

Editorial

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Our intention in launching this journal is to provide a virtual collegial forum in which teachers, researchers, policymakers and others with an interest in teaching can safely document and explore the complexity of teachers' work in Aotearoa New Zealand (see also our website: teacherswork.ac.nz).

Unfortunately, safe dialogical spaces are few and far between. In the contemporary educational terrain the language of accountability dominates policy-making and, increasingly, institutional, workgroup and classroom practices. The largely tacit ethical practice of teaching in pursuit of greater social justice has long since been discarded in favour of observable behaviours and measurable outcomes to satisfy Treasury, State Services Commission and 'back to basics' politicians of various hues. For these lobbies, complexity and artistry in teaching are too difficult and too expensive to portray in all their richness and therefore not worth the effort; hence trust is out, narrow compliance is in.

To their discredit, senior managers in educational institutions have for the most part been unable to find the willingness, words and practices to rebut this narrow but all too pervasive official policy conception of teaching and learning. Indeed, in many cases they have merely taken on board without question the educationally impoverished language of efficiency, effectiveness and quality assurance.

In such an environment, it is vitally important to document and analyse the work teachers do in richer fashion. There are any number of justifications (theoretical, political, moral) for this but the following serve as our compass points for selecting contributions to this new journal.

First, teachers need to know that their work is valued on its own terms. The pieces in this journal hopefully speak about and to teachers in language that empathises with practitioners in their struggle to provide meaningful experiences for learners. Teachers should recognise in effect the sights, sounds and smells of the classroom, workgroup, institutional and community challenges they encounter day in and day out in the various pieces they read here.

Second, to teach in the public education service (early years, compulsory schooling and post-compulsory education and training) is properly to strive towards the attainment of a socially just society. In this journal we aim to provide portraits of and reflections on teaching contexts where teachers are trying to materially improve the life chances of learners, often against almost overwhelming political, economic and social odds. We want to illustrate how teachers exercise their agency in a society that under-resources teachers' work and to remind ourselves constantly how difficult and demanding a task that is.

Third, empathetic enquiry around teachers' work is a legitimate and necessary form of scholarly work. Empathy is based on understanding; understanding requires us to suspend judgment and to treat teachers and what they do with the utmost respect. Scholarly accounts of teachers' work too often fail in this regard, reducing teachers' philosophical, emotional and psychological endeavours in diverse contexts to atomised taxonomies of preferred antiseptic, sterile behaviours. We reject this form of analysis of teachers' work, arguing that teaching is contextually embedded and that in order to understand how teaching works, we also need to understand the contextual web within which teachers practise their craft.

Fourth, and most importantly, teachers are not victims of their occupational circumstances. On the contrary, good teachers actively mediate official policy texts and the demands these make on their routine and accustomed patterns of work. They question rather than simply accept or accommodate what the state bureaucracy, remote institutional managers or the community demands of them. Equally, they reject populist demands for new vogues in teaching and learning in favour of painstaking trial and error. Clearly, this highly political work can also be debilitating and dangerous in terms of personal survival and advancement. It can be a lonely, isolating form of commitment. In this regard, and without romanticising what we hope to achieve, we see the *New Zealand Journal of Teachers' Work* as something of a beacon and a haven for those who dare to question both official and populist views of what teachers can and should be doing.

The contents of the journal reflect these four principles. The journal is free and readily accessible by any teacher in the country. The editorial board is broadly representative of those who have an informed and vested (in the best sense of the term) interest in teachers' work. The journal contains a mixture of opinion pieces, research overviews and peer-reviewed articles, reflective discussions by teachers in the field and book reviews. In organising our forum in this way, we hope to attract contributions that promote thoughtful and articulate discussions around teachers' work as it is actually practised in early childhood settings, kohanga reo, schools, kura, wananga, polytechnics and universities in Aotearoa New Zealand.

Our commitment to this project is a long-term investment: intellectual, ideological and emotional. Our own work as teachers over several decades has convinced that we are not by any means alone in conceptualising teachers' work in these terms. We hope that you, our readers, will also want to recognise and affirm the importance of this journal in sustaining an articulate, passionate and worthwhile view of the unique responsibility that public sector teachers have in improving the quality of life for all members of our society.