

EDITORIAL : SETTING THE SCENE

In Volume 1 of this journal, the editorial was called Setting the Scene and a number of issues were examined under that heading. At least two of the issues treated there raised questions relating to standards. Under the heading English as a Foreign Language : A Welcome Development? I observed that "although it is true that some very high quality provision in this area has been made available and that New Zealand is well placed geographically to offer this sort of service, it is not immediately obvious that it is well placed to do so in other respects." Under the heading, English as a Second Language : Are the Schools Equipped? I observed that "the situation in the ESL area is a critical one and one that could, in view of the largely unplanned promotion of New Zealand education overseas, lead within a very short time to major political embarrassment." There is no reason to believe that there has been substantial change in either of these areas in the past year. Changes, however, are taking place. Increasing numbers of people in New Zealand are gaining qualifications in the teaching of English and they are increasingly wishing to have their qualifications adequately acknowledged within a properly defined and adequately rewarded profession. As Martha Pennington observed in Second Class or Economy? The Status of the English Language Teaching Profession in Tertiary Education (Prospect Vol 7, No.3, 1992), "although ELT is a field which, just like, say, physics, is based on a specialised body of information, it is not generally recognised as such." She goes on to argue that "it should not be the case ... that anything that anyone does under the rubric of ELT must be accepted as 'ESL teaching'" and that "it should not be that anyone who claims to be an ESL teacher is automatically accepted as an ELT professional" (p.9). In surveying a number of articles on attitudes/behaviour, Pennington concludes that "one of the biggest problems in our field - and one of the reasons that English Language teaching still does not command competitive salaries in most places around the globe ... is that it is not, in fact, perceived as a coherent field or profession with a coherent set of practices and standards for those practices" (p.12). There is no doubt that she is right. However, the situation in many parts of the world is changing. In Australia, for example, professionalism - in terms of required qualifications and experience in various areas of the ELICOS industry - is already firmly established. This is not the case in New Zealand where there has too often been a tendency to call for a specification of competencies rather than qualifications. There is a clear need for both. The argument that the introduction of requirements in relation to professional qualifications will pose a threat to those who do not have them, is not adequate grounds for refusing to act in this area so long as routes to obtaining such qualifications are provided and so long as people are given adequate time to do so. At least one session at this year's Community Languages and ESOL conference will be devoted to the consideration of this issue. If the matter is not seen as sufficiently important to warrant urgent action, those who seek, through various routes, including the publication of work by those in the field, to promote full professionalism are likely to feel more than disappointed.

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