



## NEW ZEALAND PRINCIPALS' FEDERATION

### Speech delivered by NZPF President, Philip Harding to NZPF National Conference, Hamilton - 10 July 2013

Kia ora koutou kua huihui mai nei i raro i te tuanui o tēnei whare  
Ko wai tēnei?  
Ko Aoraki te maunga  
Ko Waimakariri te awa  
He pākehā ahau  
Ko Philip Harding tōku ingoa  
Nō Ōtautahi ahau  
Engari, e noho ana ahau kei Rangiora.  
Ko Tua-hu-riri taku koro-wai whaka-ruru-hau.  
He tumuaki ahau i te kura tua-tahi o Paparoa Street  
Nō reira  
Tēnā koutou, tēnā koutou, tēnā koutou katoa

To the Minister of Education, the Honourable Hekia Parata MP, to Norm Hart, the President of the Australian Primary Principals' Association, to Chris Harrison, the past President of the National Association of Head Teachers, to Pat Poland, the President of the Waikato Principals' Association, to Rubina Wheeler and John Coulam, the co-convenors of this 2013 national NZPF Conference, to members of their hard-working and enthusiastic organising committee, to life members, association presidents, overseas delegates, fellow colleagues, warm greetings to you all, and welcome to the 2013 NZPF Conference here in Hamilton.

My career spans nearly thirty-eight years of teaching, from starting out in a low decile city intermediate, through six years leading a rural two teacher school in Mid Canterbury, three years in an international school in Port Moresby, Papua New Guinea, three years in North Otago, and finally, back to the city I knew I would never leave – with ten years at Waimairi School and now the last five at Paparoa Street School. I wish to publicly thank and acknowledge my DP Raewyn Saunders for stepping up and allowing me to serve as your President, and the support I have received from the rest of my staff, my Board, and my community as well. I know that every one of them has the best interests of our children at heart in all that they do. Possibly that is why they let me go and live in Wellington.

I would like to acknowledge my NZPF Executive and the wonderful staff from our national office, for the dedicated work they do on your behalf. Eighteen people who give up at least ten weekends a year to serve their colleagues, who can be hard to please sometimes!

This year five members of the executive will step down and I wish to publicly thank and recognise Peter Simpson, Ernie Buutveld, Paul Drummond, Sally Direen, and David Ellery, who have given years of service to education, and will step down in December. I ask you to show your appreciation to them all.

During all my years in teaching, the one thing that has never changed, is the expectation of constant change.

I have just returned from the ICP Conference in Cairns, where we were engaged by a wide range of excellent speakers, who challenged our thinking about leadership and our future focus.

Yong Zhao restated his view that the essential key competency for the 21<sup>st</sup> century has to be creativity and entrepreneurship. With frightening trends automating world production, the future will not replicate the past. The smart phones we all carry are killing jobs at an ever increasing rate, reducing staff requirements in areas such as banking, air travel, and even in restaurants. In Cairns we could order a drink or a meal using our phones.

Michael McQueen reminded us of the frightening characteristics of Gen Y and Gen X. The old advice was offered up again – we are preparing today's children for jobs that have not yet been invented. This begs the question, of what should our educational focus be to prepare these children for such a future?

Andreas Schleicher shared his analysis of PISA data to highlight the strategies that successful countries have used to raise student achievement in their systems.

We heard again about Finland – leading the world with its bi-partisan approach to education, and its focus on elevating the status of the profession in the eyes of their public. There are no league tables in Finland. It is a system improving itself through collaborative and de-privatised practice.

By the way – the ICP Conference in 2015 will be held in Helsinki in 3 – 6 August. Finland was very aware of the tenuous nature of its fame, and nervously awaiting the next PISA rankings. Yong Zhao reminded us to remember that PISA reflects past success, and not necessarily future results.

The truly remarkable Tim Costello, who amongst many wonderful accomplishments is the CEO of World Vision Australia, and he reminded us of astronomer Clifford Stoll's remark –

Data isn't information. ... Information, unlike data, is useful. While there's a gulf between data and information, there's a wide ocean between information and knowledge. What turns the gears in our brains isn't information, but ideas, inventions, and inspiration. Knowledge—not information—implies understanding. And beyond knowledge lies what we should be seeking: wisdom.

So – back we come to New Zealand to consider our achievements and our challenges. Here is New Zealand's PISA ranking in 2009. I have left out the non-country states such as Shanghai because the table I found left them out.

Fourth in the world. Now Let's look at the spending...

There we are – lurking at 20<sup>th</sup>. Mind you Germany is missing from this list, so in reality we are probably 21<sup>st</sup> in the OECD for primary school funding.

Principals could be forgiven for thinking that our achievement data must have been much much worse. Didn't the Prime Minister tell us all that – “teachers have let this country down”?

In 2007 the profession was busy. Schools were grappling with the new curriculum - a wonderful and world leading document that promised a renewed focus on pedagogy and student engagement. An exciting period was looming where emerging technology would blend with powerful practice to create a rich and forward looking framework. This document was shaped by us all, owned by us all, and it was exciting us all. It was truly a roadmap to creativity and thinking skills, where authenticity was assured, with student engagement at its centre.

And then – 2009, national standards. Anne Tolley told the NZPF executive when we begged her to talk about the pitfalls “– we have been elected, and we are doing it”! Passed under urgency, regulated with new NAGs – you all know the story.

Since its inception morale has plummeted, PLD across the country has withered and shrunk to a narrowed focus on literacy and numeracy in schools deemed under-performing, and now instead of discussing teaching and learning we gather to gloomily mutter about inconsistent data gathering practices, and school achievement data online, which can be found complete with comparison tools, on the Stuff website.

Why have we followed the failed policies of other countries?

America describes its education system's current state, as one of crisis, and the No Child Left Behind Policy has failed. The UK Head Teachers' Conference in Birmingham in May of this year resounded with the genuine anger of a profession appalled by the impact of its government policy. Interestingly, in just the last week the Secretary of State for Education in the UK, Michael Gove, has announced his support for a joint Commission to review assessment practice across the UK, in an attempt to deal to the damage of recent years. In Cairns last week, Australians were shaking their heads at the impact of Naplan on their future focus.

Why have we turned our back on an exciting step change opportunity offered by the NZC in favour of data driven comparison of schools?

If we accept the idea that you get what you measure, then we better be sure that what we are measuring is indeed the most important thing on which to spend our time. Time is a resource that can only be spent once, and time taken on this, is time taken from that.

The tragedy of the national standards distraction is that it can never achieve its stated purpose – namely to close the gap, to raise the tail, to deal to the one in five... All it can ever do is raise the mean by a small amount, and maintain the gap.

Finland has taught us the importance of equity in raising system performance. New Zealand has in fact one of the widest socio-economic ranges amongst high performing countries, but has performed well in the past.

We would all agree that there is always room for improvement in New Zealand, and there are some exciting possibilities on the horizon that should be embraced and pursued by us all.

No-one here today would argue against the Minister's vision for a Teachers' Council owned by the practitioners, and setting the highest possible aspirations for the selection, on-going professional development, and standards of the profession.

No-one would argue with defining consistency and clear expectations around appraisal – as long as the purpose is to develop and strengthen teacher practice through coaching and collaboration.

No principal wants to protect teachers who can't or won't cut the mustard.

No-one would disagree with the Minister's goal of raising the profile and prestige of the profession.

We need to have a robust and frank conversation about the recent ERO Report on Mathematics and why we lag behind.

But if we are to solve the problem of the 20% alleged to have failed in this country, can we actually agree on the true nature of the problem?

A senior Ministry staffer told the Inclusive Education Capability team last month, that 15% of NZ children will need access to special needs funding at some stage during their time at school. 270,000 children live in poverty, but there are nay-sayers even to that. Politicians who argue that poverty doesn't exist in this country. Ask any principal from South Auckland or the far North what is their greatest challenge and they will quietly tell you that it is the impact of poverty.

And yet when principals raise such issues they are slated as deficit thinkers.

We simply want to talk of the **whole** complexity of the problem, and not simply suck up and implement a policy that we regard as flawed. We have been told that this is simply an ideological difference, and that governments have the right to set such direction.

Well my thirty eight years of teaching experience are shrieking at me that we are taking our evolutionary and revolutionary world class system down the wrong path, and I know from countless discussions around the world that educators everywhere feel exactly the same.

The PACT tool has been discussed in recent weeks. Many people feel that we are simply debating the mandatory nature of the tool, or where the data might be held, or how it will be used.

It is much simpler than that.

Here is the critical question. Do you endorse and support the national standards policy, brought into law, under urgency in 2009?

If your answer is NO, then we must walk away from PACT.

The issue is not about teachers cutting off their noses to spite their faces, but rather a deeply held professional certainty. Every educator worth its salt knows that by comparing schools' "achievement" on websites such as the Fairfax "School Report", children and education are harmed. If all children in all schools and in all contexts were widgets, that might not be true, but any parent and every teacher knows the diversity of the child.

The tired conservative argument of "back to basics" has been around for decades, but a modern 21<sup>st</sup> century education seeks to engage children in broad, rich, and meaningful learning, in a world that is changing so fast that it is breath-taking. Parents did NOT support this policy in two elections. Most were oblivious in 2008, and confused in 2011. Teachers have remained consistently opposed, not to protect their patch, but because it is bad for children when the only thing that matters is two curriculum areas out of eight.

The PACT tool will strengthen somewhat the consistency of national standards. That is like saying that better gun-sights will improve the accuracy of a firing squad. Parents must ask themselves, why is the profession so implacably opposed? And be worried.

The trouble that I see in this matter, is that we principals are all such goody two shoes. Our need to know, our need to not miss out, our need to be up with the play, will all lead us to reassure ourselves that just knowing about the tool can't hurt.

Well it will. Do not be confused. This debate is not about this clever and seductive wee tool. It is about its intended purpose, and the impact of PACT on national standards data.

There is acknowledgement from the highest levels, including the Minister, that a national test is a destructive thing. It narrows the teaching focus to the test items of previous years, and narrows the professional classroom response to that being measured.

PACT is set to become our national test, and claiming that because we have based our model on teacher judgements we avoid those associated problems is to deny the impact of high stakes comparison.

Imagine a New Zealand where each school's national standards data defines them. One where no-one can attack the validity or reliability of these numbers, because they are finally made consistent by this tool's score, tweaked by the statisticians, not even criticised as "just one test on just one day".

We have warned against creating a high stakes system since the policy was first mooted. One only has to observe the effects of public data in other countries to find incontrovertible evidence that the approach is wrong.

It's bad for schools, and it's bad for children. It's especially bad for priority learners.

I invite you all to attend the Annual Meeting on Thursday, where this issue can be debated properly, and you can endorse or challenge the four sector groups who stood side by side to declare that we would not support the development of this seductive national test.

We are not asking any school to act illegally. We have simply said that we cannot and will not assist with the *development of a tool* which will give legitimacy to a bad thing for our children – that is, published national standards.

If we turn our attention to our priority learners, the challenges are there too. A recent survey by the Federation asked principals to respond to funding levels for the learning needs of your non-ORS special needs children. A staggering 95% of respondents stated that the resource is insufficient.

When asked about truancy, a third of you told us that it is an issue for your school community. When asked about transience, 41% of you told us that it is a problem for your school community.

NZCER will probe this issue more deeply in this year's comprehensive survey of schools, and I encourage you to assist Cathy Wylie by engaging with her research if your school is chosen to take part.

The challenge that I wish to offer the Minister today is simple. The harm of national standards comes when it drives the focus of schools in the wrong direction. The unintended consequence which diverts attention from where it matters onto precisely the things that don't. Much of the professional discussions that have occurred in schools in the last three years have clarified practice and revealed the thinking that underpins teacher judgements. This sort of professional learning is an important driver to school improvement.

We would have little problem with what has happened in the aftermath of this implementation if a school's data were safely held inside a school, and scrutinised by its community, the Ministry and the Education Review Office. It should not be on a website for comparison. If the political will were there I believe this could be achieved and we could move forward positively.

### **So, what are the positive opportunities that we can use?**

The Federation welcomes the appointment of Peter Hughes as the new Secretary for Education. Peter has shown himself to be a fast learner, and someone who places strong relationships and communication at the heart of what he does. If he has an achilles heel, it is that he has little practical experience within the education

sector itself. That need not be a hindrance if he continues to work collaboratively and positively with those who do have that experience – namely the professionals who work in schools.

The chief issue that he will have to address is the manner in which this Ministry relates to and supports its clients – namely its schools. The issues of the last three years have done real damage, and there is a disconnect between Ministry policy intention and the actual delivery experience for schools that is unparalleled in my memory.

Colleagues – we have some glorious things going for us. We have our professional integrity, and we get to make some sacred choices. We have such depth of experience and knowledge across our leadership at this time in education that we may look back upon our past years of teaching as a golden age.

We principals must take back the agenda. We must turn our attention and our schools' resources back to the things we believe and know will make a difference. We must walk the talk in our schools.

The challenges I have mentioned are all significant, but none can be more important to solve than the ever present concern about the achievement of Māori and Pasifika children. If future success is to be predicated on collaborative problem solving, then this one has proved perplexing and hard to shift.

Some problems are complex, and require a co-ordinated set of factors to be worked on simultaneously. There is no silver bullet.

Your national executive, fiercely poked and prodded by its Māori whanau, Peter Witana, Keri Milne-Ihimaera, and Whetu Cormick, have demanded that we respond.

I wish to address the Pakeha principals present.

In thinking about framing our key message, I suddenly saw myself, aged five, on my first day of school, back in 1961. Instead of walking into St Michael's School in Christchurch, I am standing outside a Māori Kura. The colours, brown and white and black and red, are strange to me, and the carvings at the front of the school are nothing like anything I have ever seen in my middle class Christchurch life. The people are all brown, with no freckles anywhere, and they are all speak a language that I don't understand and can't speak.

And I am trapped here at school until my mother picks me up. And I don't like it. And I don't want to be there.

Could this be how it feels to be Māori in a school dominated by Pakeha?

NZPF today wishes to announce a new initiative soon to be available to all schools. The Māori Achievement Collaborative will use the research underpinning the power of clustering to support groups of schools who are serious about strengthening and developing their culturally inclusive schools.

We know the efficacy of working with others to challenge our practice, and this concept sits well with the tenets and structures of the Te Ariki model. Māori Achievement Collaboratives will provide some real resource provided through the Ministry of Education, to assist schools in the funding of champions and mentors, and the regular meetings of small groups of local principals. MACs will seek to assist schools to consult with local iwi and whanau, and build stronger links between all families and their schools.

MACs will assist schools to make connections, to share their challenges, to reflect and modify their next steps, in a framework of collegial accountability. The resourcing will be accessed through the Ministry's resource, and we must acknowledge the assistance of Pauline Barnes and her colleagues for the collaborative way they have approached this.

It is a fundamental birthright for all children to feel included and safe in their local school. Too many of us have done too little to truly acknowledge tikanga in our schools' daily lives. We have not always provided the frameworks and pathways needed to include whanau inside the school gate in ways that make them feel genuine partners in their children's learning journey. The distraction of other policies has diverted our attention from the successful implementation of Ka Hikitia and Tataiako.

If you would like to work in a well-resourced cluster of other schools to work in this way, please visit the NZPF stand out the front of the sponsors' hall and express your interest.

When you leave this conference, motivated and excited by the excellent line-up of keynotes in the programme, and hopefully these brief words of mine, I challenge you to reflect on your beliefs about what is important in a child's education, and then to lead and act accordingly.

Do not be seduced by the national standards.

Do not start gaming your children's summative assessments as a futile way to improve your school's performance.

Go back and engage with the NZC with fresh eyes and read its potential.

Ensure that your school curriculum is focused on the diversity and potential of your learners, and that it excites and engages not just the children for its authenticity, but the teachers too for its purpose and value and creativity.

Integrate that curriculum into literacy and numeracy – not as an end in itself, but as a necessary and relevant tool to communicate and publish and share with others.

Consult openly and appropriately with your community, Māori, Pasifika, and Pakeha, and talk about what they think is important that you teach in their place.

Ask your parents how they feel about the way that you are reporting to them about their children's progress, and respond positively to any challenge it brings.

Share with them the ways that they can best support at home the work of your teachers at school.

Accept their feedback and concerns as constructive and meet the issues head on.

Help your teachers to reflect on their practice by sharing it with colleagues and opening themselves to feedback and challenge and stretch. Resource them to de-privatise their practice and welcome others into their classroom space - not for a one-off window dressed appraisal visit, but for an on-going relationship that will continue as long as they are teaching.

Ensure that your schools are true learning communities where everyone expects to be lifelong learners.

Let me close with the words of Elliot W Eisner, the emeritus professor of Art and Education at the [Stanford Graduate School of Education](#), when he said this in 1997,

“We would like our children to be well informed - that is, to understand ideas that are important, useful, beautiful and powerful. And we also want them to have the appetite and ability to ask questions, to think analytically, to be able to speculate and imagine, to see connections among ideas, and to be able to use what they know to enhance their own lives and to contribute to their culture.”

What better words than these to leave you to reflect on your school's future as you lead your school bravely towards even greater things.