

New Times for Education Policy in Aotearoa-New Zealand

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It seems appropriate for the premier Education journal in Aotearoa-New Zealand to acknowledge the new Labour-led coalition government, and the likelihood that education policy may change significantly as a result. The new Minister, Chris Hipkins, wasted little time in announcing the scrapping of National Standards, which may well be a sign of changes to come. Charter schools have been put on notice that they will become incorporated in the state system, and subject to state controls. It is not yet possible to be completely sure what form all these changes will take, since, although the Labour Party policy Manifesto published before the election is likely to be the blueprint, it is also likely that New Zealand First and the Green Party will want to have input here too. For present purposes, however, we will consider only the Labour Party Education Manifesto (New Zealand Labour Party 2018).

This comprehensive document proposes policy to cater to the full range of education provision, from Early Childhood Education to tertiary education, including workplace training. The Manifesto addresses some highly specific issues—as for instance, the ‘ring-fencing’ of financial provision for careers teachers, and pledging support for struggling schools by reviewing the role of the Commissioners and Limited Statutory Managers, with a view to replacing these with a more constructive and less burdensome system.

As it currently stands, this Manifesto must be seen in the context of an election campaign, so therefore it reflects policies and statements aimed against the education policies of the previous National-led government. Thus, charter schools, ‘Aspire’ scholarships, Public Private Partnerships and lowered targets for ECE teacher education, for example, are presented as disadvantageous to the provision of a quality public education system, which the new government is openly keen to preserve and improve.

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What Kind of Theory of Education is Implicit in the Labour Party Education Manifesto?

Labour aims to be more inclusive in its education policy-making, and to encourage greater democracy: students are to be re-included as representatives on decision-making bodies and the undemocratic composition of the Education Council is to be addressed, so that, presumably, teachers and other representatives are elected to its Board, rather than appointed by the Minister. Learning is still life-long, and linked to the economy, but at least provisions will be made available for people to retrain without the rhetoric and expense of 'investment'. Secondary schools will once more be able to offer night classes, there is a move towards encouraging more apprenticeships, and a real drive towards re-invigorating technical and provincial tertiary education. Underlying this policy intent is a commitment to drive back the educational disenfranchisement in recent decades of less advantaged, rural, Māori, and Pacific communities.

Pedagogy is included under several headings: the selection of potential teachers is to be more rigorous (several control mechanisms to keep teacher education institutions in line are proposed, including ERO oversight); buildings are to be designed in conjunction with the schools to ensure a coherence between pedagogic and architectural conceptions; and knowledge is clearly disparaged in favour of 'skills', which are becoming so increasingly complex they approach becoming forms of knowledge in themselves.

Whilst there are elements of this Manifesto that call for critical scrutiny, its overall tenor suggests that this Labour-led government has the will to promote policy that takes seriously the potential role of education in shaping the future of the nation-state (Olssen et al. 2005). There is much in this policy Manifesto to summon a new spirit of optimism—which is increasingly evident among those who care about a conception of education as a public good that underwrites democracy and works for social justice.

E ngā mana, e ngā reo, rau rangatira mā, tēnā koutou katoa. Tēnei mātou e pīkau nei i ngā mahi takatā i te hautaka nei. He nui hoki ngā mihi ki ngā etita o mua.

NZJES has had a change of editors. The incoming editorial team, Georgina Stewart, Leon Benade and Nesta Devine (books editor) would like to acknowledge the sterling work done by the previous editors, Roseanna Bourke, Judith Loveridge and Stephanie Doyle. We intend to build on their substantial work on behalf of the New Zealand education community. The new team are all members of the staff of Te Kura Mātauranga School of Education at Auckland University of Technology. We aspire to see the journal reflect the wide range of educational disciplines and communities in New Zealand, and to encourage the discussion of international topics that have relevance or importance for New Zealand education. The business of reviewing and editing is always one of reconciling the production of high quality writing with the obligation to encourage and support authors, and we are well aware of these two sometimes conflicting dimensions of the role.

We are honoured and privileged to have been appointed by the Editorial Board of the journal to be its new editorial team. In this spirit, we are pleased and proud to present our first issue of the journal, and extend our best wishes to all readers.

Nō reira, tēnā koutou, tēnā koutou, tēnā anō tātou katoa.

Leon Benade (Co-Editor-in-Chief).
Nesta Devine (Book Reviews Editor).
Georgina Stewart (Co-Editor-in-Chief).

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