



Newsletter

Thoughts about being a 'professional'

A further characteristic of a profession is that it is the occupational group (ie teachers) who make decisions about such matters as self-discipline, and not the consumers (public, parents) and not the managers (ie the bureaucrats).

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

Muriel Newman and *An Inconvenient Truth*

Some interesting developments are taking place around an issue that is probably of less concern to readers of this newsletter than they are to the person writing it! However, I have always been of the view that 'even if you're not interested in politics, politics will be interested in you!'

A recent radio report noted a failed attempt by ex-ACT MP, Muriel Newman, to have some amendments to the Education Act passed that would protect students from 'political indoctrination'. She had brought a petition signed by over 250 members of the public charging that the use of Al Gore's climate change documentary, *An Inconvenient Truth* amounted to indoctrination.

Newman argued as follows:

- a British High Court judge in 2007 had found scientific inaccuracies in the documentary;
- thus teachers using the film were required to qualify its use by pointing out the errors to students and telling

- them that there are alternative views;
- the New Zealand Education Act makes no similar provisions against indoctrination by teachers;
 - therefore, the Act should be amended.

The Ministry of Education did not buy the argument, claiming safeguards are present in:

- the 'professionalism' of boards, Principals and teachers;
- the Code of Ethics;
- besides, the use of this documentary presents an opportunity to develop critical thinking in students.

For once, the Ministry has probably got it right. The Education Select Committee agreed with the Ministry, and recently turned down the petition. So why has the MOE got it right? The answer lies in the following extract from the Code of Ethics:

Teachers will strive to: present subject matter from an informed and balanced viewpoint.

Now this could be more bluntly expressed as: 'present subject matter in an impartial and unbiased manner', however, we get the point easily enough.

This simple statement highlights some key features of what it is for a teacher to claim to be a 'professional' (in my academic work, I refer to 'ethical teacher professionalism'). One of these features is that teachers have specialist knowledge they have gathered away from the workplace and under the tutelage of respected experts and

teachers over a period of time. This equips them to make important decisions in the workplace, and to do so in an impartial and ethical manner.

University academics speak of 'academic freedom' and this makes a similar point to the one just been made – if a provision was passed *into law* that prohibited teachers from using material they believed was appropriate, then effectively, the law would gag teachers, thus denying them academic freedom, and an important characteristic of their status as ethical teaching professionals.

Naming and shaming

There seems to be a sudden rash of NZTC decisions on errant teachers. Have you noticed this too, or is it just me? I wonder:

- is the Council trying to justify why it should be getting a fat increase in fees from teachers?
- or is the Council showing the public of New Zealand that teaching is a profession, because it self-monitors and disciplines its members?
- or is there an increasing incidence of rotten apples?

Whatever the reason, the media have lately been drumming up support for the idea that these teachers should be named. So significant is this challenge that Peter Lind, the Director of the NZTC has appeared on TV One *Breakfast*, and has written to all teachers on the topic. Indeed, we are invited to participate in an on-line survey on whether to name these people. This is despite the NZTC view being not to name teachers, in order to

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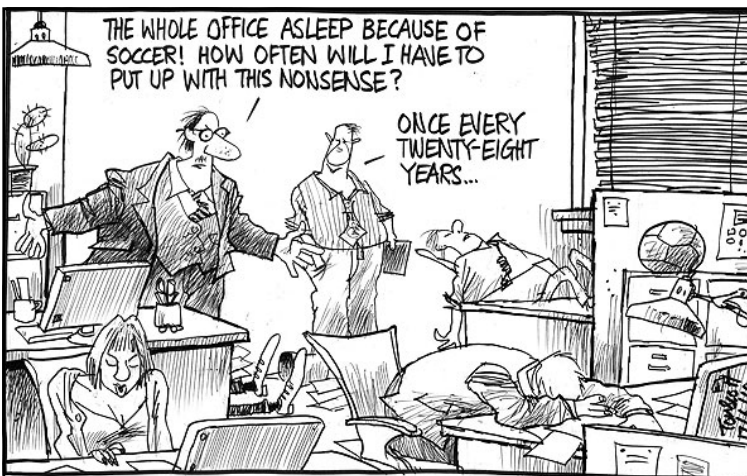
protect students.

It is vital that all teachers participate in this survey. A further characteristic of a profession is that it is the *occupational group* (ie teachers) who make decisions about such matters as self-discipline, and *not* the consumers (public, parents) and *not* the managers (ie the bureaucrats). So if the majority of teachers think that naming and shaming is acceptable, that should be *our decision*; we should not have to be forced to accept a decision made in the public forum.

A Vision for the Teaching Profession

By now, many of you will have become aware of this important report and discussion document. Some significant proposals to enhance the 'professional' character of teaching include significant changes to teacher education AND the work of the NZTC. For instance, there is a suggestion that a graduating teacher will be fully registered, but that at entry, only those with a 'disposition to teach' will be allowed to train as a teacher.

This has very interesting implications for all concerned – Beginning Teachers will still be Provisionally Registered and attached to a school, but will effectively complete their studies in that time *in association* with their tertiary provider. They may, therefore, be envisaged to be more like 'interns' who could spend less time teaching, whilst they complete a Postgraduate qualification, but be spending more of that time in deeper reflection on the link between theory and practice.



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

Business Activity in 2010

May 2010: Business Activity

- On-going NZC implementation work (whole staff workshops & committee work)
- Board consultation & training
- Principal appraisal

May 2010: Client Schools

- Sancta Maria Catholic Primary School
- Avondale Primary School

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