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The US education 'reform'

Secondary education on
the APY Lands 1996-2001

An information-driven
community: The why?

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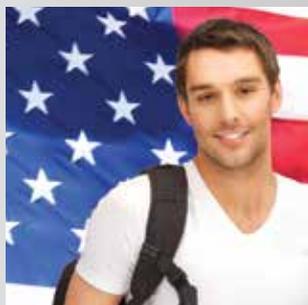
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Some articles included in the February edition of *Professional Educator* contained errors that occurred during the production process. We apologise to any authors whose work was affected.



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Education communities

The theme for this edition of *Professional Educator* is education communities. There are a variety of ways of conceiving what is in effect a highly socialised and interactive profession. At the macro-level the education community can be considered within a national and, increasingly, an international context. Each educational organisation also operates within a localised community. Finally each educational organisation is itself a community.

The second broad aspect of the concept of community is that of change. All communities at all levels are in a constant state of change both in a physical or environmental and in a cultural sense. At the local and school level each community is distinctive yet at the same time all levels of community are in constant interaction with the circles of influence widening and deepening.

Teachers are increasingly utilising online resources such as the Education Futures Collaboration Mapping Educational Specialist knowHow initiative (MESH), a research-based clearinghouse or 'Wikipedia' for educators (see www.meshguides.org/). Education Communities (see www.educationcommunities.org/welcome.do), another online resource connecting educators globally with a view to improving educational practice, is also growing rapidly in reach and impact. Some of these online communities of practitioners and researchers are more specialised such as the Digital Education Research Network (DERN) (see dern2.acer.edu.au/) operated through ACER and led by Dr Gerald White, an ACE Fellow.

Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCS) are now providing professional development for teachers – and many others, globally. For example the Commonwealth Education Trust, with which I am working, is providing eight six-week online courses for largely untrained practising teachers globally in its professional development series Foundations of Teaching for Learning (see www.coursera.org/specialization/#foundationsteaching/4?utm_medium=courseDescripTop).

Thus we have a rapidly growing, global, interactive community of educators. Educational organisations and teachers are becoming less dependent on local authorities and professional bodies and are more likely to seek answers anywhere they can find them. The challenge for traditional providers of professional development for teachers and professional associations such as ACE is to keep up with these developments.

The concept of schools as learning organisations (Senge, 1990) has given way to that of communities of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998), whereby schools and other organisations are linked in their learning through mutual interest and benefit. Perhaps we need a new concept of global communities of practice?

Turning to the local community, there is an urgent need for all educational organisations to engage meaningfully with those they serve. Effective educational organisations engage with families and the community through strong, authentic partnerships. Effective communication is at the core of these collaborations. Of course, a diverse community with possibly varying expectations for education and difficulties with communication poses a greater challenge. Generating mutually beneficial participation is both essential and challenging in these circumstances. Some communities face a raft of problems and disadvantage. Poor health, generational unemployment and social issues can make it difficult to break cycles of disengagement and underachievement. Where individuals and groups have ceased to value education this exacerbates the challenge.

Within every educational organisation there is of course a community. The health of that community is a vital factor in the learning and development of its teachers and students. Unfortunately, every time a problem arises in society someone advocates for this to be addressed within the school curriculum. Rarely is anything removed to balance what is imposed. This results in an overcrowded and at times unbalanced curriculum, both in schools and in pre-

service teacher education courses, and pressure on teachers and resources.

Some of these 'extras' society seems unable or unwilling to deal with include: sex and sexuality, drugs, healthy food, homophobia, racism, environmental concerns, body image, bullying, bicycle safety, bomb education, weed identification, boys' education, driver education, dog education, career education, manners, resilience, crime detection, stranger danger, child abuse, depression and forced marriage, to cite but a fraction of those advocated over the past decade (I have been keeping score but the list is certainly incomplete). It could be argued that these issues are significant, but the cumulative effects are deleterious. At the same time educational organisations are dealing with these issues, there is also pressure to lift student performance on external measures of student achievement. However, as the breadth of what is expected to be taught increases, inevitably depth and effectiveness decrease.

Thus educational organisations are communities under pressure. There is a need for renewed clarity and agreement over the purposes of education and the most effective ways of achieving the outcomes the broader community expects of education. There is a need to rethink expectations we hold for teachers and for educational organisations and whether current arrangements and processes are the most effective ways of achieving these. There are still 'wars' over pedagogy and the new Australian curriculum is under review before it has been fully implemented.

The articles in this edition of *Professional Educator* are an important stimulus and input to these essential discussions and this rethinking. The writers highlight initiatives across the nation designed to improve and benefit from more effective work between educational organisations and communities within the current and emerging complex context.

**Professor Stephen Dinham OAM PhD
FACE FACEA FAIM
National President**

Secondary education on the APY Lands 1996-2001

DIANE RUSSELL

Reflections

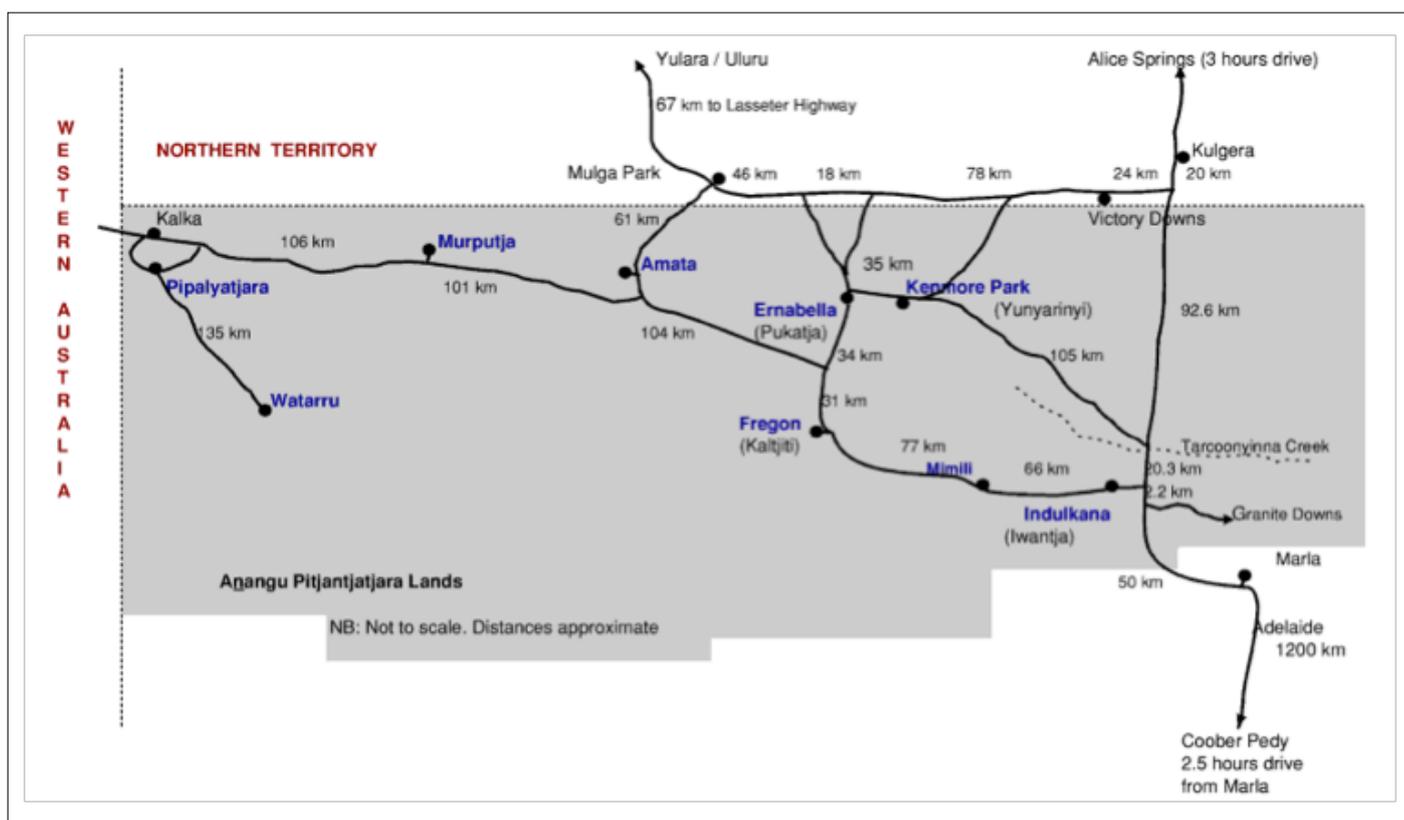
Between 1996 and 2001, I spent six years in the far north-west of South Australia working for the Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara (APY) Education Committee (PYEC), which contracts the state education system to provide education for students across the APY Lands (see map). At that time Anangu Education Services (AES) was the school district designated to support this through staff recruitment, administration and curriculum development functions. Its main office was in Adelaide but there was also an Ernabella office with support staff to provide more face-to-face support for schools, headed by a coordinating Principal. Under AES there was also the Wiltja secondary program based at Woodville High School in Adelaide, supported by a hostel, which took students from Lands schools, and those in nearby Northern Territory and Western Australian schools, to give them a taste of secondary education and a possible secondary schooling pathway.

The people on the APY Lands call themselves 'Anangu', 'Pitjantjatjara' meaning 'people' which is generally used to refer to those people of Pitjantjatjara, Ngaanyatjarra and Yankunytjatjara background who live, or have lived on the APY Lands. All Anangu students in the nine schools (names in blue on the map) across the Lands are classified as English as a second language (ESL) students because outside school the majority of communication is in Pitjantjatjara or a closely-related language. Although most Anangu are based in one of the communities, many of the families are highly mobile. They travel great distances, often interstate, for cultural ceremonies and funerals. Then there is weekend 'football' which is run as a series of football and softball carnivals often spilling over into the following week. The resulting broken schooling is complicated by the fact that traditionally most families allow students to decide for themselves whether or not they will attend school.

I went to the Lands when my husband was appointed principal of both Pipalyatjara and the homelands school

at Watarru. He was the sixth principal at Pipalyatjara in two years and, like all school principals across the Lands, he worked with an Anangu coordinator to run the school. The first question the community asked him was: 'How long are you going to stay?' He stayed for six years during which time the school developed considerably because he worked with the community to make appropriate changes. I was initially given a compassionate transfer to Pipalyatjara, in a supernumerary capacity, because the district director knew that my husband would need all the support he could get in that first year.

There was plenty for me to do! In addition to taking on some teaching roles across the school to release staff for extra professional development as all except two were new to the school, I organised the school library and front office. Then, mainly at weekends and out of school hours, I helped my husband with administrative matters as there was no 'front office' staff member. This included cleaning up graffiti – an ongoing task



“ As an experienced secondary school teacher and leader who had also worked three years in a regional support role, I was shocked to find that the senior girls’ teacher (appointed at the same time as myself) was an experienced junior primary teacher... ”

until some perpetrators were engaged to help and people in the community realised that graffiti would no longer be tolerated.

As an experienced secondary school teacher and leader who had also worked three years in a regional support role, I was shocked to find that the senior girls’ teacher (appointed at the same time as myself) was an experienced junior primary teacher and that the senior boys’ teacher was primary trained with no experience in middle schooling. Supporting these teachers and working with the students in these classes when I relieved the teachers, I soon understood why both enrolment and attendance at these classes are so poor. Neither class looked or felt like a secondary class, let alone offered anything like a secondary education. This also explained why students who had experienced the Wiltja program in Adelaide did not return to school when they came home.

Tucked away in a compactus, I found secondary modules in seven curriculum areas developed for AES by the Open Access College (OAC) in Adelaide. These were not being used, so I started to use them.

Students really engaged with these resources because they sensed they were learning something new, rather than being confronted with the same literacy

and numeracy tasks their younger peers were learning, just because they did not have good literacy and numeracy skills. They started to want to learn to read. They also began to engage in discussions about issues in their community and we experimented with some combined boys’ and girls’ lessons.

The school decided to combine the secondary boys’ and girls’ classes for 1997. The senior boys’ teacher took the middle primary class and the senior girls’ teacher took the combined secondary class. There was no position for me in the school so I took leave to finalise my PhD thesis. I knew an ‘across-Lands secondary leadership’ position was to be advertised and I intended to apply for it.

While on leave, before I found out that I had attained the position, and at her request, I began supporting the teacher who was taking the combined secondary class. I continued this role when I moved to Ernabella to begin my new position. This was the beginning of more than four-and-a-half years of living 350 km from my husband, only seeing him three times a term and at school holidays.

In my new role I supported secondary school teachers in all schools. The way I worked with each teacher was quite different because of their diverse backgrounds. One of the secondary trained teachers had spent so long at his school working mainly with a post-primary boys’ class that he had forgotten how to teach a mainstream curriculum. Therefore, the way I worked with him was more similar to the way I worked with the remaining teachers who had primary or junior primary backgrounds. All, from my perspective, were using inappropriate pedagogies and resources, and had inappropriately low expectations of their students.

My main concern in my support work with teachers, regardless of whether they were primary or secondary trained, was to ensure the use of appropriate pedagogies, resources and, most importantly, appropriate goal setting for student achievement.

I provided curriculum support for these teachers, helping them to develop cross-curriculum themes using the middle

school section of the SA Curriculum Standards and Assessment (SACSA) Framework and many of the often unused OAC units schools owned. I also gave lessons, showing teachers how to engage students in the planning of thematic units because they were the experts in knowledge about their local communities. At times I relieved teachers from their classes so they could document this. Teachers soon realised this kind of programming helped students learn new vocabulary as it was continually reinforced in different learning contexts. Therefore, teachers did not need to devote a large amount of time outside the SACSA curriculum areas to developing the students’ literacy skills; instead, this was happening in every curriculum area as the language was used in context.

At the same time, I kept the principals and Anangu coordinators of each school informed on how I was working with their teachers. I also discussed with them possible ways they and the teachers could gradually change the culture of the secondary classrooms to be more like mainstream secondary classes, which is what all Anangu coordinators said parents in their communities wanted.

For example, where possible and over time, schools employed secondary trained teachers for their secondary classes, invested in single desks for the students and purchased pencil cases and individual equipment for each student. The single desks could easily be grouped when required for specific activities. Some teachers even asked me to reorganise their classroom settings for them. This change was easy to achieve compared to another major problem in the secondary classes: Because none of the secondary-aged students had good literacy and numeracy skills, teachers tended to grab resources from their school libraries that had very low literacy requirements. Unfortunately, most of these resources were designed for much younger students and did not engage the secondary students.

I showed the teachers how to use the OAC units, gradually introducing new vocabulary by talking about the illustrations in the texts and then reading small sections at a time. I also worked

with the principals and, in the larger schools, the librarians to purchase a range of more appropriate resources. For example, Black Ink Press produces well illustrated, culturally relevant readers for young people in both English and a range of Indigenous languages.

In addition to working with individual teachers, I organised meetings once a term for the secondary teachers and supported two teachers in engaging in a statewide numeracy project. In all of this I had the support of both Ernabella and Adelaide-based AES support staff. The Adelaide based AES Distance Education Support Teacher and I trialled some cooperative distance education teaching with the junior secondary students, utilising the specific curriculum skills of individual teachers. For example, she taught students at three different schools an Art unit and I taught a Science unit. Both required a lot of planning because the schools needed to order the equipment required.

“ I have no regrets about my time on the lands. Apart from the fact that I know I made a difference, even if only a small one, I thoroughly enjoyed the challenges and what I learned from my experiences and the people. ”

As a result, attendance of secondary-aged students increased significantly and many of those who came back from Wiltja returned to their local schools. Also, they stayed at school longer.

This created another challenge for the schools as they now had senior secondary-aged students who should be undertaking SACE (SA Certificate of Education) studies. Where possible,

schools employed a second secondary teacher to teach these senior students. For some subjects students were enrolled through the OAC but it soon became obvious that OAC teachers were not fully aware of the learning context on the Lands, the students were tentative about having lessons over the phone with people they did not know and some of the mainstream curriculum content needed to be modified. Therefore, I organised for the OAC teachers to visit the Anangu schools and inducted them to the context as I drove them across the Lands. This was very successful because it made obvious the need to modify course content because topics like credit cards in Maths had no meaning for Anangu students.

By the end of 2001, very few students were going to Wiltja. This created a financial problem for AES because it meant they lost a lot of Federal funding to support the Wiltja program that students from NT and WA states were still attending. My position was downgraded and I decided not to reapply for it as I had already been working at lower than my substantive leadership position for over four years, apart from the six months I filled in as principal of Fregon.

I have no regrets about my time on the Lands. Apart from the fact that I know I made a difference, even if only a small one, I thoroughly enjoyed the challenges and what I learned from my experiences and the people.

I also learned to listen to Anangu and found that they do have a vision for the future of their children on the Lands despite the problems most remote Indigenous communities face. Education is an integral part of this future. I talked with many Anangu about this. Early in my secondary support role the district director had asked me to articulate a 'dream' about a possible future for secondary education on the APY Lands. *The Anangu Dreaming* was published in 1998.ⁱ The concept included the establishment of a secondary boarding facility on the Lands, away from any community. Secondary students would travel there on Monday mornings and return home to their communities on Friday afternoons. This would enable

them to stay on the Lands, while at the same time access well-resourced secondary education, something that will never be possible in individual communities. Anangu were very supportive of this concept. However, this 'dream' was before its time.

The 'dream' resurfaced in 2008 in the recommendations of the review of secondary and further education on the APY Lands undertaken by Charles Darwin Universityⁱⁱ, along with several other recommendations of things that were already occurring in my time on the Lands. Now, 16 years since my original articulation of this 'dream', community leaders from the APY Lands, are indicating interest in a community-based boarding school for the Lands in an effort to lift attendance rates and performance.

ⁱⁱⁱ

Dr Diane Russell completed a PhD in Aboriginal Education. She has taught Aboriginal students from Reception to Year 12 in both rural and remote parts of the SA. After retiring in 2004, for four years she supported the development and implementation of an alternative education program in Port Augusta, which helped to re-engage severely disengaged young Aboriginal people in formal education. She was elected Fellow of the Australian College of Educators in 2011. Diane and Peter Russell are both members of the Archives Fellows Research Group in Adelaide.

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ⁱⁱ Lea, T; Tootell, N; Wolgemuth, J; Halkon, C & Douglas, J 2008 Excellence or Exit: Ensuring Anangu Futures through Education, Report to DECS from a review undertaken by Charles Darwin University.

ⁱⁱⁱ Martin, S 2014 'Scullion flags boarding school for indigenous students', The Australian, 13 February, p. 5.

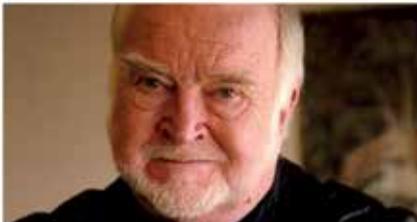
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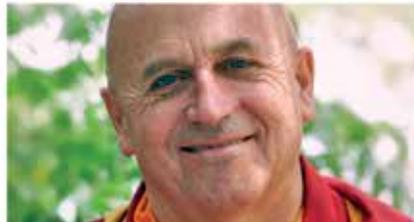


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STEPHEN DINHAM

Q & A

with **Bronwyn Pike** -
new ACE board
member

As the College welcomes former Minister for Education in Victoria and Member of Parliament for Melbourne from 1999–2012, Bronwyn Pike to its Board as the new president-elect, current Board national president Professor Stephen Dinham briefly chats to Ms Pike and introduces her to the Australian College of Educators (ACE).



▶ In 1999, Ms Pike was elected to the Victorian Parliament as the member for Melbourne and as a Minister in the Victorian Government. As one of the longest-serving female ministers in Victoria's history, she looked after the health, education, housing, community services and aged care portfolios.

Some of her career highlights include: leading the \$1.9 billion Victorian Schools Plan to upgrade approximately 500 Victorian schools over four years during her time as Victorian Minister for Education (improving technology and science facilities and classrooms, and building new schools in growth areas. A main aim of this program was encouraging joint-use of school and community facilities. By 2011 more than 900 schools were redeveloped); being appointed chair of the South Australian Urban Renewal Authority in May 2012; being appointed a director of Melbourne's Wesley Mission and chair of the Centre for Urban Research Advisory Committee.

“ The College must continue to build its membership to be fully representative of the education sector and earn the right to speak with confidence on these issues of such significance. ACE must also seek out every opportunity to contribute to public debate and reinforce that access to the highest quality education is the foundation of a fair and prosperous society. ”

PE: Bronwyn, congratulations on your appointment as president-elect and deputy chair of the board of the ACE. We are delighted to have you and the strong expertise in public policy, government, non-government, business and academic sectors across a range of policy areas that you will bring to our independent professional development organisation. Why are you attracted to the College? How does your background equip you for the role?

BP: I am honoured to have been asked to become part of the Board of the Australian College of Educators. I think it is very important for there to be an independent body advocating for excellence in education in every sector and setting in Australia. The College has a distinguished history of sourcing and articulating evidence-based policies, which will improve the quality of teaching and learning and thus improve outcomes for students.

I come from a family of teachers and understand the transformational power which education can have in people's lives. Having worked in the community services sector and as Minister for a range of Health and Human Services portfolios, I came to the role of Education Minister with a greater appreciation of the challenges many people face in accessing education and the complex policy challenge of breaking down these barriers.

PE: What are some of the big issues facing Australian education today and how should ACE be responding to these?

BP: Because everyone went to school and everyone is an education expert, or thinks they are. The ingredients for educational excellence are complex and require informed, strategic and innovative investment. We also know that we have a widening gap in educational attainment based on socio-economic and geographic disadvantage.

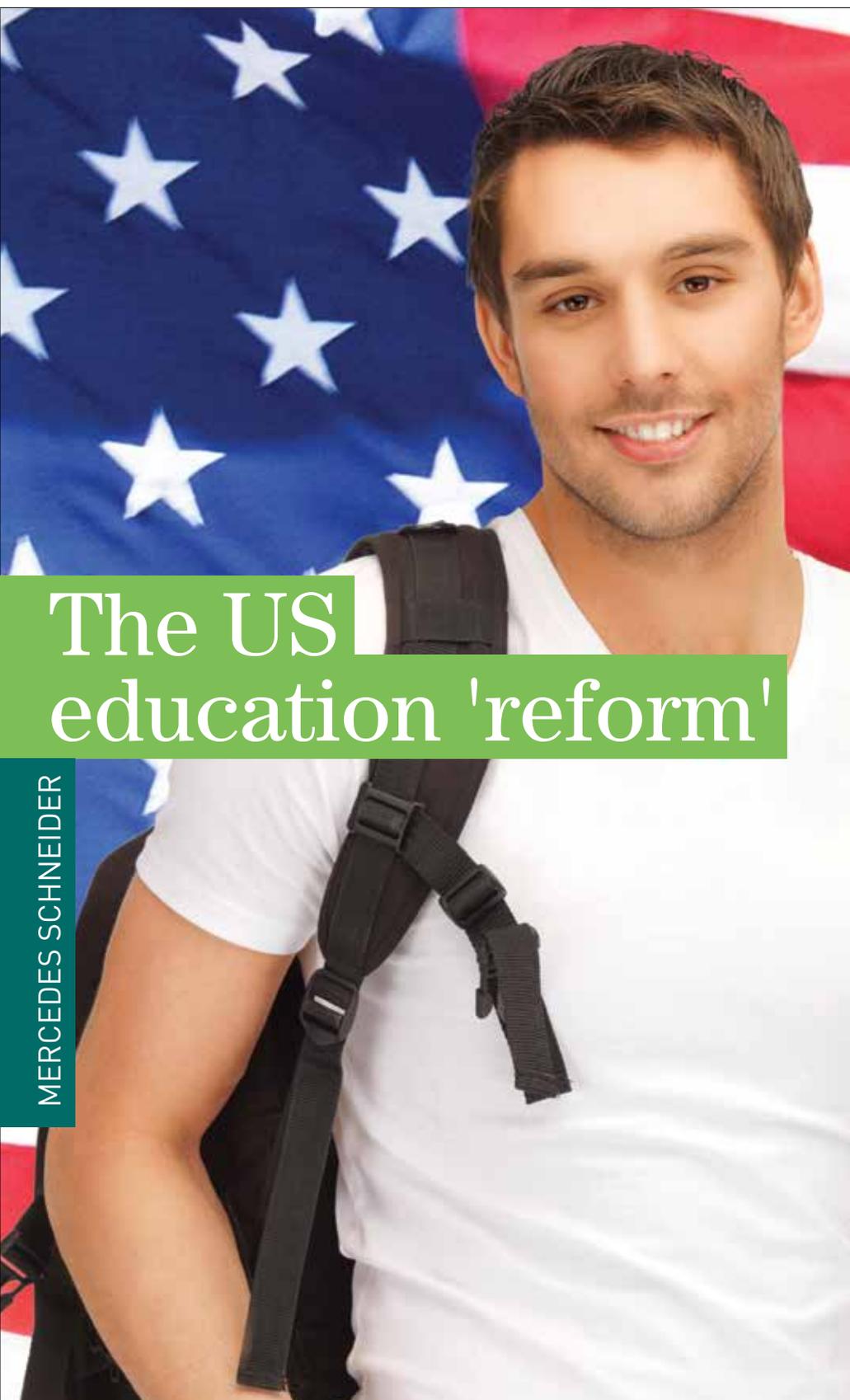
This gap means lost productivity and costly disengagement which will hurt individuals and Australian society and reduce our international competitiveness. ACE has a responsibility to advocate for the most effective policies and resourcing to address these issues.

“ I am honoured to have been asked to become part of the Board of the Australian College of Educators. I think it is very important for there to be an independent body advocating for excellence in education in every sector and setting in Australia. ”

PE: What does ACE have to do to ensure that it remains influential across the educational landscape in the decades ahead?

BP: The College must continue to build its membership to be fully representative of the education sector and earn the right to speak with confidence on significant. ACE must also seek out every opportunity to contribute to public debate and reinforce that access to the highest quality education is the foundation of a fair and prosperous society. The College can empower its members to become bold, take some risks and engage in multiple media and forums because the messages won't sell themselves.

PE: Thanks, Bronwyn. We look forward to having you on our Board and to drawing from your knowledge.



The US education 'reform'

MERCEDES SCHNEIDER

At a time when education reform in Australia is ongoing, and Australian education authorities, federal and state alike, are increasingly looking overseas, it is important for Australian educators to be aware of developments in other countries.

A teacher and education blogger from the US has provided *Professional Educator* with an overview of education reforms and their impact on US teachers and the education system.

My name is Mercedes Schneider. I am an American teacher. Given the US' current widespread privatisation of public education, I need to qualify why I have italicised the word 'teacher' below.

When I entered the teaching profession, I had the intention of building my professional career in teaching. Seems obvious, doesn't it, that one who enters teaching intends to build a career in teaching? However, I feel that one can no longer assume as much.

When I graduated from Louisiana State University in 1991 with a degree in secondary education, it was commonly assumed that I would spend the next two-to-three decades in the classroom.

And so I have.

I taught public school for two years in Louisiana and another five in Georgia. While teaching, I attended the University of West Georgia at nights and over the summers for two years to earn my Master's degree in school counselling.

After finishing my counselling degree, I took four years off from teaching to study for my PhD. I had taught seven years of public school and decided I would like to continue, but at university level. To that end, I began my doctorate in counsellor education, but changed majors midway to applied statistics and research methods. ►

While working on my doctorate, I taught undergraduate statistics part-time for two years. After graduating in 2002, I taught graduate and undergraduate-level statistics for five years at Ball State University, Indiana.

In 2007 in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, I decided to return home to New Orleans. The return found me once again in the Louisiana public school classroom—where I have been for the last seven years.

So, you see, I am a *teacher*.

'Teacher' meets privatising reform

My first brush with the government and corporate efforts to privatise public education occurred during my time at Ball State. I was teaching an undergraduate course, Tests and Measurement. The year was 2004, and then-President George W. Bush had passed his No Child Left Behind (NCLB) legislation. It was the first time that federal government had tied high-stakes funding outcomes to student test scores.

NCLB declared that the US would reach '100 percent proficiency' by 2014. In 2007, the *Washington Post (WP)* declared such a goal 'out of reach'. In 2012, *WP* declared NCLB a 'policy failure'. NCLB was the first time I heard of the US actually tying teacher jobs to student scores on standardised tests.

I taught my Tests and Measurement students that using student test scores as a measure of teacher performance is a validity issue—that student tests are designed to measure student achievement, not teacher performance—and that lawsuits would likely result from such a practice.

I found it also rather punitive that schools, not meeting some determination of 'adequate yearly progress', would face sanctions including replacing school staff, restructuring the school, or reopening it as a 'public charter' (meaning that a private entity could take public money to run the school; a problem given that 'private' entities are generally in business to make money).

“ I found it also rather punitive that schools, not meeting some determination of 'adequate yearly progress', would face sanctions including replacing school staff, restructuring the school, or reopening it a 'public charter'...”

I did not think the idea would catch on. I was wrong.

The American Legislative Exchange Council

By 2004, the idea of privatising public education was decades old. Many of the ideas associated with the US' current push to privatise education and obliterate teaching as a profession were contrived and promoted by the American Legislative Exchange Council (ALEC).

The excerpt below is from a post in which I catalogue much of ALEC's 'model legislation':

The American Legislative Exchange Council (ALEC) [established 1973] offers corporate America the opportunity to shape legislation that serves its profit-garnering interests and to do so in statehouses around the country.

To accomplish this controlling of the legislative process, ALEC provides forums (conferences that double as posh vacations for legislators and their families) in which both companies and legislators meet in order to write and vote on "model" legislation. The agreed-upon "model" legislation is then advanced in statehouses nationwide, carried home with legislators like a corporate-financed virus, with ALEC providing abundant reminders and "talking

points" (a short list of statements that offer the appearance of having detailed knowledge of an issue) for legislators to help ensure passage of bills designed to fill those corporate-sponsor coffers. ...

ALEC was able to operate under the radar for decades, until Common Cause filed a whistleblower complaint against ALEC with the IRS in April 2012. Seems ALEC forgot to acknowledge more than a decade of lobbying on its tax forms.

Despite the Common Cause filing, the ALEC mission of serving its corporate sponsors via its model legislation continues.

Here is an example of an ALEC model bill:

Great Teachers and Leaders Act (2010)

*The Great Teachers and Leaders Act reforms the practice of tenure, known as nonprobationary status in some states. Teachers can earn **tenure after 3 years of sufficient student academic growth; tenure is revocable following 2 consecutive years of insufficient growth. The council for educator effectiveness will define teacher effectiveness and come up with parameters for an evaluation system that requires 50 percent of a teacher's evaluation to be based on student achievement using multiple measures. The Act requires principals to be evaluated annually with 50 percent of the evaluation based on student achievement and their ability to develop teachers in their buildings and increase their effectiveness. [Emphasis added.]***

I learned about ALEC in March 2012, following the Louisiana governor's and legislature's passing a whirlwind of anti-teacher legislation, including legislation to grade public school teachers using student test scores. The legislation, known as Act 1, was declared unconstitutional for a second time in district court in January 2014. Act 1 remains in the courts on appeal.

The education 'reform' spectrum

Even as Louisiana teachers were coming to grips with legislation to grade them using student test scores, and with the state salary freezes to show that policymakers had decided we could not be trusted to do our jobs without having our pay (and our livelihoods) tied to test score merit, we faced another mountain. A challenge that required a national effort to standardise English Language Arts (ELA) and mathematic learning in classrooms across the nation (known as the Common Core State Standards [CCSS]).

Both grading teachers using student test scores and CCSS are part of a spectrum of the so-called 'education reforms'. That is, these and other 'reform' concepts are meant to be part of an inseparable package of reforms.

Even though NCLB was a failure, it has yet to be formally canceled. Instead, our current president and secretary of education have decided to allow the US to exit from NCLB by 'entering' into a new (worse) version known as *Race to the Top* (RTTT). RTTT is much more standardised-test-dependent than NCLB and more controlled by the federal government.

In a 2009 National Governors Association (NGA) meeting, the key components of RTTT were showcased (though they were not then called RTTT). As I note in a post I wrote at this NGA meeting:

At the June 2009 Hunt Institute and the National Governors Association (NGA) symposium focused on the allocation of American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) funding, Duncan and the governors decide to focus on four areas for education reform:

1. Common standards
2. Teacher performance (value-added assessment)
3. "Turnaround" of "low performing" schools
4. Building data systems.

I will highlight parts of this document (but may I add the entire document [16 pages] is well worth the read. Keep in mind that the document is from June 2009, yet it includes the following statement:

*At the Symposium, Secretary Duncan made an important announcement regarding these funds: US \$350 million of the RTTT funds has been earmarked to support the development of high-quality common assessments. **With 46 states and three territories already signed on to the Council of Chief State School Officers and the National Governors Association-led initiative to develop a set of common core standards that are fewer, clearer, and higher, this announcement was greeted enthusiastically by Symposium participants.** [Emphasis added.]*

The resulting 'standards' were not completed until June 2010, yet 46 governors and three territories were willing to blindly follow this as-of-yet uncreated [forget untested] 'effort'.

In short, the intended reform package was to include the following: national standards (though promoters prefer the image of states just happening to accept the same standards at the same time as opposed to calling CCSS 'national' standards; grading teachers using student test scores; handing over public schools with 'low' test scores to private companies (often known as 'charter school operators'); and pervasive (invasive?) data collection of student information.

Promoters of this spectrum of reforms made two points clear: that they intended to institute their reforms as quickly as possible (no careful planning and pilot testing); and that they expected public resistance but intended to forcefully push their reform agenda.

“ A major component of the push to privatise education in the US is the adoption of the 'common standards' (CCSS). ”

Back to those 'common standards'

A major component of the push to privatise education in the US is the adoption of the 'common standards' (CCSS). CCSS is little more than a federal effort to standardise public education funneled through compliant states. CCSS currently covers two core education subjects, ELA and math, across the entire public school career (kindergarten through grade twelve).

The effort to standardise is evident in the fact that teachers are not allowed to alter CCSS. We must use it as it is - and it is copyrighted by the two groups credited with writing it: NGA and the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO).

Only two signatures were required to commit states to adopting CCSS in place of previous state standards: the governor's, and the state education superintendent.

Furthermore, the federal government promoted CCSS and encouraged governors/state superintendents to sign the CCSS contract before it was even completed.

Bill Gates

A number of US philanthropists are dumping millions (billions?) into education ventures designed to abolish the public education system in the US to favor a corporate-run, under-regulated, profit-driven enterprise. No so-called philanthropist represents this privatisation effort better than former Microsoft CEO Bill Gates.

Consider CCSS. In my series on Gates' CCSS funding, I tracked US\$173.5 million spent by Bill Gates on all aspects of CCSS—much of it on the implementation—despite the fact that CCSS was hastily created and never pilot tested.

Bill Gates has paid millions to both national teachers unions for the advancement of CCSS and to both CCSS copyright holders and supposed authors, NGA and CCSSO.

He has also spent US\$1.3 million toward 'professional development' for the federal department of education (USDOE); and the USDOE has allowed him to do so.

Both USDOE and Gates are aggressively promoting CCSS. Gates' financing of USDOE affairs adds an incestuous component to their commonly-shared American education privatisation agenda.

The hub of the education reform effort in the US is the so-termed set of RTTT-coerced 'common standards' and Bill Gates has made it his business to secure for CCSS its largely unwelcome place in the American schoolroom.

In writing this article, my goal was to offer a realistic survey of the impact of profit-driven education reform upon the classroom in the US. The goal of the US education 'reform' movement via RTTT is as follows: Have all public schools

teaching to the same set of inflexible ELA and Mathematics standards (and have private companies sell curriculum, and professional development materials, and tests); test all schools and compare all states (via unprecedented student data collection) to decide which schools/states are 'failing'; obliterate teaching as a profession and instead, turn it into profit-driven, temporary employment; and turn over 'failing' schools (and their public tax money) to private education companies. The final result: privatisation of the public education system in the US.

For further reading

This summer, I wrote a book on the subject due for release in April 2014, *A Chronicle of Echoes: Who's Who in the Implosion of American Public Education* (Information Age Publishing, North Carolina, US). It is 500 pages long, and even then, I had to reduce the content.

Indeed, there is much to write on the subject. To this end, I wish to offer readers these additional suggested readings from my blog:

The privatisation of New Orleans public schools via the state-run Recovery School District

The promoting of hastily-trained, temporary teachers through the agency, Teach for America

The unstable, easily-manipulated farce that is the school performance score

The biased grading of teacher training programs via the self-appointed National Council on Teacher Quality

The profit-garnering, under-regulated charter school industry

The mining of student data.

For further references please email Mercedes at deutsch29@aol.com

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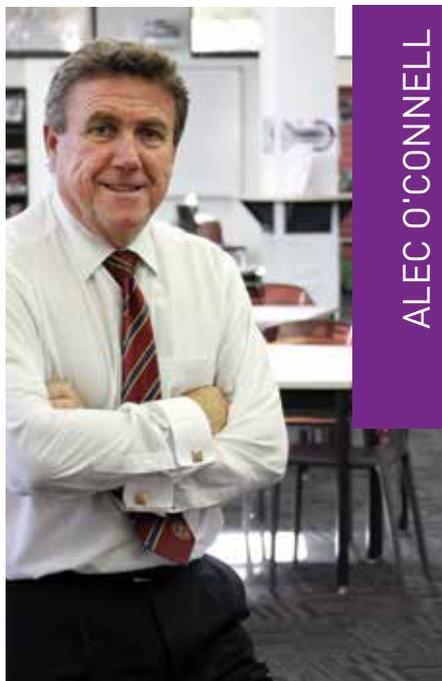
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ALEC O'CONNELL

An information-driven community: The why?

One of the greatest threats to any organisation, including schools, is complacency. As Bonnor and Caro (2012, p223) state: 'Regardless of how good they are, all schools should be trying to do better. Sustainable improvement in schools can take many years and needs to survive changes of teachers, principals and governments.' One of the most important strategies is to ensure that the key drivers that we put in place across all facets of the school are geared at improving teaching and learning. In a highly competitive educational environment, and one that comes at a significant cost to many families, we need to continue to add value and improve the educational experience for everyone.

We have all heard the saying 'change for change sake'. Within the educational setting we often see programmes, or initiatives implemented simply because a colleague was doing the same. Change, however is inevitable and a healthy part of the ongoing journey as educators. Educational change provides a wonderful opportunity to realign our personal and organisational priorities and determine what really matters to a community. The process of implementing an initiative provides a Johari Window moment through which to view and revisit who we

are and what we are trying to achieve. The Johari Window model is a simple and useful tool for illustrating and improving self-awareness and mutual understanding between individuals within a group. The model can also be used to assess and improve a group's relationship with other groups. Being involved in a change initiative provides a community with an opportunity to gain a better understanding and appreciation of each other and share in a mutual journey.

It was Ghandi who once said, 'Be the change you want'. On the surface this is a simple premise, yet in so many ways hard to achieve; not necessarily because of a lack of ability, nor hard work, but simply because the reason for the change may never have been questioned nor articulated at the strategic level. Before embarking on a change, those leading the change must ask a very simple yet powerful question, 'why are we doing this?' Because many other schools are doing it is simply not good enough. Likewise a statement such as 'I think this may be helpful' does not fill one with vigour, or confidence that the change will lead to any value add.

In his book *Start with the Why*, Simon Sinek provides a salient argument to explain why we need to get the 'why?' right. He presents a number of challenges: Why are some people and organisations more innovative, more influential and more profitable than others? Why do some command greater loyalty from customers and employees alike? Even among the successful, why are so few able to repeat their success over and over?

If we can get the 'why?' correct, then the challenges of implementing change can be refocused into opportunities. More

importantly it may well lead the school to say 'no' to an initiative because the idea is not aligned to who they are, or where they are heading. I would suggest that this is an equally great outcome and a reason for asking 'why?' before embarking on any new venture.

For my journey, I consider the drive for better access, the use and delivery of information before I even commenced at Scotch College in WA. We began with a review of the role of libraries and staffing within; quite often staffing structures can reinforce outdated models of delivery and in many ways can negate the level and quality of information usage and access.

In our case the 'why?' was simple and compelling. Students, parents, old boys, staff and the wider college community needed access to quality information to remain informed and at the forefront of a rapidly changing world. We also thought the project could become the catalyst for community-wide connectedness through a service approach to information delivery.

Our ultimate goal was to develop a culture of information creation, discovery and sharing, without the limitations of artificial boundaries, which sometimes are reflected through physical and mental constraints of how we think a library should look, feel and function.

The how – Mrs Anna Hu, Director of Information Learning Technology

At Scotch responsibility for the strategic direction of the library is located in the executive portfolio of the Director of Information and Learning Technologies (ILT). There are several strategic reasons

for this, the most important being that when ILT is part of the solution, it can enable, engage and empower an environment of community connectivity. In a contemporary school, the ILT and library strategies need to be symbiotic as both need to focus on education, information and the whole-of-school goals. At their core they must be focused on providing services to the whole community.

Investments in infrastructure, as well as people, are the critical component enabling a strategy that is driving for better access, use and delivery of information to more than 8000 community members, with plans to include almost 10,000 Old Scotch Collegians (OSC) in 2014. Building a resilient network that supports and facilitates this access across two schools, Scotch College and our sister school PLC, brings with it added complexities, while enabling significant economies of scale.

From a technical perspective, schools need to provide a network that puts no limits on access to information, the tools needed to create information, nor the ability to share information. Security and knowing who is viewing and accessing information is critical. Enterprise systems for authentication, fast and reliable internet, fast and reliable access to the resources wirelessly across the campus, and access to all of these resources from any location, need to be a normal expectation.

From a personnel perspective, investment in specialised personnel such as digital creators and technical support staff is critical. Their role is to work alongside staff, students, parents and the broader community empowering them with the skills to locate and critically assess, create and share multi-mode information. With the rapidly changing world, today changes in technology, personnel and infrastructure, all contribute to success. Changing the mindset of traditional educators, IT departments and libraries to create a culture of change requires a clear vision and direction.

The what – Mr Bradley Tyrrell, Head of Library, Information and Research Services

Creating an environment that welcomes all members of the community is critical in establishing the first aspect of the vision. At Scotch we have an expectation that library 'touch points' with members of the community must be positive. This is due to the fact that we are a service to our community and we must ensure that all of the experiences they have are positive rather than negative. While we acknowledge that we are not able to provide everything, we are a conduit that enables our community to connect with those who can provide assistance.

This support extends beyond the normal limits of students and staff. All library services are available to parents in order to enable them to help their children with any aspect of study or an assignment. Supporting our boys' parents is paramount in enabling them to be involved in their sons' education. Specifically parents can login to our library OPAC, borrow books directly from each library, borrow books from our extensive eBook collection and access the academic databases. In 2014 we will extend these services to our OSC with access to the college eBook collection. This in turn will provide service and connection to more than 10,000 users.

The nature of assistance has also diversified significantly for our boys and staff. The traditional skills of literature promotion, research skills and English support are now morphing into a position that is no longer isolated and without context. Integrated, collaborative and collegial support directly related to the curriculum is the only way that libraries will remain relevant to the various teaching programmes. By establishing this relationship we are then able to resource the specific needs of the curriculum with the teacher directly involved in the resource selection and one not only relevant to non-fiction. At Scotch, students are involved directly in the selection of fiction books with programmes in place to ensure that titles are ordered and issued straight to the requesting student.

One of the paramount modifications to the role of the Scotch library has been the implementation of the Content Redefinition Framework (CRF). This framework is one where the Teacher Librarians, ILT Coaches and the newly-added role of Digital Content Creator support teachers in creating original content. By establishing this charter, we have established a user-friendly, non-invasive way for libraries to work with staff to address the various ways of redefining their teaching. At each wedge of the CRF the teacher is involved; the full process takes two years and in the third year of the framework the teacher becomes self-sufficient at creating original content and only requires 'on demand' assistance.

While this is what we do in our library at Scotch, we have set our sights on a loftier goal. The library should and must collaborate and share with other libraries locally, nationally and internationally. Through sharing/presenting ideas in international forums, participating in webinars and by hosting professional development days we give back to our professional communities. An excellent by-product of this process is the reciprocal nature of these communities in assisting us in achieving our goals. It is a rich world of information and we aim to contribute to it.

In an ever-changing world, schools simply cannot assume a status quo approach to the delivery of information and library services. By doing so there is a real danger of stagnation and decline. While the process of change can be challenging, it does provide rich opportunities for communities to come together and debate what is best for them and how the different members of community can contribute and drive the overall process of change. The information project at Scotch has in many ways provided just such an opportunity. While there is still plenty of scope for the growth and improvement of our current project and model, the benefits for a community engaged in a major change project are always in the journey not simply the destination.

Dr Alec O'Connell is Headmaster of Scotch College, Swanbourne, Western Australia.



KATE BAXTER

Providing more choices in more places

One of the persistent challenges of being the TAFE responsible for more than half, or 500,000 sq. km of New South Wales (NSW) state (but only approximately two per cent of the population) is ensuring that those who live within the region have access to an appropriate range of training choices.

While TAFE Western supports a large number of students in the central-west and Orana regions of NSW—such as Orange and Dubbo—it is also responsible for the communities of the far-west, including Broken Hill; some 10 hours by car from Orange and the isolated towns in the north-west of the state.

Many of these locations are regarded as some of the most disadvantaged and isolated communities in NSW. In education this disadvantage is shown by limited levels of school and post-school education achievement. School retention

from years 7 to 12 is significantly lower than the state average and markedly poorer for Indigenous school students.

These challenges are compounded by the difficulties that come from isolation including: historically-restricted access to diverse training opportunities; viable class groups; suitable equipment and experienced teachers.

Within this context, and over time these communities have been affected by the changes in their local services. Many have observed a drop in services, with commercial and government agencies rationalising and reducing their offerings due to the need for efficiencies.

TAFE Western has not been exempt from the budgetary pressures that have led to a restricted range of training choices outside larger regional centres. Communities have spoken out about

the lack of choice, in particular their anxieties about the lack of opportunities encouraging young people to remain in their towns, while at the same time having the opportunity to secure the skills and qualifications for their lives and careers.

Making connections for new choices

TAFE Western has always been proud of its 'sense of place' in western NSW and its determination to live up to the vision of providing education and training that can change lives. It is also pleased of being able to overcome the challenges of distance, isolation and educational disadvantage. The feedback received from communities inspired the development of a new initiative to assist in meeting the needs of the region called TAFE Western Connect.



TAFE Western Connect is a simple idea aiming to integrate, coordinate and promote training delivered online by video conferencing, flexible workshops and mobile delivery units armed with specialist teaching equipment. The integration of delivery methods is fundamental to the school's approach because research and its experience have proven that online and distance delivery alone, is not universally accepted or effective.

At TAFE Western Connect students can train through a variety of means: through online materials which ensure access to experiences which emulate a more personal learning interaction. Students are supported by phone, video conferencing (Adobe Connect), social media tools, and through an online tutorial service. This can also involve video conferencing classes where students and teachers from different communities can communicate through an 'on-screen class'. This technology means that a student from a remote community can access any class from any one of TAFE's 24 colleges. This alone is a dramatic expansion of the range of choices available to most of the region.

This style of training lends itself to developing underpinning knowledge and emphasising the 'hands-on' technical aspects of training. This can be challenging in a remote location where the community lacks the infrastructure required for the training. TAFE Western Connect's solution has been to build mobile training units, in specially-equipped trailers and trucks, so that the equipment and the training can be transported physically to communities.

With the 'pop-up' workshops and learning spaces, TAFE Western Connect has been able to take training into the region in childcare, nursing and health, coffee making, shearing, confined spaces, conservation earthworks, welding and many other areas. Using the most current simulation technology, the initiative has also been able to deliver training for driving heavy vehicles and mining equipment into isolated towns.

The mobile units provide opportunities that would otherwise be unlikely. For example, a mobile welding unit travels

an 800 km circuit for two weeks at a time. Its route can include welding training for adults in Wilcannia; and in the correctional centres in Broken Hill and Ivanhoe. Similarly, our Mobile Library is the only library service many of these communities ever have the opportunity to access.

With these options TAFE Western Connect has added approximately 80 new choices for our students:

- Certificate III in Children's Services delivered via videoconferencing, interactive whiteboards and mobile learning unit visits
- Certificate III in Educational Support delivered online and through connected classrooms
- Certificate III in Library and Information Services delivered online
- Certificate II in Resources and Infrastructure Work Preparation delivered using the mobile mining equipment simulator
- Certificate I Logistics using the heavy vehicle driving simulator
- Certificate I Aboriginal Languages using videoconferencing.

A clear demonstration of TAFE Western Connect's work is in the area of Children's Services. One of the school's early students related that they worked part-time at a preschool in the north-west of NSW and decided to enrol through the TAFE facility in the Certificate III in Children's Services to improve their skills in compliance legislation. They said that TAFE Western Connect was the perfect study option as it meant they didn't have to travel to Cobar or Dubbo.

Another example saw one student attend classes regularly joining their teacher in Dubbo and other students in western NSW by using the connected classroom at the local college. The teacher also took a mobile learning unit filled with specialised equipment into the community. This kind of service has assisted the students into practising the theory they learned in class, through play sessions for local children.

Karen Forrester, teacher Children's Services, said: "I enjoy driving the

mobile learning unit into our smaller communities – it's like having a classroom on a trailer. My students are really enthusiastic and can't wait to help unpack the equipment. We then spend the class putting into practice the theoretical knowledge that the students have been learning. Being able to learn in a hands-on environment helps the students contextualise their training, which is really important."

Connecting Indigenous to education and training

One of the areas of focus for TAFE Western Connect is bridging the gap for Indigenous student in education and employment. Close to 17 per cent¹ of the total population of western NSW are Indigenous; the highest proportion in number for any region in the state.

Each year approximately 7000 Aboriginal students enrol at TAFE Western Connect, comprising more than 18 per cent of the total student population; a significant figure because it not only demonstrates a prominent focus of the TAFE Western Connect initiative, it also shows that the level of participation in training is higher than the proportion of the population.

With the working-age Indigenous population of the region estimated to be around 16 000 people, nearly one in two are training with TAFE Western Connect. This is an important responsibility considering that the employment rate is below 40 per cent in the region.

While TAFE Western Connect is not a strategy specifically focused on Indigenous education and training, it has been encouraged by its apparent effectiveness in this area. Within its first two years of operation around a third of the student enrolments were Indigenous.

Another important indicator of the program's long-term benefits is that a high proportion of Indigenous students are studying at the Certificate III level, or higher. This is important because research has shown that this level of training is the tipping point for getting and keeping a job as well as amplifying the student's earning potential.

¹ 16.8% according to the ABS demographic profile of the Aboriginal population of NSW 2006.

Recent analysis seems to indicate a positive trend in the completion of qualifications by Indigenous students through TAFE Western Connect. It is also widely acknowledged that retention through training, leading to completion of qualification, is an area where there is a notable gap between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students.

One of the unanticipated benefits of the TAFE Western Connect approach is that course completions for Indigenous students may be five per cent higher, than for the organisation as a whole. It is still not clear yet why this has eventuated. TAFE Western Connect has considered that the important implication of the figure is that it may be able to make a vital contribution to 'bridging the gap', not only through increasing participation in education, but also by improving course completions.

Revitalising regional NSW

TAFE Western Connect has achieved significant outcomes for its students, communities and industries. Specific benefits include approximately 80 new training options on offer throughout the region particularly in the smallest communities of western NSW with approximately 3500 annual student enrolments of which around one third are at the higher qualifications level.

TAFE Western Connect is proud of its geographical reach. Enrolments have been made by students residing within 110 NSW local government areas, and current analysis is showing that the services are expanding the educational activity in the small and remote communities of the state.

Since the initiative commenced in 2012, TAFE Western Connect has seen the following outcomes:

- 8552 student enrolments in TAFE Western Connect courses
- 2261 Indigenous enrolments, 29 per cent of which were at Certificate III level or above
- 905 students with a disability trained
- 3432 course completions.

As a result of these very positive outcomes, TAFE Western Connect received an award from the Premier of NSW in 2013 in the category of Revitalising NSW.

TAFE Western Connect is growing in importance as a delivery vehicle for the state. It is proven that it really does help overcome the barriers of geography, teacher location and the practicalities of building viable classes using different technologies.

Kate Baxter is Institute Director of TAFE Western, NSW.



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Managing a community, rather than a classroom

New teachers commonly turn to high-control models of teaching when faced with the challenge of managing their classroom. After all, textbooks and teaching mentors tend to favour and promote the conscientious enforcement of rules. Teacher educators commonly impart rule-based techniques that reportedly shape the behaviour and attention of students. *Don't smile until Easter* is perhaps the most clichéd advice directed at teacher candidates when they join the teaching community.

Standing firm to prohibit anti-social and aberrant forms of student conduct will always be good teaching practice. However, many beginning teachers soon discover the stress and inefficiency of relying on a highly authoritarian approach

to managing the behaviour of their pupils. The effort required to maintain high-control classroom management strategies—some of which create more conflicts than they resolve—often distracts the teacher from curriculum goals, destabilises their pedagogy and unsettles their students. As a result, inexperienced teachers often become frustrated with their own inability to attain the levels of student attention observable in the classrooms of their veteran peers.

The great leap forward usually comes when the teacher turns away from punitive measure, and attempts instead to develop a positive social mood in the classroom, a mood that reflects authentic interest, mutual respect and personal trust. This is the moment when contested

wills and conflicted emotions give way to shared purpose. The teacher and their students can then direct their attention to contemplating new ideas and undertaking transformative tasks.

When assisting trainee teachers, many of whom are struggling to manage a classroom, I find that success comes sooner if they reinterpret their role as the manager of a community. Rather than diminishing the role of the teacher, shifting the focus from classroom to community opens up a range of possibilities. Where communities are acknowledged, notions of leadership and relationship become productive. Although the management of a community places new ethical restrictions on the manager, it has the potential to motivate the

members of the community, affording more productive community outcomes.

At first glance, characterising the classroom as a community might appear to be just another way of favouring student-centred pedagogy. But arguments over whether the classroom should be teacher- or student-centred are not only less productive, they are also based on the erroneous notion of a competition between teacher and student and therefore less productive than exploring the implications of viewing the classroom as a learning community. Recognising a class as community in no way undervalues the teacher's authority as either an instructor or the generator of purposeful curriculum; on the contrary, teachers who intentionally shape their classroom into a community can almost certainly count on having a more meaningful impact on student learning.

So what exactly does it mean to perceive the classroom as a community?

At an abstract level, *community* is anything but a simple concept to pin down. Raymond Williams has traced the word back to its Latin and French origins, where it was employed to describe a body of fellow townsmen and ownership shared by the public. But the recognition of shared ownership brings with it a host of political controversies. Recently, commentators have pointed to the emergent nature of communities, describing how they spring forth in a myriad of contexts, each community with its own particular set of expectations and affordances.

The emergence of a community within a classroom occurs where the students become active and responsible sharers of the available resources. This is dependent upon the use of teaching methods that reflect the primacy of social interaction, intercultural interface and communal orientation. To put it another way, a community is likely to emerge in a classroom where the teacher fosters constructive social agency.

When advocating such methods, university courses typically cite the socio-psychological work of Vygotsky, the student-centred thinking of Bruner, the child / curriculum distinction of Dewey,

and even the social behaviourist model of Bandura. The acquisition of skills and knowledge is mostly considered a matter of internalising shared cognitive feats that pre-exist in the social realm. Group-work activities are commonplace, and opportunities are created for peer-to-peer modelling of skills and knowledge. The subjectivity of each learner is retained when they assemble with their peers as legitimate members of a community.

The link between classroom communities and sound classroom management is even more apparent where the students and the teacher are regarded as the cohabitants of an effective learning space. Working with this premise to devise their *communities of learning* model, Brown and Campione (1994) identify several operational features in an effective learner-centred and teacher-directed classroom, including: sharing expertise with other members of the community; becoming familiar with the structures of participation; learning constructive community discourse; participating in the learning of others, as well as benefitting from the learning of others; and the communal seeding or appropriation of ideas. A teacher will turn these elements into routine procedures where they come to understand their role *prima facie* as the member of a community of learning.

This shifting of the focus from discipline-management to the creation of a sense of community was later explored by Kohn (1996). Rather than emphasising control, Kohn was concerned with helping students to flourish. His claim was that students benefit more where a community structure is provided, rather than a set of disciplinary rules. The foundations for this structure are the teacher's willingness to share, plan and reflect with the students. In communities beyond the classroom, such an approach is accepted as normative practice.

Another widely embraced vision of the classroom as a community can be found in the work of Bell Hooks (1994). Striving to replace classroom hierarchies with caring, Hooks challenges teachers to reflect on whether the obedience of their students is demanded or earned. In a sharing community, obedience can only be earned, either by entertaining

the students, or through building relationships of mutuality. Where the learning environment fails to acknowledge and care for the individual needs and lives of the students, then obedience functions as an oppressive force, working against real learning.

Regardless of which model of community is adopted, it takes time for new teachers to learn how best to achieve a sense of community in their classroom. There are, however, codes of practice that rapidly strengthen the classroom community while promoting educational achievements.

One such code that student teachers appear to find useful is the three-step approach of *protect-include-support*. This structure is premised upon the notion that communities are sustained where those seeking inclusion in the community are both protected by their membership and supported by the community to achieve their shared goals.

When this structure is translated to the classroom context, classroom management takes on a new look. If a student is not *protected* within the classroom community, or if their interests are not *included*, or if they are not *supported* to achieve their learning goals, then it is unlikely that they have ever experienced membership of an emergent community in the first place.

Accordingly, teachers have the special responsibility of engineering a sense of community by firstly *protecting* their students from the harm and anxiety that flows from antisocial conduct. Secondly, the teacher will need to be proactive in finding ways to include individual students in their passion for their subject knowledge and skills. Finally, where an individual student has been protected and included, the role of the teacher is to devise mechanisms whereby the community can support the student's learning. Some of the more common forms of support are how-to feedback, encouragement and task-modification – all of which are the mark an expert teacher.

The community-derived structure of *protect-include-support* represents a philosophy of internal social cohesion, rather than an attitude of extrinsic force

and coercion. It is difficult to imagine that a student would be disengaged and disconnected where they experience protection from unjust anxieties, where they are authentically included in learning tasks, and where the support is tailored to provide them with knowledge and skills.

When new teachers are inquiring into the nature of the teacher-student relationship, they often turn to uncomfortable analogies of friendship or parenthood. But there is a good case for arguing that the teacher-student relationship is only found by applying the lens of *community*. Identify a teacher who is able to protect, include and support a student, and there you will find the definitive teacher/student relationship.

Political reasons have also been offered for conceptualising classroom management as a matter of community building. Campbell (2007) has documented the history of the social dimension of schooling, which he represents as a narrative of social class formation. Schools, then, have a responsibility to condition students to living in an equitable and collaborative community. It follows that teachers are active agents who facilitate distinctive practices and class relations. The task of the teacher is to generate habits of community, or else they contribute to the reproduction of social inequality.

The same principle drives the philosophy of John Dewey, which presupposes the communal nature of existence, as well as linking the individual's interests with those of the community. Dewey contends that if we don't treat the classroom as a community, then we are not preparing our students to participate in democratic society.

Political reasons aside, there are also pedagogical reasons for interpreting the classroom as a community. We have moved into an age that regards skills of inquiry and analysis as being equally important as declaratory or factual knowledge. Inquiring on one's own is rarely as fruitful or dynamic as involving others in the quest for a successful outcome or solution. This again calls attention to the community dimension of learning.

“ *The link between community and inquiry has inspired a number of educators to engineer and circumscribe what is known as a community of inquiry.* ”

I once attended a school valedictory assembly where the guest speaker declared to a cohort of more than two hundred school leavers that everything he had attempted alone had come to nothing, while everything that he had achieved in life had been a joint enterprise with others. A similar sentiment rests beneath an aphorism of the Xhosa people of South Africa, that *people are people through people*.

The link between community and inquiry has inspired a number of educators to engineer and circumscribe what is known as a *community of inquiry*. Building on the work of Peirce and Dewey, Lipman (2003) has described communities of inquiry as educational settings in which the students are authentically engaged, reflective, and appreciative of the indefinite nature of knowledge. Another model proposed by Garrison (2007) regards educational experience as a product of social presence, cognitive presence and teaching presence. Contrary to the myth that they are open and instructionless arrangements, communities of inquiry are usually circumscribed by a tight set of social conventions, and require as much expert input from the teacher as any other approach to the teaching of knowledge.

The efficacy of the community of inquiry approach has seen it become one of the key methodologies employed and advocated by Museum Victoria. Every year, thousands of teachers who are planning to take their class to Melbourne's major museums are given access on the Museum Victoria website to an extensive and detailed guide for conducting a community of inquiry.

The community is said to work best where the thinking of the students is caring of other members, creative of new ideas, and critical in the examination of reasons and opinions. For the teacher, developing and applying good dialogue and questioning techniques is crucial.

Finally, it should be noted that some words grow to encompass so many concepts and perspectives that they risk losing their significance. Due to the affective quality of its usage, *community* is one of these words. Politicians appeal to *community* values and *community* safety, while bemoaning the ills of *society*. When criminals are punished mercifully, they are ordered to do *community* service. Real estate agents are quick to point to nearby *community* amenities when selling a house. However, it is difficult to imagine a more appropriate application of the word than in the context of the classroom. For in the classroom, real lives share their resources, their thinking, and their physical space, and often for vast tracts of time. Other than the family sphere, it is difficult to imagine a place of more intense and beneficial communal interaction.

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JULIE RIMES

When school communities work together

Every so often you have a light bulb moment. One such moment occurred for me when I attended the ACER 2012 Conference titled: *School Improvement: What does research tell us about effective strategies?* Keynote speaker David Hargreaves spoke about his work in the United Kingdom with the National College for School Leadership and described his work on creating a self-improving school system (ACER 2012). His talk focussed on educational communities and self-improving school systems.

We all interpret what we hear to make it collocate with our own thinking but what I found so compelling about David Hargreaves' talks were his four building blocks of a self-improving school system. These four building blocks are firstly, the clusters of schools (the structure); the local solutions approach and co-construction with significant others are what he refers to as the two cultural elements or the second and third building blocks; and system leaders (the key people) is his fourth building block. Hargreaves asserts that all four need to be strengthened so that schools can collaborate effectively in professional learning and school improvement. Hargreaves has written extensively on this and all of his think pieces are freely available electronically. What made the most impact on me was my immediate consideration of our practices as schools and the education communities we work and collaborate with, and those that we do not, and the effect these education communities have on our practice. As I sat there I considered these four building blocks and how to move towards being a self-improving school.

Like many schools, my own enjoys a variety of relationships with others involved in education at an institutional or individual level. Some might be described as strategic alliances because they are central to our operations; some are fairly loose alliances that are merely clusterings of like-minded professionals who meet to share information and collegial assistance. We all have education communities but have we harnessed them in ways that can really make a difference?

What I began to question was the impact of the existing school communities and how these could be strengthened so that these collaborative efforts could be more effective in terms of professional learning and school improvement. The idea of schools working together collaboratively has long been with us, but recently it has become more commonplace; think for example of the growth in the number of professional associations for teachers in Australia in the past few decades. Hargreaves maintains that while very few schools lack forms of partnerships, 'the character and quality vary considerably, from a relatively shallow, short-term relationship affecting limited functions and few people (loose partnership) to a deep, enduring relationship that affects most functions and most people in the schools (a tight partnership)' (Hargreaves 2010, p.6).

Hargreaves proposes that in self-improving school systems 'a maturity model' (Hargreaves 2011, p8) can apply in school alliances between two or more schools where the organisational and professional practices and processes help them to progressively achieve shared goals, both local and systemic. One of the key features of Hargreaves' maturity

model is joint practice development (JPD) where JPD is about putting professionals together to work on real issues. It's a model where people work together as equals on joint practice development and it is this that has been shown to have the greatest benefits (Hargreaves 2012).

So I returned to my workplace determined to improve some of the common outcomes I had with other education communities in my locale and to see what could be done within the sphere of joint practice development. Such was the impact of Hargreaves's presentation that I used one of the break sessions to sit in the sunshine of the Darling Harbour forecourt and shoot off a couple of impassioned emails. First on my wish-list was our local university, the University of Tasmania. As a school community we have had a long association with the State's only university over many years. Most recently we have been working on a STEM education initiative that is, in part, a collaborative arrangement between our school and the School of Engineering at the University of Tasmania. The School of Engineering working in a community engagement role (Australian Universities Community Engagement Alliance 2008) as change-agent and advisors assist school-based practitioners to create and sustain a STEM program (<http://www.utas.edu.au/stem>) in the school curriculum and we are one of their partners in this endeavour.

In a fortunate alignment the School of Engineering at The University of Tasmania also strongly believes that community engagement is a core responsibility of higher education (Australian Universities Community Engagement Alliance 2008). Working

together with school staff the School of Engineering provided a significant degree of practical professional learning for our teachers. It was their contention that the active involvement of academics in engagement initiatives with the K-12 school sector is essential in a situation, that exists in Tasmania, where educational aspirations and attainment levels currently lag behind our mainland counterparts. Engagement with the school sector provides direct involvement of STEM Faculties and access to real-world expertise and much needed contextual knowledge and resources.

Beyond the more obvious rationales for community engagement of improved inclusion and economic benefits, there are particular drivers relevant to the Tasmanian scene that gives engagement efforts heightened importance. Early in 2013 the Tasmanian State Government published its consultative framework (State of Tasmania, 2013) on community engagement, a whole-of-Government approach to better engage with communities, citing some of the benefits as: developing community capacity, discovering new ideas and expertise, and learning from each other. At various levels the University of Tasmania is seeing community engagement as a core activity requiring a depth and scope not widely seen in the past. The Vice Chancellor's Awards for Outstanding Community Engagement for staff engaged in prolonged and excellent community engagement in some ways reflect this growing area of university outreach. The outcomes of this collaboration and partnership between these two education communities are described in a forthcoming publication, *Engaging Australia: University Community Engagement and Service Learning* (2014) in the chapter Enhancing Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) Education for Girls through a University-School Partnership (Rimes & León de la Barra, 2014).

I initiated discussions with the School of Education to see how we could collaborate and improve outcomes for both institutions in the teacher learning sphere. It was my contention that too often there was a disconnection between formal learning and the requisite putting

“ *...community engagement is a core responsibility of higher education (Australian Universities Community Engagement Alliance 2008).* ”

knowledge to work in order to change practices in the workplace. What I wanted was a practice model of professional learning, where the emphasis was on both cognitive change through the acquisition of academic knowledge and on the development of best professional practice. It is about changing practice by focusing on learning-by-doing. My challenge was to develop a coherent and integrated approach to professional learning that married formal academic learning with the school-based practice. I held the belief that what was needed was to raise professional learning to a new level by engaging with a key learning community partner, the University of Tasmania's School of Education. What was needed was a process that was essentially reciprocal in that teachers work collaboratively together, but with the benefits of rigour derived from the University participation in the design and implementation phases. For me it was about seeing knowledge application within teaching practices, it was about applied research being part of school improvement, and it was about moving from intention into action.

Fortunately the university was motivated to spend the time and effort in transforming this concept into a reality. This year for the first time we are conducting post graduate course work in our own school, fully supported by the university, but based on our own work in classrooms, our own co-operative coaching and sharing relationships enhanced by our own, on-the-ground advice, support and encouragement.

The benefit for us is that we both use and build on our own social capital and thus have a direct impact on our school outcomes. Currently over 17 per cent of our staff are enrolled in this innovative arrangement with UTAS. Also using this distributed leadership style of professional learning another 15 per cent of teachers at the school are working collaboratively in a Professional Learning Community where they meet regularly over a two year cycle to improve their practices in assessment. These examples go beyond simply 'sharing good practice' by contextualising the core competencies within the teachers' own encompassing disciplines.

We are also in high-level negotiations with the University about how to work collaboratively to contribute to improved outcomes in pre-service training of teachers. Based on the belief that good teacher preparation (see, for example, Darling-Hammond, 2006), requires quality practicum experiences that are supervised by effective teachers we are working with the University to see how this can be practically implemented. In this we are engaging with others from our broader education communities to see how we can provide for pre-service teachers to spend significant time in schools, under the direct supervision of one or more teachers who model expert practice with students who have a wide range of learning needs. Hargreaves aptly reminds us that for our collaborative efforts to be successful we should possess a collective moral purpose, in this case, we have the shared commitment to improving teacher quality (Hargreaves 2012).

Dr Julie Rimes, FACE, FACEL, FAICD is the Director of the Collegiate Institute for Professional Learning, Research and Innovation in Hobart. The institute aims to increase levels of teacher expertise and understanding and to create higher capability through ongoing professional development.

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Jean Blackburn: She said it

Margaret Clark



Re-reading Jean Blackburn's words draws us back to the heady days and robust discussion of the decade 1973-83, yet they speak to us today, in a different context.

The significance of some debates that dominated this period is no less today:

...choice entered the justification of public subsidies to private schools in an uneasy partnership with need.

Tests have their place but 'as no big deal'... any approach which attempts to analyse schools according to an outcome-outputs factory model is not only damaging but futile...

All children, in my view, have a democratic right of access to a commonly agreed core curriculum, systematically developed across the years of compulsory attendance to increasingly sophisticated levels. ... The participatory working of the democratic society depends on a high degree of shared knowledge, meanings, and frames of reference. It also depends on some commitment to an idea of the common good beyond self and group interest.

She reminds us that vapid catch phrases that simplify and politicise complex educational challenges have always been around in education and we are right to oppose them:

Before we beat our breasts in masochistic response to voiced criticism of the schools, there are some things we must dare to say. Among these are:

- *Sweeping generalisations about 'the schools' are suspect.*
- *Judgements voiced by people with no first-hand knowledge of life in today's schools are suspect.*
- *Any recipes for improving the quality of schools are futile*
- *In the search for improved quality in schools no good purpose is served by attempts to make teachers feel guilty and incompetent. ... Exhortations are cheap,...*

In the oral tapes, her reflections make it clear that whatever policies we put in place, our commitment to them should be provisional and open. There will always be political compromises, unintended consequences and new understandings.

I think we now have to say that the larger issues important for equality were evaded in the resource-based approach to the so-called settlement of the state aid issue in 1973.

The maintenance of social inequality through schooling may be more influential than anything socially comprehensive schools can do to promote equality in and through schooling.

Even if conditions were ideal, our education policy solutions will never be complete fixes.

You can't look back on the history of education without seeing that it is social change which drives educational change ... Education policies are not independent and have to adapt to this. There is no way education policy can claim to fix something saying, 'I have done that'.

Her reflections highlight that in some important respects we are not having the same debates at all. It is important to remind ourselves on occasions that the individualism which now has education policy firmly in its grip did not always inform our policy decisions and actions.

The thing that distresses me the most is the polarization of society. ... What is being played out, I regret to say, is naked individual competitiveness and it is being played out on a world scale as well as on an individual scale and I find that very sad—and apart from that—almost immoral I would call it. [What has been lost is] a sense of community and ... commitment to a lot of pretty good values even if not fully realized and central among them is the idea of democracy itself. And it is very sad to see society so split in income terms.

And on gender equity

The rectification of the effects of history, involves the integrity of the culture itself, undertaken, not just to make women know that it is their territory too, that they are not alien intruders, but shapers of a future more humanely regarded culture

In Blackburn's later years her reflections on this period were honest about the flaws and failures as well as the successes but she also reminds us that even when things we hold dear seem to unravel, they don't go right back to square one. She referred to:

...attitudes and progress made in education understanding that 'cannot be revoked' – we can't un-think anti-sexism and racism even if we have periods where these are contested...



What does an educational community look like?

ELIZABETH WATSON



Educators hear a lot about 'educational communities' but what exactly does this look like? Naturally it may mean different things to different people. I have noticed that many schools striving to be an ideal 'educational community' adopt inquiry-based learning (IBL) or social constructivist pedagogy, aiming to achieve life-long learning, borne out of genuine engagement.

During my placements in Melbourne primary schools, I became interested in IBL for a number of reasons. Through my studies, I came to realise that inquiry can facilitate deep engagement and is a useful tool for integrating the curriculum. However, I also became concerned about IBL, noticing varied levels of student engagement in inquiry-based classrooms, and listening to teachers who were unsure whether IBL was effective in helping them achieve the outcomes they wanted for their students. Many teachers I worked with felt a tension between the self-directed learning school leadership promoted and the more explicit teaching provided by teachers to scaffold individual learners.

I acknowledge there are conflicting interpretations about what inquiry learning actually is. I personally see inquiry learning as existing on a continuum from guided to unguided inquiry, the level of instruction dependent on the needs of the individual learners at any given stage of the inquiry.

My vision of an ideal educational community has been dramatically influenced by my teaching experiences in Australia and my research in IB schools in China. In China I observed the IB Primary Years Program (PYP) and actively sought to find out what Australian primary educators could learn from inquiry-based teaching in the PYP. This research has helped me come to a personal understanding of what an

ideal educational community looks like. Despite my initial apprehension toward inquiry learning, my utopian classroom does in fact engage in inquiry-based learning.

For ease of application to our classrooms, I have identified five themes, or keys, to creating the ideal educational community:

A shared view of inquiry learning and collaboration

This is achieved through students, teachers, school leaders and parents having experience in the language of inquiry and agreeing with inquiry as pedagogy. Classroom teachers, librarians, specialists, students and school leadership are active collaborators in planning and undertaking inquiry. Additionally, classroom teachers are active in their own professional development in delivering inquiry and have open and honest relationships with school leaders and each other. There is no culture of 'checking', only collaboration and continuous improvement.

A school-wide common language of inquiry

A shared view of inquiry is evidenced and maintained by having a common language of inquiry. In each classroom, a model of inquiry, such as an inquiry process wheel is displayed. This is then referred to during classroom discussions to develop both teachers' and learners' understanding of the inquiry process and to support learners 'to know where they are in the inquiry and to follow a pattern of reflection on their data...' (Littleton et al. 2012, p.10). Additionally, the current inquiry is highly visible in the classroom and the classrooms show evidence of student thinking by way of a variety of visible thinking routines such as KWLs and reflection cubes (Ritchart et al. 2011).

“ I acknowledge there are conflicting interpretations about what inquiry learning actually is. I personally see inquiry learning as existing on a continuum from guided to unguided inquiry, the level of instruction dependent on the needs of the individual learners at any given stage of the inquiry. ”

Inquiries are based on generative topics and are student driven

Generative topics 'relate to significant self and social issues about life as it is lived in the real world' (Godhino 2007, p.62). When the teaching team plans the inquiry, they ask themselves if the inquiry topic or question is a 'so what' question, as in 'does it really matter?' to students. Additionally, they don't plan out the whole unit; rather they may plan the 'Tuning In' and 'Finding Out' stages (Murdoch and Hornsby 1997), but allow room for the inquiry to be truly guided by student questions and wonderings.

Physical spaces conducive to collaborative talk and learning

These include classroom table layouts and school spaces that lend themselves to discussion and collaboration.

A well-resourced library that directly supports inquiries

The librarian is an important stakeholder in the planning of inquiries, ensuring that the library is resourced to support the inquiry topics. Classrooms libraries are updated for the duration of the inquiry with related non-fiction and fiction books.

I feel that only such a framework can equip learners for life in a highly globalised and evolving world, one in which educational communities are located right in the centre.

Elizabeth Watson is a Teacher Candidate studying Masters of Teaching (Primary) at the Melbourne Graduate School of Education. She is passionate about education and providing young learners with the opportunity to develop the confidence and skills to develop to their highest potential.

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Professional Educator encourages all readers of the magazine to have 'your say' on this article and others in this first edition for the year. Please email ace@austcolled.com.au.

The Bunkum Awards



CATHERINE SCOTT

'Bunkum' is a fine word. It has its origins in American politics, dating back to 1820, when Representative Felix Walker made a speech that lasted many hours on the issue of whether to admit Missouri to the Union as a free or slave state. The long-winded speech, he said, was 'for Buncombe', North Carolina, which he represented. It was made just before the vote on the issue was scheduled to occur. His fellow representatives attempted to shout him down but he kept talking.

Since that time Buncombe, now 'bunkum', has meant tiresome, longwinded nonsense of the type often seen in politics. Or just plain twaddle of any sort.

Anyone with a predilection for bunkum will also have an eye to convincing their audience that the nonsense is in actuality the finest sort of sense. In our era the ultimate arbiter of truth is science, so it is not surprising that anyone with a barrow-load of bunkum to push often sets out to prove that there is solid science behind their

contentions. Quite often bunkum is still coloured with a tinge of politics and its apparently scientific credentials are actually a smoke screen for ideological positions the perpetrators wish to paint as fact.

The usefulness of science as camouflage for political propositions has led to the founding of ideologically aligned 'think tanks', part of whose brief it is to conduct research or produce supposedly scientifically supported policy briefs that support whatever political position is favoured by founders and/or backers. It takes an expert researcher to delve into the reports of such institutions to discover whether their results are legitimate or just plain bunkum.

'Research reports' from think tanks are often based on selective literature reviews or data that are flawed, poorly analysed or interpreted in ways that are not supportable. Even when the researchers' intentions are sound if the work is performed by researchers who do not have expertise in the area they are investigating, for example economists researching teaching and education, the findings can be of little real value.

Regardless of their quality or lack thereof, these reports are disseminated widely through the media and despite their often shaky foundations, generate considerable coverage and shape public debate about education issues.

Fortunately for educators in the USA the dedicated folk at the National Education Policy Center's Think Twice Think Tank Review Project scrutinise output from American organisations to sort the gold from the bunkum. One outcome is the annual Bunkum Awards bestowed on work that "violates the standard canons of social science inquiry".

In 2013 several awards were bestowed on reputedly scientifically based reports that nonetheless constituted bunkum.

The 'Do You Believe In Miracles Award' went to the Public Agenda Foundation for

'Failure is Not an Option: How Principals, Teachers, Students and Parents from Ohio's High-Achieving, High-Poverty Schools Explain Their Success'.

According to the Committee

A particularly egregious disservice is done by reports designed to convince readers that investment in disadvantaged communities can be ignored. In this increasingly common mythology, students' substandard outcomes are blamed on teachers and schools that don't follow the miracle-laden path of exceptional schools.

Among other failings detected by the reviewers: 'In fact, notwithstanding the report's title, four of the nine selected schools had poverty rates at the state average and thus not particularly high-poverty schools'. The 'We're Pretty Sure We Could Have Done More with \$45 Million' award went to the Gates Foundation and its Measures of Effective Teaching Project, of which the reviewers say:

We think it important to recognize whenever so little is produced at such great cost. The MET researchers gathered a huge data base reporting on thousands of teachers in six cities. Part of the study's purpose was to address teacher evaluation methods using randomly assigned students. Unfortunately, the students did not remain randomly assigned and some teachers and students did not even participate. This had deleterious effects on the study-limitations that somehow got overlooked in the infinite retelling and exaggeration of the findings.

The insidious and international nature of bunkum's influence is illustrated by the Gates reports, as you will certainly hear the project cited in Australia as support for certain methods of teacher evaluation. Thank the stars that the good folk at Think Tank Think Twice are keeping an eye on the bunkum generators.

Dr Catherine Scott, (MACE) is a Senior Research Fellow at the Australian Council for Educational Research and ACE Victorian Regional President.



WHAT COUNTS AS QUALITY IN EDUCATION?

Adelaide 11-12 September 2014



The Australian College of Educators presents an opportunity to discuss one of education's most significant themes at the 2014 ACE National Conference:

WHAT COUNTS AS QUALITY IN EDUCATION?

What is meant by quality in education?

How do we know whether we're achieving it?

What are the actual drivers of quality?

WATCH THIS SPACE AS MORE SPEAKERS WILL BE CONFIRMED

As 2014 begins, the Coalition government and state governments continue to set education policies on a platform of 'quality'. The ACE National Conference in September will discuss and make a clear statement about what 'quality' means to all sectors of education Australia-wide.

The College has secured some of Australia's most influential and highly-regarded leaders and practitioners to present over the two informative days of the conference. These include:

Federal minister for education Christopher Pyne will be opening the conference with Shadow minister for education / Shadow minister for early childhood, Kate Ellis also presenting.



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Professor Bob Lingard, School of Education, University of Queensland ACE Immediate Past President



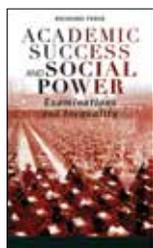
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Academic success and social power: examinations and inequality (Richard Teese) Book review by Jill Abell

Within the context of the Gonski reforms for public policy, school governance and the Parliamentary Senate Select Committee on School Funding, expected to present a report this year, a revised and enlarged 2013 edition of *Academic success and social power: examinations and inequality* is quite surprising in its presentation of evidence. It looks beyond the earlier version and its detailed sociological history of inequality in the secondary curriculum in Australia, and will stimulate new normative research approaches and more social analysis.

The author, Richard Teese, is Professor and Director of the Centre for Research on Education Systems at the University of Melbourne. Whether working globally on comparative education, or locally with state governments on the improvement of school systems, including resource allocation models as well as the socio-cultural factors impacting upon student achievement and destinations, he makes seminal and influential contributions to educational thinking and public policy through scholarly publication and media commentary.

Teese presents an in-depth history and analysis of the VCE subjects of English, Chemistry, Mathematics and Languages up to the mid-1990s. The book examines cultural ideas, the post-war and structural reforms and then the pedagogical changes with mass secondary schooling in these disciplines. The author contends that the final exams consolidated the advantages for those who were already the most socially mobile and advantaged. Informative statistical analysis demonstrates that students in high SES areas in Melbourne consistently outperformed regional or poorer students, with those in private schools having a dual advantage.

Believing that economists overlook the difference in resourcing, he argues that

governments have chosen to measure the impact of funding growth, using PISA scores and NAPLAN results on student scores in basic literacy and numeracy rather than school performance in curriculum. He argues that international test scores give little insight into why social inequality persists and why aggregated funding on public and private schools has had little impact. Teese asserts that the orthodoxy that resource levels make no difference to student achievement, and that teacher quality and school leadership matter more makes schools more vulnerable to failure than in the past. High standards for all, regardless of setting, is necessary to mount an attack on educational disadvantage where all schools, not just those for socially-advantaged families, are made first-class.

In the postscript he concludes that inequality and social segregation rise in the senior years because the cognitive and cultural demands made in the curriculum exceed the resources available to children in poorer families. He finds it remarkable that while private schools advertise small class sizes, they are denounced by economists as unnecessary and wasteful with policy orthodoxy demanding greater financial responsibility. Further, this financial rectitude then pays for the subsidised private school choice being available for middle class welfare and their social mobility. So in this complex work concerned with class and social power in the history of Australian education, Teese focuses on the success of high SES student-centred schools. Nonetheless, evidence about how underperforming schools and inadequate teacher standards can have an impact on socially disadvantaged students as well is important in any research on how to narrow the achievement gap. This is where social mobility and school choice

can disrupt this disadvantage for poorer families, too.

The book opens the way to the exploration of different educational perspectives and not just different sets of testing data. One of the most large-scale and evidence-based research projects since Fitzgerald's inquiry into poverty [in the 1970s] and Connell's making a difference to the relationship between schooling and inequality [in the early 1980s] has demonstrated that public policy in education will have a positive role in narrowing the achievement gap and disrupting disadvantage when there is attention paid to teacher quality, the curriculum on offer, the match between curriculum offered and students' interests, and the influence of home background. The most important factor for success for disadvantaged students is the impact of teacher quality. Beyond Gonski reforms, the first research report for 2014 of the Grattan Institute's School Education Program Director, Dr Ben Jensen, outlines useful international evidence for developing government policy for turning around schools that are falling behind.

Academic success and social power: examinations and inequality deals with complex and very current issues about social justice arising from the analysis of secondary education curriculum in the last fifty years. It stands apart in a startling way from the proliferation of research that argues that the education system and public policy in Australia legitimises and perpetuates social inequality due to the economic, political and ideological practices.

Dr Jill Abell is a lifetime College member and Tasmanian ACE President. Contact jill.abell@hutchins.tas.edu.au for links to references.

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Professional Educator is the professional journal of the Australian College of Educators (ACE), a professional association representing educators across all sectors and systems of education. We encourage and foster open, collaborative discussion to enable our members to provide the best outcomes for Australian students across all levels of education.

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