



Editorial: 20 Years of Teachers' Work – looking back and looking forward (Part 1)

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This year marks the 20th anniversary of the *New Zealand Journal of Teachers' Work*. We use this opportunity to look back on how teachers' work has developed and changed – or not – over the past 20 years, and we will look forward to what can be expected and what might surprise us in the years to come. The journal was founded in 2004 by co-editors John O'Neill and Paul Adams at a time when education and the work teachers do was changing and under pressure. One of the key drivers for establishing the journal, as outlined in the inaugural editorial, was to provide a forum to “safely document and explore the complexity of teachers' work in Aotearoa New Zealand” (O'Neill & Adams, 2004, p. 1). 20 years later, education and the reality of teachers' work remains complex and is arguably under even higher pressure. The situation for educators and education in Aotearoa New Zealand seems to have hit crisis point this year, culminating in strikes by unionised teachers across the early childhood, primary, and secondary education sectors. The corresponding tensions in the tertiary sector can be seen in the consistent managerialist attacks on staff positions and degree programmes at public universities and polytechnics (Bunting, 2023; Gaston, 2023; Heinemann, 2023; Kitchin, 2023; RNZ, 2022; Salter, 2022; Wiggins, 2023; Williams & Girao, 2023).

Arguably, good education is the basis for a functioning and thriving society, economy and democracy. However, high workload as well as emotional pressures can lead to burnout and mental health challenges for teachers and educators across the sector, complicated by financial challenges particularly for beginning teachers (Kitchin, 2023; Wiggins, 2023). Such pressures undercut education's pivotal position within the public good.

The neoliberal mantra of accountability, measurement, marketisation and performativity was noted in O'Neill and Adams' first editorial: 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” (p. 1). 20 years later, we can see some of the long-term outcomes of this way of thinking informing education policy, management and funding – a situation mirrored in other service areas in Aotearoa New Zealand as well, such as the health system (e.g., Lorgelly, 2022).

We also note that the situation and outcomes for so-called ‘priority learners’, most notably Māori and Pasifika students, remains precarious. Structural inequities continue despite the efforts of many teachers, principals, educators, and leaders in education. And here, it is not only the lack of appropriate service and support for ākongā, but also the continued unproportionally low number of Māori teachers and academics. While the number of full-time Māori academics, for example, has increased somewhat (from 290 in 2013 to 350 in 2022), the overall percentage of 8% remains well below the national demographic (Education Counts, 2023). In this context, Te Kawehau Hoskins and Alison Jones (2023) discuss the inherent challenges of the current ‘inclusion’ approach of universities that aims to make a predominantly Pākehā system more acceptable for Māori and instead advocate for a stronger Te Tiriti approach of *indigenising our universities*.

At this juncture, where the future of our country and the future of our young generation is at stake, we challenge politicians, managers and leaders in education to interrogate the impact of neoliberal ideology and austerity in education on the future opportunities of our society and country – and to stall its march. A challenge that is often voiced but more nuanced than it might seem, as neoliberal ideology has entered the educational body to the point that educators, managers and policy makers are accustomed to it to the point of not seeing its workings and impact on structures and practices in education. The impacts on reduced teacher autonomy, narrowness of curriculum and focus on visible, immediately measurable outcomes are now part of the educational furniture as it were, and the threats O’Neill and Adams commented on in their 2004 editorial have come to pass. One of the latest examples can be found in the current challenges in the tertiary sector, such as imminent staff losses in multiple universities and the disruption caused by the merger of polytechnics under a single national body. As Gaston (2023) puts it, speaking for the university sector:

there is little doubt universities face real challenges, from the changing nature of work, to increased expectations of digital learning, and the implications of artificial intelligence tools. But cutting staff undermines the sector’s capacity to deal with those challenges in the first place – because capacity lies at the heart of this issue.

The loss of academics in universities and across the tertiary sector jeopardizes not only the current government’s research strategy. It also can have a spiral effect of fewer students enrolling in programmes that, because they are understaffed, do not provide the vibrancy one would expect from a tertiary programme. Nik Taylor and Zoi Sutton (2023) provide a bleak account of the current situation for academics at our universities and the situation might still get worse.

So, we see that the challenges teachers and academics in Aotearoa New Zealand face have changed somewhat since 2004, but they have not decreased. Rather, these challenges have intensified and reached a new high in this 20th year of NZJTW and continues the need for an open and robust critique of the circumstances of teachers’ work. This said, not all is doom and gloom. The new Collective Agreements reached between the ECE and Primary teachers union NZEI and the Ministry of Education sends a positive signal that the current government will take steps to improve the situation for centres, schools, and

teachers. In the week of writing this editorial, the government also announced additional funding and a possible review of the funding model for universities. While some might say 'too little, too late' (staff cuts are still on the table for some universities), it shows some movement at least. Also at the time of writing, negotiations between the Government and the Post Primary Teachers' Association for teachers in secondary schools are still ongoing. We hope that another positive light will shine at the end of this process.

We would also like to support Gaston's call to the government to make adjustments to the funding of universities to prevent the loss of expertise and capacity at our universities, which is not just a local matter of employment but will affect the capacity for research, development and higher education for our young generation and the country.

We want to end this editorial, which is the first part of our 'looking back and looking forward' theme this year, with a few announcements regarding the journal and encourage readers – teachers and academics alike – to respond to our call for papers. Firstly, we are pleased to announce that previously unavailable issues of NZJTW are now being archived online, meaning that pre-2013 issues will be digitally available, and that the journal's moves into the next 20 years will encompass a full and complete digitally available record. In this issue, as editors, we have selected a number of particularly impactful and pertinent articles from the journal's past and reprinted them under the new "Editors' choice" section¹. These articles have been selected from NZJTW's first decade. Their resonance continues today. In our second edition this year, we will showcase selected articles from the journal's second decade.

Additionally, we have refreshed the format of the journal and selected a new font that was designed to be better readable in print and online. And finally, the journal's stewardship has transitioned this year from Auckland University of Technology's School of Education to the University of Canterbury's Faculty of Education. We would like to express our deep appreciation and thanks again to Associate Professor Leon Benade and Professor Nesta Devine, who took on the roles as co-editor of the journal in 2011 and facilitated the transition of the journal from Massey to AUT at the time. We would also like to express our thanks to the ongoing publishing support the journal receives from Tuwhera (AUT Library) and to UC's Faculty of Education for taking up the mantle of supporting the journal. We have further projects under development to be reported on in the next issue this year.

We trust you will enjoy the current issue of NZJTW with new and reprinted articles and we would like to invite you, dear reader, to submit for the next issue a reflection or opinion piece on your own teaching experience. What challenges do we face in education today, and which highlights do we experience? How do we envision education and teachers' work to be and to develop in Aotearoa over the next 20 years?

¹ We would like to acknowledge the work of our research assistant PhD candidate Komathi Ramiah, who has been instrumental in uploading the archived issues onto the website and in converting past articles into the new format for the editors' choice section.

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