

## WHETU'S CONFERENCE SPEECH

I want to extend a very warm welcome to our special guest. To our Minister of Education, the Hon Nikki Kaye. Welcome Minister. And thank you for taking time out of the most exciting election campaign - possibly ever - to speak to us today. We really do appreciate it.

Irrespective of the the election result on Saturday, I wish you all the best.

I want to start today, by looking back. First, I look back and thank the people who enable me to stand here today.

My Dad John was born and bred just up the road from here on the Lindis Pass, where his Dad Martin used to work for the Rabbit Board. So this area is very much the turangawaewae of my Pākehā family. I thank my Dad for bringing his Scottish values of fairness, hard work and generosity to my own upbringing and for helping to shape who I am today. I also acknowledge my Mum (of Tainui descent) who began her nursing career up the road at Dunstan Hospital, for passing on her studious and caring attributes. He wairua Maori taku.

I also thank my son Arana Whetu and daughter Tira for their love and for challenging me to be real and to think beyond my own views and beliefs and embrace the world that they live in as young adults. I thank them for teaching me why - keeping open dialogue, sharing and connecting with each other, are such powerful actions - especially if we want to maintain strong relationships.

I thank my partner Barry Macdonald for his unconditional love and absolute unwavering support which allows me to fully focus my heart and mind on the job of leading the Federation. He is the one who soaks up my doubts and disappointments and is also the one who shares the joys when things go well. He is also my greatest critic, especially when it comes to speeches and media – so this year he's had plenty of practice!

I also want to acknowledge my School Board of Trustees at BGP, my senior team Katrina Robertson and Lauren Latimer, the OPPA executive and the NZPF executive and National Office staff for believing in me and giving me the confidence to take on this position as your national president.

None of us acts alone and none of us succeeds alone. We constantly draw on the experiences of others, the advice and wisdom of others and we draw our confidence from the love and support of others. I acknowledge all of you - and all of those people who so generously contribute to my work every day.

I came into teaching in the 1990s taking on my first job in the bilingual unit at Rotorua Intermediate. Like everyone who ever enters our profession, I wanted to make a difference for the lives of our young people, irrespective of their cultural and ethnic backgrounds, their sexual orientation, or their religious beliefs or whether they came from advantaged or disadvantaged homes. I would make a difference whatever their special abilities or

disabilities and I would make a difference especially for our young Māori people who were not succeeding in line with their capabilities. I wanted to change that. I wanted schooling to be relevant and exciting for every young person so that every single person would leave school as a success. To me, a rich broad curriculum delivered in a school where young people could feel safe to be themselves, was the key.

In NZ we are so lucky to have a great curriculum. We are the envy of the world because we can teach within authentic contexts and use the flexibility of our curriculum to offer multiple learning options. We have mastered the art of Inquiry which excites and ignites the imaginations of our young people who quickly become agents of their own learning.

Through our model of self-managing schools and with community input through our Boards of Trustees, we are able to engage our young people in ways that fit with the values and aspirations of the communities they live in. It is a model that over time, we have built up to be one of the most successful education systems in the OECD.

So why is it that we are so stressed?? Why is it that we are holding a conference here in Queenstown with the theme of 'Hauora' or wellbeing? Why is it that every day I am hearing from principals that they are thinking about retiring prematurely, that they can't employ suitable teachers or that they cannot get appropriate support for their high end behaviourally challenged students? I will come back to these questions later in my speech.

I now want to return to the last time we assembled here in Queenstown for the NZPF conference. It was the year 2010. The Minister of Education at the time was the Honorable Anne Tolley. The government was in the process of implementing national standards and the mood from principals was of anger and frustration. No one wanted them. No one believed in them. No one thought they would do anything to lift the success rate of a single student. Worse, everyone was sceptical and fast losing trust in the Minister and the Ministry and in anyone who suggested that national standards could possibly have any educational value whatsoever. No one in government was listening.

I was one of those principals and it was feeling the passion of the profession at that 2010 conference that fired me up; It led me to persuade my school Board to join the Boards Taking Action Coalition (BTAC) the Governance group opposing national standards; It is what persuaded me to stand for election to NZPF so that I could be part of the on-going action opposing national standards which I viewed as toxic.

National standards would never be the mechanism by which any school would raise its academic, ethical or quality standards of teaching and learning. They would never equate to a measure of teacher or school performance or means by which schools could be compared and they would never satisfy parents that they were a definitive measure of their child's cognitive development. Yet in no time at all, they were being used for all of these things, only cognitive development had been reduced to reading, writing and maths.

Fast forward to now and we can clearly see the broader agenda which began with national standards. The agenda has acquired many more parts over the past decade, including the Investing in Education Success policy, the Communities of Schools, changes to the Education Act and more recently the Update of the Education Act. The Update of the Education Act brings changes that threaten the very essence of what is great about self-managing schools – the relationships that our schools have with their communities. Central to everything is still the measure we call national standards data.

Nine years of conflict has resulted in a profession that is battle weary. We have those in our profession who now just want a quieter life and say, look we can't change anything so let's just accept and move on. Stop fighting these things because we will never win. The Government will never listen and nothing will change. This is a global movement and we are just one little country in it.

At the other extreme are those like me who say we will continue to fight to the end. We know national standards and all the reforms that go with them are bad for our young people. Our young people don't get a voice so it's up to us to protect their futures by continuing to fight for the best education we can give them.

Amidst all of this the one weapon the profession has used to good effect is to stay positive for our young people. Whilst we have had to implement the Government's reform agenda we do not give it credibility, and we have continued the search for better innovative ways to support the learning of our young people.

NZPF and other professional groups have led the way in these endeavours. Take our own Māori Achievement Collaborations (the MACs) for example. A partnership between Te Akatea and NZPF resulted in the development of a professional learning programme that has now been operating for four years. As a result we are seeing principals change the culture of their schools so that our young Māori people feel a sense of belonging to their school; they at last feel that school is their place. They are engaging and the results are now showing. I thank our new Minister Kaye for her support of the MACs, which have until now been funded by the Ministry. We are currently working with the Ministry and Education Council to make sure we can secure the necessary funding to continue the MACs. We are grateful, Minister, that you recognise why the MAC is so successful and that we want to see more and more Māori learners become engaged and achieve success.

Just last Saturday we saw the launch of the first Māori History in Schools – 'Te Takanga o Te Wa' programme, which has been championed by Pem Bird, a former school principal and political leader. This is an initiative that NZPF supports and I know many more colleagues have been promoting the teaching of colonial history in schools for years because it is a powerful means to curb racism and discrimination. And now it is here! So congratulations to Pem Bird and all of those who have been advocating for Māori History in Schools.

NZPF has its part to play and principals everywhere are also playing their part by continuing to embrace new ideas and teaching practices that give more and better learning options to the youngsters in your schools so that Aotearoa can be a better place for everyone. I have seen what you are doing as I travel the country visiting you in your schools. I am constantly amazed at the new ways you are using collaboration and Inquiry for learning; how you are adopting flexible learning spaces and making them exciting spaces for our young people that reflect the collective vision of your community and your school; making your students agents of their own learning; continuing to work hard at keeping your curriculum options broad and rich; managing difficult behaviour through school wide approaches that again encourage student agency and ownership. We have schools operating on the principles of democracy. We have Eco-schools operating on environmental principles. Our young people are being excited and stimulated every day by what we are offering them through our schools and you deserve the highest accolades for your leadership which enables these practices.

What I also know is that so much more of this could be happening if only we could reduce the stress and unnecessary workload that are **not** adding value to our young people, their learning and our country!

Minister, I am now talking about paper work that most of us find pointless. I am talking about the compliance activities that are choking us. I am talking about over-assessment and collecting and recording data till we are strangled in it. I am talking about the Global Education Reforms that have undermined our ability and that of our communities to work together and **OWN** our decision making so that schools and communities together can share their aspirations for a prosperous future.

The Global Reforms are falling out of favour now in many countries of the world. Asian countries especially are now realising that assessment regimes have killed questioning and creativity; they have stifled innovation and critical thinking. Educational Leaders in Asia now realise that the obsession they have had with data and league tables has been a mistake and has been detrimental to developing future thinkers for the modern world. They are in some cases now **banning** testing and assessment as a result.

Here in Aotearoa New Zealand we have an aging population of school principals and are starting to see early retirements and middle leaders are reluctant to step up to become principals. Young people are avoiding Teacher Training in droves and now we have teacher shortages across the country. In Auckland, we have shortages that are reaching crisis levels. We also have insufficient support to implement inclusiveness and accommodate all young people irrespective of their learning or behavioural needs. Our teachers are leaving because they are not being adequately supported especially with our children presenting with high end behaviour challenges and mental health issues. We do not have the expertise to call on and our teachers are not as trained psychiatrists, or behavioural specialists.

Let's wait no longer to get our young people on the road to success. Let's put up a big 'STOP' sign on National Standards; On the Global Education Reforms; on Data Obsession and properly support the teaching profession to get on with what they know is right and good for the young people of New Zealand and our country's future.

It's time now, Minister, to break with the practices of the past decade which have made little difference for priority students or any other students.

I challenge you to throw out the Global Reforms Agenda, ramp up the support for the profession and engage with us. In partnership, we can collaborate with you; share our ideas and together find solutions that will make a positive difference for all young people.

In partnership we can improve principal and teacher wellbeing and work with you to raise the status of the profession.

In partnership we can improve learning outcomes for all young people.

Minister I challenge you to deliver, not for the adults of our our beautiful country but first and foremost for our young people.

Minister,

Delivering for New Zealanders?

Let's do this!

No reira, Tena koutou.

WAIATA

Please join with me and welcoming the Hon Nikki Kay, Minister of Education.