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### Introduction to Special Series

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**Special Issue Editors:** *Elizabeth Reinsfield, Chris Eames & Wendy Fox-Turnbull*

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It gives me great pleasure to introduce the first Special Issue in our new series, *Promoting a broad curriculum*:

### **Quality STEM education**

Edited by Elizabeth Reinsfield, Chris Eames & Wendy Fox-Turnbull

The aim for this series is to provide teachers and school leaders with accessible material to support teaching and learning across the breadth of New Zealand curriculum subject areas. New Zealand's National Curriculum documents for both mainstream and Māori immersion contexts are viewed as a jewel in the crown of compulsory education both in this country and abroad. With the cancellation of the National Standards' policy (2010–2017) which had resulted in a narrowing of school curriculums, the time is right to rekindle the spark of teachers' enthusiasm, knowledge, skills and practice in teaching of curriculum subjects beyond literacy and mathematics.

The 'narrowing of curriculum' (Crocco & Costigan, 2007; Jerald, 2006; Manzo, 2005; Meyer, 2005) is used to describe the outcomes that increased standardisation and high stakes accountability have on what is taught and learned in schools. The narrowing of the curriculum particularly refers to the erosion of time spent on other school subjects (e.g., physical education, science, social studies, and the arts) due to increased time and attention on literacy (reading and writing) and mathematics. Putting aside systemic socio-economic contexts and broader government policy issues, such as external pressures on educators, Jerald (2006) pointed to teachers and school leaders' decision-making:

[E]ducators should be made aware that cutting too deeply into social studies, science, and the arts imposes significant long-term costs on students, hampers reading comprehension and thinking skills, increases inequity, and makes the job of secondary level teachers that much harder. (p. 5)

Education reform based on the use of generic standards across schools and communities along with high stakes accountability for the educational progress and achievement of children had already been clearly signalled as harmful in education contexts such as the United States and the United Kingdom (see for example, Berliner, 2009; Crocco & Costigan, 2007; Manzo, 2005; Nichols, & Berliner, 2007). Harms identified in research include narrowing of the curriculum, limiting local curriculum initiatives, limiting learning for learners from poorer families, increased assessment, increased workload for teachers and students (and making it more like work than learning), undermining the expertise and professional judgement of teachers, negatively shaping teacher practice and impacting on teacher-student relationships, and impacting on school policy and public relations through school performance reporting and public records. The National Standards policy was controversial prior to its implementation in New Zealand (Thrupp, 2007).

Standards and accountability assessments go together and, of particular concern, are mandated: standardised commercially-produced assessments such as those used in the United States and the United Kingdom. Wiliam (2006) questions the design of such assessments and the decisions made on the basis of test results. One of his concerns revolves around the way commercially-made tests undermine the expert knowledge of teachers:

The failure to use the detailed knowledge that teachers have about their students impoverishes the quality of the summative assessment (and in particular makes it less reliable and diminishes validity). In other words, while teachers may not demand to be involved in summative assessment, good summative assessment demands the involvement of teachers. (Wiliam, 2006, p. 132)

Although, New Zealand's National Standards policy did not involve a required national test, it was controversial prior to implementation in New Zealand; however, the government at the time dismissed concerns (Thrupp, 2007; 2018). The impact of the enactment of these standards demonstrated much that had been predicted. Martin Thrupp and Michelle White's report on Research, Analysis and Insight into National Standards (RAINS) three-year project is titled *National Standards and the damage done*

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(2013), and focuses on how National Standards policy was experienced negatively overall by staff, children and parents in the participating schools. Thrupp and White (2013) found that during that period

National Standards are having some favourable impacts in areas that include teacher understanding of curriculum levels, motivation of some teachers and children and some improved targeting of interventions. Nevertheless, such gains are overshadowed by damage being done through the intensification of staff workloads, curriculum narrowing and the reinforcement of a two-tier curriculum, the positioning and labelling of children and unproductive new tensions amongst school staff. These problems are often occurring despite attempts by schools and teachers to minimise any damaging impact of the National Standards. (p. i)

In an Ipu Kererū blog (October 28, 2017, <https://nzareblog.wordpress.com/2017/10/28/end-of-national-standards/>), Thrupp recognised this policy's effects had become naturalised,

even though most teachers and principals did not like the impact of the National Standards policy, after a decade of its influence New Zealand primary schools are now marinated in the thinking, language, and expectations of the National Standards. This has also had wider impacts, for instance on early childhood education. It will all take a little while to undo.

It's great, though, that New Zealand primary schools will now be able to spend less time shoring up judgements about children—judgements that have often been pointless or harmful—and instead spend more time making learning relevant and interesting for each child. Removing National Standards should also allow teachers to be less burdened, contributing to making teaching a more attractive career again.

In light of these insights into the negative effects of National Standards implementation, the editor, editorial board and the Wilf Malcolm Institute of Educational Research (WMIER) are pleased to publish a series of Special Issues of *Teachers and Curriculum* titled *Promoting a broad curriculum* with the aim of promoting the 'other' curriculum subjects, while at the same time providing useful professional learning for school leaders and teachers to continue to restore the richness of a broad curriculum and the pleasure of learning and teaching.

Look for our next special issue in this series.

### **2022 Special Issue: *The Arts will find a way; Breaking through and moving forward***

Edited by Claire Coleman and Bronya Dean

Kerry Earl Rinehart  
Special Series Editor

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