

2014 Graham Nuthall Annual Lecture

‘National Standards and the damage done’

Martin Thrupp, Professor of Education, University of Waikato

Public Lecture given at the University of Canterbury, Christchurch, New Zealand, September 4, 2014

E ngā mana
E ngā reo
E ngā karangatanga maha
Tēnā koutou.

E ngā tini mate
Haere, haere, haere.

Ki te hunga ora,
ki te hau kāinga ki a Ngāi Tahu
ki a tātou i tae ki te hui,
Tēnā koutou, tēnā koutou, tēnā koutou.

Kei te harikoa ahau
ki te haere mai ki waenganui i a koutou.

Nō reira, tēnā koutou, tēnā koutou, tēnā koutou katoa.

Good evening all and thank you for your warm welcome. This morning I visited several Christchurch primary schools and was reminded again that while education has been polling as one of the most important issues in the general election this month, there are many further complexities and vulnerabilities here in Christchurch and Canterbury following the earthquakes. So thank you very much for coming out this evening and I hope there will be some useful messages to take back to your schools and communities.

Tonight I'm going to be talking about the National Standards, while also recognising that a variety of other developments cluster around or depend on the National Standards in various ways. They include:

- Public Achievement Information (PAI). This is the public release of educational data as part of a 'pipeline' from early childhood to tertiary, with the proportion of children 'at' or 'above' in the National Standards as part of that. The PAI will be discussed more later.
- Progress and Consistency Tool (PaCT). This is an online tool to help teachers make OTJs (Overall Teacher Judgements). Again, discussed later.
- Ngā Whanaketanga. Less is heard about this assessment system for Māori-medium settings compared to the National Standards. What's worth noting in the context of this lecture is that while Ngā Whanaketanga uses a four-point scale like that of the National Standards, the language of the scale is more developmental and less stigmatising. For instance 'Well below' is matched by 'Manawa Taki': Me āta tautoko kia tutuki Ngā Whanaketanga Rumaki Māori. (The student requires in-depth support to assist their achievement for particular learning areas).

- Professional learning and development. The National Standards system has come to dominate this area while PD in other areas such as science, social studies, the arts and environmental education was cut back as National Standards were introduced.
- Curriculum resources. Again, National Standards are looming large.
- 'Schoolification' of early childhood education. Anecdotally, centres are coming under more pressure to prepare children for their first year of school. Some are using preparation for school as a marketing strategy in competition with other centres.
- Possible extension of National Standards into years 9 and 10. This is quite likely but remains to be seen.
- Impact on secondary curriculum. Even if National Standards don't get extended into junior secondary classes, the secondary sector with its many assessed subject areas could be concerned about a narrowing of the broad primary curriculum through an extra focus on reading, writing and maths due to the National Standards.
- 'Investing in Educational Success'. National Standards are going to become part of how schools and/or teachers are assessed for this policy, quite how remains to be seen.
- Research and politics of research. I gave a paper about this at last year's NZARE conference (see its website or see the latest *New Zealand Journal of Educational Studies*). The Government has funded its own research on the National Standards being undertaken by Maths Technology Limited, a Dunedin-based company. The name of that project is the 'National Standards: School Sample Monitoring and Evaluation Project'. It is more about tinkering than about asking fundamental questions although it has produced some interesting findings.

We will all have our views on the pros and cons of the National Standards policy and there's likely to be some truth in even highly divergent points of view because education is complex and contextualised and so much depends, doesn't it – it depends on the school, the classroom, the teacher, even the individual child. But my argument will be that on balance the National Standards are taking us down a data-driven path that will be very damaging for the culture of our schools and classrooms and for the education of individual children.

I'm going to be basing my arguments tonight mainly on the RAINS Project, that's the 'Research, Analysis and Insight into National Standards' project, a three-year study of the National Standards policy in six diverse schools. Multiple data sources were used including 486 interviews (with many being repeated interviews) with school leaders, teachers, parents, children and ERO reviewers. There was also classroom observation and analysis of documents. There are three RAINS reports, which I will call here RAINS 1, RAINS 2 and the final RAINS report¹. As well as reporting the research findings from the schools, the reports give some background to the National Standards and to the shifting politics around the National Standards from year to year which I won't have time to go through tonight so I would recommend them for that too. It's best to start with the final RAINS report as it has a Q&A format and some of the questions cover the earlier reports as well.

Here are the six schools in the study (all names are pseudonyms of course):

- Seagull School: A large high socio-economic suburban school. Mainly European/Pākehā and Asian intake.

¹ The reports and other project papers can all be found at http://www.education2014.org.nz/?page_id=16. I am continuing to work on other publications from the project.

- Kanuka School: A large low socio-economic suburban school. About 70% Māori. Total immersion and bilingual classes.
- Juniper School: A small mid socio-economic school with a mainly Pākehā/European intake about an hour's drive from nearest city.
- Cicada School: A large low socio-economic suburban school. About 20% Māori, 40% Pasifika and 30% Asian.
- Magenta School: A high socio-economic school with a mainly European/Pākehā intake about 30 minutes drive from a city.
- Huia Intermediate: A large mid-socio-economic suburban intermediate. 40% Pākehā/European, otherwise very diverse.

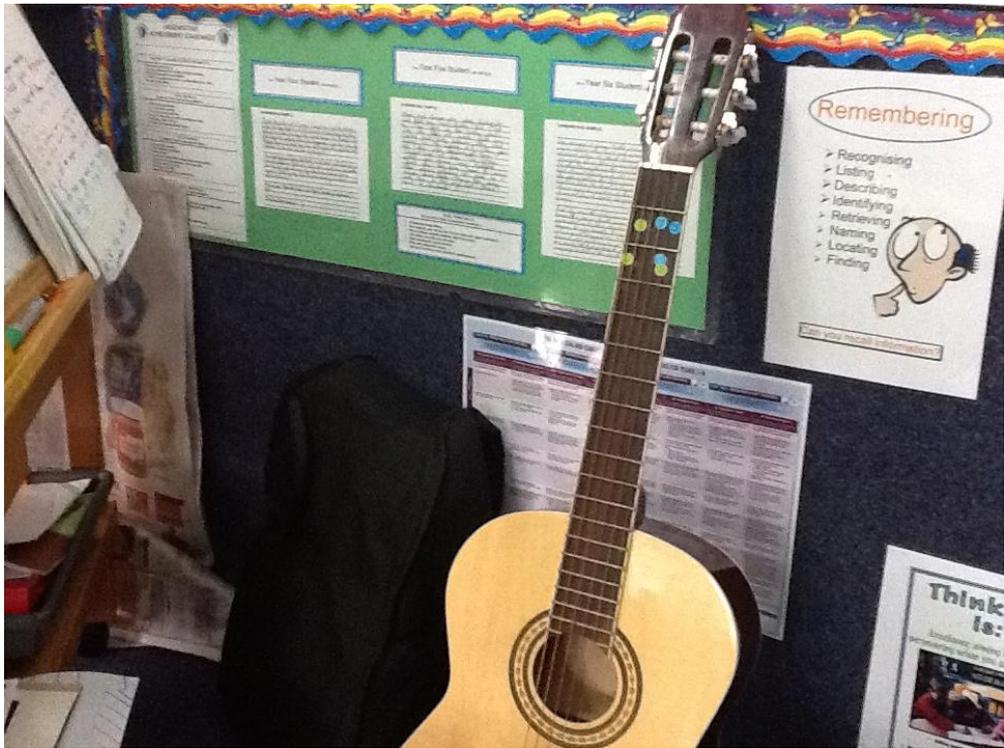
I'm not going to go through them all but would say they were chosen for their diversity, and provide some good examples of the more than 2000 versions of the National Standards that will be going on across the country in primary, intermediate, area and composite schools as we speak.

Why so many differences? As I illustrate in RAINS 1 it's of course partly about the different social context of the schools. Schools were also already on different curricula, pedagogical, assessment and leadership trajectories before the National Standards policy was introduced and their different responses to the National Standards represent incremental changes along those varying paths. And there are different enactments of the National Standards policy in the sense of different translations and interpretations. So much so that at times it seems like schools are barely reading the same book, let alone on the same page. In RAINS 2 there are twenty pages that lay out the many sources of variation at national, regional, school and classroom level that were affecting the RAINS schools' judgments against the National Standards. For instance the schools all claimed to use unconfereced (unassisted) writing samples but varying amounts and kinds of scaffolding was occurring. At Kanuka the children received 'motivation' the day before (and this would vary from class to class). At Cicada teams identified the 'topic' or language experience to use and then scaffolded the procedure over two days, with brainstorming and vocabulary identified collectively within classes and students able to access this during the unassisted writing sample. Seagull and Juniper often allowed children to write about some personal experience with Seagull also allowing vocabulary development practice prior to the writing sample being administered (but removed during the sample). Magenta used writing exemplars (conferenced) for moderation of its own writing samples (unconferenced).

Now as I say, not everyone would agree the National Standards are a problem and here's two different kinds of reasons why you might be sceptical they are causing any damage. One is the view that National Standards are not something that will do any harm. So this slide below is of a TV show that I appeared on recently, during which I said that if I found out who came up with the National Standards labels 'below' and 'well below', I would take off my shoes and throw them at that person. To which the Minister responded 'Thanks for that emotiveness but they are not labels' and then went into a spiel about how achievement data was showing improvement. So this could be said to represent the view that people like me are just scaremongering. Tonight as I share some data collected through the RAINS research, you can be the judge, remembering that the National Standards have been in an embryonic phase and if anything the issues I raise are likely to be strengthening.



Another view is that National Standards are not a problem because teachers always find a way around unhelpful policy. So for instance this slide shows a mathematics National Standards poster and the teacher could always claim to be displaying it even though it's near ground level in the classroom and unlikely anyone will read it down there.



This is a different way of being relaxed about the National Standards. A lot of us would like to think that in many schools the teachers (school leaders, board members, parents, children) take it all with a grain of salt. But sadly I think the situation where schools are giving only a token response to the National Standards is becoming less common over the last couple of years as schools have started to respond more to the National Standards agenda and are converging around it. Over 2010-11 there was some obvious contestation, with those in schools waiting to see the outcome. By 2012 school leaders and teachers were starting to resign themselves to dealing with the National Standards and by 2013 we found that practices had started shifting a lot more in some of the RAINS schools. From the final report:

[Those teachers and school leaders who were] sceptical or dismissive of the Government's National Standards agenda at the outset, have mostly come around to engaging with the Standards with more effort and attention. Reasons for falling in line with the National Standards include professional identities, pressure from central agencies, and incrementalism. There has been little evidence so far of market pressures related to the public release of data. (Overview, Final RAINS report, November 2013)

The RAINS research finished at the end of 2013 but presumably schools have been carrying on with that more substantive level of response this year as well. At the same time, some schools are certainly responding more than others. I would argue that ironically it is often where teachers and schools are doing their best to take the National Standards seriously that they will be most harmful.

So what do I argue is the damage being done by National Standards? This again from the final report:

National Standards are having some favourable impacts in areas that include teacher understanding of curriculum levels, motivation of some teachers and children and some improved targeting of interventions. Nevertheless such gains are overshadowed by damage being done through the intensification of staff workloads, curriculum narrowing and the reinforcement of a two-tier curriculum, the positioning and labelling of children and unproductive new tensions amongst school staff. These problems are often occurring despite attempts by schools and teachers to minimise any damaging impact of the National Standards. (Overview, final RAINS report, November 2013)

So you can see I'm not trying to argue that National Standards have had no benefits, in fact there could be both intended and unanticipated favourable consequences. As an example of an unanticipated benefit, it might be that someone struggling with leadership could show some leadership through their response to this policy. Good things can come out of bad policy!

But you can also see there are plenty of downsides I could talk about tonight:

- I could talk about how the Overall Teacher Judgement takes on a life of its own, how the amount of assessment that a teacher should do to support an OTJ is like 'how long is a piece of string' and how schools get caught up in regimes of checking and moderating and reporting that are often extremely burdensome;
- I could talk about how literacy and numeracy squeezes out science, the arts and other areas in the broad primary curriculum to the extent that even teachers who are

graduates in those areas feel unable to use their curriculum strengths because they must be driving up reading, writing and mathematics scores;

- I could talk about how within reading, writing and mathematics, assessment is coming to dominate more and more, to the extent that one of the schools was giving Year 1 and 2 children little multi-choice and true-false tests so that they were ready for when they moved through into Year 3 and had their first standardised STAR (reading) test. And this from a teacher of Juniors who was concerned about National Standards and that the school wasn't more focussed on the progress children were making;
- I could talk about the two-tier curriculum. This is how low socio-economic schools are under pressure to focus more directly on reading writing and maths. They are trying to accelerate children to catch them up and to do this, as one teacher put it, 'we have to make sacrifices'. Whereas middle class schools can retain a somewhat more generous curriculum. At middle class schools it is typical for more children to be 'at' or 'above' and for parents to neither see the need for, nor put up with, such a 'back to basics' curriculum. Actually we see the same socio-economic patterns in provision in England and the US, even after years of high-stakes testing, and
- I could talk about the tensions within schools caused by teachers' loss of autonomy as their perfectly reasonable view of a judgement is challenged by their line manager's different but equally reasonable view. And then there is the allocation of classes that will be easier or harder to get through the Standards and what happens when the teacher of the year before you has set you up by being too generous in their OTJs.

So there's a lot I could talk about tonight but I'd like to get a bit more focus so I'm going to concentrate on the positioning and labelling of children through grouping, data walls, reporting and the like. This offers a direct response to the Minister's dismissal of concerns about the language of the National Standards and it fits well with Graham Nuthall's concerns about the culture of teaching and learning, self-fulfilling prophecies and teachers' understandings of ability.

I do remember Graham from education conferences in the 1990s and was influenced by his work from that time, including some of the papers he wrote with Adrienne Alton-Lee. But of course its been a while so I went back to an article he wrote in the *New Zealand Annual Review of Education*². This provides an account of much of Graham's work during his lifetime and it was such a pleasure to read it as someone who is now also looking back on a couple of decades of doing educational research. Graham clearly had great enthusiasm for his work and his various studies kept taking him on a journey of discovery, he really was an explorer. I wouldn't claim the same, I have become more of a buttress or a prop, someone who is trying to reinforce public education, imperfect though it might be, against the threats of managerialism and privatisation.

Graham's concern was with what happens in the detail of classroom life. My work is in a broader, ethnographic tradition, not nearly in the same detail, but I do share some of that

² Nuthall, G. (2002). *The Cultural Myths and the Realities of Teaching and Learning*, *New Zealand Annual Review of Education*, 11, 5-30).

interest in classrooms with him. You can see it in this book³ and you'll see some of it tonight in the RAINS research. We also share a concern about social inequalities, that's one reason for the diversity of schools in the RAINS study and in those diverse schools, as Graham was, I'm interested in what's happening for children from different class and ethnic and gendered backgrounds.



Professor Emeritus Graham Nuthall (1935-2004)

That's probably enough introduction. I'll now move on to the positioning and labelling section of my lecture and then before I finish I'll make some more general comments about the public release of National Standards data, the new PaCT tool, the current politics of education and I'll come back to Graham Nuthall as well.

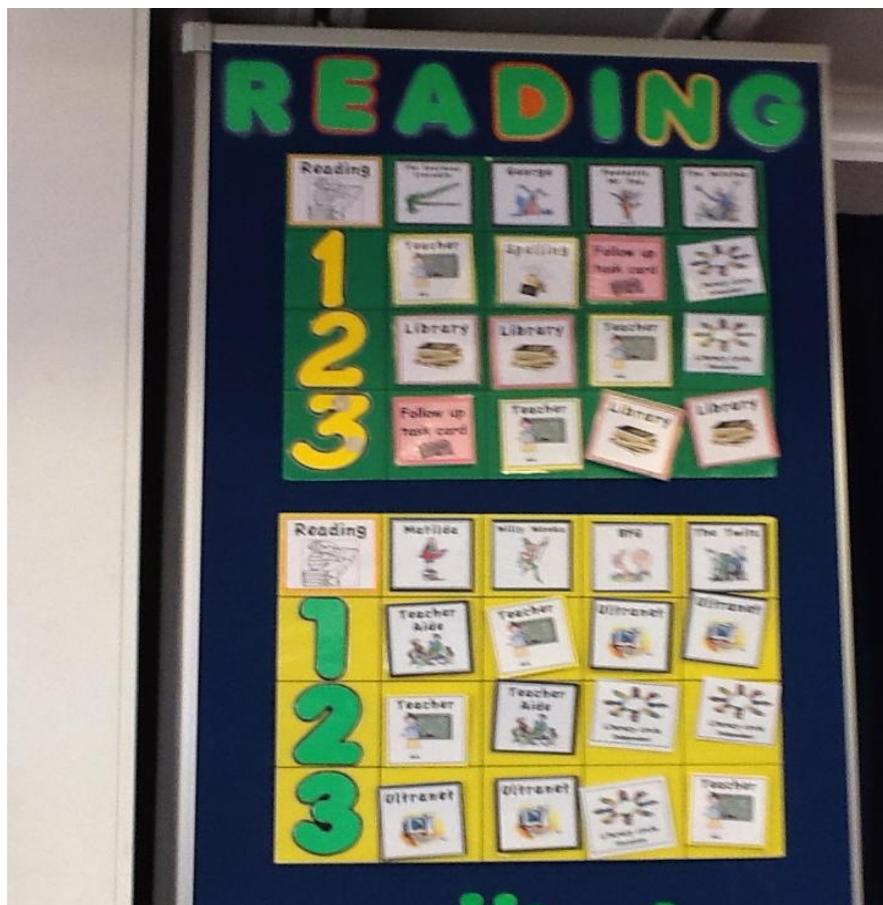
Positioning and labelling

I want to start with the approach in the RAINS classrooms to grouping in general because I think it sets the scene for how the National Standards get handled. When I think about the RAINS classrooms I observed - and I personally spent a full day in each of 27 different classrooms across the six schools and Michelle White and Anne Easter who helped me with the research were in classes some of the time too - it seemed like the children were in working in groups at least half of the time. Reading groups, maths groups, writing groups and groups for other activities too. Usually in-class grouping some kind of rotation, some groups with the teacher, or maybe a teacher aide, some working independently, perhaps on laptops or off to the library or playing a learning game. Sometimes across-class grouping as well.

A point I would make about a lot of this groupwork is that the organisation of it is really, really impressive. So this photo is of the reading rotation for a large class at Cicada that had about 50 children, two teachers and a teacher aide, there were children with special needs, there were recent refugees. There are eight reading groups going on here and going through a tumble or rotation of three activities. Only 15 minutes each but in other classes were often much longer. The groups are named after Roald Dahl books so you probably can't see it but we have 'The Enormous Crocodile', 'George' (Georges Marvellous Medicine) 'Fantastic Mr

³ Thrupp, M. (1999). *Schools Making a Difference: Let's Be Realistic! School Mix, School Effectiveness and the Social Limits of Reform*. Buckingham: Open University Press.

Fox', 'The Witches', 'Matilda', 'Willie Wonka', the BFG (Big Friendly Giant), and my personal favourite, but hopefully not intended to be a reflection on the children in that group, 'The Twits'.



And of course there are many other kinds of differentiation going on within primary schools. Children are being pulled out of class for help as individuals or in small groups and participating in particular programmes and interventions to improve their progress or extend them and some of the schools had Gifted and Talented classes or clusters.

But I don't think there was enough recognition of social and education costs for those in lower groups because I don't think we have enough discussion of the downsides of ability grouping in this country and not enough leadership from the Ministry on this issue. And whereas internationally there have been lively debates about the effects of streaming or setting or tracking, there hasn't been much New Zealand research on it for a long time apart from some recent work by Gary Hornby and Chrystal Witte at the University of Canterbury.⁴ So I think there is a widespread view in schools that ability grouping is fine and there won't

⁴ Hornby, G., Witte, C. and Mitchell, D. (2011) Policies and practices of ability grouping in New Zealand intermediate schools. *Support for Learning* 26(3): 92-96. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9604.2011.01485.x>. Also Hornby G. & Witte, C. (2014) Ability Grouping in New Zealand High Schools: Are Practices Evidence-Based?, *Preventing School Failure: Alternative Education for Children and Youth*, 58:2, 90-95 <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/1045988X.2013.782531>

be any downsides if you organise it properly. For instance this recent comment on the Giftednz website:

...solutions to [problems with streaming] are quite straightforward with the right approach from knowledgeable educators...Ditch streaming? Why on earth would we want to throw out this baby with the bath water?

Well I don't think it is straightforward because children are so aware of the status hierarchies in their groups and all too ready to position themselves and their peers. Here are some quotes from children in the RAINS project regarding their groups. Note with the final one how this boy seems to be judging his reading ability from the group he has been put in:

[The difference between Circles and Triangles maths group], not much, but the Triangles learn a bit more, like they learn more, and we learn a bit more on the ground, and they learn on the computer, we learn more with the teacher ...And Squares just do what they're told to and sometimes they go on the mat. (Year 3 girl, Seagull, 2013, S4)

We have Turtles, Monkeys and then we have these other groups and ...the furthest from [teacher's] chair... is the top reading group. (Year 2 girl, Juniper, 2011, J3)

It's Tuis, Keas, Fantails and Moreporks; Moreporks is the smartest group, Fantails is the next smartest group, Keas is, um, kind of smart and Tuis is a little bit smart. (Year 3 girl, Kanuka, 2013, K1)

I'm in the highest [maths] group...for reading I'm on the second to lowest so I'm quite dumb at reading, for writing I'm in the lowest group. (Year 3 boy, Seagull, 2013, S13)

Now I believe teachers generally recognise the children can usually see through their attempts to hide group levels but teachers also don't think or want to think it could be causing too much harm to children's view of themselves as learners. And to be fair this is very difficult terrain to get at with young children as any injuries in relation to the habitus or world-view of the child remain largely hidden. But it doesn't mean its not happening.

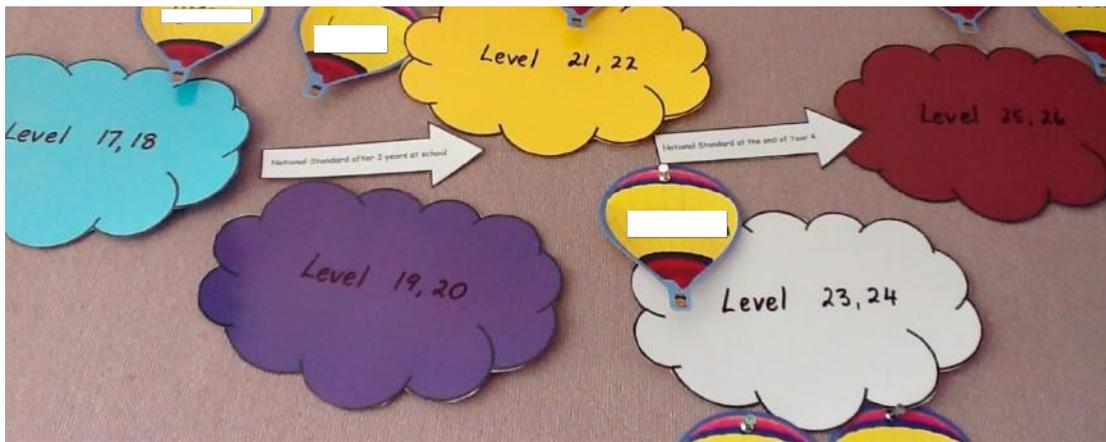
This grouping issue sets the scene for what is happening with National Standards too. Teachers are not constantly getting messages back from children or parents that the National Standards categories are having a harmful effect on children. On the face of it, comments from the 173 young children we interviewed were largely indifferent to or supportive of the National Standards apart from a handful of comments which I'll come back to. Parents (90 interviews) were generally not so much opposed to the National Standards for their children (although some were) but had only marginal interest in them. So for lots of teachers and schools then, why wouldn't you be upfront about children's positioning in relation to the National Standards?

Let me show you a range of examples of what I meant. The bar graph wall display below is probably about as explicit as it gets. It is on the wall of a senior primary class and the horizontal axis has the names of the children in the class and the vertical axis is their reading level. Here the colour coding refers to the four-point National Standards scale. There is only one child identified as 'well below' (the darkest colour and lowest reading level). Another child has no data for some reason.



The teacher of the above class was relatively inexperienced whereas the images below come from wall displays in a Year 3-4 class that had a much more experienced teacher.





In these photos the names of the children in the class are on the pencils, floating up on the balloons and on the cars and in the lower two the National Standards expectations are indicated by the white arrows. These attractive displays are possibly fine for those shown writing at the higher levels, in the higher reading balloons or in the front cars on the maths motorway, but what about those not so well placed? From the point of view of the hard-working teacher who had taught 15 years in this low socio-economic school, it was motivating for the children to position them like this:

I'm quite a visual person, I find that children engage in personalised [things] and you know, its just coming up with some gimmicky things but it makes them want to look at it and be excited about 'oh, my cars moving, its moved from stage 4 to stage 5' and it's a celebration that they have moved on in their learning.

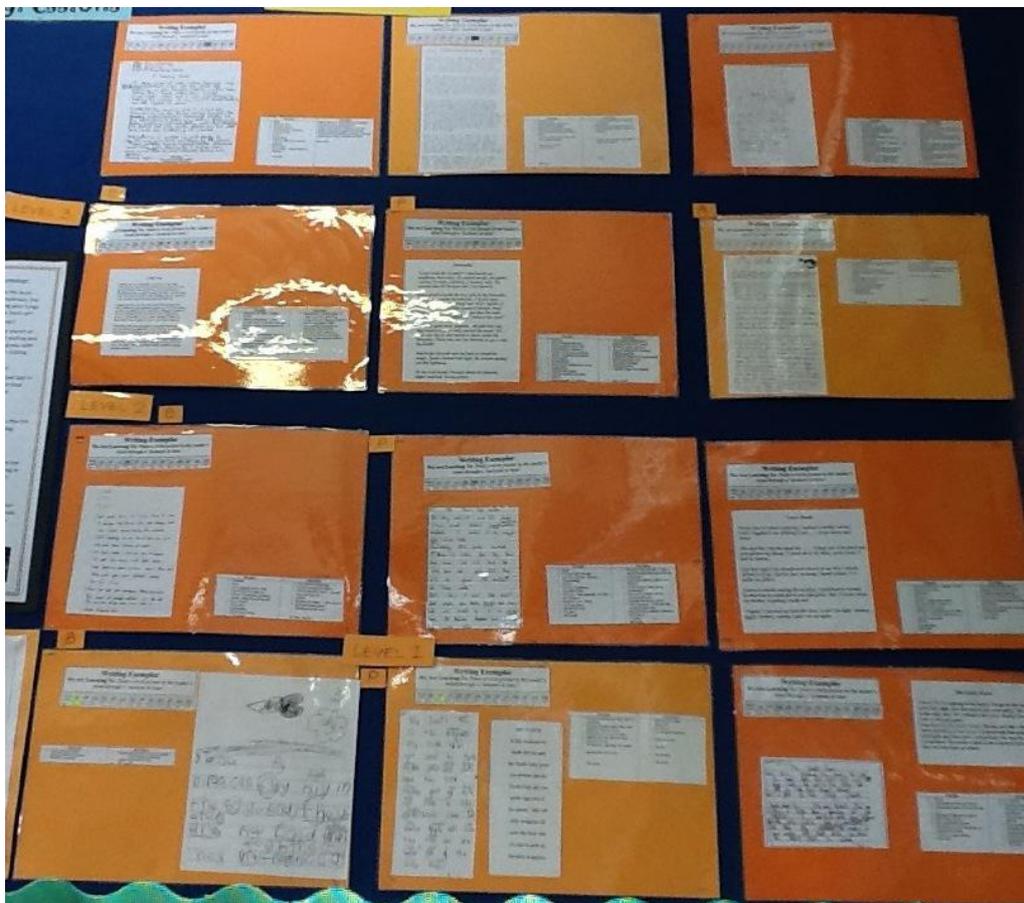
Certainly we interviewed children who were matter of fact about it:

...it's like 'oh have I moved levels, I have not moved levels, have I gone lower and you get your sheets of paper and then you know. And also there's stuff on the walls that tell you also. Because for maths [the teacher] did like a car track and um there's cars with our names on them and there's flags with Stage 4, Stage 5, Stage 6, and the cars if they're past Stage 6 flag or just before it, then they're Stage 6 and if they're past Stage 5 flag then they're Stage 5 and if they're before the Stage 4 flag. then they're Stage 4.

There are softer versions too. In the image below from another classroom, students are each represented as figures on a skate-park negotiating writing levels but their names are not on the display.



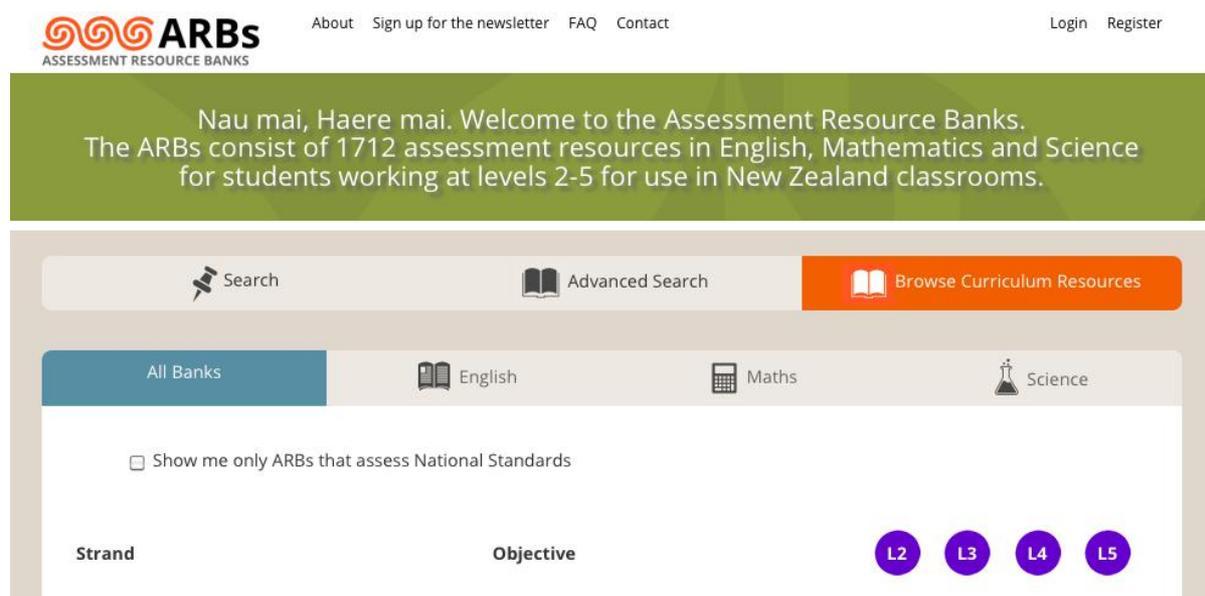
And in this final instance it is examples of the children's writing that are being hierarchically displayed, by curriculum levels and also at each level by Beginning, Proficient and Advanced.



These various classroom artefacts illustrate how teachers and school leaders thinking about children as ‘well below’, ‘below’, ‘at’ or ‘above’ will increasingly become the new norm in schools. Even where teachers are seeking to soften judgements by focusing on progress in their discussions with children and parents (and they do), and where the language of the four-point scale is not being used in reports (in some schools it’s not), teachers and school leaders will still be increasing thinking of children in terms of the National Standards. They are required to think of children in that way due to:

- Mid-year and end of year reports and all the processes leading up to those.
- The yo-yoing where teachers put children ‘below’ at mid-year on the understanding they will be ‘at’ by the end of the year – otherwise there will be no demonstration of value-added!
- Reporting to the Board and the Ministry, which has become more explicitly about the National Standards over time.
- Target-setting for particular ‘priority learners’ and other groups
- Curriculum resources and the focus of these.

An example of how teachers are being pushed towards National Standards when thinking about resources is provided by the Assessment Resource Banks (ARBS). There are 1712 of these but by ticking the box that can be seen in the photo below, teachers can bring up only those ARBS that assess National Standards (only 373 of them).



Through such means National Standards are likely to be affecting teacher expectations, and often not in a good way. As my Waikato colleague Deborah Fraser points out, they are likely to set up self-fulfilling prophecies:

National Standards threatens to perpetuate stereotypes as teachers report on some students’ lack of progress in literacy and numeracy. Although the expectancies themselves may be accurate perceptions, they can adversely affect student performance.... National Standards may [also] have an adverse effect on teachers’ expectations; as they plot the lack of progress of children they may treat low

performing children accordingly, hoping that the poor performers leave their school, or tear their hair out in utter frustration.⁵

Parents of the RAINS children were sometimes also concerned about impact on their children of the way schools and teachers were judging them

...they are progressing and they're making the most of the opportunity and they're putting all their effort into it and it's kind of like a kick in the guts for a six year old who's been working his butt off to still be told you're 'well below'. (Cicada parent C2-P, 2013).

My children have always been 'below' and have never been 'at' the expectations, so I always switch off. Not that I don't care, it's just that I believe children shouldn't be forced to look at that and go 'oh shock horror'. I'm not going to be the one; I'm not going to force them. (Juniper parent J5-P, 2013).

One year, he shared with me and pointed out his mark, where he was sitting – 'I can't read better than all of those people'. For me, that was quite upsetting. That's all he saw, he didn't see 'I'm sitting here and last year I was sitting here', that's all he saw when he explained it to me (Kanuka parent, K0-P, 2013).

He knows that sometimes he's 'below' but he doesn't get completely put off by that, he's quite happy to keep chugging away to try and get himself into the 'at' or 'above' . But my other daughter she's up there and she gets quite demoralized if she even drops into the 'at' or 'below' at all (Kanuka parent, K18-P, 2011).

The children themselves also sometimes commented on their positioning:

I'd be happy with 'at' but if I got 'below' I'd be a bit down 'cause then I'd think I haven't really tried in class. (Year 8 girl at Huia, H5, interviewed in 2012. Pākehā and Tongan ethnicity. Had just been talking about how hard she had worked that year. Mainly 'below' while at Huia).

It feels like all the rest of the class is above me and I'm not 'above' them. (Year 4 girl at Kanuka, K5, interviewed in 2013. Pākehā ethnicity. 'At' or 'above' in 2011).

'Below' is insulting (Year 6 girl at Seagull, S15, interviewed in 2013. Pākehā ethnicity, Always 'at' or 'above' over 2011–13).

When I was in Term One, I thought my teachers would growl at me for not being at a high standard. (Year 6 boy at Cicada, C12, interviewed in 2013. Indian ethnicity. Always 'at' or 'above' over 2011–13).

When it says I'm 'at' it feels like I'm not studying much and like I've been playing games too much at home ... and I feel guilty. (Year 6 girl at Cicada, C11, Thai ethnicity. interviewed in 2013. Always 'at' or 'above' over 2011–13).

Concerns about being only 'at', remind us that families have different views, related to ethnic

⁵ Fraser, D. (2009). National Standards, individual differences, and children's motivation, unpublished paper.

and class culture, about what constitutes satisfactory achievement for their children.⁶ And I think we can safely assume that children go home to families who are unhappy with their child being 'at', let alone 'below' or 'well below'. Although not as bad, some of these comments also have the flavour of those that children in England were making in the 1990s in response to SATs testing: "I'll be a nothing".⁷ What we are not getting here either is the preferable focus on internal or intrinsic motivation. As Deborah Fraser again sums this up:

...when a person engages in a behaviour without coercion; this motivation is strongest when the urge to engage in a behaviour arises from what is within the learner, rather than outside pressures such as praise, rewards and performance targets.

I want to stress again that both less and more experienced teachers are involved in the problems I have raised. I'm not particularly critical of any of them, they are just responding in the way they see best and they are well-meaning I think.

Public Achievement Information

Let me turn now to the publication of data. The final report and this lecture are called 'National Standards and the Damage Done' after the well-known song by Neil Young. For those of you old enough to remember, that song describes the addiction to heroin of musicians Young had known but in this case I am talking about the impact of a growing addiction to data. The public release of the data for each school on the Government's 'Education Counts' website was done only crudely in 2012 (a scan from whatever schools had sent the Ministry in their annual reports, sometimes even including handwritten notes) but the data released in 2013 and 2014 was done in a more consistent format, broken into year levels. Here is an example, taken from a Waikato school, but one large enough to be deemed not to require any masking of the data as is the case at some schools.

Writing, by year levels (2013)

Writing	Well below		Below		At		Above		Total
	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage	
After 1 Year	3	3.8	7	9.0	53	67.9	15	19.2	78
After 2 Years	3	4.5	8	11.9	37	55.2	19	28.4	67
After 3 Years	3	4.5	15	22.4	33	49.3	16	23.9	67
End of Year 4	2	2.4	24	28.2	28	32.9	31	36.5	85
End of Year 5	1	1.4	30	41.1	36	49.3	6	8.2	73
End of Year 6	9	10.0	31	34.4	44	48.9	6	6.7	90
End of Year 7	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0
End of Year 8	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0

⁶ Nash, R. (1993). *Succeeding Generations*, Auckland, Oxford University Press.

⁷ Reay, D., & William, D. (1999). 'I'll be a nothing': Structure and agency and the construction of identity through assessment. *British Educational Research Journal*, 25(3), 343–354.

Writing, by ethnicity and gender (2013)

Writing	Well below		Below		At		Above		Total
	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage	
All Students	21	4.6	115	25.0	231	50.2	93	20.2	460
Girls	7	3.3	36	17.0	115	54.2	54	25.5	212
Boys	14	5.6	79	31.9	116	46.8	39	15.7	248
Māori	8	5.9	53	39.0	55	40.4	20	14.7	136
Pasifika	1	6.7	3	20.0	8	53.3	3	20.0	15
Asian	1	6.3	8	50.0	4	25.0	3	18.8	16
European/Pākehā	11	3.9	48	17.1	155	55.4	66	23.6	280

There is also the beginning of a target-setting culture around the National Standards data with the announcement in 2013 of a national target of 85% of primary students being 'at' or 'above' the National Standards or Ngā Whanaketanga by 2017. And suddenly from last year there are also over a hundred infographics related to the National Standards for anyone who wants to look at them: national, regional, territorial, some just about National Standards or Ngā Whanaketanga and some linking these to the wider Public Achievement Information programme, all published online and some in newspapers:

Canterbury Region Education Profile

The key results from early childhood education through to 18-year-olds

Throughout the education system in Canterbury we are seeing progress made against important measures. That in a year, more and more students start school having attended early childhood education. In primary schools, learning Standards are being established and are providing important information about the achievement of students and the progress they are making. Between 2011 and 2012, achievement rates for Reading, Maths and Writing were improved in Canterbury and Canterbury students are steadily achieving above the national average for each standard. There is no reported data for boys and schools using Ngā Whanaketanga Runaki Māori in Canterbury. In the secondary sector, we are that many more and more young people have key NCEA qualifications at the time they leave school.

Many young people complete foundation training in tertiary education and in workplace training. The 18-year-old NCEA Level 1 measure shows that in Canterbury more 18-year-olds have NCEA Level 1 than ever before, with 19.3% achieving this qualification in 2012. However, we need to accelerate improvement for Māori and Pasifika students.

Clearly important improvements are being made every year, but more needs to be done. More and more students have lower outcomes against these measures. The additional information in the reverse side shows that there are important system differences too. We need to work tirelessly to continue to be the government and to make our education system work for all students.

Early Childhood Education 0 – 6

This shows prior participation in early childhood education (ECE) for children starting school.

Why it's important:

What it says:

Primary 5 – 13

This shows the proportion of students that are meeting their age appropriate standards in primary school.

Ngā Whanaketanga Runaki Māori

Why it's important:

What it says:

Secondary 13 – 18

This shows the proportion of students that have achieved NCEA Level 1, NCEA Level 2 and University Entrance by the time they left school.

Why it's important:

What it says:

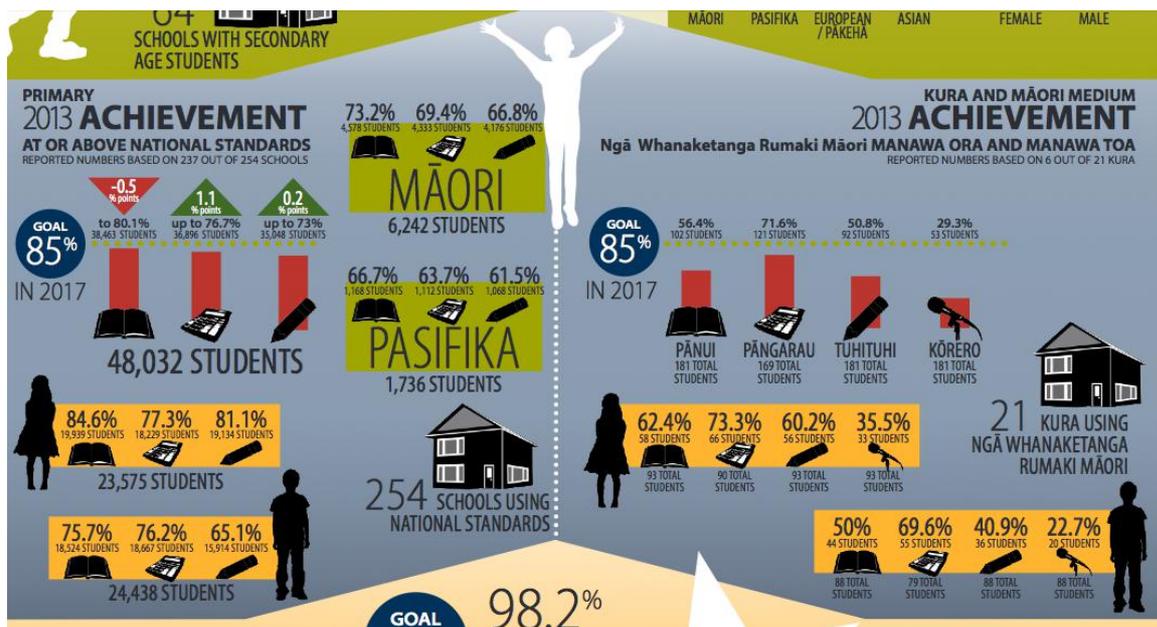
Secondary/Tertiary 16 – 18

This shows the proportion of young people who had an NCEA Level 2 or equivalent qualification at the time they turned 18.

Why it's important:

What it says:

Where do I go to find out more?



But things could have been worse in this area (and may yet be):

Opponents of the standards process might wish to reflect on what they have achieved in the process that began when John Key's new National government shoved through national standards under urgency shortly after winning the election in 2008. Neither of the big newspaper groups has actually published a "league table" of schools: both made positive decisions not to do so. It's doubtful that we would be seeing so many obvious caveats on the reporting had the issue not been pursued.⁸

The internal assessment involved with the NCEA and the different assessments used for National Standards reports make tables and data associated with them unsuitable as a best-school guide.⁹

Nevertheless there is a continuing challenge for parents and the public around the National Standards agenda that is the same as across the public sector: to avoid being seduced by the tidy rows of figures in national indicators and to be more searching about what might actually lie beneath them. For instance the following press release was put out in 2013 by multiple National MPs

[Insert MP's name] welcomes regional information on education results

"I'm happy to see [insert percentage figure] of students in the [insert region] achieved the national standard in reading. While these are great results, we want to see our primary students do even better, and this data will help schools to focus resources to better support kids".

The problem is that without a suitably sceptical approach to such rhetoric, parents and the public will take the figures seriously and nod their heads in agreement that children and schools must do better, even though the politicians concerned are in no position to comment

⁸ Russell Brown, 'Hard News' blog, September 2012

⁹ 'Parents - do homework on schools' (2014) *Herald on Sunday*. Editorial, March 2.

on the level of achievement and whether or not improvement should be expected.

The PaCT tool

The PaCT tool is being developed by NZCER and some private companies and is expected to be in use next year if National is re-elected. Quoting off Te Kete Ipurangi (TKI) here¹⁰:

The PaCT is an online tool with two key parts:

- Frameworks that break down and illustrate aspects of mathematics, reading and writing;
- An 'engine' that captures a series of teachers' judgments on aspects of mathematics, reading and writing; turns that into a PaCT score range; and recommends an overall judgment, which a teacher can confirm or review.

I am opposed to PaCT in a general sort of way in as much as it will reinforce the National Standards, the overemphasis on assessment in schools and the public achievement information agenda more generally. But PaCT is also clearly going to become a very dominant feature of teachers' lives rather than just another tool they use so I am also concerned about its impact on the day-to-day practices of teaching. If it goes ahead it is going to need some investigation and in May this year I resigned off the board of NZCER after four years service in order to get the distance to help develop that critique if I need to. More recently I have asked NZCER where the trialling had got to and whether the politics around the National Standards had made it more difficult than usual to recruit a sample. Because I expect it would have. Also whether NZCER thought the sample characteristics would have been skewed in any particular ways that might have impacted on the trialling. Reasonable questions but NZCER had to go back to the Ministry to see if they could answer them. That was 24 August, nearly two weeks ago, but I'm still waiting so I've got nothing more to comment on here than what's on the TKI website. Here's some points from the various PaCT links there that caught my eye:

A major challenge to our system is to how to measure the progress that a student makes from one year to the next. The National Standards provide eight year-level signposts or descriptions of achievement but this scale is not sufficiently fine-grained to measure progress. For example, it is misleading to suggest that a student who is assessed at the same year-level standard for two years had made NO progress. It is possible the student has in fact made just slightly less than a year's progress. If we are to measure a student's progress on the National Standards signposts we need a finer grained scale.

It seems to me that while the Ministry didn't have PaCT we were all supposed to take the National Standards seriously with the Minister making claims about nationwide gains in the data etc, etc. Is it only now with PaCT nearly available that it is becoming politically acceptable to say the National Standards categories are too crude?

The PaCT is being designed to reduce the complexity of making overall teacher judgments across the range of achievement areas described by the National Standards.

Because you and your colleagues are basing your OTJs on the same frameworks and

¹⁰ <http://assessment.tki.org.nz/Progress-and-Consistency-Tool-PaCT>

illustrations you will have more confidence that your OTJs are consistent.

Are these good things? What impact will PaCT have on teachers' practices? What will be the implications of all teachers in the school basing their judgements on same frameworks and illustrations? Is there going to be a shift to a more restricted or technical professionalism here? Is this addressing the costs of high stakes assessment or just making it more palatable?

The time it takes teachers to make judgments varies, whether they are using PaCT or not. Survey results indicate the time involved in making an OTJ, without using PaCT, can range from five minutes to an hour. Most teachers that have trialled PaCT find the time involved in making judgments reduces as they gain experience with the tool and the PaCT frameworks and illustrations help to build confidence in the judgments they make. The frameworks also give teachers a common tool for moderation discussions and will help with specific and descriptive feedback to students and parents.

Reading between the lines, this suggests that OTJs are still going to be very time-consuming. Think of a class of 30 x 3 judgments (reading, writing, maths) as well as all the report writing and discussion around the edges. We have to be realistic. I'm often in discussion with principals and teachers and I know they how joke about the number of 'blue links' (hyperlinks) in Ministry communications. In other words, they regard it as humorous that those in the Ministry think they have time to read and process such vast amounts of information. PaCT seems like it will be the same. Yet if left to their own devices most teachers can quickly give a quite accurate assessment of most students.¹¹

I wonder what Graham Nuthall would have made of PaCT. Graham was very supportive of teachers but he also argued they are about as good as what they know, what they are resourced to do and the pressures that are put upon them. And he argued that there are cultural rituals in teaching that can be counterproductive. This resonates with my concerns around the effects of performativity – how the National Standards and Public Achievement Information and now the PaCT tool will be changing what it means to be a teacher, a principal and board member, a parent and a child.

When you get up close to classrooms it builds a healthy scepticism about the assumptions within policy and media coverage of education issues and Graham had that. Yet one difference I think for Graham and I was that the politics of blaming teachers was not as intense for most of his career as it has become now. He didn't need to become an advocate for public education in quite the same way whereas I have been spending a lot of my time pushing back against right-wing ideology that is deeply inequitable and will see our education system privatised if people don't stand up for it. Here's just a few of the things I've been saying publicly over the last few months:

There are good reasons for teachers to be unhappy.... what is happening to New Zealand schools involves a thinning or hollowing out of the education culture that most New Zealanders grew up with. I am talking about the not-so-gradual decline of professional development, professional resources, educational research, teacher

¹¹ Valdez, A. (2013). Teacher Judgment of Reading Achievement: Cross-Sectional and Longitudinal Perspective *Journal of Education and Learning* 2(4), pp.186-200.

education, curriculum coverage, special education, funding, support for leadership, morale, moral purpose and security of work.¹²

When it comes to schools, the Key Government has been something like Roald Dahl's 'Enormous Crocodile', hanging around and making a nuisance of itself with all its 'secret plans and clever tricks'.¹³

Tony Ryall might look down his nose at those in the education sector but like those in health, they are very dedicated to the welfare of New Zealanders. And if they can stop a Government imposing bad policy – legend!¹⁴

Actually in many ways education policy that is imposed, is bad policy by definition. I believe the best advice when you find yourself in a hole is to stop digging. We need to move away from the token - dare I say, cynical - consultation processes that have been the hallmark of this Government's education policy over the last two terms.

The reality is that education policy is never simply implemented, teachers don't just comply and neither should they if we want thinking and creative responses to classroom problems. If we want teachers to own policy and to make it work, we need to bring them properly into the conversation in a way that both informs their practice and respects the complexities of their work. Policymakers should seek to influence but not try to control too closely what goes on in classrooms. To me PaCT carries the risk of trying to exert too much control but we will have to wait and see. What is quite apparent is that teachers need to retain considerable professional autonomy to respond to their particular contexts if they are to bring out the best for the children and young people in their care.

Nō reira, tēnā koutou, tēnā koutou, kia ora tatou katoa.

RAINS project: http://www.education2014.org.nz/?page_id=16
Email: thrupp@waikato.ac.nz

Postscript: By the time of finishing this written version of the Nuthall lecture (October 1, 2014), I had still heard nothing back from NZCER or the Ministry regarding the trialling of PaCT. The general election of September 20th returned the Key Government as strongly as ever. Unfortunately this suggests New Zealand schools will continue to be overtaken by standards and privatisation policies from which it will be very difficult to return.

¹² <http://www.scoop.co.nz/stories/HL1406/S00060/putting-investing-in-educational-success-into-context.htm>

¹³ <http://hustle-web.stuff.co.nz/business/opinion-analysis/10193517/Govt-investing-in-educational-control>

¹⁴ <http://www.scoop.co.nz/stories/ED1408/S00046/tony-ryall-and-the-education-sector.htm>