



Editorial - The Truth About Teachers' Work

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One of the imperatives for launching this journal in 2004 was our assessment that a lot of simplistic and normative rubbish is talked and written about teachers' work – 'If only teachers would do, or say, or think this ...'. The rhetorical window-dressing may come in the form of teacher 'standards', 'competencies', 'characteristics', 'qualities' or whatever, but the underlying purpose of the exercise is always the same: 'As experts, we have reduced teaching to its essential, observable and measurable components. Here is the sequence for how to become a satisfactory/good/better/best teacher'. The problem, of course, is that worthwhile classroom teaching sequences are not genomic, as it were, and therefore cannot simply be cloned in the ways that Treasury and State Services Commission, ERO, the Education Forum, the Ministry of Education, Teachers Council, NZQA and other sections of the academy would have us believe.

As editors of NZJTW we want to develop a broadly-based journal that speaks with, to and about teachers in ways that reflect the realities of their routine work in all its complexities and challenges – i.e., teaching as the thoughtful and considered embodiment of diverse dispositions, activities and relationships that are held together by a sense of moral purpose and agency. To be sure, our resultant 'conversations' with teachers may at first be hesitant, untidy and comparatively subjective; we might take many years to arrive at a shared language that describes in sufficient depth and precision the aspects of teachers' work that we all consider important enough to warrant serious consideration and reflection; and some of our contributors could initially struggle to articulate in continuous prose what was being attempted intuitively, why and how in their heterogenous centres or classrooms. Nevertheless, a year on from our launch we remain committed to the view that much of what currently passes for political, bureaucratic or scholarly analysis of teachers' work in Aotearoa New Zealand constitutes an impoverished, reductionist and technocratic agenda to control and dictate what teachers do from a position of powerful ignorance.

This journal is determined to provide a counter-space in which resistant discourses around teaching can find voice and flourish. A significant danger to this enterprise is that by its very nature, and in its preferred medium of the printed word, scholarly analysis will dominate the indigenous. We want to avoid this; to do so we must have accounts of their work written by practising teachers in home-school settings, early childhood centres, schools, polytechnics, teacher education colleges, advisory positions, educational agencies and anywhere else that thoughtful, reflexive and committed teaching takes place. This is our plea for you to write for us!

Every day in our early childhood centres, schools and tertiary settings, teachers help their students as they struggle to make sense of their lives in an era of state education provision that is increasingly characterised by damaging, ideologically driven, quick-fix, sticking plaster policy text solutions to complex and relatively intractable real educational problems. This journal aims to document

these struggles over curriculum, assessment, teaching and learning in respectful ways. In order for us to achieve our aim, we need ordinary, conscientious teachers to contribute to the journal, by documenting examples, folk-tales if you will, of how and why they engage in such struggles, individually and collectively, and of their effects on teachers' emotions and energies, now and over time.

From the comparative remove of a system level analysis, we know that teachers in public education suffer the effects of cheap 'parallel import' education policy initiatives from across the Anglophone world, the daily pedagogical consequences of the continuing fragmentation of local communities caused by chronic underfunding of basic health, welfare and social services, and the effects on students of casualised adult employment for many parents and caregivers. We also know, however, that there are numerous instances of teachers up and down the country successfully resisting the imposition of harmful education policy demands or of creatively adapting them to meet the needs of their students, colleagues and communities. For obvious reasons, stories of resistance rarely get into print. Official models of good teaching tend not to include the conviction to say 'no' when necessary in order to protect the long-term interests of students and colleagues.

In contrast, the many disparate and instrumental truth claims made around teaching by interest groups from across the ideological spectrum have done little more than create an unseemly cacophony of noise, what Popper once referred to as 'information pollution'. The difficulty for teachers who want to question and enrich their centre or classroom practice for the benefit of 'their' students is how to read the 'truth' from among all the possible sources of knowledge about teaching, some of which clearly 'lie' through omitting from their analysis key features of what it is that teachers do. Given that too much of this information pollution emanates from our competitively oriented tertiary sector institutions and PBRF-hungry (Performance Based Research Fund) individual researchers, who ought to know a lot better, it seems to us that there is a place for journals such as this that simply want to engage critically minded teachers and researchers in productive dialogue around what it really means to be a successful teacher in educational settings in New Zealand today. Like Jean Rudduck (1994: 7), however, we want to avoid 'sugar-coated accounts' of teaching practice that will simply be dismissed by teachers as unrealistic. Rather, we want to help teachers to 'learn directly from accounts of practice in settings which are similar enough to their own to ensure engagement but different enough to offer new angles and possibilities for action' because, like her, we recognise that 'teachers who are trying to move forward with their colleagues may take heart from recognising that the snares and setbacks that they are experiencing are not unique to their situation'.

REFERENCES

- Rudduck, J. (1994). *Developing a gender policy in secondary schools*. Buckingham, UK: Open University Press.