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## Summer Garden

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CLASS SIZE | NATIONAL STANDARDS | FAREWELL LIZ MILLAR

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# EDITORIAL

## New era

Liz Hawes EDITOR



IT IS IMPOSSIBLE not to be affected by the enthusiasm and joie de vivre of young children. One of the great pleasures of writing stories for this magazine is visiting schools and experiencing first-hand the indomitable optimism that children exude. It is not a misguided optimism. Kids are demonstrating that they love to discover new things and learn more about those things. They are eager to share their knowledge, show pride in their achievements and tell you what they are aspiring to next. Visiting enviroschools in Hamilton was such a treat. To report all the comments so exuberantly delivered by these energetic youngsters would fill several issues. An abiding memory, however, will be

I (wrongly) imagined that the children in this group would be the **LONERS AND GEEKS** who **PREFERRED TO BE IMMersed** in the writing of boring detail than out there breaking in the land and debating the **NEXT 'WHAT IF' QUESTION.**

meeting the group of year 6 children at Hukanui School who were recording the history of their eco classroom's development. I (wrongly) imagined that the children in this group would be the loners and geeks who preferred to be immersed in the writing of boring detail than out there breaking in the land and debating the next 'what if' question. Not a bit. These kids were enjoying their writing task because they had already been out there 'breaking in the land' and some had been at the forefront of the eco classroom building project. What I discovered was that children found it as much fun constructing the written version of this extraordinary eco classroom journey as they found in the hands-on tasks. They recognised the power of the written word and the importance of its use. They also didn't want all that thinking, discussing and planning to be forgotten, and writing it all down meant it would always be remembered. They were not performing a literacy task, they were transferring their lived experience into the written form for posterity and they were doing it knowingly. The same applied to the children taking measurements of water tank levels, recording them, creating graphs and extrapolating statistics from their data. They were recording the fluctuations

of a water supply mathematically, but I doubt they saw this as 'performing a numeracy task'.

For these kids numeracy and literacy don't exist. They would have no idea what the terms meant and if they did, I suspect they would have no interest in them. What they do know is that when school gives you lots of scope to dream, question, discuss plan, work on projects and solve problems, you use tools. Alongside the spades and rakes, trowels and watering cans are some other tools that help you find out more. They are the tools of maths, of reading and writing. But that's all they are – just tools. They don't come first any more than the rake or spade comes first.

We need to be careful about elevating the importance of one tool over another. A teacher at the Enrich@ILT programme in Invercargill noted that there were children attending the centre, clearly identified as highly gifted but who would not necessarily reach the national standard in writing or reading and some would be below in maths. Obviously, this has nothing to do with the children's thinking abilities, nor their ability to use these tools when they need to. But imagine if all that

talent, questioning, thinking and creativity was stifled while the child went into remediation to get up to some arbitrary reading or writing standard? It would be like taking them off oxygen – death to creativity and higher-order thinking. I wondered which of the Invercargill children I met could potentially be affected. Would it be the child leading the southern region chess competition? Would it be the one who painted a portrait of Walt Disney, creating a look so disapproving it made me want to apologise out loud? Or would it be the year 5 stone carver who fashioned a horse head so convincing it went on public display?

I'm an optimist. I believe sanity will prevail and it will transpire that no teacher will be interfering with the progress of a child's learning to make them sharpen a single tool because it is more important than the rest. It is not. It is expansion of minds that matters. It would greatly benefit our country as a whole if at every level we adopted that philosophy and allowed it to underpin every future policy decision irrespective of the government of the day. The children would vote for that.

# PRESIDENT'S PEN

Paul Drummond NATIONAL PRESIDENT, NEW ZEALAND PRINCIPALS' FEDERATION



THE LAST THREE years saw the teaching profession under persistent attack. The government's direction for education, spearheaded by its National Standards policy, created a divide between the profession and policymakers. It seemed like the days of being consulted, intellectually engaged and invited to comment on education policy matters were over. There was much soul-searching by principals and boards of trustees as they wrestled with an ethical dilemma. On the one hand, they wanted to abide by the law and carry out government policy, and, on the other, they wanted to ensure that children who were progressing normally and to the best of their ability were not labelled failures by this strange new turn in the system.

Time has marched on, and we as a profession have now risen above the fray of those last three years. We are buoyed by the consistently excellent OECD reports, which provide irrefutable evidence that our standards of education in New Zealand are very high, that our teachers are doing an excellent job and that the direction we are already going in is the one that will continue to yield high achievement levels for the vast majority of Kiwi kids.

Such success does not come accidentally. The work that began a decade ago on expanding the New Zealand Curriculum is a key reason for our success today. Behind our curriculum is the notion that children do not learn in the same way, at the same pace or by the same pathways. To engage with learning, children need a variety of access points to choose from and our curriculum allows for that. Parents and professionals worked together to develop a school curriculum that reflects the values and aspirations of their community. The result is a uniquely Kiwi-style curriculum which is the pride of every school community in New Zealand.

There are other features too which contribute not just to our success but to the success of other high-achieving countries like Finland and Singapore. They include working in a high-trust, low-stakes environment and fostering a collaborative approach in teaching. They include high-quality pre-service training of our professionals and ongoing quality professional development. We have managed all of these outcomes in New Zealand, despite the investment in our education system being much less than in most Western countries. As a profession, we have high energy, enthusiasm to see all Kiwi kids succeed and we are possessed of

that unique Kiwi 'can do' attitude. Have a look at the article in this very magazine on establishing an enrichment programme for talented and gifted children in Invercargill. It is just one example of how our profession will rise to an identified need or shortfall and find ways to satisfy it.

Our system is the envy of the world and we are not about to give it up. We know our communities stand strongly beside us, as the latest trust and confidence survey has revealed, placing primary teachers right up there in third place as the most trusted profession after doctors and nurses and just behind firemen and police in public confidence.

This year, I will be pursuing every opportunity to support a

**This year, I WILL BE PURSUING EVERY OPPORTUNITY** to support a direction that will lead to further **SUCCESS FOR OUR NATION'S CHILDREN.**

direction that will lead to further success for our nation's children. We have more work to do to address the issues that plague too many of our children and which hamper their educational success. As a profession, we need to get better results for those children. Inevitably, they will be multifaceted solutions that involve cultural, social and economic considerations. They will also require a strong political will, and I believe that will is there. I believe the government wants these children succeeding in education as much as we do. I believe our new Minister of Education wants to see every Kiwi kid turning up to school every day, excited and ready to learn, and I concur with her. Achieving that goal will take a collaborative effort and the time is right to make a start.





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# TMOA – NZC'S PARTNER CURRICULUM

Deanne Thomas KAIHAUTŪ MĀORI, CORE EDUCATION



**TE MARAUTANGA O AOTEAROA**, affectionately known as TMOA, is a curriculum framework, and the 'other half' of the New Zealand Curriculum.

Essentially designed for Māori-medium schools and classrooms, it encourages the development of localised curriculum that suits the particular needs of students, whānau and communities.

Māori Medium is defined as kura and other schools or classes that teach through the medium of Te Reo Māori at Level 1 and 2 of the Ministry's classification.

Te Marautanga o Aotearoa was developed and written over a three-year period by Māori educators encompassing all sectors. It is underpinned by key philosophical principles that align with Māori cultural practices and values.

Schools, when developing their localised curriculum take into account these values and select, alongside their whānau, those that best meet the needs of the students and their communities. The most common values, but by no means exclusive, include whānaungatanga, manaakitanga, aroha and mahitahi. In order to get a true understanding of these concepts teachers and whānau unpack them together, and develop statements that reflect what they mean to that school community. This may well differ from kura to kura, school to school.

It is now commonly recognised that our education system has underserved large numbers of Māori children, as well as Pacific Nations children and those with special learning needs. Te Marautanga o Aotearoa offers a pathway whereby language, culture and identity underpin the overall teaching and learning pathways within a school.

For full immersion schools, TMOA presents an opportunity to develop a curriculum that is about the children, their culture, their heritage, their language.

But for those immersion classrooms who are part of a wider English-medium school, the marautanga is more challenging. In the past three years of professional development programmes, teachers have often indicated that they 'know' it's the right thing to do, but struggle to find common ground with the curriculum of the wider school based on the New Zealand Curriculum.

Part of this challenge is because many Level 2 teachers do not teach the core subjects of literacy and numeracy in Māori. Or, the contexts within learning areas are the same as those taught across the whole school. This may serve to disengage Māori students. They need to see themselves as part of the teaching and learning programme. The solution to these issues lies within individual schools. Sometimes hard decisions have to be made, and change follows. In 2012–2013 there will be several opportunities for teachers to upskill and improve their own reo proficiency and

knowledge about teaching literacy and numeracy in Māori.

Commonly called a Graduate Profile, but known in the marautanga as 'Te Āhua o ā Tātou Ākonga', TMOA requires users to develop strategies that actively engage whānau and communities in espousing their own aspirations for their children. This is a powerful exercise and an excellent step to greater whānau engagement in children's learning. In the true essence of 'whānaungatanga' participants have a responsibility to each other, and to a commonly agreed to goal. Students also have a key contribution to make in this big picture.

Experience over the past few years in a large number of Māori-medium schools and settings show an initial reluctance by whānau to engage at this level. History tells us that it had been difficult to engage Māori parents in school activities other than hāngi, fundraising and kapa haka. But this is an opportunity to broaden that engagement, in a way that matters and that potentially has huge benefits for schools, whānau and learners. Who better to determine what children need to know, than their whānau? Whānau is more than just 'parents'. Whānau includes the extended family, the marae, hapū and sometimes even the iwi. But engaging with iwi – that's another article for another time.

A further key message in Te Marautanga o Aotearoa is the provision of learning environments that are stimulating, challenging, exciting, and culturally appropriate. Good assessment practices, engagement in quality e-learning, and exposure to the local, regional, national and then international learning platforms is encouraged. Learning after all is purposeful if it is to be successful. At all levels, Māori learners should be able to 'see themselves' in the school programme, as an important part of the school community, and know that they're important.

Although, written in Te Reo Māori, Te Marautanga o Aotearoa is underpinned by philosophies and values that ensure that the language, identity and culture of the student are at the forefront. Ko te ākonga te pūtake o te ako.

In 2012–2013 there will be opportunities for Māori-medium settings and schools to engage in Te Marautanga o Aotearoa professional learning and development programmes throughout Aotearoa. For those in the early stages of developing their localised curriculum to others that are ready for full implementation, support will be available.

*Ehara taku toa i te toa takitahi, he toa takitini kē.* My strength is not mine alone, it belongs to us all.

## REFERENCE

Te Marautanga o Aotearoa. Online at: <http://tmoa.tki.org.nz>



# ENRICHING THE SOUTHERN STARS

Liz Hawes EDITOR



Learning about perspective through pictures of pork

The children arrive for the first day of term







The entrance to the Enrich Centre is adorned with tiles hand made by the foundation children



The converted pub becomes the centre for the gifted

**LIZ HAWES INVESTIGATES** *what prominence talented and gifted children have in New Zealand schools, then journeys to Invercargill to check out the bright stars of the deep south.*

A quick scan of the literature would lead you to believe that the chances of your gifted child being identified in a New Zealand school and provided with an appropriately tailored programme are not great. Take the findings of Bricknell (2009), for example, who investigated the education of mathematically gifted students.

The research findings show that there is no comprehensive understanding by schools and teachers about the characteristics of mathematically gifted students . . .

The inadequacies of identification are reiterated by Newton (2009). Her research found that a lack of professional learning was at the core of the identification problem and this included pre-service training where studying the talented and gifted was optional, rather than embedded in the training programme. Further, Newton notes that professional learning development programmes conducted by external experts and resources provided by the Ministry of Education do not support a framework or context to ensure ongoing professional learning for teachers, thereby limiting opportunities for talented and gifted children.

Ignoring or not responding appropriately to any gifted child can of course have negative consequences, as Mazza-Davies (2008) found through researching gifted readers:

. . . prolonged mismatching of instructional reading programmes to the academic and emotional maturity of the gifted reader may well result in underachievement, and a diminished opportunity to learn how to react to challenge.

The research is unrelentingly consistent in its message. In New Zealand, we are not doing well at identifying our bright young stars, or responding to their needs.

One principal acutely aware of these shortcomings is Marlene Campbell of Salford School, Invercargill.

‘The special learning needs of talented and gifted children are frequently overlooked,’ she says, ‘mostly because resources

are very thin on the ground and programmes for children who struggle with learning take priority.’

Marlene is not a person to passively accept the status quo. She is passionate about the learning of this neglected group and was determined that at least in Invercargill, the talented would get a fairer deal.

Her crusade began with her own southern colleagues. It was not difficult to convince them that more needed to be done both in professional development and in catering for these children, so her next stop was the Invercargill Licensing Trust (ILT). She knew the Trust to be supportive of education in the city. Her proposal was twofold. First was to get help for professional development and, second, was to establish a centre to run a specially tailored programme.

The ILT agreed to support both. Alan Dennis, Chair of the Trust and city council member, is himself a former school principal and sympathetic to the cause. He also knew that if Marlene Campbell was involved, the project would fly.

A conference is now held every year and attracts the cream of international researchers in the field. ‘Last year we had 400 teaching professionals from all over New Zealand attend our conference,’ said Marlene proudly. ‘It is hugely helpful in building up our capacity to identify and provide for our talented and gifted kids,’ she said.

Next was establishing the centre; the central city Sugar Shack pub, which arguably had seen better days, was identified as the perfect space. Once the beer-infused carpets had been lifted, the transformation began.

‘Oh, we retained a few of the old pub’s features,’ said Alan Dennis as he led me around the centre. ‘See those laptops lined up over there. They’re sitting on the old pub’s leaners!’ he chuckled. I gazed at the kids perched high on their ‘bar stools,’ strategising together on how to beat the computer at chess and imagined the space, strewn with beer jugs and rowdy freezing workers strategising on the next week’s race meeting. Different era, different game, I mused.

I scanned the walls, overwhelmed by the selection of portrait art, tile prints and sculpted art work on display. I soon learn that these pieces had recently been returned to the centre by the local art gallery where they had been on public exhibition. ‘It was a



Marlene Campbell, a hands-on principal in her own school of Salford

great experience for the children,' remarked one of the teachers, 'to prepare their work for a real art exhibition and learn all about the process of exhibiting in a public space.'

One hundred and fifty Invercargill kids are enrolled in the enrichment programme and each child gets one day a week at the centre. The fifth day is set aside for the professional development of local teachers. The day I visit is the first day of term and teachers Darren, Alana and Katie are welcoming the new children.

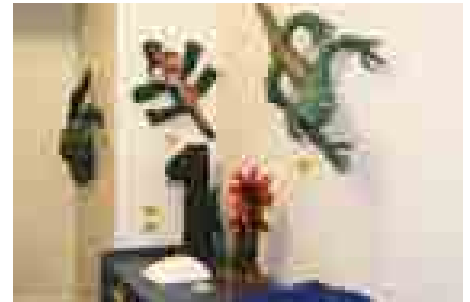
'The centre can be a bit overwhelming for kids when they first come here,' says Katie. 'In their own schools, they may have been the only gifted child, whereas here, every child is gifted. They get challenged by their peers here and can find that a bit intimidating



The children gather for a lesson in 'perspective'



A chess challenge is normal recreation at the centre



Artworks for the exhibition

until they settle in,' she smiled.

It's a full-on programme beginning with a naming game, 'to help the kids get to know each other's names quickly,' says Darren, who is coordinating today's programme. The class is divided equally into three groups. I bravely join in. Teacher Alana begins. 'I am Alana and I like astronauts.' The next child introduces Alana to the group and then introduces herself. I get the pattern. I quickly count how many names and objects I will have to remember before it is my turn. Geeesh! Twelve! All was going well until I heard, 'I am Nathan and I like narwhales.' My startled look clearly registered with Nathan who obligingly explained, 'They are arctic whales with a long tusk.'

The naming game proved to be the easy task of the day. Two of the more demanding involved learning about 'perspective' and the technology challenge.

Perspective is a concept the children had not before explored. They began the exercise as a whole group, listening to the teacher's explanation, asking questions, offering examples, listening to each other's responses and reflecting. It's important



Rolf Harris and Walt Disney, also gifted artists, gaze down on the centre's activities. The portrait was painted by a year 5 founding student at the centre

to keep up because the discussion develops at a brisk pace. Next, the children split into smaller groups for in-depth debate. One group examined pictures that all had something to do with pork. They included a hunter carrying a boar out of the bush, a butcher, pigs housed in crates, a pet pig, a scientist examining samples of pig cells, a Muslim, a Jew and so on. The children discussed the pictures in depth, including what each made them feel and think about the subject matter. The teacher held up the pictures of the wild boar and the pigs in the crate and asked the children which of the two they would prefer to eat. Justifications included, 'I'd rather eat the pigs in the crate because they look so sad, they should just be killed and eaten to put them out of their misery.' 'I would eat the boar,' says another, 'because the boar is already

dead and because of its diet, there would be more meat, less fat and be tastier.' As an afterthought, he added, 'I'd just open the crate door and let those miserable pigs out.'

The technology challenge focused on the kiwi bird. As with 'perspective', the session began with a whole class debating the 'design faults' of the kiwi which before the introduction of stoats, weasels, dogs and wild cats had no natural enemies. In smaller groups they then redesigned the kiwi to overcome the faults with each group producing a model of their 'superior bird'. The prototypes were all different and included one model with four legs to provide more speed and balance for escaping enemies and a trunk-like beak for more efficiency in sucking up worms, shoots and insects. Another model had the bird capable of producing greasy feathers to prevent enemies getting a grip.

At the conclusion of each of these sessions, the children were called together to reflect on their thinking about the task, summarise how they had resolved it and discuss what else they might have thought or done. It's a sophisticated level of thinking, but these children are unfazed by the challenge.

Enrich@ILT is an outstanding success for the Trust and one it is very proud to celebrate. The organisers and teachers know that there are more kids out there not yet identified and space is limited, but huge progress has been made with this uniquely Invercargill approach to giving young southern stars a fair go.

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# CAN NATIONAL STANDARDS REAL ACHIEVEMENT GAP?

John A Clark SCHOOL OF EDUCATIONAL STUDIES, MASSEY UNIVERSITY, PALMERSTON NORTH j.a.clark@massey.ac.nz

**NEW ZEALAND HAS** a major education problem. The Minister of Education, Mrs Anne Tolley (2011, p. 1), in her address to the 2011 annual conference of NZEI, put it this way: ‘the Government’s biggest concern is the glaring gap between our top performers and those who are failing.’ Elaborating on this, she mounted the following argument:

- The 2009 Programme for International Student Assessment results that were released at the end of last year showed that our top 5 per cent of students are up with the best in the world. As a matter of fact, they show that our top 25 per cent of students are up with the best in the world.
- But the gap between our top 5 per cent and our bottom 5 per cent is the worst of the top-performing countries. And the gap between our top 25 per cent and our bottom 25 per cent is also the worst of these top-performing countries.
- We will not tolerate one in five children leaving school unable to read, write or do maths anywhere near the level they need to succeed, both as individuals and in employment. This is simply unacceptable.
- Those one in five children deserve better, and we are determined to raise their potential.
- So, this is why we are focusing on raising achievement in reading, writing and maths (ibid., pp. 1–2).

The facts about the performance gap between our highest and lowest achievers are not disputed. Nor is it denied that we ought to do something about closing the gap. What is contested is the claim that the National Standards in reading, writing and mathematics will close the gap to any significant extent. Despite the Minister’s deeply held political conviction that they will, there are a number of compelling reasons for concluding that they will not.

## How much closure?

An initial difficulty hinges on what would count as successfully closing the achievement gap. Given all of the resources being poured into the National Standards then it would be very troubling indeed if there was no effect at all on student performance. But several issues arise:

- If National Standards apply to all children, then where will the achievement gains be made – equally across the achievement gap or mainly with the top 5/25 per cent or mainly with the bottom 5/25 per cent? The first will not close the achievement gap, the second will widen the achievement gap, only the third will start to close it. There is no telling where the dice will fall.
- There is no criterion for judging the success of National Standards in closing the achievement gap – it should be possible for the Minister to state something along the following lines: that National Standards have been successful in closing

the achievement gap if, by the time students starting school in 2011 reach school leaving age, the achievement gap between the top and bottom 5 per cent falls within the top third of OECD countries. But she has not and presumably will not.

- In the absence of a clear empirical goal to be achieved in order to measure success, then the Minister’s promotion of National Standards as the panacea for significantly reducing the achievement gap amounts to little more than political ideology.
- There is a fundamental confusion in the Minister’s argument which needs to be cleared up. She wants to raise the performance of the lowest achieving students, and it is possible that this could come about if the bulk of the resources being devoted to National Standards were directed towards assisting these children, but such targeting seems unlikely. She also wants to close the gap between our highest and lowest achievers, which also seems unlikely if the resources for National Standards are distributed across all children which will at best maintain the gap and at worst widen it. It is possible, even probable, that National Standards could both raise the achievement of the lowest achievers and at the same time widen the gap between highest and lowest achievers since the former may make bigger gains than the latter.
- As an aside, if school league tables are to be constructed on the basis of published results of school performance then there is no guarantee at all that these will do much at all to close the gap; they may even have the opposite effect of either maintaining or widening the gap.

## Causality

There is something troubling about the idea that National Standards have the capacity to reduce the achievement gap. To think that National Standards can significantly reduce the gap is to attribute causal powers to them which they do not seem to possess. If the causes of the achievement gap were located primarily or exclusively within schools and of a kind directly related to National Standards, such that National Standards could alter the causes of the achievement gap which in turn would have a significant effect on student achievement itself, then we might have good reason for supporting the introduction of National Standards.

But the causes of the achievement gap, in large part, lie well beyond the four walls of the classroom and the gates of the school. Even if there are some school-based causes, and there seems no point in denying these, they pale into insignificance compared to the far more powerful out-of-school forces which have such an overwhelming effect on children’s lives. To make the point blindingly obvious: take two children who, as five-year-olds, start school on the same day. One can read, write and do maths at a level that puts her in the top 25 per cent of new entrant achievers, while the other’s performance in reading,

# LY CLOSE THE



writing and mathematics places her in the bottom 25 per cent of new entrant achievers. Why is this so? If we accept certain relevant assumptions (absence of brain damage, none use of cognitive enhancers, normal functioning of sensory mechanisms and the like) then the causes of this very large differential in performance upon initial entry to school cannot be attributed to the school itself (since at this point the two children have not attended school) but must be sheeted home to non-school causal factors.

What would these be? Before we begin to speculate on plausible causal elements, it would be useful to see causes falling into two broad categories where the line between them is blurred rather than being clearly demarcated. Causes, if you will, stretch out on a continuum: at one end are causes of a distal kind, being far removed from the site of action; at the other end are proximal causes which bear directly and immediately on things. Distal causes tend to operate at a distance with the causal path

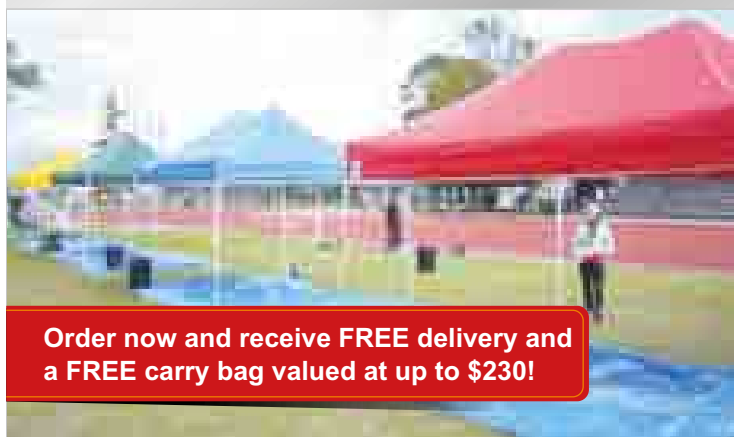
sometimes difficult to identify while proximal causes lie close to hand. It should never be supposed that there is just one cause which, once identified, can be 'manipulated' to effect a desired change. Rather, effects come about as the result of a causal set operating in complex ways, but now problems set in. How are we to identify all the constituent items in the causal set? Even if we can, do all of the items in the causal set have equal causal power or do some have more and others less? It is always possible to play up or play down the importance of a particular causal item by making adjustments elsewhere in the causal set. And after all of this, is it possible to draw out a plausible mechanism to account for what is going on?

In considering possible causes for the differences in school achievement, we should perhaps start with three which are all too often posited – social class, ethnicity and gender. If these have any causal power at all, and it seems doubtful that they do, then at best they lie at the outer edge of the distal causes.

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While there may be some correlation between social class and/or ethnicity and/or gender and school achievement, none of these three stands in a direct and immediate causal role. If they did, then all children of a particular social class or of a particular ethnicity or of a particular gender would succeed or fail. But they do not, for some children of a given social class succeed while others do not, some children of a given ethnicity succeed and others do not, and some children of a given gender succeed and others do not. True, there may be disproportionate distributions of success and failure within and across given social class, ethnic and gender groups but this logically must be attributed to causal factors other than social class, ethnicity and/or gender.

Moving closer in, families, media, peers and the like are also often postulated as the causes of differences in school achievement. These, too, seem to still be very crude categories with little causal influence. We need to drill down deeper into particulars, by-passing even proxies. By this I mean, taking families as an example, placing less weight on, for example, whether families have X number of books as an indicator of a literate family and giving far more attention to how books are used in families, if at all. It is family practices which matter: parents read to their children, parents and older siblings help young children to read, books are purchased or borrowed from the library and read by children, and so we could go on. These activities require the appropriate marshalling of family resources for their achievement – financial resources to buy books but books can be borrowed from the public library for free, time made available to engage in reading pursuits rather than being devoted to other things such as long working hours, drug and

alcohol use and so on, which deprive children of valuable reading experiences, or dispositional resources whereby parents at appropriate junctures subordinate their own interests to those of their children so that the latter receive the help that their well-being requires. Where families have the capability and the capacity to engage in these intergenerational activities, then almost invariably their children will arrive at school on day one well equipped to achieve in their school work; but where children lack these and many other prior-to-entry-to-school experiences, then almost equally invariably they will fare poorly upon starting school as a new entrant. It is these quite specific practices and experiences which have the most direct and immediate causal impact on differential achievement brought into the school on day one and which structurally hold in place continuing differences in school attainment as the years go by.

But there is more to it than this. Our experiences are our experiences precisely because it is we who experience them. That is, we learn about, remember and forget our experiences and it is this which underpins school achievement. All of this takes place in our brains. A rich and varied set of before-school experiences are locked into a complex and evolving network of neural connections which hold in place prior learning and provide the necessary foundations for successful later learning as well as providing memory storage of past learning to be drawn upon for future achievements such as solving a problem or passing a test. A meagre and repetitive set of experiences, on the other hand, will not provide a sufficient neural network to support the learning required to do well at school. To make the point in an over-simplified sort of way. If a child has a very limited amount of learning requiring each brain cell to have no more than a single connection to another brain cell, then the processing of information will be contained within an Indian file pattern which makes it hard for recall and further learning. On the other hand, extensive learning requires each brain cell to be connected to thousands, if not millions, of other brain cells so that information is processed in parallel. This requires the plasticity of the brain to make new connections as a result of learning and to retain connections for later memory (pruning of connections leads to the inability to recall, which is critical for tests and examinations as well as for future learning). If we really want to understand the how, the why and the wherefore of learning in order to explain why some children perform well at school while others do not, then there is no escaping the need for teachers to have a far better understanding of, in appropriate terms, the causal chain of learning which incorporates not only the etiological, or external, social factors which impinge on learning and about which teachers are usually very familiar, but also the constitutive, or internal, explanatory neural mechanisms about which teachers in the main remain largely ignorant of. Just as we may be able to drive a car within a social environment without knowing its internal workings, if the car breaks down we are left rather helpless if we cannot get under the bonnet to diagnose the problem and fix it; so too with teachers who may be able to teach well enough but once problems arise, such as explaining the achievement gap and being able to do something about it, they need to be in a strong position to be able to diagnose the problem and reach a well-informed view as to whether, for example, National Standards are the solution to the problem that they are purported to be.

### The school and National Standards

Schools do not create the differences in school achievement,



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but they may perpetuate them and possibly even widen the achievement gap. Whether schools can reduce the achievement gap to any appreciable extent remains to be seen. The demand by the present government that the National Standards be mandatory for all primary schools may be well-intentioned (although it also seems to smack of political ideology in the absence of any evidence for its success). The problem is that National Standards might well be a reasonable solution to the problem of the gap in school achievement if the problem were an internal problem to the school such that the causes of the problem were located in the school itself. But it is not an internal problem to schools, causally speaking. The causes are primarily external to the school and embedded in a complex and varied causal set which needs to be directly confronted if the achievement is to be significantly reduced. As government policy, much more than National Standards is required for these only plug one or two holes at the most in a badly leaking dyke. If the new Minister of Education, like her predecessor, is so firmly committed to National Standards as the causal means of closing the school achievement gap then she and her parliamentary colleagues must show even greater fortitude in implementing a raft of other economic and social policies which establish an environment external to the school conducive to providing and supporting the conditions required to enable underperforming children and their families to have those learning experiences which underpin successful school achievement. Sadly, this seems far too difficult for politicians to entertain let alone do anything about; sadder still is their locating the problem in schools and then demanding teachers do something about it by way of a legislatively imposed and mandated set of National Standards.

## Conclusion

The Minister's argument is deeply flawed. We may agree with the premises concerning the empirical facts of the matter and we could agree with the premises about the need to do something about closing the achievement gap. The conclusion about National Standards does not logically follow from the premises but presupposes further unstated premises which are extremely problematic. If we really want to make a difference, then we need to go directly to the external causes and address these as a matter of urgency. This requires political will which to date has been singularly lacking. For politicians, it is easier to place the problem of the achievement gap firmly in schools for teachers to do something about than take the politically more courageous path of revising their economic and social policies in order to create the kind of society which, amongst other things, provides the conditions for all children to flourish and succeed at school so that our achievement gap is reduced to such an extent that becomes the smallest in the OECD world. That would be the day when we could say with pride that we have a world-class education system. Until then we should do all that we can to expose the problem of the achievement gap to the full glare of critical inquiry and do our utmost to hit upon that solution which combats the problem. As much as the Minister might wish it otherwise, National Standards is not that solution.

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# CLASS SIZE AND EVIDENCE-BAS

Professor John O'Neill

AS IS CUSTOMARY following the election, government ministries prepared briefings for their incoming minister. The Treasury briefing made three recommendations 'to improve educational attainment at lower cost' (p. 4) ('get more for less'). One of the three was 'Implement initiatives to improve school teacher quality, funded by consolidation of the school network and increasing student/teacher ratios' (p. 4) (increase class sizes).

Treasury's rationalisation (p. 21) was a familiar mix of new public management ideology, Mr Micawber accounting philosophy and selective gobbits of research evidence:

Student achievement can be raised by improving the quality of teaching, which the evidence shows is the largest in-school influence on student outcomes. Increasing student/teacher ratios, and consolidation of the school network, can free up funding that could be used to support initiatives to enhance the quality of teaching, such as more systemic use of value-add data and a more professionalised workforce.

Unfortunately, while he distanced himself from some of Treasury's more extreme ideas, Finance Minister Bill English jumped at the chance to save on Vote Education. The *NZ Herald* reported his comments on Radio New Zealand as follows:

Analysis by Professor John Hattie has shown that class size is one of the least important factors in determining student achievement.

The Treasury said student achievement could be raised by improving the quality of teaching 'which the evidence shows is the largest in-school influence on student outcomes'.

A more informed assessment of the research evidence suggests we need a different education policy stance entirely. To state that the quality of teaching is 'the most important', misleading and conveniently ignores other research evidence which shows that *out-of-school* influences have a far greater affect on student achievement than what goes on in the classroom.

Treasury and the Ministry of Education have begun to grasp part of the problem in recommending greater targeted funding for early years interventions and education for socio-economically disadvantaged children, but failed to comprehend the much bigger solution.

Treasury's briefing makes no mention whatsoever of child poverty and demonstrates no understanding of the well-established links between poverty and a child's cognitive and affective development. If the statistics consistently show that socio-economic disadvantage contributes more than teaching quality to educational outcomes, why is that not the higher

policy priority? Other countries have targets for eradicating child poverty, we do not.

The Ministry of Education's briefing states the achievement gap 'problem' more precisely: 'low performing students are likely to be Māori or Pasifika and/or from low socio-economic communities' (p. 8). Unsurprisingly, the Ministry has sharply focused education strategies, policies and interventions in recent years on meeting the needs of 'low performing students' and on 'early interventions'.

Since the mid 1990s, the Ministry has consistently focused on 'the quality of teaching', based in great part on the highly influential findings of Dr Adrienne Alton-Lee's (2003) BES and the 'visible learning' meta-synthesis by Professor John Hattie (2009). The former stated that up to 59 per cent of the variance 'or even more' in student scores was attributable to 'what happens in classrooms' (p. 2), the latter that the 'quality of teaching' was considerably more influential on students' cognitive achievement than was 'reducing class size'.

Overall, Hattie claimed that 'active and quality teaching strategies' (average effect size 0.68) had much greater and more direct influence on student learning than educational structures and working conditions (0.08) (p. 244). Hence, 'quality teaching' is much more effective than 'reducing class size'.

We can now see how Treasury and the Minister of Finance may have become misinformed: if class size is 'one of the least important factors', let us save money by increasing class sizes and focus instead on quality teaching. However, if we are to have faith in politicians and officials' reading of research literature, we should at least expect them to be consistent in their use of it.

One inconsistency is that Treasury's briefing equates 'quality teaching' with the use of (i) value-add data and (ii) teacher professionalisation (these are performance management ideologies, not empirical teaching indicators). Yet Hattie's recommended high-impact 'quality teaching' strategies are all to do with an elaborated pedagogical repertoire and relations.

Another inconsistency is that the Treasury's call for larger classes demonstrates complete ignorance of what the same research tells us about the effects of smaller classes on the very ethnic minority and socio-economically disadvantaged groups of learners that the Ministry (and Treasury) say they want to prioritise. Logically, if we want to improve the lot of disadvantaged learners, we should look closely at the effects of smaller or larger classes on these students specifically.

Here class size matters. One of the ironies of the Treasury's briefing argument is that New Zealand is one of the few countries that does not provide data to the OECD on our actual average class sizes in primary and secondary schools (based on other data we are probably slightly higher than average). Treasury is therefore advocating a radical policy change both without



# ED PUBLIC POLICY



knowing what real class sizes are, and in ignorance of the effects of smaller classes on priority groups of learners (the 'average' effect of class size studies is meaningless in this regard).

Another review by England's Professor Peter Blatchford makes the point that class size effects are 'multiple'. For children at the beginning of schooling, there are significant potential gains in reading and maths in smaller classes. Children from ethnic minorities and children who start behind their peers benefit most. Research in South Auckland schools has also shown that learners with poorly developed literacy need smaller classes in the early years in order to have the support they need to become confident readers. Increasing class size would therefore appear to be in direct conflict with the government's 'crusade' around National Standards.

Class size also affects what teachers and learners actually do in the classroom. Professor Blatchford's research showed that larger classes produced more and larger groups of learners within the class. This had negative effects on teaching, learning and learners' concentration. In smaller classes, teachers were more likely to spend time with individual learners – this is exactly the kind of 'personalised learning' approach that our Ministry of Education wants and which larger classes would seriously threaten.

The Ministry of Education also wants our new 'world-class' curriculum implemented. The curriculum is all about social learning and children taking charge of their learning. In smaller classes children are more likely to be engaged in learning and less disruptive; in larger classes children are more likely to just passively listen to the teacher; in smaller classes children actively interact with the teacher about their learning.

As Blatchford concludes, smaller classes provide opportunities for teachers to teach better; larger classes force teachers to make compromises with learners. If underachievement is the 'problem',

the solution isn't larger classes and bigger sticks with which principals will be told to beat teachers.

If Treasury and the Ministry read the research correctly, it should be obvious to them that smaller classes combined with an expansive educational repertoire and a commitment to eradicating child poverty are the only solutions likely to make an enduring difference to socio-economically disadvantaged learners.

Smaller classes and pedagogical teacher development will cost the country more, not less. This means advocating a return to progressive taxation rates and committing to a greater investment in public education as a public good.

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# ENVIROSCHOOLS CELEBRATE TEN

Liz Hawes EDITOR

THE SIXTH OF DECEMBER 2011 marked an important milestone for the enviroschools movement in New Zealand. Appropriately, the Hamilton City Botanical Gardens was the venue chosen to celebrate the Enviroschools tenth birthday. Hamilton after all was the birthplace of the movement, which grew from the idea that the way we relate to the environment shapes our attitudes and can structure the way we educate

It was ultimately the establishment of the Enviroschools Foundation in 2003 that provided the leadership for these schools to grow both in number and in diversity. The Foundation, led by Heidi Mardon, provides the organisational structure and initiates partnerships with regional and community groups and councils to ensure the movement remains strong and sustainable. By the end of 2010 there were 715 or 26 per cent of schools operating



At the celebrations children made flags to promote enviro messages



children. The children in turn will take these enviro practices into their everyday lives. In this way the enviro attitudes and practices learned can be sustained beyond the school gate and spread throughout the community.

The Hamilton City Council and Community Environmental Programme got behind the idea and created a partnership with Te Mauri Tau, an educational, environmental and health organisation. Together they developed a set of principles which would guide the Enviroschools programme.

Three Hamilton schools piloted the Enviroschools Programme, one of which was Hukanui School, profiled on pp. 18–22.

enviro programmes across 15 different regions.

The tenth anniversary was a day filled with fun and lots of activities for the children attending, all of whom came from enviroschools. Even better was the giant-sized birthday cake, which was hugely appreciated by all.

One of the many activities the children engaged in during the celebrations was to create flags carrying environmentally friendly messages. 'Our flag is telling people not to put rubbish down drains,' said one young enthusiast, 'because it just blocks up and pollutes the water that could be recycled.' Emblazoned on the flag was the warning: 'Only rain down the drain! These



Inspired by their study of 'wonderful wai', Wairaki school children produced these pictures following a trip to the local hatchery



# T H BIRTHDAY

imaginatively illustrated and brightly coloured flags were then displayed for all to enjoy.

Sharing is a very natural way children from the enviroschools interact and all immersed themselves in congratulating the children representing Rhode Street School and Hillcrest Normal School. These schools were recipients of the coveted Green-Gold Award for their respective environmental actions and sustainability. The Enviroschools Foundation has set up a system of awards to which schools can aspire. These are Bronze, Silver and Gold status awards. Each level has a set of criteria and all aspects must be satisfied before the award is granted. Rhode Street School won the Gold award for their work that has resulted in the successful completion of designing, building and articulating three different enviro projects. These include the sensory garden, recycling scheme and annual Kai Festival.

Hillcrest Normal School has established systems of waste reduction and management, energy conservation and solar energy, sustainable transport and the development of natural habitats, food gardens and play areas.

As the national director of the Enviroschools Foundation



Children share in the birthday cake celebrating Enviroschools

said at the anniversary celebrations, 'Sustainability isn't just a school topic to simply learn about and then move on, it's a

The **TENTH ANNIVERSARY** was a day filled with fun and **LOTS OF ACTIVITIES** for the children attending, all of **WHOM CAME FROM ENVIROSCHOOLS**.


global challenge that needs deep enquiry and real innovation to make happen – and that's what these students and schools are doing. It's this community leadership that took Enviroschools from being a small seed-funded project to an internationally recognised movement – these students are literally changing the world.'



The Rhode Street School receive their Green-Gold award

# CAPTURING THE CULTURE OF ENVIRO SCHOOLS

Liz Hawes EDITOR



Principal David Mossop

**GULLY PLANTING, PAPER RECYCLING,** *composting, native tree restoration, liquid vermicast sales, waste management plans, environmental impact reports . . . sounds much like an action list from a DOC focus group or a Regional Council meeting. Yet, at Hukanui School in Hamilton, this is normal language and typical activity. What's more it is all led and driven by the children themselves. Liz Hawes takes a tour of the 'Green-Gold' Enviroschool to find out why Hukanui adopted the 'enviro' culture and how the school has adapted its curriculum to accommodate these eco-friendly concepts.*

It's a powerful leader who can bring people on board to share a vision and make it happen. One could assume that with 610 children on a growing roll, David Mossop, principal of Hukanui School in Hamilton, might face a few challenges trying to steer his entire school community down the enviro pathway. After all it calls for a complete mind shift in the teaching and learning approach. It follows a philosophy in which the children lead, plan and implement the programme. But for this unassuming, quietly confident and focused leader it's all in a day's work.

David is quick to acknowledge that he does not drive this vision alone. Alongside him is Michelle White, the school's Education for Sustainability leader, and according to David, Michelle is key to the success of the programme:

I see my strength as a team builder who believes in the school vision statement of 'maximising people's potential'. I see my role as encouraging teachers to develop their own strengths and passions, then giving them the opportunity

to use those passions through a differentiated curriculum to inspire children in their learning. Enviro lead teacher Michelle White is an example of the success of this approach and a key figure in developing education for sustainability in the school through the school's Electives Programme. This is an approach that enables children to study areas of interest in greater depth.

The kaupapa of enviroschools, established by the Enviroschools Foundation, is 'about the well-being of the whole school, community and ecosystem.' The thinking driving this kaupapa is explained as 'working out how to live so that our society and economy nourishes the natural systems which give us life'. It's about 'empowering students and schools to create healthy, peaceful, sustainable communities.'

Hukanui's journey began in 1998 with the first 'vision map', developed by the students and the community. 'To sustain an enviroschool,' says David, 'takes full commitment and needs the total support of the children, teachers, parents and the local community to succeed. It is all-pervasive and is reflected across our entire curriculum here at Hukanui School, including subjects like literacy and numeracy,' he said.

Current literacy research would support Hukanui's choice to go the enviro way. In her investigative study into the effects of enviroschools on literacy acquisition, Faye Wilson-Hill found that hands-on learning in the environment enhanced children's vocabulary, reading, analytical skills and understanding. Children became critical and reflective thinkers in applying

themselves to establishing sustainability goals, and through discussing different perspectives and ideas for sustainability they also became respectful listeners. She claims that students are motivated in literacy learning 'through the use of materials from across the curriculum in authentic contexts.' Not bad outcomes if your aim is to equip children with the literacy skills to confidently take on life's future challenges.

A second key element in the enviro approach is 'inquiry learning'. 'Much of our teaching could be described through the 'inquiry' method,' says David. 'Inquiry is compatible with our enviro culture which is all about empowering children to ask the "what if" questions, guiding them to research the topic and identify viable options, plan a course of action and implement it,' he said.

A good example is one of the school's early projects. The children identified a courtyard area of the school which was underutilised. Applying the survey research method the project group sought the views of the children and teachers on what to do with the identified land. They found that the most popular response was to turn it into a 'cultural garden'. 'The gardens were designed with the help of experts with whom the children worked. The centrepiece included a column set in concrete and surrounded by a circle of the children's hand-painted rocks. Parameters for the project included that the gardens must represent plants and flowers from the native country of every child enrolled in the school and there would also be a special



The native garden

section designated as a native New Zealand section. Now well established and a feature of the school playground, the cultural garden is again back on the list for refreshing. 'Nothing is ever finished here,' says David, 'which of course applies to any ecosystem. There is always maintenance, replanting, feeding, watering, weeding expanding and sometimes redesigning,' he says.

With their strong focus on zero waste and recycling it was not surprising that when a prized redwood tree was hit by lightning and died, Hukanui kids sought to make use of the remaining tree trunk. 'The upshot was we commissioned a carving which is called "circle of friends". The area surrounding the carving has

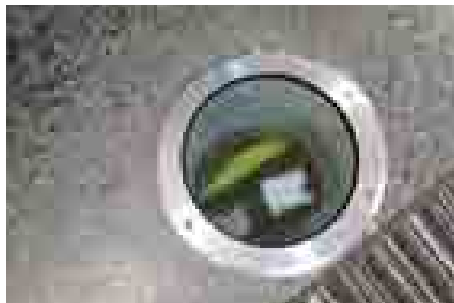


The new entrants settle down to do some reading

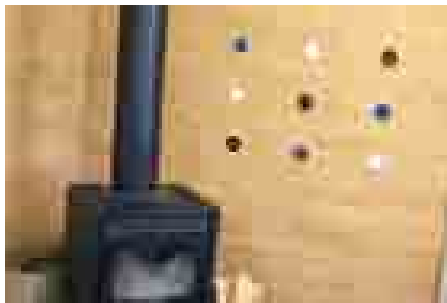
since been developed and has become a very popular playtime spot for the children to use,' said David.

A quick tour of the school revealed a now well-established gully area at the back of the school field which the children have restored in conjunction with a community group. 'Our children are now cultivating seedlings and growing them for the gully project,' said David proudly, and by the number of very healthy-looking kowhai trees lining the school's greenhouse, there is more planting ahead.

as we both enthused over the half-eaten apples, banana skins and sandwich crusts lying inelegantly atop the pile of stench. I swiftly turned down the offer to admire the cockroach 'farm' but not before the attendant children had their chance to explain the critical part each of these elements play in the life of their school ecosystem. Would I like to see the 'worm juice'? I am ready for anything now that my olfactory system has adapted to this new environment. The school's worm farm produces such quantities of vermicast (which is turned into liquid vermicast) that there is



The glass bottle insulation in the Living Room



The Living Room wood burner surrounded by the clay brick wall



The children's contribution to the composting project

Further revelations included the 'chicken tractor', complete with the chooks of course and the day's freshly laid eggs. I learn that the 'hen house' is mobile and as the straw floor becomes sufficiently 'manured', the hen house is lifted up, wheeled on to a fresh site and a vegetable garden is established on the vacated area. 'Nothing is wasted here,' laughs David. 'The children learn that different parts of an ecosystem make contributions to other areas of the ecosystem and so in the end nature is one huge finely balanced organic structure.' I examined the lush crop of tomatoes flourishing in the garden built from the last hen house input and as I gazed down at the fleshy tomato cradled in the cup of my hand I thought 'Wow! A chook grew this!'

Chooks are not the only donors of soil nutrients. The kids make their own contributions too with the composting of food scraps. I am proudly marched off to the compost bin where the rotting carpet cover is peeled back to reveal, well, a wreaking, stinking bath tub of detritus. 'I told you we waste nothing,' smiled David,

surplus to sell. I am told that in the school gardens it is used to boost the soil structure and enhance moisture retention. Profits from the sale of the surplus 'worm juice' as the children fondly call it, is poured back into other eco projects.

A more recent project is the school beehive. Again initiated and researched by the children the beehive was built under the guidance of an expert beekeeper and produced its first honey harvest in 2011. Children can observe the bees at work through a special glass window and classes study the bees' behaviour first-hand. Groups of children are allocated to maintain the beehive and collect the honey under the supervision of the school's specialist eco teacher.

'Having the bees is not so much about producing honey to sell,' says David, 'it is more about showing the children the role bees have in pollinating plants so they can produce their fruits. It is showing them first-hand the interdependencies of the wider ecosystem.'

Each of these features at Hukanui School is remarkable in its own right, but perhaps the most outstanding of all is the 'Living Room', Hukanui School's eco-classroom.

'This was the children's idea,' explains David. 'Like all eco projects at the school this one began with a vision which came from the "what if" scenario.'

An early concept was drawn up and together with the design team the children researched the building orientation the choice of building materials and did a full cost analysis. They also selected the architect and the builders, having constructed their own questions and as a panel, interviewed the selected short list. 'I was present during the interview process,' says David, 'and it was quite clear that some of the interviewees were very unaccustomed to having children on an interview panel. They kept turning to me with their answers and I just had to refer them back to the children. They were



The water tank for garden irrigation

driving this interview, not me,' he said proudly.

Next was community awareness and fundraising, which the children also led and helped raise the shortfall of money required to get the building started.

The children named the new classroom 'the Living Room' because it was intended as a living laboratory. For example, there are three different floor insulation types incorporated including pumice, polystyrene and glass bottles, so that the children can examine the differences. 'We have these transducer panels which were donated to us and these allow the children to measure the insulation performance,' explained David.

The floor itself is polished recycled aggregate concrete. Allowing the heat of the sun to be absorbed, thereby equalising night and day temperatures. There was no treated timber used in the construction and all the offcuts were recycled as skirting boards. 'One of the criteria the children had drawn up in choosing the builder was that there be zero waste,' said David, 'and I can tell you, that was a challenge!'

Earthbricks were chosen for the wall area around the woodburner and the children engaged an earth builder from



Principal David Mossop joins the 'circle of friends' in the playground

Raglan as the expert to guide them in how to make these special bricks. 'It is quite common practice for us to bring in outside experts to assist in teaching skills that we don't have,' says David.

A very complex system of ventilation systems including skylights, louvres and fans ensures maximum warm air in the winter and cool in the summer. Importantly, this living laboratory provides ongoing monitoring of insulation effectiveness and lighting control to reduce the amount of energy used. It is the eco classroom, where the children come to study eco things. This

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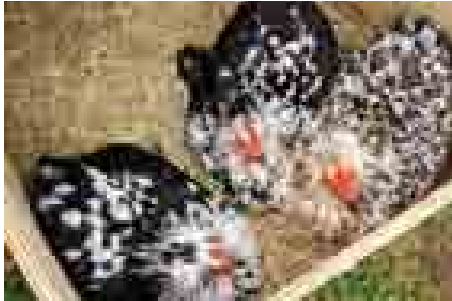
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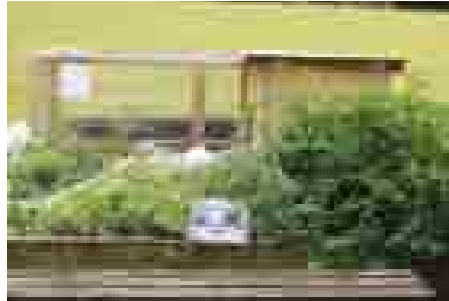
unique and special classroom was opened in 2009 and boasts half the carbon footprint of a typical classroom.

A final touch is the student designed 'Fountain of Power', a water feature designed to catch water from the roof, which flows through a series of 'paint tins' making interesting music along the way to finally drip out of the lower tins to water the wetlands. The feature was built by year 5 and 6 children. And

The eco classroom project is ongoing, and I was privileged to meet the team of year 6 children who were just completing the operations manual for the 'Living Room' alongside an account of the history of the 'Living Room's' development. The detail was astonishing and as they explained, recording all the decision-making processes and writing it all down is so important, so that people in the future will know where it all began. These two



The chooks



The chicken tractor and the vege garden have a special relationship



The eco classroom revolution – the Living Room student-led project

while the water feature feeds the wetlands, the school also has its own water tank to feed the gardens. Water is collected from the broad roof span of the school's 'Living Room'. The tank is checked daily by a group of designated children to ensure the pipes are clean and measurements are taken to check the volume of water in the tank. This water is used to irrigate the gardens and the nursery plants and any surplus water feeds into the school supply. The children all understand the critical part water plays in nourishing the ecosystem and respect the importance of recycling any waste water.

publications will be launched this year. It was made clear that the history writing would continue, so that every year the activities associated with the eco classroom are recorded.

To watch the activities of Hukanui School is a great treat. The children run everything and they do it so efficiently, because from the principal down, the staff of this school is as one in their vision. The eco activities of the school are clear and up front. I am equally impressed by the less visible but nevertheless powerful effect of the children's interactions with each other. Their collaborative approach to almost anything, their generosity and respect of each other, the way they listen to each other seems quite ordinary and natural. It was impressive to observe.

'The philosophy of enviroschools includes the creation of a healthy peaceful sustainable community,' says David. 'Our children adopt into that whole philosophy and that is why they behave the way they do. 'By the time they reach year 6 they have a real sense of the interactivities of an ecosystem. They know they have taken from that system and learned a great deal and they want to give back to it,' says David, as he led me to the outside rear of the 'Living Room'. 'See this table,' he nudged, 'the last year 6 class fundraised to get the materials and made this table for the school. It's become common practice now, for the children leaving to give something back. It's a bit like in the environment. If you take something out, you have to put something back to keep the balance. I guess that's something our kids learn from being in an enviroschool.'



The centrepiece of the Cultural Garden



# HILLCREST NORMAL – ANOTHER EXAMPLE OF THE SUCCESS OF ENVIROSCHOOLS

Liz Hawes EDITOR

TO VISIT HILLCREST NORMAL SCHOOL today it is hard to believe that in 1994 this school had just lost a seven-classroom block to fire and while under MOE management, was, like the phoenix, rising from the ashes.

Seventeen years later, under the leadership of Irene Cooper, principal, the school is flourishing again.

‘We have adopted the enviro approach at Hillcrest Normal,’ says Irene, ‘because we believe that it is not only the best way to deliver our curriculum but it’s also the best pathway to higher achievement for the children,’ she said, as she took me through the extensive list of enviro projects both completed and in train at her school.

As at Hukanui School, Hillcrest Normal’s enviro programme is very much led and managed by the children and the process of identifying a problem to solve or a playground space to develop follows a similar path.

Take the goal of zero waste which Hillcrest Normal has adopted. Through analysing the rubbish, the children identified

that wrappers such as chippie bags were a problem. They wanted them eliminated. Resolving this issue took a two-pronged approach. First was examining the food contained in the wrappers for their nutritional content, and second was finding a way to communicate the finding that these foods were not desirable. Get rid of the chippies and you get rid of the chippie bags.

‘Driving a project such as this is all about asking good questions,’ said Irene. ‘In this case they had to ask how much waste do we create? What types of waste? Where does it come from? That led to identifying the chippie bags.’

Next the children undertook a scientific experiment. They selected a bag of Twisties, counted them, crushed them into powder and poured them into a beaker with boiled water. After some time, the oil separated out and came to the top.

‘The children witnessed first-hand how gross this looked, and by measuring the proportions of oil to water and analysing the other food groups making up the Twisties they recognised



that these Twisties were a bad nutritional option. They then undertook the same experiment with chippies, with similar results,' said Irene, 'and while they were at it they did a comparison of the cost of chippies and Twisties versus a healthy food choice like apples.'

To heighten awareness of this issue, they had to be inventive. They constructed a large cardboard pillar onto which they stapled every chippie bag from one day's rubbish, a total of 250 bags.



The chippie bag pillar display - communicating the findings

They included on the pillar a pictorial of their experiment and the comparative cost analysis.

'Out of this project has emerged a renewed relevance for our "nude food" promotions, which are all about children bringing wrapper-free lunches to school,' said Irene.

This is a perfect example of how one enviro project will interact with another. It is also illustrative of the skill level the children engage with in conducting these problem-solving projects. The chippie bag project alone involved high-level sequential and consequential thinking processes, logic, scientific experimentation, observation, recording, mathematical analysis, communication and marketing, artistic design and selection. It's an impressive list of skills which is unlikely to emerge from sitting



Experimenting to find out the food value of chippies

at a desk reading a book assigned by the teacher or completing a maths worksheet.

'The power of the learning,' says Irene, 'comes from the children being in charge of these projects, asking the questions and working out how to solve the problems themselves. When they need knowledge that they don't have, we call in experts. It's all hands-on and that's how they learn best.'

I wouldn't argue with that. I saw for myself the outstanding achievements these children were experiencing for themselves and for their school.

Congratulations Hillcrest Normal children and teachers. You are most deserving of your new Green-Gold Enviroschool status.

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# LIZ MILLAR RETIRES FROM NZPF EXECUTIVE AFTER EIGHT ILLUSTRIOUS YEARS OF SERVICE

Liz Hawes EDITOR

WHEN I CASUALLY told a principal friend of mine some 18 months ago that I had been appointed to a position with NZPF, my friend immediately said, 'Oh wow! You will be working with Liz Millar!'

I sensed a tone of undoubted admiration and huge respect. These were not misplaced impressions. As I got to know Liz, and the work she has done with and on behalf of principals over many years, it is clear that she is very much the trusted 'go-to' person especially for advice on process matters and leadership issues.

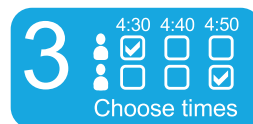
Whilst she has for many years held an esteemed position amongst her peers and continues to do so, Liz has represented the nation's principals in a more formal way for the past eight years as a member of the NZPF executive committee. Her colleagues on the executive similarly hold her in very high regard and frequently defer to her when it comes to critique and analysis. She attacks such tasks with a razor-sharp intellect and brings her not inconsiderable wealth of experience to every issue. Liz has the ability to make a discussion fly, because she can quickly define the relevance of a particular issue in terms of the wider context and overall objectives of the organisation. Her ability to rise above the micro-discussion and take the grand overview is legendary. As Paul Drummond, NZPF President says, 'Liz's whiteboard strategic mapping is an art form in its own right!'

Liz has redefined what we mean by 'hard work'. Her capacity for taking on extra tasks seems limitless and all done so generously. 'When we had no regional association taking on the job of organising our 2011 NZPF conference, Liz just put her hand up and said I'll organise a group,' says Peter Simpson, immediate past president. 'She's extraordinary in her capacity to organise



and make things happen. This turned out to be one of our most successful recent conferences, but why am I not surprised?

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Everything Liz takes on tends to be highly successful,' he said.

Like so many principals I have now met, Liz does not seek acclamation for the outstanding contribution she makes to her profession, and can be incredibly understated.

When it comes to role playing, however, there is no understating her glorious wit and acting talent. She is a hoot! When in satirical mood no one is safe from her outrageous

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impersonations. Those weaknesses we all try so hard to hide, she places centre-stage and unrelentingly sends them up! She will be greatly missed at NZPF executive meetings.

So why is it time for Liz to leave the NZPF executive? Well, certainly not because she doesn't have support. As long as she has stood for the executive she has always been one of the highest polling candidates. Her popularity remains strong. No, it is time, she says, to put more energy into her greatest love which is professional leadership development. She has been a regional

director for the Te Ariki professional development project since it was first established under the directorship of Dr David Stewart and continues to lead and encourage principals to adopt its philosophy of quality leadership through continuous reflection, evaluation and improvement.

On the executive she led the team responsible for professional leadership and as team member Phil Harding says, 'Her broad professional knowledge, especially in professional leadership, her understanding of Ministry structures and processes and her acute insight meant our team was progressive and always focused,' he said. 'I have huge respect for Liz. She is always up to date with her reading of research underpinning best practice and has a powerful grip on the latest thinking, which she would bring to our work. She has been a tower of strength to our executive,' added Phil.

'We know that the profession will continue to benefit from Liz's talents and expertise at many levels from mentoring first-time principals to leading major professional development programmes,' says Paul Drummond. 'Liz has long promoted the virtues of learning communities and in both her NZPF and school work she 'walks the talk', he said.

The NZPF executive extends its very best wishes to Liz for a future filled with the richness of life, with professional success and, above all, fun!

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# PERFORMANCE LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT IN NEW ZEALAND STATE AND INTEGRATED SCHOOLS

JACQUI DUNCAN PRINCIPAL, CASHMERE PRIMARY SCHOOL

**THE RE-ELECTED NATIONAL GOVERNMENT** has said it intends to *immediately begin work to develop more effective teacher and principal appraisal*. My wonderings are why make this a priority and why the urgency? Where are the gaps and what in the opinion of the writer would make principal and teacher appraisal more effective?

## A brief history of what is happening in schools

Several initiatives over time from multiple sources resulted in the current system of performance management in schools; 1989 introduced self-management into New Zealand schools and legislation (reflecting government's of-the-day ideology and policy), research by academics, consultation and contribution from the sector and reports from the Education Review Office (ERO) and the Ministry of Education (MOE) has over time given us a system that is robust, flexible and focused on teaching and learning with an emphasis on principal and teacher development leading to increased student achievement. Evaluating the performance of the principal is the responsibility of the board of trustees (BOT) and evaluating the performance of staff is mainly the responsibility of the principal and leadership team as delegated by the BOT.

In the 1990s requirements for teacher and principal appraisal were mandated through Administration Guideline 2, which required boards to promote high levels of staff performance. The State Sector Act 1988 also required BOT as good employers to develop the abilities of individual employees. ERO in a report on performance management in schools in the mid 1990s said that many boards needed clearer direction about managing staff performance. This helped lead to the Performance Management in Schools (PMS) framework. Then in 1999 (as part of collective agreement negotiations) the Interim Professional Standards were introduced to give principals and BOTs clear performance indicators to base their appraisal on and mandated that teachers and principals were to be appraised against these each year. These are still compulsory and in 2008 the Primary Principal Standards were revised and reduced to four dimensions. In 2011 the Teachers Council introduced the 'Registered Teachers Criteria', and this lends itself to teaching as inquiry and teachers providing evidence of professional learning and practice. This is also compulsory.

Kiwi leadership was developed and welcomed by the sector in 2008 to place more emphasis on leading learning within school communities. It links to the New Zealand Curriculum 2007 designed to provide a rich and broad

curriculum for children. In 2010 the controversial National Standards were introduced into primary schools to provide a national framework on which BOTs, parents, principals and



Since the late 1990s, NEW ZEALAND EDUCATION has benefited from excellent research including BEST EVIDENCE SYNTHESIS ITERATION (BES).

teachers can look at achievement data of their students in literacy and mathematics.

In 2012 we see that most if not all schools have performance management systems operating which balance the need to comply with regulations, to respond to different school needs and school contexts, is evidence based and ensures students receive appropriate and challenging learning. BOTs receive guidance on best practice from the School Trustees Association (STA), the MOE through its website and TKI and from their principals who in turn have had specific professional development on best practice in leading learning communities and developing the skill set, confidence and effectiveness of their staff.

Since the late 1990s, New Zealand education has benefited from excellent research including Best Evidence Synthesis Iteration (BES). This research is New Zealand owned and developed and is valued across the world. We do know what best practice is and what policies and practice will lead to children experiencing learning success at school. In 2010 ERO introduced new evaluation indicators and a self-review model for schools to use.

New Zealand education enjoys a very good reputation internationally for its innovation and overall excellence across all schools. Principals and teachers across New Zealand work tirelessly to provide learning environments where children can learn and experience success. We do, however, have one of the widest gaps between our highest achieving children and our lowest achieving children within and across schools. Hence in recent years there has been a focus on reducing disparity.

### What is considered to be best practice?

The dual purpose of performance management systems so far developed has been principal and teacher development and principal and teacher accountability. Research published in the last ten years leans towards effective practice as having a strong link to professional development and evidence-based formative performance management systems.

BES Teacher Professional Learning and Development gives four important understandings that arise from the evidence base and strongly advocates teaching as inquiry.

## The DUAL PURPOSE OF PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT SYSTEMS so far developed has been principal and teacher development and PRINCIPAL AND TEACHER ACCOUNTABILITY.

1. *Student learning is strongly influenced by what and how teachers teach* regardless of a student's socioeconomic and personal factors that a child brings to the learning.
2. *Teaching is a complex activity.* Teachers' numerous interactions and decisions made each day are influenced by the knowledge, skills, beliefs and experience of each teacher.
3. *It is important to set up conditions that are responsive to the ways in which teachers learn.* Use teachers' background knowledge and understanding of how the world works, develop new knowledge and awareness of teaching strategies and curriculum and promote thinking and self-management skills that will help teachers set goals and strive for improvement.
4. *Professional learning is strongly shaped by the context in which the teacher practises. This is usually the classroom, which, in turn, is strongly influenced by the wider school culture and the community and society in which the school is situated. Teachers' daily experiences in their practice context shape their understandings, and their understandings shape their experiences.*

(Timperley, p. 6)

Therefore, using the insights of research, case studies and the literature we find that there is no mystery as to what effective teaching and leadership is. Recent research (including BES) scaffolds this in detail. Therefore, critical school-wide performance management practices school review and evaluation will be highly effective if they:

- have teacher, principal and BOT understanding and buy-in
- are focused on schools individual context and identified next steps
- are focused on student learning and student achievement
- require pedagogical leadership

- are inextricably linked to the school's review, strategic planning and reporting processes
- are linked to school improvement, student learning and achievement and accountability
- use both qualitative and quantitative methodologies
- have a pedagogical and formative focus to assist school leaders and teachers to decide what is worth doing in the classroom and across the school and what can be stopped.

The government has these insights, understanding and knowledge at their disposal through the MOE and ERO. It is crucial that any initiative to improve appraisal takes these into account. There needs to be a genuine evidenced-based commitment to strengthen schooling.

### What are the strengths and limitations of what we have now?

Schools are expected to have robust and evidence-based performance management systems along with developing and delivering the 2007 Curriculum across eight learning areas, to have valid multisource assessment including National Standards, and school review systems operating. They are already overloaded, understaffed and under-resourced, yet ERO reports and international reports on NZ education show that many/most schools do this well. Some schools struggle, resulting in schools' capability being at variance with performance expectations. The self-managing school system has resulted in schools being able to prioritise their strategic focus allowing schools do things differently and in a different order. School effectiveness is dependent on quality teaching, leadership and governance and not all schools have all three working in sync or as well as they could be. All schools have next steps that they are working on.

### What and why might the government want change?

The only valid reason for the government to want to urgently focus on 'appraisal' in schools is to strengthen *all* schools ability to support and build upon quality teaching, learning and leadership across schools as research (BES Leadership) shows this is what makes a difference. Resource schools to be able to use the tools already available to them to strengthen their review and evaluation systems linked to student learning and staff formative performance review. Fully implement and resource Kiwi Leadership 2008 and ERO's self-review model 2010.

The full implementation of the New Zealand Curriculum 2007 and Kiwi Leadership 2008 has slowed down, partially due to the rushed implementation of National Standards and the removal of many supports to schools including the advisory service.

### What future developments would strengthen best practice?

I believe the following six actions would improve performance management in schools:

- Engage with the sector and find out what is happening in schools.
- Use ERO's knowledge of what is happening in schools and strengthen it to accurately identify schools that need help.
- Strengthen and build upon Kiwi Leadership and the Teachers Council Registered Teacher Criteria by developing coaching and mentoring systems in schools.

- Use research to design any changes and use the sector to support struggling schools.
- Leave alone schools that are doing a good job and celebrate and incentivise innovation and excellence.
- Use the advantage that self-management gives for community buy-in and good will.

My hope is that the government sees that fulfilling its pre- and post-election promise on strengthening school appraisal is wider than a narrow accountability *one-size-fits-all* focus and instead wants to build on current practice and improve it.

The government needs to be clear about its intentions and the outcomes it is seeking.

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# SCHOOL LINES

## Like it or lump it?

Lester Flockton FEEDBACK, FEEDFORWARD, FEEDUP, FEEDDOWN lester.flockton@otago.ac.nz



WHEN MR KEY announced his political party's education policy a matter of a days before voters went to the ballot box, with the then Minister of Education standing behind him and clearly on the way out in favour of a party member with some credentials, intellectual agility and at least a modicum of charm, it was too late for any discussion, justification, explanation, debate or challenge (the backbone stuff of good democratic process). It was a matter of what we should expect, like it or lump it.

So, what are the likes, and what are the lumps? Well, that probably depends on your *beliefs* about the direction in which education is heading in New Zealand, and what excites you most as an educational leader. Is it the prospect of a share of the \$1 billion that will be spent to 'modernise and transform' schools for the 21st century, or the 'bedding in' of National Standards, or the strengthening of teacher and principal accountability and performance 'measurement'? These are just a few of the government's priorities announced in its election manifesto last November. Or is it something that doesn't appear to have found a place or mention among the priorities – like giving children a rich, well-rounded education that is squarely based on the New Zealand Curriculum, and where the main measure of success is children's enthusiastic engagement in learning across all of its dimensions – something not readily captured by numeric 'data'.

The government's 2011 education policy manifesto (*Education in Schools: Building better public services*), with its 13 'What we will do next' categories and 42 specific actions, is an interesting contrast to its 3 policy priorities in 2008. They were fundamentally the introduction of National Standards in reading, writing and mathematics: plain language reporting to parents, and public data reporting in relation to the standards. It is clearly pleased to tell those who read electioneering stuff that this policy is working, as described in its election case study:

A decile 4 full primary school in the South Island had a charter that included a reading target. As they worked towards the target, the school identified a significant number of six-year-olds not meeting the National Standard in reading.

As a result, the school was identified as suitable to participate in an accelerated learning programme for literacy.

After staff training, the school engaged with parents about the programme through face-to-face discussions and a letter that identified the students' current reading level in relation to the National Standard.

The accelerated learning programme was put in place and all children made significant improvements in their reading.

The Principal said that they could 'not believe the rate of acceleration over the term. The students are now engaged and loving their reading.'

Since the name of the school and all other relevant information necessary for validating or critiquing the story are not given, we might reasonably assume that it is fiction! Nonetheless, it very neatly spins together all of the key ingredients of the silver bullet – targets, standards, staff training, accelerated learning, 'significant improvement', reporting to parents, and an incredulous school principal! But if these sorts of stories are to hold any water and be regarded as anything more than propaganda, then we should expect to have full access to all of the evidence and, with time, year-by-year evidence to show that improvement is sustained and continued as the children move through their schooling – not just when they were six. Without this, an isolated case study from one school in over 2000 is worthless and unconvincing.

National Standards aside, the other numerous policy directions announced by the government last November cover a wide spectrum of initiatives. Some are remarkably similar to those that the Ministry of Education has been driving at for some time (e.g. Focus on building the capability of teachers, principals and boards to use data to inform teaching practice; Building strong and informed connections between families and schools). Some are a sharpening of the wedge that has been foreshadowed by Ministry behaviour over the latter part of last year (e.g. Having education agencies actively engaging when schools are identified as potentially failing students; Improve reporting of system-level performance, including investigating school-level reporting). Other policies, however, signal new directions (Have more effective teacher and principal appraisal; Ensure capable school leadership by requiring selection and training of new principals).

On the surface, many of the policies may seem progressive or remedial of system problems. The detail and language of the policies does, however, leave one wondering whose ideas they are, and who put them together. Regardless, we have learned from National Standards that everything will depend largely on how the Ministry crafts or engineers them for implementation, realising that Sewell has gone and a new Secretary of Education is at her desk, and Tolley has gone and a new Minister of Education is at the helm.

Optimistic? Confident? That may depend on what kind of educational thinker and leader you are!

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# RURAL RAMBLINGS



## Looking after all of our children; a balancing act

Baabaara Ramsbottom

**THE FAMILY** I grew up in was very different from the one in which I now live. We were the typical 1960s nuclear family; parents who married in their early twenties, a father who worked on the railways and a mother who gave up work to look after two kids and a succession of goldfish (all imaginatively named Goldie and none of whom survived more than a few weeks of us stirring their water and feeding them chippies!).

In contrast, my partner has three sisters, five nieces and fifty first cousins. Our blended family proudly boasts four boys aged between 1 and 16. My mother was a great role model – the problem is that she modelled a different sort of life. Our Christmas lunches were cosy winter affairs for four – over within 45 minutes and followed by a sedate game of Monopoly before the Queen's Speech and a brisk walk to visit our grandparents.

This year I had the dubious honour of cooking Christmas lunch for 20 – a high-decibel affair held in the garden, accompanied by much laughter, storytelling and enough food for the whole street.

'No pressure, Helen,' our 16-year-old smirked every time he passed me poring over cookery blogs on producing succulent turkey. Enrolling my sister as sous-chef should have taken the pressure off – it would have if both of us weren't vegetarians. Eventually, we opted for a belt-and-braces approach involving Annabel Langbein's 'brining' (submerge turkey overnight in a sack of salt water, honey and spices) and Jamie Oliver's herb butter (stuff butter under the breast so that it bastes as the turkey cooks).

On the big day our turkey was declared a success – this was nothing short of a miracle given that it was unexpectedly frozen

when we collected it from the supermarket, so it defrosted in the brine and we said a short prayer as we pulled it out hoping it wasn't (a) still frozen solid or (b) reduced to a soggy mass at the bottom of the ex-Trade Me purchase NZ Post bag. It was my sister's job to stuff the butter under its skin – it was only when she commented that our turkey must have been doing Jenny Craig that we realised we had it upside down and she had stuffed its back!

The festive season over, the prospect of heading back to work would have been a welcome return to routine if I hadn't first had to find a new caregiver for our toddler. Another guilt-ridden experience my mother never faced. Home-based childcare was the only option we looked at; but choosing the right person to spend so much precious time with our boy wasn't easy. We

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visited several potential carers – one of whom felt the need to tell us that her son had already watched *Cars* about five times that day – rightly or wrongly we didn't pick her!

Throughout my career I have always been determined that I would never look back and regret having spent more time caring for other people's children than my own – my New Year's resolution therefore is to work harder at achieving balance in both my work and home lives.



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In my professional life, achieving balance involves re-examining my priorities over the coming year. National Standards have been a huge focus in the last two years and whilst there is still much to fight for, there are other issues I would like to focus on.

One of them – undoubtedly connected – is child poverty in New Zealand.

Bryan Bruce's documentary *Inside Child Poverty* aired in November last year and was watched by 385,900 New Zealanders and more than 14,600 online via TV3 On Demand. The content was shocking and demands some response from all of us concerned with child welfare.

Bruce, known for his work on the crime show *The Investigator*, highlighted that NZ currently ranks 28th out of 30 countries in the developed world on measures of child well-being – behind Italy, Ireland and the Czech Republic. More than 25,000 children were admitted to hospital last year for respiratory infections, most caused by overcrowded living conditions and doctors are treating diseases such as rheumatic fever and scabies, which have been eliminated from European countries.

Bruce has stressed that his stance in making the programme was apolitical and that he was making a call for politicians to unite in prioritising child welfare over political agendas. It was interesting to hear Barack Obama echoing this message in his 2012 State of the Union address:

We need to end the notion that the two parties must be locked in a perpetual campaign of mutual destruction; that politics is about clinging to rigid ideologies instead of building consensus around common-sense ideas.

Although there has been no formal response to Bruce's programme from the main political parties in New Zealand, a Facebook page set up after the programme has received considerable press coverage, including an extensive write-up on the Internet news site Stuff entitled 'Teen becomes leader in child poverty fight.'

The Facebook page 'Children Against Poverty' was started by a 16-year-old from Northland named Jazmine Heka. She has begun petitions calling for free healthy school lunches, free healthcare for all children and warrants of fitness on all rental houses. Her determination to do something in response to the programme is to be applauded. Poor-quality housing and lack of access to healthcare are issues just as prevalent in rural areas as our towns; I will be bringing her Facebook page to the attention of children in my school as a positive example of a young person making a difference – her petitions can also be accessed via the page.

Achieving balance in 2012 will be – as always – about choosing where to put our energies for the good of *all* of our children.

#### WEB REFERENCES

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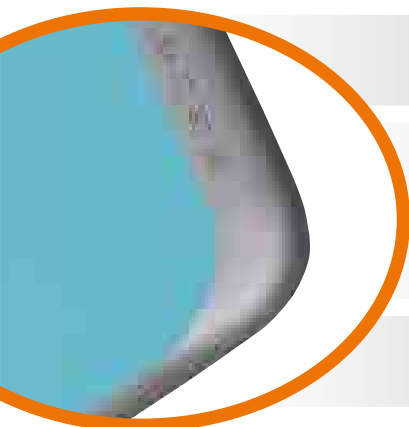
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