

Conference Abstract

INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE 23-26 June, 2005: Reflective Practice – The key to innovation in international education

The 'forgotten little sister' in the international sector: The 'nanny state' effect in recent educational policy developments in the primary sector

Dr Richard Smith, School of Education Te Kura Mātauranga, Auckland University of
Technology
richard.smith@aut.ac.nz

One of the major issues to emerge from the marketisation of education from the late 1980s and early 1990s has been the idea of schools being self-managing entities. Self-management has meant that Boards of Trustees and the management of schools have assumed full responsibility for decision-making and school finances and many have sought new ways of generating additional income. Some schools have chosen to supplement their income by engaging in the international market, by hosting international students (I S).

One of the ways in which the 'export education industry' as a sub-set of the process of increasing internationalisation has developed is through institutions hosting international students. Whilst this practice is more prevalent in the tertiary sector, also occurs in the compulsory schooling sector in particular in secondary schools, but also in the primary sector. There has been expeditious growth in the number of international students undertaking study at New Zealand primary schools from 208 in 1993 to 1,682 in 2001 (Ministry of Education, 2001). This considerable growth continued throughout the next two years resulting in 4,293 in 2003 (Ministry of Education, 2003a). However, in 2004 there has been a decline in enrolments to 3,598 (Nixon, 2004, p. 4), and this represents a decrease of approximately 16.2 per cent. Some potential reasons for this decline are outlined through this exposition.

In this paper the tertiary and secondary sector are referred to as the more mature, older sister siblings and primary the 'forgotten' little sister. It is argued that the primary and intermediate domain been the Cinderella of the education sector, and because of its relatively small number of international students, and possessing less political clout than its larger older siblings it has been the sector that changes were most easily implemented. Furthermore, because of this lack of significant influence and lack of contestation – the government in early September 2003 made a unilateral strategic decision to change the rules of the game (changing the *Code of Pastoral Care for Pastoral Care International Students*, Ministry of Education, 2003b) for primary schools who had invested hosting international students. This decision by the 'nanny' state was delivered swiftly and with minimal consultation with the educational providers of international educational services, which in some cases has had considerable financial impact upon these schools. It may be claimed it actually undermined some of the central principles of self-management and could be labelled as attempting more centralised control over this important economic area.

The government's decision was prompted by the findings of some research that it had commissioned in 2002 and delivered in July 2003 which raised concerns about the welfare of very young international students (aged 13 and below). However, in spite of the understandable support a position for slightly more regulation, the government imposed its preferred policy position requiring more restrictive conditions for schools enrolling students 13 and under.

Whilst the controversial decision met with considerable support in some sectors such as the New Zealand Educational Institute (NZEI, 2003) some providers were understandably concerned at a national policy decision was made which directly affected their financial viability and ran counter to the policy of entrepreneurialism. Some considered the primary and intermediate sector was being punished for problems in the PTE sector and the demise of dubious education providers in the tertiary education sector.

This paper critically outlines some of the recent legislative changes to the *Code of Practice* which have directly impacted in the down-turn in the numbers of international students studying in the Aotearoa/New Zealand education system. Furthermore, it outlines some of the criticisms of participants in a recent collaborative research project on the effects of international students on the teachers' workload in ten Auckland primary and intermediate schools (Smith, et al., 2004). Some of the findings and recommendations from this research are explored and further research into this area is recommended.