

29 July 2005

Ann Corcoran
Federal Member for Isaacs
62 High Street
Cranbourne 3977

Dear Ann

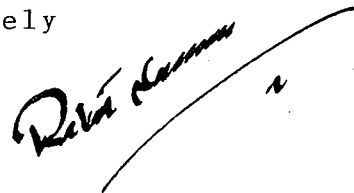
In your latest News you invite ideas and experiences regarding education. It is something about which I have very strong views, and so I am submitting them in as short a form as possible.

I do have some qualifications for commenting. The last twelve years of my working life before I retired were spent teaching. It was certainly not the best paid job I ever had; but it was by far the most satisfying. I lived in Japan for three years and studied the language and other things, and when I returned to Australia I started the Japanese language course at Geelong Grammar School.

Now I have two great grandchildren at government schools, one primary, and the other year two of high school, and I sometimes help them with their homework and projects. This, as well as occasional visits to the schools, and what I have read in the media, and heard from other parents has given me a very low opinion of education in state schools.

This is the basis for the brief note which I enclose. I could have written much, much more; but if I had probably no-one would have read it. I hope that it may be of some use.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Robert Newson", with a long, sweeping underline that extends to the right.

(Robert Newson)

E D U C A T I O N T O D A Y

Education today, at least in state primary and high schools in Australia, is at the best child-minding to get children off parents' hands for as long as possible so that they can earn more money. At the worst it is giving children a quite false picture of the world they live in, and their place in it, that will affect some of them all their lives.

The reason for this is that more and more place in it is being given to electronic machines, and less to teachers. These should be banned from schools, at least from primary schools. Education is not information. It means teaching children about the world they live in - what it is, how it works, what other people live in it, and how; and, most importantly, their rights in it and their duties and responsibilities to it, and that the first depends on the second. This can only be done through a personal relationship between teacher and student, it cannot be done by machines.

A teacher is a person who has the will, ability, and knowledge to teach, and gain the confidence of those he (or she) is teaching. A teacher must really believe, and give that belief to others. A teacher is really teaching the student to learn, and inspiring the student to do so.

To produce teachers like this needs a basic reconstruction of teaching training. Firstly they should be taught what

education is, which they are not at present. They should understand what the world they are teaching about is, which most of them do not seem to at present. They should have moral standards, and know that 'discipline' and 'duty' are not just discredited words from an obsolete past. They should know that the object of life is not to have 'fun'; but that fun, if it is the correct word, comes later when the student has achieved something and knows the achievement.

Once potential teachers understand these things they are ready to start teaching. It is one of the skills which can only be learnt by doing it - it cannot be taught by lectures in classrooms. They learn by their mistakes, and they get far greater rewards than most other people do from their work by their successes.