

NZPF PRESIDENT'S SPEECH TO TE AKATEA CONFERENCE

JULY 2011

Maori enjoying educational success as Maori

E nga tumuaki o Aotearoa

Rau rangatira ma

Tena koutou katoa

Nga hau e wha

Nga iwi e tau nei

Tena koutou, tena koutou, tena tatou katoa

It is a great privilege to be asked to speak at this hui. Thank you for inviting me to share my thoughts with you about how together, we can make a positive difference for Maori in education. It is of special significance that I come to this hui with the whole NZPF executive. The most important reason we are here together is that the NZPF executive wants to build stronger and closer relationships with Te Akatea. We want to work alongside you in promoting the philosophy of Maturanga Maori throughout the education sector. We want to take direction from you about what is the best way forward, and support you in getting your vision for the educational success of Tamariki Maori embedded in mainstream schools. We want to follow your

lead, support your strategy and support your solutions that will lead to Maori enjoying educational success as Maori. Your problems are our problems. Your solutions are our solutions and what you tell us is right for Maori success, will also be right for Pakeha success.

I acknowledge the excellent support I receive from our three NZPF Maori executive members, Keri Milne-Ihimaera, Whetu Cormick and Peter Witana, and our Kaumatua Tauri Morgan. Whilst Peter has been on our executive group for some years now, Keri and Whetu are newcomers this year and together with Pete are teaching us to see our education system through a new lens. We are so fortunate to now have such strong Maori representation on our executive which we have never had before. It strengthens all of us to have such effective Maori representatives around our table who can educate us and open our minds to different ways of thinking and leading.

We all consider the children in our schools to be individuals, not standardised clones of each other. But what we sometimes fail to recognise is that the systems within which we operate, the knowledge we count as legitimate to teach and assess is not necessarily bi-cultural. Mostly, we are educating the Maori tamariki in our classes, from a Pakeha knowledge and values base. Our NZPF Maori reps have brought new ideas for us to think about when Maori children come into our mainstream schools, which is the education setting for over 90% of all Maori children.

We have learned about the importance for Maori children to first establish relationships with the principal, the teaching staff and other children in the school. “Developed by Russell Bishop, Te Kotahitanga has been introduced in a number of secondary schools to assist teachers to help children establish these important relationships. Many of the fundamental principles in Te Kotahitanga will already be

familiar to Maori teachers who run great classrooms! Again, this is an example of **us** learning the things that many of **you** already know.

Having a sense of belonging and affiliation with the school engenders pride, loyalty, a sense of family or whanau and ultimately the children want to participate in what is going on at school. Achieving a suitable environment for Maori children at school means that it must become natural and normal to use Te reo, to incorporate Tikanga Maori into curriculum activities and to find ways to measure achievement that are consistent with achieving 'as Maori'.

We have learned how once relationships are established, a sense of belonging follows and school stops being a foreign and strange place to be. Our reps tell us it is then and only then, that our Maori children are ready to engage and to learn, because they feel they fit in. They belong and therefore have a part to play in the school's culture. It seems such a simple thing to do, yet when we examined our own practices in our own schools, we could all recognise how much we overlook this very important aspect of supporting children to build relationships in their school. And when we think about it, we realise what a great thing this practice can be for all children, not just our Maori children. We are all more likely to succeed in an environment in which we feel connected and engaged. So what is good practice for Maori, is good practice for all children.

As we learned from a recent presentation from Ann Milne, Principal of Kia Aroha College, we are often, unwittingly, practising a form of institutionalised discrimination by denying our Maori tamariki the right to learn and succeed as Maori. Too often we do not acknowledge the beliefs, values, language and cultural knowledge of tangata whenua when teaching the curriculum in our classrooms. Ann led us to think about

our teaching practices and to consider that although we do not intend to be discriminatory, we are nevertheless enacting practices that could be seen as no more culturally sensitive than the practices of our forefathers who banned Maori language and all tikanga Maori from our schools. Today we are still guilty of demanding that tamariki Maori are taught and assessed in knowledge, customs and practices that are entirely Eurocentric. We are not teaching Maori children to succeed as Maori.

It is no secret that NZPF opposes the implementation of National Standards in their current form. The main reason for this is that National Standards assume that all children have the same ability, have a single language and culture, come from the same socio-economic background, have the same cultural knowledge, values and social connections. Then they assume that all children progress at an identical pace and on identical pathways. They do not. As Dame Marie Clay said many times - *there are multiple pathways to literacy and learning and few if any children, [even native speakers of English], follow a pre-set ladder like set of progressions in learning.* Maori children are even further disadvantaged because the National Standards take no account of Maori ways of knowing and so Maori are further pushed to the periphery. If National Standards measure anything at all - and 95% of New Zealand principals seriously question that - it is this country's 'mainstream' Pakeha knowledge that is under scrutiny. There is no place in the National Standards system for 'Maori children enjoying educational success as Maori.'

We shouldn't be surprised that our Maori children fill up a large chunk of the tail of underachievement in our country. Our systems and practices lead them to be disengaged and disillusioned with school. As Ann Milne counsels us, if we want an equitable system this situation has to change. Our thinking as school leaders has to

change. I am challenged to imagine just what the tail would look like if ***Ka Hikitia, Managing for success***, the Maori Education strategy, was fully implemented in all mainstream schools. This strategy takes account of Maori cultural practices, the importance of whanau connections, language and different knowledge sets that are valued within Maoridom.

It is my belief that for too long, we adopted a deficit approach in teaching and learning, which I reject. It is a model which places the blame for failure with the child and with their parents. It is a model which prevents us from looking at alternative ways of thinking.

We don't have to go far to find statistics to demonstrate that many of our Maori children are not doing as well as their Pakeha peers. Maori students have more stand downs from school, higher exclusion rates, higher truancy rates, leave school earlier, are more likely to be non-enrolled and less likely to attain a qualification to enter university.

We are here today, because we want a solution to this impasse as much as you do. If we are denying many of our Maori children the right to express themselves as Maori and to develop their own cultural identity in their school learning environment, then we want to know what to do about that. It would be true to say that most mainstream principals and teachers do not know what it means to 'be Maori' and nor would they understand what it means to 'learn as Maori'. We are in our **infancy** in addressing these issues. But if this is the territory we need to explore in order for our Maori children to enjoy success, then this is the territory we want you to partner us in.

We do not want to wait until yet another inappropriate intervention strategy has been imposed on us. We want to begin this journey with you now. That is the message that I and my executive bring you today.

For too long many Maori students have endured a culture in education so foreign and hostile to them that they now languish in the tail of our achievement statistics. Its time for those of us who now know how we have contributed to that statistic to do something more than just blame Maori and their whanau rather than the very system that labels them as failing simply because we expect our culture to take precedence over their own.

My executive and I are committed to working alongside Te Akatea to promote the philosophy of Maturanga Maori and to find solutions that will lead to Maori enjoying educational success as Maori.

He aha te mea nui ki a au. Ko te whanau, te whanau, te whanau.

Na reira e te whanau nei o Te Akatea, Tena koutou, tena koutou, tena koutou katoa