Editorial Introduction
New Zealand Annual Review of Education (2022 Special Issue)

What will it take to lift the quality and effectiveness of education provision in Aotearoa New Zealand?

The contributions to this Special Issue identify significant challenges for the education system in addressing the trajectory of decline in education performance and achieving equity and excellence in education outcomes. Although the articles focus on a range of education contexts, the themes that emerge are consistent.

From a system perspective, many of the articles highlight the significant impact of the *Tomorrow's Schools* (1989) reforms in creating a highly devolved, competitive environment and the fragmentation of system functions. Despite multiple government reviews of different parts of the system and the identification of issues that need to be addressed, the lack of coherence and alignment of functions limits system capacity to develop responsive, evidence-based policy solutions and implement them effectively. Government changes and competing agendas in the education sector are also powerful influences on the system's policy response, approach to change, and capacity for sustained improvement.

In the first article, *Creating system change to improve schooling outcomes in Aotearoa New Zealand,* McIntosh argues that Aotearoa New Zealand's approach to system improvement over the last two decades has not been at the scale required or sustained over time. A shared vision and purpose for the system is yet to be realised, variability in practice remains an issue, and a focus on leadership and engaging families/whānau and community in education has been limited. McIntosh identifies the following as areas for future focus: a prioritised set of aligned actions; sustained approaches to develop stakeholder understanding and support for change; a balance of top-down and bottom-up engagement; and the building of relationships and trust.

Alcorn's article, *The 'contested enterprise' of Initial Teacher Education*, provides an important analysis of changes in English-medium Initial Teacher Education (ITE) in Aotearoa New Zealand since 1990 to highlight tensions created by a neoliberal, competitive environment in which ITE policy and practice operates. Alcorn identifies significant system changes since the 1989-1990 reforms: the establishment of independent ITE providers; the fragmentation of system functions across key education agencies; and the opening of ITE provision to new providers in 1996. The changing role and function of the Teacher Registration Board (1990) and the associated debates about standards and programmes illustrate fundamental tensions that have yet to be resolved. Alcorn highlights the vital role of ITE in system change.

Promises and challenges for effective school and system leadership by Wylie discusses system challenges associated with ensuring effective and sustainable school and system leadership. The 1989 *Tomorrow's Schools* reforms generated a competitive leadership environment between schools and between school leadership and government agencies. In 2019 the Tomorrow's School's Independent Taskforce (2019) identified the need to reposition school and system leadership. Wylie argues that government agencies need to work together more coherently, aligning policy frameworks and roles, implementing leadership initiatives effectively and evaluating their impact on improvement.

2

In their article, *Designing for empowering curriculum implementation: The potential of enduring competencies*, Hipkins, Cowie, Tolbert and Waiti highlight the design challenges associated with the integration of structural change articulated in system level policy frameworks. The introduction of competencies in the New Zealand Curriculum (2007) is an example of structural change that appears to have had little impact on learning opportunities or approaches to assessment. Hipkins et al. identify new opportunities associated with the current refresh of the curriculum and the implementation of a competency-based approach, introducing the concept of "enduring competencies" in the context of science education. A co-design approach is critical to build capability and enable change.

Poskitt's article, *Improve education provision in Aotearoa: By building assessment and learning capability*, focuses on building assessment and learning capability as a mechanism for improving the quality of education provision in Aotearoa New Zealand. She highlights some challenging findings in the current schooling context: the decline in a sense of belonging by age 15 and high rates of bullying; the trend of decreasing attendance and inequitable attendance rates, particularly for Māori and Pacific students; and the inequitable outcomes and declining achievement in schooling. Poskitt argues that building assessment capability is critical to improving education provision in Aotearoa New Zealand.

In his article, *What can we do to realise our excellence and equity goals in literacy?,* McNaughton uses the context of literacy to illustrate major issues that the Aotearoa New Zealand education system needs to address: solving the system challenges of variability, scalability, sustainability and capability; and engaging with selective use of, and limited reasoning about, the evidence. McNaughton argues that research, policy and practice communities collectively know a lot about what it would take to achieve excellence and equity goals in literacy but fail to act on it. He suggests a collective, evidence-informed approach and a well-funded, targeted research, science and innovation strategy for education is needed.

Ell's article, *Lifting the quality and effectiveness of mathematics education provision in English-medium schools in Aotearoa New Zealand: What will it take?,* examines the provision and performance in mathematics education in the compulsory years of schooling in English-medium schools. She notes that international and national assessment studies identify a trajectory of decline in overall achievement and significant inequities in learner outcomes in mathematics. Ell begins by looking at the historical context of mathematics education provision to suggest that the issues are not new. She describes three curriculum revision processes in the last thirty years with each iteration supplemented by additional initiatives (and associated resources). Improving performance requires learning from the past and the collaborative design and implementation of evidence-based provision.

The article by Alansari and Li, *Maintaining good working experiences in the context of NCEA changes: Enablers and Influences,* provides key insights into how the system can support teachers to implement educational change. Drawing on survey data from the National Survey of Schools project, the article explores the links between schools' professional learning and development cultures and teachers' attitudes towards NCEA changes, including their understanding of the potential impact of the changes on outcomes for learners who are currently underserved by the education system, and their work experiences. They suggest a positive association between teachers' views of their schools' professional learning and development culture and their attitudes towards NCEA changes to improve learner outcomes.

In *Unleashing the full potential of teachers: Personal ecologies and funds of knowledge/identity as resources for curriculum making*, Cowie, Cheng and Bryan identify the possibilities for teaching and learning associated with a "credit/asset" perspective of the knowledge and expertise that teachers bring to curriculum and the challenges facing schools. Through a collaborative curriculum case in

science, they illustrate the application of personal learning ecologies to show how curriculum and learning can be enriched when students and teachers are able to bring their identities and funds of knowledge to the curriculum and learning context.

In *Exploring the shift to an improvement-oriented approach to external evaluation in Aotearoa New Zealand: The case of the Education Review Office,* Parsons and Higgins provide an overview of the development of the Education Review Office's (ERO) approach to external evaluation since 1989. The tensions in ERO's evaluation role and functions, accountability (including compliance) and improvement, have been evident since its establishment, and calls for ERO to shift to an improvement-orientation are not new. ERO's *Evaluation For Improvement* approach, *Te Ara Huarau*, has the potential to influence school improvement. However, the challenge lies in the implementation and operationalisation of the approach in which the role of the external evaluator is critical.

In *Transformative shifts in early childhood education systems after four decades of neoliberalism*, Mitchell provides a critical overview of the shifts associated with neoliberalism that have occurred in early childhood education over four decades. The associated discourses have shaped policy in relation to funding, planning and provision. First, Mitchell documents policy shifts related to funding and provision and the associated outcomes since 1990 to make a compelling case for transformative action. She then focuses on systemic issues in the current context in terms of the use of early childhood education funding for profit at the expense of the quality of the service provided. She argues for a participatory approach to policy formulation and decision-making.

Gunn and Hedges in their article, *Knowledgeable and qualified early childhood teachers: Tensions, constraints, and possibilities*, argue that despite the system goal of increased professionalisation in early childhood education and related objectives articulated in the *Early Learning Action Plan 2019-2029*, these have not been reflected or enacted through the development and implementation of policy such as teacher qualifications and teacher professional learning. Regulating a benchmark standard Initial Teacher Education qualification in 2000, along with regulating full registration of all early childhood education qualified teachers by 2012, were never achieved. The replacement of the term "qualified teacher" by "knowledgeable teachers" signals the shift required, recognising and investing in the specific knowledge and expertise required by teachers in high quality early childhood education settings.

In *Leading education into the future*, Le Fevre focuses on how we might respond to the challenges facing the Aotearoa New Zealand education system in improving the learning, wellbeing, and outcomes of our young people. Her framing of the current leadership context highlights the limitations of leadership policy and reform over time in bringing about the change that is needed, situating these alongside the uncertain and dynamic context in which leaders will need to operate in the future. Le Fevre then discusses the development of effective leadership of policy and practice for the future through three important concepts: creating a vision for the future; being openminded; and responding to emotion.

Berryman's article, *What will it take? Understanding settler silencing and realising cultural and structural reforms*, is a powerful commentary on what it will take to achieve the transformative reform in education required to achieve equity and belonging for Māori learners. A process of national unlearning is needed to allow the new learning that will achieve both cultural shifts and structural change. Her analysis of the current state of our cultural relationships illustrates colonising activity over time and how this historical context has shaped the development and depth of our belief systems and relationships with Indigenous peoples, and that some views remain dominant while others are silenced. The overview of the development of the Treaty of Waitangi and Te Tiriti o Waitangi, as well as the earlier *He Whakaputanga o te Rangatiratanga o Nu Tireni*, illustrates the conflicting perspectives and contested narratives that have shaped our

historical journey. Restructuring of the education system through the focus on giving effect to Te Tiriti o Waitangi is a collective opportunity and responsibility. The need to make changes that reflect the structural response of society in Aotearoa New Zealand is urgent.

The articles in this Special Issue clearly articulate the need to focus on a coherent, systematic and sustained approach to change and improvement. Aotearoa New Zealand has not been successful in improving learner outcomes and reducing the significant inequities in those outcomes over the last two decades.

McNaughton argues that in addressing the challenges facing the system, we need to respond effectively to the issues of variability, scalability, sustainability and capability. Although we collectively know a lot about what it will take to achieve equity and excellence, we fail to act on it. Many articles highlight the need for increased investment in, and a more systematic approach to, evaluation, research and development.

Government agencies and research, policy and practice communities must take a collective, evidence-informed approach to policy development, implementation and evaluation that prioritises every learner's entitlement and access to quality education provision, and opportunity to learn and achieve success. Increased investment in leadership and professional capability building throughout the professional life course is critical in achieving system improvement. Berryman clearly articulates the challenges associated with achieving the transformative reform required in giving effect to Te Tiriti o Waitangi. Aotearoa New Zealand is at a crossroads.

We take this opportunity to thank our reviewers for their contributions to the journal.

No reira, tena koutou, tena koutou katoa.

Editorial Team
Ro Parsons, Joanna Higgins, and Grant Zouch