

21 November 2000

Hon. MP Dr. Nelson

Dear Sir

I gather watching 60 Minutes Program on Channel 9 that you are heading a committee to investigate the educational problems facing boys in schools today. As an observer in the classroom for the last thirty five years and an educational researcher for the last ten years, let me assure you that it is just one of the many problems facing education in the 21st century. The myriad of problems facing education are interconnected, most of them originate from the anachronistic system that has been patched up over the years by politicians who want to placate the populace and the media.

What the system need is radical surgery or reconstruction and not palliative care or patching up the cracks. The catch phrase in educational reforms is break the mould of the 100 year old system, based on compulsory education, manned by a majority of poorly trained teachers, drawn from the lowest ranks of the qualifiers for tertiary education. The system is 50-60% successful largely due to the work of the dedicated minority of gifted teachers, administrators, effective schools and the innate abilities of the student population. It has struggled through the 20th century, without finding answers to many problems facing humanity. The human brain remains the greatest gift to mankind, capable of solving all the problems facing humanity if the brain power is harnessed for that purpose.

Priority one is to empower the teacher population across the nation. I have designed a tool combining the enormous power of the computer, the internet, VCR or DVD using a multipurpose TV screen. Using this tool in front of the class any teacher would be able to draw upon the rich resources of multimedia presentations to arouse the interest of the pupils and cast that spell in any subject, which is a talent of a tiny minority of gifted and creative teachers today. If we could convert all teachers to be gifted and talented using the new tool, the students whether they are boys or girls would be drawn into the exciting exploration of ourselves and our environment. All humans specially the young ones are gifted with an innate sense of curiosity which is destroyed today by text book based information unloading to pass some internal and external examinations. Fear of failure is a poor motivating strategy.

The next step is to create a learning environment in which each individual student is challenged to master the skills, knowledge, morals and values and achieve the competencies necessary to live the life of a constructive human being, learning at his/her own pace, using the learning styles unique to the individual. I have provided for this in my design of the Classroom of the 21st Century, with five learning stations. A computer station, a VCR/ DVD station, a music station, a media station and a literacy station where the teacher could not only help with literacy work but also attend to the educational and pastoral needs of every individual child. It is cost effective, since a class could manage with five units of each category of tools.

One teacher with the help of all what the educational technology has to offer would be in charge of each classroom. He or She would accept the responsibility for the education of the students. This accountability would get rid of those incompetent teachers and challenge the others to accomplish their important mission of helping each individual child. This is an extension of the present primary system to the secondary schools with teaching tools and changed environment of learning up to the end of year 10. Tertiary education could begin at year 11 and 12. Teachers who consider themselves as specialists could take over but still using the Integrated Teaching Tool.

I have enclosed a copy of my reform plans to overcome the many problems facing education today. It is not a panacea but would go a long way solving the intractable problems which feed on one another.

The Victorian Government's Ministerial Working Party 'Public Education, The Next Generation' after six months of fact finding published their report in September 2000. Copies are available on the Internet.

In chapter five pp 34-36 they high light the need for major reform that I have spelt out thus:-

If all young people are to benefit from powerful new tools and possibilities for learning, there is now a need for an imaginative, systemic initiative to widen the scale and increase the pace of innovation, exploring the potential of ICT (Information and Communication Technologies) to make possible new ways of thinking and of bringing creativity to bear on a range of increasingly complex problems.

There is an urgent need to acknowledge children's ability to harness new and emerging technologies for learning. If educators fail to understand the capabilities that children can develop with powerful new tools, there will be disenchantment with schooling among young people.

Thousands of them would go on being the victims of drug and alcohol abuse, self inflicted violence and diseases, mental illnesses, teen age pregnancies, criminal activities, suicides, senseless violence against people and property and social misfits bent on destruction and mayhem. I did present my reform plans to the working party and together with others of the same opinion would have had some influence in the reform program.

As a history teacher I am familiar with the impact of education on society. In the ancient world of Greeks and Romans they valued it but education remained the exclusive privilege of the elite. The Catholic Church played a pioneering role in providing access to education, but higher education was restricted to the clergymen. The Renaissance opened the doors for a wider population and empirical research became the new way of learning. Till the reforms of the 20th Century education was still restricted to a minority. Private and public education are still locked in battle in many first world countries. Many third world countries are still struggling to provide primary education for their people. Can you imagine the waste of human talents. If the potential of ICT is effectively used there would be a World Renaissance, that is what is needed for the 21st Century and not punitive measures against schools and teachers, a solution favoured by many politicians.

After 40 years of teaching in UK and Australia and twenty years of postgraduate research in education I have retired after suffering a number of heart attacks, but I have recovered completely after open heart surgery. I would love to play a role in bringing about effective reforms in education.

Yours Sincerely



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Evaluation

1. If these changes are made available would you be willing to use them? YES/ NO
2. Please write down two or more reasons for your choice.
3. What other reforms would you suggest?

Thank You

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NAME

SCHOOL OR ORGANISATION

Please return one copy to the above address

A PLAN TO ENHANCE THE QUALITY OF EDUCATION IN PRIMARY AND SECONDARY SCHOOLS

The Classroom of the 21st Century and The Integrated teaching machine are solidly based on the Educational Theory of CONSTRUCTIVISM.

This theory states that humans gifted with rationality, free will, and a conscience do construct knowledge and wisdom as individuals, critical thinking directs them towards truth and reality. They have to search through conflicting and paradoxical evidence. The more supporting and opposing information they process the closer to the truth they can get. Falsehood and their perpetrators eventually crumble, as illustrated in the history of mankind over and over again.

The classroom of the 21st century allows that kind of active search and processing of information on any subject. The teacher who had to toil alone in collecting and presenting information is supported by experts in various subject areas via CD ROMS, video tapes and Internet sites. World events, scientific break throughs, explorations of outer space and other relevant events are immediately available for the teachers and students. The students would be able to enrich their education by searching across the fragmented disciplines. According to Professor Birch, knowledge is a seamless garment, the examination oriented culture in education has torn it into bits of information packages, unrelated to each other and guarded jealously by subject specialists who know more and more about less and less.

The school timetable of five hours a day, dominated by English, Maths and Science, with Humanities, Creative Arts, Health and Physical Education struggling with a host of other subjects to find a place is chaotic and overcrowded. Students and teachers dashing from classroom to classroom waste at least ten minutes per period. It is not possible to switch on and off mental work according to the sounding of the bell. That is why the new design attempts to hold class groups in home rooms with one or two teachers in charge from 7-10. The subject specialists could take over from 11-12.

The new set up would enable the teachers to present captivating lessons using multimedia to fire up the imagination and creativity of the students. The students could engage in self paced independent learning. There is opportunity for individual and group work. The slow learners and the gifted could help each other instead of creating problems for the class. They could learn the art of helping and living together in community. The teachers would have time and opportunity to undertake real pastoral care. This is the most crucial role of the teacher, to befriend, to inspire, and to carry the stragglers. It is by far the most rewarding. Acting 'Loco Parentis' to children some eager to learn, others depressed, traumatised, by family break ups, abuse and violence is a challenge to teachers, the school and compassionate teachers are their last hope.

With more and more students dropping out at the end of compulsory education, many unable to find work or establish lasting relationships, it is not surprising that drug and alcohol abuse, violence to themselves and others, depressions and other mental breakdowns, senseless destruction and suicides claim the lives of thousands of young people every year. The present system is not very effective, it is necessary to renew the system for the sake of the present generation and the future generations.

CLIMB EVERY MOUNTAIN

Climb every mountain, ford every stream
Follow every rainbow, till you find your dream

A dream that will need, all the love you can give
Every day of your life, as long as you live

THE SOUND OF MUSIC

The hills are alive with the sound of music
With sounds they have sung for a thousand years
The hills fill my heart, with the sound of music

My heart wants to sing, every song it hears
My heart wants to beat like the wings of the bird
That rise from the lake to the trees

My heart wants to sigh, like a chime that flies from a church
on a breeze
To laugh like a brook, when it trips and falls over stones on its way
To sing through the night, like a lark, who is learning to pray

I go to the hills, when my heart is lonely
I know I will hear, what I have heard before
My heart will be blessed, with the sound of music
And I will sing once more