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Kia ora koutou

This issue of *Teachers and Curriculum* is timely for several reasons.

The first of these is the recent release of the Education Review Office's report *The quality of year 2 beginning teachers* (Education Review Office, 2004). Much of this report adds nothing new to what we already know, although it has been misrepresented in the news media as an indictment of pre-service teacher education. However, when one looks beyond the newspaper headlines, at the actual content of the report, what it says needed to be said. In particular, the report affirms the belief that teacher education should be a life-long professional development investment. What the ERO points out is that in spite of this belief, investment in our neophyte teachers in their first two years of teaching is, at best, patchy. One of the few newspaper headlines that accurately captured the report's findings summed them up this way: "New teachers feel alone one year on" (NZ Herald, 2004). The ERO's advocacy for more systematic and developmentally-oriented induction programmes for beginning teachers is a strong recommendation in the report. This is one of many interesting outcomes. In summary, the ERO report recommends the following:

- strengthening the tutor teacher's role and status as a step on the senior teacher's career path;
- providing more targeted professional development for tutor teachers;
- increasing time allowance for tutor teachers and beginning teachers during the beginning teachers' second year of teaching;
- increasing professional development opportunities for beginning teachers that focus on the pedagogical areas of weakness identified in [the] report's findings;
- facilitating the establishment of, and access to, support groups for all beginning teachers...; and
- investigating the practice of some schools to employ beginning teachers on a temporary basis as de facto probationers (ERO, 2004, p. 2).

The full report is available on <http://www.ero.govt.nz/whatsnew/index.htm>

The release of this edition of *Teachers and Curriculum* is also timely in that the Ministry of Education, in conjunction with the New Zealand Teachers Council, has released a discussion document titled *Teaching quality: The role of initial teacher education and induction*. This has been released in the context of consultation about a draft strategy for preparing teacher education graduates to teach diverse learners effectively. I must confess that this was less exciting than the ERO report. At the heart of the document are the notions of distrust and of centralised control of teacher education - something foretold some years ago by Gibbs<sup>1</sup>, who suggested that the demise of the NZQA standards in teacher education would inevitably lead to the prescription of a curriculum for initial teacher education. One of the "eight potential levers that could be used to give greater assurance of the quality of graduates from initial teacher education programmes" (Ministry of Education, 2004, p. 2) is "mandating a curriculum for teacher education" (ibid.).

What then of diversity of philosophy amongst teachers, of diversity of ways of teaching children in order to meet their needs, especially when those needs are diverse?

What we teach our children, and how we teach them (the curriculum, hidden and espoused), is central to the heart of the work of teachers. Implicit in this is the sense that teachers, who know and understand their children, must be empowered to make wise and humane decisions about the curriculum that is best for those children. We must resist the tendency to regress to the safety of the "norm" on this matter, for the educational lives of our children are at stake, as is the autonomy of our teachers, and the sense that curriculum is more than what we want children to know and understand. The curriculum is about preparing children where they are at in this present time, for their individual and collective futures. No central prescription or mandated curriculum for teacher education can regulate for that. Nor should teachers' effectiveness be gauged against their capacity to deny what is right and appropriate for an individual child at a given time, in preference for ensuring that state-regulated and mandated curricula are delivered. We should, likewise, expect no less from our teacher education providers and programmes. Why should these be centrally proscribed in terms of form and content (one size fits all), in the mistaken belief that in doing so we ensure standards are upheld?

These documents, and others, present us with challenges about which we cannot be complacent. We need seriously to consider the implications of the direction being advocated for the management of teacher education and its curriculum.

The articles presented in this edition of *Teachers and Curriculum* are particularly pertinent. They discuss ways in which teachers perceive and meet the needs of diverse learners; debate the merits of curriculum reform; and identify the differences between the political rhetoric and the chalk face reality of what teachers believe (and do) and what their political masters would hope for and aspire to through the curriculum.

I hope the issues raised stimulate readers to think and to respond.

## REFERENCES

- Education Review Office (2004). *The quality of year 2 beginning teachers*. Wellington: Author.
- Ministry of Education (2004). *Teaching quality: The role of initial teacher education*. Wellington: Author.
- New teachers feel alone one year on. (2004, September 30). *New Zealand Herald*.

## NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> Colin Gibbs, now Professor of Education at the Auckland University of Technology, was the writer, along with the late Raeside Munro, of *Qualset Teacher Education Standards*.