



## Concluding Editorial – The Future of Teacher Professionalism and Professionalism in Teaching

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This editorial is our last as joint editors. From Volume 11, Issue 2, guardianship of the journal will move to a new team based at Auckland University of Technology: Leon Benade, Nesta Devine and Joce Jesson. We are very pleased that the work of the journal will continue, but for us it is time to hand over after 21 issues and more than a decade.

The journal was launched as a consequence of a two-day seminar on the politics of teachers' work, held at Massey University Palmerston North, with the support of seeding funding from the New Zealand Association for Research in Education (NZARE). The aim of the journal has always been to provide a safe space to engage in collegial discussions about the complexities of teachers' work. In our first editorial in 2004, we observed that:

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. (p. 1)

In 2014, this agenda is still very much in vogue although over the course of the last decade, politicians and officials have become far more adept at hegemonic work: persuading teachers that learning to comply with policy demands and to provide regular displays of compliance for the reassurance of others in the workplace is 'being professional'.

A key ideological battleground today concerns what we might call the taxonomy of teaching. Since this journal was launched, the word 'teaching' has been spot-welded in policy texts to the word 'quality'. It is now virtually impossible to participate in education policy discourse in New Zealand without using the noun couplet 'quality teaching' [sic]. The most influential source for the quality teaching noun couplet has been the first 'Best Evidence Synthesis', written by Dr Adrienne Alton-Lee in 2003, and published by the Ministry of Education. In that policy text, quality teaching acquired a new but seemingly precise meaning:

Quality teaching is identified as a key influence on high quality outcomes for diverse students. The evidence reveals that up to 59% of variance in student performance is attributable to differences between teachers and classes, while up to almost 21%, but generally less, is attributable to school level variables. (Alton-Lee, 2003, p. v)

Despite this and subsequent 'best efforts' to quantify the effects of a whole range of variables on student outcomes (based on systematic, iterative analyses of 'quality research'), quality teaching remains a dangerous proxy concept in the sense that it acts as a cover for any and every political agenda in publicly-funded education that aims to further circumscribe teacher autonomy.

Ironically, given the political and emotional investment in the precision of the quality teaching couplet, across early childhood, compulsory and tertiary education environments, there are just as many, if not more, policy initiatives that are designed to blur the definition of teachers and teaching. For example, in early childhood education, the nonsensical official advice that no research has been conducted to prove whether having 100% qualified teachers is better or worse than having 80% or 50%, or any other % qualified teachers, was used to justify capping government funding aimed at increasing the proportion of qualified teachers in teacher-led centres.

Similarly, following an infamously cynical 'cup of tea' compact between the National and Act parties, publicly-funded, privately-owned charter schools were introduced to the primary and secondary schooling sectors in New Zealand in order to permit 'flexibility' in the mix of qualified and unqualified 'teachers' on staff. Sadly, the flexibility to employ unqualified teachers [sic] in over-resourced, boutique schools was argued to be the answer to the problem of the one in five students who were supposedly being 'failed by the school system'. And most recently, the politically motivated determination to break organised teacher labour in New Zealand education has seen the plan to replace the Crown controlled New Zealand Teachers' Council with a supposedly independent statutory body for teachers, which will nevertheless be called the Education Council of Aotearoa New Zealand (EDUCANZ). While this body is likely to be responsible, quite appropriately, for assuring the competence, conduct and ethics of qualified, registered, practising teachers, it will also be responsible for assuring the competence, conduct and ethics of unqualified 'educators'.

In 2014, then, it is difficult to remain hopeful about the future of professionalism (the politics of gaining public respect and trust) and professionalism (the virtues of being respected and trustworthy) in teaching. In our view, it is even more difficult to be optimistic about the years ahead. Despite, or because of, where we are in 2014, the role of the *New Zealand Journal of Teachers' Work* remains vital. It still provides a dialogical space in which alternative accounts of teaching can be told and shared. In this sense we are both hopeful and optimistic that the journal will be in good hands with its new editorial team.

## REFERENCE

Alton-Lee, A. (2003). *Quality teaching for diverse students in schooling: Best Evidence Synthesis Iteration (BES)*. Wellington: Ministry of Education.