



Editorial: Courage, Freedom and Educational Know-how

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Journals depend on the inspiration of their authors for their content. Despite the unique contributions to this issue, as a whole, it continues to reflect some of the ongoing and significant debates and issues for New Zealand education.

Thomas Knaus inspires the title of this editorial when he observes that, in the context of using digital devices more effectively in a pedagogic sense than is currently the norm, it is important “to give (teachers) the courage, the freedom and the educational know-how”. The other contributions to this issue too reflect this need for ‘courage, freedom and educational know-how’.

Clearly, the neo-liberal framework under which we operate at present limits all three of these qualities: by insisting on strictly defined and measurable literacy and numeracy achievement, the curriculum is narrowed, both in schools and in the Initial Teacher Education (ITE) sector. Robyn Trinick and Dawn Joseph point out that “neo-liberal policies in Australia and New Zealand [are] paring away the provision of a rich curriculum for all students”. This process robs student teachers of both the knowledge and educational know-how required to be effective music teachers.

Similar observations were made by Mere Berryman in the context of the virtual abandonment of the *Te Kotahitanga* project, a teacher professional learning approach supporting teachers in their work with Māori students¹: “We have an increasingly narrow curriculum and assessment focus rather than understanding learning as part of school-wide cultural reform...Culture and identity are being forgotten” (Collins, 2017). Berryman’s comments were reflecting on the devolution of professional learning to so-called ‘communities of learning’ (CoL) that have far narrower concerns—a point also made in a teacher reflection piece by Clare Curtice.

Keeping with the theme of Māori achievement, Georgina Stewart draws attention to a highly specific area in which courage, freedom and know-how are essential to improving the outcomes and experiences of Maori students: in science education. Although Stewart focuses on the need for broader forms of knowledge—philosophy and history of science in particular, there can be no doubt that teachers who try to implement a truly critical, historically and philosophically informed form of bilingual or culturally cognisant science are going to require both courage and freedom.

¹ Yet, in 2010-2012, this project demonstrated that “the achievement of Māori students (as measured by NCEA levels 1–3) in Phase 5 schools improved at around three times the rate of Māori in the comparison schools” (Alton-Lee, 2015, p. 9).

Whether the goals of New Zealand education are encapsulated in the terms 'bilingual', 'bi-cultural', culturally responsive or Te Tiriti-based, we recognise in New Zealand an earnest and widespread (if never quite as widespread as we would wish) desire to do things better. Chris Jenkin's work reflects many years of commitment and reflection on these issues of courage, freedom and know-how in the area of New Zealand's efforts to produce a fairer education system for its Māori Treaty partner.

Such freedom is unlikely to be enhanced by the form of creeping privatisation that John O'Neill describes. Although charter, or partnership, schools are presented as offering forms of freedom, that freedom is generally restricted to the founding parties, and is enjoyed by the owners or trust boards, rather than teachers and students in the form of adventurous or developing curriculum beyond what is envisaged by the founders. For state schools creeping privatisation can only inhibit the effort to produce the well-rounded citizen which was once its goal.

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