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*Special Edition:*  
Reclaiming and reframing  
teacher education in Aotearoa New Zealand



# WAIKATO JOURNAL OF EDUCATION TE HAUTAKA MĀTAURANGA O WAIKATO

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## Editorial introduction: Reclaiming and reframing a national voice for teacher education

**John O'Neill, Sally Hansen, Peter Rawlins and Judith Donaldson**

Institute of Education  
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The Teacher Education Forum of Aotearoa New Zealand (TEFANZ) was formed in 1999 to promote teaching as a research-informed graduate profession. Membership was and is open to all providers of initial teacher education nationally. TEFANZ superseded the New Zealand Council for Teacher Education (NZCTE), a representative body for the five Colleges of Education and the University of Waikato School of Education. Both NZCTE and TEFANZ have attempted to articulate a national collegial voice for teacher education through politically charged, fiscally constrained and inter-institutionally competitive times.

Over recent years, initial teacher education (ITE) has become a site of tension around what politicians and officials typically regard as a linear relationship between preferred teaching practices and desired learner outcomes. Appearing to lack the authoritative voice of many disciplines and professions, tertiary-based teacher educators currently face a major crisis of identity, credibility and agency in responding constructively to this hegemonic 'quality teaching' discourse. Recognition of this burgeoning crisis gave rise to both the theme and format of the 2012 TEFANZ conference.

In 2011 a group of Directors of Teacher Education met informally in Wellington to share collective concerns about the level of 'compliance creep' and 'political interference' in the content and provision of ITE. At this meeting the group (with many years' shared ITE history and expertise) resolved with the support of TEFANZ to 'reclaim' and 'reframe' ITE. The Massey University TEFANZ conference organising committee then set about designing a conference format that could provide a strong platform for such critical reclaiming and reframing discussions to occur.

It was decided to base the 2012 biennial conference around a limited number of specially commissioned position papers. Without the now ubiquitous PBRF-able conference format (a tight production schedule of brief 'research output' presentations from every registrant but no time whatsoever for collective reflection or discussion), there was a very real risk that few teacher educators would get financial support from their institutions to attend. However, the greater risk was that TEFANZ members would not find the essential time and space to talk at length with each other. So, the New Zealand Council of Deans of Education (the heads of the university-based education



faculties) were requested, and agreed, to support conference attendance for the purpose of generating community, debate and consensus.

Alan Scott's opening keynote address provided an historical account of the claims and counterclaims of the contested domain of teacher education. He challenged attendees to consider a number of central questions and it is these questions that resonated through all the conference sessions: On whose behalf do we train teachers? Is teacher education a technical or a social endeavour? Is teacher education an engagement or an estrangement? Is teacher education value-free? Who owns education? Who has the right to stake some claim? Whose voices should be heard? How will we hear them?

Diane Mayer's keynote address extended this socially critical discourse by drawing on the way teacher education has been 'problematized' in Australia. The comparisons with the developing Aotearoa New Zealand situation were clearly evident. Professor Mayer's key message was a challenge to teacher educators to work 'smartly' within new public management assumptions, frameworks and accountabilities: shaping the current and future agenda in order to professionalise teacher education and the teacher education system in ways that are, at the very least, acceptable to teacher educators.

The eight commissioned position papers and authors were chosen to provide input and expertise from the various 'players' in the teacher education endeavour: tertiary and setting-based teacher educators, the New Zealand Teachers Council and the New Zealand Council for Educational Research. The commissioned papers examined policy developments since the 1970s, the extent to which teacher education may be regarded as a professional endeavour, equity, productive connections between tertiary- and field-based settings for developing teachers, what can be learned from teacher education in similar overseas systems, what teacher education could look like in ten years time, the evidence base that is needed to bring theory and practice together, and who should be involved in developing teacher education policy. Collectively, the papers were designed to enable TEFANZ to develop a warrant to talk with, and back to, government with one voice. The papers were sent to all registrants in advance of the conference.

There were two hour-long conference sessions devoted to each paper in which authors were given a maximum of ten minutes to summarise their key points, followed by facilitated discussion. Two key discussion themes emerged from rapporteurs' subsequent accounts of the paper sessions: the importance of fostering ITE programmes that are responsive and up-to-date, and the need to enhance communication, collaboration and partnership between all parties involved in education and teacher education.

ITE programmes face the challenge of being responsive to the growing diversity of New Zealand's bicultural and multicultural society. While there is certainly a commitment to 'quality', the research evidence of what constitutes effective ITE practice is as yet fragmentary and not universally known or accepted in a diverse ITE space that includes numerous public and private providers. Learning to become a teacher requires students to build not only their craft and subject knowledge, but also to transform their thinking through reflexive practices and the development of praxis. While the requisite skills and knowledge have much in common with current practice, rapid changes within society that are reflected in educational settings (e.g., the role of social media), coupled with ongoing developments in curriculum and assessment, pose new and different challenges for teacher educators and their students.

There was a strong call from conference delegates for the development of better communication and collaboration: stronger partnerships between teacher educators and the schools and centres that host student teachers. The ‘us’ and ‘them’ mentality that has at times been the hallmark of relationships needs to be challenged, and replaced with relational models that are truly cooperative. Suggested initiatives included the creation of a ‘third space’ in which authentic discussions of innovative practice could be stimulated between teacher educators, mentor teachers and graduating teachers. Other possible collaborative models included ‘associate teacher’ development projects, and the exploration of different models for the teaching practicum.

Also pertinent to the theme of closer collaboration was the desire for representatives from tertiary- and field-based ITE settings to work together with organisations such as the New Zealand Teachers Council, the Post Primary Teachers’ Association, the New Zealand Educational Institute, the Ministry of Education and principals’ groups in the development of initial teacher education policy.

Educational research would benefit too from closer collaboration between teacher educators involved in research and teaching practitioners. Of particular value would be a shift in the typical balance of power, to enable teaching practitioners to ‘own’ and contribute authentically to the whole research endeavour, thus enabling the creation of mutually beneficial projects.

Within the conference programme, time was also allocated for Special Interest Groups (SIGs) to meet and discuss issues relevant to the conference theme of Reclaiming and Reframing Teacher Education. There were seven SIGs in total.

The first SIG looked specifically at the government document *Tātaiako: Cultural competencies for teachers of Māori learners*. A key point of the discussion centred on the need for ITE staff to have a deeper understanding of the cultural competencies in order to more fully integrate these into their programmes.

The second SIG looked at inclusive education in ITE programmes and how ITE programmes can prepare teachers for the government vision of Success for All 2014. Constraints and affordances for improving the effectiveness and sustainability of inclusive education practices within ITE programmes were identified.

The third SIG centred on the opportunities and challenges for ITE programmes that have arisen from the inclusion of the new Learning Languages learning area in the New Zealand Curriculum. It discussed the special place of Te Reo Māori and also the variance in levels of expertise amongst the different education sectors.

The fourth SIG discussed the use of ICT and e-learning in ITE programmes. In addition to preparing prospective teachers through the use of ICT, it was recognised that it was equally important to prepare beginning teachers for the challenges and opportunities of using ICT in contemporary classrooms to encourage new ways of learning.

The fifth SIG concentrated on issues relevant to ITE in the early childhood sector: teaching qualifications, ratios, professional development, community-based provision versus privatisation, and the possible impact of National Standards. Of specific concern were the policy direction of government in recent years and the implications for preparing teachers for the early childhood sector.

The sixth SIG looked at the literacy and numeracy competencies of students in ITE programmes. International concerns coupled with recent policy changes in New

Zealand have centred the spotlight on teachers' personal competency in literacy and numeracy, and, in particular, the selection and preparation of students in ITE programmes.

The final SIG investigated the role of ITE programmes in developing awareness of the concept of 'sustainability'. A broad definition from the UNESCO framework for the United Nations Decade for Sustainable Development was introduced and discussed. This definition includes broader issues of poverty, social equality, societal and environmental risks and culture.

Looking *back*, we believe that the conference format helped to facilitate the goal of TEFANZ and the Massey University organising committee. The various 2012 conference addresses and position papers were suitably provocative yet, as the rapporteur and SIG summaries show, they scaffolded subsequent discussions well. The conference also helped to regain some of the ITE policy and practice space that was in danger of being lost to a remote central polity (politicians, officials and academic policy entrepreneurs). Looking *forward*, we also believe that sufficient consensus and confidence emerged so that TEFANZ, as the national voice of teacher education, now has a warrant to engage productively and robustly with government on the future shape and direction of teacher education policy. That is no mean feat in austere teacher education times, both at home and abroad.