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Te Hautaka Mātauranga o Waikato

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*Special Edition:*  
Reclaiming and reframing  
teacher education in Aotearoa New Zealand



# WAIKATO JOURNAL OF EDUCATION

## TE HAUTAKA MĀTAURANGA O WAIKATO

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## Te Hautaka Mātauranga o Waikato

Volume 18, Issue 1, 2013

Editorial introduction: Reclaiming and reframing a national voice for teacher education <i>John O'Neill, Sally Hansen, Peter Rawlins and Judith Donaldson</i>	3
Policy driven reforms and the role of teacher educators in reframing teacher education in the 21st century <i>Diane Mayer</i>	7
Is initial teacher education a profession? <i>John O'Neill</i>	21
Rapporteurs' report: Is initial teacher education a profession? <i>Beverley Norsworthy</i>	33
Teacher education policy in New Zealand since 1970 <i>Noeline Alcorn</i>	37
Rapporteurs' report: Teacher education policy in New Zealand since 1970 <i>Andy Begg and Barbara Allan</i>	49
Towards equity through initial teacher education <i>Dr Airini</i>	53
Rapporteurs' report: Towards equity through initial teacher education <i>Chris Jenkin and John Clark</i>	67
From preparation to practice: Tensions and connections <i>Mary Simpson and Lexie Grudnoff</i>	71
Rapporteurs' report: From preparation to practice: Tensions and connections <i>Monica Cameron and Walt Rutgers</i>	83
What are the characteristics of exemplary initial teacher education programmes in countries similar to Aotearoa/New Zealand? <i>Peter Lind</i>	87
Rapporteurs' report: What are the characteristics of exemplary initial teacher education programmes in countries similar to Aotearoa/New Zealand? <i>Peter Lind, Barry Brooker and Beverley Cooper</i>	101
What should initial teacher education programmes for 2022 look like and why? <i>Jane Gilbert</i>	105
Rapporteurs' report: What should initial teacher education programmes for 2022 look like and why? <i>Letitia Fickel and Julie Mackey</i>	117

What evidence-base do we need to build a stronger theory-practice nexus? <i>Lisa F. Smith</i>	121
Rapporteurs' report: What evidence-base do we need to build a stronger theory-practice nexus? <i>Judith Donaldson and Kama Weir</i>	131
Who should develop initial teacher education policy and why? <i>Judie Alison and Sandra Aikin</i>	135
Rapporteurs' report: Who should develop initial teacher education policy and why? <i>Graham Jackson and Jenny Ritchie</i>	147
Special Interest Group report: Tātaiako: Cultural competencies for teachers of Māori learners <i>Jen McLeod and Pani Kenrick</i>	151
Special Interest Group report: Early Childhood Education <i>Kerry Bethell</i>	155
Special Interest Group report: ICT/eLearning competencies in ITE <i>Mary Simpson</i>	159
Special Interest Group report: Learning languages in ITE <i>Adèle Scott</i>	163
Special Interest Group report: Literacy and numeracy competency of ITE students <i>Beverley Cooper and Bev Norsworthy</i>	165
Special Interest Group report: Inclusive education in ITE <i>Missy Morton</i>	171
Special Interest Group report: Sustainability in initial teacher education <i>Jenny Ritchie</i>	175



## **Rapporteurs' report: Teacher education policy in New Zealand since 1970**

### **Presenter**

**Noeline Alcorn**

### **Rapporteurs**

**Andy Begg**

Auckland University of Technology **and**

**Barbara Allan**

Te Tari Puna Ora o Aotearoa New Zealand Childcare Association

Noeline Alcorn's paper and questions stimulated considerable debate and more questions than solutions. The responses covered policy, curriculum, context, sectors, and collaboration.

### **Policy**

Policy was defined as a plan of action adopted by a person, a group or a government, (underpinned by educational, economic, political and personal philosophies), and made by governments, institutions and individuals. Concern was expressed regarding links between policy and practice being temporal rather than causal, and a lack of acknowledgement of underpinning philosophies and overseas influences.

Policy 'flip-flops' as a result of three-year government terms were contrasted with Finland's situation where cross-party consensus prevailed. Mention was also made of large countries where policies are made at multiple levels, small countries where personal connections might unduly influence policies, and New Zealand's policy being too closely linked with economics. Our tradition of experimentation was mentioned, and the current drive to standardisation was seen as counterproductive—one size does not fit all.

One participant asked, "Should we be interested in education policy?" Others responded: we must find what works to unite parties, we have to strike where it hurts, and parents are concerned with what's "good for their children".



## **Curriculum**

The lack of teacher education curriculum policy was noted and the question asked, “What constitutes the ideal curriculum for pre-service teachers?” The lack of influence of the school curriculum on initial teacher education was discussed. One participant suggested that the Essential Skills from 1993 and the Key Competencies from 2007 implied that something more important than subjects existed. Linked to this was the question of how much time should be spent lecturing and how much should be devoted to enquiry-based learning to prepare trainees to be autonomous lifelong learners. Numeracy and literacy projects, national standards and NCEA also exist, but their influence was similarly not evident.

Regarding assessment, it was asked whether teacher education adequately addresses assessment, and educational underachievement by Māori and Polynesian students and those from low socio-economic backgrounds.

## **Context**

The contextual issues causing concern included yearly variation of intake size, cultural challenges due to immigration, teachers moving overseas, lack of experienced associate teachers, inadequate time allowances for associate teachers, inappropriateness of the government’s free-market mentality for education, and one-year postgraduate courses.

## **Sectors**

The question, “Why are we put into boxes?” produced the response, “Together we stand, divided we fall!” So, we need a united voice to change policy. It is important to remember that while one may not be able to change policy, one can change one’s practice.

Teacher education qualifications were discussed including whether we all need higher degrees or could trade qualifications be more useful. The possibility of a unified teacher education programme for early years, primary, secondary (and tertiary) was also raised.

The challenge of weaving practicum with educational theory caused concern. One participant asked, “How much of teacher education should be in classes and how much in schools—it’s 1:2 in the UK?”

Issues raised about professional development included funding, support services, whether ITE educators should also be involved in professional development, bonded sabbaticals for teachers, whether teacher educators are professionals, and the extent to which we reflect on our practice and help students reflect on theirs.

Mention was made of the separation between the Ministry of Education, teacher education providers and teachers. Patch protection was suggested as a reason, and one response added a new metaphor for looking at this—“We are not stuck in traffic, we are the traffic”.

## **Collaboration**

Should education be a cooperative or competitive enterprise? (Collaborative rather than cooperative was used, but collaboration suggests working ‘traitorously’ with the

enemy.) The debate suggested there were interesting and different things occurring but others were unaware of these initiatives; better communication between sectors was needed. When the issue arose regarding the vision from schools and centres not matching that of initial teacher educators, the response was that we need partnerships with teacher educators, teachers and parents, but resourcing these could be challenging. One successful collaboration was discussed from early years education—when seeking a common direction a draft Strategic Plan was developed from nationwide meetings hosted by Anne Meade, who asked questions to focus discussion.

“Who should decide the aims of teacher education?” caused debate about the Teacher Registration Board, graduate attributes, TEFANZ’s role, and the need for cooperation rather than competition. One participant said teacher educators need to be clear about their work and asked, “What do successful initial teacher education programmes look like?” Another said we need research on effectiveness but acknowledged the problem with a multiplicity of purposes for education, and added that all questions are contestable, schools are conservative, and there are complaints from schools that new teachers have all the theory but cannot mark the roll.

Programme development without significant preliminary discussion was an issue. One participant reported how schools had been aghast when the University of Waikato introduced a one-year course, but later reported it was satisfactory. Another spoke of suspicion involving the PPTA and the University of Auckland regarding Teach First NZ, and how branches were waiting to see if it worked while the university was working hard on it.

TEFANZ’s level of engagement was critiqued: we function the same way each meeting but we don’t engage. We need to get down to heart-to-heart conversations about what is going on nationally amongst us; there is a fear that we will go away exactly as we have done previously. We need environments where professional learning conversations occur.

Some participants felt communication was occurring with research being more classroom-based now that teacher education was in universities, and a university-school partnership with associate teachers in schools half a day each week was mentioned.

## **Conclusion**

We have seen how earthquakes (and similar disasters) provide stimuli that lead to new community learning and trust—perhaps teacher education needs a shake-up! We need to consider what changed education in the past, and what possibilities lie ahead; there’s much to be learnt by looking both ways.

