

Editorial: Education policy and practice: At the crossroads

This issue of the *New Zealand Annual Review of Education* comes at a time of change in New Zealand politics with the election in September of a Coalition Labour-led government with a Labour woman Prime Minister, Jacinda Ardern. This follows nine years of a National-led government during which time education policy adopted a neo-liberal framing and associated policy mechanisms to facilitate system-wide accountability and evaluation. The previous three issues (19, 20 & 21) included commentaries on issues evident in the first term of the last government. The articles in this current issue (22) largely comment on the educational context prior to the election, although some have been updated to reflect key policy events in the last few months. Pressing issues as 2017 comes to an end are teacher supply, student achievement in reading and mathematics, narrowing of the school curriculum, increasing student diversity, teacher competency, rising costs and quality provision of early childhood education, and falling participation rates in tertiary education.

The National-led government's third term generated a number of new policies culminating in the *Education Amendment Act 2017* which came into effect in May 2017 and is described on the Ministry of Education's website as "the most comprehensive update of New Zealand's education legislation in almost 30 years". It includes: enhancing the support framework for communities of learning | Kāhui Ako; introducing cohort entry to school; making student achievement central in early childhood education and compulsory schooling; and related to this "strengthening the efficiency, effectiveness and accountability of schools and the schooling network." During the period since our last issue there has been an ongoing programme of instructional reform in the schooling sector and an associated focus in evaluation work by the Education Review Office on successful outcomes for all students. Aligning with this focus on student outcomes, the Education Council of Aotearoa New Zealand has been reviewing requirements for teacher registration and their guidelines and approval of initial teacher education (ITE) programmes.

Since being elected in September, the Labour-led government has signalled increased spending on education and significant shifts across a number of policies in the early childhood education, schooling, and tertiary education sectors, built around Labour's focus on maintaining "learners at the centre" of policy initiatives. Within the first 100 days in office, the Labour-led government has moved on several key policies including the abolition of National Standards, a policy central to the previous National-led government's framing of accountability of the schooling sector. Whilst it is unclear at the time of writing this editorial what expectations will be placed on schools regarding the reporting of children's achievement, the move will enable teachers to shift their focus from the excessive assessment associated with National Standards to a greater focus on learners. Significant changes to funding for tertiary students have also been announced with the introduction of the fee-free policy for students entering (or with less than six months previous study) tertiary education from January 2018. Increases to both the student allowances and the amounts that students can borrow for living costs under their student loan will also take effect in 2018.

There was considerable synergy across the education policies proposed by Labour, New Zealand First and the Greens prior to the election and, as we move into 2018, we wait with interest to see the extent to which key policies beyond the two above are implemented. Across the education sector there is considerable support for, and expectations for implementation of these policies. For example, a recent NZEI survey of principals has found

that, if implemented, more than 80% would sign up to the Labour Party's policy on school fees, which would provide \$150 per student per annum for schools that agreed not to seek school donations from parents (NZEI, 2017).

Whilst the Families Package announced by the government in December 2017 includes several measures that will impact positively on families with young children – such as increasing paid parental leave from 18 to 22 weeks in July 2018 and introducing the Best Start initiative that provides families with a grant of \$60 per week for the first year of a child's life – there has been a notable absence of policy announcements in relation to the early childhood education sector. This is despite comprehensive ECE policies across Labour, New Zealand First and the Greens that collectively include increased funding rates, improved requirements for qualified teachers in the teacher-led sector, and additional support for Kōhanga Reo and Playcentre. In the wake of a recently-released survey of ECE teachers that indicated significant concerns about quality within centres (Child Forum, 2017), the early childhood sector will be watching closely for progress on the implementation of these election promises.

The first paper by Thrupp provides retrospective insights about the controversial policy of National Standards. Reflecting back from 2016 over an almost 10-year period since the standards were first introduced, he observes ongoing uncertainties with evidence-based policy processes that he suggests have impacted the implementation of the policy. He provides a detailed historical account of a defining policy of the National-led government. In spite of the National Standards being recently abolished, Thrupp's call for greater transparency about consultation processes and advisory group activity can inform evidence-informed policy development and implementation of the new government's education policies. His call for government to take greater account of research evidence is timely.

Several of our contributors have focused on ITE programmes. In the first of these, Lee-Morgan and Muller make an important contribution to the literature on ITE for Māori-medium settings; their two-year project addresses some of the complexities inherent when students preparing to teach within Māori-medium educational settings are engaged with both language learning and pedagogical preparation. By drawing on student voices, their study adds another layer to our understandings of language regeneration and student experiences in Māori-medium ITE programmes.

In the second of our contributions focused on ITE, Hansen, Sewell, Fernando and Safa present findings from their research into changes in student teacher efficacy beliefs during their programme. The qualification, one of several offered across New Zealand as part of a Ministry of Education initiative to develop exemplary postgraduate ITE, is designed to enhance student teacher expertise in teaching learners traditionally at risk of lower achievement. As an early study conducted within the context of this policy initiative, there are implications from their findings for ongoing teacher education reforms designed to assist with the long-term goal of achieving more equitable educational outcomes in New Zealand.

Cherrington's article on professional learning and development (PLD) in New Zealand early childhood education reviews system-level changes to policies and practice with a focus on the associated challenges and opportunities for teachers to engage in PLD. The complexities of the regulatory context of the early childhood sector, largely led by the Ministry of Education, are unpacked in terms of expectations of PLD. One of the challenges identified is the overall growth of the early childhood workforce, particularly in qualified and registered teachers. This, Cherrington suggests, has led to three key challenging aspects critical to the sector; greater expectations of engagement in ongoing PLD, more qualified

teachers required to demonstrate such engagement, and changes to Ministry of Education-funded PLD. Cherrington concludes by suggesting that professional learning communities offer promising opportunities for teachers' engagement in effective PLD.

New Zealand policy on adult literacy, alongside adult numeracy, Furness and Hunter identify as emerging strongly and as involving significant sector investment particularly between 2002 and 2012. They identify *More than Words: The New Zealand Adult Literacy Strategy* launched in 2001 as foundational to the subsequent development of consecutive Tertiary Education Strategies since 2002. Their article reviews the state of policy in 2016 from a sociomaterial perspective on literacy to generate a critique that illuminates public discourses about literacies in policy and its enactment. Their analysis identified the discourse of adult literacy in both policy and the everyday materialisation embedded in dominant neoliberal ideologies of individual responsibility and entrepreneurialism. This prompts them to call for other perspectives that promote alternative material text and artefacts.

Takemoto, Tait, and Gleeson's study is important within the context of increasing linguistic diversity within New Zealand's early childhood settings given the rapid increase in languages spoken by children and families engaged in early childhood education services (Education Counts, 2015). Such linguistic diversity can create challenges for teachers and educators and their findings highlight the importance of providing culturally inclusive resources within the play-based environment to support social and linguistic learning amongst children. The teachers' role in pedagogically framing the environment is identified as an important part of facilitating the learning of emergent bilingual children.

Hubbard's paper focuses on adolescent literacy to examine secondary teachers' text choice for the New Zealand English (language arts) classroom. The article is framed in terms of accountability for student progress at Years 9 and 10. It draws on a study conducted with experienced New Zealand secondary school teachers of English to examine the extent to which they took account of students' interests and backgrounds when choosing texts. Hubbard argues that to retain an ambitious curriculum there is a need to protect teachers' flexibility and choice in the teaching of secondary English text to guard against a narrowing of curriculum approaches associated with increased accountability measures.

Rimoni's article focuses on how Tama Samoa (Samoan boys) enact their identities as Samoans authentically within the New Zealand secondary school context. By drawing on the voices of Tama Samoa, Rimoni highlights the influences of family, peers and school experiences on Tama Samoan identities and reveals how the young men in her study used their multiple identities as a tool to help them adapt within different contexts. Such understandings have implications for teachers and policy-makers concerned with the educational success of Tama Samoa at school.

McDonald and Tufue-Dolgoy argue for the use of the transfer of training literature in ITE with a specific focus on informing practicum experiences. They draw on a study conducted in New Zealand and Samoa in which teacher educators were interviewed about their knowledge and use of the notion of transfer. Their finding is that teacher educators had limited knowledge of models and strategies of transfer and there were similarities across the two contexts, New Zealand and Samoa. Suggesting an emerging research agenda, they propose that the use of transfer of training principles and methodologies may assist initial teacher educators to identify challenges and barriers more efficiently in the application of theory to practice, that is from the lecture theatre to the classroom.

The papers in this issue consider the impact of policies across the education sector at the cross-roads of a change of government during 2017. In doing so historical issues are

provided in a current and future context. We take this opportunity to thank our editorial board members as well as our reviewers for their contributions to the journal.

No reira, tena koutou, tena koutou katoa.

Joanna Higgins and Sue Cherrington

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