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PRINCIPALS CALL FOR COLLABORATION ON EDUCATION POLICY

A recent radio interview with Melbourne University academic, John Hattie, has prompted Denise Torrey, President of the New Zealand principals' Federation (NZPF) to call on politicians to engage in more collaboration with the profession in developing education policy.

'The interview provokes several issues,' said Torrey. 'We would welcome the opportunity to engage with policy makers on Initial Teacher Training programmes, teaching standards for the profession and appropriate structural changes and initiatives which can make a difference to children's learning outcomes,' she said.

'We agree that professional collaboration has the potential to enhance the quality of teaching practice when the profession and politicians have a shared understanding of what effective collaboration is, when the model for collaboration is right and it is resourced accordingly,' she said.

'That will require a shared understanding of the diverse learning and cultural needs of children, and will take into account their different social and material contexts alongside their aspirations for educational attainment,' she said.

'Principals would agree with Hattie that many structural 'fixes' that have been suggested or imposed on the profession over the years bear no relationship to student learning outcomes and at worst are just distractions. These include performance pay, league tables of school performance (when the variability between schools in New Zealand is the lowest in the OECD), the introduction of charter schools and the augmentation of privatisation, to satisfy a politically held view that 'parents want more choice',' she said.

'Such initiatives are ideologically driven and a disgraceful waste of precious education funding. We want that money spent on developing a higher quality teaching profession which can have a significantly positive influence on all children's learning outcomes,' she said.

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For more information:

NZPF Spokesperson: NZPF President, Denise Torrey: 021 262 5557

www.nzpf.ac.nz