



## Editorial: Teachers' Work in a Pandemic

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Teachers' work has come into greater prominence in 2020, although perhaps not as spectacularly as front-line medical workers. Teachers have nonetheless demonstrated their patience, persistence, and expert exercise of teaching skill in difficult circumstances, requiring them to acquire new digital proficiencies under urgency. Face-to-face teaching was resumed often in smaller, unpredictable classes, teachers well aware too of their own possible exposure to Covid-19. Teaching in 2020 was complicated by institutional decisions, good and bad, closer relationships with parents, and haunted by the failures in educational systems that have been exposed or exacerbated by the pandemic.

For a time, teachers achieved new respect, once parents and caregivers found themselves thrust into the role of 'homeschoolers'. Ministry of Education plans to provide portable computer devices<sup>1</sup> to homes whose children did not have these, were not smoothly implemented<sup>2</sup>. There were reports of school principals complaining that devices were delivered to homes that did not require them, while homes that did require these, lost out. In some cases, devices were delivered to homes with no Internet access, highlighting the persistent digital divide that besets Aotearoa New Zealand. We editors are keen to receive copy in the coming months exploring the various efforts, successes and missteps that marked education in the pandemic across all sectors, especially as these may have intersected with the work of teachers.

As a journal that represents the interests of *teachers' work*, it is important that our authors draw attention to the significant effort of teachers across all sectors to realign their professional work so that their students could continue to learn and progress, against the challenge of abrupt closures. In this context, policy seemed to develop on an ad hoc basis, exemplified by Ministry of Education directives being emailed to school principals on Friday nights in anticipation of changes to alert levels the following week. Such unpredictability beset universities too. For example, university courses were arbitrarily reduced

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.beehive.govt.nz/release/covid19-government-moving-quickly-roll-out-learning-home>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.newshub.co.nz/home/politics/2020/04/coronavirus-some-modems-possibly-misaddressed-in-device-rollout-ministry-of-education.html>

in size and scope. One University administration intended to implement a fresh start to semester one after the (extended) Easter break, with the academic year therefore ending just short of Christmas, hence rendering all the work of students and staff before Easter invalid – or not to count for assessment. During the year, face-to-face classes were on-again, off-again, while graduations were postponed, re-scheduled and again deferred.

Education is never far from change, and 2020 is no exception (even without the virus). Amongst the mooted changes (real and speculated) in Aotearoa New Zealand are the Action Plan for Pacific Education 2020-2030<sup>3</sup> a ‘refreshed’ *Ka Hikitia* Māori education strategy<sup>4</sup> the Tomorrow’s Schools review<sup>5</sup> and the NCEA Review<sup>6</sup>. Affecting research-active tertiary staff, of course, was the PBRF review, that (seriously) suggests among its recommendations, that PBRF becomes ‘TREE’ (Tertiary Research Excellence Evaluation)<sup>7</sup>. We say ‘speculated’ for some of these, because long lead-in times can sometimes be overhauled by political events, and despite there being powerful reasons for education to be excluded from the game of political football, it rarely is. Here too, the editors welcome critical reviews of these policy documents for publication in 2021.

Some changes can be deeply distressing to certain categories of teachers (if not of concern to all teachers). An example is the intended axing of classical studies (and other ‘specialist’ courses) from NCEA Level 1, and the complete cancellation of Latin from NCEA at all levels<sup>8</sup>. This suggested change is an example of one with a long lead-in, full implementation being expected in 2023. These changes will undoubtedly reinforce the views of those who regard New Zealand’s education system to be in decline. Recent reports of the cyclical OECD PISA evaluation suggest an overall decline in New Zealand’s level of reading, mathematics, and science since 2009, with reading seemingly becoming increasingly unpopular amongst 15-year-olds<sup>9</sup>. These results are echoed in the latest Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS), which has New Zealand’s performance for thirteen-year-olds in mathematics and science dropping further below that of traditional partner nations<sup>10</sup>. Reports such as these continue to provide justifications for applying further pressure to the work of teachers, who have experienced ongoing work intensification over several decades, certainly since the advent of neoliberalism in education. Here too, the editors encourage robust critical analyses from authors to explore, for example,

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<sup>3</sup> <https://conversation.education.govt.nz/assets/PACIFIC/Action-Plan-for-Pacific-Education/Pacific-Education-Plan-Summary.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> <https://education.govt.nz/our-work/overall-strategies-and-policies/ka-hikitia-ka-hapaitia>

<sup>5</sup> <https://conversation.education.govt.nz/assets/TSR/November-2019/TSR-Government-Response-WEB.pdf>

<sup>6</sup> <https://conversation.education.govt.nz/conversations/ncea-review/>

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.education.govt.nz/assets/Documents/Further-education/PBRF-Review/The-Report-of-the-PBRF-Review-panel-E-koekoe-te-tuie-ketekete-te-kaka...pdf>

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.rnz.co.nz/news/national/432101/disappointment-and-frustration-over-ncea-level-1-subject-changes?fbclid=IwAR1JNSyfRbEKw1OM68XuMbBO3qXI00Zy1o5XH-IFCQMHPb-oTjG3eTR4i0>

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.stuff.co.nz/national/education/117890945/new-zealand-topend-in-oecd-latest-pisa-report-but-drop-in-achievements-worrying>

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.rnz.co.nz/news/national/432516/results-in-maths-and-science-a-worrying-trend>

the ongoing influence of such league tables on education in Aotearoa New Zealand.

Against these grim reflections, this issue ranges across themes and problems that include social justice and inclusion, video approaches in a tertiary setting, and inquiry and collaborative practices. The authors inject a sense of hope and optimism, despite the difficult contexts that form a backdrop to some of their studies. In this way, they demonstrate the resilience of teachers, who project onto their work and students the ideals that brought them into the profession in the first place.

Finally, this is an opportunity to refer to some development in the life of *New Zealand Journal of Teachers' Work*. From one perspective, 2019/2020 have not been easy years, with a noticeable drop in submissions. This necessitated the production of 'double issues' in 2019, and again now. From another perspective, however, there are positive developments. The OJS platform on which the journal is published, has been updated; the journal is now indexed in ERIC (the Education Resources Information Center); and in February 2020, the Editorial Board approved the appointment of one of its members, Christoph Teschers, as an Associate Editor. For his part, Christoph has already made a significant contribution. Finally, 2020 has seen an increased number of submissions, that we hope will translate to a return to two issues each year. The health of the journal, which is essentially a *free resource* to educators and policymakers at all levels, continues to depend heavily on its authors, readers, reviewers, and editorial board members, who are each able to spread access to the journal through their multiple networks, and whom we, as editors, thank sincerely for their on-going support.