

# **Insights and Oversights for Principled Principals by Lester Flockton**

## **PREFACE**

### **1.09.05**

I am pleased to take up the opportunity offered by the NZPF to write a reasonably regular column for its website. My goals are

- to stimulate challenging critical thought (which should 'rise up' as considered analytic thought rather than being 'put down' as negative cynicism)
- to promote the rightful place of principals as key educational leaders in knowing what is good and right for our schools, colleagues, students and their families (not in any particular order of priority)
- to constantly argue common sense in the face of nonsense, clarity in the midst of confusion, and autonomy and creativity of thought in response to dictates, mandates and all form of claptraps.
- to assist principals and their readers by providing background information on a range of matters, topical or otherwise, that prevail upon the work of schools
- to help restore peace to troubled minds and a sense of happiness and great personal professional satisfaction when the rightful joy of the job is under threat, for these are best evidence ingredients of the good and productive life in our schools.

These goals are a tall order, particularly in midst of such a richly diverse group of educational leaders. That we will not always agree could be a healthy sign.

In the forthcoming columns, I want to take up some post-NZPF "2005 Conference Themes", but for this initial restart column let's consider rights and wrongs, taking our lesson from the scripts of the New Zealand Herald, June 2005.

### **Ivan Snook's Right and Wrong**

New Zealand education is blessed to have a person of Ivan's deep and highly intelligent devotion to both philosophic and practical concerns for education in this country. In his article in the NZH (07.06.05) he said some interesting things, including

- Competition has driven out co-operation, and compliance has pushed out creativity
- Testing has squeezed out teaching
- Teachers are less and less permitted to think for themselves: they are seen not as professionals but as skills technicians.
- Where (teachers) used to help design the curriculum, now they merely “deliver” it.

I have personally witnessed these unpalatable situations – but only in schools where it has been allowed to happen from within. I have also, happily, witness the reverse, but only in schools where it has been allowed to happen from within! Principal leadership requires moral courage and downright good sense! It could be time to restore the balance.

### **Trevor Mallard’s Right and Wrong**

I’ve not known a Minister of Education who has not been motivated by pursuing what he (yes, they’ve all been men) has believed to be in the best interests of education. But they all have one other thing in common – they are all politicians and a major priority is holding onto office! Work out the rest for yourselves. It just makes plain sense.

Trevor’s response to Ivan’s article (NZH, 20.06.05) included the following:

- Ivan Snook advises teachers to continue with their professional reading. I would endorse that advice, with the proviso that teachers find someone other than Ivan Snook to read.
- The Tomorrow’s Schools reforms of the late 1980s assumed, and depended on, the professional skills and judgments of principals and teachers.
- Our teachers have discretion over what is taught, how it is taught and the resources and textbooks they use.

There is something hugely symptomatic and fundamentally disturbing in the first quote that subverts basic principles of democracy – but since Trevor is a politician, it is perhaps an understandable defence, and will be regarded (disregarded?) in a manner so deserved.

The second and third points are brilliant affirmations. Stick them in the front of your policy files and curriculum plans! Make them true!