

McKenzie Award Acceptance Speech, 4 December 2007

Emeritus Professor John Codd

E nga iwi, e nga reo, e nga mana

Rau rangatira ma, haere mai.

Koutou kua tae mai, no nga hau e wha

Tena koutou, tena koutou

Tena tatou katoa

This is indeed a special honour – recognition from one’s peers is the most gratifying and significant recognition one can receive. Moreover, to receive it at my alma mater, the University of Canterbury, adds to the occasion.

It is especially significant for me because NZARE has had a considerable influence on my academic career. In fact, I would say that my research over the past 30 plus years has been shaped and guided by my students, my colleagues and by the wider research community of NZARE.

I attended the inaugural conference at Victoria in 1979 and over the past 28 years I have missed only 4 conferences. In all, I have presented, or co-presented, a total of 26 papers and I was the convener of a memorable conference in 1988, the year of the Picot report and Tomorrow’s Schools.

Over the years, my research interests have varied widely but NZARE has always seemed an appropriate forum in which to present my work.

The first paper I presented at the 1979 conference was entitled “The Use of the Piagetian Clinical Interview in Curriculum Evaluation”.

The most recent, at last year’s conference in Rotorua, was entitled “The Knowledge Economy and the Erosion of Academic Freedom”.

I certainly have traversed some diverse ground between those two papers.

Perhaps because of my interdisciplinary interests, my research has not been easy to categorise, but NZARE, being a broad church, has provided me with an ideal forum and many opportunities to make valuable connections with peers and colleagues working in other institutions. I am very grateful to NZARE for those opportunities and I am totally overwhelmed by the honour that this Award brings.

In accepting this Award, I also want to acknowledge the outstanding support that I have had throughout my career from my colleagues at Massey. I cannot name them all, but there are a few of whom I wish to make special mention.

Firstly, I would like to acknowledge my mentor, colleague and friend, Ivan Snook, whose wisdom and example have been an inspiration throughout my academic career.

Also, I wish to acknowledge my colleague, Dick Harker, who in his quiet and unassuming way has been a reliable and supportive collaborator and who has, over many years, made a substantial contribution to this Association.

Thirdly, but certainly not least, I want to recognize the influence on my work of my late colleague, Roy Nash, who was, of course, last year's recipient of the McKenzie Award. Roy was a fearless defender of the highest standards of educational research and his legacy, both nationally and internationally, will endure. I feel extremely humbled to be receiving this Award just one year after someone of Roy's stature.

I want now to make a few comments about educational research and the role of NZARE.

Clearly, I am someone who has benefited from NZARE's tradition of taking an open and broad view of educational research and scholarship.

Research serves many purposes. For me, an important purpose of research is to problematise the obvious. Research, of course, should be a search for meaning and truth, but not absolute or immutable truth – it is about provisional truth (in the Popperian sense) based upon sound empirical evidence and strong cogent argument. To achieve this, I believe that research must often challenge the assumptions of practitioners and policy-makers. The enemy of truth is taken-for-grantedness.

It is these convictions that have drawn me to critical theory. But again, I interpret critical theory in a broad sense. It is only through robust well-informed criticism that research can advance knowledge and can truly make a difference in valid and defensible ways. Vigorous academic criticism in an open, public forum is a necessary precondition for the growth of knowledge.

On this point, I believe there is an important challenge facing the New Zealand educational research community.

We are a small country and, as researchers, many of us know each other, often at a very personal level, as friends, colleagues, students or fellow researchers. This often makes us hesitant to criticise the work of others. We may feel offended when our work is criticized, or we may feel afraid of offending others.

We may perceive criticism as gratuitously negative, or even destructive, or merely ego-driven. It can be difficult for us to separate strong academic criticism from personal criticism.

Along with these individual sensitivities, there is also a very worrying trend for research to be politicized – particularly by our state institutions and government agencies.

The notion that research is a form of intellectual property, to be controlled, owned and used only by those who have funded it, is not only a major threat to academic freedom, but it is a contradiction of the very purposes of research that I have referred to.

Moreover, as I have argued elsewhere, the personalization and commodification of research by the PBRF has also had pernicious and negative consequences.

These are serious challenges.

Open academic criticism and public debate are vital to a healthy research community and I believe that NZARE, through its conferences and its journal (the NZJES) has a crucial role to play in promoting and maintaining a strong tradition of public academic criticism and debate.

This is the challenge that I leave in the trustworthy hands of those who will lead this vital and thriving Association into the future.

It is with a paradoxical mixture of both pride and humility that I accept the McKenzie Award for 2007.

I wish sincerely to thank the Council of NZARE and the McKenzie Foundation, whose great benefactor, Sir Roy McKenzie died earlier this year.

Thank you for this magnificent honour.

Tena koutou, tena koutou, tena tatou katoa.