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Vouchers and the Privatisation of New Zealand Education LIZ ELEY AND JOHN CLARK	3
Standards-based Assessment in English: Take 3 TERRY LOCKE	13
Poem: Untitled PIRKKO MARKULA	32
Qualifications, Critiques, and Reforms: The Rhetoric Surrounding the New Zealand Qualifications Authority IVAN HODGETTS AND DARRIN HODGETTS	33
Poem: Boarder's Leave Ending RACHEL WOOD	50
The Maori Language Science Curriculum in Aotearoa/New Zealand: A Contribution to Sustainable Development MILES BARKER	51
<hr/>	
SPECIAL SECTION: TEACHER EDUCATION AND TEACHING: TRENDS AND POSSIBILITIES	61
Introduction BARBARA HAROLD	61
Reviews of Teacher Education in New Zealand 1950-1998: Continuity, Contexts and Change NOELINE ALCORN	63
Research Trends and Possibilities in Teacher Education CLIVE MCGEE	77
Teachers Talk Back: Educational Theory and Teacher Education SUE MIDDLETON AND HELEN MAY	89
Stories to Live by on the Professional Knowledge Landscape D. JEAN CLANDININ	107
Remapping the Practicum in Teacher Education ROSIE LE CORNU (DOBBINS)	121
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The Effectiveness of a Māori-Focussed Teacher Education Programme FRED KANA	133
Poem: Day is Done TERRY LOCKE	138
Coping with the Dual Crises of Legitimation and Representation in Research RICHARD PRINGLE	139
Poem: Tracks JIM DENISON	151
Bright Future, Five Steps Ahead - Making Ideas Work for New Zealand: A Commentary HOWARD LEE AND GREGORY LEE	153
Ka Ora Kāinga Rua: Finding a Home in the Academy. A study into the Experiences of Four Maori Women in the Academy LAURA HAWKSWORTH AND PARE KANA	165
Neo-Liberalism and Constructions of Democracy: The Impact on Teachers' Work NESTA DEVINE	171
Producing an "Iwi-Meaningful" Doctoral Proposal: A Case Study BELLA TE AKU GRAHAM	181
"Coming to Know" in Teaching Physical Education: Moving Across Cultural Boundaries GEORGE SALTER	189
To the Fullest Extent of his Powers: C.E. Beeby's Life in Education NOELINE ALCORN	199
Poem: Junia DEBORAH FRASER	208
Poem: Tania DEBORAH FRASER	209
Poem: Otorohanga, 1966 DEBORAH FRASER	210
Book Reviews	211
Poem: Let's Hear It TERRY LOCKE	217

SPECIAL SECTION

TEACHER EDUCATION AND TEACHING: TRENDS AND POSSIBILITIES

BARBARA HAROLD

*Department of Professional Studies
University of Waikato*

The speed of social change together with huge increases in the impact of technology on our lives has led to the emergence of what Hargreaves (1994) describes as "the postmodern condition". He writes (1994, p. 83) that, "if changes facing teachers seem confusing and disconnected, this is often because . . . the postmodern condition is complex, paradoxical and contested". Certainly, in terms of teaching and teacher education, a huge shake-up has occurred during the final years of the century. Following internationally-implemented reforms to educational administration and curriculum during the last decade, attention has more recently turned to the process and content of teachers' education and work, which is coming under increasing scrutiny by policymakers and researchers.

This special section of the *Waikato Journal of Education* brings a range of perspectives to the nature of teacher education and teaching as we near the end of the twentieth century. It is intended to allow readers to make links between each article and also to read them together as a snapshot of the current state of the field. The first three articles focus on teacher education and are followed by two where the voices of teachers explicate their beliefs and practices.

Noeline Alcorn leads off the selection with an historical overview of key reports on New Zealand teacher education, set firmly in their sociopolitical context. She provides a clear elaboration of Wilkin's (1994) view that teacher education is best understood as an ongoing dialogue between the ideology of those in power and the views of the professional community. Her commentary is particularly topical, given the current focus on reviews of teacher education. Alcorn's discussion traces the changing picture of teacher education from relative homogeneity up until the late eighties, a period characterised by diversity and change.

The second article, by Clive McGee, outlines how research in teacher education has moved from a predominantly quantitative approach to the greater use of alternative approaches using qualitative methods. McGee reminds readers of some dilemmas in the application of research to the work of teachers and suggests some useful strategies for further exploration of the nature of that work. The relative paucity of data about teacher education, argues McGee, has left those engaged in the enterprise little room to counter political pressure and propaganda. It is timely, in a period of increasing central

control, to consider new directions in research which will allow teachers' voices to be heard in the debate over policy implementation.

Sue Middleton and Helen May present material from their recent book *Teachers Talk Teaching*. A rich tapestry of stories about teacher education experiences comes from their interviews with teachers, covering much of this century. They discuss the impact of pre-service teacher education upon these teachers. The stories span several decades and underscore Alcorn's point about how sociopolitical issues of the time impact on the process and content of teacher education. The use of contextualised life history narratives is seen by Middleton and May as an effective way to bring theory to life in meaningful situations for teachers.

Jean Clandinin adds support to McGee's call for teacher voices to be heard in the literature, and brings a postmodern narrative approach into her research on the nature of teachers' work. Like Middleton and May's teachers, hers too highlight the complexity of classroom interaction and the impact of their own and others' beliefs, and attitudes on their work. For Clandinin, the content of teacher knowledge, its origins and application in current educational landscapes, can be best understood by listening to teacher stories about their lives inside and outside classrooms and looking at the intersections with the stories of those of other participants. Clandinin (p. XX) likens education reform to a parade where "rather than trying to stop the parade, or walking against the direction, [teachers] imagine reform to be best accomplished . . . walking along with participants, trying to hear their stories, trying to tell our own, and then trying with them to understand the interconnected web of stories".

The teaching practicum in teacher education programmes has, arguably, been somewhat taken for granted. The teaching practicum is a relatively neglected aspect of teacher education. Rosie Le Cornu reports that this aspect needs reappraisal, and describes how one Australian university went about "remapping" its pre-service practicum. She describes how restructuring (changing rules, roles, responsibilities and relationships) within programmes must be accompanied by a reciprocal process of "reculturing" (changing beliefs, attitudes, customs and expectations) if real change is to occur.

Together, this set of articles captures the complexity of teacher education and allows readers the opportunity to see from where we have come and in which directions we might sensibly head in a paradoxical postmodern environment. The authors represent a substantial body of experience in teacher education and their views give pause for thought and reflection about trends and possibilities in this very important field.

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