



# PRINCIPAL MATTERS

NGĀ TUMUAKI O AOTEAROA

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

Level 8 The Bayleys Building,  
36 Brandon Street  
Wellington NZ 6011

PO Box 25380  
Wellington 6140

[nina.netherclift@nzpf.ac.nz](mailto:nina.netherclift@nzpf.ac.nz)



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### President's Message



Kia ora e te whānau

Something quite extraordinary occurred last week.

The first significant 'arts' resource, in over a decade, was launched and provided to schools.

The Te Rito Toi website is the brainchild of Professor Peter O'Connor at the University of Auckland. Professor O'Connor and his team curated this stunning arts resource, specifically for schools, to help teachers work with young people when they return to school at the conclusion of COVID-19 Level 3. The programme is designed as arts 'therapy' for young people, following major traumatic or life changing events.

Te Rito Toi is a gift to New Zealand children.

Professor O'Connor uses the arts as a vehicle to help young people process the impact of crisis, such as the Christchurch earthquakes.

I had the privilege of working with Professor O'Connor and his team last year, when he brought another of his arts offerings to my school in Hastings. *Everyday Theatre* is an applied theatre workshop, in which students interact with and direct the actors in real time, to explore issues of family violence. The work took my breath away. It was raw, confronting and powerful.

The experience also left me with a profound sense of loss.

We have lost our way with the arts curriculum. We see so little drama, dance and music in our schools. I am not talking about the dance groups or the school production or the instrumental music lessons. I am referring to using the arts as a pedagogy to help young people become more fully human. In practice, this means experiencing the world through an arts lens, using the arts to prompt expressive language and creative endeavour, in ways that integrate with other curricula.

It is not a coincidence that Professor O'Connor uses the arts to help young people deal with difficult issues, such as family violence, or this international medical crisis we are currently experiencing. One cannot be a bystander in arts learning. The arts provide a vehicle for confronting human experiences and interpreting them in ways that literal language cannot. In their broad and unique expression of human emotion and insight, the arts enable deep understanding and empathy to grow.

The loss of the arts in our schools has not been a slow creep. It has been accelerated by successive government policy.

The amalgamation of Teachers' Colleges with Universities saw an overt emphasis on academia, to the detriment of teaching practice. This has had a devastating impact on the arts. How does a beginning teacher learn to teach dance, drama, music or visual art, having only experienced a lecture or two on the theory, without an opportunity to learn by doing?

The outstanding School Advisory Services, home to champions of the arts - who had deep expertise in leading teacher development - were replaced by a decentralised market driven model of professional learning. Curriculum favoured by political imperative, such as literacy and numeracy, crowded out the arts and devalued their importance.

Make no mistake, this isn't a trend experienced by schooling alone. Our tertiary institutions have also seen a significant drop in the numbers of students choosing to study the Humanities.

This is not because the Humanities lack relevance for our young people. In a world where alternative facts and fake news abound, the importance of critical thinking, insight and empathy is self-evident.

Any society that strips its education system of what it means to be human and denies its young citizens the opportunity to explore and celebrate human expression, should be concerned about how this affects a healthy functioning democracy. There has never been a time to be more vigilant and protective of the humanities and artistic expression than now!

The challenge is there for government to be proactive in supporting a rebuilding of arts education.

So here is a three-stage plan:

1. Revitalise pre-service teacher training, by decoupling it from academic rigor alone. Despite Professor O'Connor's excellent work, Universities have never seen themselves as experts in practical learning. Practical learning is anathema in our ivory towers and inappropriately occupies a lower status. Rebuild teacher training to embrace the practical as well as theoretical learning.
2. Build pathways for arts curriculum leadership to flourish and enable these leaders to excite and inspire arts learning in our schools. The loss of our school advisory service is a travesty.
3. Remove the overt dominance of literacy and numeracy in determining school quality and genuinely release schools into a future where every curriculum subject has status. This will require the Education Review Office to shake off the vestiges of neo-liberalism and embrace an exciting vision for the future of learning.

The arts are deeply embedded in the philosophy of education in our country. We stand on the shoulders of arts' giants such as Elwyn Richardson, Jack Shallcrass and Ralph McAllister, who wove the arts into the expressive language of children. Over time, embedding the arts in language teaching, proved critical to children's language development and contributed to our high rates of literacy in New Zealand.

That mantle of excellence is being eroded. It is not a coincidence that the period of disincentive and disinvestment in the arts, reflects a reduction in our literacy achievement rates.

We know the value of the arts and we have never needed permission to act on our beliefs. I ask you to join me in championing the arts anew. Discover the value of the arts for your school curriculum and build capability in your teachers to embrace them.

Thank you, Professor O'Connor, for your passion and leadership in breathing life back into the arts. Let us, together with government, set the arts flag flying again.

Ngā manaakitanga

Perry Rush  
[perry@nzpf.ac.nz](mailto:perry@nzpf.ac.nz)

## NZPF Notices



### NZ Principal Magazine also Online

You and/or your team members can easily access the NZ Principal Magazines online, as an e-magazine or as a PDF. Additionally you can search for a previous issue, an article by title or by the author of the article. All magazines back to Term 1 2012 are available in this format. To view or search click [here](#).

## Useful Information



### Webinar - Taking Teaching Online: Risks, Responsibilities and Remedies

Family Zone is hosting a free webinar for NZ schools in form of a Q and A with John Parsons, on **Wednesday 6 May at 3.30pm**. This is aimed at helping schools, teachers and communities to navigate this new landscape.

John Parsons is a leading expert in online child protection and will be familiar to many schools who are already working with him.

The discussion will cover:

- Managing emerging risks during online education
- Maintaining professional standards when teaching online, from home
- Clarifying duty-of-care in online spaces
- Practical strategies for teachers and students to keep themselves safe online
- Supporting parents to protect their kids online

This webinar is free for anyone to attend and schools can invite all staff if they wish.

Click [here](#) for further details and registration.

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