



Specialist Schools  
and Academies Trust  
EXCELLENCE AND DIVERSITY

## New Zealand's Place in Global Education

The iNet Australia conference, held in Melbourne from April 29 – May 1, was a valuable opportunity for members of iNet New Zealand. By joining up with the well-established iNet Australia network, New Zealand delegates were able to see how iNet can develop in New Zealand.

Professor Yong Zhao, from Michigan State University, delivered the keynote address. His engaging and frank style belied a powerful message, with an urgent challenge for school leaders of the South-East Asian region. He described the cultural differences in education across Asia and the USA. To use the example of testing:

- The USA uses compulsory standardised tests;
- In China testing is not permitted;
- In Japan testing is decentralised;
- In Singapore the focus is on thinking and learning rather than testing.

China aims to be more innovative and creative, driving the move away from centralised testing and towards a wider curriculum. The USA, on the other hand, is addressing the dire literacy and numeracy of its students by imposing federal directives in curriculum and testing (No Child Left Behind). New Zealand is also grappling with its approach to testing and curriculum. In fact, we are perhaps closer to an education for the future than some commentators might suggest.

Professor Zhao provided several illustrations of how global forces are influencing young people, and the cultural clashes this can create. Images of young people working as 'gold farmers' (professional video game players) brought home the significance of the virtual world, including the virtual economy, that operates between Asia and the USA. The physical boundaries between countries, workplaces and relationships are reducing rapidly.

Professor Zhao asked us to consider how we can support our young people to hold true to their history, personal context and values while also learning to be global citizens with the ability to co-exist in other cultures. He challenges schools to find their 'niche', to identify how technology can re-define the talents of our students, and to find out what is most important to know in a global and virtual world. Our students need cross-cultural competencies, including cultural literacy, multilingualism, the ability to negotiate differences, and the capacity to manage complex relationships. New Zealand must face up to the reality of this future and our position in the Asian region. There are huge implications here for the youth that we educate, and the 'key competencies' must be implemented in a 21st century context, not a 19th century one.

Professor Zhao also asserts that schools must change to focus on globalisation instead of nationalism and protectionism, as this is imperative for a peaceful future. We must work towards understanding interdependency; that we are more influenced today by what is happening in another country than by our own neighbours. The most important skill required in the future is creativity, and yet 'creativity can't be taught, but it can be killed,' especially by schools that are focussed on testing and competition. In reforming education to meet these needs we must consider the 'how' *and* the 'what'; before deciding how to teach, we must first work out what knowledge and talents are important.

In facing the reality of educating tomorrow's children from within yesterday's constructs, the importance and value of a networking organisation such as iNet becomes clear. We build the capacity to think globally by celebrating our differences while also embracing our interdependency. We become role-models for cultural literacy, and manage complex relationships in a way our local communities can mirror. We also develop an understanding of the cultures that will have the greatest influence on our students within the next 10 years. As Dr Wendy Cahill, Director of iNet Australia, expressed it: 'Education becomes the hub of personalisation, localisation and globalisation.' iNet New Zealand has an important role to play in encouraging and supporting educators to become transparent and cooperative in order to transform education and schooling for the globalised world.

**Juliette Hayes, Waikato Diocesan School, 3rd May 2007**