

Aug 2009

Special points of interest:

**Calls to repeal the Integration Act - tawdry debate or democratic discussion?**

- ◆ Financial pressure
- ◆ Petulance?
- ◆ Obligations & rights



# Newsletter



## Should the Integration Act be repealed?

Kia ora tatou, talofa lava, malo e lelei, greetings.

Pre-marriage counselling and the wisdom of the 'olds' suggest that when the financial 'wolf is at the front door, love leaves by the back door'. So it is in these recessionary times one sees the PPTA mounting an argument for the repeal of the Integration Act. The argument the union is making is that in these difficult times, it is not the obligation of the state to bail out private schools who now wish to integrate because they find the economic going too tough.

This seems to be a valid argument. It goes along with the associated argument that integration takes resources away from state schools. However, this soon leads to the claim that integrated schools become 'unduly privileged' and are allowed to cherry pick the best students, thus giving them a public profile making competition for state schools increasingly difficult.

This argument comes out sounding churlish and petulant, however, because the 'collateral damage' of taking pot shots at existing private schools wanting to use legislation to save their own skins is that existing integrated schools also become a scapegoat. Indeed, the *Education Review* has mounted its own campaign to prove that integrated schools are better off financially, student for student, than state schools of a similar decile.

It is not my intention to debate

the merits of this argument, other than to say that personal experience of low decile integrated schools suggests it is nonsense. This is primarily because low decile integrated schools cater for students from working class communities. As a result, levels of payment of the so-called 'attendance dues' that it is claimed can help integrated schools to be 'better off', are typically low. Besides, in many integrated schools, these dues are merely collected by the school acting as an agent for the Proprietor, who is still repaying old debts from the initial phase of integration.

What this tawdry debate seems to overlook is that education should be focussed on the educational requirements of the nation's youth, *whatever school* they attend. One of these requirements is that they be initiated into the practices and beliefs of a democratic state. These beliefs include the necessity of protecting certain freedoms and rights, in return for the carrying out of certain obligations and responsibilities.

The state *is obliged* to educate its youth, and it does so through a network of state schools. The thinking of Kenneth Strike<sup>1</sup>, an American philosopher, helped inform the concept of 'values' in the *New Zealand Curriculum*. He argues for 'big tented values' which are 'thick, but vague', so that state schools can gather together a disparate range of communities under such broad values as 'excellence', 'diversity' and 'equity'.

The state is *not obliged* to provide education for communities who gather under much tighter values – what Strike calls 'constitutive values' – such as a belief in the salvific power of Christian love. That the state does so is not because there is some self evident right to such an education, but because to put such rights in place and to continue to protect them is a mark of a broad-minded, liberal and democratic society.

By its attempt to open up a debate that could bring about the end of the Integration Agreement, the PPTA is ignoring questions such as whether state schools have the capacity to accept the students who would be the victims of school closures and whether it is more or less economical for the state to pay to keep those students where they are or to attempt to fit them into the state system. Nor does the PPTA seem to recognise that it has numerous members working in the Integrated system.

It would of course be undemocratic to argue that this debate should not occur – for debate is at the heart of democratic practice. But then so is tolerance of a range of differences. It is the responsibility of schools in a democracy to teach tolerance; churlish attitudes by professional education leaders does not bode well for that objective.

<sup>1</sup> Strike, K. (1999) Can schools be communities? The tension between shared values and inclusion. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 35(1), 46 - 70.



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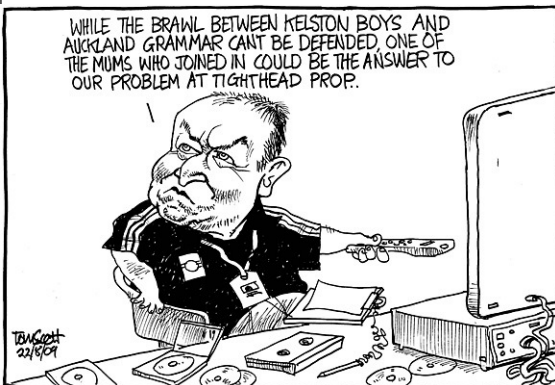
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Talk of performance pay has re-surfaced.

Cartoon by Nicholson from "The Australian"  
[www.nicholsoncartoons.com.au](http://www.nicholsoncartoons.com.au)



<http://www.stuff.co.nz/blogs/opinion/1251886/Tom-Scott>

**Business Activity**

**Aug 09**

**Business Activity**

- BOT consultation on new Principal Appointment process
- On-going NZC implementation work
- BOT consultation on NZC
- Principal appraisal

**Aug 09**

**Client Schools**

- Kaikohe West School
- Kaikohe Christian School
- Elim Christian College
- St Pius X School
- St Mary's School, Avondale
- Holy Family School
- Wesley College
- Whangarei Intermediate
- Whau Valley School
- Park Estate School
- St Ignatius School

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