

MOOT 2020

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AN ELEVATED MOOD suffused regional presidents as they poured into the Moot this March. Election years create an atmosphere of excited expectation. It is the one day in each three-year cycle, that regional heads reflect on education policies through the lens of their own experiences. Unearthing common ground excites them even more and passionate speeches spring from all corners of the room at the rate of sprouting spinach. As the reality that they can collectively act takes hold, the presidents enthusiastically fuse their ideas into coherent statements – to be embedded in the NZPF manifesto. Moot 2020 did not disappoint. The themes to emerge from the energetic debates were wellbeing, equity, poverty and social issues, bullying, mental health and violent behaviour, curriculum and progress, leadership, Māori education and racism.



Recording ideas

NZPF President, Perry Rush, opened the day's debate with a stirring speech, which energized his audience further. 'Now is the time to hold the people in power to account,' he said. 'We want to hear what you've got to say to inform how we will communicate your realities to politicians.'

As he stepped down from the podium moving closer to his audience, he proceeded to outline his own ideas about what count as the key ingredients for successful school leadership.

Practice-based leadership was high on his list. He indicated that Initial Teacher Education (ITE) needed a reset. Teaching degrees, he said had developed a heavier academic emphasis. In Rush's view, the balance is out of kilter and we need to re-focus on practice-based leadership.

'You can't teach dance and drama from a university lecture theatre,' he said, 'and it's critical that we embark on a revival of the Arts, which have been decimated in our schools.'

Rush's second leadership prerequisite was to '**lead by your own moral compass**' – choosing your thoughts and actions based on values. As he gently paced the front of the room, he wound up the momentum.

'It is leading with integrity, based on the values, aspirations and philosophies of school communities. It is leading for a localized curriculum – taking a holistic view of teaching and learning and having an appreciation of the collective memory of the community,' he effused.

'We must commit ourselves to the success of every student in our schools,' he said, 'and welcome diversity into our schools.' This is what Kiwi principalship is about!

His third point was political. 'We must collectively **set the agenda**, not just react to policy creep,' he said. 'The voices of



Listening, Talking, Recording

principals must be heard in the corridors of power and in policy making.' He called on his audience to identify the goals that principals can collectively put their shoulder to, indicating that would be their work for the rest of the day.

Wellbeing was next on the list. Staff and students were mentioned equally. 'Despite the huge focus on wellbeing we continue to have both staff and students under stress,' he said. He told us that reducing compliance issues assists and eliminating national standards from the mix was a big help, but despite this, the workloads and inability to easily access support, needed to change.

More students are suffering anxiety and emotional trauma than ever, he said. Bullying was a key factor and at worst was associated with our unacceptably high youth suicide rate. Bullying through social media, he described as a huge challenge since it spills over into the out-of-school lives of students too. 'It is a challenge that we must confront,' he said, 'and we need to have those hard conversations.'

Dealing with violent, abusive and disruptive students brought further threats to wellbeing, he said, and the tension between keeping staff and students safe and keeping mentally and emotionally challenged young people in school was becoming intolerable. No principal wants to be excluding students, he said,

but with few alternatives, we would see more of these vulnerable young people out of the school system. Trained experts and school counsellors at the primary and intermediate levels were urgently needed, he said, but so was research.

He highlighted the pilot study underway in Napier as a possible solution for some cases. This is an initiative operating in a Kahui Ako in Napier, called 'Managed Moves'. Minister Martin has allocated \$1.4 million to it.

So far it is working very effectively, and Rush indicated he would be encouraging Minister Martin to extend 'Managed Moves' to all Ministry districts. He also said easing up the access to residential school options and the Intensive Wrap-around Service (IWS) would help. 'We can't get to an IWS meeting until a student is in crisis,' he said.

Māori education was his next target and he explained that he is deeply passionate about getting success for Māori. 'The challenge lies in English-medium schools,' he said. 'That's where we need to direct our efforts – Pākehā principals with sizeable Māori rolls, in English medium settings.'

'I'm challenged by this,' he confessed. 'It is important we look at ourselves as school leaders, as Pākehā, who don't walk in two worlds as Māori do – but we need to.' It is disturbing, he said, that after 180 years, we are still arguing about whether Te Reo Māori should be compulsory in our schools.

He acknowledged the presence of the Te Akatea Māori Principals' Association president, Myles Ferris, saying that we (NZPF) want to support Te Akatea and share with them. We want to support the Māori Achievement Collaborations (MACs) and keep that kaupapa growing. With a nod to the Pacific Island Principals in the room, he said that our young Pacific Island students similarly walk in two or more worlds and he said he is pleased to be participating in the Tautai o le Moana Advisory Group, an initiative inspired by the MAC, to support Pacific Island learners.

The new Leadership Centre, yet to be developed and yet to be



NZPF President, Perry Rush, warms up his audience before launching into his address

located, was next on Rush's agenda. 'We don't want this Centre politicised,' he said. 'We don't want it located in the Ministry.' 'We want to be involved in its development and inform the debates about leadership support, advisory and PLD.'

Rush saved his most fervent passion for his final topic. 'Improving teaching and learning is your expertise,' he hollered, banging his invisible drum, 'so activate localization!' 'Curriculum is not a job for the Ministry!' he warned, raising his voice another octave. 'Push back on any assessment that puts kids in boxes; Curriculum is for *you* to decide with *your* community!'

To show he is unafraid to confront and challenge authority, Rush concluded with a recommendation for his audience to familiarize themselves with the book 'Disobedient Teaching' by Welby Ings.

'Take confidence from this book and return to practice-based leadership.'

'Be vocal, connect to colleagues and build collective power. And if that means disobedience that's fine! Challenge the status quo! Challenge it for our kids!'

Rush's speech was met with a spontaneous haka from his Hawke's Bay colleagues.

Te Akatea Māori Principals' Association President, Myles Ferris, was next to take the podium. His kōrero included some very powerful messages which received much positive response.

'I'm impressed with the Government's support of Māori programmes to get people out of poverty,' he said, 'and ways to improve sustainability of Māori educators.'

Te Hurihanganui and the MACs resounded positively with Ferris. Te Hurihanganui is an initiative evolving from the Government's summit conversations, which indicated unacceptable racism and bias in our education system. It supports positive learning experiences for Māori by finding out what works best to address the cultural bias and racism.

'These initiatives help change the inequity of our system,' he

said, 'but they are no silver bullet. We still have too many Māori not achieving success. There is much more work to do.'

He acknowledged the efforts of Pākehā principals who are building momentum in immersing themselves in learning Te Reo Māori. 'It is great to see Pākehā principals and teachers surfing off the new platforms to get involved in the Reo and in Tikanga Māori,' he said, 'because there are huge benefits from having a culture steeped in Māori.' He called on them to, 'Be brave and carry on!'

He also underlined the challenges in front of schools catering for the needs of Māori. 'We have concerns when we hear that some are not connecting to hapu and iwi when designing their curriculum, but recognise that, in some cases, hapu and iwi are



Getting down to hard debate

also not ready to make those connections.' On the other hand, he noted that some are highly engaged and that is getting results.

Ferris then launched into the core issue which he described as systemic racism. 'We have to change the hegemonic power base that is Pākehā centric – and that includes the Ministry, school management and the Board structure,' he said.

'We have to understand that our Māori people are suffering trauma through historic and systemic racism. Look back at our history of land confiscation and racist treatment and you will see the root of it. Poverty, physical and emotional abuse all stem from there,' he said.

'Only if we understand this trauma can we address the challenges for whānau. Stop judging Māori as deficient. That just makes the trauma worse. Stop the blame game! Stop blaming Māori for bad parenting,' he challenged his audience. 'If we address the inequities, we will reduce that trauma,' he said, 'because untreated trauma is our biggest killer – it kills hope and families. We all have to challenge the status quo to attain equity.'

His final message was for Minister Hipkins, 'We commend you for the millions of dollars spent on so many reviews and working groups, and Māori have had an active voice in all of these. What we need now are the policies that reflect the findings of these reviews,' he said.

'We would also like Māori to be given a governance role in Māori medium schooling because we have the knowledge and the experience.' His final challenge to the Minister was, 'If you want Māori to trust the Ministry and the sector, start trusting us!'

Minister of Education, Hon Chris Hipkins was next up and much anticipated by the regional presidents in the room. He congratulated and thanked them all for their resolute leadership,

as our nation begins the fight against COVID-19. 'Thank you for the clear health messages you have been disseminating to the sector and your communities,' he said.

He outlined the five pillars of education for the Labour Party's manifesto.

- Keep learners at the centre
- Break down all barriers
- Focus on quality teaching
- Relevant education for the future
- Quality public education

These, he said, are also supported by all the *Tomorrow's Schools* summits and reference group members.



Catching up with colleagues before the work begins

Trumping all of these he said is wellbeing. For too much of the past we have been focused on measures that don't reflect what is important, that sees learning as linear and has built mistrust. We are rebuilding from there.

Returning to wellbeing he said it is about health – physical and mental wellbeing. It's also about emotional self-regulation and these are all the business of education.

In Government things move slowly and we want people to feel empowered by change. We want to include your voice in the changes, he said to the principals in the room. He then listed out all the things that this Government has so far achieved describing it as 'significant' progress.

They included eliminating national standards and charter schools; introducing progress as the measure for the whole curriculum; the NCEA review; introducing NZ History to the NZ Curriculum; catching up years of under-funding of school property with a hefty injection of funds although there are, he said, constraints with availability of tradies; and a significant budget has been allocated to learning support, despite acknowledgement that there is much yet to do; the teachers' pay settlement has been concluded; and we have agreed on an accord which potentially could be transformational.

There are recommendations from the *Tomorrow's Schools* review yet to be implemented and a start has been made on supplying lunches in schools, which results in improved behaviour in the afternoons; and a generous budget has been allocated to Te Hurihanganui to address racism and bias in the system which is a barrier to learning.

He acknowledged there is more to do to increase the number of teacher trainees and to explore different pathways into training and progress for leadership with the establishing of

the leadership centre to help support and grow more leaders. These will be the focus of subsequent budgets, he said, but the up-coming budget for 2020 will prioritise early childhood education.

‘If we can intervene early and teach more emotional self-regulation at the earliest level, hopefully there will be fewer issues at the school level,’ he said.

In conclusion he said, ‘we want to reclaim humanity for education and write in humanness, kindness, mercy and love. These are the values that should lead all we do in education.’

He thanked all principals for their good will and engagement and looked forward to that continuing and accelerating the progress we can make.

Question

When will we be able to address the issues for 1700 kids with severe behaviour challenges, as a result of mental health trauma, in the Northland area?

Answer

There is a workforce challenge in this area. We don't have enough specialists and we want faster progress because we know we are not doing well enough.

Question

There are now schools refusing to take Ministry direction to take very challenged kids. These kids excluded really struggle to get back into school. What options are there?

Answer

By the time kids are refused enrolment, it's too late. Every New Zealander has the right to the education that best meets their needs and this group is not being well served. Some schools are shouldering a disproportionate number of these youngsters and that has to change. They need help before they get to this point.

Question

Could I suggest student counsellors, ‘Managed Moves’ and residential schools as 3 immediate practical ideas?

Answer

‘Managed Moves’ is a good example and it would be good to scale that up, but we must get it right.

Question

The MAC has been supported for the past four years and has been successful, but we are concerned about its future funding

Answer

The intention of having a 30-year strategy, the NELP, is so that



Putting the argument

we can continue to invest in what is working. But that is now dependent on the Budget. We see the value of the MACs but we have to convince New Zealanders to fund it. It's a balancing act. You can see why we think tax cuts are bad for education. We need a good level of tax to pay for it.

Question

The Ministry is looking at iwi accredited facilitators for Mātauranga Māori PLD for teaching Māori histories. How will that proceed?

Answer

I can't give an accurate answer to that question right now. It would be better to address that directly with Minister Kelvin Davis.

Government Budget Constraints

The Minister acknowledged that all the suggestions so far required money, which would be difficult to deliver given we were now entering a period of global economic downturn as the coronavirus spread across the globe.

‘Our big earners like tourism will be 80 per cent down, and we expect a massive downturn in international students,’ he said. ‘The Government's budget will have to be completely rewritten and we may find we are not in a position to do all the things we wanted to do.’

He said that in an economic downturn, Governments increase spending, but differently to the way we spend when the economy is high. It will be tough on the country so we must be aware of that.

Every principal in the room was aware that we are now living in extraordinary times, and that the COVID-19 virus, for which there is no treatment or vaccine, will take its toll, not just on Aotearoa New Zealand, but across the continents of the world. A global financial crisis is inevitable.

As principals debated the education issues they saw as priorities for Government attention in this election year, they were equally mindful that priorities for the Government may not stretch to a big increase in Budget allocation for education. Whilst the framework for the NZPF manifesto was outlined, there were no high expectations that any political party would be promising to fund the areas agreed as priority by the regional presidents.