



NEW ZEALAND PRINCIPALS' FEDERATION

Annual Moot Wellington – 4 April 2014

PRESIDENT'S ADDRESS

Kia ora koutou
Ko wai tēnei?
Ko Te Kinga 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 tuahuriri taku korowai whakaruruhau.
He tumuaki ahau i te kura tua tahi o Paparoa Street
Nō reira
Tēnā koutou, tēnā koutou, tēnā koutou katoa

Kia Orana, Malo e lelei, Talofa lava

Welcome to the 21st Annual Regional Presidents' Moot.

Special welcome to **Lester Flockton**, our life member from Dunedin. We are thrilled to have you here Lester to contribute to our discussions. Also, I wish to acknowledge past NZPF President Geoff Lovegrove, who will retire from principalship at the end of this term, but has graciously agreed to chair the debate later in the proceedings.

Today will be jam packed with information and challenge, and your job, to quote my old friend Lester – is to do your own thinking.

Your National Executive agonises over its responsibilities every day, and increasingly I find myself sitting in Ministry meetings, alone and somewhat isolated, and speaking for and on behalf of every principal in the country, about weighty issues that I know are front and centre for you.

This notion of “the sector leading the sector” is no bed of roses.

We have deliberately endeavoured to create some time today, by summarising some of the seminal events of 2013 prompted by last year's Moot. We have recorded their status for you to read at your leisure and take away and share, rather than discussing them within this speech or indeed within this day. The summary of 2013 is already on the NZPF website and will be published in a flyer in case you want a digital version. Please do engage with that document, as it lists some important achievements over the last twelve months.

The Moot's programme today is before you, and it should lead to some well-informed debate as the day unfolds. I ask and indeed insist, that we act today with restraint and respect in any discussion, be it with me or the Minister or anyone else.

Today I will deliver three key messages that I would like you to consider throughout the day.

- 1 The NZPF Executive believes that this IES policy will proceed with us or without us
- 2 The NZPF Executive believes that true collaboration is a stronger proposition than competition for raising achievement
- 3 The NZPF Executive believes that we must remain in the IES tent to achieve any influence

Before I outline the challenges of the last two months – and it has been just seventy-two days since the IES policy was announced, let me make our intent for today, perfectly clear.

Today you will hear from some of the major policy shapers, hear more information about what the policy is shaping to be, and not be. I do not want the debate to leap to a simplistic and binary argument, where some colleagues clamour to get “out”, while others argue to stay “in”. We need to assemble all the facts we can, and we will do that by remaining respectful and calm, and listening closely to the ideas expressed. Later today, the combined wisdom of all the good people in the room will give us their clear advice.

It is fair to say that the proposal that was launched by the Prime Minister on 23 January came as a complete surprise to everyone involved, including the Asian delegation.

That delegation of which I was a part and that travelled to Singapore and Hong Kong to view two “world class” education systems were well aware of the very different cultural contexts of those systems. Speaking purely personally, the thing that impressed me the most, was the obvious system coherence in many different areas that could be achieved when you had a small geography, just 350 schools, clear expectations for practice, and one teacher training provider.

In the conversation that followed back in New Zealand, Cathy Wylie’s book *Vital Connections* was featuring prominently. I don’t doubt that many of you will be familiar with the book. Her fundamental premise is that since 1989 NZ Education has suffered due to a lack of system coherence, and collaborative practice has been reduced in many areas as individual schools have competed, and either thrived or struggled. Cathy will speak later today.

Vital Connections laid a direct challenge to us all by suggesting that Tomorrow’s Schools really needed a review. Some of you will remember the Picot Report and the process that led to the Tomorrow’s Schools design. There was widespread consultation in an unprecedented public discussion, and those of us who were principals at the time largely welcomed the opportunities that the new landscape offered. Has it met its objectives? It certainly changed the way schools were, and are, and created competition between schools for pupils and status.

Returning now to 2014, none of us had the slightest inkling of the 23 January announcement.

I confess to being astonished to hear that \$359m had been appropriated for in-school leadership, and further, that the sector would be asked to help shape the policy. I was interviewed on the way out of the announcement and my initial enthusiasm was captured. I regret my comment, because unwittingly it appeared that I had immediately positioned myself positively behind a Government policy.

Since that day a great deal has happened.

The process was quickly underway with the working group comprising all the usual players, chaired by Peter Hughes, and with Dr Graham Stoop and some Ministry staff all on hand to “shape the detail”. We were told that the emerging papers were confidential to the group. This was after all a budget initiative and Government plans are not usually consulted in advance – simply announced in the House sometime in May, by the Minister of Finance. This was a new process for us all.

The only real clue to its emerging shape has been the Cabinet Paper which was shared, and the policy has changed significantly since then, although the Cabinet Paper is the artefact to which we must return.

Regardless of its detail and intent, a few matters are obvious to everyone. As a change management process, this has been a disaster. It has been carried out with all the hallmarks of a top secret mission, except that everyone is supposed to know that it’s happening due to the broad terms of the Cabinet outline, but not worry about the actual detail. It’s been a long time since the sector was invited to inform a government policy initiative.

It has been launched into a sector characterised by deep mistrust after six years of betrayal and hidden agenda.

It also signals a dramatic change to the New Zealand Education landscape and good change management process states a vision, and a rationale, and sets small and achievable goals that move people forward. Michael Fullan talks about setting out change through a “North Star

Proposition” but I fear that no-one within the sector has any sense of following a bright star at the moment.

The NZPF Executive has laid these very important process concerns at the feet of the Minister, who has batted them away, replying that we were lucky to be given this opportunity to shape a budget proposal. Consequently, there is a wide range of opinion held by principals, much of it based purely on the only detail available – the Cabinet Paper. The feedback to our survey on 17 February, which was largely negative, was wholly informed by the Cabinet Paper’s information.

Parents and Boards have not been included in the discussion either, and I fear that many still know little if anything about it, or had time to consider its potential impact on school governance, their own school’s leadership, or their future relationship with the schools down the road.

I have personally been incredibly troubled by the navigation of this issue. If one focuses on the scope of a hidden government agenda there is a conspiracy in every corner.

If the discussion considers the Treasury’s influence on policy, their OIAed documents point to scary shadows and frightening directions. This initiative could lead schools into losing their status as individual entities and see weaker schools swallowed up by their stronger neighbours. Is this the first signs of performance pay coming in under a different label? Is it the end of Tomorrow’s Schools as we know them?

Regardless of the merits or otherwise of the proposal, it has been announced by a Government with its tail in the air, determined to drive home its agenda.

NZPF is in Wellington for two critical reasons. They are to represent principals’ views, and to influence policy. To achieve those objectives we need to be part of critical discussions.

Since the start of the working party’s deliberations, significant changes have been won to the detail of this proposition. We have removed the original titles for the positions. Participation at this stage is voluntary. The money is increasingly being referred to as a "resource".

I have sought wide advice and despite the wide range of views, the majority of that advice is to stay engaged and exerting that influence. The policy implementation will continue regardless. It has been publically announced by the Prime Minister no less, and this genie will not readily go back into its bottle.

There are strong arguments being promoted about the impact of poverty on schools, and NZPF totally supports those arguments. However, our focus has to be on both what matters inside schools, AND what matters outside. It’s not one or the other – it’s got to be both. It is totally appropriate to lambast this government for its track record around equity issues, but we still need effective and successful schools that are improving.

So what do we want?

We want this policy to be evidence based. Where are the academics and the architects and why are they not in the room informing and helping to shape the detail? We are assured by Graham Stoop that he has spent many hours discussing the detail with academics. Peter Hughes has made the comment that we should have Michael Fullan involved as soon as possible to advise and inform the implementation process and improve the detail.

We want principals, teachers, parents, and Boards to be urgently consulted on the full detail of this policy, and its emerging intent, with clarity and transparency. That won’t happen until the policy is shaped and approved by Cabinet. Peter Hughes is confident that it will go through with our advice intact, and that after it is approved it will be a highly visible and transparent document that will be widely shared. It will be flexible enough that communities of schools can operate with creativity, flexibility, and choice. He has described the objective of this policy process as “tight/loose”. Tight enough to be approved, but able to be interpreted and improved.

We want to make it loud and clear that we will never accept National Standards as the arbiter of all that is good or bad within a school or indeed a group of schools, especially with the ongoing issues around the formation of the standards themselves, validity, reliability, and inter-school consistency. This has been acknowledged, but needs more work to ensure that our concerns

are reflected in a range of wider and co-constructed indicators that reflect the NZ Curriculum, and identify other key non-academic indicators of great school performance.

We want this policy to be informed by the wider profession in respectful and transparent ways, and that means that the present secrecy has presented a huge challenge. This will apparently become possible once the policy is adopted.

We want this policy to be based on a definition of real collaboration based on a shared belief in a co-operative approach, trusting that better things will come from us all working together than from one of us working alone. In true collaboration, all participants are treated and valued equally.

The Federation's commitment to collaborative practice between schools has been well established with our commitment and development of our Maori Achievement Collaboratives and our partnership with NZEI in developing and promoting the Te Ariki Project over many years.

"Bad collaboration is a waste of time and resources and produces no results. Deciding not to collaborate is a better option than bad collaboration." So says Morten Hansen, Professor at Berkley School of Information.

I thought Eric Schmidt, chairman of Google, had a very interesting — and sarcastic — comment on this topic. He said, "When you say collaboration, the average 45-year-old thinks they know what you're talking about: teams sitting down, having a nice conversation with nice objectives and a nice attitude." (smile)

One respected principal commented this week – many principals think collaboration involves holding a lunchtime meeting with neighbouring principal friends and talking about what's on top.

This policy will fail if the true nature of the collaborative process is missed. So - what is our agreed definition of collaboration?

When I discussed the policy with Michael Fullan last weekend he made it clear that such a policy will not work as an imposed top-down structure, without genuine buy-in from the players, and agreed values of working for a common purpose. The model however is voluntary. You don't have to opt in to it, and there is an emerging sense of an organic start-up driven from the bottom, and using successful collaborations to model the possibilities.

Fullan talks about the power of collegial collaboration in his excellent new book, "The Principal – Three Keys to Maximising Impact". Those three keys, which he explains in greater detail in his book, are:

- Leading Learning
- Being a district and system player
- Becoming a change agent

Fullan has lots of advice for New Zealand at present – some of which many of you may not like or agree with. He talks at length of the power of true collaborative practice, and identifies the drivers that work and the ones that don't.

Again, according to Fullan:

- **Accountability** is the wrong driver, while **capacity building** is the right driver
- **Individualistic solutions** are the wrong driver, while **collaborative effort** is the right driver
- **Technology** is wrong driver while **pedagogy** is the right driver
- **Fragmented strategies** are the wrong driver, while **systemness** is the right driver.

He explains these right and wrong drivers in much more detail and I urge you to read the book, but if he is even remotely right, then what does this say about our competitive and individualistic Tomorrow's Schools? We have been repeatedly assured that there are no plans afoot to dismantle self-management. However, if we fail to develop new ways of working and thinking,

we may see a reform that makes a far more dramatic sweep through our current governance arrangements.

Whatever you think, anything we invest in so heavily has to perform for all of our kids, and especially for Maori and Pasifika. One way to make this more likely to is study the evidence and learn from the successes of other countries with similar challenges and profiles to us. We also want to tap in to the innovative practice and creative thinking for which New Zealand is famous, and not cookie cut schools into clones of each other.

Are there any other obvious advantages? Think of the strength of a group of principals speaking with a united voice about those issues which are front and centre for their community. Think of the weight of a wider community of schools, whose parents and Boards are united and cross about a government policy.

A colleague has pointed out the tricky ethical dilemma that its current voluntary nature implies. If you as a principal decide, (in partnership with your board), that you don't want a bar of it and its resource, then where does that leave your staff members? Unable to become expert teachers or lead teachers? This is a real problem, but are there ways to work it through?

There is of course one key check and balance in all of this.

The policy cannot be enacted without changing the legislation which has been ruled out. The current intent is to structure the changes through variation to the Collective Agreements to which we and all teachers are party. This gives the final word to the sector surely? If the proposals do not continue to strengthen, and respond to the advice from our trusted experts, then why would we agree to change our Collective Agreements?

I stand here today, endeavouring to tell you what I know about this policy that I can share. I hope that I may have clarified and set aside some of the myths and legends which have become this policy.

We planned the Moot in November and long before the policy was announced. The speakers were invited back then, and we have an impressive and relevant line-up today. I know that you will listen carefully and respectfully, and that your questions will cut to the heart of the legitimate concerns you bring.

May I leave you with our three key messages for the day:

1. NZPF Executive believes that this IES policy will proceed with us or without us
2. NZPF Executive believes that true collaboration is a stronger proposition than competition for raising achievement
3. NZPF Executive believes that we must remain in the IES tent to achieve influence

And now, please, do your own thinking.

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