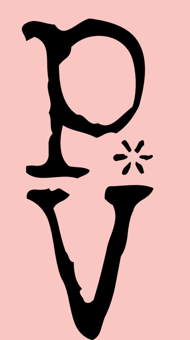

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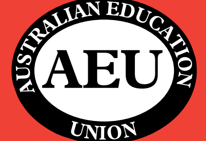

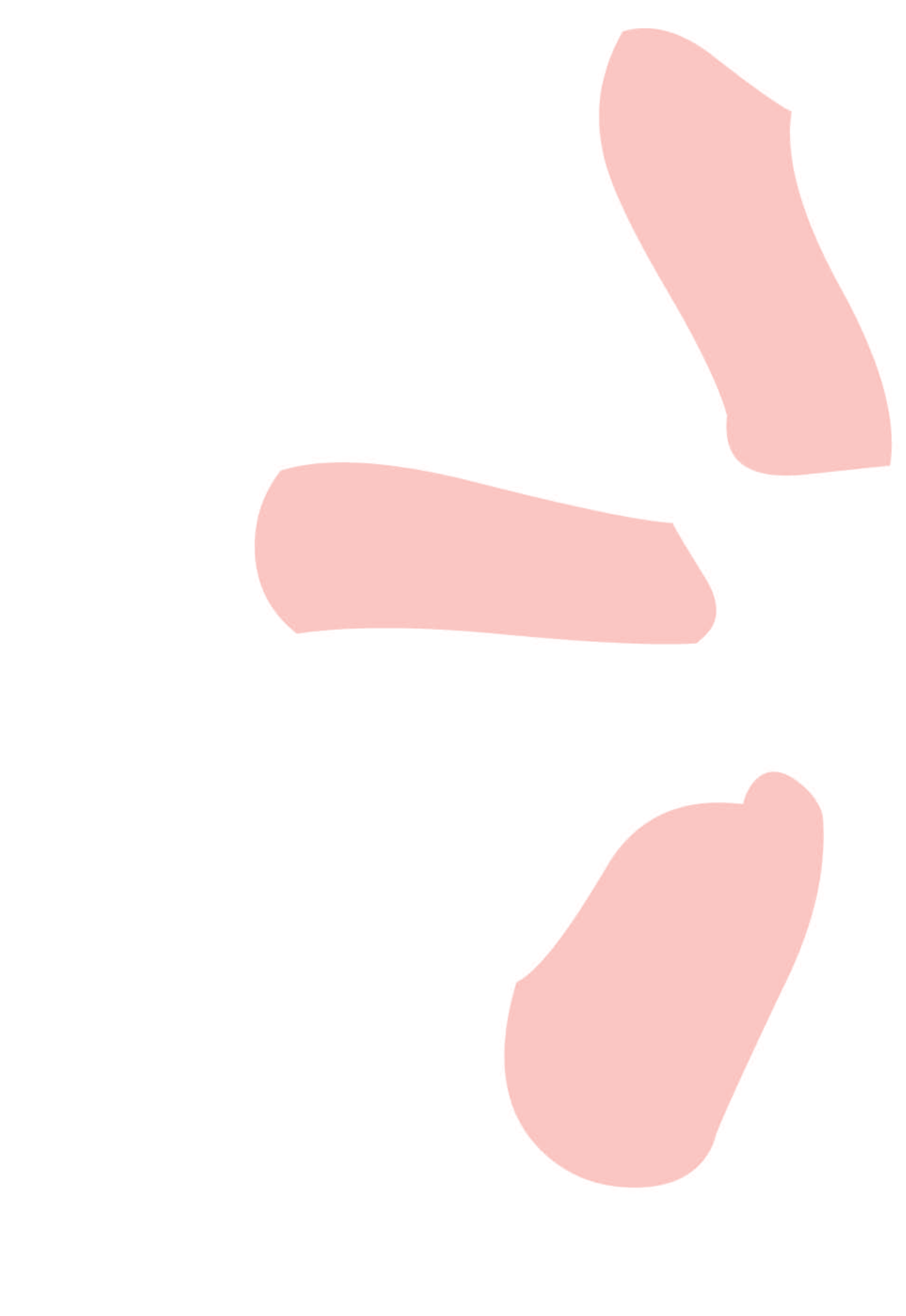

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Setting the National Agenda

MARY BLUETT

EVERY FEDERAL ELECTION is touted as critical for the nation's future, but it's fair to say that few in recent memory have held quite such significant implications as the poll expected later this year.

Prime Minister John Howard has made clear that the return of a Coalition government will mean far-reaching changes to the education system. For his part, Labor leader Kevin Rudd too has built an election platform around education. They do so against a backdrop of vigorous argument about the kind of education system we want to see.

This edition of *Professional Voice* is a contribution to that debate, setting out some of the issues at its centre, the challenges facing some of our education sectors and pulling apart some of the positions of the leading players. In particular, unashamedly, we have asked contributors to analyse elements of the Coalition's policies on education, because they appear to have the potential to alter the public school system most radically and most irreversibly.

Performance pay, standardised testing, league tables and a national curriculum are all part of a drive towards centralisation in the hands of one of the most ideological federal governments we have seen. The merits and disadvantages of centralising our

education systems can be debated long into the night, but it is surely a matter of deep concern that this could happen under a government mounting a sustained attack on the values and standards of public schools, with its talk of Maoist teachers and dumbed-down curricula.

The (Labor) state and territories are together developing their own version of these federal structures, but with a greater emphasis on collaboration and co-operation between governments. Meanwhile, the deliberate and accelerating shift in Commonwealth funding to private schools has decisively tilted the playing field away from public education.

John Graham, the AEU Victorian branch's research officer, sets out much of this ground in the opening article in this edition, with an analysis of the differing positions being taken by Canberra and by the states and territories.

Alan Reid pulls apart the arguments for a national curriculum and sets out the principles that should underpin it; while Terry Hayes, former president of the Victorian Association for the Teaching of English, puts the issue in context with a teacher's eye view of the culture wars.

After the debates about values and history teaching, performance pay appears to be the Coalition's new favoured battleground. American commentator Alfie Kohn argues convincingly here that performance pay is inherently flawed and divisive, on the evidence of attempts to introduce it in the US.

What of other sectors? The conductors of two recent AEU inquiries — Peter Kell and Kathy Walker — set out the challenges and dangers facing our preschool and post-school institutions. Kell argues that TAFE needs to undergo a process of renewal, while Walker calls for greater equity and access.

Finally, Frank Crowther challenges school leaders to grasp the reform agendas of Howard, Rudd et al and make them work. But he warns that success will require a new kind of leadership.

It's only too tempting to conclude that Australia might benefit from the same.

The future of schooling

The battle between Canberra and the states

JOHN GRAHAM

2007 IS A year when "national" issues will frame almost every debate in education. This is due to two related factors — the ongoing political struggle between the Coalition-run Federal Government and the Labor-run states and territories over control of education, and a looming federal election where both sides have identified education as a key political battleground.

In a federal system of government, such as Australia's, where there are no "clean lines" defining jurisdiction over areas of responsibility, there is an inevitable tension between the powers of the centre and those of its component parts. This arises even when the same political party is running all of the constituent governments. These tensions are exacerbated, however, when the government at the centre is held by one political party and all of the state governments are held by its political opponents. Such tensions and frustrations are further ratcheted up when this political stand-off continues over an extended period of time, and one party (Liberal) can win federal but not state elections and the other party (Labor) can only do the opposite.

The Howard Government spent its first eight years in office, in its eyes, with one arm tied behind its back. It lacked control of the Senate and therefore had to argue and cajole to get its prized policies into legislation. This meant that its relationship

with the "hostile" Labor states, while robust, was tempered by the exigencies of political compromise. Once it won control of both houses of Federal Parliament in 2004, the gloves came off: where formerly it had been willing to go along with a notion that "national" meant semi-cooperative federalism through structures such as Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA), its new Senate dominance was accompanied by an assertion that Commonwealth interest equals the national interest at the expense of the states.

The state and territory governments have been, until recently, fairly compliant in the face of federal government edicts executed through mechanisms such as tied grants. The impression is that of a federal government forcefully implementing its own education change agenda, and state governments acting defensively, attempting to alleviate its effects. This situation began to change last year when education moved further up the food chain and became part of the National Reform Agenda (NRA) through the peak federalist body — the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) comprising the Prime Minister, state premiers, territory chief secretaries and the President of the Australian Local Government Association. Education — specifically literacy and numeracy and early childhood education — was included in the "Human Capital" section of the NRA.

In April 2007 the states and territories through their own peak body, the Council for the Australian Federation, launched two "federalist" papers in an attempt to take the initiative away from the Federal Government and begin to re-balance the federal relationship. The first of these papers looks at the economic and social advantages of a federal form of government, as compared to centralised and unitary governments. It also outlines areas where reform is needed. According to the paper, one of the most urgent areas for improvement is the use of Commonwealth specific-purpose payments (tied grants) to the states. It estimates that up to 33 per cent of state budget outlays can be effectively controlled in this way. They are described as responsible for overlap, duplication, cost-shifting and the confusion of roles and responsibilities. The paper cites the Schools Quadrennial Funding Agreement as a perfect example of these inefficiencies:

> *...[it] is inflexible, imposes prescriptive and burdensome administrative requirements out of proportion to the funding received, is focused on inputs and processes rather than outcomes, and makes funding conditional on matters unrelated to education.*[1]

The agreement it refers to requires states to implement such matters as A-E reporting, flagpoles and the reporting of school performance data, as a condition of receiving Commonwealth funding.

The second federalist paper is entitled *The Future of Schooling in Australia*. It represents a schooling reform agenda from the states and territories "to reassert the importance of national collaboration to promote high-quality schooling for all Australian students"[2]. The crux of what the states want is contained in a 12-point national action plan:

- The development of a national curriculum with core content and achievement standards, starting with English, maths and science
- A plan to improve the capacity of schools to assess students in relation to national standards
- Full cohort national testing in literacy and numeracy and a cycle of sample-based testing in the other areas of the curriculum
- Reporting to parents of student performance in relation to national standards
- Establishment of new benchmark levels (minimum, medium and high attainment) in the national tests at Years 3, 5, 7 and 9
- Public reporting on school performance with a focus on value-adding
- Development of guidelines for best practice school leadership programs
- Recognition and rewards for "high-performing" teachers and principals
- Harmonising teacher registration around the country, initially focusing on pre-service teacher education courses
- Reduction of red tape regulations
- Working with the Commonwealth to reduce unnecessary reporting in the next four-year funding agreement with the states
- A biennial national forum to showcase innovative educational reforms from around the country.

On the surface, this agenda looks remarkably like that espoused by the Federal Government. Any difference between the states' national action plan and the Commonwealth's schooling policies would seem to lie in the unspelt-out details. For example, Action 8 (recognition and rewards for high-performing teachers and principals) could be seen as "performance pay" as espoused by the Federal Minister of Education, Julie Bishop. The states, however, rejected the federal minister's version of performance pay (based on student testing, parent/student opinion and a bonus pool) at the MCEETYA meeting in April and decided that they would further develop their own strategies to enhance career structures and share good practice. Similarly, Action 7 (guidelines for best practice school leadership programs) could, at a stretch, fit into the Federal Government's agenda to introduce hiring and firing powers for school principals in semi-autonomous public schools. There is no indication from the paper that this is one of the states' preferred options. It would clearly be counter to the systemic support policies of the Victorian Government and undermine the ethos of its extensive school leadership training programs.

In the above examples, the states' action plan targets the same areas of reform as the Federal Government (rewards for teachers, improved leadership) but does not necessarily reach the same conclusions about the way forward. The federal agenda is addressed by keeping the skin of the issue but removing most of its venom. This pattern is repeated in the other areas of action. The overall curriculum direction focuses on standards, testing and the development of core content for a national curriculum. A conservative program, while reflecting the hobby horses of the Howard Government, has generally been supported, at least for political reasons, by the states. There is nothing in the paper, however, to indicate that the states are in favour of putting the

curriculum clock back to the mythical 1950s. There is no indication that they share the Prime Minister's view that the curriculum has been "dumbed down" into a "relativist wasteland" or is just "fad schooling" and "incomprehensible sludge". There is no attack on the standards of achievement of Australian students or on the performance and values of public education.

While *The Future of Schooling* calls for a common core curriculum "to promote equity for all students", it must be "agreed" and have "the flexibility for states and schools to innovate and adapt and to share their experiences of what approaches achieve the best results"[3]. It asserts that international testing demonstrates that Australian school students "in general perform at high standards by comparison with other countries". The caveat is the long tail of the distribution and the comparatively strong link between low performance and socio-economic background. The paper rejects the Federal Government idea that this problem will be addressed by changing the standards embodied in the curriculum.

"Reforms and investments that can enhance the quality of teaching and learning of students are the remedy here, rather than prescribing curriculum from one source."[4]

The states' support for Action 6 (fair public reporting of school performance) is of greater concern, as it sounds like the Federal Government's support for market-based school league tables. The paper states that any such reporting of school performance should be based on a "value-added" model which would "disentangle the influence of the school from the influence of the social backgrounds of the students whom the school enrols"[5]. This sounds promising but the feasibility of doing this in a valid and reliable way is questionable and the paper talks vaguely about "paying attention to developments overseas". There is no credible evidence that any form of publicly available school league tables will enhance the quality of education at the individual school or in the system as a whole. There is evidence that they can have negative consequences for both. If there is to be public reporting of school performance, the "fairest" model would be a more sophisticated (value-added) version of the existing situation in Victoria where schools report only to their own communities.

A fundamental difference between the state and federal governments is that the former actually have to run public education systems. What happens in the schools in those systems can be sheeted home to state governments. State governments are responsible for providing buildings and equipment, employing teachers and meeting student needs and parental expectations. The Federal Government does none of this. It can "...exploit the uniqueness of the Australian federal system under which it has no direct responsibility for schools but is free to comment on, and to some extent intervene in, them. Few governments elsewhere in the world have the luxury, which [John Howard and his education ministers] have exploited to the full, of being able to criticise freely without being held responsible for the things they were complaining about."[6]

The relationship of the Federal Government to state schools has traditionally been at the level of government-to-government rather than at the individual institution level. However, measures such as literacy vouchers, the creation of Australian Technical Colleges and the direct funding of public school infrastructure indicate that it is seek-

ing to subvert this situation and more directly intervene in school administration. It is also increasingly using its funding powers to intervene indirectly in the management of public school systems. For example, the present requirement that all schools report to parents using A-E grades is a case of federal funding requirements micro-managing what happens in classrooms around the country. The 2007 federal budget continues this approach. All of the main measures affecting government schools were designed to manoeuvre around state governments to fund parents (extending literacy vouchers: $457 million), schools (performance bonuses: $53.2m) and teachers (summer schools: $101m) directly. The Federal Government has determined that its political advantage is best served by acting as though public school systems as such do not exist. The budget reveals that it is willing to spend $600m to achieve this end. The consequence is wasteful inefficiency and the further undermining of public systems of schooling across Australia.

The federal budget also contained the news that the next four-year funding agreement with the states will come attached to a federal straitjacket of performance pay for teachers, greater autonomy for school principals to hire and fire, and school league tables. These funding conditions are a deliberate snub to the states, which already rejected similar proposals at the April MCEETYA meeting. Because these measures come within the ambit of a federal election budget, a re-elected Howard Government will be able to claim that it has an electoral mandate for their introduction. The most reprehensible aspect of this "education" budget comes in the fine print; it reveals that the new demands on public schools will be accompanied by a fall in their share of Commonwealth funding from 34 per cent to 31 per cent over the next five years.

The fact that the Federal Government has to deal with Labor governments in every state and territory gives it more reason to try to impose its own ideology and less incentive to do so in a politically collaborative way. It can exercise power without responsibility and has increasingly defined the agenda for public schools in this way.

The state and territory governments have to weave their way around the Howard Government's onerous priorities. This means that their own agenda for reform is formulated as a reaction to what's coming out of Canberra rather than as a blueprint for opening up new educational opportunities and possibilities. The end result is a heated political debate and a stunted agenda for national education reform. A change of government in Canberra may be the only way forward.

NOTES

1. Twomey, A and Withers, G, *Federalist Paper 1, Australia's Federal Future: Delivering growth and prosperity,* Council for the Australian Federation, April 2007, p48
2. The States and Territories, *Federalist Paper 2, The Future of Schooling in Australia*, Council for the Australian Federation, April 2007, p6
3. Ibid, p20
4. Ibid
5. Ibid, p32
6. Graham, J and Martin, R, *Will National Consistency Raise Curriculum Quality?* Curriculum Perspectives, ACSA, Vol 26 No 3, Sept 2006, p61

National Curriculum Collaboration

– A case of déjà vu?

ALAN REID

IN THE PAST few years there has been a lot of curriculum activity at the national level. Most, but not all, of it has been initiated by the Federal Government, with the states and territories responding to a diverse range of initiatives emanating from Canberra. To the extent that there has been a debate about this national curriculum agenda, the focus has tended to be on the "content" of the various initiatives — A-E reporting, functioning flagpoles, consistency of learning statements, values, an Australian Certificate of Education, compulsory history and so on.

While the discussion around whether or not these are educationally desirable is important, it tends to mask another central aspect of the debate — the processes and structures of national approaches to curriculum. I want to argue that current approaches are a case of déjà vu, repeating the process and the mistakes of the past. If national approaches to curriculum are to make any headway, there is an urgent need to reassess these processes.

Elsewhere (Reid, 2005) I have suggested that the Federal Government began to take an interest in curriculum following its entrance into the school funding field in the 1960s. Approaches to national curriculum collaboration can be organised into

four broad periods ranging from indirect attempts by the federal government to influence state curricula through the development of teaching resources and professional development, to quite explicit attempts to manufacture uniformity across the country through initiatives like national statements and profiles in the early 1990s.

The current period began during Brendan Nelson's time as federal Education Minister, and is clearly interventionist using financial muscle. The states are forced to sign up to curriculum initiatives under threat of losing federal funds.

However, whether national curriculum approaches have been indirect or interventionist, they have rarely grabbed the educational imagination. While many professionally useful projects and resources have been developed and shared across the country, there has never been a consistent sense of a national collaborative effort, nor an excitement about the possibilities of national collaboration. In my view this is not only because the constitutional and political realities of Australian federalism tend to inhibit such work. It is also because the Federal Government and the states and territories have failed to consider the *principles* of curriculum development that might underpin such work.

In this paper I will draw from some of the previous attempts at national curriculum collaboration to propose a set of principles that might be a starting point for future work. I will suggest that many of the current activities fall well short of these principles.

PREVIOUS APPROACHES HAVE FAILED TO DEVELOP A RIGOROUS RATIONALE FOR NATIONAL CURRICULUM COLLABORATION

Attempts at national curriculum collaboration over the past 35 years have been justified on the basis of three major arguments. In my view these do not represent a powerful rationale — individually or collectively — for a national approach.

The first argument maintains that there is a need to promote greater consistency across education systems in order to benefit students required to transfer across state/territory boundaries. In 2003, for example, Dr Nelson pointed to the 80,000 students whose families move state each year and claimed that these students were disadvantaged. And yet, it is difficult to maintain an argument that an entirely new curriculum edifice should be created for the 3 per cent of students who are mobile. For a start there may be other, more powerful, ways to facilitate student transition, such as the introduction of student portfolios.

But more importantly, the mobile student argument is a technical one. It fails to offer guidance about the nature of the curriculum, which is the purpose of a powerful rationale. Supporting mobile students may be a side benefit of national curriculum collaboration; it should not be its raison d'être.

The second argument is economic: that it promotes efficiencies through the sharing of scarce resources across systems, such as curriculum materials and curriculum development. This view is flawed on a number of grounds, not the least of which is that it assumes a particular model of curriculum that requires standardised resources, and that the most efficient way to deliver such a curriculum is by centralising the production of these resources. Apart from being an impoverished view of curriculum,

such an argument can only be sustained if the nature of the resources is identified and justified. This may or may not suggest that there are economies of scale at a national level. It should be the curriculum arguments that drive national collaboration rather than the economic ones. That aside, the argument needs to be based on some empirical evidence that points to the level at which resource-sharing starts to become productive. Such evidence is not available.

The third argument has been more implied than argued in any substantive sense. It is that a national approach will help to produce a sense of national cohesion, a feeling that we are all Australians. Separate state/territory curricula can work against this aspiration, it is claimed. This argument holds some promise, because it provides a starting point for evaluating current curriculum approaches and for shaping new approaches. But it is undeveloped. Aside from rhetorical flourishes about national identity, the official arguments for a national approach fail to build a case in any substantial sense. In a globalising world, at a time when the nation-state is undergoing such fundamental changes, it is surely necessary to construct an argument about the purposes of education in the contemporary world in order to establish whether such purposes are best pursued through national collaboration — and, if so, what such an approach might look like.

Perhaps the most powerful way to understand the nature of these three arguments is to examine the language that has been used in the service of national curriculum collaboration over the past 35 years.

The dominant metaphor connecting the arguments has been that of the railway gauge: just as the various states and territories had different railway gauge widths in the 19th and early 20th centuries, resulting in time-wasting inefficiencies and the needless duplication of stock, so too the existence of many state curricula is wasteful and inefficient. The problem with this metaphor is that it reduces curriculum to a "thing", a product that can be standardised in order to get the country running on the same educational track. In my view, such an understanding of curriculum is conceptually flawed. A different metaphor is needed — one that captures the fluidity and diversity of contemporary times. In summary then, *a national approach to curriculum should be based on and consistent with a clearly articulated rationale*.

PREVIOUS ATTEMPTS AT NATIONAL CURRICULUM COLLABORATION LACKED A WELL-DEVELOPED THEORETICAL BASE

One of the surprising aspects of the national curriculum collaboration story is the fact that so many of the approaches and initiatives taken in its name have been based upon unstated assumptions about curriculum itself. This has resulted in approaches that have lacked theoretical substance, and that have simply recycled the dominant curriculum tradition and so been easily ignored or subsumed within existing practice.

Even if this has been adequate in the past it is surely not appropriate to meet the challenges of contemporary times. Three examples explain this point:

- **Previous approaches have failed to articulate a view of curriculum:** There are a number of possible views of curriculum, each of which shape particular

approaches and practices. National collaboration has been informed dominantly by an understanding of curriculum as product, although this is rarely enunciated. Thus, the majority of initiatives have involved producing teaching resources to support or influence the official curricula in the various states/territories, or constructing a single national official curriculum such as Statements and Profiles. The current version involves constructing national "learning statements". There would be nothing wrong with this focus on documentation if it occurred within an agreed broader and articulated view of curriculum. But in the absence of such an understanding, curriculum is rudderless, amounting to little more than a set of (unconnected) curriculum artifacts. In summary then, *a national approach to curriculum should be based on and consistent with a theorised and articulated view of curriculum*.

- **Previous approaches have lacked a research base and so been conceptually flawed:** All too often, decision-making about the official curriculum has been conducted as a political, rather than educational, exercise. Decisions are made, and often justified, on the basis of "practical" experience or "common sense", and theoretical and empirical research is dismissed as impractical or out of touch. Not only does such an approach sell the education profession short by denying that professional knowledge is anything more than accumulated experience, it also results in conceptually confused initiatives. In summary then, *a national approach to curriculum should be based on and consistent with a strong research and conceptual base*.
- **Previous approaches have failed to articulate philosophical reference points:** The process of curriculum-making cannot be conducted in a philosophical vacuum. It is more than a set of techniques or procedures. It involves making ethical, moral and value judgments, choosing between different purposes, and deciding on priorities. That is, curriculum work is not an objective and scientific endeavour, although it has its roots in a curriculum tradition that tried to make it so. Curriculum work must have a clearly articulated and coherent philosophical stance as a reference point for decision making. This is rarely articulated, leaving the philosophical assumptions to be inferred. In summary then, *a national approach to curriculum should be based on and consistent with clearly articulated purposes and philosophical reference points*.

PREVIOUS ATTEMPTS AT NATIONAL CURRICULUM COLLABORATION FAILED TO ARTICULATE A VIEW OF CURRICULUM CHANGE

The 35 years of attempts at national curriculum collaboration have largely been organised around traditional models of curriculum change. These involve decisions being taken at government level, development work being outsourced to education "experts", and the product being handed to teachers to implement.

The key aspect of this process is the classic split between conception and execution, with the conceivers and developers of the "product" usually not being the people charged with its execution or implementation. Sometimes the process of development

involves "consultation" with the implementers (ie, the teachers), but this consultation always occurs after the conceptual decisions have been made — that is, it involves consultation about means not ends; technical detail rather than conceptual issues.

What is the problem with this approach to curriculum change? Apart from the impoverished view of teacher professionalism it reflects, it is counterproductive to advancing national curriculum collaboration, for two reasons.

First, the model runs contrary to all that is now known about curriculum change — especially the fact that unless those who are expected to implement curriculum are engaged in the conceptualisation phase, the initiative will be either ignored or simply fitted within existing understandings/paradigms and shaped to reflect these. It is the process of thinking through the knotty conceptual issues that enables educators to challenge taken-for-granted assumptions, to recognise alternatives and to understand what is needed to make new approaches successful. *Clearly a national approach to curriculum should be based on and consistent with a process that engages the professional community in the conceptual phases.*

Second, the model fails to develop a deep constituency of support for new approaches. Rather than building exciting professional conversations about issues, problems and possibilities, and engaging teachers in the sort of professional dialogue that whets intellectual appetites and stimulates the circulation of ideas and the exchange of different viewpoints, the model shuts out the profession, pretending there to be certainty and right answers.

By excluding teachers and their professional associations from this professional dialogue, and limiting their involvement to a desultory and time-challenged consultation process, the model foregoes the building of professional support and commitment to national projects. People cannot identify with something into which they have had so little input. It is not going too far to say that it would be difficult for states and territories to resist approaches to national curriculum collaboration if the professional community was committed to them. And commitment comes from genuine, not superficial, involvement. In summary then, *a national approach to curriculum should be based on and consistent with a process that builds a constituency of support.*

PRINCIPLES FOR NATIONAL CURRICULUM COLLABORATION

In summary, I am arguing that a national approach to curriculum should be based on and consistent with the following principles:

- *Clearly articulated rationale, purposes and philosophical reference points*
- *A theorised and articulated view of curriculum*
- *A strong research and conceptual base*
- *A process that engages the professional community in the conceptual phases*
- *A process that seeks to build a constituency of support.*

When stated starkly like this, the principles appear blindingly obvious. And yet they have never been the basis of an approach to national curriculum collaboration. In my view, a number of the current national curriculum approaches also fall well short of being consistent with such principles. The children of the military and the old railway gauge metaphor are still being trotted out as the justification for a uniform

national approach; ideas such as the A-E report card are still being foisted on teachers with little chance for professional debate; and while curriculum work is proceeding apace, there is not an articulated view of what is meant by curriculum.

Until attention is paid to the processes and structures through which curriculum is designed and developed, the exciting possibilities that national approaches to curriculum could present will never be realised. We will simply have to endure another case of curriculum déjà vu.

NOTE

This article is based on a section of a DEST project published as: Reid, A. (2005) *Rethinking National Curriculum Collaboration: Towards an Australian Curriculum*, DEST, Commonwealth of Australia, Canberra, pp. 1-72, ISBN 0642775052, on-line version: **www.dest.gov.au/research/publications/national_curriculum/default.htm**

English teaching and the national curriculum agenda:

works in progress, but to what ends?

TERRY HAYES

> *Many of the fads and politically-correct fashions that have found their way into our schools undermine the quality of education. When television's* Big Brother *or a text message jostles with Shakespeare and classical literature for a place in the English curriculum, we are robbing children of their cultural inheritance.*

WHO SAID THAT, last February? Julie Bishop? John Howard? Kevin Donnelly? It was actually the Prime Minister when launching Kevin Donnelly's text, *Dumbing Down: Outcomes-based and politically correct – the impact of the Culture Wars on our schools*. But it could have been Julie Bishop at the National Press Club, or an extract from Donnelly's book. When it comes to commentary on subject English or literacy education by conservative politicians and their media acolytes, they are essentially reading from the same script. English teaching is going to the dogs. Kids can't read, can't spell, can't punctuate, can't write grammatically and know nothing about great literature. And whose fault is it? Ideologically driven teachers who prefer the pedagogy of whole language and critical literacy to systematic phonics instruction and the cultural transmission of "Australian" values.

As Brian Cambourne and Wayne Sawyer show in their contributions to *Only Connect: English teaching, schooling and community*, populist politicians and their ilk have been very adept over the years at manufacturing literacy "crises", and they do so with regular monotony. Drawing on the work of the cognitive linguist George Lakoff (*Don't Think of an Elephant*), Cambourne analyses a 2004 parliamentary speech by then federal education minister Brendan Nelson to demonstrate the way conservative politicians "frame" public debate in terms favourable to themselves. Nelson utilises a "common sense scientific rationality" metaphor to imply that, yet again, "scientific research" shows us that there is a literacy "crisis" that requires a "common sense" response from government to fix it. If, however, contrary research which challenges such a claim can be cited, Sawyer argues, that research is either ignored or demonised. We can already see this in the ways in which the PISA research undertaken by the OECD on the reading literacy of 15-year-olds — which rates Australia second only to Finland — is being white-anted. The PISA findings are "dubious" because they do not put enough weight on spelling and grammar as a test of "true" literacy.

The context for this latest litany of complaints about literacy and English teaching is the national curriculum agenda, an agenda which, if developed with due consideration for its educational implications, could have far-reaching implications for Australian society in the 21st century. As Alan Reid argues in a DEST research paper, *Rethinking National Curriculum Collaboration: Towards an Australian curriculum*, the starting point for national curriculum planning should be "the identification of the capabilities needed to live enriched lives and to participate actively in democratic life" (p45). Such capabilities, Reid suggests, would include: knowledge work, innovation and design, productive social relationships, active participation, intercultural understandings, interdependence and sustainability, understanding self, ethics and values, and communication and multiliteracies.

Unfortunately these kinds of legitimate concerns about national curriculum collaboration or consistency have been swamped by quite inappropriate populist ones about falling standards and teacher failings. A national curriculum, so the argument goes, will provide the Federal Government with an opportunity to lift both academic standards and the quality of teachers. Anyone who has any doubts about this being the way future deliberations on national curriculum will be characterised needs only to consider the terms of the hastily convened Senate inquiry on academic standards and school education, released in the same week as Bishop's speech and Howard's launch. The report is due to be released in August. Urgent, immediate Federal Government action on improving standards through a national curriculum will, no doubt, be recommended just in time for the election campaign.

If the above is the present and future rhetoric of the national curriculum agenda, what of the current political realities of national English and literacy education, as judged by two recent milestones, the *Teaching Reading* (Rowe) report, Nelson's "commonsensical" response to the latest literacy "crisis", and the DEST-commissioned ACER report, *Year 12 Curriculum Content and Achievement Standards*?

The Rowe inquiry was a response to astute lobbying by a group of educational

psychologists, concerned about the "crisis" created by whole language teaching, advocating systematic phonics instruction in primary schools. The report made 20 recommendations as to how this "crisis" might be remedied but, as Cambourne argued (*Idiom,* No 2 2006), their effect could be either a tonic or a toxin for literacy teaching and reading in primary schools depending on how they were interpreted and implemented. Judging from reports in *The Australian* (5 April, 6 April, 30 April), the score may well be Tonic: 1, Toxin: 0. The instigators of the report are not at all pleased about the fact that the one teaching resource developed to date to support the report's recommendations was by Curriculum Corporation. The resource favoured a constructivist approach rather than the intensive and systematic teaching of phonic skills of their preferred candidate, MULTILIT. However, if at first you don't succeed… Members of the original group have made a submission to the Senate inquiry complaining of the "unwillingness or the complete inability of federal and state governments to allow education policy to be determined by the best available scientific evidence on how to teach children to read" (*The Australian,* 30 April).

The DEST report on Year 12 curriculum and standards states some obvious facts about English at the senior levels, facts that would probably apply to English at any level. There is a fair degree of consistency among states and territories about the skills and understandings that senior English courses are intended to develop: communication in writing, understanding the role of context in text, understanding values, ideas and belief, making meaning through texts, and "an infinite number of ways of satisfying (such) curriculum objectives" (p32). A degree of commonality is provided by the organisation of the curriculum around text types and considerable ongoing debate within the profession about which text types should be included. The emergence of multimedia texts as legitimate objects of study jostles with a desire, among many teachers, to teach traditional text types such as novels, plays, poetry. The recent "English Lite" debate about reducing the number of such traditional texts for study is one manifestation of that debate. The authors of the report, possibly perplexed by the bewildering array of the possible in any English syllabus, wonder out loud: Have teachers been given too much choice over what to teach?

The real tension in any national curriculum collaboration for English teachers, however, is not a matter of which text types or specific texts to choose and which to leave out. It is more a matter that, as Malcolm Skilbeck implies, the closer "consistency" gets to requiring homogenised syllabuses — and the accompanying assessment procedures — the more problematic becomes the ability to "sustain the diversity, creativity and imaginative experimentation that are the bedrock of innovation" (*The Australian,* 14 March). Nor, is such "consistency" likely to address adequately the "diversity of the student population: ability, aptitude, interest, home circumstances and cultural background". It has been precisely these two criteria — the capacity for creativity and innovation in the making and analysing of texts and the diversity of the student cohort — that have been at the heart of English curriculum development. In Victoria at the senior level we have five "English" courses — English, ESL, Literature, Language, and Foundation English, not to mention the burgeoning Literacy

and Communications units in VET and VCAL. There are sound social, cultural and educational rationales as to why. Would Victorian English teachers be willing to give up this diversity that constitutes "senior English" for the sake of "consistency"? I doubt it. Would other states and territories recognise the Victorian diversity model as an apt one for their students?

What we do know is that, whatever the deliberations of the politicians, the English teaching community is ready to engage in the national curriculum agenda. One hopes that engagement will be at the conceptual rather than the consultative stages of the process for, as Reid suggests, the unsatisfactory nature of past attempts at developing a national curriculum can be sheeted home to a distrust, and marginalising, of teacher professionalism in that important conceptualising phase. However, given the early muttering of both Government and Labor I wouldn't count on it. The conservatives, as we know, prefer to handpick "expert" teachers for boards and inquiries. Labor puts its trust in the state educational bureaucracies and corporate research bodies such as ACER and Curriculum Corporation.

This is a pity, because English and literacy teachers, working through their national professional associations, the Australian Association for the Teaching of English (AATE) and the Australian Literacy Educators' Association (ALEA), have an excellent history when it comes to thinking nationally while acting locally. AATE, for example, has developed six Statements of Belief which are given tangible shape in the English curriculums of each state and territory. These beliefs affirm the profession's commitment to our cultural and literary heritages, to the study of the linguistic structure of English, to the study of contemporary cultures and the emerging multiliteracies of the new technologies, and to critical literacy and constructivist teaching, as well as English teachers' commitment to ongoing professional learning and collaborative learning communities. They have been reiterated in AATE's submission to the Senate inquiry. The recent AATE publication, *Only Connect*, referred to above, is a tangible example of how powerful an advocate the collective professional voice of English teachers and literacy educators can be in carrying the battle to the conservatives in Donnelly's Culture Wars. The STELLA standards project (**www.stella.org.au**) demonstrated how common agreement about professional standards for English/literacy teachers can be developed nationally if they are constructed around broad principles which allow for the diversity of local contexts in which to implement and demonstrate the standards. An example of true "consistency, not uniformity", to quote the current national curriculum mantra.

A basic subtext of all such work has been a recognition of the inherent dynamism of literacy and subject English. Neither can be defined or confined by static knowledge content or practices. The Luke-Freebody definition of literacy, quoted in the foreword to the STELLA project, recognises this inherent dynamism in the interrelationship between literacy as a repertoire of practices and the texts which are the grounds for those practices: "Literacy is the flexible and sustainable mastery of a repertoire of practices with the texts of traditional and new communications technologies via spoken language, print and multimedia." In 1995, at the AATE National Conference, Gunther Kress

invited the profession to re-imagine English: "In a period of intense change, (English teachers) have a duty to be involved in design: the design of socialities; of forms of economic life; of ideas of pleasure; and of value systems. English is the subject in which the resources for the design of the future are the stuff of everyday interaction" (*Only Connect*, p41). Writing 10 years later he asserts: "I feel certain now that a school curriculum needs a subject (English) in which meaning, value, style, ethics and aesthetics are *the* issue" (*Only Connect*, p30).

There are, I would suggest, synergies between a curriculum constructed with the Luke-Freebody definition of literacy in mind, Kress's English curriculum, and the kind of "capabilities curriculum" Reid posits as important for enabling young people to lead enriched lives as active citizens in a democratic society. They are certainly synergies I intend to point out to my English teaching colleagues and others in the months to come.

The FOLLY of merit pay

ALFIE KOHN

THERE'S NO END to the possible uses for that nifty little Latin phrase *Cui bono*?, which means: Who benefits? Whose interests are served? It's the right question to ask about a testing regimen guaranteed to make most public schools look as though they're failing. Or about the assumption that people with less power than you have (students, if you're a teacher; teachers, if you're an administrator) are unable to participate in making decisions about what they're going to do every day.

And here's another application: *Cui bono* when we're assured that money is the main reason it's so hard to find good teachers? If only we paid them more, we'd have no trouble attracting and retaining the finest educators that — well, that money can buy. Just accept that premise, and you'll never have to consider the way teachers are treated. In fact, you could continue disrespecting and de-skilling them, forcing them to use scripted curricula and turning them into glorified test-prep technicians. If they seem unhappy, it must be just because they want a bigger paycheck.

In 2000, (research organisation) Public Agenda questioned more than 900 new teachers and almost as many college graduates who didn't choose a career in education. The report concluded that, while "teachers do believe that they are underpaid", higher salaries would probably be of limited effectiveness in alleviating teacher shortages because considerations other than money are "significantly more important to

most teachers and would-be teachers". Two years later, 44 per cent of administrators reported, in another Public Agenda poll, that talented colleagues were being driven out of the field because of "unreasonable standards and accountability".

Meanwhile, a small California survey, published in 2002 in *Phi Delta Kappan*, found that the main reason newly credentialed teachers were leaving the profession was not low salaries or difficult children. Rather, those who threw in the towel were most likely to cite what was being done to their schools in the name of "accountability". And the same lesson seems to hold cross-culturally. Mike Baker, an education correspondent for BBC News, discovered that an educational "recruitment crisis" exists almost exclusively in those nations "where accountability measures have undermined teachers' autonomy".

That unhappy educators have a lot more on their minds than money shouldn't be surprising in light of half a century of research conducted in other kinds of workplaces. When people are asked what's most important to them, financial concerns show up well behind such factors as interesting work or good people to work with. For example, in a large survey conducted by the Families and Work Institute in the US, "salary/wage" ranked 16th on a list of 20 reasons for taking a job. (Interestingly, managers asked what they believe matters most to their employees tend to mention money — and then proceed to manage on the basis of that error.)

Educational policymakers might be forgiven their short-sightedness if they were just proposing to raise teachers' salaries across the board — or, perhaps, to compensate them appropriately for more responsibilities or for additional training. Instead, though, many are turning to some version of "pay for performance". Here, myopia is complicated by amnesia: for more than a century, such plans have been implemented, then abandoned, then implemented in a different form, then abandoned again. The idea never seems to work; but proponents of merit pay never seem to learn.

Here are the educational historians David Tyack and Larry Cuban: "The history of performance-based salary plans has been a merry-go-round. In the main, districts that initially embraced merit pay dropped it after a brief trial." But even "repeated experiences" of failure haven't prevented officials "from proposing merit pay again and again".

The leading advocates of this approach — conservatives, economists and conservative economists — insist that we need only adopt their current incentive schemes and, this time, teaching really will improve. Honest.

Wade Nelson, a professor at Winona State University, dug up a government commission's evaluation of England's mid-19th century "payment by results" plan. His summary of that evaluation: schools became "impoverished learning environments in which nearly total emphasis on performance on the examination left little opportunity for learning". The plan was abandoned.

In *The Public Interest*, a right-wing policy journal, two researchers concluded with apparent disappointment in 1985 that no evidence supported the idea that merit pay "had an appreciable or consistent positive effect on teachers' classroom work". Moreover, they reported that few administrators expected such an effect "even though they had the strongest reason to make such claims".

To this day, enthusiasm for pay-for-performance runs far ahead of any data supporting its effectiveness — even as measured by standardised-test scores, much less by meaningful indicators of learning. But then that, too, echoes the results in other workplaces. To the best of my knowledge, no controlled scientific study has ever found a long-term enhancement of the quality of work as a result of any incentive system. In fact, numerous studies have confirmed that performance on tasks, particularly complex tasks, is generally lower when people are promised a reward for doing them, or for doing them well. As a rule, the more prominent or enticing the reward, the more destructive its effects.

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So why are pay-for-performance plans so reliably unsuccessful, if not counterproductive?

1. Control. People with more power usually set the goals, establish the criteria, and generally set about trying to change the behaviour of those down below. If merit pay feels manipulative and patronising, that's probably because it is. Moreover, the fact that these programs usually operate at the level of school personnel means, as Maurice Holt has pointed out, that the whole enterprise "conveniently moves accountability away from politicians and administrators, who invent and control the system, to those who actually do the work".
2. Strained relationships. In its most destructive form, merit pay is set up as a competition, where the point is to best one's colleagues. No wonder just such a proposal, in Norristown, Pennsylvania, was unanimously opposed by teachers and ultimately abandoned. Even those teachers likely to receive a bonus realised that everyone loses — especially the students — when educators are set against one another in a race for artificially scarce rewards.

   But pay-for-performance programs don't have to be explicitly competitive in order to undermine collegial relationships. If I end up getting a bonus and you don't, our interactions are likely to be adversely affected, particularly if you think of yourself as a pretty darned good teacher.

   Some argue that monetary rewards are less harmful if they're offered to, and made contingent on the performance of, an entire school. But if a school misses out on a bonus, what often ensues is an ugly search for individuals on whom to pin the blame. Also, you can count on seeing less useful collaboration among schools, especially if an incentive program is based on their relative standing. Why would one faculty share ideas with another when the goal is to make sure that students in other schools don't do as well as yours? Merit pay based on rankings is about victory, not about excellence. In any case, bribing groups doesn't make any more sense than bribing individuals.
3. Reasons and motives. The premise of merit pay, and indeed of all rewards, is that people could be doing a better job, but for some reason have decided to wait until it's bribed out of them. This is as insulting as it is inaccurate. Dangling a reward in front of teachers or principals — "Here's what you'll get if things

somehow improve" — does nothing to address the complex, systemic factors that are actually responsible for educational deficiencies. Pay-for-performance is an outgrowth of behaviourism, which is focused on individual organisms, not systems — and, true to its name, looks only at behaviours, not at reasons and motives and the people who have them.

Even if they wouldn't mind larger pay cheques, teachers are typically not all that money-driven. They keep telling us in surveys that the magical moment when a student suddenly understands is more important to them than another few bucks. And, as noted above, they're becoming disenchanted these days less because of salary issues than because they don't enjoy being controlled by accountability systems. Equally controlling pay-for-performance plans are based more on neoclassical economic dogma than on an understanding of how things look from a teacher's perspective.

Most of all, merit pay fails to recognise that there are different kinds of motivation. Doing something because you enjoy it for its own sake is utterly unlike doing something to get money or recognition. In fact, researchers have demonstrated repeatedly that the use of such extrinsic inducements often reduces intrinsic motivation. The more that people are rewarded, the more they tend to lose interest in whatever they had to do to get the reward. If bonuses and the like can "motivate" some educators, it's only in an extrinsic sense, and often at the cost of undermining their passion for teaching.

For example, a recent study of a merit-pay plan that covered all employees at a north-eastern US college found that intrinsic motivation declined as a direct result of the plan's adoption, particularly for some of the school's "most valued employees — those who were highly motivated intrinsically before the program was implemented". The more the plan did what it was intended to do — raise people's extrinsic motivation by getting them to see how their performance would affect their salaries — the less pleasure they came to take in their work. The plan was abandoned after one year.

That study didn't even take account of how resentful and demoralised people may become when they don't get the bonus they're expecting. For all these reasons, I tell Fortune 500 executives (or at least those foolish enough to ask me) that the best formula for compensation is this: pay people well, pay them fairly, and then do everything possible to help them forget about money. All pay-for-performance plans, of course, violate that last precept.

4. Measurement issues. Despite what is widely assumed by economists and behaviourists, some things are more than the sum of their parts, and some things can't be reduced to numbers. It's an illusion to think we can specify and quantify all the components of good teaching and learning, much less establish criteria for receiving a bonus that will eliminate the perception of arbitrariness. No less an authority than the statistician-cum-quality-guru W Edwards Deming reminded us that "the most important things we need to manage can't be measured".

It's possible to evaluate the quality of teaching, but it's not possible to reach consensus on a valid and reliable way to pin down the meaning of success, particularly when dollars hang in the balance. What's more, evaluation may eclipse other goals. After merit-pay plans take effect, administrators often visit classrooms more to judge teachers than to offer them feedback for the purpose of improvement.

All these concerns apply even when technicians struggle to find good criteria for allocating merit pay. But the problems are multiplied when the criteria are dubious, such as raising student test scores. These tests, as I and others have argued elsewhere, tend to measure what matters least. They reflect children's backgrounds more than the quality of a given teacher or school. Moreover, merit pay based on those scores is not only unfair but damaging if it accelerates the exodus of teachers from troubled schools where they're most needed.

School-wide merit pay, again, is no less destructive than the individual version. High stakes induce cheating, gaming, teaching to the test, and other ways of snagging the bonus (or dodging the penalty) without actually improving student learning. In fact, some teachers who might resist these temptations, preferring to do what's best for kids rather than for their own wallets, feel compelled to do more test prep when their colleagues' pay cheques are affected by the school's overall scores.

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It may be vanity or, again, myopia that persuades technicians, even after the umpteenth failure, that merit pay need only be returned to the shop for another tune-up. Perhaps some of the issues mentioned here can be addressed, but most are inherent in the very idea of paying educators on the basis of how close they've come to someone's definition of successful performance. It's time we acknowledged not only that such programs don't work, but that they can't work.

Furthermore, efforts to solve one problem often trigger new ones. Late-model merit-pay plans often include such lengthy lists of criteria and complex statistical controls that no one except their designers understands how the damn things work.

So how should we reward teachers? We shouldn't. They're not pets. Rather, teachers should be paid well, freed from misguided mandates, treated with respect, and provided with the support they need to help their students become increasingly proficient and enthusiastic learners.

Towards a principled future for TAFE in Australia

PETER KELL

TAFE AND MORE broadly vocational education in Australia now occupy a place in debates around education and training that has given this sector a new profile. In a stunning convergence of opinion, there is general agreement between industry, government, employers, teachers and unions that the system is badly in need of reform. Most attention is directed to the need to respond to a skills shortage that has been attributed as a failing in the training system to turn out qualified workers.

The metaphor of a skills shortage has dominated the discussion of vocational education in the media and by politicians. Skills shortages have been identified across the spectrum of occupations with concern about the inability of employers to get skilled people in what have been labeled traditional trades and a shortage of apprentices. The public training system is generally identified as being the problem here, neatly concealing some of the other reasons such as poor wages, poor support for apprentices and trainees, poor working conditions and limited career prospects that have reduced the appeal of many occupations.

While the "skills shortage" debate has highlighting the long-term neglect of the VET system by state and federal governments, it has also obscured some long term issues in and the need for a firmer commitment to the role of TAFE. There is a failure to support a role for TAFE, as both the Federal Government and several state Labor

governments prefer to view it as just another training provider in a market.

While VET is the subject of growing demands for change, there is a frustration that much of the rhetoric of reform and change coming from Canberra is really just more of the same. It assigns a mythical quality to the training market and a faith in industry to know what it wants and an ability to drive training. After over 10 years of this rhetoric we now have almost universal recognition of the need for change; the training market and reliance on industry to drive the agenda have failed to produce a workforce for the future. New ideas are needed and these are often well expressed by teachers, employers, students and members of communities where education and training are valued as an important social asset.

The TAFE Futures inquiry was conducted in 2006 and involved consultations across the country with the people who make TAFE work. It engaged people such as teachers and students who too often have been left out of government and industry reviews about training. The inquiry generated a great deal of interest as it travelled across the country and conducted open sessions and forums to consult a range of people and communities. Its findings contain some interesting ideas for the future of the Australian VET system that policy makers and future governments need to consider.

WORKING TOWARDS A PRINCIPLED FUTURE FOR TAFE.

TAFE Futures found significant support for a role for TAFE as the major public provider of training. In many communities TAFE was seen as a major asset to the community and a source of economic prosperity and social stability. Even the strongest and most trenchant critics of TAFE conceded it played a valuable role.

Rather than being confronted with negative and nostalgic views about TAFE, the inquiry found a sense of optimism and willingness among participants to respond to change. The inquiry found strong support for TAFE emerging from the training partnerships that have been forged with schools, universities and locals councils. It is clear that TAFE is most effective when it has strong partnerships and works in collaboration with schools, universities, employers, community groups and government. Far from the often negative and dated images of TAFE that have been part of the Federal Government's attack on public education, the inquiry found in many instances a vibrant and creative organisation with many passionate and professional people working towards a role for TAFE as a public provider of first choice.

There was frustration that these changes, and the role of TAFE as a public provider, are not recognised more widely and that politicians, policy makers and some TAFE bureaucrats fail to assign it a role as the training provider of first choice. There was almost universal concern that Australia was under-investing in VET — that the skills shortage was a legacy of funding cuts and the failure of so-called training markets. The "more with less mentality" that characterized the way education and training were being conducted under the market-based approach was strongly criticised. People from all walks of life argued that Australia's economic and social wellbeing would be largely determined by a boost in government funding to education and training and more particularly that this needed to be directed to TAFE.

People also expressed frustration with the way state and federal governments evaded responsibility for TAFE, assigning blame to each other. They expressed a belief that more cooperative relationships between all governments are essential to the success of TAFE. This included local government, which emerged as one of the most common and most effective partners with TAFE, particularly in regional Australia.

Traditionally TAFE has been seen as a cost effective option for training and it has had a strong history of promoting access and equity through free courses or exemptions. As a consequence of the growth of the training market, the inquiry found an escalation of fees and charges and reduction in options for exemptions. Fees and charges have grown without any rationale for the pricing levels and these have directly impinged on the opportunities that people have to undertake and access training. Charges as high as $13,000 were common and out of reach of many people, particularly the working poor who may not qualify for exemptions. The valuable access and social justice role that TAFE was created to fulfil has being placed in jeopardy by a user-pays mentality. This shift to cost recovery was happening at a time when students were struggling to make ends meet and there was growing evidence of TAFE students living in poverty and being subject to homelessness, depression and alienation.

The TAFE Futures inquiry recommended a set of principles that identified a role for TAFE, the responsibility of governments to TAFE as well as commitments to the access to training and education and the costs of training. These represented a shift from the market ideology to a commitment to a principled training system.

Principle 1: TAFE is endorsed by all governments in Australia as the nation's "first choice" public provider of vocational education and training.

Principle 2: TAFE provides education and training across the full spectrum of post-compulsory education. It works in partnership with, and in, secondary schools, universities, other further education providers, commerce and industry. It engages in community development programs to meet the need for both broad general education as well as vocational and technical education.

Principle 3: TAFE is funded by all governments to provide a comprehensive educational and training experience for students using professionally qualified teachers, managers and support staff and providing high quality and safe student services, equipment and facilities to enable learning that is relevant, appropriately resourced and connected to the broad learning needs of students, the community and industry.

Principle 4: TAFE actively and vigorously promotes the access of all Australians to education and training around the following propositions:

1 No Australian student should be refused access to TAFE because they cannot afford course fees or the costs associated with their training.
2 No Australian resident should be refused access to high quality English language teaching on the basis of cost, limitations of hours or location.
3 Every Australian requesting education and training in TAFE must be provided with an appropriate program by TAFE that accounts for their locality, their previous learning background, and their health and social circumstances as well as their learning needs.

Principle 5: TAFE teaching is recognised as an autonomous profession with fair employment conditions and qualifications appropriate to the status of a profession. The nature and character of TAFE teachers' relationships with their employing bodies reflects that professional status.

Principle 6: Australian governments work in a consultative and cooperative manner with the community, teachers, students, industry and trade unions to support TAFE in fulfilling these principles.

These principles identified the way in which government and TAFE should integrate in more productive and collaborative ways with a recognition of TAFE being the provider of "first choice".

WAVES OF CHANGE IN A FUTURE TAFE

The TAFE Futures inquiry also identified some important changes that needed to happen to capitalise on what were seen by participants as opportunities for TAFE to enhance its status. These changes are expressed as five waves of change, summarised here.

Wave 1: A renewed organisational rationale for TAFE

Many participants saw TAFE as being a post-compulsory education and training provider that spanned the school sector and universities and also included general education, vocational and technical education. This suggested a reshaping of the institution, with a broader organisational role that enabled an engagement with industry, community and individuals in a more holistic way. This requires a new form of institution, with a better link between economic development and training, where TAFE works cooperatively with the community and industry partners to generate planning for training that links with local industry and community needs. This enhanced role will assist TAFE become a provider of first choice.

Wave 2: A renewed relationship with the learner

A key consequence of the training market was a paradox, whereby there was considerable talk about the client but an absence of concern about meeting the needs of learners. TAFE Futures suggests that learners' needs are diverse and that the learning goals of TAFE students are generally formulated in consultation with their families, employers and community members. TAFE Futures proposes that TAFE should assist people in the planning process with a form of educational planning called TAFE Life Long Learning plans. It is proposed that these be called TAFE 3LPs. This would put TAFE at the forefront of people's decision-making about their training and education options.

Wave 3: A renewed commitment to access for all in TAFE

The consequence of the training market has been a reduced commitment to access and equity in TAFE at a time when basic and foundational education occupies an important role. TAFE was seen as its own worst enemy by cutting equity programs at a time when the way out of entrenched poverty and unemployment was education and training qualifications and work experience. TAFE fees and charges remain one of the biggest barriers to attaining this and much needs to be done to respond to student poverty and to support students to undertake what they see as life-changing study.

Wave 4: A renewed professionalism for teaching in TAFE

Teaching in TAFE is not a homogenous and unskilled occupation but a profession with a strong culture of innovation and change as teachers respond to a diversity of learners and the new settings of learning in the workplace and in virtual classrooms. TAFE Futures identified how the training market had eroded a sense of profession through casualisation and perspectives on learning that saw teaching as an instrumental and unreflective production line process. TAFE Futures suggested a renewed commitment to professionalising TAFE teaching with a recognition of its value and the development of real career options that reward and recognise teaching as well as leadership. To promote a more reflective practice, the inquiry also proposed the establishment of an Australian Institute of TAFE. This would be run and managed by TAFE teachers, with the task of promoting improved practice, reflection on teaching and learning issues and the exchange of ideas. The activities would be broad and include areas such as Indigenous education and technical and trades teaching, and would take a national perspective.

Wave 5: A renewed resource and funding strategy

Participants in the TAFE Futures consultations recognised that no improvement can be achieved without a boost in the quantum of resources and the funding of TAFE and the way in which they are distributed. Under-investment and neglect by the Federal Government need to rolled back. Low-cost delivery responses that have typified TAFE as a consequence of the training market need to be replaced with funding processes that promote innovation and change and facilitate alliances and partnerships between industry and TAFE. Some proportion of funds needs be unlocked for local negotiation with some of TAFE's industry and community partners. More funds need to be directed towards student services, student learning needs and supporting students in their courses and addressing the challenges of student poverty. Perhaps most importantly, resources need to ensure that TAFE teaching is an autonomous profession with fair employment conditions and that TAFE teaching has the appropriate status and qualifications of a profession.

Responding to these waves of change is crucial to ensuring that Australia has a principled and effective provision of vocational education and training, with TAFE occupying the role of provider of first choice for the education and training needs of future generations.

Where does preschool education sit in a national curriculm?

KATHY WALKER

IN 2004, I conducted the independent national inquiry into preschool education, *For All Our Children*. It was the first national perspective to attempt to ascertain children's access to a preschool year in the year before they commenced school. While this was the major focus of the inquiry, a number of other key issues about children's early education were raised and noted.

Across the country, preschool education was and still is in degrees of disarray: fragmentation, no national perspective, an unwillingness by the Federal Government to take responsibility for it, and, in some states, the incredibly high cost of preschool resulting in access across Australia being anything but equitable. Many children throughout the country are missing out on this particular year, which is internationally noted in many key studies as one of the most fundamental years in a child's development, with an impact on children's learning, life opportunities and wellbeing well into the primary years.

Three years since the inquiry was undertaken, not much has changed. However, interestingly, in relation to primary and secondary education, discussions and debates have recommenced about national curricula, national standards, and performance pay for teachers.

It is important to reflect upon how these issues are interrelated. It seems ironic to

suggest that while on the one hand there is discussion about the possible benefits of a national curriculum, some states of Australia such as Victoria don't even recognise preschool eduction as part of the education system. The gap in curriculum and pedagogy that exists between preschool and primary education in Victoria is extraordinary. The lack of a seamless curriculum — between one year and the next in Victoria, let alone consistent with the rest of the country — reflects a narrow approach to curriculum interpretation and a naïve approach to preschool education.

This has important implications for issues such as a national curriculum. It might mean that in some states, where preschool education is part of the education department, a national curriculum may have the opportunity to link preschool and school more holistically and consistently across the country. If this is the case, many parents who move between states and territories and report how confusing they find the differences between states in relation to entry age, preschool curriculum, terminology, expectations, curricula, assessment and reporting may find this leads to an improvement. However, in states such as Victoria, where preschool education sits within another government department, there will still be no provision to link either funding, curriculum or consistent approaches between preschool and school.

In these circumstances it is the child and the family who continue to get caught in a system that is out of touch with the rest of the country and more importantly, currently refuses to recognise the importance of early childhood professionals across preschool and school actually sharing a curriculum.

A national curriculum itself is an interesting consideration. While the debate continues to rage, very little has been done to define what a curriculum actually means. It is often misinterpreted to mean syllabus, which is the actual bits and pieces that have to be taught. The true meaning of curriculum is much richer, broader and inclusive than a syllabus. Curriculum provides the basis for identifying the key principles and practices that are important to facilitate a child's education. This goes beyond the traditional aspects of literacy and numeracy to include the whole child, and their social, emotional, cultural and social lives.

Obviously, how they are interpreted and used depends not so much upon a one-size-fits-all approach. but rather upon the particular set of circumstances, culture, economics and experiences and needs of the children and families in any one part of the country. National curriculum doesn't have to mean exactly the same application or interpretation. This is one of the elements that is missing to date in the discussion.

Additionally, a national reporting or standards approach to education itself doesn't equate to sameness. This is where we appear so naïve and backward in our discussions. How could any system, any computer program, any form of assessment, ever capture the essence, richness and varied individual set of circumstances, development, family and culture that each child brings into the learning environment.

This attempt to equate consistency and equity with sameness is a concern, as inevitably it sets some up to fail and, dangerously, gives a message that it is actually possible to find a uniform system and accountability structure that is so clever it captures the diversity of everyone and everything in the country. This is the problem with a system that is now so inextricably caught up with an economic perspective

on life. It attempts to measure the learning and development of a human being by a predetermined number. Data can itself be misused or misinterpreted to provide any particular perspective that is currently required. This is similar to the outrageous aim of some to have a measure of teachers' abilities linked somehow to their students benchmarks.

One can see that this economic approach to measurement and accountability feeds on itself in a dangerous cycle. It works like this:

We assume that there is a universal standard that all children can reach at the same time and in the same way.

We then say that if a certain child or group of children fail to get to this particular standard, the teacher must be at fault; or if the children move beyond the national standard, then the teacher must be more effective.

Such a nonsense would be laughable except for the fact that these approaches are being seriously considered.

One wonders what happened to the recognition of the uniqueness of the individual. We seem to have moved so far from what it means to be educated, to a system where children are schooled and institutionalised.

This enmeshment of economics with what it means to educate results in us all losing sight of the child. It is the child at the centre of curriculum, not a benchmark. It is the child at the centre of our focus, not a standard. It is the child at the centre of learning, not a universal literacy level. The child changes and shifts. Their learning is sometimes about reading and writing, and at other times much more about their sense of self, their identity, their sense of belonging. No measure can do justice to the complexities of a human life, the depth and breadth of what they learn and experience.

And so, we become tangled up in debates about national perspectives, curricula, assessment and reporting, based upon a current political agenda rather than upon what is in the true best interests of the child and family.

What is it that children and their families need? Particularly in these early childhood years, from birth through to eight years?

I believe they do need an equitable system which provides them with access to quality early childhood programs with qualified early childhood teachers delivering the preschool years. They need the system to be affordable/free and secular. They need consistent terminology, general structures and starting ages across the country. Not an entry age that pushes down the starting age to even younger than some states currently have so that an additional year of child care is not needed and federal funding for child care can be spared.

Children and families across the country require a consistent language, key principles and a seamless curriculum between their preschool and first year of school. They need funding that comes from the Federal Government so that getting a preschool year does not depend upon which state or territory you live in.

Given the current level of interest and debate about national perspectives, it seems a good time to place preschool education back on the federal agenda. Child care provision and the Federal Government's commitment and focus upon this is often a distraction or causes confusion among the general population. Even when the media

reports on early education, it focuses on the provision of child care rather than the recognition that preschool education is under-funded and inequitable across the country. The current discussions about a national curriculum do provide a platform for unifying preschool education in relation to access, equity, affordability and consistency.

There is still far too much fragmentation across the country as to what a preschool year actually is, who has access to it and who can afford it. There is still great discrepancy between the states in relation to preschool education. In Victoria particularly, the continued division of preschool and primary school disempowers children, families and teachers and denies them the opportunity of a consistent and unified approach to teaching, learning, professional development and parental support.

The issues currently at the national level are difficult and complex in many ways. A shift is required away from assuming national means sameness; away from assuming that a national benchmark or standard is either appropriate, desirable or indeed possible. However, there is an opportunity in this debate to reflect upon the wide and different, fragmented and unequal opportunities for children to commence their preschool education year at present across the country.

It is not good enough that it depends upon the state or territory you live in, your level of income, or some particular local enrolment policy as to whether you actually get a quality preschool education that is recognised throughout the country.

A national perspective on curriculum is an opportunity to bring preschool education back onto the federal agenda. However, the current discussions about a national curriculum, performance-based pay and standards are a dangerous distraction from what we know is most important. Children and families need equitable access and a quality of education that goes far beyond the simplistic notion that anything of worth can be measured by a number on a page.

NEEDED:

21st century educational leaders for 21st century challenges

FRANK CROWTHER

LEADERSHIP, REDUCED TO its barest essentials, is about the exercise of influence to bring about change, and preferably improvement, in people's lives.

The need for concerted educational leadership in Australia is greater in 2007 that it has been for several decades. But so is the opportunity. I say this for two reasons.

First, there exists across the Australian educational landscape a growing mindset that the quality of school outcomes is shaped significantly by factors other than socio-economic-cultural considerations, and can be heightened if particular school-based variables are supported and encouraged(1). It is essential that we consolidate and affirm this mindset since it can be lost far more easily than it has been gained(2).

Second, with a watershed federal election looming, the major political parties have developed and articulated highly focused educational proposals. Such a definitive national focus on education is quite rare — I can think of no comparable situation since the Whitlam-initiated constitutional adjustments and associated compensatory educational reforms of the 1970s.

Herein lies what I regard as a truly unique and compelling challenge for those Australian educators who would call themselves leaders and who aspire to exercise influence for the betterment of their communities and nation: *to accept that there is merit in each of the major education proposals that is being asserted by the major*

political parties and to develop educational responses to them, both singly and through aggregation.

To do so will require intellectual depth, because of the complexity of the underlying polarisation; moral courage, because of the need to set aside personal convictions and assume an apolitical stance; and professional trust, because of the need for new forms of relatedness. To the extent that we are successful in this highly challenging pursuit, we can claim to be exercising the distinctive form of leadership that the 21st century will almost certainly require of all of its institutions .

21ST CENTURY EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP - A THUMBNAIL SKETCH.

Since the dawn of leadership research in US universities in the early 1950s, scholarly inquiry has been dominated by analysis of the behaviours of authority-based individuals from within four groups — military officers, political figures, corporate giants and school principals. The numerous leadership models that resulted until as recently as the mid-1990s — managerial/strategic, transformational/inspirational, moral/ethical and educative/advocacy, for example — all tended to emphasise the importance of individual capability in relation to contextual factors.

With the advent over the past decade of the dual concepts of learning organisations and knowledge-based economies, however, it has been accepted that successful leadership cannot be restricted to either individuals or offices. Rather, leadership for 21st century economies and workplaces must be able to utilise the diversity of workgroups to create new forms of meaningful knowledge and to institutionalise processes that ensure organisational quality of life[(3)].

With this emerging construct of leadership in mind, I pose the question of how the Australian education community might capitalise on the education platforms of the major political parties as a watershed federal election looms.

THE EDUCATIONAL CHALLENGE.

Both major parties assert that education is both a social and an economic issue. Both acknowledge that high quality teaching is a shared responsibility of governments and the teaching profession. But that is the limit of their apparent similarities.

The Government's core education proposals can be viewed as twofold[(4)]. First is a commitment to national consistency in curricula, particularly in such basics as literacy, numeracy and mainstream history. Education Minister Julie Bishop has indicated that the implementation of national curricula will be accompanied by an increased emphasis on systematic student assessment, and the possible creation of school league tables. Second is the extension of WorkChoices into the nation's education systems through the introduction of a performance pay scheme for highly accomplished teachers, presumably in conjunction with a form of AWAs managed by school principals.

Of immediate relevance to the Government's policy platform is that there is no education system in the world where performance pay has been successfully implemented on a sustained basis. Moreover, research shows conclusively that overall (ie, schoolwide) student achievement is closely linked to shared professional learning and

collegial trust [5]. It can therefore be argued that it is difficult to see how contractual arrangements and pay schemes that are based predominantly in a concern for individual teacher accomplishment would enhance the quality of the nation's schools. It is important also to keep in mind, however, that the concepts of *profit sharing* and *group incentives* have been shown to raise productivity levels and to increase teamwork and knowledge sharing in instances where active employee participation is valued, practised and rewarded[6].

Second, in response to questions about the well-known effects of individual rewards systems on teacher trust and collegiality, it might be asserted that such problems can be largely overcome if one simple question is addressed in whatever reward system is devised:

> *How has your professional leadership, management, teaching and conviction helped to make our school a more effective centre of learning for all?*

Also of utmost importance is that the salaries of Australia's most experienced teachers, no matter how dedicated, expert or professional they may be, are currently relatively low when compared with the top end of salary scales for other professional groups. Relatedly, retention rates for experienced teachers are distressingly low and particular difficulties are being encountered in attracting teachers to maths and sciences, disadvantaged areas, and to working with children with learning and behavioural difficulties.

Thus, it could well be argued that we owe it to those professional teachers whose pedagogical excellence and leadership are sustaining quality in the nation's schools to find ways to significantly increase their workplace rewards generally and their remuneration levels more specifically. On this criterion, if no other, it could be considered self-defeating to reject out of hand the Government's performance pay policies. Thus, two questions emerge:

> *What forms of compensation systems would enable highly accomplished teachers to receive extrinsic rewards at the same time as sustaining and nurturing productive working relationships in our schools? What sort of leadership would be needed to support the successful implementation of such schemes?*

The Federal Opposition's education proposals are framed in the context of espoused priority concerns for global competitiveness and minimisation of disadvantage[7]. Accordingly, the Opposition has indicated that two initiatives in particular will drive the educational agenda of an elected Labor government — increased school and student assessment to facilitate early intervention and provide a basis for sustained high achievement; and needs-based funding as a derivative of substantial increases in the national education budget.

Given the relative decline of education funding in Australia over the past decade by international standards, Labor's education finance platform can be regarded as defensible. However, it should be kept clearly in mind that authoritative research over the

past two decades has established that the provision of additional educational finance to schools will not in and of itself result in higher levels of school outcomes[8]. It is only when those inputs are used to enhance professional learning and school-wide pedagogical processes that heightened student achievement is likely to occur on a systematic basis[9].

Given the OECD-PISA research-based insights regarding the relatively low achievement levels of the lowest performing 20-25 per cent of Australian students[10], Labor's proposal for high quality assessment — both diagnostic and normative — can also be regarded as responsible and forward-thinking. However, it should be remembered that high quality assessment does not necessarily guarantee high quality teaching and learning, nor does it necessarily provide an explanation of why Australian schools have historically been less successful with low achievers than with high and average achieving students.

The complexity of the issue of needs-based funding should also be kept in mind in assessing the Opposition's educational platform. Mechanisms for determining genuine need and, in particular, for ensuring that funds distributed on a needs basis are deployed productively can be said to have defied, to some extent, the best efforts of not only our education systems but other Australian social and welfare agencies as well. The continuing sad plight of Australian Indigenous communities stands as stark testimony to that regrettable fact.

Thus, the key questions that emerge from the Opposition's Education platform might be summed up as follows:

> *How might we employ equity principles and increased educational funding to facilitate needs-based school development schemes while also ensuring that the overall educational standards of Australia's schools are world class? What sort of leadership would be needed to support the successful implementation of such schemes?*

It is my position that we should not expect Minister Bishop or Shadow Minister Smith to take responsibility for what are essentially strategic, moral and intellectual issues for professional educational leaders. The responsibility for teasing out the proposals that they have developed, and for testing their pragmatic potential, goes with the territory of educational rather than political leadership.

While each set of propositions poses particular opportunities as well as difficulties, the critical challenge is to postulate what might ensue from their amalgamation and to devise leadership processes that would be up to the task of implementing those amalgamated solutions. Specifically:

> *What educational blueprints would meet the challenges of a scenario in which schools are provided with significant additional resources, to be distributed with a priority concern for equity as well as generic educational achievement, and where those professional staff who lead successful improvement processes will be eligible for extrinsic rewards? How might those blueprints be effectively implemented in Australia's schools?*

WHERE TO FROM HERE?

At the risk of gross oversimplification, solutions to this compelling challenge may indeed be within our grasp.

Thirty years of Australian experience with compensatory education, reinforced by huge projects in North America and Europe, have taught us a great deal about the dynamics of successful needs-based funding. Highly credible international student assessment mechanisms are now available for both diagnostic and norming purposes. Numerous approaches to school-based development have been trialled and evaluated in Australia and elsewhere and used to develop generic models of quality-assured school improvement.

Relatedly, the specific functions of school principals in successful school revitalisation — visioning, building school identity, creating organisational cohesion and effectiveness, developing distributed leadership systems — are relatively well understood. Additionally, the concept of teacher leadership has been explored in all Australian education systems over the past two decades and has been found to have widespread appeal, particularly when treated with sufficient flexibility to acknowledge the full complexity of teachers' professional and personal lives(11).

Finally, the delicate concept of teacher success can (and should) be extended beyond outmoded definitions of individualism to include schoolwide and team-based professional action.

The AEU, as an organisation and through its membership, has a critically important leadership role to play in the Australia that is emerging. The AEU itself has the capacity to influence public, political and professional opinion on educational issues that are fundamental to Australia's well-being in the 21st century. AEU members have the opportunity in their schools and collegial groups to assess the major educational platforms that are being proposed and to ascertain how one plus one might be synergised to make three. In so doing they will be demonstrating what "new knowledge" can mean, as well as how it can be created. They will also be helping to create shared understanding and agreement where polarised arguments currently dominate. And they will be demonstrating that vital forms of 21st century Australian innovation require the engagement of the educator professions if they are to materialise.

The 2007 federal election campaign has therefore brought into focus unique educational challenges. It requires leadership that is grounded in new forms of intellectualism, moral courage and professional relationships. It is difficult but it is possible.

NOTES

1. The landmark research of Newmann and Wehlage, featuring the dual concepts of *authentic pedagogy* and *professional learning community*, is fundamental to this point. See Newmann, F and Wehlage, G (1995) *Successful School Restructuring: A report to the public and educators* Madison, WI: Center on Organisation and Restructuring of Schools.

2. The US *Coleman Report* (1966) led to a widespread belief that "schools basically don't make a difference to children's life chances". It took 30 years (until Newmann and Wehlage's research in 1995) for this

mindset to be seriously challenged. In the meantime, immeasurable harm was done to the image and status of the teaching profession internationally, including Australia.

3. Renowned international change theorist Peter Drucker has stated that, in successful knowledge societies of the 21st century, schools will be the key institution and professions such as teaching will constitute a "leading class". See Drucker, P (1994) "The Age of Social Transformation", *Atlantic Monthly* 27, 53-80.

4. My syntheses of Federal Minister Julie Bishop's policy proposals are based primarily on: (1) Bishop, J, (7 February, 2007) *Preparing children to succeed – standards in our schools*. Canberra: National Press Club; (2) Bishop, J, (1 February, 2007) *Education and Economic Growth*. Address to the Committee for the Economic Development of Australia, Brisbane.

5. See, for example, Newmann and Wehlage (above) and Newmann, F, King, B, and Youngs, P (2000) *Professional Development to Build Organisational Capacity in Low Achieving Schools: promising strategies and future challenges*. Madison, WI: Center on Organisation and Restructuring of Schools.

6. See Silva, G (1998) *An Introduction to Performance and Skill-based Pay Systems*, International Labor Organisation. **www.ilo.org/public/english/dialogue/actemp/papers**. See also Ingvarson, L, Kleinhenz, E and Wilkinson, J (2007) *Research on Performance Pay for Teachers*, Melbourne: ACER.

7. My syntheses of Shadow Minister Stephen Smith's policy proposals are based on (1) his presentation, *The Future of Australian Education*, Yeronga State High School Auditorium, Brisbane (7 March, 2007); (2) Smith, S (February, 2007), *Matter of Public Importance: Education*. Canberra: Parliament House.

8. See, for example, Hanushek, EA (1995) "Moving beyond spending fetishes", *Educational Leadership*, 53, (3), 60-64. See also Crowther, F and Lewis, M (1999) *Managing Resources in Postcorporate Educational Organisations: A preliminary framework*. Toowoomba: Leadership Research Institute, University of Southern Queensland.

9. See Newmann and Wehlage, above. For relavant Australian research see Crowther, F, Hann, L and McMaster, J, (2001) "Leadership", in Cuttance, P, *School Innovation: Pathway to the knowledge society*. Canberra: DETYA, 123-142.

10. OECD (2004). *Learning for Tomorrow's World. First Results from PISA, 2003*. Paris. See especially Chapter 5, "The Learning Environment and the Organisation of Schooling", 208ff.

11. For a comprehensive analysis of the dynamics of successful teacher leadership see Murphy, J, (2005) *Connecting Teacher Leadership and School Improvement*, Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.

RICHARD ELMORE

ON THE USE OF TEST DATA, ACCOUNTABILITY SYSTEMS, BUILDING TEACHER CAPACITY AND THE ROLE OF POLITICS IN EDUCATIONAL CHANGE

INTERVIEW BY JOHN GRAHAM

THIS IS THE third part of an interview John Graham conducted with Richard Elmore, Professor of Educational Leadership at Harvard University, during his visit to Melbourne as a guest of the Victorian Educational Leadership Consortium, Deakin University and The Victorian Government Department of Education. Professor Elmore's most recent books include: *School Reform from the Inside Out* (2005), *High Schools and High Stakes Testing* (2003) and *Restructuring the Classroom: Teaching, Learning and School Organization* (1996).

JG: *What is the role of external performance data in the school improvement process?*

RE: When a school takes on an issue pretty persistently, and has pretty powerful evidence of its impact on student learning and students' access to higher level content, one of the things you see is that they pay attention to external measures of their performance. They disaggregate data in the school at the level of specific items within content areas and at the level of specific students or grade level scores on external examinations.

But past a certain point that's

largely diagnostic. It's not remedial because if you start using external data to drive instruction you're going to make mistakes. So what they tend to do is address the kind of problem that that data is useful to solve, like what's happening in this domain where none of the students in our school were able to score at any decent level in items that have this common theme or quality.

JG: What do schools generally discover when they apply the data in this way?

RE: The leading hypothesis for why there's a problem is, it's not being taught. Or alternatively, what's happening is we're doing a really good job of teaching X but it's out of sequence with the testing because the text is testing Y. Should we alter the sequence in which we're teaching just for the purpose of elevating our performance, or if we're not, how are we going to adjust to that? Those are the kinds of problems that external measures are good for solving, but you can see they're not the most important problems for improvement of instruction.

JG: What sort of data do you use to address the "important problems"?

RE: What schools then tend to do is develop their own more curriculum-based formative measures and those measures tend to be pretty opportunistic and pretty rough and ready. But they have the additional advantage of being powerful to teachers in understanding how well they're succeeding with students at any particular moment in time. So they probably have pretty low reliability, but reasonably good validity in the sense that there's a pretty tight connection between the assessment, the curriculum and the pedagogy.

You wouldn't want to use those tests as performance measures for the school because they're just not technically strong enough. But they're very powerful assessments for influencing practice. And then what you see is schools start to organise their professional development, their problem-solving groups, their internal resource allocation around more and more specific problems of practice that crop up in the process of figuring out how to do this work at higher and higher levels. And at some point, I have to say, they begin to regard the external measures as largely prophylactic, which is they're hygiene measures rather than performance measures.

JG: What's the difference you're drawing between hygiene measures and performance measures?

RE: The external tests are the things that you use to protect yourself from external scrutiny and criticism rather than the things you use to drive your decisions about what to teach and how to teach it. And gradually, as teachers assume more control and agency over instruction and the school begins to exercise more control over what it thinks students ought to know, those tests become

less and less important to their decisions about what to teach and how to teach it and more and more important as just ways of representing themselves to the outside world.

JG: *One of the persistent problems created by external testing and examinations in Victoria has been the publication in the media of league tables of secondary school results. Schools which do poorly in the league tables have experienced a community backlash against them, and their expected intake of new students begins to fall. So you still have to take account of those external performance measures.*

RE: Of course you do. What I'm saying is however, that the stronger the school is as an organisation controlling its own improvement process, the less important those external measures become in dictating what they do inside. If you're a relatively low-performing school and you're losing students because of it, you don't have much choice but to pay attention to the external measures. While if you're a school that's been previously low-performing but you're now on the move, with the improvement measures starting to show progress, those external measures are going to be progressively less important to you as you get further into the work.

If you try to use those external measures for purposes for which they're not constructed (because of their technical characteristics), you're making a mistake and it's a mistake that's going to cost you. Because you're going to make the wrong decisions about how to allocate resources internally. That's what happens when schools cheat; that's why schools that teach to the test are not terribly successful. That's why schools that have very coherent and high levels of internal accountability generally don't worry about the alignment of their curriculum with the external test because students generally do well on the external test regardless of how well the curriculum is aligned to the test. And that kind of a finding comes directly out of our accountability research.

JG: *So just moving into that notion of accountability. Is there an accountability system that you believe promotes good teaching and learning and promotes good schools? What should happen to our accountability systems to do that?*

RE: Well, those are two different questions. First of all, on the subject of what is a good accountability system, I have to preface what I have to say by saying that performance-based accountability is going to be a condition of this sector for the foreseeable future. So what I tell my Harvard students is you don't get to choose whether to have it or not; you may get to choose between whether you get a good one or its evil twin.

Point number two is that in strong highly-professionalised environments the accountability system is always a highly contested arena. So if you're operating in an accountability system in which there's not

a lot of conflict and there's not a lot of disagreement over what the measures should be, and what the basic design parameters are of the accountability system, chances are you're not working in a very good or powerful accountability system. Effective regulatory regimes are always highly contested politically.

JG: What do you see as the profession's role in this political contest?

RE: One of my problems with the current accountability system is that the profession is not sufficiently well-mobilised; it hasn't taken responsibility for its own knowledge base and its own capacity, its own professional knowledge, so as to use its knowledge in an authoritative way to push back at the accountability system. Most of the objections that educators have to the accountability system are not persuasive to decision-makers or to the public because they're not based on knowledge that the public or the policy-makers regard as authoritative.

JG What does a good accountability system look like?

RE: A highly effective accountability system has two or three really key design principles. One is that the levels of performance and paths of improvement that the system expects schools to achieve have an evidentiary basis. That is, they're based on some understanding of how students learn, the relationship between structural practice and student learning and how organisations respond. If there's no evidentiary basis then you're going to have a bad accountability system because the basic parameters of the system are operating in thin air, not in relation to anything that's going to happen on the ground.

The second characteristic is that all good accountability systems have very strong reciprocity principles. The way I state that is for every unit of performance I require of you, I have an equal and opposite responsibility to provide you with a unit of capacity. It's important to acknowledge that teachers aren't sitting around schools holding back their best practices waiting for someone to force them to use them through some kind of external pressure. People in schools for the most part are working at or close to their capacity to do what they're being asked to do.

JG: So it's essential to invest in teacher capacity as part of any school improvement plan?

RE: Gains in performance always lag gains in quality. So you should expect to see substantial increases in the quality of instructional practice, in the level of the content, in the work that students are producing inside schools, before you ever see evidence of that on external performance reviews. And if you're not seeing the former, then the investments you're making in putting external pressure on schools aren't working out. If you're not seeing improvements in quality then the likelihood

you're going to see improvements in performance is almost nil.

So the primary response you want is for the organisation to become a more coherent and powerful place for people to work. That does not happen automatically by applying external pressure. It only happens when people pay attention to making that happen and when you invest in resources and the capacity to make it possible for people to do that.

JG: So that gets back to the political problem again?

RE: What I worry about is that the political incentives for elected officials to pay attention to the consequences of capacity problems are relatively weak. The incentives for them to continue to push on output and performance measures, and generate political credit by criticising schools for failing to respond, are fairly strong. And that is a fundamental problem of political accountability, not a problem of school accountability.

What it means is that they [elected officials] have relatively free rein to do pretty much anything they want by way of criticising schools because there are very few consequences attached to it and they have very weak incentives to pay attention to capacity issues. So I think that we're in a politically and substantively very dangerous position here, unless public officials start paying attention to some of the capacity issues.

JG: In Australia the Federal Government is trying to impose its own accountability processes on the state systems of public education, even though the states are constitutionally responsible for school education. The Federal Government says we will give you the money to run your system providing you do X, Y and Z. They've taken their version of accountability down to the level of specifying a particular type of report card.

RE: The key to reciprocity is capacity, not mandates. So all they're doing is trading support for mandates and they're saying this is a contractual relationship: you get money from us, you have to comply with the following mandate. Mandates aren't capacity. In fact, mandates actually consume capacity.

That's why in the US, the state of Connecticut was willing to turn down the money offered by the Federal Government because they did the benefit cost calculations and they understood the costs of the mandates and they understood that mandates are a cost not a benefit. When a state government says back to the federal government keep your money, we're not going to do it, that's actually an attempt to introduce some political discipline into what is essentially a hugely complex accountability problem.

One of the problems with political accountability at both the state and federal levels, in Australia and in the US, is that elected officials get rewarded for new ideas, they don't get rewarded for doing existing ideas better.

NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

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A former secondary teacher, she is also a federal executive member and a director of the International Trust Fund. Mary has also been a VTHC vice president as well as executive member over many years. She also has experience on the Teachers Registration Board, State Superannuation Board, Director Housing Co-op, and Director Trades Hall Finance. Mary has over the years been elected to represent the AEU at International Congresses/Forums in Canada, Melbourne, India, Sweden, Thailand, Zimbabwe, America and Brazil.

FRANK CROWTHER is a renowned advocate of the teaching profession. His career spanned 44 years in Canada and Australia, culminating in his appointment as dean of education at the University of Southern Queensland, 2002-6. He is now Emeritus Professor. Frank is particularly well-known for his leadership in the development of the IDEAS Project, a school revitalisation initiative that involves schools in the application of parallel leadership strategies to create and implement school-wide pedagogical principles. In 2004 Frank was recognised by *The Bulletin* magazine as one of the 100 Smart Australians. In 2006 he was awarded the Order of Australia (AM) for his services to the teaching profession nationally and internationally.

JOHN GRAHAM is a research officer at the Australian Education Union (Victorian branch), with responsibility for researching curriculum and professional developments in education and training. He has written extensively about curriculum change, teachers and teaching as a profession, developments in education at an institutional, state and federal level, and on a range of other matters from funding to organisational review. John has been a teacher in Victorian government secondary schools, a researcher and writer for a national equity program, and a project manager and policy developer for the Department of Education.

TERRY HAYES taught English and drama in Victorian secondary schools for many years. He is past president of both the Victorian Association for the Teaching of English (VATE) and the Australian Association for the Teaching of English (AATE). He was also executive officer for the Council of Professional Teaching Associations of Victoria (CPTAV). He currently serves on the council of the Victorian Institute of Teaching (VIT).

PETER KELL was the chair of TAFE Futures, an independent inquiry into TAFE funded by the Australian Education Union. The full report can be found at **www.tafefutures.org.au**. Dr Kell is an associate professor in adult and vocational education in the Faculty of Education at the University of Wollongong, NSW. He is a former TAFE teacher who has research and teaching interests in TAFE, vocational education and adult learning.

ALFIE KOHN writes and speaks widely on human behaviour, education, and parenting. The Boston-based author of 11 books and scores of articles, he lectures at education conferences and universities as well as to parent groups and corporations. Kohn's criticisms of competition and rewards have been widely discussed and debated, and he has been described in *Time* magazine as "perhaps the [US's] most outspoken critic of education's fixation on grades [and] test scores." His books include *The Homework Myth: Why our kids get too much of a bad thing* (2006), *Unconditional Parenting: Moving from rewards and punishments to love and reason* (2005), and *The Schools Our Children Deserve: Moving beyond traditional classrooms and "tougher standards"* (1999).

His article here is reprinted from *Education Week* with the author's permission. For more information, please visit **www.alfiekohn.org**.

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His research interests include educational policy, curriculum change, social justice and education, citizenship education and the history and politics of public education. Alan is also involved in policy development at state and national level, most recently on a three-person panel appointed by the SA minister of education to review the South Australian Certificate of Education.

KATHY WALKER is a Melbourne-based educational consultant. Formerly a university lecturer in education, she conducts professional development throughout Australia for staff working across all sectors of early childhood and primary education, in particular regarding school readiness, school transition, multi-age classrooms and developmental curriculum. She is a regular contributor to *Education Age*. Her latest book, *What's the Hurry?* is designed especially for parents and covers a range of topics including school readiness, behaviour, self esteem and resilience. Kathy was appointed the independent inquirer for the AEU-sponsored National Inquiry into Preschool Education; her expertise in transition issues and readiness was an integral part of the inquiry.

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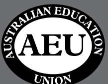

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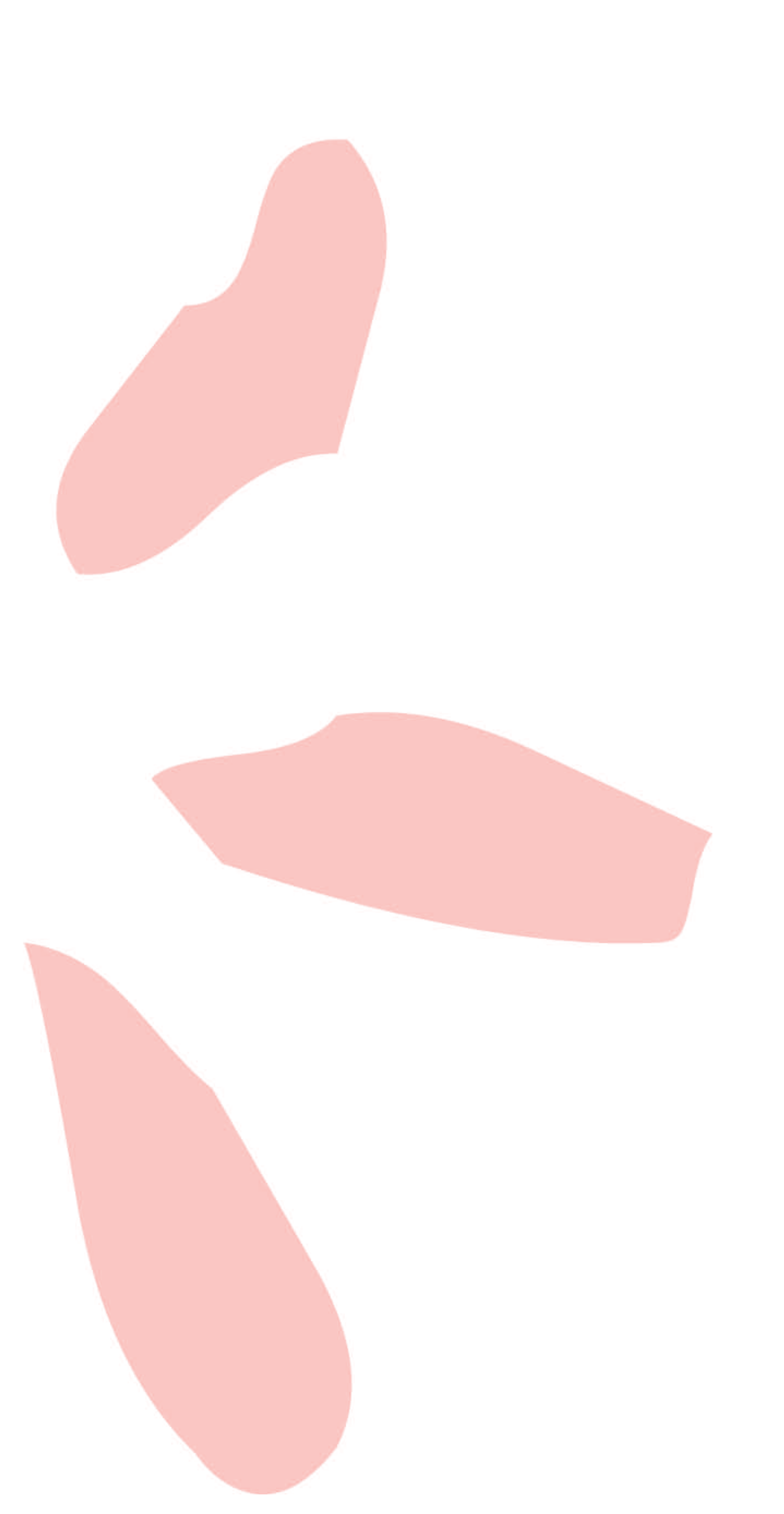

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