



SPANZ

SECONDARY PRINCIPALS' ASSOCIATION OF NEW ZEALAND INC.

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President
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President's Comment 20

Moderation Debate and Teachers as Professionals

Nobody, least of all I, is suggesting that we have got NCEA right.

"Let's be honest. NCEA with its underlying assessment approach is the most radical change to have occurred in the secondary sector in 100 years. (Matriculation??). It is still in the early stages of its implementation and probably has last chance status. . ."

"I want to assure you through representing you on the Leaders' Forum and the Leaders' Forum Qualifications Group, that the issues preventing NCEA from moving from a credit to a merit and possibly an excellence have been identified and that there are strategies in place to address those issues.

Issues identified:

- *Variability*
- *Public understanding*
- *Public confidence*
- *Student motivation*
- *Extending more able students*
- ***Robust moderation of internal assessment***
- *Inclusiveness*
- *International acceptability . . ."* (President's Comment 9th March)

Even taking these comments into account I find the revelations of the "Herald on Sunday" investigations to be alarming. That 29% of last year's internally assessed NCEA work sent in for checking was not marked at the National Standard is of concern. That *"a teacher admits he bumped a boy's 'Not Achieved' to an 'Achieved' because he was a heck of a nice kid"* and that *"schools are looking at how they can boost their own results and the easiest way to do it"*, (*'Herald on Sunday' 16th July*) puts the debate at watershed time. (And the debate is no longer about NCEA but about whether teaching was, is, or could ever be a profession).

As an organisation SPANZ has consistently argued for self-management of schools in an environment of high trust and high accountability. High trust requires teachers to act as professionals. If we show we can't be trusted then another layer of compliance and audit is dumped on top of us, the consequences being we will continue to stagger along in a low trust high accountability environment as semi-professionals.

As an individual seeking professional advice from a lawyer, plumber, builder, doctor, electrician or dentist, I usually accept that advice. If I have concerns I seek a second opinion. It is only when the 'professional' demonstrates that they are untrustworthy that I bring in that profession's watchdogs, take my business elsewhere or increase my audit of their services.

Teachers need to demonstrate that they can be trusted; that they will give professional assessments. But not only does the teacher at our school need to be trusted, I need to trust the teachers at the school down the road. If that can happen then in the perfect world we will have a teaching profession operating with self-managing schools in an environment of high trust and high accountability.

My pragmatic solution to the current moderation debate would be, to make available a greater number of assessment exemplars so that teachers have half a chance of internalising standards and then to get consistency between exemplars developed by the Ministry of Education, by NZQA, and by moderators. But, more than that, I would apply the quality assurance of accreditation audit and review with much more rigour. That is to say that if an agency (a school) is accredited to NZQA and an audit shows that professional practices are not in place, then the agency (school) should be disenfranchised and lose its accreditation. Further and taking into account the open society we live in, I would put external moderation of internal assessment reports in the public domain.

We need to get this right not just for the 'profession' of teaching but because the stakes are so high for our individual students and for the country as a whole.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'G. Young', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Graham Young
President
Secondary Principals' Association of New Zealand