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Introduction to the Special Issue: How to educate a nation's teachers. Debating quality initial teacher education for today and for the future

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The Teacher Education Forum Aotearoa New Zealand (TEFANZ) was officially launched on 12 July 1999—17 years ago—as the national voice for teacher education in Aotearoa New Zealand. TEFANZ members represent New Zealand Initial Teacher Education (ITE) providers who offer programmes at degree or graduate level. Members span the University, Polytechnic, Wānanga, and private sector across ECE, primary, and secondary. This broad constituency provides a rich picture of ITE in Aotearoa New Zealand.

Formed to promote the development of research-informed teacher education programmes, TEFANZ actively seeks to promote teaching as a graduate profession and to develop partnerships within the teaching profession and the education community. The association aims to provide a national voice for teacher education issues in the political and policy arena by regularly consulting with the Ministry of Education, the Education Council, and other relevant professional organisations and government agencies. TEFANZ does not represent the institutional interests of its members but is instead focused on issues of quality in teacher education, with the intention of speaking on behalf of important professional and research-informed issues in education to improve the public perception of teacher education and the education profession.

The biennial TEFANZ conference provides a forum to share research across the ITE sector in and beyond Aotearoa. The Wilf Malcom Institute of Educational Research (WMIER), based at the University of Waikato, has committed to sponsor a special issue or section of the *Waikato Journal of Education* drawing upon the research presented at TEFANZ conferences. In this way, research about New Zealand based ITE from scholars in the field is added to the evidence base and made more public. The 9th biennial TEFANZ conference held at the University of Otago College of Education in 2016—*How to educate a nation's teachers. Debating quality teacher education for today and for the future*—presented a wide variety of research about practicum, partnerships, policy, pedagogy, and practice. This special issue captures the flavour of some of the presented research.

What constitutes high quality initial teacher education (ITE) has been the subject of intense debate internationally as systems grapple with achieving equitable outcomes for all learners. Improving

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teacher effectiveness to lift student achievement has been the topic of many reviews and position papers (e.g., Auguste, Kihn, & Miller, 2010; Carter, 2015; Department of Education and Training, 2015; Education Council New Zealand, 2016; Levine, 2006; Schleicher, 2011).

Many scholars have debated the features of effective teacher education programmes, recognising that teachers need a multiplicity of competencies, including an understanding in diversity and inequity and commitment to social justice (Airini, 2013; Bishop, Berryman, Cavanagh, & Teddy, 2009; Cochran-Smith et al., 2015; Nieto, 2014) adaptive and transformational thinking (Gilbert, 2013; Liu & Low, 2015; Timperley, 2013) and ability to work collaboratively to focus on learning (Korthagen, Loughran, & Russell, 2006; Shulman, 2004). Greater collaboration and integration between teacher education providers and university and schools/centres to strengthen the bridge between theory and practice in ITE programmes is also a recurrent theme in the literature (Allen, Howells, & Radford, 2013; Darling-Hammond, 2006; Zeichner, 2010). Darling-Hammond (2006) summarised the features of effective teacher education programmes succinctly:

> Three critical components of [strong, more effective teacher education] programs include tight coherence and integration among courses and between course work and clinical work in schools, extensive and intensely supervised clinical work integrated with course work using pedagogies that link theory and practice, and closer, proactive relationships with schools that serve diverse learners effectively and develop and model good teaching. (p. 300)

Government policy and initiatives focusing on lifting educational achievement of targeted groups who have consistently shown inequitable educational outcomes in New Zealand has put the spotlight on ITE and its quality (Education Council New Zealand, 2016; Education Workforce Advisory Group, 2010). Understandably, and in response, ITE institutions in New Zealand have re-examined practices and conceptual underpinnings of programmes, studying the central role of school/early childhood centre and ITE provider partnerships considered vital for effective teacher preparation. Drawing on evidence from international research that reports enhanced partnerships with the profession will lead to an improved teaching workforce (e.g. Carter, 2015; Department of Education and Training, 2015; UNESCO, 2014), the work seeks to reduce disparity of educational outcomes for marginalised groups. Several of this journal's authors engage with these ideas in the research published here.

In addition to the current emphasis of enhanced achievement of diverse learners, there is also a growing interest in studying the way schools are operating with new ICTs and in redesigned learning spaces. Such changes bring about development in pedagogical approaches, and learning structures and ITE institutions need to prepare pre-service teachers for both the now and the rapidly changing schooling sector. To lead effective change to pedagogy it is imperative that schools/early childhood centres and ITE institutions work collaboratively to ensure experiences for pre-service teachers are robust, well supported and provide opportunities for innovation. Again, issues of partnership and innovation are discussed in this issue.

The first paper in this issue titled *The influence of an intentional sustained practicum in a low-decile primary school on pre-service teachers' knowledge of teaching priority learners* by Lexie Grudnoff and Mavis Haigh reports on a qualitative study where pre-service teachers in a Master's level ITE programme were intentionally placed in a low-decile school with a high proportion of so-called priority learners. They describe how a sustained placement experience disrupted the pre-service teachers' prior beliefs about such schools as well as their expectations of priority learners. The pre-service teachers reported strengthened feelings of confidence in establishing relationships with, and being responsive to, the learning requirements of diverse learners. They had time to get to know the children and to make meaningful connections with their lives and experiences. Seeing learners as individuals appeared to encourage the pre-service teachers to take on the responsibility of promoting the learning and achievement of all the children in their classes by setting high, but realistic, academic expectations for each of them. The authors caution that other aspects of ITE programmes also support pre-service teachers to understand issues of inequity and practicum is but one component. They further

caution that pre-service teachers need to be supported to understand that schools and teachers alone cannot be held responsible for the impact of historical societal inequities.

The second paper, *A complex act—Teacher educators share their perspectives of practicum assessment* authored by Karyn Aspden and Claire McLachlan, reports on findings of a doctoral study that examined the assessment of practicum in early childhood ITE and, in particular, the way in which practicum assessment was enacted and experienced by early childhood student teachers, associate teachers and teacher educators. The paper highlights the complex and multi-dimensional role of the teacher educators as they act as intermediary between the ITE institution, early childhood education settings and the student teacher. The assessment of practicum, heavily reliant upon the professional judgments of assessors, is shown to be subjective, shaped by the beliefs, knowledge, experience and expectations of the individual. The paper argues that the way in which teacher educators are inducted into, and supported in, their assessment role must include increased transparency (of judgement making), specific articulation of assessment expectations, and opportunities for moderation of assessment decisions.

The third paper, *Positions, storylines and speech acts: How five mentor teachers from EIT's Bachelor of Teaching (Primary) conceptualise their role in the partnership* authored by Viv Aitken, Frances Corkery, and Kirsty Jones, focuses on the role of mentor teachers in the practicum partnership. The mentor teachers in this small-scale follow-up study to an earlier 2014 investigation emphasised the importance of relationships, communication, commitment and collaboration for partnership models between schools and ITE providers if these are to meet the needs of all parties. Through an analysis of data drawing from positioning theory, the study reports on how mentor teachers, when describing their mentoring with pre-service teachers, aligned themselves with their schools, the ITE institution and teacher educator colleagues when conceptualising their work in ITE. This study suggests their experience of partnership is not one of merging into 'one-ness' but of co-operation between distinct entities to work towards the same goal of preparing effective teachers.

The fourth and fifth papers discus the ways ITE might respond to changing schooling environments as both classroom physical spaces and pedagogical approaches within these are adapted. The paper *Practicum as Nexus: Using student voice to improve digital pedagogy within ITE* by Peter Maslin and Nigel Smith discusses the dilemma of supporting pre-service teachers to develop confidence in using digital technology pedagogically when there is often a mismatch between what the pre-service teachers have experienced in their own schooling, in comparison to their experience in ITE, and then in relation to what they experience in schools. Two models, each providing an action plan that course planners can follow to build the digital pedagogical confidence of pre-service teachers, associate teachers, visiting lecturers and coursework educators, are discussed. The models aim to illustrate how ITE students might learn through the creation of safe, scaffolded, and interconnected digital experiences.

Learning to teach in ILEs on practicum: *Anchoring practices for challenging times,* authored by Emily Nelson and Leigh Johnson, addresses how pre-service teachers might be supported to learn in innovative learning environments when alignment between ILEs and ITE programmes is not assured. Nelson and Johnson argue that key 'anchoring practices' built into ITE curriculum design help pre-service teachers make sense of the unfamiliar ILE environments they may encounter on practicum. When specifically supported to theorise their own thinking about ILEs and by having opportunities to engage with collaborative teaching practices within their ITE programmes, pre-service students have been supported to successfully negotiate the challenges and opportunities of the ILE-based practicum experiences. Implications for ITE programme design and teacher educators' pedagogical practices are highlighted.

The final two papers, *Influential and intentional teacher education: Embodying a conceptual framework* authored by Cathryn Bell, Karyn Robertson, and Bev Norsworthy, and *Challenging dominance in the education sector: Why is it important and how can I do it?* by Kathleen Cooper, highlight the potential for teacher education and transformative teachers to address social justice and equity issues in New Zealand education now and for the future. Bell, Robertson, and Norsworthy

describe the importance of ITE conceptual frameworks (CF) for orienting teacher educators and student teachers towards altruistic and optimistic teaching practice. Discussing the development of their own ITE programme, which includes a CF that prioritises the holistic and dispositional development of student teachers, the authors argue that continual engagement with aspirations embedded in a well-designed ITE programme's CF will produce student teachers who, in their case, develop their own vision for teaching and learning, a commitment to social justice and citizenship, and who can also weather the complex and ever changing nature of education. Their goal of supporting student teachers in their progress towards becoming transformative educators is traced back to their programme design, underpinned by a well-articulated CF for ITE.

Kathleen Cooper's paper *Challenging dominance in the education sector: Why is it important and how can I do it* makes arguments about how challenging heteronormative dominance benefits physical, social, cultural, and emotional safety of children, teachers and families in the education sector. Kathleen describes how participants in her study of lesbian teachers in early childhood education, used a range of planned and unplanned strategies to challenge perceptions and raise awareness of diversity of family composition. She argues that when teachers understand that they operate within a particular discourse, they can start to question their teaching and challenge the dominant discourse, pursuing with others a more equitable, socially just, and inclusive teaching practice.

Conclusion

The theme of the 2016 TEFANZ conference, How to educate a nation's teachers: Debating quality teacher education for today and for the future, sought to bring wide-ranging discussions and debates to the teacher education research forum in Aotearoa New Zealand during a time of significant change and contestation in relation to the role of ITE in preparing teachers in a future focused rapidly changing educational landscape. The conference saw the release of the Education Council's major ITE consultation paper Strategic options for developing future oriented initial teacher education (Education Council New Zealand, 2016). The Deputy Secretary Early Learning and Student Achievement Ministry of Education presented a ministerial speech, which outlined how ITE was expected to help address persistent problems within the system. The paper recognised that the teacher's role is complex and this complexity should be reflected in ITE preparation. The importance of culture, family and community, the diversity of learners and the impact of technology were factors that were highlighted as needed to be reflected in ITE programmes as was the preposition that graduates from ITE need to be adaptive to face different contexts and changing needs.

During the conference scholars and practitioners of teacher education shared findings of 35 recently conducted teacher education related studies in Aotearoa. The papers in this special issue of WJE provide a snap shot of current New Zealand research and engage with teacher education in this state of change—a socio-political-historical moment where the field is expanding outward beyond the principal domain of ITE institutions into renewed partnership models where together, members at all levels of the teaching profession are working on changing the system to benefit all learners. The papers reflect many of the aspects talked about in the consultation paper and international reviews, and demonstrate a commitment to best practice and innovation based on evidence in the New Zealand context.

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