

# Editorial

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I open my editorial with the acknowledgement that 2021 has been yet another difficult year. I would like to formally acknowledge the authors who submitted their work for publication. I am aware that the pandemic made the already challenging practice of writing much more difficult with increased professional and personal demands on their time, and the ability to conduct research. A special thank you to all the reviewers who supported the authors and the journal who also experienced similar increasing professional workloads and changing personal circumstances. Again, a deep, heartfelt thank you—without your generosity in time and intellect the publication of this issue of the journal would not have been possible.

For so many people the COVID-19 pandemic has had immense social and economic repercussions. These challenges have made visible existing inequities leading to growing political tensions internationally and at home. Inequities in financial capital, and the power and status attached to it, have clearly identified a divided world—global North and South, East and West. Similar divisions exist nationally and locally where a now-familiar story of COVID-19 related changes in professional and personal circumstances, as well as higher costs of living, are impacting a larger proportion of society.

The pandemic has also united the world by creating the need for different thinking about responding to social and economic crises. Education has emerged as a key sector requiring significant shifts in both thinking and delivery. The shift to online, home-based learning in light of COVID-19 has generated heated curriculum debates about what to teach, and how best to educate children and young people. These conversations have become increasingly political, which has only exacerbated different challenges for those involved in education and parents—all of whom have arguably struggled to keep up with the ever-evolving pandemic learning landscape. American curriculum discourse has created international headlines with political calls to ban critical race theory and a growing list of books examining issues of race, gender,

and sexuality. Their northern neighbours in Canada have taken a distinctly different perspective with a national initiative to indigenise the curriculum in response to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Key outcomes of this national inquiry include action promoting the greater inclusion of indigenous language, worldviews, and knowledge in the compulsory primary and secondary education systems and extends to higher education institutions. Aotearoa New Zealand is also experiencing heated public conversations about curriculum matters with the introduction of history as a compulsory subject, and debates about the role of mātauranga Māori in the proposed curriculum changes.

The authors in this issue of *Curriculum Matters* raise numerous questions about the curriculum. Four articles in this issue are situated within the Aotearoa New Zealand context. The authors examine a range of curriculum matters across early childhood, primary and secondary sectors which connect to wider curriculum debates about how young children understand teachers' curriculum based expectations; the political tensions implicit within curriculum policy; and how teachers' understandings of the curriculum influences classroom practice. Two additional articles raise further questions about the complex nature of interpreting and delivering curriculum in global contexts.

Maria Cooper, Lyn McDonald, and Christine Rubie-Davies' study of young children's perceptions of their teachers' expectations in early childhood and first year of primary school contexts positions children's voices at the heart of their work—which in itself is an important contribution to educational research. Their study offers unique insight into how children experience their learning environments and their teachers' practices as they relate to ability grouping, class climate and goal setting within the national bicultural early childhood curriculum *Te Whāriki*. Study findings indicating children's high level of awareness of their learning abilities and their teachers' practice prompts educators to think about how to fulfil the vision of the the *New Zealand Curriculum (NZC)* and *Te Whāriki*—both curriculum documents provide the space for children's agency and responsibility for their own learning.

Genaro Oliveira and Matt Kennedy's article is the first of three New Zealand-based studies that engage us in subject-specific curriculum conversations. Their study gives voice to primary-school teachers teaching history against the backdrop of the government's announcement of making history a compulsory

subject in 2022. Their work offers a critique of the highly politicised nature of the current curriculum reforms. The authors maintain a strong argument for stronger inclusion of teacher's views in the process. Oliveira and Kennedy's identification of the social sciences as the curriculum space from which many teachers already teach history enters wider debates about the official and hidden curriculum, teacher agency and the current flexibility of the current curriculum that allows for such opportunities to occur.

Using critical discourse analysis Felicia Ward explores some of the tensions within the English secondary *NZC*. She posits that the existing English curriculum presents a "progressive veneer" which, upon deeper analysis, contains a strong neoliberal discourse. Ward's analysis highlights the complexities involved in curriculum policy and design, and the multiple methods of interpreting curriculum documents. Ward's research draws readers into several quintessential debates about the purpose of the education vis a vis the curriculum including questions about how educational policy articulates sociopolitical messages about the acquisition of knowledge, skill development, life long learning, and academic "success". These questions are particularly relevant within global educational reform movements (GERM) which make such conversations both internationally relevant and highly contested.

Claudia Rozas Gómez explores the secondary English curriculum from another lens. Her research asks how teachers' constructions of subject English fosters the curriculum's vision of actively engaged learners. Rozas Gómez's study illustrates the critical role of teacher agency in untangling the competing discourses about the *NZC* aims and vision inherent within the curriculum that influence how English is taught in New Zealand classrooms. In this way Rozas Gómez's research, along with other authors in this issue, highlights the power of teachers in shaping how curriculum is delivered, and thus, ultimately what young people learn.

Kyughee Shin's study of Korean primary school teachers' lived experiences helps us to understand the role of teacher agency at Innovation Schools whose threefold mandate includes improving teachers' curriculum and instruction practice. Hailed as a more progressive alternative to traditional state school rote learning, Shin's work provides insight into how teachers make sense of innovation education agendas in their classroom, including modifying the curriculum to meet the needs of diverse students. With origins in grassroots

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teacher activism, Shin's work about Innovation Schools also delivers political commentary on the global debates about educational reform, teacher autonomy, agency, professionalism, and progressive schooling alternatives through the lens of curriculum co-development and delivery.

Cahit Erdem turns our attention to think more deeply about the extension of teachers' educational philosophies on their curricular design decisions. His inclusion of inservice teachers across all three early childhood, primary, and secondary sectors examines how Turkish teachers' worldviews may influence their understanding of the national curriculum. Despite curriculum-design orientation preferences associated with a range of educational philosophies, an important contribution of Erdem's work relates to findings that suggest a stronger connection between a progressive philosophy, and learner-focused and problem-centered curriculum models. This finding underscores the importance of educational philosophy and the role of curriculum policy amidst a growing global emphasis on teaching practice.

While each article engages with various aspects of the curriculum, they each advance our thinking about core questions about the curriculum including: policy—how it's written, interpreted and delivered; its connection to philosophical thinking; and teacher agency and practice. The authors' collective body of work in this issue is timely in two distinct ways. Timely in the sense that many of the questions they raise are enduring ones. In an equally timely way COVID-19 has highlighted how the authors' engagement with curriculum really *matters*. As educators and policy makers grapple with how to manage what will seemingly be a new learning landscape of ongoing interruptions requiring flexibility and adaptation, the contributing authors' work prompts us to continue to think deeply about the relationship between curriculum, teaching and learning.

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