

Submission to:

House of Representatives Standing Committee on Education and Employment

Australian Education (Consequential and Transitional Provisions) Bill 2013

Re: 9 Implementation Plans and school improvement plans

1. An enormous amount of time is devoted to preparing Implementation Plans and school improvement plans by staff, especially the principal.

Problem: Principals in state schools are rarely educational leaders, despite Educational Leadership being part of the criteria which they meet to be appointed.*

The people who appoint the principals are rarely educational leaders. (So as long as the candidate writes and says things which can be matched with the indicators with which selection panel members are provided they are shown to meet the criteria. If candidates actually talk about authentic aspects of education, leadership, teaching and learning the panel members rarely have the sophistication to see how such knowledge and experience match the criterion and if it's beyond and outside the criterion then it counts for nothing).

*Where educational leaders are teachers who know:

- what and how to teach to gain significant academic and behavioural improvement from all types of students.
 - how to analyse the culture and position of a school and understand what it should next be striving to achieve and how that should be implemented.
2. In the past the principal has spent considerable time with regional staff to ensure that the documents are prepared in accordance with government department expectations.

Problem: They do that because the focus is on satisfying the bureaucracy with an acceptable document, not on school improvement. At the end of the process there's a plan of which staff have little, if any, awareness and one which certainly has no relevance to their daily teaching life. There are some great principals who try and match parts of the document with specific intentions which the school has, even though the document itself is of no use to them, but usually it's just a job to complete.

3. The plans form part of the school review. It will be another time in the school year where teachers will be required to spend time contributing to the process.

Problem: First the plan is completed according to a pro forma, usually by people who don't understand anything about how to achieve school improvement, and then another aspect of principal "leadership" is to demonstrate how the plan was put into effect, teaching improved and goals achieved. If Mathematics was a curriculum priority the principal will be looking for there to be Professional Development in that area and a Numeracy Co-ordinator will likely be asked to write some sort of program. There might not be any intent for the program to be enacted, that depends on the culture of the school, but the program document will be evidence that the school plan was followed. Similarly there might not be any follow-up to the professional development experience but it will be written up as having had a significant impact on teaching in the school.

4. Reviewers check on schools as part of the accountability procedure.

Problem: Reviewers are probably people who also don't understand what's important in education but they don't have to, they only have to audit the plan against what's been happening. Largely they rely on the principal, so if the principal shows the math's program which was developed due to the plan and sings its praises the reviewer will write about the valuable math's program and the positive direction math's is taking in the school.

5. Summary

"Accountability" has become one of the key words in school education and it's a farce on every level. Governments and education department bureaucracies spend a lot of time and money to develop a system which shows everything is all right when it does nothing of the sort. Schools and principals do what they have to do to comply because that's their job. I think some principals actually believe they are doing something important and being a leader by producing such a fine document and having it reviewed in glowing terms.

The situation won't change until school culture changes. School culture won't change until school leaders are truly educational leaders. Schools won't have educational leaders until they're selected by people who understand what's necessary and important in education. There will continue to be only a minority of people who understand what's necessary and important in education until teacher-training institutions teach student-teachers what they need to know to be

outstanding teachers. Teacher-training institutions will continue to produce teachers who are inadequately prepared until excellent teachers and/or ex-teachers have significant input into their training. But who can identify the excellent teachers? Government “reforms” invest heavily in the assumption that principals must be the cream of teachers, that’s how they’ve risen to the top, and that they can identify excellent teaching. It is a flawed assumption. Principals are the masters of creating positive perceptions when there are no underlying realities to verify them and they notice favourably teachers who do the same.

THERE IS NO STAGE OF EDUCATION, INCLUDING PERFORMANCE REVIEW AND JOB APPLICATION, WHERE A TEACHER IS REQUIRED OR EXPECTED TO PROVIDE THE DATA WHICH PROVES THEY HAVE BEEN EFFECTIVE.

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