



Massey University

**Gamekeeper to Poacher:
Notes on the journey from policy to practice**

**New Zealand Association for Research in Education
Annual Conference
Auditorium, Hokowhitu Campus
24 November 2008**

Hon. Steve Maharey
Vice-Chancellor
Massey University
New Zealand



Te Kōwhiri
ki Pūrehuroa

Gamekeeper to Poacher: Notes on the journey from policy to practice.

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Good afternoon.

As a resident of Palmerston North and Vice-Chancellor of Massey it my pleasant task to welcome you to the city and the University.

For those of you who are new to the city, the tangata whenua are Rangitane; around 75,000 intelligent, good looking and progressive people live here; this is the centre of New Zealand's food bowl; the city has excellent shops, cultural and sporting facilities; it is a centre for distribution, light manufacturing, high tech, science, health and education. It takes environmental sustainability seriously as is shown by the windmills.

It is a beautiful, tree-lined city surrounded by rolling country and small hamlets, ruffled by light winds and bathed in warm sun.

Massey sees itself as New Zealand's defining University. It is head-quartered in Palmerston North but also has campuses in Wellington and Albany. We are New Zealand's distance university. Our key areas of specialisation cover agri-food, creativity and design and innovation within the new economy.

The College of Education is a jewel in our crown and we are seeking to occupy a position of contributing to the shape of education in the future: which is what I want to talk with you about today.

Choose a Brighter Future

As some of you will be aware I used to be a politician and had the privilege of being the Minister of Education and the Minister Responsible for Tertiary Education.

These were not portfolios thrust upon me – I wanted them.

It is perhaps because of what I see education has done for me that I want to see policies, research and practice that give all New Zealanders the opportunity to reach their potential.

The opportunity to learn beyond the most basic level is a relatively new thing in societies like ours. Only really in the post-war period have we moved toward allowing open access to learning at all levels.

It is, of course, not as open as it looks. It was only last year, to take but one example, that the state made the significant

step of providing 20 hours of education for three and four year olds. The debate about the policy usually focused on the level of funding. What was too often missed was that the Government was accepting responsibility for funding early childhood education.

Years of arguing in favour of education for 3-4 year olds came to a positive end with well over 90% of them now accessing publicly funded education.

There are other issues of access that require attention but let me turn my attention the kind of education people get access to.

We all know that our education system has failed and continues to fail many learners. Getting access does not necessarily bring every learner the opportunity to fulfil their potential. Indeed, in many cases it blocks off their potential.

A nice story is that of the politician visiting an early childhood centre at a time when the children are drawing. The teacher takes her to look over one young girl and the politician asks “What are you drawing?” “God” replies the young girl. “But no one knows what God looks like,” protests the politician. “They will do when I am finished” replies the young girl.

Such a story is usually accompanied by concerns about where this kind of boundless confidence goes as our children move through the schooling system.

The failure of our education system became a key focus of the Royal Commission on Social Policy of the 1980s where it was revealed that Maori, Pacific Island peoples, boys, working class kids – almost everyone it seems – had poor educational outcomes.

Actually, if the investigation had included a discussion of what young people needed to learn to equip them for the 21st century, it might have concluded that everyone was being short-changed in one way or another.

Unfortunately, the result of the “crisis in education” as it was called in the 1980s (and repeated every few years ever since) was that people who knew nothing about education took over. A supermarket manager, for example, gave us Tomorrow’s Schools.

The focus was on school organisation – which is important – but not on learning.

The failure to focus on learning at a policy level continued through the 1990s when most energy went into industrial issues.

Thankfully the failures of the policy environment were not repeated within education itself.

Slowly but surely new approaches to teaching, assessment and the curriculum emerged. New technologies were explored. Different ways of organising learning were tried; even new ways of building schools.

Forward Together

I became the MP for Palmerston North and began work on educational policy – albeit from the Opposition benches.

My work concerned the tertiary sector from whence I had come. Prior to entering politics I was a Snr Lecturer in Sociology.

In the late 1980s the then Labour Government had produced Learning to Learn and begun to think about how tertiary institutions could respond to economic and social change. Nothing much was implemented because Labour lost the election and the policy framework moved to emphasise participation. Tertiary institutions were given the incentive to compete for students, they did and participation went up.

But by the late 1990s, concerns were rising about the quality, relevance, cost and connectedness of tertiary education.

The policies that emerged in the 2000s were a reaction to what was seen as the “marketisation” of tertiary education. Policy shifted toward a more strategic focus with the establishment of a Tertiary Education Commission (TEC), a Statement of Tertiary Education Priorities and the Investment in a Plan process.

The aim was to maintain high levels of participation while asking tertiary institutions to show how they were creating public value. The importance of stakeholder engagement was emphasised.

Policies like the Performance Based Research Fund (PBRF) raised the profile of research and the importance of effective teaching was facilitated through Ako Aotearoa.

An enormous amount of money went into student support in an effort to maintain open access.

If I can jump forward to today and reflect on the gamekeeper turned poacher phrase, I am feeling very comfortable with these policies as a Vice-Chancellor. Working within a strategic environment as opposed to a market competitive one is better for tertiary education with one proviso – money.

The kind of tertiary education New Zealand needs and aspires to costs a lot more money than is currently allocated. Salaries of staff are too low, funding for student learning is too low, research funding is inadequate, capital expenditure is far behind what is needed – the list is predictably long.

Strategy needs to be backed by resource allocation and this is not happening to the degree needed.

It is a tragedy that as we enter a period of economic uncertainty we are unable to provide a lift in funding for the tertiary sector. We are unable to do so because of massive tax cuts, promoted by both sides of the political fence, and a rather limited interpretation of infrastructure as roads.

In a knowledge society, education is infrastructure.

Clearly the case for investment in tertiary education, and education in general, has yet to be won. Each of us is going to have to carry on demonstrating just how important education is to preparing New Zealanders for the challenges of this century.

Teach your Children Well

In 2005 I became the Minister of Education.

After talking with people in the sector I identified issues of key concern – effective teaching, discipline, foundation education, leadership, assessment, curriculum, resources and the secondary tertiary interface.

I argued that if we addressed these issues outcomes for all students would improve.

But I remained concerned that although the list was comprehensive it lacked the coherence of a big picture. I wondered what brought all of these policies together.

The answer came with the concept of personalising learning.

We do not have time today for an in-depth discussion, so let me give a very truncated outline of personalisation.

It is based on the argument that we live in a knowledge age. We do not value knowledge more than in other societies, but we do see it as having economic value. We expect knowledge to be useful in all areas of life. We have a different understanding of knowledge as a result.

Attempting to explain this different understanding, Manuel Castells says that knowledge is no longer a “thing” developed and stored by experts and able to be organised into disciplines. Instead, knowledge is seen as a form of energy. It is dynamic and fluid, something that does things or makes things happen. It is defined not by what it is, but what it can do.

Similarly, Jean-Francois Lyotard has talked about our new understanding of knowledge as “performativity” – its ability to do things.

The essential point to be made here is that knowledge is equated with doing.

Let me put this point into practical terms. Sir Ken Robinson points out that when a graduate presents themselves to an employer today, the fact that they have a degree will be taken for granted. The employer will say, “It is nice you have a degree but what can you do?”

This view of knowledge has profound implications for teaching and learning.

For learners this means:

- **high expectations;**
- **more control of their own learning;**
- **learning to learn;**
- **working with others;**
- **understanding the learning process;**
- **identifying the knowledge they have gained and the next steps.**

For parents and whanau it means:

- **being partners in the learning process;**
- **understanding how their children are progressing;**
- **being involved in planning their children's learning.**

For teachers this means:

- **high expectations of all students;**
- **use knowledge about student achievement for future learning;**
- **use a range of teaching techniques that strengthen students ability to work in groups and on their own;**
- **build inclusive learning communities;**

Indeed there are implications for the whole system including new technology, buildings, school organisation and the Ministry.

None of this will be new to you because the notion of personalisation reflects where education was headed during the 1990s.

During my time as Minister I was able to gather numerous examples of this personalised approach in practice.

Looking back at these policies now I can only hope they continue to expand.

But do not take this for granted.

Personalisation and the view of knowledge it assumes is a radical break with the view of knowledge that has prevailed for centuries.

Knowledge has traditionally been understood to be, as Mathew Arnold said, the best and greatest thinking that we have accumulated over time.

Getting access to this accumulation of knowledge is what informed our academic tradition. Most parents, because they went through the system, employers, many educators and politicians assume that education is about instilling (drilling) this knowledge into young people.

We can see this clash of views in a policy like the testing of age cohorts as they move through school.

Such a policy can only be advanced by people who believe knowledge is a thing that has to be acquired. The education system should move them along together finding who is and who is not up to speed.

The assumption is that all students must acquire this knowledge so for most of the century, as access to education expanded, a production line model of education was gradually expanded to accommodate numbers.

people were sorted out to see who had the best memory, the ability to recall knowledge on demand and could demonstrate persistence.

These are important attributes, but they represent a rather narrow and increasingly inadequate approach to learning.

Today we understand that learning should give young people an opportunity to develop a wider range of intelligences and to find out where their particular strengths might take them.

We want to know what they can do and how well they can do it as opposed to discarding them at set stages in the educational process.

You may have heard me repeat the story of Richard Taylor from Weta Workshop. He points out that amongst his employees are hundreds of young people who failed at school. They were the kids who drew monsters on their pencil case and the teachers hoped would leave.

Yet these same young people are behind the films that have made New Zealand a world centre of excellence. They are motivated, self disciplined, hardworking and highly creative.

The problem is, says Taylor, not with them but with a schooling system that focuses on one kind of intelligence.

Although our system has changed a great deal, Taylor has a point. And in saying this I should note that I am a person who believes strongly in teaching young people content. I think they should know their history, read Shakespeare and be able to list the nations of Africa. (Mrs Palin).

But if we are committed to improving outcomes then we need to expand the opportunities for young people to succeed and to focus on what they can do with knowledge as opposed to simply remembering it.

And by the way, although this discussion has been focused on schools (including ECE) as a Vice-Chancellor I am committed to the same changes in the University.

Tertiary education has been focused on instructing students in content for the most part. Change has started but the personalisation of learning is still a long way off.

Change you Can Believe In

I have talked enough.

Let me leave you with some thoughts for your conference.

The theme is educational change – I would ask that you are clear on the drivers of change, what that change is, how we should respond and how you can lead it.

Can I add theory – many of you will have read Jane Gilbert’s excellent book on the knowledge wave. Much more has to be done to develop a sound theoretical understanding of knowledge.

Research – education is notoriously fashion driven. Sound research is required to provide the evidence base for the changes taking place in education. I am particularly attracted to the model of teacher as researcher.

Policy – consistent, comprehensive policy that supports change is required.

In times of change leadership is required. Education is in a period of change.

Leadership is, in essence, being able to show how order might be achieved amidst disorder.

I wish you well with your deliberations and your leadership of educational change.

Change does not come easy. Can we change it?

Yes we Can!