a collection of information from a variety of sources, which both now and in years to come should prove an accessible, user-friendly and invaluable educational archive. It concludes with a bibliography of difficult-to-locate references drawn from the Index New Zealand (INNZ) databases.

This issue of the Review contains some disturbing articles. Some of these deal with matters which the authors themselves find disturbing, but about which others may hold different views. That is to be expected

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in a pluralistic society. But the first item, on Youth Suicide, by Annette Beautrais, contains a wealth of soundly-researched information which everyone must find disturbing. New Zealand teenagers are killing themselves at one of the highest rates in the developed world. Furthermore, the suicide rates for Maori young people have moved up to parallel those of Pakeha youth in this regard. In an era when the conventional wisdom is to "close the gaps", this must be a gap which we would dearly have wished to see closed in the other direction. It represents an intractable problem with major implications for the education of our children and grandchildren.

In the next four articles, Phil Brown and Hugh Lauder, John Barrington, Gay Simpkin, and Linda Mitchell examine important policy issues which have confronted schools and preschools during the past year. The first considers macro trends in the global economy, and argues that education cannot reconcile social justice with economic efficiency, in spite of what policy makers may assume. The other three articles examine particular features of the administration of schools and preschools which have occasioned wide discussion during the year. After a careful documentation of the evidence available, the authors come up with their own conclusions, presented for serious and urgent debate.

The sixth article, by Ken Stevens, on the future of rural schools, sees them as small educational laboratories for the development of new technologies in "virtual classes", and leads naturally on to the article by Graham Wagner and Errol Jaquiere, which explores the tremendous explosion in possibilities with multimedia approaches in distance education, in particular with the use of the Internet.

Next, Geraldine McDonald takes a retrospective look at gender equality, comparing the issues for women debated (or not debated) at two conferences, in 1975 and 1995, twenty years apart.

The last two articles, on Information Literacy, by Penny Moore, and Media Studies, by Chris Watson, give the Review its curriculum thrust. The first examines how a new approach to problem solving is required in the face of the hurtling information avalanche now facing children, and argues that both teachers and librarians will require new skills to cope with it. Finally, Chris Watson examines the chequered career of the subject Media Studies, and maintains that the way in which it is evaluated has a major effect on its future viability.

All in all, I believe the authors cover a wide range of pressing issues with admirable perceptiveness, and I commend the Review to the widest possible readership of students of educational policy, no matter what their political ideology or social perspective.