Analysing the National Education and Learning Priorities Policy Statement Through the Lens of Fielding’s Person-Centred Education Framework

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Abstract
In the 30 years since the advent of the fundamentally system-altering ‘Tomorrow’s schools’ reforms in the 1990s, the education system of New Zealand has undergone many reviews and changes. The recent Taskforce Inquiry into the suitability of the current system to deliver equitably for learners as we approach the third decade of the 21st Century has seen a detailed report produced that proposes more significant change for the system. The Ministry of Education has used this to develop its National Education and Learning Priorities that will drive the next stage of development of the education system in Aotearoa, New Zealand. This analysis examines the report, the subsequent National Priorities and their philosophical underpinnings through the lens of Michael Fielding’s typology of Person-centred education frameworks and suggests that despite a significant shift towards Person-centeredness, the underlying neo-liberal building blocks of our current schools remain, and that it is likely the system will remain focused on competition, high-stakes assessment results and a narrow interpretation of educational success and equity.

Keywords Philosophy of education · National education and learning priorities · Tomorrow’s schools · Policy · Person-centred · Policy analysis

Introduction
Following the seminal Administering for Excellence report of 1988 (widely referred to as the Picot report in New Zealand), the New Zealand education system underwent one of the most significant changes in its entire history. The 1989 Tomorrow’s Schools reforms saw changes in almost every aspect of the administration and leadership of schools across the country. Arising amongst a global shift towards
In the 30 years that followed, many reviews and analyses of the reforms have been written (Benade & Devine, 2018; Court & O’Neill, 2011; Haque & New Zealand Council for Educational Research, 2014; Novlan, 1998; O’Neill, 2015), but it was not until April 2018 that a formal, Ministry-sponsored review of the reforms took place, with a view to discover “whether the system we put in place 30 years ago was delivering equitably for our learners and was still suitable as we approach the third decade of the 21st Century.” (Ministry of Education, 2019). This review importantly highlighted several issues with the Tomorrow’s Schools model and made a number of recommendations for reform. Most noticeably, it recognised that the intention of the Tomorrow’s School reforms, ostensibly to increase the range of choice of education by parents for their children and their ability to influence that education via the Boards of trustees, had instead resulted in “2500 self-governing islands that work for the most part independently of each other”. The report went on to argue that the Tomorrow’s Schools and subsequent associated reforms had led to a low trust model with “school/kura leaders feeling unsupported, and schools/kura that are failing their learners/ākonga being allowed to continue far too long without intervention” (Haque et al., 2019).

The Ministry of Education responded to this report with their own report (referred to in this paper as ‘the Ministry response’), acknowledging many of the shortcomings of the system and pledging to adopt many of the taskforce’s recommendations. They embarked on a process of consultation with schools and parents, and produced a summary document entitled Shaping a Stronger Education System with New Zealanders in 2019. All of this work, combined with the Ministry of Education’s own ‘Education Work Programme’ eventually led to the publication of the National Education and Learning Priorities, or the NELP. These priorities are part of legislation and Boards of trustees are required to “have particular regard to the NELP, including when developing or renewing their charters, for example by ensuring their strategic goals align to the NELP priorities” (Ministry of Education, 2020).

Michael Fielding is Professor Emeritus at University College London and has long been an advocate for democratic principles in schools. In his important work on developing Person-centred Education, he describes four archetypes of organisation that reflect the different approaches adopted by schools. In particular, one is prevalent—that of the ‘high performance’ learning organisation that Fielding argues is the most dangerous of them all (Fielding, 2006). He contends that this approach encourages control and compliance at all levels and, rather than delivering the desired outcomes for a 21st century knowledge-based civilisation, it is, in fact, damaging our very humanity. Fielding goes on to outline a preferred approach, that of the person-centred learning organisation, which is examined in greater detail later in this
discussion. This framework provides a compelling ‘lens’ through which to examine our current school system and the ideals proposed in the recent government policy statements. For this reason, Fielding’s framework has been chosen to examine the NELP and its precursor policy documents, in particular, the *Shaping a Stronger Education System with New Zealanders* document.

The first section of this paper considers the background and precursors to the priorities. It examines the recent review of Tomorrow’s Schools in two documents; that of the independent taskforce created for the purpose and its report, *Our Schooling Futures: Stronger Together, Whiria Nga Kura Tuatintini: Final Report* and the policy document written in response by the Ministry of Education, *Supporting all schools to succeed: Reform of the Tomorrow’s Schools System*. It compares and contrasts the underlying philosophies of the two reports and aligns them to Michael Fielding’s typology of high-performance and person-centred schools.

The second part of this paper looks in-depth at the recently published National Education and Learning Priorities and contends that despite espoused intentions, they continue to align with Fielding’s high-performance typology. It asks whether the priorities are capable of bringing about the change desired by the Ministry without going deeper and examining the fundamental purposes of schooling. While there is much to be applauded in the taskforce review, this paper questions whether the Ministry response will be embraced by schools or whether they will default to existing practices; clinging to an idea of ‘what-we-know-works’ to succeed under the current settings.

**The National Education and Learning Priorities and Their Roots**

The recently published National Education and Learning Priorities (hereinafter referred to as the NELP) sets out the government’s priorities for education in New Zealand. They are statutory documents, produced under the Education and Training Act 2020, and they were created to give guidance and some obligation to Boards of trustees in schools. Historically in New Zealand, the government has always given guidance to schools through a variety of legal and professional means. This particular iteration, the NELP was developed in response to a significant and wide-reaching review conducted over the previous 4 years into the provision of compulsory schooling in New Zealand, by an independent taskforce of academics, practitioner/researchers and specialist researchers chaired by Bali Haque (author of *Changing Our Secondary Schools* published by NZCER in 2014), and including Barbara Ala’alatoa (Principal of Sylvia Park Primary School and previous Chair of the Educational Council of New Zealand); Professor Mere Berryman (University of Waikato and Director of Poutama Pounamu); Professor John O’Neill (Head of the Institute of Education at Massey University), and Dr Cathy Wylie (Chief Researcher at the New Zealand Centre for Educational Research). This review group was tasked with “a focus on developing a schooling system that promotes equity and excellence for all young people, and prepares them for the challenges and opportunities they will face in the future” (Haque et al., 2019). In their final report, *Our Schooling Futures: Stronger Together*, the taskforce describes a ‘desired schooling system’
and then outlines a case for change, giving evidence of disparities and shortcomings found in the current system.

The desired schooling system section of the report is an attempt to present a coherent purpose for schools in New Zealand and is worthy of detailed consideration. It begins with a profound sentence—“The primary purpose of a schooling system is learning”, and immediately points out that any recommendations for change “must be based on an agreed notion of purpose”. Despite the contestability of these statements, their presence makes this one of the most powerful policy reviews seen in a long time, in that they represent a rare example of the singular importance of asking ‘Why do we do schooling and what does that mean it should look like?’. The report itself has three further queries with which to develop this constitutive question: “What is the final destination? What kind of schooling system are we trying to create? What will it look like?” (Haque et al., 2019). It then goes on to propose its own model of a desired schooling system by describing five criteria.

Firstly, the desired schooling model should embody biculturalism and genuine equity and partnership between Māori, Pākeha, and Tauiwi under Te Tiriti o Waitangi. This foundational statement places the importance of Te Tiriti firmly at the heart of any schooling system. It argues that with such a rich body of research showing the disparity of achievement between Māori and Pākeha in our current system, that the only way to promote equity is to make this principle fundamental in all decision-making processes. Secondly, it argues that the rights and best interests of children be prioritised, particularly when it comes to allocation of resources. With these two fundamental principles in place, the model then calls for learning that meets the needs and potential of diverse learners, particularly those whose needs are not currently being met. This alludes to the importance of an inclusive system, where success is diversely recognised; an idea strongly echoed in Fielding’s person-centred schools where success is “widely and imaginatively conceived” (Fielding, 2000). Building on this idea, the model advocates for learning that “enables children and young people to reach their fullest potential in becoming connected, confident, and active lifelong learners” (Ministry of Education, 2007). Finally the model calls for a system where learners are able to “make thoughtful, genuine and ethical choices about their learning, work and life”. An idea that is, again, strongly aligned with the person-centred organisation of Fielding’s typology that promotes the importance of community over corporate success, and moral and intellectual success criteria over the more instrumental ideas of the current performative approach (Fielding, 2006).

Overall, this outlining of a desired schooling system by the independent taskforce is profound in that it presents a coherent philosophy and allows for meaningful discussion and thinking about the purposes of any system and recommendations contained later in the report. It highlights a distinct and immediately noticeable difference between itself and the Ministry response, which fails to either present their own purpose of schooling, or to engage with that of the taskforce. Indeed, the closest that the Ministry document comes to discussion of purpose is a “30 year vision for education”, which comprises two statements. The first is that “learning will be inclusive, equitable and connected so we progress and achieve advances for our people and their future journeys and encounters”, and the second is that education will “enable every New Zealander to learn and excel, to help their whānau and
communities thrive, and to build a productive and sustainable economy and an open and caring society” (Ministry of Education, 2019). The contrast between the two policy documents and their underpinning philosophies is interesting. While the taskforce approach takes two fundamental philosophical ideas and then carefully, and in a detailed manner, builds on them using language that is inclusive and personal, the Ministry approach has a more ‘mission statement’ approach to it. The Ministry document uses some of the same words (‘inclusive’, ‘equitable’, ‘connected’, ‘open and caring’) but does not explain what it means by these terms. It also uses a number of more business-oriented phrases such as ‘excel’, ‘thrive’ and ‘productive and sustainable economy’. This approach of using what Fielding labels “a simulacra of care” is typical of the high-performance typology of organisation, where an apparently personal approach is used to hide instrumental, manipulative intentions, indeed, where the personal relationship is increasingly seen as ‘social capital’ and where there is “a move from having relationships towards doing relationships and towards relationship management” (Fielding, 2006). All of this highlights the underlying, and original neo-liberal, business model roots of the Tomorrow’s Schools reforms that the taskforce acknowledges and of which, Fielding advocates that we remain wary.

The independent taskforce then goes on to argue that to have a schooling system that promotes equity and excellence, and that prepares learners for the challenges and opportunities of the future, there needs to be change in how schools are governed and led, how teachers are supported, how schools are provisioned, how student access to learning is made more equitable, and how learning is resourced and assessed (Haque et al., 2019, pp. 13–17). In all, they make eight wide-ranging and profound recommendations that address almost every aspect of the current system. They give detailed proposals of how these changes might be made, the desired outcomes for each change, and even go into detail on the system-wide change that would be needed at a government department level for this to be successful. Critically, the taskforce identifies that the current system has created a culture of “low trust”, focussed on “compliance”, that discourages innovation, increases unproductive workload and stress, and that undermines professional commitments to ensure that all learners succeed (Haque et al., 2019, p. 4). This current established culture strongly reflects the high-performance model of Michael Fielding’s framework. In this framework, a school operating as a high-performance organisation has a commitment to student achievement but takes the view that such achievement is desirable for the purpose of promoting the public performance of the organisation. As such, student learning is primarily valuable where it enhances the reputation of the school within the education marketplace. Under such a regime, an organisation, students and their teachers are subject to many pressures and covert messages that mean their significance is judged in terms of their performance, more often in easily measurable, “increasingly ubiquitous lists of generic competencies that marginalise judgement and prescribe a predictable practice” (Fielding, 2000). There is a clear alignment in the taskforce identification of low trust, compliance focussed cultures in schools, with the high-performance model framework of Fielding’s typology. Fielding argues that in high-performance organisations, teachers see their task as getting results. They motivate students through competition and emphasise the importance of measurable outcomes. They tightly control what content is taught and
will attempt to engender ‘ownership’ in students. Fielding sums up the role of the teacher in such schools as “a highly skilled persuader with an overriding emphasis on ‘what works’” (Fielding, 2000, p. 53).

Further supporting evidence is found in other evaluations of the current schooling system. In their 2018 report *What Drives Learning in Senior Secondary School?*, the Education Review Office of New Zealand found that schools were increasingly narrowing the content and curriculum that they taught to fit the requirements of national assessments. They reported that “schools have used NCEA assessment standards as the default curriculum”, and that this meant that students were “not given opportunities to develop the values and key competencies of the New Zealand Curriculum” (Education Review Office, 2018, p. 6). This preoccupation with teaching to the test, has seen some schools in New Zealand lauded for knowing ‘what works’ to get students to achieve outstanding results, and for rising to the top of publicly published league tables, while others are criticised as under-achieving on this narrow criteria of success. Indeed, the independent taskforce itself uses, as evidence for inequality in the current system, some of the results of this high-stakes national assessment system. It points out that “the disparities increase at each senior secondary level, from 10.5 percentage points at National Certificate of Educational Achievement (NCEA) Level 1, to 28.9 percentage points at University Entrance Level” (Haque et al., 2019). We can clearly see that our current system is adumbrated within a high-performance culture as outlined by Fielding’s typology.

However, it is important to note that the very concept of ‘what works’ in a school is a contested one, with several researchers challenging the concept at an epistemological and ontological level as well as at a practical and pragmatic level. Biesta challenges the idea that it is possible to have a representational view of the world, arguing that by its very nature, experimentation has an impact on the world that it seeks to measure. Biesta makes a similar point to the independent taskforce when he states:

> It is only when we have provided an answer to what we hope to achieve that we can begin to ask questions about the ways in which we might be able to achieve such outcomes…This is one reason why, in education, values come first (Biesta, 2010).

This returns us to philosophical questions of the very purpose of schooling and what outcomes are desirable for young people leaving our formal education system. We are led to ponder, when the taskforce was asked to consider a school system that “promotes equity and excellence for all young people”, in what do we wish to have equity and, in what do we desire young people to excel? The response from the Ministry of Education to such questions is their own report, *Supporting all schools to succeed: Reform of the Tomorrow’s Schools System*, and one of its outputs, the NELP.

**Examining the National Education Learning Priorities**

In this section, we will examine the NELP and the details behind them, which come from the Ministry response document, *Supporting all schools to succeed*. The NELP provides, at its broadest level, five objectives for the school sector:
These objectives are used to group together the next steps of the reforms outlined within the report. It is helpful to consider the argument for these priorities and to consider the evidence and the process that has led to them.

Firstly, the Ministry report acknowledges some of the key issues raised by the independent taskforce. They highlight that “the system faces significant and persistent challenges in delivering equitably for all children and young people”. It reinforces the taskforce finding that Māori, Pacific peoples, young people with disabilities and those from disadvantaged backgrounds are “underserved” by the current system and uses as evidence a 2018 UNICEF report that ranks New Zealand 33rd out of 38 developed countries for its overall educational inequality (Ministry of Education, 2019, p. 10). What is conspicuous in its absence however, is any discussion of the outcomes that are desired to be equitable. What is it that the Ministry wants all learners to be “equitably served” with? Only when we dig deeply into the reports, do we see that the evidence used to identify the disparities are those same narrowly-defined achievement standards that were used by schools to limit the content and curriculum that they deliver. The report implies that an equitable system will be one where every student becomes more skilled at meeting their narrow criteria. This is the very outcome that Fielding warns against when outlining the problems with the high-performance model of learning organisation. The framework predicts that using such evidence to measure the equity and success of schools will only enhance compliance and further restricting of the curriculum. Fielding insists that to truly reform the system for equity, we will need to look in a philosophical level at the purpose of schooling itself.

To illustrate why failing to address the core purpose of education itself will diminish the success of the policy, consider the first of the objectives—Learners at the Centre. This objective is broken down into two priorities within the NELP, namely; to “Ensure places of learning are safe, inclusive and free from racism, discrimination and bullying”, and secondly, to “have high aspirations for every learner/ākonga, and support these by partnering with their whānau and communities to design and deliver education that responds to their needs, and sustains their identities, languages and cultures” (Ministry of Education, 2020, p. 4). In the Actions section of the NELP, this second priority is resourced through the provision of a number of professional learning programmes, initiatives at national and regional level, changes to legislation and even updates to the national curriculum document that are intended to bring this priority into being. To take one such action as an example, the government commits to “Develop locally-focussed PLD priorities, with a focus
on cultural capability, inclusion and critical consciousness” (Ministry of Education, 2020, p. 5). The Ministry then proposes that the success of such locally-focussed PLD priorities will be evaluated by a range of tools and criteria that are admirable in their diversity. For example, the document proposes that measurement methods could include not only traditional assessment outcomes but also surveys of students and their families, measures of participation in learning, teacher workforce data, employment engagement data, measures of social well-being, engagement in wider cultural communities, and finally, research into the health of schools, the system’s environmental performance, and even the quality of the Treaty of Waitangi relationships. Such a wide range of measures surely has the potential to give a rich and meaningful measure of the ‘success’ of our schools. Unfortunately, as admitted by the NELP itself, these are aspirational measures that will need to be developed over time. It remains to be seen if they will ever eventuate, and if they do, how the rich information they gather will be recorded and shared with the various stakeholders.

There is a significant risk, that in the absence of such measurement tools, schools simply continue to do what they know ‘works well’ to meet the current approach of assessing the success of students by narrow ‘high-performance’ objectives. If we continue to use the same methods of evaluation and to measure the same narrow criteria, then there is little reason or motivation for schools to change their systems and philosophies. However, by considering the person-centred model from Fielding’s framework, we see the possibility of a more effective system, that offers a mode of operation for our schools and the underlying aims and goals for education that might be desirable.

The Person‑Centred School and the Philosophy of John Macmurray

The alternative to the high-performance organisation within Fielding’s typology is the ‘Person-centred school’. To understand the critical differences between the two types, a consideration of the philosophy of John Macmurray, a Scottish philosopher of the twentieth century, whose work considers the problems of agency, identity and community, is helpful. For Macmurray, human beings are inherently linked with their modes of relating to others. He describes two methods of relating: the functional and the personal. For Macmurray, the interdependence of the functional and the personal are desirable and inevitable. The functional is needed, so that the personal can have practical expression. It provides a way for the personal to express our shared humanity and for the mode to demonstrate itself through the provision of necessities, and special acts of kindness. So too, the functional needs the personal. Functional relations only work, based on an understanding of wider human purpose and on how humans go about getting things done (Macmurray, 1961, 1969). Fielding gives an educational viewpoint on this when he says “schooling (the functional) is for the sake of education (the personal); within schools themselves, administrative, management and other organizational arrangements (the functional) are for the sake of a vibrant and creative community (the personal)” (Fielding, 2006).

The crucial point, argues Fielding, is that each mode depends on the other. To attempt to separate the functional and the personal is inevitably, bound to eventually
fail. Fielding builds on this philosophy in his own work where he argues that not only are the two modes of relating reciprocal, but that “the influence of the personal on the functional is transformative”. Both Macmurray and Fielding highlight the importance of means and ends, with Fielding espousing that the means should be transformed by the ends by which, they are themselves inspired. He sums up this view for schools thus:

The functional ways in which we work together in schools to achieve personal, communal and educational ends should be transformed by the moral and interpersonal character of what we are trying to do (Fielding, 2006).

Applying this philosophy to Fielding’s typology, we then arrive at two distinct types—the High-Performance Learning Organisation, where the personal is used for the sake of the functional, and where community is a useful tool to achieve organisational purposes. And in contrast, the Person-Centred Learning Organisation, where the functional is for the sake of the personal and is transformed by it. The organisation exists to promote community (Fielding, 2006). While both types of school value student achievement, one (the high-performance school) only does so in that it promotes the school itself and has an impact on its market-standing. The other values achievement as a measure of a set of “widely and imaginatively conceived outcomes” and achieving them is “as satisfying morally and interpersonally as it is instrumentally” (Fielding, 2000).

Returning then, to the NELP and its Objectives, Priorities and Actions, we see a close alignment with the functional. There is prolific use of terminology that reflects this with language such as: ‘high expectations’, ‘key foundational skills’, ‘sufficient progress’, ‘appropriate teaching approaches’, ‘accessing learning’, ‘processes’, ‘successful transitions’ and many others; all of which reveal the broadly neo-liberal, market-driven context of the Tomorrow’s Schools model. Despite the positive elements of the NELP, with its obvious intent in reforming some of the inequalities and shortcomings of the current system, there remains a persistent and strong undercurrent of competition, prescribed practice, and human resource management language. It may be possible then, that in following the Ministry directive to “have regard for the NELP” when strategically planning, schools may inadvertently reinforce such competitive, prescribed practices rather than supporting the change needed for the twenty-first century, knowledge-based school systems.

**The Case for Change**

In both the initial independent taskforce review and the subsequent Ministry response, a case for change is presented. In the independent taskforce report, they present a broader picture of the purposes of education, and identify that it is difficult to measure many of the possible purposes for which schools exist. In their case for change, they report that “it is relatively easy to identify, measure and report on an ‘achievement gap’ between those who do well in our current system and those who are poorly served by it”. They cite statistics from well-known traditional sources such as PISA reports, attendance data and NCEA results. Significantly however, the taskforce also highlight that “achievement is not the only important indicator
of success at school. Belonging and well-being are also fundamentally important” (Haque et al., 2019). This broadening of view around the purpose of schools aligns with the “widely and imaginatively conceived outcomes” (Fielding, 2006) of person-centred schooling, and raises the question of why schools are not more focussed on this “fundamentally important” measure. The answer is revealed when the taskforce acknowledged that “at present we do not know enough about how well schools/kura do for their learner/ākonga in these areas” (Haque et al., 2019, p. 13).

There is a significant body of literature in the New Zealand context that deals with the processes, priorities and factors for success in changing leadership in schools. This literature is particularly useful as we consider the process of change being proposed by the Ministry of Education through the NELP. Le Fevre argues that for change to be successful it is important that the reasoning for proposed changes is made transparent and is linked to relevant student learning needs. She also contends that schools have a “tendency to engage with multiple and sometimes conflicting professional learning initiatives” (Le Fevre, 2010). For change to be effective for both students and teachers, coherence is needed. In the case of the NELP, it may be that for many schools, already engaged in their own change processes, that this is simply a case of one change too many. Schools engaging with the NELP, will naturally look to see where these priorities align with their own vision and mission statements and make decisions about what to incorporate. This may involve “identifying initiatives that need to be cut or postponed to enable sufficient attention and strategic resourcing to be given to prioritised projects” (Robinson et al., 2008). The suggestion is that the focus of schools on NCEA and other high-stakes assessment results, and PISA scores by elements of the government and politicians, is heightened because schools may be easily measured and compared using such data, and so schools may prioritise them as a way of ensuring they are judged as successful. By not having a quantitative measure of concepts such as well-being of students, it may be that schools and their leaders prioritise it below more quantifiable concepts. This would imply that if we are to use the NELP to support schools in shifting towards a more person-centred model, it will be critical that we consider the metrics and data that we collect, and how we share and assign value to such data in ways that matter to schools and their communities.

In the Ministry response, the case for change is presented subtly, but more importantly, differently in its scope and intent. The language used in their change statements reveals a continued underpinning of neo-liberal ideas and misses much of the nuance, detail, and vision of the independent taskforce. Under the Ministry response, the case for change becomes three key problems, namely: “persistent disparities, competition between schools that has led to a compliance model, and a lack of trust between schools and central agencies”. In outlining these three issues, the report uses a collection of statements with business-sounding terminology such as “autonomous, self-managing entities, loosely connected to each other”, “compliance monitoring and high workloads”, “systematic incentives for schools to compete for students”, and “underserved by the system” (Ministry of Education, 2019). The report suggests, in several places, that the issues at the heart of the problems in the current system hinge around concepts like clarity of roles, lack of a relationship between schools and central government, and the distribution of resources in the
current system. While all of these may be true, they miss the point entirely in that they fail to grasp any issue of *purpose*. They seem to imply that the current system will be fine, if only we can explain it better, resource it better, and talk to each other more often. There is no questioning as to *why* schools exist in the first place, and what it is that they intend to achieve for their students and the wider community. Under the framework proposed by Fielding:

> Unless we take the trouble to think things through at a more than immediate level then the dominant policy context of neo-liberalism and the prevailing intellectual motifs of performativity will ensure ‘personalization’ binds us more securely and more comfortably to purposes we abhor and practices we come to regret. (Fielding, 2006).

> Unless we go deeper than simply improving the clarity and resourcing of the current system, unless we take this opportunity to consider the purposes of schooling and the fundamental means and ends and how they interact, we will most likely see this current policy, the NELP, go the way of so many before it and be largely ignored. Schools will continue to focus on ‘what they know works’ without considering if what they are striving for is worth striving for in the first instance. It is worth considering an alternative approach—that of Fielding’s person-centred learning organisation.

### Conclusion—An alternative to High-Performance Schools

Fielding’s person-centred school offers a fundamentally different approach in that it asks participants to consider their purpose (the ends) and also their approaches and systems (the means) from a wider viewpoint than that of the high-performance school. It proposes that the personal relations within any organisation provide the “point and purpose” of the systems inherent within. That is to say, that the purpose of the school then becomes about helping everyone become ‘better persons’; a concept that is “widely and imaginatively conceived”, and a place where success is “as satisfying morally and interpersonally as it is instrumentally” (Fielding, 2000).

If the intent of the review of the current system and the subsequent Ministry policy is, as espoused, one that “promotes equity and excellence for all young people, and prepares them for the challenges and opportunities they will face in the future”, then it behoves the Ministry and communities to go beyond narrow metrics of what excellence is, and to rigorously attend to the question of ‘what it is that schooling is for and what we wish success to look like’ as we approach the third decade of the 21st century. There is much to be applauded within the comprehensive, widely-imagined report of the independent taskforce. It presents a desired model of schooling that, at the very least, presents a philosophy of schooling that can be engaged with by school leaders and teachers in their consideration of what it is that is needed for students in our schools. It looks in a nuanced and considered way at the diverse needs of learners, and realises that school is about so much more than narrowly-defined high-stakes assessments. The response of the Ministry is less comprehensive and it remains to be seen what impact it will have. It has glimpses of purpose and intent but without the detail of the taskforce version, therefore, it runs the risk of...
being skimmed over by the education sector in favour of a return to a more narrowly-defined interpretation of success, and a reliance on ‘what we know works’.

Appendix 1: Timeline of Recent New Zealand Policy Documents

1988: Administering for Excellence report (The Picot Report, led by Brian Picot)
1989: Tomorrow’s Schools introduced. April–Nov 2018: Stage one of review of Tomorrow’s Schools by the Independent taskforce. December 2018: Interim report released. December 2018–April 2019: Public consultation occurs on the interim report. June 2019—Final report from review group—Our schooling futures: Stronger Together
November 2019: Ministry response—Supporting all schools to succeed.

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