

COMMENTARY

TEN YEARS OF THE WAIKATO JOURNAL OF EDUCATION

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The 2004 *Waikato Journal of Education* is the tenth volume; a cause for celebration and special comment. The journal's origins are closely linked to the origins of the School of Education at the University of Waikato. The school was formed from amalgamation of a teachers' college and university education department in the early 1990s. A Department of Leisure Studies (now Sport and Leisure Studies) was added soon after. Together, over 100 hundred academic staff worked in the broad field of education, notably teacher education, the education 'disciplines' and sport and leisure studies. These tertiary teachers ranged in experience from those who had established research reputations to those who had little or no published work.

In the eyes of some senior academics there was the possibility of the school beginning its own academic journal to achieve several goals:

- publish across a wide spectrum of topics in the field of education to provide an outlet for a large group of academic staff;
- provide an outlet for a range of academic writing approaches;
- build academic capability through a quality assurance process (a refereed journal) and mentor inexperienced and emerging academic staff; and
- gradually attract national and international contributors alongside local ones.

The 10 volumes reflect the achievement of these goals.

As foundation editor, I recall the mixture of excitement and trepidation in the first year following a decision to commence the new publication. Helped by a willing editorial committee, many decisions were needed for the birth of the first volume. The editorial work required for each volume can go largely unnoticed by those not directly involved. The work to produce a journal is enormous and because the *Waikato Journal of Education* is not linked to a publishing house, the entire production is in the hands of dedicated volunteers: editors, reviewers, proof readers, layout technicians and so on to produce camera ready copy. In my own experience it is, however, greatly satisfying to see the hopes of the originators realized, and quality work published for an informed audience. The distinctive cover of *Waikato Journal of Education*, designed by Donn Ratana, deliberately reflects our Waikato setting and signifies an innovative, contemporary publication. With the content of *Waikato Journal of Education*, the editorial committee set high expectations of academic as well as presentation standards so that the journal would compare favourably with other well-regarded publications. It soon became evident that while most papers followed the APA production style required, variations could be accommodated such as historians' use of footnotes.

I want to make some observations about the achievement of the *Waikato Journal of Education* in relation to its goals. What of the authors? The first four volumes were dominated by authors from the University of Waikato, but other New Zealand and international authors were soon more evident. The 10 volumes, 1995-2004, contain nearly 150 contributions by at least 194 authors. Some are repeat contributors but when assigned to categories the distribution is: 119 University of Waikato, 49 other New Zealand, and 26 international.

What sort of content has *Waikato Journal of Education* published? Taken together, do the papers reflect the somewhat eclectic approach advocated in the original goals? To answer these questions, I surveyed all 10 volumes and assigned each paper to a content area according to its main focus. Such a grouping is at best, a bit imprecise where a paper might have focused upon an aspect (or aspects) of education that could have easily been assigned to more than one group. However, accepting this limitation, a sense of the coverage is achieved. In the following summary I have listed some major groups and the number of papers and made reference to more specific topics within each group. Where relevant, numbers of papers are shown in parentheses.

- Papers on teacher education made up the largest group (n=27). The papers covered 18 topics in teacher education, including teachers' work (4), practicum issues (3), university-school partnership (3), reflective practice (2) and single papers on other topics such as the place of teacher education in the university, beginning teaching, student-teacher views, online teaching, and research trends.
- The second most numerous group I arbitrarily called sport, leisure studies, and fitness education (n=23). The papers were spread over numerous topics such as aging, bodies in motion (a special issue theme in 2004) and goal setting for coaches.
- Curriculum theory and design was the next most numerous group (n=18). Most papers focused upon particular subjects and most school curriculum subjects were represented, with science (4), literacy education (2) and health education (2) prominent. Curriculum ideology, integration, early childhood issues and unit standards in assessment design were some of the rest.
- Papers in Māori education also featured prominently with 17 contributions. Language and culture (3), research approaches (4), politics and Māori education (2), behaviour modification programmes (2) and Treaty of Waitangi issues (2) were the topics with multiple papers.
- Sixteen papers were grouped as learning and teaching, including student assessment (6 papers), achievement and school effects (4), co-operative learning (2), gender and achievement, and indicators of school success.
- There were 13 papers in the politics, history and sociology of education, with specific topics such as citizenship education, state aid to schools, vouchers, qualification issues, and the place of philosophy in teacher education.

- Educational leadership was the topic of eight papers, with school principal leadership (2) and gender and leadership (2) prominent.
- Another eight papers were focused upon tertiary education with topics such as students' writing processes (3), writing and thinking (2), tertiary course design, and ethics.
- There were also papers on research methods (3), international education, special education, early childhood education, middle schools (2) and ICT and society.

Clearly, the *Waikato Journal of Education* has published a very wide range of topics in the field of education, thus meeting its goal of a diverse mix of papers for an eclectic audience. The journal also succeeded in another of its goals – building academic capability through publishing, mentoring and co-publishing first-time authors (as well as experienced academics). Teachers and postgraduate students have also been the authors or co-authors of a number of papers.

What of the writing approaches? At first I followed a fairly traditional stance on what was accepted for publication. However, Jim Denison became joint editor in 1997 and his influence was to challenge the editorial “policy” by advocating a more daring practice. He believed research and scholarship in education should be told through alternative voices. Consequently, one of the innovations of the journal is to publish in a variety of writing formats. For example, the journal has featured many reports of qualitative research, and provided an outlet for ethnographic writing approaches: poetry, drama, narrative, and so on. These approaches depart from the somewhat restrictive tradition of standard social science practices, and employ metaphor, imagination and personal experience to reveal ideas and evidence. *Waikato Journal of Education* was commended by Laurel Richardson in the recent *Handbook of qualitative research* (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000) for daring to publish ethnographic writing and being one of the few journals to do so.

This policy has been continued by the current co-editors Toni Bruce and Deborah Fraser. Publishing groups of papers in themes is another feature they have continued. Themes have been compiled on relevant high-interest topics such as teacher education, educational leadership, Māori culture and education, theorizing pedagogy, and issues in body in motion.

What of the next 10 years? It is my view that *Waikato Journal of Education* will grow, capitalizing upon the gains of the first 10 years. The goal should be to continue to publish a broad range of papers in education with particular themes to reflect the ever-changing nature of education itself. Earlier themes might, at times, be revisited. Along with this goal should be a flexible publishing policy to include an expanding range of writing and presentation approaches and styles. Published papers should reflect the influence of a range of research paradigms and methods to investigate educational issues. And there should be a place for academic debate over issues in particular papers (as has occurred recently). It would be good to think that the circulation and readership will continue to expand; however, *Waikato Journal of Education* does not enjoy the advantage some of the competitors do of being linked to – and supported by – a professional or academic association or body. Nevertheless, the *Waikato Journal of Education* has been fortunate in the support it receives from the leadership of the School of Education.

Just as the journal goes to press with this 10th anniversary issue, we have been approached by EBSCO publishing to be listed on their international research and bibliographic databases. This is a credit to the journal as it will be listed aside other prestigious publications such as *The Harvard Educational Review*, *The British Journal of Education* and *Child Development*. The exposure of the journal through EBSCO augers well for its continued growth and success.

Waikato Journal of Education has made its mark on scholarship in New Zealand. As its tenth birthday is celebrated, its future looks assured.

REFERENCE

- Richardson, L. (2000). Writing: A method of inquiry. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research* (pp. 923–948). Thousand Oaks, California: Sage.

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