



PRINCIPAL MATTERS

NGĀ TUMUAKI O AOTEAROA

THE MOST RESPECTED AND INFLUENTIAL ADVOCATE FOR NEW ZEALAND'S PRINCIPALS

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President's Message



Kia ora e te whānau

Principals have high aspirations for our profession and that includes getting it right from the beginning – with Initial Teacher Education (ITE).

We use outputs of the system, or student achievement data, to judge the quality of the system. This is a bit like closing the stable door after the horse has bolted.

The key to a quality education system is beginning with a sound teacher training foundation so that we produce high quality teacher graduates and a strong sustainable workforce. Then we have a much greater chance of producing high achieving students.

The decision to subsume Teachers' Training Colleges into University faculties in the late 1990s and early 2000s marked the beginning of teacher education decline.

I take issue with our esteemed Professor Martin Thrupp, who argues in the March 2021 issue of *NZ Principal* magazine, that ITE is best placed in universities. Universities, he argues, are well placed to foster the critical thinking to respond to the manipulation of truth, extremism, populism, consumerism, and the challenges of climate and growing social inequalities and discriminations.

I do not question the role of our universities in fostering critical thought, but there is so much more to the 'practice' of teaching. In essence, teaching is an applied art; a practice-based profession.

The location of teacher training in universities has disabled the 'how' of learning to teach. Practicums in schools are not substitutes for being taught the skill of teaching. Practicums are an opportunity to practice those skills. The absence of learning *how* to teach is the Achilles heel of the universities, particularly in curricula that are heavily practice-based. These include the arts, physical education, technology, science, and the use of apparatus in mathematics to solve real world problems.

Thrupp quite rightly identified the negative impact of universities' participation in the Performance Based Research Fund (PBRF) system, which has become a default measure of university success and status. This system has encouraged universities to prioritise researchers over experienced school-teachers, when making appointments to teacher training roles in their education facilities. The result is that very often skilled researchers are training our teachers to teach, rather than skilled practitioners. Skilled researchers can also be skilled practitioners, but this tends to be the exception.

I sadly recall the exodus of highly capable practitioner lecturers from the former Wellington College of Education when it became the VUW Faculty of Education in 2005. The new standard for the Education Faculty was for lecturers to hold a PhD and be generating research funds, otherwise you were not wanted. Gone was the high value previously placed on practice-based education.

The problems have been exacerbated by funding models that have incentivised universities to enrol maximum numbers of students, with scant regard for candidate entry level, and for students to demand short term training, to limit the costs associated with training. These features have not served our profession well.

The Teaching Council is responsible for accrediting ITE programmes and some gains have been made to enable greater oversight. Largely though, to maintain their funding as teacher education providers, ITEs are required to submit

evidence to show they are meeting a set of standards. Such an approach misses out the critical observations needed about what lecturers are delivering through their teaching programmes and whether the teachers they are graduating do know *how* to teach.

In a practice-based profession this is a glaring anomaly.

Learning how to teach is not a lecture theatre exercise, nor is it just about developing critical thinking skills. Learning to teach is about understanding what it means to live in Aotearoa New Zealand, it is about the personal commitment to teach and it is about a lived understanding of the ethics of the profession and its vocational nature. Learning to teach lies in the long-term maturing of a vision borne of teacher training programmes that commit to educating the 'whole' person not just the 'academic' person.

Successive Governments have been shy to activate serious reviews of the quality of ITE. NZPF believes a substantial redesign is long overdue.

Rather than dramatically wringing our hands over national and international student achievement data, let's be brave and address the significant building block you'll find in any high performing system of education - the quality of teacher training.

NZPF is calling for significant change in ITE. We know other peak bodies share our concerns. We look forward to joining together and contributing to the long overdue change to the way our teachers are trained.

Ngā manaakitanga

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NZPF Notices

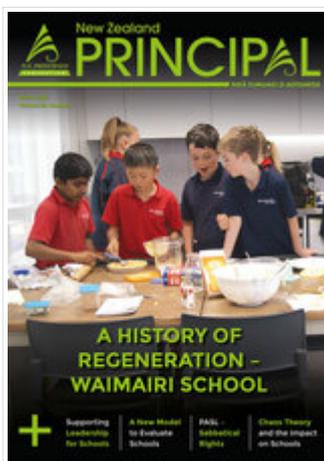


NZPF Conference - Registrations Open!

Registrations for the NZPF Conference 2-4 August 2021, which will be held at the Energy Events Centre, Rotorua, are now open.

Please go to www.nzpfconference.com for details and to register.

Please note that all NZPF awards given last year for the purpose of attendance at the Trans-Tasman Conference, can be used for the NZPF Conference in Rotorua.



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