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#### PRODUCTION

Stuart Sue (Design)  
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#### SUBSCRIPTION

Distributed free to all schools in New Zealand.  
For individual subscribers,  
send \$36 per year to  
New Zealand Principals' Federation  
National Office, PO Box 25-380,  
Wellington 6146.

*The New Zealand Principal is published by Cervin Publishing Ltd on behalf of the NZ Principals' Federation and is issued 4 times annually. For all enquiries regarding editorial contributions please contact the editor. We welcome contributions. Please send articles, reports, copies of useful ideas, formats or methods you have used with success.*

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ISSN 0112-403X



Cover art  
by Zoe Lithgow & Isla Pickles  
Bayfield School, Year 6

*This painting was a collaboration between Zoe Lithgow & Isla Pickles and was inspired by Dean Buchanan*

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# Do What You Do, Do Well

Once again, a song title came to mind as I was writing this on the weekend before school begins for the year (that's a problem with the long lead-time needed for this journal). Several teachers, both DPs and the Resource Manager are here at school, sorting out those last-minute details before the children arrive on Monday.

Christmas, and a lovely New Zealand Summer, seem distant memories already. However, a great chance to rest and re-charge for another exciting year ahead. Catching up on novels left beside the bed during the year, and with friends and relations over a barbecue and a relaxing evening or two.

One of the great aspects of school leadership is the tremendous challenge of the "Daily Stuff". The job is all about people, and it is all about relationships with those people. Principals spend much of their day dealing with the human factor, and it is often not until 4.30 or 5.00pm that they might begin to catch up with the paperwork, the messages, the planning and the "deeper features" of the role of leadership.

*If parents feel under-informed about the progress their children are making at school, what do we need to do to improve that?*

This issue of the New Zealand Principal Magazine contains some challenging articles relating to our role, and the way we think about what we do. I urge you to read and reflect on David Stewart's feature article on the Ariki Project – a new development in the professional growth of school principals. Unique to New Zealand, and a model that sets the standard for professional learning and development for principals. Similarly, Marion Fitchett, a previous editor and regular contributor, writes on the Kiwi Leadership for Principals and its emerging importance as we reflect on our role and our own progress.

A new government is now bedded in, and is coming to grips with

a strained world economy, and how it might implement its policies within those constraints. There is a tension in schools when the words "Introduce National Standards" are mentioned. School leaders are determined that New Zealand will not go down the track of overseas countries, who have introduced State and National Testing as a political move to "raise standards". There are many things that New Zealand Schools "Do Well", and the evidence is there to confirm this. However, we also acknowledge that there is work to be done, and we also know that we need to do some things better. If parents feel under-informed about the progress their children are making at school, what do we need to do to improve that? The best way to improve parent understanding of children's progress is to ensure they are well informed, in plain English, and with openness and honesty.

Most schools have introduced Student-Led Three Way Conferences / Interviews and Student Portfolios. There is no set model for this, as schools reflect their local communities and the specific learning needs of their children. Are we doing that well enough? We have a duty to ensure that our teachers speak with authority and assurance, that our pupils can talk about their learning, and that our parent community are very well informed about their children's progress.

New Zealand might appear as a flyspot on the world map, but that also gives us the advantage of learning from the mistakes of others. We hear horror stories of schools overseas barely touching on the creative arts and sciences, as they focus only on Literacy and Numeracy, in an effort to pass the tests in those essential areas. Our children deserve better than that. We have a New Zealand Curriculum that stands proud, as it emphasises the key competencies and values of a good society. We do so many things well. We need to keep that leading edge by ensuring our children get the best possible deal from our time and our renewed energy. 2009 is an exciting time to be involved in education, and New Zealand is a great place to practise our craft. Whatever you do this year, do it well. Your students deserve nothing less. ■

**Geoff Lovegrove**  
Editor, New Zealand Principals' Federation



# Issues! What Issues?

*With the election rhetoric fading just a little and with the political landscape settling in for a blue period, one just wonders to what degree the issues used in the election campaign to distinguish left from right, might mature into the big issues of 2009.*

As the academic year gets underway and the operational issues are for the moment almost sorted, the larger, longer-term issues have a chance to seep to the surface. Now with only months to run before the New Zealand Curriculum is fully implemented in all classrooms, this might well be important. However, given the apparent interest around standards and reporting, the issue of assessment continues to lurk close to the surface and perhaps is destined to remain there in perpetuity.



*NZPF President Ernie Buutveld, with Past Presidents Judy Hanna and Paddy Ford*

Literacy and numeracy measures dominate the landscape of external benchmarking and of course with these tools, teachers set out to gauge relative progress for individuals and principals for targeted cohorts and across the school. Although this smorgasbord of tests does not allow easy comparison for either schools or the ministry, it does focus on those core areas of language acquisition and mathematics.

The challenge will be for schools to balance these core areas (as in the New Zealand Curriculum) against other core areas also given prominence – namely the five key competencies delivering a broad and balanced curriculum, including the creative arts, giving priority to literacy and numeracy without subverting the programme and heading down the path of overseas countries and moving away from where the test becomes the end in itself.

Using data to somehow rank schools against each other is dangerous for our children. For an education system long hailed as one of the best, the curriculum would become too focused and narrow. Why are kiwis sought after across the world? Because along with the basics, they have a “can do” attitude and an ability to solve problems – something kiwi classrooms had before identified as the key competencies. Let’s remain balanced, and keep the political issue away from the real needs of our students.

Add into the debate the small matter of somehow linking teacher (or is that student?) performance into the pay packet. This debate was kicked-off early in the New Year by John Hattie’s research as to what key factors influence student learning most. Will this join with standards, reporting and assessment, to become the issues of 2009? How will the new Principal and Teacher Standards be woven into this context?

Looking back, the issues around extreme behaviour and special

education, property and even the 90-day employment trial period passed before Christmas are still there, unresolved. Work is under way on a number of fronts including what might replace the Principals Development Planning Centre, which closed in December. All in all, the issues abound and although you might feel somewhat distant from them, do represent your views locally and through your representatives. Regardless of whether you are left-handed or right-handed, politics is always within reach.

I am looking forward to the contact with school leaders and the challenge of representing the issues as we see them, close to where the policy engineered centrally meets reality. The issues above, like all issues, challenge us to wrestle with them whilst at the very least maintaining the relationships.

Having been well supported by respective principals in my early career and more latterly by colleagues, being able to do the same at a national and international level is a rare and privileged opportunity. ■

*Ernie Buutveld  
National President of the New Zealand Principals' Federation*



# The Ariki Project

## Collaborative Critique based on Evidence of Practice

By David Stewart

*(Ko tona mana i hokai i runga i te nuinga noa atu o nga hapu.)<sup>1</sup>*

### Background

Principal professional learning projects have been sponsored by the NZ Ministry of Education for over a decade. They have, in the main, encouraged small groups of principals to regularly spend time debating and examining the way in which they work.

This has provided opportunities to problem solve together, to consider emerging ideas from the literature, and to help and assist each other as they engage in a very demanding professional life. That this has been a successful strategy can be attested by the large numbers of groups which continue to function long after their particular contract period has expired. The *Ariki Project* aims to further expand and strengthen this process.

### Introduction

It has become customary to cite a predominantly overseas body of research suggesting the genesis of the planned approach to a new development model. This *Ariki Project* which is constructed around a *focus on interactions* while occasionally travelling in tandem with some of the notions which have been reported in the literature, had its beginnings in an essentially New Zealand context and has been developed to meet the idiosyncratic NZ system of school governance and principalship. Nothing, of course in this field can be entirely novel and this brief preamble will cite links, where appropriate, to existing literature as the various elements of the project are discussed. What is thought to be unique is the manner in which these various elements are assembled and operationalised in this particular project. Here the internal and external *Focus on Interactions* can also be used by the participating schools as an alternative to the more traditional Principal Appraisal for a calendar year. By exchanging the obligation to engage in the usual Principal Appraisal procedures for a year, schools are able to devote the recovered space and energy to the Ariki Project. It doesn't become yet another demand on their time.

### Why focus on interactions?

If we were able to lift the roof of a school and watch the activity as it happened, it is likely that we would be struck with the predominance of interactive talk amongst the occupants. Teachers talk with students, with each other; students talk and from time to time visitors talk with various groups. Obviously there are times when students study independently and individually and teachers prepare and mark but the dominant activity is likely to be interactions amongst the people. Thus it makes sense to use these actions and reactions as the raw data for our study and development activity. In so doing we will extend the kinds of interactions considered to include those occurring in the Quality Learning Circles<sup>2</sup> within each participating school and the QLC activity that takes place within the regular meetings of the principals' reflective groups.

There is support for this kind of reasoning by Elmore (2006) for example: "We have known explicitly for at least thirty years, and probably implicitly for a good deal longer, that it is not the policy, or the program, that directly produces the effect."... "interaction effects dominate main effects. The effects most worth knowing about ... are interaction effects." (p4); and by Spillane (2006, p84); "Interactions, as distinct from actions, are critical."

### The Reflective Groups

At the heart of this programme of development is the concept of the reflective group. The particular form that we propose to use is Quality Learning Circles. This is a concept already in wide use around the country and has been employed as an interactive and process guide in a number of New Zealand school research studies. (See for example Lovett 2002, 2003, 2004).

Quality Learning Circles are focused interactions with colleagues where shared professional narratives are illustrated with evidence of practice. Each circle is a small heterogeneous group whose members take turns to recount their selected interaction. This is supported with shared evidence. They then ask critical reflective questions of each other. Before separation they may confirm the summary that has been kept and make arrangements to visit each other for further learning. Groups may extend their discussion through the introduction of virtual visitors and reference to appropriate literature. This process underlines the search for meaning that characterises professional behaviour. Throughout the year this activity becomes a substantive part of principal appraisal and each leader's search for correlations between their intentions and their work and what happens in classrooms.<sup>3</sup>

The pilot studies to date suggest that prime focus needs to be on the individual school before principals join groups to talk about the pedagogical implications of their work. The underlying assumption here is that principals need to understand fully and be able to talk about the correlations of their own interactions with staff, with what their teachers actually do in the classroom before they can integrate new knowledge from research articles or from their peers in meaningful ways. What this project attempts to do is to firstly engage principals in their own schools gathering evidence of their practice to support their descriptions. Only when this is done can the across school reflective groups really get up to speed. To this end, there is a new taxonomy for critical/reflective discussions which seem to facilitate this and principals then use when engaging in follow up classroom visits. The Ariki Project concept proposes that the gathering evidence of practice methodology, the reflective group process, and follow up visits focus can follow the same design for both the internal school practice and the across school principal groups. This gives a level of consistency to the practices and facilitates the possible growth of higher order thinking across all the groups.

In relation to creating reflective questions most of the studies perused presumed that these questions would be posed by the group facilitator, the academic leading the study or the teacher of a student group. There

is little evidence in the literature search which has been conducted to date to parallel the direction taken by many of the principal groups who have worked in the various Ministry contracts so far. Our intention has been to provide a simple taxonomy with some examples from which groups can generate their own questions which best fit the local context. Furthermore we have endeavoured to provide a template which was soundly based around group activity as different from personal study or direct supervision. The latest version of this categorisation uses just four sets; questions about meaning, questions about lateral links, questions about existing data, and questions about validation. These notions are detailed in an Edex tutorial <http://www.edex.net.nz/files/Asking%20Reflective%20Questions.swf>, and in a separate resource entitled 'The Reflective Group Process' <http://www.edex.net.nz/files/The%20Reflective%20Group%20Process.pdf>

Another of the areas where the reflective group dynamic differs from other critiquing methodologies, such as peer coaching for example, is in group audience behaviour. As one group member presents their narrative and engages with the others in discussion there is always at least one other person just listening. Anecdotal evidence suggests that this listener often engages in internal debate comparing and contrasting what is being presented with their own practice. We believe this often results in the listener altering their own subsequent behaviour. Perhaps as the Ariki Project gets underway we will be able to collect some more data around this issue.

A further specific difference from much of the reflective discussions reported in the literature is that prime facts for discussion come from selected interactions that participants have identified in their own work as being important (See also Spillane 2006, p4).<sup>4</sup> As groups critique these interactions, which form the bulk of what they do, they are seeking to determine whether these behaviours are *worthwhile*<sup>5</sup> and whether they are achieving the goals they have set for themselves and their students. Indeed, a central element becomes the search for correlations between what they do, what they planned to do, and classroom and student consequences.

## A Process Instrument

Having selected a *focus on interactions* as the major dimension of the project it becomes vital to then provide a means of thinking about the range of possible options. To this end the writer has developed a **concept map** which performs a number of functions. Firstly, it provides an overview of the possible range and shape of the interactions that may become the focus of study and critique. Secondly, it arranges these possibilities in a construct which attempts to mimic the manner in which a practising educator might approach them. Thirdly, these templates are then presented in an interactive web based design which facilitates simple recording and diary entries. Over time these diary entries come to constitute a personal portfolio. It is examples of these diary entries which are taken to the quality learning circle discussions and used as evidence of practice. (See also Doig, Accessed 2007)

## Why appraisal?

Having assembled a suitable process we need an application to enable the model to be operationalised. The assumption here is that these reflective and critiquing concepts need to become part of routine professional behaviour if they are to have an impact on professional practice. In a real sense choosing to apply this *focus on interactions* through an appraisal application answers one of the serious questions that Elmore posed to the OECD Conference:

“What the present conception of accountability lacks is a *practice* of school improvement to go with the *policy* of accountability.” (2006, p7).

The Ariki Project offers contiguously, a practice of accountability and a network for school development and improvement. New applications desirably, should replace some existing work in schools, should offer multiple means of application, and place choice in the hands of the participants. This project does that and enables principals and teachers to use examples from their daily work in regular scheduled discussions where these data are validated and critiqued, and perhaps modified or changed where necessary. This particular application of principal

appraisal will replace more traditional models for each school opting into the project for one year. The pilot studies would suggest that such an exchange moves the thinking around these concepts from perceiving them as predominately a function of control to acknowledging that the processes enhance meaning and promote higher level practice. Accountability or responsibility is still a central notion.

### Six assumptions behind the thinking from which this project is created:

- Current Principal Appraisal processes have a bias towards compliance and have limited ability to focus on the principal's influence on learning and teaching.
- Effective schools encourage reflective thinking and critique at every level.
- We should be looking for correlations between what teachers do and leadership interactions.
- Teachers should be expected to critique their practice on a regular basis and principals should be guiding this critique.
- Summaries from these teacher reflective sessions should provide evidence of the school's strategy in action.
- Pedagogical leadership can be ascertained to be present when principals are able to assemble evidence of their own practice which can be shown to have a positive effect on what happens in classrooms.

This proposal also acknowledges that many educational professionals appreciate a group focus to their work. Furthermore, the initiative for deciding what is important is in the hands of the participants rather than being directed by some external authority. It should be an attractive proposition for schools as it is not something additional to do but rather substituting reflective group activity based on evidence of current practice, for a number of currently mandated but often time intensive procedures which often divert energy from the ongoing teaching and learning focus.

## Metaphor

“metaphors not only make our thoughts more vivid and interesting but they actually structure our perceptions and understandings” and ... “We live our lives on the basis of inferences we derive via metaphor.” (Larkoff et al 1980, p273)

The predominate metaphors in this field have been variations of *organisation* – learning organisation for example – which conjures up a kind of coat hanger diagram emphasising responsibilities or *community* concepts usually implying a flattened hierarchy based around relationships. Both of these notions are about the structure of the school. In this project where *function* has priority, we need other ways of constructing our thinking. If the function of schooling is to grow and develop human citizens for example, then we might facilitate thinking and discussion by introducing a metaphor based around an *incubator*.

## Outline of The Ariki Project

### Objective

To trial the concept of emphasising a focus on interactions as an alternative to the more traditional notion of principal appraisal.

### Process

The principal will construct a personal portfolio based broadly around the concept map on KnowledgeNet.

Teachers will use the same concept map – through individually pass-worded copies – to prepare and record the data about their interactions which form the base material for the Quality Learning Circle discussions.

### Data Recording for Project

Pre-project questionnaire (Supplied)

Student data (Perhaps whole of school aggregated graph as at



Term1)  
Principal portfolio entries  
Volunteer sample web diary entries from a range of staff  
Agreed sample summaries from QLC meetings (Template with example supplied)  
Description of training, use of resources, problem solving etc  
Term 4 student aggregated graph  
Post-project questionnaire/interviews (Supplied)

## Expectations

The principal will complete an entry on most pages of the concept map but will concentrate predominately on page 2 'Classroom Interactions'.

Similarly teachers will concentrate on page 2 'Classroom Interactions' and all will complete at least one entry prior to each QLC meeting. (6 entries over three terms.)

The project will seek to find correlations between the principal's interactions and classroom teaching and learning.

## Confidentiality

The material from this study may be used for publication and for further research but the identity of all persons and school will remain confidential to the researcher. All staff will have access to the final draft of any publication prior to its release.

## Report to Board of Trustees

The group (or a named facilitator) will present a written report to the Board describing the process and broad conclusions. This will include some analysis of the Principal's Portfolio and the relationship of this work to the draft principal standards.

## Comment

This outline is based on a trial project conducted through 2008 in the Wellington region.

## Links to Kiwi Leadership for Principals

When the major elements from the *Ariki Project* are superimposed on the Kiwi Leadership for Principals Diagram (2008, p12) the links are self evident. There is a strong challenge recognition and problem solving dimension within the Ariki Project and this is also cited in Key Principal Leadership Activities section of the KLP(2008:17). In a real sense this project provides 'way of working' for those principals committed to putting the notions of the KLP into practice.

Strong links can also be traced to the new Draft Professional Standards for Primary Principals. In particular many of the standards in the Pedagogy section are expressed in similar terms throughout the Ariki Project outline.

## In Conclusion

The *Ariki Project* is an unashamedly New Zealand grown development. The *Reflective Principal* courses which led originally to this particular group dynamic amongst school leaders and were revived again under Liz Millar's recent direction of the NZ Principal and Leadership Centre, contribute a necessary stage of thinking and renewal for many.

Behind this programme are many years of partnership with NZ principals and a strong desire by all the participants to improve the quality of teaching and learning in NZ schools. As this overview has demonstrated, elements of the notion are strongly supported in the contemporary literature but it is local experience and the uniqueness of the context that has resulted in the particular mix presented here.

By building on experience to date and adapting current processes as our knowledge widened we have reached a very exciting place. Now we need to walk on, and throughout 2009 the New Zealand Principals' Federation will be conducting a Ministry sponsored Ariki programme with 40 schools. The self-funded pilot studies are also continuing and more information is available at <http://www.edex.net.nz> ■

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