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Education reform and its antidotes

John Graham

There is nothing like an election to raise the spectre of disruption and change-for-change's sake in school education. Australia has just had a Federal election so its schools are now facing an uncertain future in terms of funding, the national curriculum, national testing, school governance, the role of the principal and teacher pre-service education. These were all areas targeted in the Coalition election policy document on school education titled *Students First*. With the exception of funding however, these policies do not constitute a significant break from the direction of the previous Labor Government.

The convergence/minimum differentiation politics which categorise electoral contests between the two major political parties in Australia mean that policy differences exist only at the margins. In this case, both parties are fully signed up members of what is now known as the Global Education Reform Movement (GERM) – school markets, test-based accountability, a focus on literacy and numeracy (rather than the whole curriculum), school winners and losers, criticism of teacher quality, performance pay, school autonomy and the undermining of the concept of public education. The GERM agenda has become an article of faith for both parties; the differentiation is about what sort of school autonomy, how many tests, how to improve the (“poor”) quality of teachers, what degree of privatisation etc.

At the Victorian state level, the Napthine Government, which has a (very erratic and unreliable) one seat majority, is facing an election in a year's time. It has been tagged a “do nothing” government so it has suddenly embarked on a flurry of policy initiatives – not least in education. In October of this year it released its school teaching and leadership paper titled *From New Directions to Action*. The “action”, which it wants to occur over a very short time-frame (2013-14), includes fundamental changes to: performance review processes, teacher

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and principal salary increments, teacher dismissal processes, principal selection processes, pre-service teacher education and the governance of the Victorian Institute of Teaching. In addition, it has given notice that it wants changes to school governance, qualifications, assessment and reporting and the school curriculum. All of this to be introduced over the next few months as the electoral clock ticks away.

In his article in this edition of *Professional Voice*, Lawrence Ingvarson quotes the Harvard education professor Richard Elmore about the effect of expedient political interventions such as these on schools:

I used to think that policy was the solution. And now I think policy is the problem . . . To policy makers, every idea about what schools should be doing is as credible as every other idea, and any new idea that can command a political constituency can be used as an excuse for telling schools to do something. Elected officials . . . generate electoral credit by initiating new ideas, not by making the kind of steady investments in people that are required to make the educator sector more effective. The result is an education sector that is overwhelmed with policy, conditioned to respond to the immediate demands of whoever controls the political agenda, and not in investing in the long-term health of the sector and the people who work in it.

Diane Ravitch in her interview in this edition of *Professional Voice* takes more specific aim at the GERM agenda. She says bluntly that it not only doesn't work but is harmful to the health of the education system. She describes her own conversion from someone who believed in the theory of improvement through incentives and sanctions in the 1990s, when she occupied public office under the first George Bush and Bill Clinton, to one of its most trenchant critics.

When the theory was turned into actual policy, when real incentives and real sanctions were established, I realized that the theory was terribly wrong. What we now called "test-based accountability" has so many negative consequences that it undermines education, destroys teacher morale, and turns schooling into little more than preparation for testing.

The research evidence that would confirm that either the parts or the whole of the GERM agenda leads to "global top tier performance" (to quote the Napthine Government) is nowhere to be found. When the State Government in its 2012 *New Directions Discussion Paper* attempted to lay out the evidence for its new vision of education, it merely exposed its shortcomings. The references to research studies that pepper the paper were vague

(non-page referenced), often misleading, highly filtered, unbalanced and designed to push a partisan case. There were many inconsistencies between the so-called supporting evidence and the various proposed actions. The more closely you analysed the paper's "evidence" the more it crumbled into ideology. The overall impression is that the authors of the paper were tasked to find 'evidence' to justify the policies the Government had already determined to implement.

At the federal level, Julia Gillard justified her advocacy of market-based schooling policies (testing, transparency (My School), "failing" schools, a lack of enthusiasm for public schooling etc) by quoting the success of the New York system of education. She even brought Joel Klein, the then Chancellor of the New York City Department of Education, to Australia to convince the naysayers that what she was proposing was a tried-and-true recipe for success. As the research came in about the real performance of the New York school system however, its "success" was seen to be chimerical and Joel Klein quickly departed to a highly paid job with Rupert Murdoch. The problem for Australian schools was that this research-based evidence had no impact on the policies of the Federal Government or the then Federal Opposition. The fact that Australian and Victorian student performance on national and international testing has shown no improvement despite the implementation of the GERM agenda has also had no effect on government policy. This adds further substance to the widespread belief among teachers that ideology rather than evidence is behind the policy.

Another question Diane Ravitch addresses in her interview is the influence of economists on education policy and their contribution to the GERM agenda. The work of the prominent American economist Eric Hanushek has been used by the Victorian Government to justify its market-based approach to schooling, including its New Directions proposal to improve the quality of the workforce by sacking 5% of teachers. This makes no sense to Ravitch:

I worked closely with Eric Hanushek at the Hoover Institution. His theories are speculative. He believes that firing the bottom 5-10% of teachers will yield huge economic benefits to society, but there is no real-world evidence that this is true. No successful nation has achieved a great education system by a policy of firing teachers. Successful nations become successful by creating a strong and professional teaching force, one that is respected, enjoys professional autonomy, and is committed to continual professional growth.

Hanushek and other economists also argue that degrees don't matter, and some argue that experience doesn't matter. This is counterintuitive, as it is really an argument that education doesn't matter.

Another perspective on the GERM agenda comes from Warwick Mansell. He tracks education policy changes in England under the polarising leadership of Michael Gove, the Secretary of State for Education in the Conservative-Liberal Democrat Coalition Government. He describes Gove as “the international poster boy” for GERM. Gove’s mission is to break up systemic public schooling by turning all English schools into autonomous academies or free schools. He has forced schools to become academies despite a majority of parents opposing the move and placed many of them under the management of semi-private academy chains. Gove has also attacked the history curriculum, the quality of teachers and moved teacher “training” away from the universities and into schools. Those who oppose him are called “enemies of promise”. Documentation from Coalition Governments in Canberra and Melbourne show how much Gove’s “reforms” are seen as a blueprint for policy changes in Australia.

Test-based accountability is at the heart of the GERM agenda. Greg Thompson from Murdoch University details his research on the impact of NAPLAN on teachers, schools and the curriculum. He believes NAPLAN is an example of Campbell’s Law:

...the more any social indicator is used for social decision-making, the more subject it will be to corruption pressures and the more apt it will be to distort and corrupt the social processes it is intended to monitor.

Thompson’s evidence is that the high stakes attached to NAPLAN distort the reliability and validity of the data collected. His survey of teachers in Western Australian and South Australian schools about the impact of NAPLAN found that few teachers could identify any positive effects of the testing program. Teachers saw NAPLAN as causing stress to all concerned, having a negative effect on curriculum and pedagogy and a significant majority (67%) said it had not improved student learning. In general when you have results like these (similar to those reported in our last edition of *Professional Voice*) you either fix up the instrument being evaluated or get rid of it.

The CEO of the Australian Council for Educational Research, Geoff Masters, takes a more fundamental look at assessment and reporting as he believes the ways we carry out these processes shape the beliefs of students and their parents about the nature of learning itself. He describes and analyses three different assessment and reporting approaches, each of which embodies a way of thinking about what it means to learn successfully. The first approach is a sort of “success for all” philosophy where students are given tasks only within their current capabilities. The second approach, which presently dominates curriculum thinking at state and federal levels, is all about setting and attaining standards. Masters calls the third approach “growth over time”. In his view only this approach will lead to satisfactory

learning progress for all students. In the third approach teachers first establish where each individual student is in the learning process, provide individual "stretch targets" and then monitor learning progress from that point over time. Assessment becomes focused on understanding rather than judging. This is a long way from the standardised dogma and test-based obsession of GERM.

A concern about teacher quality is now front and centre of any comment on schools by politicians. Their investment in test results as the single measure of educational success creates a dilemma when these results are flat-lining or falling. Rather than considering the whole policy context (their own responsibility) and the relevant research, they take pot-shots at the "quality" of the teachers teaching in their schools and propose such discredited knee-jerk "solutions" as performance pay. Lawrence Ingvarson has been writing about and researching the issues around teachers and teaching over a long period of time. He believes that the way forward for the profession is for it to build its own independent standards-based professional learning and certification system. The system must be developed and owned by the profession itself or it will lack authenticity and credibility. He sees the present development of a national system of standards through AITSL as fatally flawed because AITSL lacks both independence and authority. It reports to, and its work is sanctioned by, governments and non-government employing authorities and there are no currently practising teachers on its board.

Another take on the teacher quality debate comes from Brenda Cherednichenko, the Pro Vice-Chancellor at Deakin University. She takes issue with media and political attacks on the allegedly low ATAR scores of school leavers gaining entry into teacher education courses. She points out that only 28% of students enter Australian teacher education courses straight from school. She believes that teachers are being blamed for policy failings in the education system itself. "The debate in Australia must move from arguing for quality teachers to developing and enabling quality teaching". Unlike Ingvarson, she sees the AITSL development of national professional standards as unproblematic and a real step forward. The question is how to sustain such initiatives and the collaborative partnerships for improvement which must accompany them.

Governments and bureaucrats now feel obliged to find research-based evidence to justify their policies. They use references to various studies to show that their policies are "evidence-based" rather than, as their political opponents claim, just a cost-saving strategy or a party political opinion about how the economy, society and the education system should function. Often the "evidence" used is highly selective and driven by expediency. John Hattie's book *Visible Learning*, which has much to say about ways to improve student learning, does not support the GERM agenda. However his work has been used selectively

by politicians around the country for one purpose only – to attack the idea that reducing class sizes is a sensible and strategic way of improving student performance. In his article in this edition of *Professional Voice*, Neil Hooley from Victoria University questions the validity of the mechanism (“effect size”) Hattie uses to compare the effectiveness of each educational intervention. He identifies what he sees as the limitations of the statistical model and cautions against equating the size of Hattie’s meta-analysis with its validity.

Towards a growth mindset in assessment

Geoff N Masters

The approaches we take to assessing learning, the kinds of tasks we assign and the way we report success or failure at school send powerful messages to students not only about their own learning, but also about the nature of learning itself. Assessment and reporting processes shape student, parent and community beliefs about learning – sometimes in unintended ways.

This article describes three general approaches to evaluating and providing feedback on the outcomes of learning. Each approach is based on a particular way of thinking about what it means to learn successfully, and each has implications for how students view themselves as learners and how they understand the relationship between effort and success. It is argued that commonly used approaches frequently send unhelpful messages.

1. Providing 'success' experiences

The first approach is based on tasks chosen because they are within students' capabilities and are likely to be completed successfully. Underpinning this approach is a belief that, if students are given tasks on which they are likely to succeed, then the resulting success experiences will make learning more pleasurable, increase engagement, build self confidence and lead to further learning success. In contrast, the experience of failure is assumed to make learning less pleasurable, lower self-confidence and lead to disengagement and thus poorer learning outcomes.

Because, under this first approach, students are assessed on tasks chosen to ensure a high probability of success, most students perform well and so receive praise for their performance. By praising success, teachers endeavour to promote positive attitudes, build self-esteem and encourage all students in their learning.

Professor Geoff Masters is Chief Executive Officer and a member of the Board of the Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER) – roles he has held since 1998. He has a PhD in educational measurement from the University of Chicago and has published widely in the fields of educational assessment and research. He has served on a wide range of national and international bodies related to educational research and undertaken major reviews for Federal and State Governments. He is the author of *Reforming Educational Assessment: Imperatives, principles and challenges* released in March 2013.

There are several unintended consequences of this approach. First, when teachers assign tasks only within students' current capabilities, they risk not challenging and stretching students and minimising learning by keeping students within their comfort zones. There is considerable research evidence that learning is most likely when students are given challenging tasks just beyond their comfort zone, in what Vygotsky (1978) called the 'zone of proximal development', where success is possible, but often only with assistance.

Second, when teachers praise students for success on easy tasks, they risk sending the message that success at school can be achieved with minimal effort. Rewarding success on unchallenging tasks does little to develop students' understandings of the relationship between effort and success.

Third, by providing success experiences for almost everybody, this approach can encourage the view that success is an entitlement – that every student is a good learner and is entitled to good results and positive feedback. By protecting students from failure, this first approach does little to develop healthy attitudes to risks, challenges, mistakes and failure.

Psychologist Carol Dweck argues that, rather than giving students easy tasks within their comfort zones and providing praise for succeeding on these tasks, teachers should be communicating to students that unchallenging tasks are a waste of time:

Many educators think that lowering their standards will give students success experiences, boost their self-esteem, and raise their achievement... Well, it doesn't work. Lowering standards just leads to poorly educated students who feel entitled to easy work and lavish praise. (Dweck, 2006, 193)

2. Judging performances against 'standards'

The second approach has been developed as a response to the first. Underpinning this second approach is a belief that, by specifying 'standards' to be achieved by all students in each year of school, and by judging and reporting performances against these standards, learning expectations and thus achievement levels will be raised.

The appeal of this approach is that it sets clear expectations for student performance. Grounded in the well-established industrial processes of specifying quality standards, judging performances against standards and grading products for their quality, this approach has particular appeal to politicians because it can be represented as rigorous (setting explicit

standards against which performances are to be judged) but also fair (equitable in the sense that it holds all students to the same expectations).

This approach has the added advantage of being consistent with the way society generally thinks about schooling and what it means to succeed or fail at school: the role of teachers is to teach the curriculum specified for the year level, the role of students is to learn what teachers teach, and the role of assessment is to establish how much of what they have been taught students have successfully learnt. Students who demonstrate most of the expectations for their year level are rewarded with high grades; students who demonstrate few of those expectations receive low grades and may be judged to have 'failed'.

The problem with this second approach is that it suffers from many of the same disadvantages as the first. It often is no better at helping students understand the relationship between effort and success. It often does not provide students with stretch challenges. And it often encourages fixed mindsets about learning ability.

How is this possible? The answer lies in the variability of students' achievement levels within each year of school. In any given year of school, the most advanced 10 per cent of students typically are between five and six years ahead of the least advanced 10 per cent of students (Harlen, 1997; Masters & Forster, 1997; Wiliam 2007). Children begin school at very different points in their social, cognitive, emotional and psychomotor development. Many of these differences persist throughout the years of school. As a consequence, rather than being at a similar stage in their learning, students in any given year of school are in reality spread over a wide range of achievement levels.

This is not to say that students who are at different stages in their learning are not making good personal progress. They often are. It is simply that less advanced students are tracking five to six years behind the most advanced students. And these relativities tend to be maintained across the years of school. One of the best predictors of student achievement in the later years of school is achievement in the earlier years.

We may wish that this were not the case. It may be our intention that all students of the same age should be at very similar points in their learning and development. However, the reality in our schools is that this is not the situation, and almost certainly never has been. The problems with the second approach arise from the attempt to ignore this fact.

In reality, students commence each school year with very different levels of readiness for the year-level curriculum that teachers are about to teach. Some are still several years behind. Inevitably, these students struggle, master less of the year-level curriculum than other students, and are judged and graded accordingly. Often these students perform below the year-level standard year after year. In fact, there is some evidence that, in mathematics, less advanced students, on average, fall further behind each year (William, 2007; Masters, 2013).

When students' performances are graded against year-level expectations, some less advanced students can receive the same low grade year after year. The feedback these students receive is that they are consistently performing below standard and below other students. A to E grades provide little or no sense of the learning progress that individuals actually make over time. A student who receives a 'D' year after year could be excused for concluding that they are making no progress at all when, in reality, they may be making as much annual improvement as a student who consistently receives an 'A'. And worse, they may conclude that there is something stable about their capacity to learn – that is, they are a 'D-student'. Such demotivating messages undermine students' beliefs in the relationship between effort and success and frequently lead to disengagement. As Grenny *et al.* (2013) observe, for many less advanced students, 'dropping out [of school] is a sane response to persistent disappointment and repeated reminders that they're performing below average'.

However, the problems with this approach are not limited to less advanced students. They apply equally to more advanced students. When learning expectations are couched only in terms of year-level standards, these common expectations can fail to challenge and extend more advanced students. For example, in some secondary schools it is common for all entering students to be taught the same mathematics curriculum and to be assigned the same mathematics tasks during their entire first year. (Some schools justify this on the grounds that it gives them a year to 'sort students out'.) This practice inevitably disadvantages more advanced students who are ready for more challenging work.

And, in some classrooms, it is common for students to be given 'free time' when they complete set class work. Rather than extending more advanced students with challenging, more difficult material, this practice makes the completion of assigned class work the common goal for all students. (In fact, there is anecdotal evidence of reluctance on the part of some teachers to give additional work to more advanced students because this could be interpreted as a form of 'punishment' for finishing set work early.)

Adding to this concern is a finding by Patrick Griffin and his colleagues at the University of Melbourne that teachers are less able to identify intervention strategies to assist more

advanced students. These observations may explain why more advanced students, despite receiving higher grades, do not always make as much progress in their learning as less advanced students. In their study of progress in reading and mathematics, Griffin and colleagues concluded:

Students at the bottom levels of the proficiency scale are improving rapidly. Students at the top end of the scale are hardly improving at all. (Griffin et al., 2013, 5)

Observations of this kind also may help to explain why the decline in achievement levels at 15 years of age over the past decade has been greatest among more advanced students (Thomson *et al.*, 2011).

And there is a risk of these students, too, developing unhelpful beliefs about the relationship between effort and success. Because they begin each school year five to six years ahead of some other students, more advanced students sometimes achieve high grades with limited effort. These students can develop a belief that, because they are 'smart' – that is, 'A-students' – they do not have to make an effort in the way that other students do. And, as Carol Dweck observes, there is no research evidence that more advanced students are more inclined than less advanced students to enjoy challenges or to extend themselves.

This second approach – assessing, judging and grading student performances against year-level 'standards' – was intended to challenge and motivate students, encourage effort and raise achievement levels. In practice, it often has the opposite effect on student attitudes and behaviours. The costs to learning and achievement in our schools are potentially significant and certainly justify the search for an alternative.

3. Assessing 'growth' over time

The third approach is focused on establishing the points that individuals have reached in their learning, setting personal stretch targets for further learning, and monitoring the progress that individuals make over time. Underpinning this approach is a belief that, at any given time, every student is at some point in his or her learning and is capable of further progress if they can be engaged, motivated and provided with relevant learning opportunities. Rather than expecting all students of the same age to be at the same point in their learning at the same time, this approach expects every student to make excellent learning *progress* over the course of a school year, regardless of their starting point. In other words, this third approach sets high expectations for every student's 'growth'.

Carol Dweck refers to this way of thinking as a growth mindset:

When [teachers and students] change to a growth mindset, they change from a judge-and-be-judged framework to a learn-and-help-learn framework. Their commitment is to growth, and growth takes plenty of time, effort and mutual support. (Dweck, 2006, 244)

When students' performances are assessed from the perspective of a growth mindset, the focus is not so much on 'judging' as on *understanding* where individuals are in their learning at the time of assessment. What knowledge, skills and understandings do they currently demonstrate, regardless of how other students are performing or what the intentions may be for students of this age or year level? To answer this question it may be necessary to investigate and diagnose in some detail the difficulties that individuals are experiencing or the misunderstandings that they have developed.

Assessment information of this kind provides starting points for teaching and learning. It enables learning activities to be selected and designed to maximise the likelihood of successful further learning. It also assists teachers and students to set targets for learning. Rather than being based on common year-level expectations, these learning targets are personalised; they set realistic stretch challenges for individual learners.

When assessments provide information about where students are in their learning at the time of assessment, they also provide a basis for monitoring individual progress over time. Assessments of progress are an alternative to judging success only in terms of year-level standards. Under a growth mindset, success is defined in terms of the progress each student makes, or the 'distance travelled'.

Importantly, the adoption of a growth mindset does not represent a lowering of expectations. On the contrary, it sets high expectations of *every* learner, including more advanced students who sometimes are not challenged or stretched and hardly improve at all. Under a growth mindset, 'failure' is defined not in terms of year-level expectations, but as inadequate learning progress.

The adoption of a growth mindset also invites a change in thinking from a belief that there are 'good learners' who meet year-level expectations year after year, and 'poor learners' who perform below standard year after year, to a belief that, although students may be at different points in their learning and may be progressing at different rates, all are capable of good learning progress.

And, when learning is evaluated in terms of the progress that individuals make, the relationship between effort and success is clarified. Students' self-confidence is built, not through success on easy tasks, but when they are able to see the progress they are making, when they appreciate how the quality of their work has improved, and when they succeed on challenging tasks that once were beyond them.

Many existing learning frameworks provide a basis for assessing student growth. School curricula that define clear progressions of learning across the years of school make explicit what long-term growth in a domain looks like, and so provide a basis for establishing individuals' current levels of attainment and for monitoring growth over time. So do a range of empirically-based 'proficiency scales' and 'developmental continua' (Masters, 2013).

No small challenge

This article has argued for defining, assessing and reporting school learning in terms of the *progress* that individuals make. However, this is no small challenge. Success at school usually is assessed not in terms of the progress that individuals make (for example, over the course of a school year), but by judging and grading performances against age/year group expectations. Although letter grades are a relatively recent phenomenon – they appeared for the first time in some North American higher education institutions in the late 19th century and were widely used in schools only in the 20th century – they have come to define what it means to learn successfully at school. Reform depends first on a change in mindset.

Added to this is the challenge of developing credible and easily understood alternatives to current reporting practices. The kinds of reports called for in this article would provide information about: (1) where students are in their learning at the time of assessment (eg, what they currently know, understand and can do); and (2) how much progress they have made over some specified time (eg, a school year, a semester). Good reporting alternatives of this kind generally do not exist. In their absence, the practice of reporting success in terms of year-level expectations is often justified on the grounds that parents wish to know how students are performing in relation to others of the same age. However, this may be less true if parents also had good information about where exactly students are in their learning and what progress they are making over time.

Changing mindsets and developing assessment and reporting tools to support such change are long-term educational agenda. They almost certainly require a transition phase in which processes based on differing mindsets operate in tandem. A starting point is a wider

appreciation of the ways in which efforts to provide 'success' experiences and to evaluate learning in terms of common year-level 'standards' fail to engage and challenge some students and encourage fixed rather than 'growth' mindsets in our schools.

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Establishing a national certification system for teachers

How are we doing?

Lawrence Ingvarson

A recent conference organised by the Queensland Teachers Union was titled "Reclaiming the Professional Agenda". A question that hung in the air was, "how could this be done"? On what grounds might teachers claim to be members of a profession? How might teachers demonstrate their professional "credentials?"

There are many aspects to this question, but, undoubtedly, building its own independent professional certification system would have to be one of the key strategies for strengthening teaching as a profession. A certification system is a system for defining high-quality teaching standards, promoting development towards those standards and identifying those who reach them. If you can't do that, you don't qualify as a profession. Professions are normally trusted to run their own certification systems.

Certification is the way most professions drive continual improvement in their members' practice, in their own and in the public interest. It is the means by which they maintain control over their own professional learning system (which teachers appear to have lost). They provide novices with high performance standards to aim for over several years. They provide a rigorous and independent system for assessing when they have attained those standards. Successful applicants gain a respected certification that employers are willing to pay for, thus creating a strong market for their knowledge and expertise. They gain the esteem of having "made it" in their profession.

Recent history

A remarkable consensus emerged in Australia during the 2000s about the desirability of a national certification system for accomplished teachers and school leaders. In 1998 a Senate Inquiry into the Status of Teaching recommended that:

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A system of professional recognition for teachers must be established, which is based on the achievement of enhanced knowledge and skills and which retains teachers at the front line of student learning. Such knowledge and skills should be identified, classified and assessed according to criteria developed by expert panels drawn from the profession. Education authorities should structure remuneration accordingly. (p. 7)

The Senators recognized that a professional certification system has two components essential to its success: a rigorous process for the certification of teachers who attain high standards; and recognition for the value of that certification in terms of substantial salary advancement and new career opportunities. Responsibilities for these two components should be kept distinct, for good reasons. The first rests with the profession; the second with governments and other employing authorities if they are committed to promoting high standards.

In 2003, 15 teacher associations, including teacher unions, put together a National Statement from the Teaching Profession on Teacher Standards, Quality and Professionalism. It recommended that

A nationally coordinated, rigorous and consistent system should be established to provide recognition to teachers who demonstrate advanced standards The enterprise bargaining process between employers and unions will be an important mechanism for providing recognition for professional certification. All employing authorities should be encouraged to provide recognition and support for professional certification as the process comes to demonstrate its credibility and its effects on professional learning. (p. 4)

The 2003 National Statement was consistent with the Senators' recommendation and with several other major reports at that time, such as Business Council of Australia (Dinham, Ingvanson & Kleinhenz, 2008). During the 2000s, sixteen professional associations developed certification standards for their specialist fields. Teacher unions were supportive provided teachers would be assessed by an independent and fair process and rewarded through salary increases.

By 2007, the in-coming Labor Government had promised to establish a rigorous standards-based certification system for recognizing accomplished teachers. In an address to a Teaching Australia and BCA Symposium (15 October, 2008) the Minister for Education, Julia Gillard MP, stated

In broad terms, both the Business Council's and the AEU's proposals for a rigorous national certification system are consistent with the approach currently being examined by COAG and MCEETYA.

Following this, the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL) was established in 2010, with responsibility "for developing and implementing a nationally consistent certification function".

What happened to the ideal of a professional certification system?

AITSL has made considerable progress in several areas, but it is becoming apparent that it does not have the capacity to ensure that Australia gains the respected profession-wide certification system that it needs. Several factors have undermined its chances of success.

Lack of independence and authority

The first factor, perhaps the main one, is AITSL's lack of independence and authority. In no sense have we created an independent professional body that can speak out on equal terms with governments about matters of professional practice. There are no practising teachers on its board. It reports to state and territory Ministers of Education and representatives of other employing authorities. Because of this, AITSL's capacity to develop a rigorous national professional certification system has been undermined.

AITSL bears little resemblance to national certification agencies in other professions. In fact it was prevented from providing certification. The Council of Australian Governments directed that AITSL develop a "nationally consistent", not a national, system of certification. Jurisdiction to operate a certification system in the way that applies to other established professions has not been granted to AITSL.

Instead, MCEETYA members directed that the certification function be delegated to state and territory "jurisdictions", meaning that Australia could have at least eight different certifying bodies, and probably several more. In effect, state and territory Ministers of Education and other employing authorities have successfully hijacked responsibility to operate their own local certification systems, a role that they do not play for any other profession – nor would dare to.

Most established professions in Australia and England received their "jurisdiction" through some form of Royal Charter many years ago. More than twenty professional associations in Australia now operate under a jurisdiction overseen by the Governor-General.

It may be time for the Australian teaching profession to seek a charter similar to the one a Select Committee of the House of Commons recently recommended for teachers in England.

We acknowledge and support the case for a new, member-driven College of Teaching, independent from but working with Government, which could play important roles, *inter alia*, in the accreditation of CPD and teacher standards. We recommend that the Government work with teachers and others to develop proposals for a new College of Teaching, along the lines of the Royal Colleges and Chartered Institutions in other professions.

Lack of a stable policy context

A second factor limiting AITSL's capacity to deliver an effective certification system has been that ministers of education keep changing or adding to its agenda. Recent Government decisions have undermined the concept of certification itself. It takes a stable policy environment to establish a successful certification system and a patient long-term trust in the capacity of teachers to ensure its rigour.

For example, during the last election the Australian Government suddenly announced that it would introduce a Reward Payments for Great Teachers bonus pay scheme if elected. The task of developing what was called The Australian Teacher Performance Management Principles and Procedures scheme was handed to AITSL, in addition to its previous certification brief.

This bonus pay scheme was clearly inconsistent with AITSL's original brief to develop a certification system. It bore all the hallmarks of what politicians will say to win elections. Bonus pay schemes are the business of employers and it was inappropriate for a federal government to be imposing one. In addition, the methods listed were undeveloped and untested, the scheme would be expensive and a burden for schools, and would have a negative effect on staff relationships.

This proposal ignored the original certification role the Ministers had given to AITSL. Quite apart from the fact that this scheme was an ill-conceived election promise, it placed AITSL in an awkward, if not contradictory, position. Was its main role now to establish a nationally consistent certification system, or was it to provide school managers with procedures for their performance management and annual bonus pay schemes? The latter represented an unprecedented Federal intervention into an area of school functioning.

In effect, the Australian certification scheme was transformed into a performance management and bonus pay scheme. Under the current directions from the Australian Government Minister for Education, teachers who apply successfully for certification were to gain a one-off bonus, not a certification recognised in terms of advancement to higher salary levels.

Given the increasingly unstable political context recently, AITSL's initiatives appear unlikely to gain national acceptance and support. After recent elections and changes in government, two states, Queensland and Victoria have opted out of the AITSL certification system. The Victorian Government rejected the idea of certification in favour of a unworkable merit pay scheme.

It is apparent that Australia provides a good example of a problem that Elmore (2011, p.35) identifies in the USA:

I used to think that policy was the solution. And now I think policy is the problem . . . To policy makers, every idea about what schools should be doing is as credible as every other idea, and any new idea that can command a political constituency can be used as an excuse for telling schools to do something. Elected officials . . . generate electoral credit by initiating new ideas, not by making the kind of steady investments in people that are required to make the educator sector more effective. The result is an education sector that is overwhelmed with policy, conditioned to respond to the immediate demands of whoever controls the political agenda, and not in investing in the long-term health of the sector and the people who work in it . .

For the future, I am putting my energy into building a stronger profession, not into trying to repair a desperately dysfunctional political system

Failure to appreciate the complexities of standards-based assessment

Third, the timetable imposed on AITSL to develop valid and reliable assessment methods for advanced certification reflected little understanding of what it takes to do it well. AITSL was given a few months to develop the assessment methods and processes for training assessors before the system went "live", something we know takes several years normally. The risk is imposing a system that lacks credibility and respect with the profession.

Reliability in judgements seems unlikely, as the current guidelines about "evidencing the standards", are not structured in ways that will ensure teachers interpret them in the

same way. The assessment guidelines need greater clarity about how a teacher might show they meet the standards and what counts as meeting the standards. This calls for carefully designed assessment tasks that provide evidence relevant to several standards at the same time, such as structured portfolio entries. Contrary to expectations, research indicates that structure is welcomed by teachers and leads to perceptions of fairness in the assessment process. Transparent structure breeds confidence in a system.

Current AITSL guidelines for assessment methods are being implemented in different ways across states and territories. Several states such as WA, SA, and NSW are going their own way, using previous methods "deemed" to be equivalent to the AITSL guidelines. It will be difficult to ensure the levels of consistency required for a credible certification system.

Reliability also requires that the assessment methods together cover all the National Standards and provide adequate evidence from each of the Domains. However, under current guidelines, evidence for the Knowledge Domain is poorly sampled, even though research indicates the critical importance of knowledge about teaching and learning subject matter in a teacher's specialist field.

Current guidelines also need to recognise the need to ensure *generalizability*; that is, the need to gather a sufficient sample of teacher's knowledge and performance to be able to generalise confidently about their capability to meet the standards. A rag-bag of disjointed evidence in a portfolio is unlikely to provide sufficient evidence to make a reliable and valid judgement about a teacher's capacity to meet the standards. At a minimum, for example, a primary teacher's portfolio should contain several independent entries showing their ability to promote learning in each of the main key learning areas of literacy, numeracy, science and social studies.

Likewise, a secondary teacher's portfolio should contain several independent portfolio entries, each from different classes and year levels. Early indications are that some certifying authorities are asking for limited direct evidence of highly accomplished classroom practice and ability to advance student learning compared with evidence about activities beyond the classroom.

As yet it is unclear what procedures will be used for *setting standards* and arriving at a final decision about whether or not to certify a teacher. This is a complex process, not be dealt with in a casual way. It involves decisions about the relative weighting that will be given to the different types of evidence. It involves developing a defensible process for amalgamating the assessment scores and setting the standards for certification; that is, for deciding what levels of knowledge and performance represent meeting the standard. This

depends on developing rubrics based on the standards that clearly distinguish qualitatively different levels of performance. However, the current National Standards do not provide an adequate basis for developing such rubrics, as they do not provide elaborations of the standards describing the key indicators and critical attributes of highly accomplished practice.

Without developing and testing such procedures, doubts about the *validity* and comparability of certification will spread quickly – its ability to distinguish teachers who meet the standards from those who do not needs to be established by well-resourced trials and research. Previous research indicates it would be unwise to proceed before confidence in the validity of the certification process has been demonstrated

Quality of the National Professional Standards Framework

Several concerns about the rigour of the assessment procedures stem from the generic and somewhat politicised nature of the National Professional Standards Framework itself. Consequently the standards are not well grounded in contemporary research on what accomplished teachers know and do in the various specialist fields of teaching. (e.g. what should a graduate teacher know about recent research on teaching reading? What should a mathematics teacher know about identifying and rectifying misconceptions in learning important mathematical concepts? And so on.)

Nor do the levels reflect an underlying theory about the development of expertise. For example, no distinction is made between "highly accomplished" and "proficient" teaching of English, physical education or drama, etc., in terms of classroom skills.

There also needs to be much more clarity about what accomplished teachers are expected to be able to show they can do in different fields of teaching. What a highly accomplished teacher of music should demonstrate is very different from what a highly accomplished science teacher should demonstrate.

These weaknesses make it difficult to develop rubrics that distinguish different levels of knowledge and performance. Consequently, it will be difficult to train assessors to the levels of reliability essential for a credible certification system.

Governments are not living up to their side of the National Partnership Agreements.

The National Partnership Agreement on teacher quality contains an agreement to provide

recognition and reward to teachers who reach high standards and gain certification. This is an employer's task if they accept responsibility for promoting quality teaching.

The final and perhaps most important factor limiting AITSL's capacity to deliver an effective advanced certification system is that several state and territory governments and the Australian Government appear to be withdrawing from their side of the bargain, which is to use certification as the basis for substantial salary advancement beyond the top of current incremental scales. As a result, certification will not realise its capacity to become a powerful driver toward widespread use of successful teaching practices.

At a time of national concern about the ability of teaching to attract and retain high quality graduates, this seems short-sighted and irresponsible. As the recent Productivity Commission report points out, teachers' salaries have not kept pace with increases in other professions especially at the top of the salary scale. Teachers' salaries in Australia are only 30% above GDP per capita, whereas the average in OECD countries is 65%. Recent research shows that it is the salaries of experienced teachers relative to other professions that distinguish countries with higher student achievement.

Concluding remarks

Governments are ultimately responsible for ensuring that salaries and career pathways enable teaching to compete with other professions for the best graduates. A rigorous certification system gives the profession a sound basis on which to press governments to meet this responsibility. Rhetoric about the importance of teacher quality is hollow if this responsibility is not met. Likewise, for the profession's side of the bargain; teachers wanting greater respect and rewards must embrace the responsibilities of a profession to set their own high standards and demonstrate their ability to assess those who have reached them.

The possibility of establishing a standards-based professional learning and certification system in Australia remains uncertain. A splendid opportunity to professionalise teaching and treat teachers as trusted professional partners appears to be slipping away once more.

It is hard to see how teaching can make a convincing case for better salaries without building its own professional learning and certification system. Despite a lot of talent, expertise and good management within AITSL, it looks once more as if we may need to start all over again. It is to be hoped that next time governments will understand that it is in their interest to support a genuinely independent national professional body with salaries that encourage all teachers to gain its certification.

The English model of education reform

Warwick Mansell

Is Michael Gove, England's most ambitiously controversial secretary of state for education for perhaps a quarter of a century, a role model for neo-liberal reformers around the world or a study in the dangers of over-reaching oneself?

More than three years into the Conservative-led coalition government's rule, the jury is still out on whether Gove's attempt to change every major aspect of education policy in England, raising the hackles of many critics along the way, will prove a success or a fleeting, hyperactive period of reform that fails long term.

Gove, a former journalist for London's *Times* newspaper, came to power in June 2010 after his right-of-centre Conservative Party formed government with the centrist Liberal Democrats. Within weeks, using emergency powers meant for anti-terrorist legislation, he was hastening through Parliament a bill designed to increase the number of academies – state-funded institutions that operate independently of local authorities and which are often managed by a private trust.

Academies do not have to follow England's national curriculum and can bypass the national teachers' pay and conditions structure. Outside "sponsors" appoint the schools' governing bodies (several prominent sponsors have been donors to the Conservative Party) although no one, currently, can profit from managing the schools.

Rather than working within the legal framework that applies to all other state schools, they operate under independent funding agreements between the Government and the trusts that run them.

Academies, which are similar to US charter schools, started in 2002 under the previous Labour government as a response to secondary schools that were deemed to be

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underperforming. But Gove wanted to put "rocket boosters" under the scheme, allowing all schools to apply to become academies, while poor performers could be compelled to do so.

Gove initially over-sold the positivity of schools' reactions, announcing that more than 1,000 had "applied" to become academies in the first few weeks of his stewardship when all they had done was tick a box on a government website asking for more information. However, academy numbers have grown substantially and the policy is widely portrayed in the media as his signature success.

There are now more than 3,000 academy schools in England, representing about half of all secondary schools and 7% of primaries.

Although supporters say the growth of academy schools has been driven by the desire for more autonomy and less bureaucracy, there is evidence that, for most schools, the main motivation has been money, with funding formulae seemingly having favoured academies over conventional schools, particularly in the Coalition Government's early years.

Several scandals have affected individual academies and semi-private "chains" running groups of them, and campaigns have been organised against Government moves to force schools into the arms of academy chains.

In some cases, Gove has used his powers to force academy status on schools, transferring their management to a semi-private academy chain despite overwhelming opposition from parents. Audits show that academies have cost taxpayers an extra £1 billion over the past two years.

But academies have not created the most problems for Gove in the past three years. That dubious honour lies with his twin attempts to change England's national curriculum and its qualifications system (which academy schools are not bound by). In the past year, Gove has had to retreat several times on his plan to reform the General Certificate of Secondary Education, or GCSE, which 16-year-olds sit.

Since June last year, GCSEs have twice come close to being scrapped, only to be reprieved in February following outcries and fears that Gove wanted to return to a system where "less intelligent" pupils took a lower-status qualification, and that he wanted a two-tier exam system where certain subjects were favoured.

England's national curriculum review, instigated by Gove in January 2011, has also provoked much controversy. He had to back down on a new history curriculum that critics

said was overly nationalistic and too detailed. Historian Simon Schama described it as "insulting and offensive" and 100 academics wrote to *The Independent* newspaper saying Gove's curriculum plans asked "too much, too young" of pupils. Gove's response – he called the academics "Marxists" and "bad academia", enraged many.

Gove, who is well supported by sections of the media and has been billed as a possible future leader of the Conservative Party, is articulate and can be charming. But, in a survey published in July in the *Sunday Times* newspaper, he received the second-lowest approval ratings of eight senior politicians, with only 13% of respondents saying he was performing well.

In an earlier poll in February, 22% of respondents thought Gove was doing a good job and 47% thought he was performing badly.

It is not uncommon now to hear observers with a wide range of political sympathies wondering whether the Education Secretary's confrontational approach to opponents – he calls them "enemies of promise" - is proving counterproductive.

In May, the National Association of Head Teachers followed the lead of the National Union of Teachers, National Association of Schoolmasters, Union of Women Teachers and Association of Teachers and Lecturers in passing a vote of no confidence in Gove.

In an article published in May, Fraser Nelson, a media cheerleader of Gove's, worried that the Education Secretary's reluctance to allow state-funded schools to be managed for a profit was limiting the number of private organisations willing to take on academies and related "free schools" (which are new academy schools).

With relatively few free schools having been set up, Nelson speculated that it might be easy for a future Labour government to return free schools and academies to local authority supervision. Some form of greater public supervision of academies may be possible under a Labor government.

Gove also appears to be risking more implementation problems with his move to reduce the role of universities in teacher education. He is instead encouraging a rapid rise in the numbers of teachers trained by school-led consortia, which some experts are warning may lead to a teacher shortage.

His most significant initiative this year, to begin next year, is replacing salary progression for teachers with a performance pay system overseen by head teachers.

This promises plenty of strife with the unions, the two largest of which plan at least a one-day national strike next term over Gove's "relentless attack on the teaching profession".

The Government also got a vitriolic reaction from unions and many others with its plan, announced mid-year, to introduce, from 2016, a system giving all 11-year-olds a percentile ranking in national tests, with pupils in the bottom 10% to be possibly reminded of their relatively poor results and poor progress. The Association of School and College Leaders described it as "as subtle as reintroducing the 'dunce cap'".

It is possible to see Gove as the international poster boy for what Finnish educationist Pasi Sahlberg describes as "GERM", or the global education reform movement, members of which want schools reconfigured along business lines, with private organisations taking over schools, high-stakes testing, performance pay and marginalisation of unions and independent academics.

Charter school enthusiasts in the United States would likely view with envy the pace of change in Britain, which outstrips that which has occurred in the US in the past 20 years.

This has largely been made possible by the degree to which England's education and public service system has been centralised in recent decades. Its local authorities no longer have any meaningful power, most of the statutory advisory bodies that once exerted some kind of influence over ministers have been scrapped, and staff numbers in the Department for Education have been drastically cut. British governments, even those without a parliamentary majority, can now drastically reshape their education system in their five-year terms.

Gove remains a highly polarising figure. His legacy may depend on whether his party can buck current opinion polls and win another term in 2015. But if a great legacy is dependent on winning over those who must implement his reforms, he has a long way to go.

What's the fuss about NAPLAN?

Greg Thompson

In September each year in Australia, schools and the families of students receive their NAPLAN results. Since 2008, students in Years 3, 5, 7 and 9 have sat tests in literacy and numeracy. Since 2010, schools' NAPLAN results have been listed on the My School website. The tests are designed to improve student achievement by "improving the transparency and accountability of schools and school systems at all levels" (Rudd & Gillard, 2008, p. 19). The policy logic, it seems, is that test-based accountability encourages improvements in teachers and schools.

Improvement in student learning is important. Student literacy and numeracy are also important, as are other curriculum areas and skills not tested. Despite ongoing public debates about education quality, Australia is described by the OECD as having a "high-quality" schooling system, albeit with challenges around student equity. However, literacy and numeracy achievement has become politically important because of its link to national productivity agendas. This has resulted in an emphasis on measuring and ranking education performance; being in the "top five by 2025" will deliver greater economic prosperity and social cohesion for Australia, proponents claim.

The list of standardised tests used to measure and rank Australian students and schools include NAPLAN, TIMMS, PIRLS and PISA. Of these, NAPLAN is the only annual, national, "Census"-style test taken in Australian schools. It seems testing breeds the need for more testing and, despite its limitations, NAPLAN data is being used to measure student progress, school quality, teacher quality and is mooted for use in assessment of teachers for performance pay.

Evidence from countries such as the United States and England (whose systems inspire our education policy makers despite not performing as well as Australia's) shows there are

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often unintended consequences associated with tests such as NAPLAN. These include a narrowed curriculum focus, teachers teaching to the test and/or excessive test preparation and increased pressure placed on principals, teachers and students to improve test-based performances (Barret, 2009; Jones, 2008; Biesta, 2010). To be fair, there are significant differences between the testing regimes in the US and England and NAPLAN, which is not linked to student grade promotion as it often is in the US, nor has it resulted in school closures, as in England.

Aims of NAPLAN

The purpose of the NAP assessment program (which incorporates NAPLAN) is "to help drive improvements in student outcomes and provide increased accountability for the community" (ACARA, 2011). In a nutshell, the two aims of NAPLAN explain the ongoing challenge for the testing regime and the school leaders and teachers who administer it. Testing for accountability and testing for diagnostic purposes often sit uneasily with each other because excessive focus on performance can distort what is being measured and the reliability of the data collected. For example, if schools teach to the test, will NAPLAN measure the transferable literacy skills of students or the ability of the school to prepare students for the test.

In the US, with the emphasis on testing required under the No Child Left Behind policy, Nichols and Berliner explain the problem of high stakes versus validity in the context of Campbell's Law, or the idea that "the more any quantitative social indicator is used for social decision-making, the more subject it will be to corruption pressures and the more apt it will be to distort and corrupt the social processes it is intended to monitor" (Nichols & Berliner, 2007, p. 1). In other words, while authorities warn against teaching to the test for NAPLAN, the stakes associated with accountability encourage an excessive focus on the tests, which in turn distorts the measure. "Put another way, the higher the stakes, the more likely it is that the construct being measured has somehow been changed. High stakes, therefore, lead inexorably to invalidity" (Nichols & Berliner, 2007, p. 1).

The problem

Decades of education policy research show us that good policy intentions, or worthy policy goals, devised without significant input from the profession, rarely have intended effects. Ball, when looking at the impact of education policy in England, argued that "responses vary between contexts" as various "compound and structural changes" mediate the intent of policy (Ball, 1994, p. 25). In *Professional Voice* in 2010, Allan Luke said this was also true for curriculum:

Any official curriculum comes to ground via an *enacted curriculum* of teaching and learning events 'lived' by students and teachers ... The enacted curriculum will be influenced by adjacent policies and practices on assessment, evaluation and credentialing (which define 'what will count') (Luke, 2010, p. 41).

Last year I surveyed 941 teachers in all systems in WA and SA. Teachers were asked about the positive and negative effects of NAPLAN on their school community, of its impact on pedagogy and curriculum, teacher stress and self-efficacy. They were also asked open-ended questions about the effect on relationships in their schools.

Positives of NAPLAN

When asked "What, if any, are the positive impacts you've seen in your school/class due to NAPLAN?"

- 29% of the coded responses nominated that NAPLAN had led to a whole-school approach to the literacy and numeracy programs. These teachers felt NAPLAN had led to a greater coordination of literacy and numeracy interventions, and had resulted in increased teacher collaboration and sharing of resources. Also positive was the access in some schools to better resources and targeted funding to improve students' literacy and numeracy.
- The second most common coded response (27%) was that there were no positives; the tests were not designed to improve student achievement but to control and limit what teachers could do. There was also a perception that there were better, more reliable alternatives for gauging student achievement.
- A further 26% of coded responses said improved test-taking skills could be considered a positive, and the tests could improve goal setting and provide reinforcement of student achievement when they did well or improved.
- 18% of coded responses suggested that a positive of NAPLAN was that it enabled better tracking of students over time, that it could be used as a reflective tool to identify an individual's strengths and weaknesses, and that the ability to compare students' performance nationally was beneficial.

Negatives of NAPLAN

When asked about the negative effects of NAPLAN:

- 44% of the coded responses reported stress issues linked to NAPLAN. Teachers perceived students to experience varying levels of stress or anxiety, some extreme. Teachers reported increased pressure to get good or improved results, and many

teachers reported that NAPLAN led teachers to doubt their ability. There was also concern at the pressure that NAPLAN performance put on principals and parents, and reported cases of parents putting pressure on children, teachers and schools to do well in NAPLAN.

- 31% of the coded responses reported a negative impact on curriculum and pedagogy. These effects included teachers feeling pressure to teach to the test and some curriculum areas being neglected, particularly early in the year. There was also a perception that test preparation meant that the needs of some students were ignored, and the emphasis on teacher-centred pedagogies made the classroom less inclusive.
- 17% of the coded responses focused on problems with the test design, including the problems associated with using a one-off test to rank student achievement and to compare school quality. Also, the format of the tests disadvantaged some students, particularly those for whom English was not their first language.
- 6% of coded responses spoke of the negative impact NAPLAN was having on staff relationships, as evidenced by increased friction between staff and a decrease in teacher efficacy and confidence.

Effects on learning

When asked "Do you think NAPLAN improves the learning of students in your class?"

- 67% of the coded responses suggested that NAPLAN had not improved the learning of students in their class. Criticisms of it included narrow focus, lack of relevance to students; it was a snapshot assessment that carried too much weight; its questions were difficult for some students; increased stress or pressure; reduced student confidence; timing wrong; didn't reflect pedagogy/teaching priorities.
- 21% of the responses suggested that NAPLAN had improved their students' learning by focusing teachers, students or schools on important aspects of learning; guiding teaching and learning; helping students develop test strategies. NAPLAN worked for able or motivated students or students with particular skill sets; it increased teacher and school accountability and enabled national comparisons to be made.
- 10% of responses suggested that NAPLAN occasionally had a positive impact or that some students had benefited from it.
- 2% of responses were unsure.

As a volunteer survey, these results should be considered exploratory rather than definitive. As well, teachers in different states may have different experiences. That said, the survey findings suggest that NAPLAN is affecting teachers' work and we need to consider whether these effects are likely to help improve student achievement, equity and the quality of children's education. The reported effect of NAPLAN on curriculum and pedagogy,

including a narrowed curriculum focus and excessive time spent cramming for the test, are particularly problematic. The findings of the survey are in line with many international studies. The perception that NAPLAN has also generated increased anxiety among students, teachers, parents and school leaders is also concerning. A bid to improve student learning that involves increased stress for all involved would appear to be self-defeating. Perhaps part of the reason for the lack of improvement in NAPLAN results is the unintended consequence of placing too much emphasis on the results. Use of the data, and effects of that use, requires further investigation.

The future

NAPLAN reflects a changing emphasis in our education priorities. Like all policy interventions it has a trajectory, and what happens next is incredibly important. I wrote last year that there were four possible policy futures for NAPLAN.

“The first of these is that nothing changes. At this stage the Federal Government and the Opposition seem committed to retaining NAPLAN in its current form.

The second is that the continued lack of improvement will result in an increased emphasis on testing. Certainly this has been the experience in some states in the US, where high-stakes testing has become the most common form of assessment sat multiple times in the year. A move to link testing results to teacher pay is a worrying trend in that direction.

The third is that Australia follows the practice of some countries and stops using high-stakes literacy and numeracy tests such as NAPLAN.

The fourth is that we act to make NAPLAN operate less as a high-stakes testing regime and more as an assessment mechanism to improve learning. To do this we would have to pay as much attention to how the information is used, as the actual results. After all, if we use the data to improve learning, performance generally follows.

This year, federal Education Minister Christopher Pyne has expressed reservations about publishing NAPLAN scores online, it is not known whether science will be included in future tests and ACARA remains committed to conducting the tests online.

What is uncertain is whether Australian students make the global “top five by 2025”.

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Educating Australia

Teachers, learning and committed collaboration

Brenda Cherednichenko

Media coverage of education in the past 12 months paints a dismal picture: our international test scores are in decline, universities have been opened to all and teachers are poorly educated and can't do maths or science. The many commentators on education all have solutions – get rid of bad teachers and train and hire only great or “quality” teachers. But such claims are misinformed and work against improvement.

This article proposes another way forward: supporting and encouraging teachers and collaborating at individual, system, political and university levels to enable our teachers to thrive and engage in quality teaching. Perhaps I can be accused of also “knowing” the solution. I'll let you be the judge. However, this paper argues that none of us have the solution and it is only by working together that we can achieve the success we seek for young people.

Who should be a teacher?

Some argue that only the top 20 or so percent of 17 year olds - based on their year 12 scores - should be allowed into teaching courses. But as Dinham (2013) and so many others point out, ATAR scores are only indicators of possible success at university. While the higher the ATAR the greater the chance of success, do universities only access those who will succeed despite them? What value does a university education add to the preparation and continuing learning of teachers?

There is no evidence that suggests the high school results of a year 12 graduate are in any way a determinant of the educational outcomes of students that person may teach some 5-10 years later as a school teacher. 60% of school leavers with an ATAR of 55 or 60 will be successful at university. Should they be denied access to university because their chance of success is lower? Significantly, in Australia, only 28% (Preston, 2013) of teachers come

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to teacher education straight from school, so the whole debate about quality teaching is derailed by the discussion of ATAR.

The value of a university education has also been put into question by the School Direct scheme in the UK. This experiment allows schools to select and 'train' their own teachers in their own likeness (Richardson 30 July 2013, BBC News <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/education-23491085>). The focus is on training rather than education with schools hand-picking those who show they fit the system well. As a result, the UK school system faces a teacher shortage, universities are not fully engaged in the professional learning of teachers, and teacher training has returned to the workplace.

Quality Teaching from Teachers of Quality

The Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership's (AITSL) Australian Professional Standards for Teachers (<http://www.aitsl.edu.au>) have been established to strengthen the professional preparation and development of all teachers. Yet the standards approach is in danger of falling apart unless we cast aside individual differences.

We can all recall our early days teaching. What could have prepared us better? Perhaps, we should all have had more time in primary and secondary classrooms and less time in university, and become experts in every subject as well as road safety, drug awareness, climate change and many other areas, and the mastery of at least one musical instrument. The reality is we were not perfect teachers on our first day, and some of us admit to not being perfect teachers yet.

There are high expectations of graduate teachers. They must graduate with a highly competent knowledge of the Australian curriculum, be aware of all aspects of child development and learning, be able to structure a program for all students that maximises their learning, have mastery of appropriate diagnostic and assessment techniques, run a well managed classroom with every student fully engaged all the time, maintain confident and supportive relationships with parents, exceed national benchmarks and maintain their professional development.

These expectations are desirable but not as desirable as the quality of being a wonderful learner. When we look back at our own professional beginnings, we know we did not have all this knowledge or all these skills. But we began with a strong base, knowledge that we had a great deal to learn and a commitment to working hard on our own development.

The imperative to improve learning, learning outcomes and teaching quality is extremely important. However we must also work as educators and systems to include the key

influences, families and teachers, on the development of an improved schooling experience and educational outcomes. The most important influence on a child's educational achievement is the child's family and family background (Teese 2005). The teacher is the strongest school-based factor (Dinham 2013).

The debate in Australia must move from arguing for quality teachers to developing and enabling quality teaching. Quality teaching is framed by the continual learning of the teacher, for the improvement of learning.

Connell, Ashenden, Dowsett and Kessler, started a movement in 1982 when they wrote *Making a Difference*. They challenged us all to pick up the mantle and do so. Most research shows we have yet to do so. Young people's educational outcomes are improving very slowly and only in some domains. While Australian education is not broken, it can be improved. The state of Australian education is not the fault of teachers nor their responsibility alone to improve.

The Learning Profession

The Australian Professional Standards for Teachers are arguably the most significant national achievement for Australia's teachers. They serve to raise the profile, standard and quality of the teaching profession. They provide clear and strong guidelines about the development of all teachers, from graduation to senior leadership as principals. They prescribe a set of knowledge, skills, tools and achievements for quality teaching.

While we definitely need to improve the learning outcomes of young people and the status and professional education of teachers, there is no quick fix for Australian education. Gonski (<http://www.betterschools.gov.au>) knew it and teachers know it. Linda Darling-Hammond (2005), the prominent US educator, has long argued that making a difference requires a sustained commitment to change and a persistent approach to a new course of action that puts teachers and young people's learning at the centre for all of us.

Not all parties are pursuing strategies for which there is evidence of success. In all the educational research, the one feature of successful educational reform is a sustained commitment to collaborative partnerships that benefit young people.

Sustainable partnerships for improved student learning

School reform requires a bipartisan commitment without blame or repercussion. The evidence of successful partnerships between communities, schools, systems and universities is strong. What has been missing is the capacity of all partners to sustain such partnerships.

This lack of capacity is often blamed on the reliance on financial incentives to underpin the relationships and the work. This is an error. While money almost always makes a significant difference, sustainable partnerships are based on a shared commitment, and the renewal of work practices so that the new initiatives are embedded permanently as new ways of working. The capacity for sustainable partnerships is built with commitment, vision, practice, succession planning and inclusive practice (Kruger et al 2009).

If education was funded appropriately and commensurately with the importance placed on it by Australians, then capacity and ways of developing partnerships might be significantly altered. We must take responsibility for our individual and collective failure to achieve the improvements we can describe but not deliver. We do not have the time to wait for funding to be systematically increased. We know what works. The challenge for educators is therefore to come together and make it happen.

National approach to professional teacher learning

This paper challenges all stakeholders to agree on a national approach to reform and renewal. Stakeholders include students, pre-service teachers, parents, the business community, researchers, policy makers and politicians. Until we pay attention to well-documented research we will continue to blame everyone but ourselves, fund exemplars and pilots of great practice, wonder why we have stagnated on all international standard measures and continue to change policy direction every time governments change.

Top-down reform is only successful when driven by sound evidence of what works from the perspective of users – students, communities and families. In Australia we have not addressed poverty, the social and economic status of Aboriginal people and workforce reform. Looking to countries such as Finland for insights is appropriate but replicating their actions is naïve.

We are smart and capable enough to devise our own way forward. But we must be prepared to change, to involve everyone in the decision and share responsibility, including financial responsibility, for reform. Young Australians should not have fewer or lesser choices because of their socio-economic background.

Collaboration and partnerships must be accountable and research-led. Young people are the victims of our complacency and lack of commitment. It is time to get together and make a difference. My challenge is: do we value young people and our collective futures enough, have the civic courage, the social commitment and personal determination to work together to make a sustainable difference?

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Making judgements about John Hattie's 'effect size'

Neil Hooley

Principals and teachers are giving some attention to the notion of "effect size" featured in John Hattie's book *Visible Learning*. Hattie has drawn from more than 900 meta-analyses of learning studies to calculate an 'effect size' of more than 100 factors, including class size, co-operative learning, exposure to reading and the like (Hattie, 2009).

According to Hattie, "an effect size provides a common expression of the magnitude of study outcomes for many types of outcome variables, such as school achievement". It can be calculated by the difference in mean values between the end and beginning of a program divided by the pooled standard deviation. In a similar way, it can be calculated by the difference between a control group and a program group, divided by the pooled standard deviation (see Cohen, 1988; Coe, 2002).

A number of questions come to mind when effect size (ES) is applied to education:

- Does this calculation provide a valid measure of educational effect? That is, does it measure what it is claimed to measure? Classrooms are complex places and keeping all variables exactly the same while changing one is often rough at best. Hammersley (2012) for example, discusses a wide range of philosophical questions regarding the nature of educational research, indicating that simplistic 'before and after' measures may be inadequate. Notions of research validity involve issues such as credibility and trustworthiness, face validity in terms of relationship to practitioners and member checks, construct validity regarding connections with the literature and catalytic validity in terms of better knowing situations in order to change them. Statistical effect size does not seem to take these matters into account.
- Does ES include quantitative and qualitative data? According to Hattie's statistical calculations, qualitative studies are not included, only studies that involved statistical measures such as means, variances and sample sizes providing data that could be

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used in equations. This is a serious weakness as many factors affect classroom life, not only those that are reported in statistical terms.

- Specifically, has socio-economic background of families and schools been taken into account? Such factors have not been included in *Visible Learning* on the grounds that they cannot be influenced by teachers. Hattie comments that "critical discussions about class, poverty, resources in families, health in families and nutrition are not included – but this is NOT because they are unimportant, indeed they may be more important than many of the influences discussed in this book. It is just that I have not included these topics in my orbit." (p. ix).
- Have the weaknesses in meta-analysis been acknowledged? A number of weaknesses have been discussed by Hattie, including the "smoothing out" of nuance and the use of mean scores as not taking into account spread of results. While effect size of the relationship between variables can be useful descriptively, the findings can become treated as relatively static, rather than implications being seen as requiring dynamic inter-relationships among many variables.
- Have problems of validity been discussed concerning original testing procedures on which meta-analysis is based? Hattie does raise a number of issues regarding methodology and the nature of meta-analysis. It has been assumed that test procedures are accurate and measure what they are said to measure. This is a major assumption given the criticism of testing and whether or not philosophical underpinnings are in accord with the way all groups of students learn. As with all research the quality of the findings depend on the quality of the research design – including the instruments (measures that assess students) and the sampling design (criteria for selection, size and representativeness of sample etc).
- How accurate is the ES scale? Like all scales, the ES scale is arbitrary with high, medium and low being matters for professional judgement. In a remarkable statement, Hattie notes the values of ES used by Cohen and then comments that "the results in this book *could suggest* $d=0.2$ (where $d=ES$) for small, $d=0.4$ for medium and $d=0.6$ for large when judging educational outcomes" (p. 9, emphasis added). This shows the arbitrary, subjective and approximate nature of the scale used and the similar nature of statistical conventions agreed by researchers.

In light of the above comments, an example of interest to most teachers is that of class size. Hattie reports that a small effect size of $d=0.10 - 0.20$ is obtained when class sizes are reduced from 25 to 15. This suggests that costly reductions in class sizes have little effect on student learning, an argument likely to be supported by many policy makers. However, Hattie discusses some possible reasons for this finding. He notes the need to change teaching strategies when class sizes are reduced and the different concepts of good teaching in larger versus smaller classes such as the type of differentiated learning

that can be established with small group work as distinct from teaching to the whole class. Hattie does not mention the different epistemologies that become possible with small class sizes, including different philosophical views of mathematics, science, language and the like that may involve much more community and cultural experience in ways not feasible with larger numbers of students. For example, maintaining essentially the same positivist and behaviourist approach to mathematics in a class of 30 compared with a class of 20 will most likely not result in improved learning. Under these circumstances, the measure of effect size is highly dubious.

The issue of class sizes demonstrates an inherent weakness of the ideology of effect size and of educational statistics generally. Imagine a teacher taking a Year 7 science class with 30 students. The teacher considers a topic as agreed by the science team, the previous sessions conducted with the class and how they are approaching science, the ways in which the key ideas of the next lesson can be raised and explored by young students, the type of experiments to be conducted and suggested learning outcomes. When introducing the topic, the teacher will take many background factors into account and will constantly make professional judgements as the lesson unfolds. When particular students or groups of students do not seem to be connecting with the assigned tasks, unplanned strategies will be applied. Towards the end of the lesson, the teacher will judge what progress has been made and how to review the lesson in preparation for the next. Clearly, it is impossible to keep all these variables exactly the same for another class while reducing student numbers to 20 as the only change. This is the inherent diversity and complexity of classrooms.

In his final chapter, Hattie discusses a number of factors regarding research and schooling. His comments are balanced and provide a useful framework by which teachers can consider his work. He notes, for example, that only meta-analyses have been included and that "a review of non-meta-analytic studies could lead to a richer and more nuanced statement of the evidence". (p. 255). He concludes that:

In many classrooms and schools, there is evidence of low effect sizes, reliance on poor methods and strategies, a dependence on 'war stories' and anecdotes and an agreement to tolerate different and sometimes poor teaching. We beseech these teachers to be evidence-based but so many government agencies and departments, teacher educators and others are not evidence-based and seem reluctant to accept evidence if it is contrary to current policies.

There is little evidence to suggest that teachers are not evidence-based. Teachers have always taken a range of evidence into account to inform their teaching and curriculum

including research reports, journal papers, professional learning strategies, advice of experienced colleagues who know students well, classroom observations, tasks and projects, contact with families and communities and their own professional judgements. That is, they have taken a range of materials into account rather than merely one dominant data set.

For example, the 'Data Wise' (Boudett et al, 2010) materials produced at Harvard University are clear that use of the term "data" means "not only scores on high-stakes tests but also the broad array of other information on student skills and knowledge typically available in schools" (p. 2). Such data is analysed and interpreted collaboratively by teachers to form an action plan for student learning improvement. While it is correct to suggest that teachers have more centrally-generated evidence available to them than in previous times, it is not correct to impose such data as the only valid evidence that should underpin their professional judgement.

In their review of *Visible Learning*, Higgins and Simpson (2011) quote Eysenck (1978), who described "ill-conducted meta-analyses as 'an exercise in mega-silliness'". (p. 197) They conclude (p. 200) that:

We certainly applaud some of the intentions behind *Visible Learning*: synthesising evidence more widely and attempting to draw comparative implications can be of real value, particularly when trying to make cost-benefit analyses. However a more rigorous set of criteria needs to be developed to ensure the comparability of effect sizes (both in statistical and conceptual terms), the connection between research designs and coherence of the sets of studies before such an attempt can be made. When one starts combining results (even from well conducted meta-analyses) to determine meaning for 'educational significance,' we need to exercise a large amount of mega-caution.

These considerations show that effect size should be subject to rigorous critique and validity criteria, as are other measures of education, including statistical procedures. Effect size may provide some indication of effect but this needs to be elaborated by a range of qualitative data. The example of class size is telling whereby claims of low ES must be moderated by the complicated range of reasons for such a result. A serious problem arises when schools do not investigate the basis, assumptions and validity of statistics and, in this case, effect size, and accept the apparent truth of numbers in providing a comprehensive picture of their students.

The main point of this critique is to know the limitations of statistical analysis – and of individual research studies – and to recognise that there are always confounding factors when these findings are applied in a particular time and place. They are not exclusive and not intended to tell you about everything that is important for a particular setting but they do tell you to pay attention to the main finding as well as the other contextual factors.

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Interview: Diane Ravitch

On education reform

Interview by John Graham

JG The dominant "reform movement" in school education in Australia parallels that in the United States and has largely been derived from it. It revolves around "accountability" and the marketization of schooling - school competition and autonomy, test-driven curriculum, school league tables, teacher performance pay etc

I have read about your background and long involvement in education policy debates. At a certain point you changed from being a strong advocate of the choice and accountability agenda to being one of its most outspoken critics. Can you explain how and why you changed your viewpoint on these matters?

DR I was a strong advocate of incentives and sanctions as a matter of theory in the 1990s and early 2000s. The theory made sense, I thought, because people respond to incentives and sanctions. When the theory was turned into actual policy, when real incentives and real sanctions were established, I realized that the theory was terribly wrong. What we now called "test-based accountability" has so many negative consequences that it undermines education, destroys teacher morale, and turns schooling into little more than preparation for testing.

The theory seemed to make sense. The reality is horrible. And that is why I began to recant my former views about four to five years after the passage of No Child Left Behind and became an active opponent of test-based accountability with the publication of "The Death and Life of the Great American School System: How Testing and Choice Are Undermining Education." The book was published in 2010, but the views it expressed reflect the shift in my thinking as of 2007 forward.

JG Where did the "reform movement" come from and why has it become so influential?

Diane Ravitch is Research Professor of Education at New York University. From 1991 to 1993, she was Assistant Secretary of Education in the administration of President George H.W. Bush. From 1997 to 2004, she was appointed by the Clinton administration to the National Assessment Governing Board, which oversees the US federal testing program. She held the Brown Chair in Education Studies at the Brookings Institution and was Adjunct Professor of History and Education at Columbia University. She has received numerous awards and written and edited many influential education texts including *The Death and Life of the Great American School System: How Testing and Choice Are Undermining Education* (2010).

DR The demand for testing and standards began in the 1980s and was based in large part on an influential 1983 report called "A Nation at Risk." That report, which reflected the views of a federal commission, was alarmist and warned that the future of the nation was at stake because of the "mediocrity" of the schools. The report recited doleful statistics from international tests and called for all sorts of what now seem to be sensible reforms, like a stronger curriculum, higher graduation requirements, better teacher pay. There was very little about market solutions. Nevertheless, what the report created was a persistent demand by business leaders for change, and also a habit of blaming the schools for the economic problems of the moment. Governors saw education as their way to attract new industry and jobs. Between the business leaders and governors, a coalition was forged to demand higher test scores. And given that business leaders always believe in market solutions, we began to hear more about merit pay, and other ways of encouraging market ideas in education, both incentives and sanctions.

The passage of No Child Left Behind (NCLB) in 2001 seemed to be a high-water mark for the business-governor coalition; the law passed with overwhelming bipartisan support. It was all about imposing market discipline, demanding testing on a yearly basis from grades 3-8, and setting goals that were impossible (100% proficiency for ALL students by 2014). At the time, key senators told me that they knew the goal was impossible, but that it was "good to have goals." Many educators assumed the law would be revised. Unfortunately, the law was not revised, and many schools have been closed or privatized because they could not reach a goal that no one believed reasonable. Most of the schools punished thus far enrol large proportions of students who are poor and have a variety of needs, such as disabilities and inability to read or speak English. Yet despite the punitive and harsh reality, the law and the theory behind it (markets know best) have continued to be powerful and to have the support of government, large corporations, large foundations, and the major media. The ideas are simple and seemingly intuitive: Meet the targets or you will be labelled a "failing" school." If you "fail" to meet the target for five years, you will be sorely punished.

The punitive, harsh nature of NCLB was intensified by the program of the Obama administration, called Race to the Top (RTTT). RTTT is worse than NCLB, because it targets not only schools, but teachers as well. So now we have had for the past four years a loud chorus demanding that teachers must be punished. If they can't raise test scores, they must be named and fired. They must not have tenure, because tenure protects bad teachers. They should not have unions, because unions protect bad teachers. They must win rewards if the scores go up, and they must be fired if they don't.

This movement for testing and accountability has now turned into a full-blown attack on the very principle of public education. Large amounts of money are now spent by Wall Street hedge fund managers and by entrepreneurs to promote privatization through "charter schools" and in some states, vouchers. The goal is to have schools that are run by private individuals and boards, that are funded by government but free of most regulations. We now have thousands of charter schools, enrolling about five per cent of all students, and growing fast. Ninety per cent of these schools are non-union. They are free in many states to hire uncertified teachers. Some operate for-profit and are lucrative.

The next step in the movement is the creation and imposition of national standards, which will be tested by computer.

Many in the entrepreneurial sector see enormous potential for profit, selling new technology to solve problems or take over school functions. The business leadership are strong supporters of the so-called Common Core, which are the national standards that were developed with minimal public oversight and imposed by the Obama administration as a condition for receiving new federal funding of up to \$5 billion at the depth of the economic downturn in 2009.

JG Are there any signs that its influence has peaked in the US and that either at a federal, state or local government level new directions in education reform are now emerging?

DR There is now a vigorous opposition among teachers, administrators, local school boards, and parents to test-based accountability. In many local communities, in many states, there are groups organized to oppose high-stakes testing, which is the beating heart of test-based accountability. Many oppose the national standards, fearing a federal government takeover of state and local responsibility for education. Many parents are angered by the frequency of testing, which in some districts consumes as much as twenty per cent of the school year. Some of the annual tests take 10-12 hours, which are longer than college entrance exams or exams for the bar. And test preparation is a huge industry and time-consumer.

So it is true on one hand that the test-based accountability movement and the privatization movement continue to be very politically powerful. They have the full support of the Obama administration, so it is difficult to find any prominent political figure who has opposed these movements, yet the popular opposition is strong and growing stronger daily. Students are resisting, teachers are resisting, parents are resisting. New organizations are forming.

Most hopeful is that everything this so-called reform movement does has failed. At some point, this repeated failure will become so obvious that the movement will become an object of ridicule. In my new book "Reign of Error: The Hoax of Privatization and the Danger to America's Schools", I patiently explain how the premises on which the movement are founded are a series of failed ideas and in some cases, outright hoaxes. It is a hoax to believe, for example, that the private sector can do a better job of educating children than the public sector; the only way it gets higher test scores is to exclude low-performing students, leading us to the creation of a dual school system, one for the strong, the other for rejects. Another hoax is the belief that inexperienced, poorly trained college graduates such as those in Teach for America will be better teachers than those with a year or more of preparation and long experience.

JG The role of public education in Australia has been under threat for some time. Government policies and the political leverage of pro-private school lobby groups and the media has seen an ongoing decline in the proportion of students in public schools. What is the situation of public schools in the United States? Is there a decline in the proportion of students in public schools? Has there been a growth in the private sector?

DR The privatization movement has operated in a clever way. They have opened "charter schools," which they call "public charter schools". They insist again and again that "charter schools are public schools", but in fact they are privately managed and operate with minimal or no regulation. So the privatization has taken place by deception in this manner. The deception has been aided by the fact that some of the charters are opened by progressive parents and educators trying to escape from the over-tested, hyper-regulated public sector. So to the public eye, the charter schools represent choice, which is a good thing. Some of the most successful are not at all progressive, but are actually copies of 19th century schools, where discipline is strict and children are expected to obey without questioning; these are known as "no excuses" schools, and they are flourishing in major urban districts, often with an all-black enrolment.

At the same time, there is a growing political push from right wing politicians and think tanks for vouchers, which allow families to use government funds to send their children to private and religious schools. For many years, vouchers seemed to be a dead issue, but with the Obama administration advocating for choice through charter schools, vouchers have returned from the dead, and there are now nearly twenty states that permit some form of voucher or tax credit for private school tuition.

JG Why is it important to have a strong public school system?

DR The public schools are a cornerstone of a democratic society. Their doors are open to all. They are supported by the public to achieve public goals. When one looks back at the 20th century, all the great social movements originated in public schools: racial desegregation began in the public schools and eventually radiated out into the larger society, transforming it from a racial caste system into one where blacks and whites could freely interact in many spheres of society; assimilation of diverse cultures and races began in the public schools; gender equity began in the public schools; inclusion of students with disabilities began in the public schools. None of these social movements would have had any traction had schooling been solely a private matter. Furthermore, as the schools become privatized, they become more stratified by race, income, and other factors.

JG *Governments in Australia have increasingly placed their faith (and rhetoric) in the concept of school "markets" as a means of improving education. They have been supported by various Australian education economists who often refer to their American counterparts (such as Eric Hanushek) as their research references. What are your views about school markets and the idea that they offer the best means to raise student achievement?*

DR I worked closely with Eric Hanushek at the Hoover Institution. His theories are speculative. He believes that firing the bottom 5-10 per cent of teachers will yield huge economic benefits to society, but there is no real-world evidence that this is true. No successful nation has achieved a great education system by a policy of firing teachers. Successful nations become successful by creating a strong and professional teaching force, one that is respected, enjoys professional autonomy, and is committed to continual professional growth.

Hanushek and other economists also argue that degrees don't matter, and some argue that experience doesn't matter. This is counterintuitive, as it is really an argument that education doesn't matter. Some government and business leaders like these ideas because it means schools can rely on inexpensive teachers, who come and go with frequency. This means lower costs, but common sense says it will not mean better education.

The economists have been very influential in pushing free market ideas, based on theory and speculation, but their ideas turn out not to work in reality. They also base their theories on test scores alone, which reduce education only to what is tested. They bear a good deal of the responsibility for the ineffective and harmful ideas that have been foisted on the schools in the past decade.

JG There is a strong push from many quarters in Australia to link student performance in national and international testing almost exclusively to the quality of the teaching profession. If there were 'better' teachers or the present teaching workforce was incentivised to improve their performance, the argument goes, then student achievement would rise. What is your view of this argument (as I know this same claim is often made in the US)?

DR We have heard this argument for the past several years. It gained national prominence with the advocacy of Arne Duncan, Michelle Rhee, and Joel Klein, but the reality is that they do not have a single example of a district that has achieved the miraculous results they promise. Certainly not the districts for which they were responsible: Chicago, Washington, D.C., and New York City. Student test scores reflect family income more than anything else; even Hanushek in his studies has estimated that the teacher affects about 7-15 per cent of test scores at most. Other economists have estimated that family accounts for about 60 per cent of test scores. I personally don't understand how economists determine what per cent of test scores should be attributed to home or family, but this much is certain: Every standardized test in the world reflects to a very large degree the socioeconomic status of the student's family. The advantaged students from affluent circumstances get the highest scores, and those from the poorest circumstances get the lowest scores. Although some poor students reach the top, and some rich students get low scores, on average the tests are a sure barometer of advantage and disadvantage. Our major college-entrance examination, known as the SAT, publishes a yearly report that shows the performance of students in relation to family income. The correlation is very close and tight: the richest students at the top, the poorest at the bottom.

When pundits and economists blame teachers for low scores, they are simply diverting attention from the obvious cause of low scores: poverty and disadvantage of various kinds.

Of course, teachers make a difference, and teachers can change children's lives. But the current demand to tie teacher evaluation to student test scores makes the tests far too important and leads to predictable negative consequences, such as narrowing the curriculum only to what is tested; teaching to the tests; gaming the system to inflate scores; and even cheating.

At the end of the day, teachers must insist that testing is not the be-all and end-all of education. When we think of the teacher who had the most profound effect on our lives, we think of the man or woman who challenged us, who inspired us, who gave

us the confidence to try new things and to believe in ourselves. We don't think of the teacher who raised our test scores.

JG More specifically, what is your view of performance pay/performance bonus schemes for teachers and principals and the Teach for America program (aka Teach for Australia here)?

DR Bonus pay schemes, aka merit pay, has been tried for nearly 100 years in the U.S. I trace its history in my new book. It has never worked. Never. In recent trials, conducted by economists, it has repeatedly failed.

JG Another idea which is being advocated by the State Government in Victoria, and by a number of education economists here, is the employment of business people who are not qualified teachers as principals to run schools. Is there something similar happening in America? What do you think about this idea and, in general, about what makes an effective school leader?

DR This is a terrible idea that has been popular over the past 10-20 years at the level of superintendent. Thus we got Arne Duncan as a superintendent, although he never taught, and Joel Klein, who never taught. Klein created a "Leadership Academy" to recruit newcomers and turn them into principals, but it was not successful. Not many districts are willing to hire business people as principals. As superintendents, yes, but not as principals. The idea in general is intended, like TFA, to say that education is not a profession, that anyone can do it. An effective school leader requires many qualities, but chief among them must be the experience of working in a school as a teacher, then as an assistant principal, learning the job.

JG An area of longstanding concern which has recently come into sharper focus through analysis of Australian school performance in national and international testing programs is the strong link between a student's home background and their academic achievement. My understanding is that similar equity concerns are central to education debates in the US. What do you think can be and should be done to improve the equity outcomes in school education?

DR In my new book, I go into detail about the ways to reduce the gap between advantaged and disadvantaged students. I can't recount them all here, along with the evidence, but in brief it means a strong program of prenatal care, which reduces disabilities and developmental delays; help for new parents to learn how to care for their child; early childhood education; reduced class size; a strong curriculum to encourage children to

grow and develop in many dimensions; assessment that asks students to demonstrate what they know and can do, through projects, essays, and portfolios of work, instead of expecting them to answer multiple-choice questions; and a strong education profession, composed of people who are well prepared for their work.

JG How would you describe a good school?

DR A good school should be measured not by the test scores it produces, but by the environment for learning that it creates. It is a place where adults and students are working towards common goals in an atmosphere of respect: respect for education, respect for adults, respect for children and families. It is a school that offers a full curriculum, including the arts, mathematics, languages, science, history, civics, and other studies. It is a school that encourages students to try out new ideas, to take risks intellectually, and that promotes a love of learning.

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This edition of Professional Voice moves away from the thematic approach we have used in the past and instead highlights quality writing that questions taken-for-granted ideas surrounding contemporary educational discourse.

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The autumn 2012 edition takes a broad look at equity issues. Alan Reid argues that governments have fallen in love with quick fixes and easy answers. Alan Smithers notes that choice and standards policies in England failed to increase equity because they were not part of a well-designed system. Tony Vinson says that investment in early years is not only the best investment we can make in society, it is a moral imperative.

PV 8.3: The National Agenda

This edition of PV casts a critical eye at the national schools agenda, from funding to curriculum to the new teacher standards. A strong line-up of writers includes Chris Bonnor, Alan Reid, and Lyndsey Connors. Also in this issue, part one of a major interview with leading US academic Linda Darling-Hammond.

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This edition of Professional Voice examines the relationship between schools and families - the ways and reasons why parents and carers are involved in schools and their role in teaching and learning.

PV 8.1: The NAPLAN Debate

The genesis of this Winter 2010 edition of Professional Voice was a national symposium held in Sydney in July.

Its title was "Advice for Ministers and ACARA on NAPLAN, the use of student data, My School and league tables".

Contributors include Alan Reid, Margaret Wu, Allan Luke and Brian Caldwell.

PV 7.2: Beyond Edu-Babble

With education policy paralysed by management speak and business cliches, Guy Claxton, Howard Gardner, Robin Alexander and others attempt to cut through the cant with fresh thinking on the challenges facing education.

PV 6.2: Early Years Education

The second of our three-issue survey looks at developments including the new early years framework, effective literacy programs and the national reform agenda, plus analyses of early intervention and phonics programs.

PV 6.1: Post-compulsory Education

This is the first of three issues each looking at different phases of the education continuum. Articles look at developments and issues in TAFE, higher education, technical and vocational education and training.

PV 4.1: Teacher Quality and Quality Teaching

Includes Andy Hargreaves on teaching in the knowledge society, and the implications for schools of globalisation; Leonie Rowan and Chris Bigum on the challenges of measuring quality in teaching and education; and Lyndsay Connors on the part that class still plays in education.

Global Education Reform Movement



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