

Editorial: Money, Money, Money...

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It's a rich man's world! Probably true, and the covert sexism in this ABBA lyric ought not also to escape our attention. But in the international financial marketplace, where money talks loudly, does education find its place. Is it simply another commodity, to be bought and sold to the highest bidder?

There are some who appear to think so. A recent article in the *Dominion Post*, reporting comments from the Business Roundtable Chairman, Rob McLeod, reads as follows, "Education in most countries operated without the state for centuries, either in the home or in private schools, with parents paying fees. I see no compelling reasons why the Government has to own and run all schools." (Weir, 2004, June 16). As far back as 1990, an overseas consultant Stuart Sexton, brought to New Zealand by the same Business Roundtable writes:

Just as parents feed, clothe and house their children with their own effort and resources, so too they should educate. The exception relates to welfare situations where the rest of society accepts a duty to unfortunate children by asking the state to step in. Other than in that case, the state *need* have no role in education, leaving it entirely to the parents. (1990, p. 4)

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The government's assumed obligation could be fulfilled by requiring that all children attend a school (or its equivalent); by providing parents with the funds, out of taxation, to pay for attendance at schools; and then to stand back and let the "market" take over. (p. 6)

But is education a solely private good, a commodity to be bought and sold like any other commodity in the market place, or is it more akin to a public good, with other characteristics? Several of our writers in this issue grapple with this dilemma, which really first hit the headlines in 1987 following the robust New Zealand Treasury input into the educational reforms, in its *Brief to the Incoming Government*.

Educational philosopher **John Clark**, from Massey University, takes up the idea of an "education myth" – a term given currency by C. E. Beeby, as an over-arching policy framework, an "unattainable but approachable goal" that reflects public aspirations over a specific period of time, but is eventually replaced by another myth. John considers three such myths: *Survival of the Fittest* (from 1877 onwards); *Equality of Educational Opportunity* (from 1939); *Education as a Commodity* (from 1987); and finds them all wanting. He proposes a fourth "myth", *Educated Citizens in a Democratic Society*, which he argues is well-placed soon to overtake the "economic" myth, and provide a much sounder foundation for the education wellbeing of the country.

Two complementary articles follow, dealing with the lucrative venture which has come to be known as Export Education, the education within New Zealand schools and tertiary institutions of a rapidly increasing number of overseas, full-fee-paying students, mostly from Asia. **John Codd**, also from Massey University, approaches the development from the philosophical, policy viewpoint, seeing public education in New Zealand as now having become a highly profitable, globally marketable commodity. This raises fundamental questions about its true purposes, and whether global economic purposes should have priority over those of citizenship and national identity. Following on, the Dean of international students at one of Wellington's secondary schools, **Deb King**, argues from a complementary perspective that schools have now come to depend on international student funding to meet their normal budget requirements. She notes that there is an unequal distribution of such full fee-paying students across secondary schools, with those from already well-off, high decile schools getting the lion's share of the very substantial economic benefit accruing.

Graham Collins, Massey University, examines another current issue with strong financial implications, that of the position of small primary schools, largely rural, with declining rolls. He observes that the present policy (recently halted by a Ministry of Education moratorium, because of strong opposition) which consolidates small schools by strengthening some and closing others, under-estimates the nature of local community feeling associated with such schools, and misunderstands the impact of the process on patterns of inter-school behaviour.

Another "hot" financial issue is dealt with by three staff members from Victoria University, **Cedric Hall**, **Kay Morris Matthews** and **Theresa Sawicka**, who assess the impact on their university of the financial re-packaging of money for research, away from a student

numbers (efits) based formula, to one founded on a measure of research output. Although agreeing that the Performance-Based Research Fund (PBRF) has been carefully designed, incorporating many features which reflect well on its reliability and validity, they see problematic issues with regard to the danger of inappropriate use of “league tables”, the excessive compliance costs to institutions, and the lack of information on, and analysis of, longer-term benefits of this form of funding, to be progressively introduced into all tertiary institutions over the next few years.

Ann Beer, a recently appointed member of our Editorial Board, and editor of the *McGill Journal of Education*, Montreal, provides the overseas input for this issue, in giving a succinct overview of current educational reforms in Quebec. Although the origins and history of the two systems are very different, readers will see many fascinating parallels between the bicultural (French-English) scene in Quebec and our own New Zealand efforts at institutional and curriculum reform, within our own bicultural setting.

Following up some of the matters dealing with teachers’ professional development, raised in earlier issues of the *Review*, **Noeline Alcorn**, from Waikato University, considers the ambiguous role of teacher professional bodies, on the “faultline” between the profession and the state. She examines the challenges for teachers’ councils across four countries, as they grapple with complex issues of professionalism and accountability, and regards the recently established New Zealand Teachers Council as having a problematic role as “gatekeeper” to the profession.

Debby Upsall argues against the managerialist construct of school leadership, officially encouraged since the decentralisation of school administration following the *Tomorrow's Schools* reforms of 1989. She advocates more collaborative management structures, as having the potential to attract into school leadership a wider variety of applicants. The exploration of alternative models of school principalship that might make the job more manageable and attractive, particularly to women, is recommended. From her own research, she considers in more depth one such alternative model, that of shared principalship.

There are two articles on early childhood in this issue, both from Victoria University staff. In the first, **Helen May** gives a revealing overview of the early childhood “landscape” as seen through the contributions to the early childhood conventions, held every four years since 1975. In celebrating nearly two decades of considerable political activism and reflective debate, she traces the challenges, critiques and

strategic directions of the period, and forecasts some new frontiers in the struggle. **Val Podmore** weaves together some selected themes from the last of these Early Childhood Conventions, the eighth, held in Palmerston North in September 2003. She reflects on the concept and development of early childhood centres of innovation (COIs), with their focus on collaborative, innovative practice and research.

In the first of our two curriculum pieces, **Juliet Twist** reviews in some depth the literature on the small- versus large-unit debate, which comes to the fore when young children are being taught to read. This is followed by an analysis of the *Ready to Read* teacher support material in order to determine where it stands in relation to the issue of whether only grapheme-phoneme correspondences should be taught to beginning readers, or whether they should also be taught rime-analogy strategies. In the second curriculum-related article, we tackle a topic which has not been covered in the *Review* before, that of peace education. **Marg Sellers** notes that with the thawing of East-West relations since the Cold War, educational interest in peace also dissipated. However, recent events have revoked the calm and initiated a global war against terrorism. In the light of this, she revisits the role of peace in education, and presents how peaceful perspectives are inherent in learning and teaching. She concludes by outlining a peaceful interpretation of various subjects in the school curriculum, something which she sees as a priority for the future.

Finally, **Charlotte Thomson** identifies the need for New Zealand schools to implement empirically-based research strategies in order to improve achievement outcomes for students whose needs they are failing to meet. Her article highlights the gap between research and practice, and she advances the construct of *acceptability* as a possible explanation for the gap. Variables affecting the acceptability of interventions are analysed, and a case is made for Resource Teachers Learning and Behaviour (RTLb) to fill the role of a scientist-practitioner in schools, in order to link the academic researcher and the teacher at the front line.

Immerse yourselves in these very timely articles, and get your money’s worth!

References

- Sexton, S. (1990). *New Zealand schools: An evaluation of recent reforms and future directions*. [Auckland]: New Zealand Business Roundtable.
- Weir, J. (2004, June 16). Roll back government, urges Roundtable head. *The Dominion Post*, p. C3.