



## Book Review

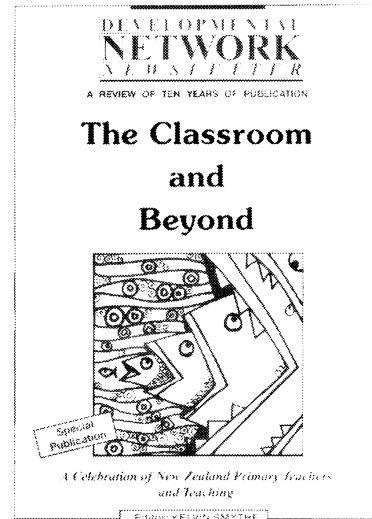
# *The Classroom and Beyond: A Celebration of New Zealand Primary Teachers and Teaching*

Gregory Lee and Howard Lee

A review of

*The Classroom and Beyond: A Celebration of New Zealand Primary Teachers and Teaching*, edited by Kelvin Smythe, published by Developmental Publications Ltd., Hamilton, 1999.

In our work as educators, we are frequently deluged with copious quantities of thick and thin literature from New Zealand and abroad that appears in our institutional mailboxes, libraries, resource rooms, and staffrooms. Not surprisingly, authors of this material are keen to promote the educational merits of their respective contributions, given that these publications are competing with others for our attention and, often, for access to our chequebooks. Our typical response is to earmark some material for later reading - time permitting - and to promptly reject the other on the grounds of perceived irrelevance, bulk, wordiness, or lack of instant visual appeal, besides other criteria (ill defined or otherwise). If we decide to read certain works in preference to others, it may be because they unapologetically link educational theory with teaching and learning, examine real educational concerns in preference to those that are merely administrative, and encourage educators to assess official pronouncements from developmental, humanistic, and philosophical perspectives (alongside others). More often than not, however, there is an official and public expectation that teachers will always be familiar with whatever assessment publications are released from the Ministry of Education. For those moments when teachers crave a meatier educational diet - and it is our hope that they will - *The*



*Classroom and Beyond* will provide superb nourishment (see, for example, pp.72-78).

Featuring 84 extracts, cartoons and poems spanning 236 pages, Smythe has assembled in an attractive and reasonably priced publication a delightful smorgasbord of offerings from primary and intermediate teachers; academics in colleges of education, universities, and other tertiary institutions; parents; school advisers; and educational commentators. These contributions represent but a small selection of several hundred items that have appeared in the many issues of the *Developmental Network Newsletter* published over a ten year period. Founded in 1990 with the intention of providing "an independent voice for teachers [by] speaking out on matters that need to be spoken out about" (p.1), as well



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as offering “practical advice on school and classroom practice” (p.1), authors in this special 1999 publication have dealt with such wide-ranging topics as country teaching; computers in schools; young children’s use of calculators; supportive teaching and learning environments; paired learning; the mathematics and reading curriculum; reading recovery and outdoor education programmes; the teaching of art, drama, music, and science; teaching an integrated curriculum; neo-liberal education policies; and the emergence of middle schools.

Adopting the format used in previous issues of the *Developmental Network Newsletter*, Kelvin Smythe includes his own commentaries on a variety of educational topics in *The Classroom and Beyond*. As well as providing well-informed, articulate critiques of political parties’ and politicians’ educational promises and subsequent policies, readers will find insightful analyses of school charters; educational administration and school management practices; rural schooling difficulties; school curriculum revisions; and school assessment and teacher appraisal policies. Smythe’s commentaries are far-reaching: the Education Review Office; the 1993 National Curriculum Framework; the Picot and Tomorrow’s Schools’ reports; and neo-liberal educational policies and practices thankfully do not escape his critical scrutiny. Moreover, Smythe does not resort to making unsubstantiated and bold assumptions in his critiques, preferring instead to explain how and why *educational considerations* have become marginalised in the official quest for administrative efficiencies and institutional and teacher ‘accountability’. His arguments are certainly persuasive.

In the course of writing about school charters a decade ago, for example, Smythe shrewdly observed that the Picot Report represents “a philosophy...[one that is] still unfolding”, as well as remarking that “the government’s obligations to charters weren’t set out” (p.9),


although individual school obligations were outlined. He concluded that charters inevitably involve “a trade-off” being made between different interest groups. When discussing the work of the Education Review Office, at the same time, Smythe lamented the official tendency for education to be “reduc[ed] to a formula” (p.10), within which an “output appraisal approach” is predicted to steadily and deliberately undermine teacher professionalism. He criticised ERO for “working against the Tomorrow’s Schools’ ideal of [granting] more power to the community” (p.85), for upholding a “behaviourist philosophy” (p.85), and for contributing to “the increasing bureaucratisation of education” (p.85). Smythe suggested that a better approach would be to encourage “evaluation in schools [to] largely be the domain of consenting teachers and parents” (p.86).

Smythe’s discussion of the deficiencies and consequences of influential education policies reveals a sophisticated understanding of the connections between policy and classroom practice. His claims that “a structural crisis derives from Tomorrow’s Schools’ allocation of increased powers to layers of bureaucracy at the expense of teachers’ sense of control over things important to them” (p.146), and that “the much vaunted claim by the review office for its need to have complete independence is...a cover for the review office to have complete freedom of action in its pursuit of increased power” (p.176), are but two examples that demonstrate such an understanding.

Not content to simply critique educational policies and practices, Smythe presents numerous thought-provoking solutions to the dilemmas he skilfully identifies. “Teacher appraisal” should be relabelled “teacher development” (which, in turn, ought to be seen as only “a small part of [teachers’] overall professional development” (p.28)). The review function undertaken by ERO should be made contestable, Smythe asserts, to allow teachers to

**Metacognitive reading**  
Introducing 3


In question 2, you are asked to describe the main idea of each paragraph, and the structure of these paragraphs, and to explain why they are not traditional.




**Metacognitive reading**  
Introducing 4

In activity 2, you are asked to re-construct the story of the text in this activity, and to use the strategy of knowledge strategy, to identify the main message in the text, and to use the strategy of processing information, to identify the main message in the text.

- What is the main message of the text?
- What is the main message of the text?
- What is the main message of the text?




**Metacognitive reading**  
Introducing 5



**Metacognitive reading**  
Introducing 6




Draw lines from the items in column A to the matching items in column B.

A	B
• Reached in parallel form	• Strategy
• A natural force	• Behavioural function
• The path towards the corner of the Earth	• Wind
• The surface moving against each other	• A force
• Pushed by the wind	• Strategy
• The	• Windforce
• Rough surface	• Wind
• When force is used in a new direction	• Behavioural function
• A simple machine	• Physics



**CRACK housing and education policy**  
An address by Corina Arbitrary


CRACK's policy is to solve the problem of housing and education for the poor... (text continues)

**LANE**


1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31	32	33	34	35	36	37	38	39	40	41	42	43	44	45	46	47	48	49	50	51	52	53	54	55	56	57	58	59	60	61	62	63	64	65	66	67	68	69	70	71	72	73	74	75	76	77	78	79	80	81	82	83	84	85	86	87	88	89	90	91	92	93	94	95	96	97	98	99	100
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Some further considerations of specific...




**The key art concepts and composition 8**

Learn about the key art concepts and composition... (text continues)



**The key art concepts and composition 9**

Learn about the key art concepts and composition... (text continues)



"gain the control necessary to act in the interests of children and the wider society" (p.86), and to permit individual school communities to "decide on the nature and extent of the kind of evaluation that suits them" (p.86). Furthermore, he suggests that the technology subject in the Curriculum Framework ought to place less weight on marketing and fiscal considerations and more on promoting "self-expression, altruism and aesthetics" (p.108), as well as frankly conceding that "technology" is neither unproblematic conceptually and practically nor is it a palliative for society's ills.

Smythe similarly criticises the approach adopted in the Social Studies curriculum where, although "it might be tidy to organise [human] behaviour into concepts from a study's outset" (p.172), the result is that such tidiness "[is] attained at the expense of the richness of human experience" (p.172). A decisive aim of Social Studies, Smythe contends, ought to be to create "a change in the behaviour of the children concerned" (p.172), supported by clear and concise statements about "the values on which this change should be based" (p.172). In a similar vein, he cautions readers that attacks on teachers will not raise the quality of teaching and learning in classrooms *ipso facto*. They will, in fact, more likely than not have a counterproductive effect: "haranguing [teachers], niggling at them, showing them up by example, is stopping them listening, even to constructive voices, and is giving education bureaucrats the leeway to bring in even more controls and entanglements" (p.234).

Smythe's contributions, we suggest, neither compete with nor overshadow those from other writers included in the volume. Taken together, the articles in *The Classroom and Beyond* both inform and entertain readers, whether professional educators or laypeople. Among the many witty and humorous entries are to be found Smythe's observations on two education conferences (pp. 8, 112-

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113); Jenny Powell-Chalmers' reflections on her teachers' college years (p.4); Penny Huber's poem on outdoor mathematics (p. 23); Smythe's commentaries on management courses (p. 29) and on Maris O'Rourke and Lockwood Smith (pp. 60, 116); and three excellent satires on the development of assessment policies (p. 165), the ACT party's housing and education policy (pp. 193-194), and the national curriculum (pp. 3-4). In all of these pieces, serious educational and social messages are conveyed.

In launching the first issue of the *Developmental Network Newsletter* a decade ago, Kelvin Smythe announced that he wanted teachers to view the new publication as "a co-operative enterprise" (1999, p. 1). Smythe hoped that it would encourage teachers "to share ideas and support one another in these very different times" (1999, p. 1). Ten years later he wrote that the contributions appearing in *The Classroom and Beyond* tell "a story of affirmation, reflection, sharing and resistance" (p. 1). It is a story that, without doubt, deserves to be told.

