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AN INTRODUCTION TO THE SPECIAL ISSUE: NGĀ TIMATANGA HOU: FRESH PERSPECTIVES ON EDUCATION

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Introduction

We, as guest editors of *Teachers and Curriculum*, are excited to introduce this special issue: Ngā Timatanga Hou: Fresh Perspectives on Education. The authors whose work is featured in this issue have recently graduated with their Master of Teaching and Learning degree, and many have also just experienced the joy of stepping into their new professional roles as beginning teachers. It is our hope that this special issue might encourage conversations around what beginning teachers' perspectives can bring to the field of educational research.

The articles within this issue started their journey as assignments within the class Te Pouako hei Kairangahau: Teacher as Researcher, part of the Master of Teaching and Learning degree at the University of Waikato. This course was taught by Jessica, and Katie participated as a guest speaker, offering insight from her journey from the classroom back to the university as a doctoral student. Through the class, the authors refined their research and academic writing skills as they explored their areas of interest, and developed expertise and a scholarly view of a subject about which they might one day produce new empirical research. In reading their final reviews, it was clear that these works offered fresh perspectives that could contribute to understanding the topics in a way that is unique, and that some of them had potential for broader publication. The authors' positionality included a recency and a unique circumstance of being on the cusp of completing their initial teacher education and becoming teachers. Their passion for their chosen fields and their dedication to crafting their pieces was evident to us as guest editors, as we hope it is evident to the readers of this journal.

Articles in the special issue

We are proud to introduce the eight articles in this special issue, articles that showcase the passion and enthusiasm of the authors. In and through their writing, they have woven aspects of their lives and special interests within the field of education. We have arranged the articles in three overlapping themes, of supporting students and teachers with inclusivity, physical health, and mental well-being.

In "Meeting the Principles of Inclusion in Mainstream Education for Students with Autism/Takiwātanga in Aotearoa: A Scoping Review", Gillian Hook uses a scoping methodology to explore the research-based knowledge available to support our students in Aotearoa with autism/takiwātanga. In Māori, *takiwātanga* refers to a person who exists within their own time and space. In addition to being a beginning teacher, the author positions herself as a loving aunty of *he tangata whaitakiwātanga* (a person with autism) and brings our attention to the need for there to be more support for teachers and learning assistants to effectively create inclusive environments for students with autism. In "Ki Te Ao Mārama: Experiences of Māori Inclusion in English-Medium Schools", Amy Hancock (Ngāti Maniapoto, Ngāi Tahu, Ngāti Tūwharetoa) explores the ways that Māori teachers and students have experienced inclusion (or not) within English medium schools. To support her writing, she also constructed a research framework which draws from Mātauranga Māori. Amy's research framework takes inspiration from the Māori origin story; the phases within her kaupapa Māori inspired framework parallel the phases of this story as she explains the three phases Te Kore, Te Pō and Te Maramatanga, understanding that the cultural depths of Indigenous concepts are sometimes altered or lost through translation, these phases, in a basic sense, can be understood as the phase of nothingness

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and/or unlimited potential, the phase of darkness and the phase of enlightenment. In the next article, Micaela Fistonich draws our focus to Pacific education within the context of secondary schooling in her article “Factors of Engagement: Secondary Pasifika Student Learning”. Through her thorough analysis, she points to the need for teachers to gain an understanding and connection to their Pacific students’ respective cultures, and also emphasises the need for teachers and others to recognise, and step away from, prevalent negative discourses.

The next three articles explore education spaces as they potentially support students’ health. In his review, “The Changing Landscape of Relationships and Sexuality Education in Aotearoa New Zealand Secondary Schools”, Jonathon Lee investigates relationship and sexuality education in Aotearoa from 1999 to 2023. He explores whether RSE has adequately evolved within this timeframe, while taking into consideration the prevalence of sexual content online. Shona Lee Thorp explored health education more broadly in her piece “How is Health Education Being ‘Taught’ and Experienced? A Literature Review”. With an exploration of fear- and risk-based discourses, this piece explores varying pedagogical approaches to teaching health in Aotearoa. In “Schools as Promoters of Active Lifestyles: A Review”, Jay Thomas Piper-Healion synthesises some of the ways education can have a positive impact on lifestyle and health beyond school spaces. He also encourages a mindset shift from “physical activity” to “active lifestyles” to bring attention to the importance of health encompassing all aspects of our lives.

The last two articles are written by new secondary school teachers whose concern for supporting students’ mental health and well-being exists within and beyond their content-area teaching. In “Reducing Mathematics Anxiety in the Classroom”, Christine Anne Bautista discusses the connection between enjoyment in this subject and success in this subject, drawing from international research but maintaining a New Zealand-based lens. Finally, Caitlynn O’Toole presents “A Literature Review of the Role of Teachers in Supporting Students’ Mental Health”. Ultimately, while research shows that many secondary teachers understand their role as including supporting students, they feel underprepared to do so.

The articles presented in this issue acknowledge the importance of honouring students as whole people. Robbins (2018) said that “the emotional, cognitive, and physical energy it takes to cope with an unfriendly and intolerant environment will drain even the best and brightest from their potential” (p. 7). While ensuring academic success for students is an important part of being a teacher, these articles highlight that academic success can be at least partially produced by feeling valued and included within the learning environment. The authors have illustrated the importance of creating environments that are inclusive of cultural diversity and neurodiversity. They have also highlighted the importance of supporting students with their mental and physical well-being.

Beginning something new as a collaborative process

The phrase *ngā timatanga hou* translates to new beginnings. We chose this title mainly as an acknowledgement of the authors’ new careers as teachers, but this special issue marks a new beginning for us, the guest editors, as well. A new beginning, as we see it, is not a single event experienced by an individual but a collaborative process that can unfold gradually.

Since these authors are new to academic writing, we felt a responsibility to support them to adapt their class work for broader publication. We also saw an opportunity to facilitate a spirit of friendly collaboration that we sometimes wish were more present in our own academic writing experiences. While the class that produced the drafts of the articles contained here was quick-moving, the writing experience offered us more time to talk about big ideas; opportunities for non-mark-related feedback from editors, peers, and anonymous reviewers; and — perhaps most significantly — a whole day for potential authors to be in each other’s presence as part of a minimally-structured writing workshop. This workshop took place at the Hamilton campus and coincidentally was the day after most authors received their master’s degrees at their graduation ceremony. Many of them had completed the course via Zoom, so this was the first time for some of them to meet their peers in person. There was excitement

in the classroom as they spoke to us of their graduation, their new classrooms, and how it felt to be working towards making their voices heard about topics they care about so much.

It is rare that all authors featured in a journal issue have the opportunity to meet, sit together, and support each other as they craft their respective pieces of work. As they were writing, we noticed the organic initiation of the tuakana/teina learning model among the authors. In a literal sense, *tuakana* translates to the older sibling and *teina* denotes the younger sibling. As a learning model, tuakana/teina refers to reciprocal learning between someone with more experience and another who may be less experienced. In this context, the roles of tuakana and teina were fluid, continually shifting depending on the aspects of writing or context at hand. We could hear advice being given from one writer to another in ways that were constructive and supportive. The workshop attracted attention from some of our colleagues, wondering about a classroom alive with joyful activity during the semester break. From the workshop, the articles then took the usual back and forward journey of the review process.

As the authors learned how to craft their work for a specific context and purpose, taking a step beyond marking schedules and lecturers as their sole audience, we were also learning alongside them what was required to guest-edit a special issue of a highly-regarded journal. We know that in the process of academic publication, many of the hands that help to craft the final product remain invisible, including the anonymous reviewers who supported this issue. We, the guest editors, take this moment to thank our anonymous reviewers for their help, insight, and firm but fair suggestions for revision. In addition to supporting our learning and the editing process, they helped the authors, new to publication, to consider ways of framing and/or thinking about their work. For some pieces originally under consideration, the anonymous reviewers' comments helped the writers to understand that their work was not ready for broader readership; we acknowledge that when offered constructively, the signal of "not yet" is itself a gift.

It is also with deep gratitude that we acknowledge the mentorship and guidance provided by the resident editor of *Teachers and Curriculum*, Kerry Earl Rinehart. Kerry seems to have mastered the elusive balance of helping mentees while also giving them space to take risks and give new things a go. Throughout this process, she has offered us support but also offered us her trust. We feel especially honoured to have worked on this particular special issue, Kerry's last as editor-in-chief before starting her well-earned retirement. Thank you, Kerry, for allowing us to be a part of your final installment, and for lifting others up at every opportunity.

Conclusion

We would like to conclude by encouraging all beginning teachers to embrace the present value they bring to their first classrooms alongside their potential to continue on the path of becoming teacher/researchers. In addition to the contributions they make to their respective fields, we hope that these articles might start conversations around the possibility for beginning teachers to create positive change by contributing to conversations in academia from the unmatched vantage point of being new to the profession.

References

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