

SUBMISSION TO SENATE INQUIRY

**Teaching and Learning (maximising our investment in
Australian schools)**

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INTRODUCTION

I write as a Victorian educator. My career in education extends over 50 years. I have been privileged to be teaching through the period, 1970's, 1980's, early 1990's when Victoria had School Based Curriculum, where each school community was trusted to implement curriculum best suited to the needs of their children, where members of each school community (teachers and parents) worked together writing curriculum policy and program. This approach to curriculum development saw the growth of deep and substantial teacher knowledge, and professionalism. Teachers organised professional development around their perceived needs. What was so significant was that curriculum was developed and implemented relevant to the children for whom it was intended. Allied with this was the view that classroom assessment best occurred as classroom teachers interacted with their pupils, collected artefacts from the children to be kept in personal learning files. Assessment was a necessary component of classroom teaching for it informed future planning and teaching.

1. The effectiveness of current classroom practices in assisting children to realise their potential in Australian schools.

In contrast to the approach to teaching and learning described above, control of what happens in schools today, has been taken by politicians, out of the hands of educators.

- Today in Australia the federal government has implemented national testing which has detrimentally impacted upon all that teachers do.
- Test preparation in classrooms, occurs from the start of the school year to the delivery of the tests in May, thus teaching time is considerably reduced and the curriculum is narrowed and boring.
- NAPLAN results reach the schools in either late September or early October, so are of little assistance to classroom teachers in planning for student learning.
- The tests are seriously flawed (See 'Say No to NAPLAN' papers, Nos 1,2,4, 13,14,15)
- Added to which multiple choice machine marked tests cannot measure anything of value.
- Money spent on developing, publishing, marking, and promoting the tests is a scandalous waste of public money, particularly when there is a giant need for further resources in public schools (particularly human resources).
- Who is determining what NAPLAN tests? As yet there is no National Curriculum. There can be no match between the official curricula of the different states, with NAPLAN.

- Classroom teachers today are generally unhappy with what they are being made do in the name of education. Rather than being involved in important decision making they are being directed from afar to do things they know, are not in the best interest of the children they teach.

2.The structure and governance of school administration ‘local and central’ and its impact on teaching and learning

- While much is made of self managing schools, one must ensure this is more than ‘managing the books’, including, employing contract teachers and inexperienced teachers, so as the books balance.
- What is of key importance at the local level is who the pupils are, what are their interests and needs, and how can the school develop curriculum best suited for developing a love of learning in these children? Sadly with the implementation of National testing, and the forthcoming National Curriculum (in specific grade levels) all control of curriculum will have been removed from local control.
- Decisions about the specifics of what happens in which classrooms at what time, are best made at the local level. Only local teachers know, for example, if many of the children (through no fault of their own) arrive late each morning. It is thus foolish in that school to timetable the teaching of reading for 9.00am. Only classroom teachers know whether the five year olds they teach have ever been read to, ever owned a book. Such knowledge is essential for their teacher, in planning to have them to learn to read.

3.The influence of family members in supporting the rights of children to receive a quality education

- In a modern democracy quality education is a right of all members. Sadly in Australia today all children do not receive well resourced quality education. Impoverished families living in impoverished areas, attending disadvantaged schools will not experience the same quality of education, that children attending schools in more affluent areas, receive. This is not saying that impoverished parents have lower expectations for their children than those of affluent families. Impoverished families do not have money for books or computers. Many of their children come to school hungry.

4.The adequacy of tools available for teachers to create and maintain an optimal learning environment

- The most important tool for any teacher is **ongoing professional learning**. Knowledgeable teachers are the key to the development of happy, enquiring, problem solving , socially competent, students. Indoctrination is not the same as professional learning.

- To create and maintain an optimal learning environment teachers must have input into **the curriculum** they teach. Note the definition of 'curriculum' included below:

Definition of 'Curriculum'

'The curriculum is all the arrangements made by a school to promote the development of the child. By "school" we mean the principal and staff acting in consultation with the school council. These arrangements include-

- the arrangement of *learning experiences* for the child
- the arrangement of children into *groups* and *classes*
- the arrangement of the *teaching tasks* of staff members
- the arrangement of the *content* of teaching into a curriculum program
- the arrangement of a *learning* environment for the children
- the arrangement of the interaction between the school and its *neighbourhood*
- the arrangement of a systematic *evaluation* of all the arrangements'

The Primary School Curriculum; A Manual for Victorian Schools, Education Department of Victoria, 1979

Professional teachers must be free to make decisions about curriculum such as how to group the children, which neighbourhood inquiries to conduct, how to involve community members. Professional teachers are not puppets being manipulated by unseen politicians, thousands of miles away.

5. Factors influencing the selection, training, professional development, career progression and retention of teachers in the Australian education system

- There is a need for teaching practice experiences in schools, as part of initial teacher training, to be prioritised, and valued by the universities. Some universities employ casual people to visit student teachers while they are in school on practice rounds. These casual supervisors cannot follow up the practice seen, after the rounds, in tutorials at the university, for they are employed only to visit schools. This undervalues the classroom practice.
- Currently lecturers in universities are finding it hard to fail students, particularly overseas students. It appears that the universities are so hard done by for funding, they cannot afford to lose fee paying foreign students.
- The practice of school communities selecting their own staff has been very successful, in Victoria. It should continue, but the staffing structure

of any school should ensure there is a balance of older experienced teachers, with those less experienced.

- The practice of employing 'contract teachers' should be stopped immediately. I visit schools and find very capable young teachers, fronting up for their third or fourth interview, for yet another six month contract, at the very same school, for the very same teaching position, that they accepted on graduation from university.

6. Other Related Matters

I have spent all my working life in education. I remember the joy of teaching in the Whitlam era. I was deputy principal of an inner city school, which was on the maximum level of disadvantage. With the Carmel Commission, we went from broken asphalt playground, rotten fences lying on the ground, nits and scabies aplenty and not a hot water tap in the school, - to, much improved physical conditions, working together to develop a program, applying for funding and receiving money to implement it. What a wonderful learning environment we created! How professional our teachers became!

It is heart breaking to see the slow disintegration of what was once a fine education system. Major anti- educational decisions are being made and forced upon schools by politicians, who rarely, if ever, enter schools.

Educators need to reclaim education

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To access 'Say NO to NAPLAN' papers, see
www.literacyeducators.com