



Editorial: Shouldn't 'Normal' Schools be More Normal?

New Zealand Journal of Teachers' Work, Volume 8, Issue 2, 90-93, 2011

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New Zealand's first Normal schools were established in Otago (1876), Canterbury (1877), Wellington (1880) and Auckland (1881). They provided an environment for both the education and practice of trainee teachers (Harte, 1972). In those days it was a relatively modest enterprise. The schools' respective first year enrolments were 27, 53, 12 and 12 students. By December 1886, their respective total student rolls were 59, 45, 18 and 21 (p. 35).

In 1904, the Select Committee on Education recommended that these become training colleges for teachers, situated as they were in the main university centres. The subsequent regulations for training colleges and pupil-teachers were issued in March 1905. These distinguished between the 'training college' and the 'normal' or 'practising' school. The new normal school, devoted to the practice of trainee teachers, was envisaged to comprise a main school (up to 300 pupils), a model country school (35-40 pupils), and a secondary department (40 pupils) (pp. 40-41). Students attending the Colleges were either Division A (successful ex-pupil teachers who had passed Matriculation), Division B (no previous teaching experience but with Matriculation or a higher University qualification), or practising teachers (p. 41). In terms of a national strategy, 'the whole trend of Departmental policy was in the direction of co-ordinating, as closely as possible, the work of the Training Colleges with that of University Colleges' (p. 41). The colony was growing rapidly through immigration and 'naturally' looked to Europe for models of teacher education to enable public provision of basic universal primary education to a predominantly anglophone British settler population.

Today, Aotearoa New Zealand is markedly different. In 2010, the school population was approximately 55 percent New Zealand European (NZE), 22 percent Māori, 10 percent Pasifika, 9 percent Asian and 2 percent other ethnicities (Ministry of Education, 2011). The Ministry of Education has in recent years consistently chanted the ideological mantra that background and family circumstances are no excuse for poor educational outcomes. As a consequence, it has prioritised initiatives to improve the attainment of Māori and Pasifika children in particular. In the last two decades successive governments have also greatly increased the proportion of operational funding that is allocated to schools in lower decile communities on the basis that socio-economic deprivation is also a significant barrier to educational achievement. Finally, 'quality teaching' [sic], particularly the commitment of teachers to meet the needs of diverse learners, has been proselytised as the most influential education policy lever at the Ministry's disposal in seeking to 'close the achievement gap' and make New Zealand's so-called 'long tail of underachievement' in the international league tables, disappear.

Logically, then, one might expect our cohort of Normal schools, as specially designated and funded demonstration or practice schools for aspiring teachers, to have been 're-engineered' over time to help support these laudable aspirational goals. It is rather surprising, then, to see that they still remain on the whole much

closer to what they always have been, both in terms of their geographical locations and the overall demography of their student composition. This inevitably raises questions about the degree of 'fit' between the soaring Ministry rhetoric of 'quality teaching for diverse learners' and the duller reality of an historical anachronism whereby practice schools are located, for convenience of access, close to the universities which are mostly located in the better parts of town. This, it must be emphasised, is no criticism of the Normal schools themselves, merely a wondering on our part why governments and the Ministry of Education have not acted over time to increase the number and diversity of Normal schools to make them, as a group, more representative of Aotearoa New Zealand's diverse community, both in relation to income distribution and bicultural and multicultural population.

In 2011, the country has 22 Normal schools and a handful of model country schools. Table One contrasts all schools in Aotearoa New Zealand (ANZ; in blue) with Normal schools by decile and ethnicity. Intermediate schools are shaded.

Area	Name ¹	Decile (1-10)	NZE (%)	Māori (%)	Pasifika (%)	Asian (%)	Other (%)
All ANZ schools²			55	22	10	9	2
Auckland	Auckland Intermediate	9	43	3	3	43	8
	Epsom	9	24	2	3	61	10
	Mount Eden	10	63	6	4	16	11
	Papakura	3	22	51	16	5	6
	Sunnybrae	6	35	10	8	38	9
	Takapuna Intermediate	9	45	5	1	37	12
Hamilton	Berkley Middle	9	63	12	2	13	10
	Knighton	5	29	37	9	14	11
	Hillcrest	9	69	6	-	20	5
	Silverdale	7	33	30	7	6	24
Palmerston North	Central Normal	4	41	48	4	5	2
	College Street	9	59	9	2	18	12
	PN Intermediate	9	58	16	3	12	11
Wellington	Karori	10	68	-	-	9	23
	Karori West	9	63	9	8	12	8
	Kelburn	10	79	2	-	12	7
	Raroa	10	73	7	2	15	3
Christchurch	Elmwood	10	79	7	-	2	12
	Heaton Intermediate	9	80	6	-	7	7
Dunedin	Dunedin NE Valley	5	66	19	3	8	4
	George Street	9	73	13	1.5	6	6.5
	Tahuna Intermediate	8	71	12	3	4	10

Table 1. Normal schools by decile and student ethnicity

¹ Individual school information is from the latest accurate Education Review Office (ERO) report for each school.

² These figures are as at July 2010 and derived from Ministry of Education (2011) Statistical Table A12.

In terms of their socio-economic distribution: there is only one low decile 3 school; five mid-decile 4-7 schools; and, the remaining 16 schools are high deciles 8-10. In total, 15 of the 22 Normal schools nationally are decile 9 or 10, while none are decile 1 or 2 (with the average decile for all Normal schools being 8). All the intermediate Normal schools are decile 8 or 9.

One simple, constructive way for government to balance the list, then, would be to identify fifteen decile one and two primary schools nationally that demonstrate both exemplary teaching and a supportive culture of teacher learning, and to designate these all new Normal schools. If teaching quality is so important to the government agenda, surely the argument for more rather than less exemplary practice schools in which aspiring teachers can learn their craft is compelling.

In terms of their distribution by ethnicity: six of the existing Normal schools have 5 percent or less Māori students; seven schools have between 6 and 10 percent; and, three schools have between 11 and 15 percent Māori (with an average Māori learner representation for all Normal schools of 13.8%, and only four Normal schools being over the national average). The figure for the school population as a whole is 22.5 percent Māori learners (and growing). In addition, the under-representation of Pasifika students in our Normal school learner populations is even more apparent. In only two schools is Pasifika learner representation consistent with the national school population demographic and in fully 20 of the 22 Normal schools, Asian students outnumber Pasifika students despite their very different predicted schooling outcome trajectories. Put very crudely, those students who are most likely to succeed in education irrespective of the quality of teaching are grossly over-represented in our Normal school populations; while those students who are least likely to achieve even with the best teaching, are grossly under-represented.

In times of fiscal austerity, how much would it actually cost to create an additional fifteen Normal schools in decile 1 and 2 school communities nationally? Let's assume for the purposes of argument that each school would have around 250 students and approximately a dozen permanent teaching staff. In 2011, Normal and country model schools receive an additional \$7.30 per student per annum via an operations grant component (\$1,825 per school, or \$27,375 per annum for 15 new Normal schools) (Ministry of Education, undated).

Normal schools receive an additional 1FTE mentoring and coordination staffing allowance (say \$75,000 including on-costs [such as superannuation] per school, or \$1,125,000 per annum for 15 new Normal schools). They also receive up to two additional management units per school to support pre-service teacher education practical experiences (\$8,000 per school, or \$120,000 per annum for 15 new Normal schools). All teachers in Normal schools receive an additional salary entitlement of \$2,000. This equates to \$24,000 per school, or \$360,000 per annum across our fifteen new decile 1 and 2 Normal schools.

By our calculation, this gives a grand total of \$1,632,375 per annum to establish and maintain 15 new Normal schools in decile 1 and 2 communities throughout the country. Over four years, this new initiative would in our estimation require an increase in Vote Education of \$6,529,500.

In the 2011 Budget, the government announced a new initiative to '*Develop a Framework to Ensure Consistency of Teachers' Judgments against National Standards*'. It has been allocated operating and capital funding from Vote Education of \$9,677,000 over four years.

In terms of addressing the 'wicked problem' of structurally embedded educational underachievement, both initiatives attempt to reshape what we understand by 'normal' in our schooling system, but in radically different ways. We believe only one of these two initiatives represents value for money; and only one is likely to lead to better and more meaningful learning for our most educationally disadvantaged students.

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