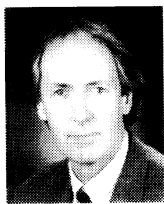


EDITORIAL



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In this editorial last year, I commented on the difficult and demanding nature of teaching. In this country it may be that a new orientation is developing now that the consequences of attempts to apply monetarist policies to education and schooling are being revealed. Examples of the new 'climate' may be the abolishment of bulk funding for schools, and the reversal, some months ago, of the funding decrement decision that might have spelled the demise of School Support Services. Many would claim these are steps in the right direction. The question that teachers are asking, though, is what further increased help might they expect to do with the curriculum – its delivery, resourcing, and associated professional development? Another question that many are posing is when might basic research into curriculum development and implementation in the classroom again be funded? In the past ten years the Ministry of Education has directed funds towards the generation of new curriculum documents and associated activities. The time now seems right to support research into what is actually being learned and taught in schools, building on some credible studies of the past (including those by Alton-Lee).

In this fourth volume of 'Teachers and Curriculum' we present a range of articles that are topical and relevant to all teachers. The 'opinion' page is provided by an experienced principal. Hill emphasises the need for children from schools such as hers to gain a strong foundation for learning. In short she is underlining the importance of curriculum.

Again there are informal themes running through the publication that allow a natural grouping.

The first thread comprises comment on learning theories and related issues. Barker notes how theories have changed, and the personal sense that he has made of this genesis. He asks the important question, 'how do I know what constitutes the latest fad?' In applying one of the dominant learning theories of the nineties, Rolfe describes how constructivism has impacted on assessment, and reminds us that assessment should have the improvement of learning as its primary goal. Continuing the theme of assessment Lee, Lee and Hill provide a comprehensive analysis of assessment in New Zealand schools, and remind us of the purposes and potential pitfalls of the past and present.

The changing, dynamic curriculum is a theme taken up by Biddulph, Taylor and Biddulph. Their detailed exposition is particularly timely as we try to provide a fair and just society for our children. One is reminded of the current debate on moral education, and the concerns expressed by prominent educators such as Ivan Snook who reminds us that education should promote critical reflection rather than indoctrination. In this vein Oliver discusses the role of 'philosophy for children', and articulates the reasons for creating a community of inquiry in schools. Oliver maintains that the most important single purpose of education is to enhance people's abilities to seek for themselves good answers to the question 'what is good living?' This question activates the human processes of analysis and critical thinking. Critical examination is taken up by Mills who claims that political control in New Zealand has impacted on our science curriculum, and that co-operation, purposeful interaction and teacher development should underpin any future revision.

Professional development is the theme for Stewart's article as she discusses the various 'agendas' that manifest themselves in curriculum initiatives – the political agenda, the school management agenda, the teacher's agenda, and the facilitation team's agenda. How these potentially conflicting agendas are managed, and whether or not they are necessarily troublesome, are important considerations. An issue that arises constantly in

the classroom in terms of technology is that of gender. Henderson takes a look at this using the context of music composition through computer programmes. The high school sample provide important insights for all teachers who use computers regularly in their classrooms. Another issue of some concern, this time in math education, is the use of the calculator. In spite of research, over many years, showing that calculators help students get INTO mathematics, Jane McChesney's prediction some years ago the calculators might have a difficult road ahead seems to be born out in some cases. Biddulph and Bailey present several useful, practical suggestions for teachers of junior classes that will help students develop mathematically with the help of the calculator.

It is particularly pleasing that the School of Education, University of Waikato has an established link with its equivalent School/Department at the University of Newcastle upon Tyne, England. The curriculum comments by Bramald on mathematics education and Blake and Newton on science education will make interesting reading for New Zealand teachers. Both articles illustrate the different ideas that learners bring to a situation. Bramald's article could well provide the content for a fascinating staff development session in a school. Blake and Newton draw on New Zealand research as they report on what children in north-east England know about the inside of the Earth. Teachers who read this article may well want to replicate this with their own class. The international focus is maintained by Carr and Gray's views on the teaching of mathematics in the Netherlands – is there something we could learn from that country?

Clayton's article stresses the key role that presentations increasingly play in our roles as teachers. He gives a web site that can be accessed if we wish to pursue this.

Finally, Lee and Lee review a significant book on New Zealand education and schooling. Kelvin Smyth's volume has, according to Lee and Lee, several shrewd, thought-provoking and informative points to make. Smythe provides essential reading for those who want to understand what is happening in education in this country.

The contents of 'Teachers and Curriculum' indicate that curriculum is interpreted in it's broadest sense, and that educators and other interested parties maintain a critical approach to curriculum.