



# Newsletter

*The cliché that the only certainties in life are death and taxes, should be expanded to include 'decisions taken by the Ministry of Education'.*

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

Wading into the National Standards debate, unless one is appropriately 'anti', seems nothing short of performing ritual professional suicide. However, if one tries to maintain some degree of balance ('objectivity' is a farcical notion dreamed up by empiricists) it is not difficult to see the merits of *aspects* of both sides of the debate.

On one hand, despite all the efforts of the '21<sup>st</sup> century digital-age' ideologues to suggest otherwise, one point is certain: if children cannot read or write, their life chances will surely be stunted. Therefore, any effort to ensure that student literacy (and numeracy) is successfully and effectively managed by schools must be welcomed, even if cautiously.

On the other hand, a return to prescriptive, centralised strait-jackets can as easily stunt creativity and independence, and

## Will National Standards negate the New Zealand Curriculum?

is also amenable to safe methods of 'teaching to the average'. Herein lay the concerns about 'national testing' and 'teaching to the test'.

The cliché that the only certainties in life are death and taxes, should be expanded to include 'decisions taken by the Ministry of Education'. Once it has made up its collective mind, no matter what it may hear through its so-called 'consultation' processes, it forges ahead anyway. Other recent examples include the introduction of the NCEA and of course the 2007 New Zealand Curriculum.

Experience has shown the implementation of both to be fraught with difficulties and challenges, and no doubt, the implementation of National Standards will be equally challenging. These examples serve to highlight the extent to which education is merely a political football, and a rather blunt tool for governments to achieve their particular socio-economic aims.

This is a digression, however, so to return to the main point: the National Standards policy is a reality, so what possibilities exist that will turn it to the advantage

of students, teachers and schools? Teachers are generally reasonable people endowed with a practical common-sense that is enriched by their daily experience in the classroom, working with their students, so they should consider these possibilities.

One of the criticisms of National Standards, in addition to that above, is that it will jeopardise and even negate the value of the New Zealand Curriculum (another massive exercise that many schools are turning to their advantage). One of the reasons the New Zealand Curriculum is proving to be a rich mine for schools is that it articulates views, comments and ideas that, when read with thought and consideration, allow for very creative interpretation.

A reading of pages 5 – 8 of the *Reading and Writing Standards for years 1 – 8* (Ministry of Education, 2009) reveals some interesting points that ought to be heeded by schools.

For instance, it will help teachers to understand the purpose of these standards, if they realise that:

The reading and writing

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### Business Activity

Oct 09

#### Business Activity

- BOT consultation on new Principal Appointment process
- O n - g o i n g N Z C implementation work
- Principal appraisal
- Friend of the School (ERO Review)

Oct 09

#### Client Schools

- St Ignatius School
- Kaikohe Christian School
- St Pius X School
- Park Estate School
- Kaikohe West School
- St Mary's School, Avondale
- Whangarei Intermediate

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standards are intended to support students to cope with 'the demands of the New Zealand Curriculum';

Reading and writing is essential to students to gain mastery over the key competencies;

However, students have to be active, indeed, *interactive* readers and writers, as this is what will help them to become self reflective learners.

Much has been made of 'plain language reporting', so unsurprisingly, the National Standards in literacy are about being 'explicit':

They make the demands of the curriculum explicit;

While literacy demands in English are explicit, they are not so explicit in other areas. The

standards aim to address that situation, so that there is clarity about the literacy demands in other learning areas.

What is expected of teachers?

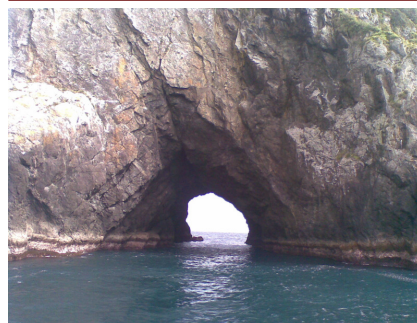
There should be explicit literacy teaching across the curriculum;

Teachers are required to evaluate the interactive mastery of literacy by students. This implies self-conscious, critical and reflective literacy use across all learning areas;

Accordingly, great emphasis is placed on formative assessment and student reflective self management of learning.

In conclusion it can be said that from this starting-point there is some hope to be had that the best of what the New Zealand Curriculum offers does not need

to be negated by the emphasis on National Standards - or at least that is what the Introduction implies! Keep an eye open for the next Newsletter!



**The famous 'hole in the rock', near Pahia, Bay of Islands.**