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Kidman, Joanna & Stevens, Ken. (Eds.) (2010) *Looking Back From the Centre: A Snapshot of Contemporary New Zealand Education*. Wellington, New Zealand: Victoria University Press.

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In the preface Dugald Scott writes, “This book celebrates the work of the excitingly diverse group of scholars who have been part of Victoria University of Wellington’s Department and later School of Education” (p.9). After reading and studying the chapters written by various contributors I must agree, *Looking Back* is, as it should be, a celebration.

Tempered with observations of the reality of functioning in the world of higher education budgets, faculties and competitive academy structures, the compilation is indeed a celebration of the quality of intellects and drive of individuals. The celebration I find most striking is the tenacity of the contributors to toil on day after day, one step at a time while recognizing, engaging and retaining

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assets within the people they are and the peoples they serve.

The book is composed of six parts devoted to (1) Sociology of Education, (2) Education Policy, (3) Early Childhood Education, (4) Rural Education, (5) Human Development, Psychology, and education, and (6) Education Matters: Teaching and Philosophies. Each section has multiple chapters, each one written by a different voice and perspective.

In Part 1, the Sociology of Education, Jane Gilbert reviews educational sociology over roughly the last 50 years, describing through discourse and example how the academy has worked to reduce disparity, inequity and increase opportunity and student achievement. The author brings the reader full circle to suggest the successes achieved have brought about need(s) for intellectual infrastructure including new theories of knowledge, social change and cognitive capacities.

Joanna Kidman serves up a delightful analogy of how things have changed and how changes exhibit themselves in the academy in terms of the campus car park. I have suggested to my own department faculty parking issues reflect far more than parking at a University and could in fact be an excellent study in sociology and policy. Dr. Kidman beat me to it, and nicely done as well. Kidman weaves a narrative as captivating as her co-editor, Ken Stevens, did for her when he was the professor of her first sociology of education coursework. Though she does not articulate it as such, the teaching method Stevens utilized was applied theory reported in the first person in the form of “story telling” used for generations by Indigenous peoples around the world.

The chapter about He Parekerekere beautifully illustrates how the Kiwi, as a community, value being educated. The discussions from Gilbert and Kidman give the reader the framework of education evolution in New Zealand; the He Parekerekere brings the reader full circle to grasp the intrinsic and tangible needs, processes of learning and significant contributions Indigenous scholars and students represent. I find a message of preserving traditional ways of knowing and learning utilized to support student and faculty achievement that is replicable and transferable. My

expectation is an in-depth study of the programs and coursework outside the He Parekerekere the Maori and Pacifica students participate in would discover direct and indirect influence and impact improving the quality of Victoria University in its entirety. Considering the substantive issues facing mainstream Universities world-wide, the He Parekerekere message is not to be ignored, rather the message is to be carefully and critically considered as we develop interventions and means to respond the financial and intellectual challenges of the 21st century.

In Part 2, Education Policy, Hugh Lauder revisits the last two decades of the 20th century utilizing the Smithfield project to analytically discuss “the role of the researcher and research in democratic debate over policy” (p. 64). Lauder develops the scenario in such a way to encourage the reader to question and consider comparatively. Findings and lessons learned are substantiated yet open ended enough to allow for discourse among the intellectual community. Ergo, Lauder informs and invites learning and perspective through expertise and demonstrative reflection in a chapter I find worthy of inclusion as required reading in education policy coursework.

Gerald Grace and Martin Thrupp discuss the commodification of education in New Zealand presenting a compelling argument to reclaim education as a public good. They challenge the reader to consider the players and forces shaping New Zealand’s education policy in government, business and the private sector. Historical policy is referenced throughout the chapter to compare and contrast policy and achievement outcomes changes over time. Clearly a discussion to look reflectively at NZ education past, present and consider the future.

James Irving discusses New Zealand’s Role in Education in the Pacific beginning with the concept of Pacific identity. The complexities of policy development and implementation are exponentially compounded among multiple indigenous populations both inter and intra related, and in concert with majority European populations in Australia and New Zealand. Irving gives the reader an overview of interrelated encumbrances of “distance and isolation, demographic changes and migration, the health and physical well-being of the people, the maintenance of indigenous languages and literacy, the recruitment and

status of teachers, economic growth, and political stability” (p. 99). Irving closes the chapter with a summary statement relevant to affecting education policy for any culturally unique population “Rather than following the western model of individual competitiveness, appropriate solutions are more likely to be found within the Pacific way of community cooperation and partnership which recognizes and acknowledges traditional values and culture” (p. 101).

Cedric Hall and James Irving conclude Part 2, Education Policy with a discussion of why policy reform takes time to embed and strategies to implement change and support for change by teachers and administrators. The authors connect change agency and experiential learning taxonomy to illustrate why it takes time for a major innovation to successfully embed in practice. The chapter concludes with restating professional development must occur contiguously with practitioner and technical expertise as a partnership and not a dictatorship. The detailed reflections within the chapter are useful discussion building structures educational policy makers, administrators and faculty can use now to improve comprehensive systemic school improvement today. Theoretical and practical, Hall and Irving bring this section of the book together for the reader in a useful, memorable manner.

In Part 3, Early Childhood Education, Carmen Dalli and Anne Meade provide a pleasantly readable account of the evolution of early childhood education and early childhood care into a complimentary set of courses blended into an integrated policy context where education automatically includes care (p127). They provide a clear foundation of how the New Zealand government established value in early education by investing in:

1. Merging training courses into a Diploma of Teaching (ECE) programme that was the equivalent of a diploma of Teaching for primary teachers;
2. Commissioning a working group on early childhood care and education as part of the education reforms (Department of Education 1988b);
3. Taking bold steps to reform early childhood education policy in *Before Five* (Department of Education 1988c) and to increase funding markedly;

4. Announcing a staged increase in the proportion of qualified teachers in all licensed services where parents were not present.

A research agenda was established for longitudinal study of early childhood education effects between Victoria University's Anne Meade and Cathy Wylie at the New Zealand Council for Educational Research (NZCER). Eleven years of data show high quality early education has enduring effects on students (Wylie and Hodgen, 2007). Successful collaboration between and within research units I find indicative of the presence of educational leaders the field of education must have to meet the needs of an ever evolving truly global society of students of all ages. Helen May tells the story of her career to illustrate the development of early childhood education pedagogy and programmes in New Zealand. May's story reflects the evolution of the importance of professional development for teachers and professoriate across the country to fully support the services required at the individual child level. Indeed, the chapter illustrates the importance of quality early childhood education represented by New Zealand as a community.

In Part 4, Rural Education, Ken Stevens gives the reader an overview of how rural education has improved student access and equity within the New Zealand education system. Utilizing a matrix of technology, pedagogy, organization and conceptuality the author illustrates how a closed system has evolved into an open system with achievement, equity and efficiency of scale intertwined primarily through the advent of the internet and distance based learning delivery of service. The presentation is concise and offers the reader relationships within the matrix in ways to be considered and applied in settings outside New Zealand. This chapter stimulates critical thinking by the reader / practitioner considering ways to improve school performance and student achievement.

Ken Stevens's second chapter on rural education is an account of open education system application in Atlantic Canada. Stevens offers detailed strategies and team structures with demonstrated success to construct a digital learning network. The descriptive is concise and leads the reader to contemplate implications for first hand applications in other communities and countries.

Collaborative pedagogy thus demonstrates economy of scale advantages through digitally based consortiums and networks. Stevens gives the reader a theoretical approach with a verifiable successful application process.

Part 5, Human Development, Psychology, and education
Lise Bird Claiborne leads the reader through the changes in New Zealand education from 1979 to 2008. Keeping social justice on the agenda is an apt subtitle for the chapter as she discusses feminism in the 1980's, interweaving class, culture and sexuality through the 1990's emerging into social justice perspectives in human development and educational psychology. Claiborne provides an encouraging conclusion academics will continue to work to make sense of the past and strive for a more socially just future.

Jane Kroger provides the reader with thought provoking discussion on adolescent identity development and specific implications for teaching and counseling. While her chapter is brief given the subject matter, Kroger substantiates the value of Victoria University's support for her work with specific examples of implementation of her work in education settings. From theory to application, the author addresses adolescent identity development as describable if not empirically measureable and useful with curriculum development and student counseling for career objectives. Again, Victoria University is represented as a forward thinking institution capable of producing scholarly products of high standard and useful application and replication.

Lex McDonald focuses on the key people at Victoria University who have been or are the movers and shakers of programs, programme shifts, and developers of new programmes to meet the education needs of New Zealand. McDonald describes personal interest in professional development linking theory to practice. Arguably, McDonald discusses the cultural capital represented by the Victoria University faculty and how that faculty embed and encourage cultural capital in students to grow and flourish, ultimately manifesting as student achievement outcomes across New Zealand.

Part 6, Education Matters: Teaching and Philosophies

Jim Collinge utilizes his experience with Peace Education studies as a foundation to discuss education theory, teaching & philosophy. Peace Education as described by Collinge is worth remembering and considering by policy makers and implementers. Current global events should remind us of the importance of contemplating what peace is, what peaceful conflict resolution is, and how society can evolve in positive ways as a result. I find this chapter to be an excellent reflection of what higher education faculty can do with critical thinking and is a compliment to Victoria University as an institution.

G. Brian Thompson eloquently lays out his research on learning to read. Thompson refers to theory to compare and contrast topic research over half a century. Informative and persuasive, Thompson offers the reader a glimpse into the importance of how we learn to read and the relevance to education policy makers today. However, I find his last paragraph the most poignant as he reflects on the colleagues, research contributors, secretarial staff, school authorities, school staff, parents and children without whom his research could not have happened. Genuine acknowledgment from a scholar to those he/she relies upon is indeed an illustration of scholarly situation both collaborative and cooperative; a positive reflection of a research based higher education institution.

Jim Neyland considers education philosophy through the lens of mathematics education in New Zealand. Overt in presentation of mathematics education efficiency specifically, Neyland discusses the broader paradigm shifts in education philosophy almost covertly. The message is really quite clear to educators as Neyland's chapter wraps up the book. The industry that is education has become overly corporate in design and lacks the qualitative meaning being educated once imposed upon our schools and systems of education.

After reading and presenting each section and chapter in short blurbs to briefly inform the readers of this review, I realized the book collectively reflects the five factors from Sun Tzu's *The Art of War* (Sawyer, 1994). The factors are (1) the Tao (culture), (2) Heaven (intangible), (3) Earth (tangible), (4) the General (leader / leadership), and (5) the Laws (policy and law). Sun Tzu contends that in order to

achieve any initiative all five factors must be thoroughly considered and addressed. *Looking Back* illustrates how Victoria University did / does address each of these five factors.

The Tao (culture) of New Zealand society is reflected in the studies focused on Maori and Pacific student success through He Parekerekere. The book would lack serious credibility without the inclusion of the Maori scholar development and the importance they bring to higher education in New Zealand by protecting and respecting Maori and Pacific knowledge and culture (Bevan-Brown, 2005; Smith, 2000; Smith, 1999).

Heaven (intangible) is reflected in the chapters on education philosophy and psychology, and in the building of community founded on the personal and professional assets of the scholars. Kretzmann & McKInight (1993) and Putnam (1993) describe the cultural capital required to build the bonding and bridging social capital found in the Victoria University community.

The Earth (tangible) can be found in the conversations discussing concrete experience in Canada and New Zealand with empirically measureable outcomes. The authors discussion is reflective of changes that count (Flecknoe, 2005; Valentine & Herndon, 2006), and implementation of methods and strategies with material effect size measures (Hattie, 2009; Valentine, Cockrell & Solomon, 2006) affecting comprehensive systemic school improvement and increasing student achievement outcomes.

The General (leaders, leadership) is found in some context in virtually every chapter, specifically the departmental development conversations that are first-person life stories. Kezar (2000) seems to support the diversity in leadership and professional development collectively represented throughout the book. Schein (1992) discusses similar organizational issues fundamental to the success of any organization in terms of a going concern. Sternberg's (2005) model of educational leadership of wisdom, intelligence, and creativity, synthesized is represented in every section of the book.

The Laws (policy and law) are found overtly in the section on education policy with additional references to New Zealand governmental entities' mandates and laws throughout the readings. Policy is addressed in formal administrative structures and in measurement constructs. Specifically, the impact of student achievement and IQ measurement instruments over decades is considered along with a conversation on the importance of appropriate qualitative evaluation means and methods (Douglass, Valentine & Cockrell, 2008). The discussion on the commodification of education I find particularly poignant to the influences higher education can have on education policy in national legislative contexts.

I have enjoyed reading and reviewing *Looking Back from the Centre*. I find the chapters complimentary of Victoria University, and applaud the scholars and editors in producing a readable and diverse representative collection of scholarly reflections. Most importantly, I find the whole to be useful to young scholars studying policy and educational leadership as they progress toward becoming policy makers either for or within the industry of education. We need informed educational leaders and policy makers who rely on, and can recognize, quality data-driven research and scholarly writing.

Worth the read and investment to keep on the shelf, I suggest the text be digitized as an eBook for inclusion in university coursework everywhere with ease. A multi-media version could include audio and video of the various authors to further enhance the scholarly value to the future education leaders in their respective areas of expertise. Thank you to everyone who made this compilation happen.

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About the Reviewer

Mary Ratchford Douglass is a PhD candidate at the University of Missouri-Columbia in Educational Leadership & Policy Analysis. A world traveler Mary has a keen interest in the scholarly contributions from educational leaders around the globe. Having lived and worked in New Zealand for the Ministry of Education for a short time ten years ago, Mary continues to appreciate the significant value New Zealand scholars bring to the field

of educational leadership and policy analysis. Expecting to complete her doctorate by August, 2011, Mary hopes to continue her scholarly pursuits in collaboration with scholars from around the globe.

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