

## Angus Fletcher - Speech to CNIDAPA Conference

Thursday 17<sup>th</sup> June 2010

Thank you for the opportunity to speak to your conference. My connection with your conference is through your organisers reading a dialogue piece I wrote for the NZ Herald called "National Standards – good politics but bad education policy". My background is in the private sector and in recent years an involvement in the not for profit sector with an emphasis on education and youth development. So I would like to present a speech broadly based around a "private sector view of education." The connection with the not for profit sector is that I think that the third sector, as its called, can provide ideas and initiatives that can support the education and school sectors.

Let me commence by reading an extract from a book. It's from a book written by the French novelist and professor of philosophy Muriel Barbery. The novel translated is called "The Elegance of the Hedgehog". The story follows events in the life of a concierge, Renee Michel, whose deliberately concealed intelligence is uncovered by an unstable but intellectually precocious girl named Paloma Josse.

The two main characters narrate the book. The extract is of Renee Michel the fifty four year old widow speaking about her youth – and reads as follows:

"As a child I was apathetic, a virtual invalid, my posture so poor you would have taken me for a hunchback, and I only managed to get through my everyday life thanks to my ignorance of any alternatives. My lack of interest verged on the void: nothing spoke to me, nothing aroused me and, like a helpless wisp borne this way and that upon some mysterious wind, I was not even aware of any desire to put an end to my existence. There was very little conversation in my family. The children shrieked and the adults went about their business just as they would have had they been alone. We ate our fill, somewhat frugally, we were not mistreated and our paupers' rags were clean and sturdily mended so that even if we were ashamed, at least we did not suffer from the cold. But we did not speak.

The revelation occurred when, at the age of five, going to school for the first time, I was both astonished and frightened to hear a voice speaking to me and saying my name. "Renee?" asked the voice, and I felt a friendly hand on mine. This happened in the corridor where, for the first day of school, they had gathered the children, as it was raining outside. "Renee?" I heard again the inflections of the voice above me, and felt the touch of a friendly hand – an incomprehensible language – still pressing lightly and tenderly on my arm. I raised my head, an unusual, almost dizzying movement, and met a pair of eyes.

Renee. That meant me. For the first time, someone was talking to me, saying my name. Where my parents habitually merely gestured or grunted, here was a woman with clear eyes and a smiling mouth standing before me, and she was finding her way to my heart, saying my name, entering with me into a closeness I had not previously known existed. I looked around me and saw a world that was suddenly filled with colours. In one painful flash I became aware of rain falling outside, the windows streaked with water, the smell of damp clothing, the confinement of the corridor, the narrow passageway vibrating with the press of pupils, the shine of the coat racks with their copper hooks where capes made of cheap cloth were hung close together, and the height of the ceiling which, to the eyes of a small child, was like that of the sky.

So with doleful eyes glued to hers, I clung to the woman who had just bought me into the world. "Renee" said the voice again, "don't you want to take off your raincoat?" And, holding me firmly so I would not fall, she removed my clothes with the agility of long experience.

We are mistaken to believe that our consciousness is awakened at the moment of our first birth – perhaps because we do not know how to imagine any other living state. It may seem

to us that we have always seen and felt and, armed with this belief, we identify our entry into this world as the decisive instant where consciousness is born. The fact that for five years a little girl called Renee, a perfectly operational machine of perception blessed with sight, hearing, smell, taste and touch, could have lived in a state of utter unawareness both of herself and of the universe, is proof if any were needed that such a hasty theory is wrong. Because in order for consciousness to be aroused, it must have a name.” (End of extract)

How relevant is this experience to current life for children in New Zealand. Maybe not to your region but unfortunately I think it's disturbingly relevant to Auckland and it's borne out in the child poverty and abuse statistics; in youth crime and in the truancy and the non scholastic achievement of young Aucklanders based on literacy and numeracy statistics.

I was chairman of Life Education Trust, I am still on the national board. The organisation has 41 mobile classrooms and educators reaching into 1,300 primary and intermediate schools annually and providing teaching sessions to around 230,000 children. The mobiles and programmes are delivered by invitation to schools. There is no government funding, the programmes fit the curriculum so there is a pressure on Life Education and particularly its educators to perform.

Trevor Grice as the founder provides the insight and vision for Life Education in this country. There are two aspects of Life Education especially relevant to the story extracted from the Elegance of the Hedgehog: Firstly Trevor tells the educators that in every classroom they teach there will be at least three kids that are really hurting. That for the short session time educators must connect with these children and attempt to make a connection with every child with the principles of Life Education. Secondly the key principle is that every child is unique and the educators must try to make each child feel comfortable with their own identity and show them how special they are.

There is, of course, much more to the programmes and the material taught to the children but the insight is in the principles which are uniqueness and then understanding the magnificence of the human body and finally in that recognition the need to support and respect each other.

I am chairman of a trust called Great Potentials, originally called the Pacific Foundation. The founder and chief executive is Dame Lesley Max. It is somewhat unusual as a Trust in that it has developed multiple programmes – HIPPY; MATES and Family Centres – to address a number of critical social issues. Much of the focus of the personnel and the programmes is on the transition points or critical stages in young peoples' development.

The Family Service Centre concept, developed and introduced by Lesley Max is a proven community based concept for low-income families. Family Service Centres now operate in six communities with the prospect of a new Centre in Takanini in 2011. HIPPY, introduced by Great Potentials in 1992 and operating in 27 locations is looking to expand its sites as the nation's pre-eminent programme for children in the transition to primary school in low decile areas. MATES based on the Perach Project in Israel, the largest mentoring programme involving tertiary students in the world, is the most recent initiative of Great Potentials. It was launched in partnership with Auckland University and currently involves sixteen Auckland schools.

Let me dwell on HIPPY. The name stands for “Home Interaction Program for Parents and Youngsters”. The 27 sites for HIPPY were originally predominantly Government funded but in recent years to achieve growth there has been large private funding. The sites are operated by a range of providers - iwi, faith-based, school-based all with a contractual relationship with Great Potentials. Evidence abounds on HIPPY's effectiveness and acceptability for the hard-to-reach. For further information on that evidence you should look at the Great Potentials website. In terms of ethnicity HIPPY families are around 50% Maori; 21% Pasifica; 20% Pakeha and 9% other families, mainly recent migrants and refugees.

HIPPY is a home-based program that helps parents create learning experiences for their children that lays the foundation for success in school and later life. The program was

designed specifically for those parents who don't see themselves as what they are – their children's first and most important teachers.

That's hardly surprising in this age when the message, both explicit and implicit, is that parents do not have a major role in their children's early education, but rather should hand them to those who have been formally qualified. Think about this from the perspective of the parent (say a mother) who has herself failed in education and how much more unworthy and incapable this parent feels.

HIPPY works with children and their parents for two years, between the children's ages of three and a half and six – in their last year before primary school and into their first year. Some HIPPY parents are trained to work with other parents as para-professional tutors. HIPPY parents work with their own children on structured, enjoyable materials for 15 to 20 minutes a day, five days a week, 30 weeks of the year for two years. Children and parents graduate, involving a formal graduation ceremony, after completing 60 modules of activities. In each site the co-ordinator is the professional person who recruits families, trains and supervises the home tutors and guides all participants. HIPPY's mission is to engage with the hard-to-reach. Our co-ordinators door-knock in the low socio-economic communities where we are located. They quickly make it clear that they're not missionaries and they are not from the government. They have a very high rate of success in terms of enrolment in HIPPY.

What are parents being offered here? It's not material goods. It's nothing that can be eaten or drunk or smoked or exchanged for goods. HIPPY is offering the chance to work for two years. Because of the demographic the parents invariably have multiple problems. Most have very little confidence or optimism. Many are dangerously isolated. Sometimes the HIPPY co-ordinator and tutor are the only outsiders they will let into the house. The offer made to prospective HIPPY parents is not that we are targeting their parenting but rather that we offer them the chance to help their children succeed at school. Typically success at school is something unfamiliar to them. Often their own school experience was miserable.

In a very short time they realise that they are also being offered a chance to connect with their child in a way that they may never have before. The child sees that mother or father as a font of knowledge and stimulation. The parent sees the admiration and love in the child's eyes. It is phenomenally potent. And then the child goes to school and the teacher asks the parent – "what have you been doing with this child? He's or she's wonderful." And that advantage persists. The evidence tells us. We have good reason to believe that the effect of HIPPY on academic performance, retention in schooling and parent/child connection lasts throughout secondary schooling. There is also a great deal of evidence to show that the family environment changes. Parents are more likely to participate in their children's schooling, while mothers, especially those who have been para-professional tutors are more likely to enter further education and employment.

This program is not intended as a substitute for pre-school. Parents are encouraged to enrol their children in centre-based early childhood education, to complement what they do in HIPPY. But be clear that one billion dollars plus of expenditure on teacher-led, centre-based early childhood education cannot do for children of hard-to reach families what HIPPY parents do for no pay – that is to encourage the parent to talk with their children enough to enable them to enter school with essential skills for success in literacy.

Great Potentials is committed to growing HIPPY. It is a program that is capable of scaling up. What works in 27 locations could work in 50, 60 or 70. In Australia where HIPPY drew heavily on New Zealand advice, materials and systems, one of the first initiatives of the Rudd Labour government was to fund a further 50 locations around Australia. We wonder why we continue to fall behind Australia.

A quick comment on the MATES program which, as with the HIPPY program, has been designed to be scaled up once proven. MATES currently involves sixteen Auckland schools with over 200 tertiary students engaged as mentors and principally focussed on mentoring year 13 students in low decile schools. A more recent project within MATES involves second

year Bachelor of Education students mentoring kids in low decile schools in Manurewa in the transition from intermediate to secondary school. These kids may look physically grown up at ages 12 or 13 but all too often have reading ages of 6. As you will know these young people will face huge difficulties at secondary school and not only for them but for the school and teachers. These MATES programmes are proving extremely worthwhile but we are frustrated by the lack of vision and financial support. What's the scale of the opportunity for MATES in this country?

In Israel the Perach project has been running for many years as a NGO and involves students from all universities and tertiary colleges in cultural and educational activities with children from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds across all sectors of society including the Arab communities. Over the years the project has grown, developed and widened its fields of activities so that today almost 30,000 tertiary students (about 15% of the Israeli student body) act as mentors to nearly 60,000 children in need from all over the country. Why not here in New Zealand? Is it because we don't have young people in need and at risk?

Life Education, HIPPY and MATES (to name just three not for profit programmes) have a number of aspects in common that ensure their programmes are life affecting.

These essentials are impossible for a government agency to replicate. A key element is TRUST – which is the essence of the relationship between the provider and the beneficiary. In outstanding not for profits it is also trust that links the organisation to its supporters – both financial by way of philanthropic support and non financial by way of volunteer support. Government and its agencies cannot generate or impose trust on beneficiaries. That's why our social welfare model fails irrespective of what political parties represent and which parties are in government. Whatever the review process undertaken, the latest is a welfare working group, the most it will achieve is some change at the margin.

My cynicism as to successive government's seeming inability to address social issues and by a similar rationale areas of imbedded educational failure was in part behind my comments on National Standards made around this time last year. I had followed the National Party's education policy prior to the 2008 election. I had heard John Key speak on a number of occasions on the youth failure rate based on literacy and numeracy numbers. I was encouraged that here was someone prepared to quantify the failure rate – 20 percent of our young people leaving school at the earliest opportunity, uneducated. What compounds this, in my experience, is that these young people are likely to have no aspiration for learning; no concept of the opportunities derived through education and continued learning. Most with no goal or ambitions. Once you mix drugs and alcohol into this mind-set you get kids that lose their sense of hope.

Now one wonders how this appalling situation has been allowed to develop. But it arises and it will remain where you get political and bureaucratic denial. So even accepting that national's policy was driven by political considerations it was at least creditable of the party that it elevated this issue into the public consciousness. But the question quickly became – what set of policies would the new government introduce to correct this situation?

What is clear now, 20 months on, is that there is no set of policies or programmes – all the Ministry of Education attention (and no doubt the considerable efforts of primary and intermediate schools) is focussed on the introduction of National Standards.

Can the Minister and Ministry of Education honestly represent that this will deal with the 20 percent "failure tail" in education? I can see how this policy appeals to a political party at election time – it is promoting the prospect of better academic performance information to parents, even the prospect of better educational outcomes to middle New Zealand. But you can assume for quite a high proportion of the 80 percent the level of information provided by schools to parents probably is not too bad. Yet the determination is that irrespective of how the pupils and the school are performing, all primary and intermediate schools other than independent schools, which is a relatively small number are going to have to meet these

additional compliance standards developed, imposed and monitored by the Ministry of Education.

The program and resources to improve literacy and numeracy outcomes would seem to me to be better directed at the problem - at the 20 percent and not the 80 percent. Let's get the metrics behind the one in five failure rate in perspective as this represents an enormous problem and a complete waste of human capital – at least for Auckland. Fifty two percent of New Zealand's decile one students are in the Auckland region. There are 159 low decile schools (that's decile one to three) in the region. In decile one schools in the Auckland region there are 29,800 kids on the funding roll and of that number, 27,700 are Maori or Pacific Island.

This is the demographic that HIPPY targets but lets get things in perspective – HIPPY co-ordinators are going into houses in which there is no conversation. There is noise – television as the third parent. But there is no talking. There is generational illiteracy and the Minister and the Ministry of Education think sending a school report twice a year is going to change this situation?

I think our standard of literacy and numeracy in schools is cause for national shame. In my view we will get to the end of the 3 year electoral cycle (only 15 months away) and there will be no discernable improvement in literacy and numeracy standards. This level and scale of wasted human opportunity is incomprehensible to me particularly coming from a privileged background, with parents that were totally supportive and driven by the prospect of providing me and my brothers with educational opportunity way beyond what they themselves had had. I may have wasted what I was offered but it's disgraceful that my generation hasn't shown the same capacity to provide for future generations. I'm complicit in this failure.

Our structure and processes for the development of education policy in this country are, in my view, totally outdated. Educational policy appears to me to be subject to political interference and therefore open to the vagaries of political endeavour within a highly confrontational political environment. Consequently educational issues and policies never seem to be debated. The Minister is not subject to a formalised process of presenting the government's educational objectives, policies and priorities. Often as not and this isn't limited to education the Minister becomes captured by the bureaucracy. In the case of education I cannot see how decisions relating to schooling in Paeroa and Te Aroha, say, can be made in an office in the Terrace in Wellington. I come from a business background where you learn that decisions are best made at the level where the relevant information is held. You will have financial and governance processes overlaying the branch or operating unit but you cannot second-guess the operational management of the unit from a head office. Successful private sector organisations know that the way to build performance is to invest in leadership and executive capability.

The Fletcher Trust is the major funder for the Springboard Trust and their program called the Strategic Leadership for Principals Program developed in conjunction with McKinsey and Company. The program is in its fourth year. For the first three years there were six Principals from South Auckland in a spread but weighted to low decile primary and intermediate schools. This year due to demand from school principals the program has doubled in size and there are 12 Principals involving school communities in Manurewa, Papakura, Mangere and Otara.

The program has also been extended this year to provide a network or alumni for those principals that have completed the one year Strategic Leadership for Principals Program. As with the main program there is a focus on strategic issues and working co-operatively. Examples of the common strategic issues are the recruitment and retention of quality staff and the development and the marketing of the individual school brand. There are workshops provided with private sector facilitation and mentoring on matters such as property management and time and performance management. The program is built around peer collaboration, in an environment in which Principals can speak frankly and openly which in turn drives powerful skill building and problem solving. At the end of the year, each Principal has a 3 year strategic plan for his or her school, a one year operational plan, a wealth of new

ideas and an enhanced support network of peers and business people. The aim of the Springboard Trust is to engage with at least 100 Auckland school principals within the next three to five years.

So if I return to the issues of literacy and numeracy, what can be done?

Arguably the problem is even now of monumental proportions and greater than what the school sector can deal with alone. We particularly need changes in the welfare area and as HIPPY shows literacy and numeracy are affected by factors outside of the school's control. But there also needs to be changes introduced into schools. In my view these must be directed through teachers into classrooms. We need teachers that can handle these dysfunctional classes and kids; the schools need to be properly resourced including putting support staff alongside the teachers in dysfunctional classes. Teachers in low decile areas must be properly selected and remunerated for what is a hugely demanding task - but the condition to this must be that the remuneration is based on performance, not on service.

Schools must develop a collective determination to introduce performance management. You have to review teacher performance on a formalised and regular basis. It is a nonsense, as I have heard teacher unions' state, that teacher performance in the classroom is not measurable. I do performance reviews for the chief executives of the Trusts for which I am chairman and all the staff for the Fletcher Trust for which I am executive chairman. There are some financial elements to the jobs of these people but in the main the measures of performance for their roles are non financial but they are all measurable.

In conjunction with introducing a performance review process you need to implement a remuneration policy and process based on pay according to the scale and responsibility of the role and the dimensions and complexity of the task. Then the annual remuneration review links directly to the performance review and set within the financial parameters determined by the governing body. A key issue for principals on the Strategic Leadership for Principals Program is recruitment and retention of quality staff and I suppose the unsaid issue of the termination of non performing staff. The way to deal with this systemically is to remunerate for performance. It's also the key for dealing with the literacy and numeracy problem from the school sectors perspective. Remuneration would be based on the scale and demands of the task and on that basis teaching in a dysfunctional class in a low decile school would carry a remuneration premium. This would, in all probability attract teachers best qualified in a behavioural sense rather than a technical sense and appropriate for the considerable demands of the task.

To all of this there will be a cost but let's put that in a context. Think about what we are notionally spending on the education of each and every one of these kids now, only for them to leave school at the earliest opportunity, uneducated. The estimate of the cost per person pre-school is now around \$60,000 so on that basis we are conceivably spending upwards of \$200,000 per person over their school years to achieve this totally unsatisfactory outcome for one in five young New Zealanders.

In the meantime, in my opinion, the Ministry of Education is heading off in the wrong direction. It will continue to be up to the not for profit sector to introduce the new and innovative educational programmes. A distinctive capability of the not for profit sector and the philanthropic sector that funds their programmes is that they invariably focus on outcomes and what works rather than the politics and bureaucracy of education. I know this is unnecessary but I would suggest you continue to avail yourself of the better private and community sector initiatives and programmes developed for the school sector.

Hopefully these programmes will continue and let's hope the government undertake a reality check on their policies around National Standards and instead purposefully focus taxpayer resources on supporting schools and in dealing with the real issues facing the education of the nation's youth.

**Angus Fletcher**