



## 20 Years of Teachers' Work – looking back and looking forward (Part 2)

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### TOITŪ TE TIRITI, TOITŪ TE WHENUA, TOITŪ TE REO.

This editorial celebrates the new, in the form of welcoming two new editors, and reflects on the old, in the form of 20 years of valuing teachers' work, and resisting encroachments on the *mana* of teachers and the teaching profession.

We can start with good tidings for NZJTW, by welcoming Associate Editors Kay-Lee Jones (Kaupapa Māori portfolio editor) and Helena Cook (Kaupapa Pacific portfolio editor). With the stewardship of the journal having moved to the University of Canterbury, Kay-Lee and Helena, both faculty at UC, have agreed to join the editorial team and help progress and strengthen the journal with a particular eye on strengthening indigenous voices and kaupapa. We are looking forward to the exciting developments ahead for the journal with your support.

In this second anniversary editorial, we start again with a look to the past to consider the future of teachers' work. We include another collection of *Editors' Choice* articles, this time from the past 10 years of the journal from 2014 to today. We also revisited the final editorial during the last transition of the journal's stewardship in 2014, in which founding editors John O'Neill and Paul Adams (2014) commented critically on the then imminent introduction of charter schools and the cementation of a certain interpretation of 'quality teaching' in the public and political discourse. Sadly, this discourse appears to have become naturalised, to the point that it seems to influence teachers' own views on their work and their working environment in many cases. And while this is a legacy that continues to challenge our sector, new developments in recent weeks have emerged with the formation of a new government in Aotearoa New Zealand which has overshadowed the tentative light on the horizon emerging over the past years with new dark clouds.

*Toitū te tiriti, toitū te whenua, toitū te reo.* – There is genuine worry among many Māori and non-Māori alike; with protests occurring countrywide to detest the government's proposed treaty referendum bill. The removal of te reo

Māori first names from government agencies and the plan to prevent further bonuses for public servants with te reo Māori proficiency are issues that educators, particularly Māori educators, will be looking at with concern. Māori and Pacific tamariki are already more likely to struggle with generational language and culture loss, deficit model stereotypes and disconnection from the education system. The new government's focus on standardised testing and achievement fails to address these factors which underpin the educational journey of many Māori and Pacific young people in Aotearoa, and the government neglects the harm that their current rhetoric around te tiriti may cause to young learners. As a mother of Māori, Samoan tamariki and educator in kaupapa Māori settings for many years, Kay-Lee shares her concerns:

My Dad went through an education system that did not value his ancestral language or culture. I have attempted to put my tamariki, his mokopuna, in spaces where their cultural identity is empowered. My children, listening to the comments the government is making, wouldn't be wrong in feeling, they are lesser, their language is not valued, or that they are not good enough. Now more than ever te reo Māori must flow from our mouths with pride, and we must be resolute in our pursuit for mana ōrite (equity) in all spheres.

The change of government to a more conservative 'coalition' presents numerous challenges for teachers, academics as well as whānau/aiga. Overall, we seem to be looking at a rather nostalgic desire to turn the cultural face of Aotearoa New Zealand back to the one it wore in the 1970s, while its economic facet reminds us of Ruth Richardson's management of the economy. In this context, Education cannot expect to fare well. Apart from the evident desire to turn back the clock with regard to Māori, politically and educationally, the evident desire to cut back the costs of government is intrinsically linked to the idea (or fantasy) of 'homo economicus', which was interpreted with regard to the public service, in all its forms, including teaching, as 'provider capture'. The implications of that include stringent restrictions on school budgets and teacher salaries.

In more specific moves, a resurgence of charter (or partnership) schools and other policy fads seem on the horizon again (Schwanecke, 2023). While the details of what is to come for the education sector and teachers' work is still somewhat unclear, the changes proposed so far seem disruptive on multiple fronts and not much has been signalled that is well supported by the sector of teaching professionals or by robust research evidence. Unquestionably, our country and education system are facing significant challenges, some of which we mentioned in the last editorial. Evidence based policies – i.e., supported by relevant (ideally) New Zealand based (not necessarily empirical) research – and ways forward are likely to be neglected in favour of ideologically founded policies. Unfortunately, in education the voices are many and (too) often, it is not the voices of the professionals and experts that are heard or listened to, but those who are loudest, most connected, or just seem to say what parties in power want to hear. Indeed, these voices invite the specific objections of 'lobbying' and 'the agency problem'. The question we should keep at the forefront when critically

evaluating policy directions is: *who benefits and who is disadvantaged?*<sup>1</sup> – This is illustrated in some of the reflections and opinion pieces we gathered in this special topic edition.

Some of the challenges we see, and hope the sector will tackle despite some of the distracting policies and directives that are to be expected, include the still dominant narrative of self-maximization and individualism in education that we would argue should be balanced by a more collaborative and holistic approach to education, teaching and learning. How would education and schooling look, guided by a mindset that is not driven by the need to win and to getting ‘ahead of the game’, but on supporting each other and using the different strengths that each tamariki (and kaiako for that matter) have? An education system that actively seeks to decolonise spaces and institutions and works towards true Tiriti partnership? An education system that does not lead towards, but combats, the issues of rising anxiety, mental ill-being and fear of failure in our young generation? John O’Neil in his presentation at this year’s NZARE conference pointed out the (negative) effects of emphasising standardised learning outcomes in schools rather than placing the aspiration of educational practice and teachers’ work to develop students into well-rounded, holistic human beings at the centre. This, again, raises the question of what education should be for – or what we should want education to be for. What kind of society do we want to live in, and how can schools support this ideal vision to come to pass? Now, more than ever, the work of kaiako matters, particularly with regards to supporting groups vulnerable to inequity and injustice.

Of course, education in Aotearoa New Zealand does not occur in geographical or ideological isolation. Rather, global developments in thinking, flows of technology, capital, and people, and geopolitical tensions and conflicts within our wider region and beyond all impact upon the nature and characteristics of education. As our children and young people grow up in increasingly interconnected and increasingly complex times in a warming and warring world, the value of education, and of critically educated teachers, that can seek critical solutions to collective challenges cannot be overstated. Our tūpuna (ancestors) across the Pacific had an interconnected relationship with the land and waters. Many live this way today. If our educators prioritise this connection, one that asserts that we are the mountains and the rivers are part of us, our tamariki and mokopuna may have a different outlook and responsibility to our environment. As a Pacific nation, Aotearoa New Zealand has a responsibility to examine our place in the region and to *teu le vā* (nurture or care for) the relationships which exist in this space. This requires critical analysis of our own values of knowledge and education and the ways in which we connect these to a wider and more global context.

So, looking back at the challenges mentioned here and in the other contributions to this special topic, and envisioning a different future, we see much need for an ongoing dialogue between teachers, researchers, policy makers and the public – a dialogue that this journal of *Teachers’ Work* will continue to support, thanks to the many dedicated teachers and researchers who publish their articles and engage in conversation, our strong readership, and through our

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<sup>1</sup> A phrase that late Prof. Kathleen Quinlivan saw as central when looking at education through a sociological lens.

growing editorial team. We are pleased to announce in this anniversary year that early back issues of the journal, which were not available on the website for some time, have now been made available again through a grant from the UC Faculty of Education and support of our research assistant Komathi Ramaya, so we can be assured that our papers do not disappear into the mists of the past, but remain available and cogent for present and future discussion.

As editors of *New Zealand Journal of Teachers' Work*, we would like to thank all authors, reviewers, readers, the editorial board and all supporters who are part of the journal's history and future, and we are looking forward to the next 20 years of *NZJTW*.

## REFERENCES

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