



## TEACHERS – KEEP US CONNECTED IN A CONNECTED WORLD

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### COMMUNITIES OF ONLINE LEARNING – THE COUNCIL'S POSITION

Dr Graham Stoop, Chief Executive.

Traffic on the education information highway moves at speed and we need to merge like a zip. Digital teaching and learning has long been part of modern education. The Government's announcement on Communities of Online Learning (COOLs) activates a more robust legal framework to support what is already happening and opens the door to new players.

We should expect no less of any government to create legislation which is future-focussed for education. Providing a bigger and broader range of learning options is the right and responsible thing to do. Creating a future education system where we are not bound to bricks and mortar makes sense.

However, the Government's proposal on COOLs (part of the Education (Update) Amendment Bill) hasn't given explicit enough priority to enabling qualified leaders and teachers to lead the learning. Quality teachers are the biggest in-school influence on children's learning.

The Education Council is the professional body for teachers and we are required, by law, to set and maintain professional standards for ongoing practice so New Zealand teachers stay at top of the profession internationally. Our teachers are amongst the best in the world.

It is the teaching profession that is skilled in taking the latest in what we know about the learning sciences and putting that into practice. Teachers make judgements about what each individual needs to learn and do, and adapt the curriculum to meet those needs. They use their knowledge to develop the best way for that learning to happen. They observe the impact of their teaching on each child's progress and adapt as they go.

Teachers also work together to design our curriculum – setting the aspirations for what we want young New Zealanders to aim for, and adapting what they teach to reflect their community and their learners.

There is developing evidence about the kind of learning our children need to equip themselves for a productive future. We support the tenets of *The Nature of Learning* which describes the principles, through extensive research, that should guide the development of learning environments for the future. These are:

- Learners at the centre: The learning environment encourages their active engagement, and develops in them an understanding of their own activity as learners.
- The social nature of learning: The learning environment is founded on the social nature of learning and actively encourages well-organised co-operative learning.
- Emotions are integral to learning: The learning professionals within the learning environment are highly attuned to the learners' motivations and the key role of emotions in achievement.

- Recognising individual differences: The learning environment is acutely sensitive to the individual differences among the learners in it, including their prior knowledge.
- Stretching all students: The learning environment devises programmes that demand hard work and challenge from all, but without excessive workload.
- Assessment for learning: The learning environment operates with a clarity of expectation using assessment strategies consistent with these expectations; there is strong emphasis on formative feedback to support learning.
- Building horizontal connections: The learning environment strongly promotes “horizontal connectedness” across areas of knowledge and subjects as well as to the community and the wider world.

And to these bullets the Council would add one more; namely, the importance of teachers having sound knowledge of the content areas they are teaching.

So is online learning critical for the future? Yes but the mode of education delivery is less important than **how** the learning environment is structured.

The introduction of COOLs misses this critical point. The Bill enables online learning but does not give sufficient priority to ensuring learning is led by the teaching profession. The Council thinks this is a **MUST** have, rather than a **MAY** have. Without qualified teachers designing, guiding and delivering, it is unlikely to help children learn. Rather than a focus on the mode of delivery, we urge the Government to focus on the most critical aspect of teaching and learning and put teachers in charge of leading learning, the curriculum and online programme design and delivery. We must ensure the investment is in teachers, their pedagogy and ongoing research and development. That, we believe, yields the greatest returns.

[i] Hattie, J. (2003, October). *Teachers make a difference: What is the research evidence?* Paper presented at the Australian Council for Educational Research Annual Conference on Building Teacher Quality, Melbourne.

[ii] The Nature of Learning, Centre for Educational Research and Innovation Dumont, Istance and Benavides