



## NEW ZEALAND PRINCIPALS' FEDERATION PRESIDENT'S MOOT ADDRESS - 24 MARCH 2006

Tihei Mauri Ora  
Ka tangi te titi  
Ka tangi to kaka  
Ka tangi hoki ko ahau

Tihei Mauri Ora

E te Atua, tena koe  
E ka Manuhiri, tena koutou

E ka mate  
Haere, haere, haere.  
Te hunga mate ki te hunga mate  
Te hunga ora ki te hunga ora

E ka mana,  
E ka reo  
E ka mata waka  
E ka hau e wha.  
Tēnā Koutou, tena koutou, tena koutou

Welcome my fellow principals and thank you for taking the time and effort to travel to be with us all today. A special welcome to our distinguished guests, especially our Minister, the Hon Steve Maharey.

The Federation views the annual Moot as one of our most important events of the year. We have over 100 of New Zealand's educational leaders here today and everyone of you represent a significant number of principals from throughout New Zealand.

The annual NZPF MOOT presents us with an opportunity to listen to those who make some of the decisions that affect all of our lives and the lives of the future generations of New Zealanders. More importantly, it gives you the practitioners and leaders the opportunity to give feedback, to meet with colleagues, to discuss issues of mutual concern, to share initiatives, to engage in debate, to let us and our distinguished guests know, what you think we, and they are doing well, need to do, or are not doing as they might or could; - but also just as importantly, the MOOT gives you the chance to share conviviality, collegiality and friendship amongst yourselves.

I would like to introduce the NZPF National Executive to you. I ask them just to stand when their name is mentioned. I am constantly amazed how they balance their schools' needs, their families' needs and yet find time to also put your, our members' welfare and wellbeing and the needs of our profession, high on their priority list, all on a voluntary basis.

**Julie Hepburn** – Levin North School, Levin

**Jacqui Duncan** – Cashmere School, Christchurch

**Peter Simpson** – Belfast School, Christchurch – unfortunately he has been called away to a funeral today

**Mark Ellis** – Rakaia School, Mid Canterbury

**Barry Hambleton** – Konini School, Auckland

**Colleen Murray** (our National Secretary) – Mayfield School, Auckland

**Liz Millar** – on leave from Hataitai School, Wellington, currently Director of the NZPLC

**Paddy Ford** – Balclutha Primary School, Balclutha  
**Marion Fitchett** (Magazine Editor) – Ngaio School, Wellington  
**Madeleine East** – Farm Cove Intermediate School, Auckland  
**Ernie Buutveld** – Havelock School, Marlborough  
**Judy Hanna** (our Vice President) – Mangere Bridge School, Auckland  
**Geoff Lovegrove** (our Treasurer) – Lytton Street School, Feilding  
and last but certainly not least, **Kelvin Squire**, (our immediate Past President) - Stratford School, or as he would say, Stratford on Patea.

Last year Kelvin spent a lot of time lying around doing little. This year I am pleased that he is back with us. Physically he may not yet be 100%, but I can assure you that mentally he is firing on all cylinders!

The theme of this years MOOT is “Where are we Heading?” and by that we mean, where is our profession of principalship heading?

I would like to take some time to speak of the good news. There is a lot of “Good News” such as :

- The recognition of the importance of Learning Communities, not only just those within the PPLC Contract but in all our institutions and Government agencies including the Ministry and ERO working more effectively as partners.
- Recognition that Principals’ Hauora is an important area that needs addressing. I welcome and thank the Ministry for their support this year, to get this issue addressed amongst the sector.
- The work around the new curriculum could result in more manageable programme design and greater local decision making.
- The initiative started just last week to promote and assist our few Pasifika Principals in their role as principal and to encourage more Pasifika teachers to take on principalships.
- The genuine desire of government agencies, including the Ministry of Education, to work in partnership with the profession. The challenge for all of us is to translate that desire into real action.
- Some of the new Special Education initiatives being trialled by the Ministry of Education, once they are evaluated and available, will be of immense assistance to us in our principal’s role. I am especially happy to be able to acknowledge that the Ministry is well aware of the major stress to you as principals, caused by students with severe behavioural problems.
- The signals from our Minister, that already point to a style that reflects a desire for partnership and good working relationships, a genuine desire to listen, and the questioning of some of the pathways we are being directed towards at this moment.

Yes there is tension at times between the practitioners, the politicians, the Ministry of Education. This in itself is not necessarily unhealthy, and this observation is not intended to undermine the overall desire to work together. Rather it is a sign of a healthy, robust relationship that requires such tension to exist to ensure the quality of action is derived from balanced understandings and experiences of the workings of education, the school and the classroom. A researcher’s angle, on its own, for example, can always be challenged, just as a practitioner’s view can be as well. The very nature of diversity should make it clear, that

there is unlikely to be one best size for all: that “best evidence” is necessarily absolute evidence or evidence that should relate to every situation.

The secret is in ensuring that consultation and collaboration amongst the various sector groups is always genuine, and that we the practitioners feel that real respect and valuing of our professionalism, our considerable “chalk face” experience and our knowledge is constantly acknowledged by the others in this relationship.

However, having said the “Good News” bit, it would be remiss of me to not cover the aspects that I as President of the New Zealand Principals’ Federation, that I as a principal, have real concerns about, with regards “Where we are Heading”?

Colleagues, before I go any further, I need to tell you that I am proud to be a school principal, proud to have been one for nearly twenty five years and proud to be able to look forward to continuing to be a principal in the future. I make no apologies about advocating passionately for the needs of my profession, even if it means pointing out the areas that are a problem, even if it means standing up and being counted. To me, it is one of the most honourable of professions, one that every teacher should be aspiring to achieve.

I believe very strongly, that it is a fundamental ethic of the profession that we exercise our own insightful levels of critical thought and judgment on those ideas and initiatives, that others would have us follow. This is to me, a basic hallmark of a true professional, of a principal.

That my colleagues, is why I am seriously concerned that today we seem to have:

- A profession where our experienced teachers don’t aspire to ever be principals.
- A profession where we have a turnover of principals equating to between one quarter and one third of our colleagues leaving each year.
- A profession where we have an average experience base within principals of about seven years experience.
- A profession where the support of principals and for principals has been dissipated over the last ten years as market philosophies and competition have destroyed commitment to community and collegiality that in the past have always been a strength of our New Zealand system of education. To me, in my words, totally insane.
- A profession where self management is being seriously undermined by increasing control from the centre, be it through Ministry inspired and controlled policy or through the very particular perspectives and judgements of ERO.
- A profession where the pendulum never seems to be kept in balance, reflecting common sense, experience and reality.
- A profession where we continue to farewell and bury too many of our colleagues from burnout and exhaustion.
- A profession where practical knowledge and experience appears to be valued less than academic qualifications and research perspectives, that at times are of either questionable authenticity or value, let alone the valuable money they gobble up.
- A profession where as principals we are constantly being ground down by initiative after initiative, all designed to supposedly improve education, but in reality many of these initiatives are designed to say to us, no matter how hard we work, we need to work harder and still longer hours.

Questions such as:

- Why is this?
- Why has this happened?

- What will be the long term effect of this?
- Why should we be concerned?
- Who or what caused this state of affairs?
- Have we identified the problems and done something about them?

Demand answers if we don't already have them.

Colleagues, none of what I have said above is made up. The survey on principals' wellbeing or Hauora conducted last year, one of the biggest surveys undertaken to look at the wellbeing of the profession ever carried out, showed most of the things above, to be the biggest causes of stress, of physical and emotional burnout, for New Zealand Principals.

What particularly upsets me, is that most of this situation need not have happened. Over the last decade or more, the profession has constantly warned various politicians, political parties and their servants, of the consequences of many of the directions taken, in face of our strong recommendations, that are now shown to be harmful to children's learning and our profession.

Just this week, I was reading Hargreaves and Fink's book "Sustainable Leadership". Hargreaves and Fink are internationally recognised for their perceptiveness on the nature and effect of relentless system reforms, and the bright ideas externally imposed on schools, by those who think they have the answers. I recommend it to you all.

I'm going to quote quite extensively from a chapter referring to unsustainable leadership and change. As I quote from this chapter, I would like you to listen and think about how much of this is relevant to our profession today in New Zealand.

*"The past decade and more has seen the educational reform and standards movement, plummet to the depths of unsustainability, taking educational leadership with it. The constructive and compelling idea of standards, that learning comes before teaching and that we should be able to know and demonstrate when learning has occurred, has degenerated into a compulsive obsession with standardisation. One literacy or mathematics programme for everyone, one way to teach it, one size fits all, and a ruthless pursuit of market competition, our standards are going to be higher than your standards whatever that takes."*  
Pg 9.

Hargreaves and Fink go on to say that *"the standards bubble began with good intentions, improving all students' achievement and narrowing the gap between the richest and poorest of them. .... that (often) early or exceptional signs of success in raising educational standards rapidly escalate(d) into collective assumptions and insistence that standards can and must rise for everyone, everywhere, all the time. Poor achievement results are not to be tolerated. Failure is not an option. If results do fall short, the answer is to tighten control of teachers and the curriculum, change the leader or close the school. Fast change. Quick fixes. No limits."* Pg 10

Hargreaves and Fink continue looking at the effect of such change on educators. They list the effects of such a climate as things like;

- *"Narrowing the curriculum and destroying classroom creativity*
- *Restricting innovative schools*
- *Encouraging cynical and calculated strategies for raising test scores*
- *Eroded professional community as teachers (principals) have kept their heads down and struggled alone to try and get through the overwhelming range of curriculum, testing and reform requirements*

- *Precipitated and increased rates of stress, resignation and non retention, even among the younger teachers, as teachers have felt downtrodden, disillusioned, and disrespected by the reform process” Pg 12*

And finally but certainly not least *“Created an accelerating carousel of leadership succession as principals have rotated in and out of schools,…… along with early exits of more disheartened principals from the profession altogether.” Pg 12*

I accept that whilst NZ might have avoided some of the worst excesses referred to by Hargreaves and Fink, their comments have many familiar resonations. Don't forget though, that the only reason New Zealand has avoided the worst excesses described by Hargreaves and Fink, is as a direct result of the extremely strong opposition put up by practitioners within our profession in the face of some politicians and bureaucrats dreams of National Testing, school rankings and other draconian measures.

Do they sound at all familiar to you? You can actually also substitute the word “Standards” for any one of the current “fads” that currently we are being told are the one and only way for us to follow if we are to continuously improve our performance, a concept that in itself, is riddled with rhetoric and oblivious to practicalities and realities. Of course improvement is central to the work of principals, schools and teachers – but it always has been. It's nothing new. We always strive to advance our own effectiveness, the effectiveness of our teachers, and the learning of our students. In the highly complex and varied situations of schools, there is no one recipe or one universal improvement gradient, that is realistic for every school.

New Zealand Principals have been subjected to continuous changes since the inception of Tomorrows Schools. We are subjected to theories imported from both overseas and also don't forget our home grown ones as well. We have had a decade of one theory after another, one policy after another, one change after another. The result is very apparent. Not only have numerous principals and teachers become lost and disillusioned, but we have lost the valuing of profession, we have lost the valuing of experience base as a result, we have lost many of our professions leaders, we have seen too many of our colleagues leave our profession early, choosing sanity and a healthier way of life, we have seen increasing numbers of our colleagues collapse on the job.

Change that is badly implemented either because it comes too fast, or there is insufficient support to accompany it, or it is forced upon principals contrary to their professional philosophies, is in the end more than counterproductive and largely a waste of time and money, it is downright dangerous as it destroys the heart and soul of the profession.

Don't get me wrong. I am not like Canute trying to hold the tide back. I am not saying every educational change or theory is wrong or silly or ill conceived. What I am saying is the moment any theory or style is promoted as the only way, then I get very nervous about what impact it will have on my profession and on children's learning. What I am saying is, there is a limit to the amount of change any human being can be expected to endure and still be capable of carrying the requirements of a high end job such as being a principal or teacher.

Let's take for example, the work being done on leadership. Huge amounts of money effort and time have been put into theories of leadership that supposedly will ensure that principals of the future will be real leaders of our schools, unencumbered by mundane things such as property, leaking toilets, human foibles either of their own making or others, even perhaps the weekly school newsletter!

A large amount of this work has been based on literature searches on examples of overseas leadership. This takes no account of the fact that New Zealand schools are unique in the

world. New Zealand schools have their own particular culture. That nowhere else do we have the huge socio-economic ranges within a school, that nowhere else in the world do we have the huge multi-cultural range of students as we do in New Zealand, that nowhere in the world do we have the diversity of size, type and location of our schools. That nowhere in the world do we have the same levels of devolution.

The inference is there, that before, during and probably even in our final days of principalship, we will be required to keep on improving ourselves as real leaders (as if we were not already) through academic study and readings, but also knowing, that no matter how hard we work, no matter what results we achieve, we must always be better.

Lets be honest, there is only so much the human brain and body can sustain on improving itself and also carrying out at the same time, the demands of being a successful school principal.

The inference is there that management tasks will be acceptable if we can reclassify them as leadership, otherwise we will have to keep them to a minimum or get someone else - who I don't know; to do them, as they are not the real tasks of a leader.

One could argue that this reading about or research or observing what supposedly makes a great leader is admirable work, but totally unsustainable from both an economic view and from a human perspective. That this work clearly demonstrates the difference between looking at something through academic tinted glasses as compared to a practitioner's glasses. It is the difference between theory and reality. What it doesn't and can't accommodate are the huge number of variables that are constantly at work in a field, where it has been established that unless "relationships" are working well, you cannot be confident that the other things will be working well.

Others could argue, that as it is an area that covers too many imponderables, an area that to have even the remotest chance of being a positive influence in some tangible practical way, would require further reform of an already worn out through over reformation of our profession, at a cost that ultimately cannot be economically sustained by New Zealand, then it is more harmful than useful.

The result of this, in its current form is that we have a profession who are becoming apologetic about carrying out the major part of their role as a principal – management and at the same time burdening themselves down by trying to ascribe to purified academic models of principalship. I have a favourite saying that basically, you cannot do much leading if the toilet's broken and you don't fix it, because eventually the stench will get to you!

I am fed up with feeling like I have to apologise for the fact that up to 75% of my role as a principal covers supposedly management tasks, whereas I am now days expected to be exercising most of my time as a "leader". If the system and its policy gurus really want to maximise the time principals' can devote to leadership, then they need to go and convince their paper making bureaucrat colleagues first – not us!

There is no escaping reality, and reality says there has to be a happy medium:

- that recognises that you cannot break up the role of a principal into management or leadership, as the New Zealand school principal's role is both
- that recognises the unique culture of New Zealand schools and their leaders
- that recognises the importance of both management and leadership for New Zealand school principals

- that recognises that principals need help with handling management tasks through a supportive infrastructure, through professional development and training
- that supports and encourages teachers to aspire to be principals because they see the job as exciting, fulfilling and the best job in the world

That is where I believe we should be going as a profession.

Colleagues, up until now I have not mentioned aspects that I believe fall under our responsibility, as professionals, as principals. Yes that is correct. We as principals have a real responsibility to our profession, and you as leaders of principals have a greater responsibility to our colleagues and to our profession.

Let us look at some simple facts. Our profession over the last ten to fifteen years, has been spitting out our colleagues at a huge rate that is totally unsustainable. We have a profession that has an experience base on average of about seven years principals experience.

It is no wonder that our profession over the last ten to fifteen years, has been caught up and adopted many unsustainable practices, such as the drive for competition between colleagues in schools, the flitting from the latest fad on learning to the next. Is this symptomatic of the depth of professional understanding, ethic and experience?

It is no wonder that our profession, over the last ten to fifteen years has placed huge importance on getting a “good” ERO report, often doing things to obtain that report that we know are superficial, that we know are window dressing, that we do things that we don’t believe in. In many cases our profession has made decisions, based more upon fear of retribution or identification, naming and shaming, rather than what they necessarily believe is best educationally.

We as principals must take up the responsibility for ensuring the professionalism of our own profession. We as principals must provide the necessary support and leadership to allow our colleagues to develop their skills experience and collegiality. The challenge I lay down today to you the local leaders of our profession is quite simple. What are you going to do, what are you already doing, to show this leadership within your own organisation?

Earlier in this speech, I quoted extensively from Hargreaves and Fink. I now want to quote from an article called “Looking Beyond the Fence” recently published in the *New Zealand Principal* magazine and written by an eminent author.

*I believe that there is a real and very urgent need, for all principals to look outside their own school fences, and to become involved in what is happening to [education](#) in New Zealand.*

*There is a real, and very urgent need, for principals to regularly debate with colleagues and staff the socio-political educational issues and trends that are driving our education system today.*

*There is a real and very urgent need, for principals to assess and reconfirm their own educational philosophies – the beliefs they own that should be used as their main measure for thinking and decision-making.*

*There is a real and very urgent need, for principals to not just accept what they are directed to do, if it doesn’t stand up to their well-founded philosophies, but to be far more organised and politically active on a local basis.*

*There is a real and very urgent need, for principals to take the [flag](#) of educational excellence*

*and justice and hold it proudly aloft, challenging those who may wish to take it from their grasp! All of this before it becomes too late.*

*There are many more questions than answers, but it is important that the questions are posed, such as: -*

*Who holds the reins?*

*Where are we being driven?*

*Why do we allow ourselves to be driven?*

*Are principals followers or leaders?*

*When did we last debate real issues at our principals' meetings or staff meetings?*

*Is it the role of the principal to lead debate in our communities, our [schools](#), or should we just reflect existing beliefs?*

*Should we leave educational decision-making to politicians and their officials?*

*Have we become too wary to stand up for our own beliefs?*

*Have many of us, in order to survive given away the personal philosophies that motivated us to become teachers in the first place?*

*Have we forgotten that to be a successful principal, to be a successful leader, means much more than running a school by numbers, or following someone else's recipe, be it from the Ministry, or ERO or any other outside direction?*

*Have we forgotten our responsibility to society, to our staff, to our future citizens? This means challenging thought and direction whenever it fails to serve the greater needs of society.*

*Have we become confused by the notion of self-management and do we apply it to only the management aspects of our job?*

*I ask what would Socrates say to you if he dropped into your local principals' meeting, or your office?*

*As I travelled around New Zealand last year, it became very apparent that we need to spend more time becoming better informed about the wider issues of education. We need to be taking a much more macro view of our world.*

*When was the last time your local principals' association actually debated these issues, or had speakers in to inform and spark debate? When did you last discuss such issues with your friends and staff? Fullan, *What's Worth Fighting For* Pg. 97, states "Schools do not thrive unless they are actively plugged into their environments, contributing to and responding to the issues of the day..."*

*We need to know who is driving the education train? Who is paying for the fuel? What track it is on? What load it is carrying? Where it will drop its load and why it is even carrying that load? We need then to have watchers broadcasting the progress of that train every step of the journey so we can both support the loads we know will benefit children's learning and just as importantly, we might find it necessary to derail the wagons carrying the loads we know will be detrimental to education.*

*If we don't debate and discuss such issues, if we are not informed and organised, if we continue to sit on the tracks with our backs to the train and our ears and minds closed, then we will be run over by the speeding juggernaut of educational change and direction.*

*Futurist Peter Ellyard, at an earlier NZPF conference, spoke of possible futures, probable*

*futures, and preferred futures. By actively encouraging and participating in informed debate on the big issues, principals will once again take a lead in developing the preferred future for New Zealand Education. "Looking Beyond the Fence" NZ Principals Magazine – Pat Newman, March 2006. "*

So getting back to "Where are we Heading?" In this speech I have pointed out some of the dangers and problems we face. I have set a challenge for everyone of you to take back to your principals' association, to start debating and thinking about the real issues. During 2006, the NZPF Email tree will often have topics that could be used in staffrooms and at principals' meetings, to spark debate, to encourage some understanding of the thoughts behind education decision making.

The direction I want us to be heading:-

- is one of real partnership development between Politicians, Ministry, communities, staff and principals
- is one where principals are informed and active in promoting good educational practice and philosophy and experienced and knowledgeable enough to be able to defend such practice in the face of recurring fads or superficial directions
- is one of collegiality, fairness and sharing amongst our colleagues, where we help each other, where we keep an eye on each other, where the human element is cherished
- where our profession is given the real support and resources necessary to adequately do the job asked of us
- where teachers are driven to aspire to be principals

I am, believe it or not, quite positive about the future. I see an increasing rejection of the competitive model and recognition of the harm it has done to our profession.

I see an increasing emphasis, understanding and involvement about the concept of Learning Communities, as the way forward to advance professionalism.

I see increasing acceptance that the practitioner just may know something.

I see a Minister who appears confident, comfortable in his knowledge and willing to critically analyse directions and policy, not only from an academic theorists point of view, but from a perspective of human and economic reality.

Above all, if we can motivate our colleagues and ourselves, to monitor educational direction critically, if we can engender debate and discussion at a local level on a regular basis about such issues, then we will have an informed, dynamic and powerful profession.

One that often proudly articulates the ideals of our profession for all to hear.

One that values experience, knowledge and freedom of thought.

One that encourages and mentors good teachers to become good principals.

That is my challenge to you.

No reira e te whanau,

Tena koutou tena koutou tena koutou katoa