

Sustaining public education: Celebrating educational leadership that is not on-message

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The end of National Standards a sharp reminder of the politics of education

It's good that the National Standards are finally being given a thorough examination, but while the system has its drawbacks the data it provides has been invaluable in improving student outcomes.

Highfield, C. (2017, November 8) *National Standards - let's not throw the baby out with the bathwater.*

<https://www.stuff.co.nz/national/education/98629070/national-standards--lets-not-throw-the-baby-out-with-the-bathwater>

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National Standards removed

12 December 2017

The Government has announced that National Standards and Ngā Whanaketanga Rumaki Māori will be removed from 2018. Instead the Government will focus on the progress and achievement of all children across the wider New Zealand Curriculum and Te Marautanga o Aotearoa.

“I feel quite sorry for those in the Ministry and ERO who strongly believed in National Standards and used all their ability to force them on schools”, said Mr Newman. “I suppose for those who so fervently believed in National Standards, their integrity will mean they will have to be looking at resigning. This is not new. Many principals when faced with the decision to introduce the standards resigned, and many others had to endure the immense pressure to conform!”

Tai Tokerau Principals' Association (2017, 30 October). *Principal feels sorry for many Ministry and other staff*. (Press Release).

<http://www.scoop.co.nz/stories/ED1710/S00092/principal-feels-sorry-for-many-ministry-and-other-staff.htm>

The firm commitments of educational leaders are often unrealised and untested

So then I went and saw [Ministry official] and he was saying, 'is this a hill that you want to die on?'... He said if it had been national testing he could understand it being a hill to die on, he said for him that would be a hill he would have to die on too because he doesn't believe in national testing. But he believes you can make National Standards work.

Principal, 'Cicada School', from an interview undertaken in 2011 for the Research, Analysis and Insight into National Standards (RAINS) project.

Contesting reform – a spectrum of responses

- Union and Professional Association activity
- National pressure and interest groups
- Collaboration amongst groups of schools
- Refusing (non-compulsory) reforms
- Critique and textual dissent
- Legal challenges
- Public resignations and stepping back from the job
- Tokenism
- Fabrication
- Cheating, lying and stealing

Thrupp, M. (2005) *School Improvement: An Unofficial Approach*. London: Continuum.

Case study

Liz Horgan
and the
'Concerned
Principals'
group

'Push-back'
leadership

Service to others recognised

Last updated 05:00, June 1 2015



Member of the NZ Order of Merit for services to primary education “Elizabeth Horgan has worked at St Joseph's School in Otahuhu for more than 40 years and has been its principal for the past 22. She's been responsible for developing its reputation as a high-performing low decile school.

She introduced the Reading Together Programme to South Auckland Catholic schools to foster parents' involvement with their children's literary development and is involved with the Gladiators of Change programme, organised for parents from Otahuhu and Mangere to be more involved in their children's lives.

Horgan was a member of the New Zealand Educational Institute Principals' Council for nine years and its chair for two, a member of the New Zealand Principals' Leadership Centre mentoring project from 2000 to 2001, and led an Auckland Principals' Mentoring Group. She is a former member of the Auckland College of Education Council”.

‘Investing in Educational Success’ (IES) policy. Announced in January 2014 by John Key, then Prime Minister of New Zealand’s National-led Coalition Government.

The IES policy would set up ‘Communities of Schools’, clusters of primary and secondary schools across the country. These groupings later became known as Communities of Learning/Kāhui Ako and came to include early childhood centres and a small number of tertiary education providers as well.

The clusters were intended to lift the quality of educational provision in New Zealand and involved various new positions of teacher and principal leadership that would attract substantial additional salary.

The proposal was agreed by Cabinet shortly before the January 2014 announcement, with education sector representatives then asked to work through detail and report back by June 2014.

Educators became divided over this policy, the secondary reaction was to engage with the policy to make it work whereas the primary sector was much more opposed. Academics were also divided.

Eventually the NZEI put forward its own proposals, in partnership with the Ministry of Education. This was called the 'Better Plan Joint Initiative'.

Thrupp, M. (in press). To be 'in the tent' or abandon it? A school clusters policy and the responses of New Zealand educational leaders. In J. Wilkinson, R. Niesche, R. & S. Eacott, *Challenges for public education: Reconceptualising educational leadership, policy and social justice as resources for hope*. London: Routledge.

The brief for the super roles are likely to require close adherence to Government perspectives, policies and targets and this is what those in the super-roles will then be driving into the classrooms and schools of those allocated to work with them... The new super roles represent deeply cynical politics because well-meaning teachers and principals committed to public education are going to be bribed to undo it and they will often feel no option but to take up the offer.... My advice is not to be first cab off the rank and to be very clear about what the super roles will involve before expressing any enthusiasm and signing up. In the meantime the teacher organisations have a lot of work to do to mediate the worst effects of yet another bad education policy from this Government, its most destructive so far.

Thrupp, M. (2014, January 26). Teacher super roles the death knell of good primary schools. *Scoop*. Retrieved from [http://www.scoop.co.nz/stories/ED1401/S00032/teacher-super-](http://www.scoop.co.nz/stories/ED1401/S00032/teacher-super-roles-the-death-knell-of-good-primary-schools.htm)

From Liz Horgan's letter to lead organisations

I guess my plea is that as we are up against the machinery of government with a very clear agenda for NZ public education, unless all the major organisations take a VERY strong, brave and professional stand they will just trample all over us. No wonder the teaching profession has such a low status! And so much for democracy! I don't propose to have the pulse of all Auckland principals but not one principal I have spoken to as yet is supportive of either the parameters of the policy or the way in which it has been 'dumped' on us.

Plus 3 pages of 'A principal's response to the Prime Minister's education announcement.....'

Meeting of the ‘Concerned Principals’ in March 2014

The Agenda:

- “(a) To just briefly outline the big picture concerns about the latest policy. We probably pretty much know what they are.
- (b) To discuss and identify what actions we can take (collectively and individually) to influence those we need to influence and attempt to ‘turn back the tide’ especially this year”.

Owen Alexander, Takapuna Normal School

John Faire, Mt Eden Normal School

Marilyn Gwilliam, Papatoetoe Central School

Liz Horgan, St Joseph’s School, Otahuhu

Frances Nelson, Fairburn School

Laurie Thew, Manurewa Central School

Malcolm Milner, Balmoral School

Cherie Patel-Taylor, Flanshaw Road school (joined later)

**Laurie, John , Owen and
Malcolm checking on their
clusters.....**

**Marilyn , Liz and Frances at
work on theirs ...**



Dear Colleagues

Please find attached a letter that was sent to NZPF, NZEI and APPA on Thursday 6 March. The decision to send the attached letter was made following a meeting of the principals listed below who met last week to discuss their concerns around the recent government policy involving the new positions of Change principal, Executive principal, Expert teacher and Lead Teacher. In summary we have very serious concerns about:

- a) The policy itself
- b) The process around it
- c) The workability of the policy
- d) Long term effects of the policy.

Our attached letter was to convey to our lead organisations some of our deep concerns. We are circulating the letter to all our colleagues to both communicate those concerns in brief to you and urge you to communicate with your colleagues and directly with your lead organisations if you share these concerns or require more information. We believe this matter is urgent and important and requires much broader discussion by the sector - principals, teachers and Boards of Trustees.

(Concerned Principals names and email addresses)

Eventually after more meetings, four communiqués,
some set-backs:

New Zealand Educational Institute. (2014, June 10).
*Thumbs down from school leaders for Government's
education plan*. Combined NZEI/NZPF media release.
Retrieved from
http://www.nzei.org.nz/NZEI/Media/Releases/2014/6_Thumbs_down_from_school_leaders_for_Government_education_plan.aspx#.WLObjBxnd0E

Some features of these principals' push-back leadership

- Political activity interspersed with the more immediate demands of school-life
- Marshalling their contacts, no hesitation to reach out either to supporters or those they want to influence to take a different position
- Drawing on their natural authority as people with considerable experience and at the sharp end of things
- Recognising and managing their differences
- Power of humour
- Working with and within representative organisations
- Concentrating on informing colleagues as part of mobilising them
- Nationally-networked and safety in numbers
- A considerable influence on policy outcomes that lies under and behind unions and professional organisations.

Evaluating Education:
Normative Systems and Institutional Practices

Martin Thrupp

The Search for Better Educational Standards

A Cautionary Tale

With Responses from
Bob Lingard, Meg Maguire and
David Hursh

 Springer

Thrupp, M. with Lingard, B. Maguire, M. & Hursh, D. (2017). *The Search for Better Educational Standards: A Cautionary Tale*. Dordrecht: Springer.

Many more examples of ‘push-back’ leadership for both National Standards and Ngā Whanaketanga Rumaki Māori

- Regional principal’s associations open letters, statements against National Standards boycotts of reporting National Standards, boycotts of National Standards training
- Boards Taking Action Coalition (BTAC) refusal to set National Standards-related targets and hand-delivery of charters without National Standards-related targets

And at a cost in some instances

- 78J letters and other pressures from the Ministry
- Public resignations
- Public denigration (‘Dirty Politics’)

One of the most impressive campaigns against any education policy to be found internationally in recent years. But why?

- a small and generally highly connected population
- the organisational politics and history of New Zealand primary schooling
- the fact that principals and teachers were not prevented from criticising Government policy, as in some countries.
- the discourse of 'school self-management'
- the involvement of various education enthusiasts, particularly bloggers.

We have here in New Zealand some world-class examples of push-back educational leadership, and the defence of public education!

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