

**SUBMISSION TO SENATE INQUIRY INTO THE ADMINISTRATION & REPORTING  
OF NAPLAN TESTING**

**With special reference to Terms of Reference Items [c] and [e]**

**This submission will concentrate on the learning-destructive influence of  
blanket-testing, with little if any reference to the use of the results on  
public notices such as *My School***

OPENING STATEMENT

I am opposed to blanket testing of any kind. As I have explained in detail in other places, I believe that such treatment of our school children is unfair, immoral, costly and unreliable.

My opposition to such testing arises from experiences as a teacher of scholarship examination classes for sixteen [16] years, being an internal testing-fixated Principal for 22 years; and a special study in 1980 that concentrated on the effects of the Minimal Competency Movement in the U.S.A. at the time and the effects of the Assessment of Performance Unit in Great Britain at the same time. During 1980-81 also, I chaired a *Committee of Review of Primary Education in the A.C.T.* This provided me with a unique opportunity. I was forced to speculate on the effects that hard-data driven schooling of the period, from up-over, might have on two Australian systems, down-under, with which I was closely linked at the time.

I was also fortunate to be able to compare and contrast the movements and assess their effects on primary schooling generally and now believe that I know what I am talking about. As with Diane Ravitch [author of 'Death and Life...], I learned a lot and my earlier hard-nosed views turned a 180. At the time I recall writing a feature article for the *Canberra Times* in which I expressed the hope that the malady would not cross the Pacific. It has now taken over 20 years to do so, but it has with a vengeance.

I am perplexed as to the origins of the introduction of an extremely new and potentially different system of schooling; and why it was introduced in so dictatorial a manner. The Australian people did not get a chance. I have not heard nor read anywhere about any Australian state school system or group of Parents, Principals or Teachers seeking to have such a hard-nosed high-stakes system introduced into Australia. It seems to have been a spur-of-the-moment political decision, made during a trip to NY by politician Brenden Nelson or Julia Gillard. It is, so obviously, a political non-educational issue.

It implies a complete change of a country's schooling system, based on just one U.S. school district where only measureable elements of schooling were selected and heavy threats used to make sure teachers did as they were ordered in under

threat of dismissal. Australia is now about to change from a long-tested system of schooling, which, with some necessary [as compared with ‘totally unnecessary’] re-thinking, can become the best in the world. It has the potential to do that.

I am given to understand that Ms. Julia Gillard or Mr. Brendan Nelson had visited one of the New York school districts and was impressed by the lawyer leader of that system. **Just one district.** She or he liked Joel Klein’s unwavering high-stakes fear-driven control of school behaviour in the alien suburban culture of New York. She then deliberately introduced this entirely new system to Australia without any discussion with any school people. Folk of high academic calibre from a measurement firm in Melbourne were employed to carry out her wishes, but the way that it was all carried out was not very Australian-like. It was certainly un-Laborlike, as I recall the Labor movement to be.

Klein claims total ownership over the introduction of the system to the school-dumb folk down-under. As recently as April, 2010, in response to a question at an SAS Conference in the US regarding any advice he might render to other leaders of School Districts, he said, **“I would look at our system. It is being implemented now in Australia based on people coming to New York.”**

[See: [www.edweek.org/ew/section/video-galleried/april10-data.html](http://www.edweek.org/ew/section/video-galleried/april10-data.html) ]

I am in a unique position of being able to stand back with no kind of connection to any lobby group or political bias or organisation....only a very deep love for pupils in Primary Schools...no other interest whatsoever.

To think that we are altering the climate of schools and the lives of pupils in this wonderfully progressive and beautifully un-New York-like country , is it any wonder that I am a very saddened schoolie, disappointed ex-Principal and very cranky grand-father.

Now to comment....

[Please note that, throughout the text, I have boxed the serious issues that I recommend the Senate Committe endorse and support.]

## **Item c (i) The impact of the NAPLAN assessment and reporting regime on the educational experience and outcomes for Australian pupils.**

Please excuse my substitutions of the word 'pupil' [above] for the word 'student'. I prefer to use 'pupil' for all levels of schooling since the word indicates the presence of a teacher in a learning exchange with someone else. The word 'student' doesn't.

**[a]** Before the heavy-handed data-driven innovations were imposed on Australian children in 2008, one must ask why there was not a general discussion on what **education essentials the Australian public would like** its school graduates to possess. For instance, it seems reasonable to expect that schools should help our pupils to develop the ability...

- \*to use language, to think and to communicate effectively;
- \*to use mathematical knowledge and methods to solve required problems;
- \*to understand spatial relationships;
- \*to reason logically;
- \*to use abstractions and symbols with power and ease;
- \*to apply and to understand scientific knowledge and methods;
- \*to make use of technology and understand its limitations;
- \*to express oneself through the arts and appreciate the artistic expressions of others;
- \*to understand and appreciate other cultures;
- \*to apply knowledge of health, nutrition and physical activity;
- \*to acquire the capacity to meet unexpected challenges;
- \*to make informed value judgements;
- \*to recognise and use one's full learning potential;
- \*to try to develop better ways of learning about all sorts of things;
- \*to prepare to go on learning for life.

**In a nut-shell, it is clear from Australia's hard-data, New York-inspired, socialist-controlled, measurement-driven education revolution that only the first two items should be taught. The rest will be caught.**

Present day threats through NAPLAN suggest that learnacy (the development of one's personal learning style and habits) will be neglected. My grandchildren will be denied the chance to explore newer and broader ways of developing idiosyncratic processes of learning. If they were encouraged to develop their natural love for learning; and taught the beauty behind mathematics, language and science with vigour but without threat, as part of the obvious [but poorly organised at present] essentials of schooling, I would have more faith in the system. I had hoped – but now pray - to see them develop as happy, contented human beings. If we had to have one, I had expected a different kind of revolution. I am truly saddened and anxious.

It can be confidently said that Australia is presently changing its system of Love-for-Learning schooling to Data-based schooling. This is an extraordinary step for no sensible reason. Sure...there are lots of reasons to improve on present-day rituals and attitudes - like time spent on subjects, enlivening of teaching strategies, occasional supply of statements to schools about expectations in some measureable subjects, teacher preparation and in-service, standardised inter-state ages of admission, years of schooling; and, especially, assistance with school-based evaluation programs based on Stufflebeam's admonition, "***The purpose of evaluation is not to prove, but to improve***".

Sadly, one can confidently predict that NAPLAN testing as it is, will persuade all schools to concentrate efforts on only those parts of the general syllabus that will be tested, using only didactic teaching routines that are the easiest for repetitive learning and practice; but whose effectiveness is always short-lived. The essentials of schooling [e.g. above] will not be a conspicuous part of the landscape. Since it is a data-driven accountability system, it cannot be anything else. Scores in these tests will improve over the next two or three years, then plateau for a few years, and then diminish as more and more lobbies will seek places on each school's time-table. Based on various competency movements over the past forty years, this can be predicted with confidence. Such bullying, fear and threats all work to a degree. Teachers deliberately convey the anxiety but do not mean to convey the fear with any malice. They are just obliged to get things done. It is expected of them. The outcome is emotional damage but the extent is not revealed. Just feel sorry for the present-day kids in the classroom.

Heavy and constant concentration on practising test items, shelving of other school subjects and re-allocation of school time seems to have happened during the February to May period of 2010 to a startling degree. It is reported that, across the spectrum, half of the normal school time was allocated to test preparation. It was encouraged by some state governments. It will become an annual pattern. It is a shame.

**ABANDON BLANKET-TESTING completely. It's dangerous.**

Scores will improve. The more one practises anything, the better one gets. Does anyone know what happened to the other subjects between February and May?

Post-test, many schools are, at the time of writing, openly reallocating time by closing-down as much as possible on the non-examinable. One Queensland High School with a highly-regarded music program is taking time from its present allocation and stopping music excursions.

At the same time, the Queensland government is trying to re-invigorate time-consuming LOTE...while schools are looking for more time to help pupils pass the tests. No one has queried past pupils of the flow-on effect. LOTE is a chic subject, like piano lessons, football, cricket and those other hobbies that can be catered for in after-school time, surely. School time is precious and important. It needs to be used well.

Suggestion : **TALK** to school people **about methods of improving** what-it-is that needs to be improved before any unilateral changes are made.

**[b] Children start school in various classes and at various ages and at various times of the year in the different states of Australia** and, after a year or so, are then described as entering Year 1. They have a variety of descriptions in different states for the first year of schooling before Year 1....Preparatory [Q., Tas. & Vic.], Kindergarten [NSW], Reception [SA], Pre-Primary[WA], Transition [NT]. Can this state of affairs ever be explained to Australian citizens in a common-sense manner? History seems to indicate that States undertake competitions at various times to introduce something different for the sake of being different...some name or change that no other state has and can be unique to it, but unwieldy in the over-all context. Trust me, I've been involved. It is most confusing for folk who change residence.

Should the testing, scoring and marking introduced in 2008 be attached to the name of a year-level or to the number of years-at-school? How can Year 7 be applied to a class that has already had seven years of schooling? Doesn't it become Year 8?

When a standard age of entry for all Australian states and territories was proposed by the combined states Directors of Primary Education [an ancient title] circa 1976, it was rejected on political grounds. The Australian Primary Principals followed up with a request. They were told that it would cost too much !!! Now, this Senate Committee has a chance to do something. **Please, please, please do it.**

Children enter formal schooling in NSW in a Kindergarten class, doing similar activities to those in Year 1 elsewhere. It is all described as 'formal instruction'.

The child moves to High School after Year 6 [= 'after Year 7' in other states] and the publishing of test scores are complicated because of this.

**SUGGESTION** : Consider an Australia-wide **start to compulsory schooling** for the beginning of the year that a child turns **seven years of age**.

It is apparent that some bold decisions need to be made about the following questions. Such questions should have been asked pre-national testing. They have been asked for many years but never seriously addressed.

The original laws of compulsory attendance at school were intended for pupils to start school in Grade 1 [as it was called] at a determined statutory age. Then, over the years we got to fiddling and mucking around with all sorts of innovations to satisfy anxious parents in the main.

**1. Why don't all Australian children start formal school at the same age ?** It seems quite sensible for Australia children to commence Year One at the beginning of the school year in which they turn seven years of age. [Provision for welfare and education of the very young is presently super-standard; and there are endless opportunities for parents to locate their pre-primary children at a caring institution before they undertake compulsory schooling at Year 1.]

**2. Then...What is wrong with seven years of seamless primary schooling in each state without any other configurations?** Centuries old, the arrangement has stood the test of time. Syllabuses would be tidier across State borders; and decisions as to proper class location for transferees not a traumatic as it now is. Parents would be more conscious of standards and opportunities and their out-sourcing for information. High schools could receive entrants of similar basic strengths.

Until these matters are sorted, it is cruel and unfair to impose a hard-nosed testing regime on trusting pupils. The following is an extract from the Queensland Minister of Education's recent letter to the author [26 May 2010] :

*"The rationale behind the proposal to move Year 7 from primary school to secondary school is multifaceted. By 2014 Year 7 students [sic] will be older than they are currently. The 2007 introduction of Prep means that, if no further changes are made, from 2014 children will spend eight full years in primary school. As well, in 2008, the Queensland Government raised the compulsory school starting age by six months. As a result, in 2015 at least half of Year 7 children will turn 13 by the end of the year."*

If one or more states fiddle with starting ages, like this, even for worthy reasons, there is a mess and any blanket testing is invalidated.

**SUGGESTION** : Entrench **seven years of schooling** for primary school pupils called **Year 1, Year 2...**



There are hundreds of styles represented on this scale and busy teachers move up and down the continuum during the course of the day

Teaching a full group for a full day is not an easy task. Each day needs to be quality interaction with learners if useful learnacy and meaningful achievement are to combine. It needs a four-year masters degree [as in Finland] study by quality child-oriented degree-candidates to develop a repertoire of techniques that suit the age and circumstances of the pupils.

Sociology, psychology and subject-oriented studies at teacher-preparation level can only go so far and are likely to be helpful but of limited use in the classroom. The real practice of teaching... evaluation as part of learning progress... how different people learn... child development... mastery...the ideas that great educational philosophers from Socrates to de Bono have shared....four years may be insufficient to produce quality teachers. We won't know for many years, but the notion of a practical Masters Degree for people learning to be teachers should be thoroughly explored as of now.

Finland lists it as its main priority...the selection and preparation of teachers.

**The most serious issue of all for 2010 is to ensure that NAPLAN testing ceases asap.**

I really hope that the presentation of the above has not been a waste of time.

I have that feeling...not because of what the committee might do....but.

There is a very large element of future-hope for Australia riding on the outcomes of the deliberations of this Senate Committee. It carries an enormous responsibility. I sincerely wish it well.

Phil Cullen A.M.



## SUMMARY OF SUGGESTIONS

1. **Abandon blanket-testing** completely. It's dangerous.
2. Consider an Australia-wide **start to compulsory schooling** from the beginning of the year that a child turns **seven years of age**.
3. Entrench **seven years of schooling** for primary pupils, called Year 1, 2 etc.
4. Undertake a wide scale discussion of **shared parent-teacher-pupil evaluation methods**.
5. All Principals groups need to be encouraged to run their own in-service courses on current issues relating to NAPLAN and come to grips with **Administrative Ethics and Professional Care of Pupils**.
6. **Talk** to school people **about methods of improving** what-it-is they need to improve before any more unilateral changes occur.

## THE LANGUAGE OF SCHOOLING

**This is also a call for the committee to suggest the use of more meaningful school-descriptive language, despite what is used in other countries....compatible but more accurate.**

1. There are only two sections attached to compulsory schooling : Primary and High. Let's not stretch either. There has been a tendency to suggest that very young child undertake early childhood education. Maybe they do. Its a concept that academics have stretched to mean anyone up to about 8 years of age. There is no such things as 'middle' or 'late' childhood in schooling terms, so let's keep it simple. If a child is too young to attend school, it is a **Pre-school** child. Amen.
2. Any person who has someone teaching him or her is a **Pupil**, no matter what age. All dictionaries tell us this. We compel young people to attend school because there are teachers there who teach them. They are pupils. That's why we compel them to be taught by someone. We are certainly not sure if they are students of anything...that's the individual's business.
3. The word **subject** has been replaced by other words ; 'Key Learning Areas' for instance. Why ?
4. The distinction between **curriculum** and **syllabus** remains unclear. It needs emphasising. I like to think of 'curriculum' as the guidance of a learner through some learning or other by a teacher; while 'syllabus' refers to a written description of parts of a general, desired school curriculum.

### **Author's Personal Experiences**

1. Primary School Teacher and Principal – Principal of State Primary Schools of in various parts of Queensland from a school of 18 pupils to 620 pupils in a variety of working cultures [ wheat farming, dairy farming, cane farming, coal mining, mixed agriculture, status city suburb] for twenty-two [22] years.

2. Regional Director and Inspector of all State and Convent schools for 5 years in the North-West area of Queensland, which extended from the Gulf of Carpentaria to the South Australian border. In size, it was three times the size of the British Isles and included schools in grazing centres of various sizes from small provisional schools on grazing properties to those in large towns [e.g. Longreach, Cloncurry] as well as those in the quickly expanding, at the time, mining city of Mt. Isa, which contained six schools of over 500 pupils].

Each primary classroom in each school and convent in these places was personally inspected, as was a number of secondary and special school classes. Except for Longreach and Mt. Isa which had High Schools, all schools were 1-7 or 1-10 or 1-12.

3. Regional Director for North Queensland which extended north from Proserpine to the Papua New Guinea border at the time. Described as the 'most challenging school district in the world' it was a wonderful 2 year experience of variety in educational enterprises. Membership of a Teachers College and University Council, providing schooling for very large suburban primary and high schools, pre-schools, nomadic aboriginal people, isolated 'hippy' families, holidaying children on Barrier Reef, aboriginal communities recently moved from mission status to state control, and Torres Strait Island people were part of the challenge.

4. State Director of Primary Education [Q'ld] for 13 years. Chairman of endless committees, the most important being the post-Ahern Primary Curriculum. Committee. Widely representative, it worked with subject personnel in the curriculum branch for its writings; and with special-interest School Inspectors who linked with all other Inspectors, tertiary institutions, Principal and Teacher groups to monitor syllabus introductions and progress. The connectivity was super-duper and working well until a departmental restructure was introduced, post-retirement.

Working directly with the State Primary Principals almost as an accepted member produced many benefits for children and their curriculum; and sharing quality control of school operations and teaching/learning standards with approximately 37 District Inspectors was a most satisfying experience. [There are now no hard-yards trained, academically successful school inspectors nor professionally-ethical principals associations.]

5. This ended in 1988. For 22 years since, the close study of Australian schooling generally has been enlightening, exciting, maddening and saddening.

6. Publications :-  
Keith Tronc & Phil Cullen : *School & Community*. [McGraw-Hill, 1976]  
Keith Tronc & Phil Cullen : *Quality Education*. [McGraw-Hill. 1976]  
G.. Bassett, Phil Cullen, Lloyd Logan : *Australian Primary Schools and their Principals*. [Harcourt Brace Jovanovich. 1984]  
Phil Cullen : *Back to Drastics - Education, Politics & Bureaucracy in Q'ld 1975-88*. [U.S.Q. 2006]

[Further up-to-date personal & professional detail can be found in "[Who's Who in Australia](#)" or <http://primarieschooling.net> or <http://kelleyandcullen.net> ]

## ATTACHMENTS

- Committee members will be more than a little familiar with the **Cambridge Primary Review 2009**. It should be compulsory reading for anyone concerned with primary schooling because it is the most definitive and authoritative comment **ever** on primary schooling for any school system that has its origins in the English, Scottish, Irish models. We are very very, fortunate to have it at our disposal at this time.

A comment on it from <http://primaryschooling.net> is attached.

- Much is made of scholastic achievement by **Finland**. Finland doesn't seem to give a hoot about testing but always leads the pack when asked by the OECD to partake of assessment procedures [called PISA – Programme for International School Assessment] that it conducts for the 57 participating countries in its organisation.

Jouni Valijarvi visited Australia in 2009 at the invitation of the Australian Secondary Principals' Association to explain, and he did so at the association's annual conference. While he was comprehensively ignored by the Australian Press, his talk was provided on [www.aspa.asn.au](http://www.aspa.asn.au) under QSPA 2009 Conference.

A comment on it from <http://primaryschooling.net> is attached.

- **The Death and Life of the Great American School System** by Diane Ravitch sold out quickly because here was the former Assistant Secretary of Education who held the second highest educational position in the land and who, originally welded at the hip to the similar ideas as Gillard, Klein, Hansen, McGaw and other data-fixed educrats, turned completely around. She reckoned that the government's agenda was "...spearheaded by a psychometric blitzkrieg of metastasized testing aimed at dismantling public education." It shocked the nation.

A comment obtained by googling **Diane Ravitch** is attached.

NOT ATTACHED BUT EASILY AVAILABLE...

- **Testing Times : The need for new intelligent accountabilities for schooling** by Dr. Bob Lingard was printed in Volume 24 November 2009 of the Professional Magazine supplement to the Queensland Teachers' Journal. It is required reading by anyone interested in testing regimes.
- **Student Assessment Regimes : Getting the balance right for Australia**. Surprisingly, the Queensland Studies Authority, a governmental authority under the auspices of a government in tune with the machinations of Ms Gillard and company, produced a statement printed in the same magazine,

that is contrary to her shenanigans. It is a brave statement, understandably cautious under the circumstances.

**It is strongly recommended that copies of all of the above books and articles be supplied to all members of the Committee.**

## CAMBRIDGE PRIMARY REVIEW 2009

The Cambridge Primary Review published its final report on 23 October, 2009. This 608-page final report is the most comprehensive review of primary education in 40 years. It is described as ‘...more of a book than a report’. As either, it is probably the book *and* the report of the century with regards to Primary Schooling. The 1967 Plowden Report was the last to have a significant impact on primary schooling. This review is what is needed for the start of the 21st century.

A compulsory text for student teachers, every primary teacher should read it at least once; at least twice by Primary Principals and at least three times by governments’ education officials. Every Education Minister should carry it with them at all times and treat it as their bible.

Professor Robin Alexander a Fellow of Wolfson College, Cambridge led the review, examining 4,000 published reports and 1,000 submissions from around the world. The report makes 78 recommendations for reforming the English system of primary education. Hope is held for Aussie learners that APPA members, subject associations and other Australian practitioners will deal with it in a thoroughly Australian-professional way [Rudd] in their advice to governments. The Review’s detailed compilation is certainly more thorough than acting hurriedly on unprofessional advice from non-teachers and a visitor from New York.

Save Our Schools, based in Canberra, had this to say on 23 October, 2009 : *Just as Australia is introducing reporting of school test results and the inevitable league tables that will follow, a major review of the primary curriculum in England has issued damning conclusions on the impact of standardised tests and league tables.*

The Cambridge Primary Review released at the end of 2009 says that the testing and reporting of school results in English and Maths has distorted children’s learning and eroded their entitlement to a broad education. It says that 10 and 11-year-olds spend around half their time in the classroom studying English and Maths and this has “squeezed out” other subjects from the curriculum. The Review recommends that the English and Maths tests be abandoned and that league tables that report schools performance on these tests be axed as well. In Australia national testing was introduced in a ‘ruddy blush’ and with malice-before thought in 2008.

The Review says that the current focus on passing exams and hitting targets at a young age was “even narrower than that of the Victorian elementary schools”. It claims that the existing system caused significant ‘collateral damage’ as children were drilled to pass exams, marginalising other subjects such as history, geography, art and science which have been “squeezed out” of the curriculum. The study said :”The prospect of testing, especially high-stakes testing undertaken in the public arena, forces teachers, pupils and parents to concentrate their attention on those areas of learning to be tested, too often to the exclusion of other activities of considerable educational importance.” Australians already knew this, but in the face of arrogant ministerial pig-headedness, it is difficult to handle at the political level.

*As children move through the primary phase, their statutory entitlement to a broad education is increasingly but needlessly compromised by a 'standards' agenda which combines high-stakes testing and the national strategies' exclusive focus on literacy and numeracy.*

The head of the review, Professor Robin Alexander, wrote in the Daily Telegraph that primary education should amount to much more than basic literacy and numeracy, supremely important though these are. He claims that tests in those areas can serve as a proxy for the rest of a child's education are both wrong and misleading for parents.

The report proposes that the tests be replaced by a system of less formal teacher assessment throughout primary school which could be externally moderated. A random sample of children could then take place at age 11 to gauge national performance in all subjects. See : [www.primaryreview.org.uk](http://www.primaryreview.org.uk)

## **ARE WE FINISHED ?**

While in power, Brenden Nelson, the Federal Minister for Education, representing the Liberal Party, proposed series of testing in schools that he thought would help to raise national standards of some elements of the curriculum in Australian schools by frightening schools and then forcing pupils to learn harder. When his government failed its own electoral test, the replacement Julia Gillard followed the same beliefs of standard-raising [so called], high-stakes, fear-driven testing regimes, believing that such techniques had worked in the New York School District of about 1400 schools where Joel Klein, ex-lawyer and political aspirant boasted of success. He became her mentor and role model. If the tests in schools were not successful, it was the teacher's fault or the principal's fault and they should go. Welded at the hip to Nelson and Klein in such ideological beliefs, Julia Gillard, possessed more power than her other two soul-mates and so instituted blanket testing to Australian schools. She set out to prove that she was very strong on the issue, since she was correct and knew more about evaluation, assessment, appraisal and testing than the general teaching professionals.

Although Gillard and Klein believe that comments from teachers and other whinging educators should be ignored, the issue has become controversial as well as the notion of publishing league tables. The heavy-handed imposition of wide-scale testing regimes challenges the altruism of a number of Australian 'professional' groups and parents' associations.

Despite a wide-spread media cone-of-silence, the general population is asking if there is some alternative to such heavy-handiness and the probable impact on curriculum offerings in schools. Finland has been presented as a country that leads the world in school achievements as measured by the OECD [the world Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development]. This organisation, established in 1961 and located in Paris with a membership of 30 countries, uses PISA [Programme for International Student Assessment], a form of assessment applied to 15 year olds. It then lists the countries in order of merit. The 2006 assessment of some 57 countries showed Finland leading on all counts. Even Finland was surprised since it does not participate in any sort of hard-nosed didactic teaching nor testing programs, nor threats. Australia and New Zealand do well...about 7th.

What does Finland do that we don't do ? Why are their school children performing so well? What's the secret ?

Professor Jouni Valijarvi, on the invitation of the Australian Secondary Principals Association visited Australia and revealed it all. Mind you he was comprehensively ignored by the media; and why that is so remains a mystery to the general public and observers in Principal's organisations and Teacher Unions.

He received a back-end mention on some evening-radio news programs when he spoke at the Australian Secondary Principals conference and that was the end of it. The Fourth Estate is now in charge and it suits its interests to maintain a controlled silence. It is now carefully monitoring letters to the editor because the controversy needs to build, and the future publishing of results, debate and league tables means big bikkies.

Professor Valijarvi said that Finland's success '...seems to be attributable to a web of interrelated factors having to do with comprehensive pedagogy, students' own interests and leisure activities, the structure of the system, teacher education, school practices and, in the end, Finnish culture" [*J Valijarvi : The Finnish Success in PISA - and some Reasons Behind it*]

The detail has been summarised as follows...

**TEACHER EDUCATION :** " If there is one single reason in Finland, it is their teacher education...how they have managed to keep the occupation of teaching so popular. All teacher education was moved to university level. A Masters Degree is the minimum for all teachers except pre-school."

"There is great competition to enter the teaching profession. Only about 13% of applicants per year are admitted to the teaching faculty. You do five years and qualify with a masters degree."

**TEACHERS :** "Schools are very much based on valuing teachers as professionals. They are a very powerful group of professionals. In Japan it is the opposite, as it is in other Nordic countries. They are very highly trusted in Finnish society."

"The average teaching class is 18-20 – very challenging if you have very different levels of learning abilities even with such small groups."

"There is a stress on self-evaluation by teachers, students and schools."

"Teachers are trusted."

**SCHOOLS:** "Primary schooling starts at Age 7."

"There is no tracking or streaming; levels are the same for all students."

"One of the strengths is that quality of schools is homogeneous – not so much competition between schools."

"Finland does not have a system of national test or school-level measuring with students at the same level every year."

"The Inspection system was abolished here and in Sweden in the 90s. Now we are hiring lots of Inspectors."

"Finland has a national curriculum – but schools have a lot of freedom in selecting within this curriculum."

"Only 2 – 3% go to private schools."

"Our Philosophy " **THE PRINCIPLE OF EQUITY IS TAKEN VERY SERIOUSLY.**"

[Full details of the summary : [www.aspa.asn.au](http://www.aspa.asn.au) Click QSPA 2009 Conference]

*A Google search of 'PISA' and "Valijarvi" is recommended*

## THE DEATH AND LIFE OF A SCHOOL SYSTEM

[Not reported by Australian press]

Diane Ravitch has written *The Death and Life of the Great American School System*. Printed by Basic Books this month, it has already sold out. This is because Diane Ravitch, a prominent U.S. education historian and former Assistant Secretary of Education, has done what Time Magazine [15 March, 2010] describes as an "...unabashed 180". She has completely reversed her views on the way educational reform is handled in the U.S. and is being cloned in Australia. This, the magazine observes is "...a rare sight in politics ...and in academia." Professor and Research Fellow at New York University, she previously occupied the second highest education position in the USA and, in this role, she was an advocate of private [charter] schooling, standardized testing and merit pay. She now uses *Death and Life* "...to proclaim her ardent opposition to the seemingly unstoppable engine of the education reform movement, which she believes is too quick to demonize teachers and unions in its attempt to improve the quality of the nation's schools and close the achievement gap. With scathing looks at the influence of private money in schools and the national obsession with testing over learning, Ravitch's critique is an essential one - passionate, well considered and completely logical" [Time, 15 March, 2010, P.10]

She says, "Nothing can come of any reform that teachers do not embrace."

There is little doubt that her critique will be avoided by Australian education writers and politically chained adherents of national testing and public flogging of schools ; as occurred in 2009 when the most extensive study of schools ever in the western world, *The Cambridge Review*, was ignored. I'll lay 'London to a brick' that neither book will grace the shelves of those who comment with academic authority in news items and education articles; as well as those who support it by their timidity and casual indifference. They would have to eat too much crow....as Professor Ravitch has been prepared to do....if they thought about what was happening to our country...and regained their professional integrity and strength.

However, the rest of us can google 'Diane Ravitch' and see for ourselves, while we wait for the book to appear on this continent. Her discourse with friend and foe Deborah Meier is fun to read on the blog: - [blogs.edweek.org/edweek/Bridging-Differences/](http://blogs.edweek.org/edweek/Bridging-Differences/)

The book itself has been described as a tour de force that is utterly and completely convincing, She explores solutions to challenges that are beyond the ken of bookish education scholars. She is a profound proponent of **experience** in the leadership of schooling and of **learnacy** vis-a-vis learning-for-tests in schools.

Professor Mark Bay of Kentucky writes, " Ravitch was a passionate advocate for the conservative policies of testing and accountability, school choice, privatization and business-style management, all of which she now powerfully shows, leave students [aka pupils] trained to take tests but not prepared to participate in a 21<sup>st</sup> century economy."

"She would" continues Professor Bay. "prefer to have professional educators rather than politicians, business leaders and philanthropists run the system and have charter [aka private] schools to help pupils most in need instead of allowing them to siphon off the best students [aka pupils] from public schools."

disrupting communities, dumbing down our schools, giving students [aka pupils] false reports of their progress, and creating a private sector that will undermine public education without improving it. Most significantly, we are not producing a generation of students [aka pupils] who are more knowledgeable and better prepared for the responsibility of citizenship. That is why I changed my mind about the current direction of school reform."



Neither does Ravitch approve of the dominant role of a federal government dictating ineffectual remedies when it has no track record of success. Such a government's reform is spearheaded by a psychometric blitzkrieg of metastasized testing aimed at dismantling public education that has taken 200 years to build.

Sound familiar? Hasten to the web-site.

Also google : *'Save Our Schools March 23 Trevor Gobbold'* and *"leading-learning blogspot Bruce Hammond"* for *A Lesson for Mrs. Tolley.*