



AUSTRALIAN EDUCATION BILL 2012 INQUIRY

Submission to the Standing Committee on Education and Employment

Introduction

My submission is based on over thirty years of experience in Victorian state primary schools. I've been an acting-principal, head teacher, science specialist, physical education specialist, librarian, middle-years leader, school initiatives facilitator, teacher of all classes from Prep to Year 6 and a Teaching & Learning Coach.

I'm writing a submission because it seems that governments are keen to follow advice from professors, doctors, deans and other education academics when what they should be doing is hearing from someone who has learned how to be the effective teacher which they claim they want.

Summary

High-performing teachers should be the only sort of teachers who can emerge from teacher-training. Until outstanding teachers are identified and become the people who are providing educational leadership for schools and teacher-training the potential for the system to improve will continue to be stymied.

The state system requires an educational approach instead of the political and administrative one which it receives. The status quo, where governments seek new ways to measure school and teacher accountability, results in an administrative response to demonstrate compliance, without there being any educational improvement.

Quality teaching

Teaching is simple; you know the subject, you understand how to specifically teach the subject, you apply teaching skills.

(Teaching isn't simplistic; which is how it's always presented by government initiatives such as seeking to be a Top 5 nation in Reading, Science and Mathematics or the Premier's Reading Challenge).

Teacher-training

To be able to understand, and effectively apply, those three components, (subject, pedagogy and subject-pedagogy), requires training delivered by someone who has already understood and effectively practised them, i.e. outstanding teachers are the people who can teach others to be outstanding teachers.

Student-teachers could complete their entire four-year Bachelor of Education without ever having seen an outstanding teacher.

Therefore, outstanding teachers are required to be involved in teacher-training and in contributing to what is provided in teacher-training.

Outstanding teachers haven't been identified so quality is measured by other means. Universities can know if a candidate for a lecturer's job in education has a masters or a doctorate. So the main instruction trainee-teachers get is from academics.

As a classroom teacher I regularly oversee trainee-teachers and I always ask them the same questions regarding English, Mathematics and Classroom management.

What has your course taught you about phonics?

What has your course taught you about problem-solving in Mathematics?

What has your course taught you about using quality literature to teach English?

What has your course taught you about developing a classroom of co-operative learning?

The answers are the same as when I did my course in the 1970s; Nothing.

(Sometimes there has been a reference to some of those things but nothing to prepare the student-teacher for how to teach it).

I hasten to add that most teachers aren't conversant on these topics either. I asked a Literacy Coach what phonics was and she couldn't tell me. Soon afterwards she became a principal, so the underprepared graduates can aim high and not feel out of place among their colleagues.

Providers of teacher-training courses clearly do not know what teachers need to know. The courses and the delivery lack the overwhelming input which should come from outstanding teachers. I think an hour each morning and afternoon for two semesters would be sufficient to train high-quality graduates who would be proficient in knowing the subject, understanding the subject-pedagogy and applying the teaching skills. They would continue to improve as they experienced adapting their skills for different students and different classroom dynamics once they were teachers. Within 5-10 years I expect they would be beginning to become more analytical and evaluating methods and procedures to invent their own styles and

methods. But experience doesn't do that for a teacher if they don't have those foundation skills on which to build. And that's how they are now after four years.

Two years ago I hosted two student-teachers who were in their first year and they were outstanding. Their ability didn't have anything to do with their university or their ATARs, it was their passion for the profession. They wanted to learn, they wanted students to learn and they established positive relationships with students. They made perceptive observations and asked pertinent questions about differentiation and classroom management. The following year they had both left the course, finding it to be both boring and irrelevant. It seems little has changed from when I completed my Diploma of Teaching in the 1970s. The experience of being in schools and practising teaching was the main benefit for when I graduated and became Head Teacher; administering the school, reporting to school council, being reviewed by the District Inspector and teaching Grades 1-6. I had a half-hour preparation time once a week when Religious Education took place compared to the five hours APT and mentoring that graduates are to receive now. There's not much value in being mentored by someone who's not an outstanding teacher. Why should a graduate require so much assistance if they have had four years preparation to teach?

So you can graduate from teacher-training by passing subjects that are irrelevant to being an effective teacher and be placed in a school where that's the same background which all your colleagues come from. Student-teachers will do their school experience teaching rounds with these teachers. Some of them will be Experienced Teachers, Leading Teachers and Principal class but nowhere along the career path has anyone had to prove that they have been an outstanding teacher.

Recently I was a Teaching & Learning Coach, often sent to schools with a history of poor results. After a couple of weeks in such schools it was easy to see why; no educational leadership provided by the principal, simplistic measures and beliefs adopted by other team leaders, ineffective teaching skills practised by graduate and experienced teachers alike. That's the legacy of inadequate training.

At the other end of the scale to the quality first-years mentioned above was the teacher with a doctorate who was meant to be teaching mathematics. He was friendly and well-intentioned like most teachers, but honestly admitting that he wasn't even trying to teach a particular student who was meant to be advance, not even having conversations with him. That's a warning to the simplistic thinking that recruiting the best and brightest from Year 12 is going to produce better teachers.

If you have a relevant course delivered by outstanding teachers then it wouldn't matter who came in, only the competent would be able to graduate from it. Mathematics is a huge weakness in primary schools because whilst all VCE graduates are going to have used English some won't have studied Mathematics since Year 10. They might not ever have mastered or enjoyed the subject, even at primary school levels. Universities should have their own tests in English and

Mathematics which students need to be able to pass in order to graduate. Similarly they should be interviewed to assess their suitability for teaching. They wouldn't need to be rejected on the basis of these assessments but they could be given an indication of what will be required. You have to be able to swim to hold an AustSwim certificate and organize a swimming program as part of P.E. but you don't have to demonstrate spelling or basic properties abilities to be an English or Mathematics teacher. Most primary teachers don't provide a music, science or P.E. program; just more subjects in which they claim they have no expertise.

When students in teacher-training during 1978 were considered for studentships, on the basis of their results, they were also interviewed to determine if they had the personality and range of interests which would make them suitable teachers. If someone has knowledge, skills and interests across maths/science, language/arts and sport they are far more likely to be a better candidate for teaching than someone who has a far superior ATAR but isn't familiar with either literature or mathematics.

Professional Development

It isn't the fault of teachers that they're not trained properly. They could quite logically believe that, upon graduating, they are now fit to teach. Taking their place in schools and working with colleagues from the same background might confirm that - unless they're lucky enough to have a great mentor, team-leader or principal. Most would learn that they don't have to be any better and that what they have to learn is how to fit in with the culture of the school.

To properly train all the people who should already be properly trained would be an enormous undertaking. Victoria's DEECD provided relevant PD in content and delivery to its 200 Teaching & Learning Coaches. They couldn't possibly differentiate between coaches so they provided the PD in conference formats over two days with various electives to choose from and the process was repeated a number of times over the years. The idea was for those coaches to work in schools that would most benefit from coaching, often selected due to their poor NAPLAN performances over time. The concept was sound, even if flawed by the bureaucracy in its delivery and not warmly embraced by the culture of schools.

A similar model could be used where outstanding teachers were inspectors or reviewers or Teaching & Learning Advisers and empowered to review and educate schools and staff. There's no point in schools having triennial reviews where the principal, with support from regional personnel, just trots out another strategic plan and annual improvement plan and implements a new program to show how the school is addressing the literacy problem. There shouldn't be a school in the country that has Literacy or Numeracy improvement priorities because they should be

assumed fundamentals that are always of the highest quality. School priorities should have moved on to be about addressing a philosophy or a response to a societal issue. Given that schools are often reacting to poor performances in Literacy and Numeracy means that the T & L Adviser needs to be able to intervene, and that might mean spending some time in the one school. Start with the schools which have a history of poor improvement. Work out how many T & L Advisers are required and what it will cost to train them and employ them and budget for it. Training them shouldn't take long because they should come from an outstanding teacher background and already know what to do, how to do it and possibly how to coach others to do it. It wouldn't take an outstanding teacher more than a day of questioning school leaders about what they were doing to determine whether they should be school leaders at all. There seem to be few people in schools and regions and beyond who are setting agendas for what will take place who can actually talk the specifics of what and why and how teaching must be done.

People from beyond schools like Doug Clark, Lane Clark, John Munro, Di Siemon, Di Snowball, Robin Fogarty and Patrick Griffin would know how to lead the T & L Advisers if outstanding teachers couldn't be identified. After all, who is going to know how to identify them other than another outstanding teacher?

Career path

How do graduates become professionally accepted and forge a career if they haven't the foundation skills to be an outstanding teacher? They learn through the process of osmosis that it's not learning results that count but embracing the prevailing culture of the school. Generally that means only speaking in reverent and serious tones on a topic where there can't be any danger of disrupting the status quo. If teachers want a career, rather than a vocation or a job, they don't announce at a staff meeting that they've noticed that Grade 6 seems to be regularly playing rounders every morning and that this can't possibly be in the best interests of either a comprehensive P.E. program or the learning of English and Mathematics skills. The thing to do, if you actually had the abilities to recognize that it was a bit odd, would be to say nothing. That person might be your next team-leader or on the panel that you go before seeking a permanent position. You might need them to be a referee and they might be contacted as a referee even if you didn't want that. Most teachers, and especially principals, speak in vague generalisations which can't be challenged and which leave room to embrace anything, e.g. "It's important that kids learn their tables." But they're not going to specify why or how.

Being popular is far more beneficial than being right. Creating positive perceptions of what you're doing and not ever declaring that you're struggling in some area is far better than revealing the realities. That's what everyone else in the school might be doing. Instead of teaching a subject for the children teachers without adequate skill in the subject can teach it for themselves. They find a way to do it which keeps them in control and appearing to be in command of the situation.

T&L Coach: I think your Math's lessons are like this small box in the middle of the page but Math's is all these other things, (draws arrows coming out of box and labels them).

Graduate: You must be a psychologist! That's exactly what I do. I hate Math's.

T&L Coach: Well Geoffrey isn't going to learn anything this year unless he gets Math's activities which can lead him on from where he's at now.

Graduate: Well he's not going to learn anything this year then.

As far as the school and the principal were concerned the graduate was a shining example of a young teacher making her way. She was friendly. She was good fun. She dressed well. She kept the class quiet. She kept the class occupied.

If she applied for a job she would only have to write to the criteria, speak to the criteria and have referees that verified her claims such as, "wrote the Numeracy Plan" or "led the initiative of introducing a two-hour uninterrupted Literacy block every morning". The fact that there's no evidence that the Numeracy Plan improved results or that the Early Years actually hindered the development of reading comprehension doesn't matter, only broad generalisations praising its success and the effective communication skills demonstrated in the implementation process are required. Eventually one can become a principal without ever having known what constitutes outstanding teaching and without ever having been an outstanding teacher. That doesn't mean the person hasn't been hard-working, conscientious and professional to the full-degree of their limited understanding.

That principals don't recognize outstanding teaching was demonstrated some years ago when Professor Richard Elmore conducted sessions for DEECD principals and, running the now popular mantra that it's quality teaching that makes the difference, (interesting that another professor had to tell us that with the results of his meta-research rather than it just being professionally obvious), discovered that the principals couldn't actually articulate what a good teacher did. I would think that if anyone had ever been an outstanding teacher they would certainly know what they did.

It resulted in a very professional DEECD document, the e5, a black album to follow the white album. Now a teacher will be asked how they're addressing the e5 because it's from the government department. Well, perhaps that's not the case when it's still on the principal's shelf and no-one has seen it, as was the case at one poor-performing school. The principles of the e5 weren't new, they should have been an integral part of teacher-training and totally unnecessary for the DEECD to be publishing. Principals, if they were worthy of being principals, should have been leading the development of such skills in their schools. Now principals are being encouraged to look into classrooms and observe e5 practices taking place so as to become more familiar with them. Eventually we'll have these same underperforming

and ignorant principals, given more power and autonomy by government, reviewing a teacher and informing him/her that the lessons are lacking in a particular “e”.

So how do principals get to be principals, in charge of selecting staff, when they can't even articulate what constitutes a good teacher? Well, they're never actually looking for an outstanding teacher, they're looking for someone with whom they feel comfortable and who they can say satisfies the criteria for the position. No-one is ever asked to furnish evidence that proves they were effective let alone outstanding. Evidence of highly-developed pedagogical skills would be whatever you wrote and said which matches the popular thinking of the day and fits a DEECD model for effective teaching.

Outstanding teachers would be disadvantaged in front of most panels if they were to write and speak of what they do because it would be highly unlikely that anyone on the panel understood the importance of what they were explaining and what they had done.

There is another very professional document DEECD document, *The Developmental Learning Framework for School Leaders*, known as the white album. It specifically details the Leadership Domains, and therefore the capabilities, which someone must possess to become a principal; Technical Leadership, Human Leadership, Cultural Leadership, Educational Leadership and Symbolic Leadership.

I have worked with more than twenty principals and only one provided leadership in the five domains. Most of them were good people, a few were good leaders who recognized that someone else was better to drive educational leadership in the school, but half of them were incapable of providing educational leadership. There are principals who don't seem to do anything at all other than fulfil some Technical Leadership aspects which keep the regional people to whom they report satisfied. They mirror the model which government provides, create a positive perception of what's going on, don't admit that something's wrong and try to keep everyone happy.

Read these conversations with principals.

Principal: I need to see you about your Math's program. There's not enough in it and I don't understand it. I know you know what you're doing each week but I need to know.

Teacher: Well, I don't know what I'm doing next week because that depends on what happens today and tomorrow and the next day. My plan for tomorrow mightn't take place because of what happens today.

Principal: Well, now I'm really worried. You don't know what you're doing. I need a proper plan that shows what you're doing each week.

Teacher: That's not what I do. The plan I've given you shows how I work and that's why I get the incredible results that I do.

Principal: Your NAPLAN results were pretty ordinary.

Teacher: I would have thought my NAPLAN results were outstanding. I don't think there would be a teacher in the state who wouldn't want to swap with me.

Principal: Yes, well there's too much attention paid to NAPLAN. It's just a one-off test. I need a proper plan that details what you're doing. You haven't done as much as the others.

(With the encouragement of a colleague to play the game and take one for the team the teacher copied the plan out of a commercial text book, Math's Plus, and handed that in as the Math's Program).

Principal: Oh, this is much better. Still a few things that need improving but this is far more befitting of someone with your experience.

Teaching is stressful when there's not even anything unusual taking place. It would be impossible to be consistently out-performing Like Schools and the State if you didn't know what you were doing and only working 38 hours a week. Outstanding teachers work hours in excess of 40 per week at the school and then there are the after-school and weekend hours and holiday hours on top of that. If that wasn't the case it would be impossible to be an outstanding teacher. Outstanding teachers can't afford to have their time wasted by principals, to whom governments want to provide with greater powers, when they have no understanding of quality teaching and have reduced it to some simplistic measure. In the conversation above, the principal's knowledge was inferior to the teacher's and she couldn't recognize an excellent program taking place in her own school.

Principal (addressing public meeting of parents with staff in attendance): The teaching in the primary section needs to improve. There's only one teacher who can be regarded as displaying excellent teaching skills and that's, (names the teacher).

Parent (at private meeting with principal a few days after the meeting): I'm on leave at the moment so I might be able to help your staff acquire the sort of skills you're after. I've been getting great results using de Bono hats, combining Gardner's multiple-intelligences with Bloom's taxonomy and looking at what sort of learners the students are in terms of Gregorc's domains. Would you be interested in me running a PD session?

Principal: No, because I don't know whether those things are important or not.

Parent: Oh. Well who's responsible for educational leadership in the school?

Principal: Me.

About seven years later the principal publicised how important it was that the school was learning about de Bono hats under the Innovations and Excellence program and sold it to the school community as new and exciting. A whole generation of students

at the school had missed out because it took him so long to know whether it was worthwhile. Anyone remotely interested in education had been practising it for over 10 years.

Principal: Hello. I'm just phoning because one of my staff members, Irene, wants to start a Sex Education program. I asked her how that would look and she said that she wasn't quite sure where to start but that you'd know because you'd done some work in that area.

Acting-principal: Right. Yes, that's something which I've done. What do you want me to do, write out a program?

Principal: No, I don't want you to do anything. I just want to tell her that I've spoken to you because I told her that I would. I'll just tell her that we need to form a committee and have some meetings about it, and present it as a document to school council, and after a few years it should go away.

I attended the principal's school and listened to him proudly telling the assembly that his school was one where great things were always happening.

I could go on with many more anecdotes and examples. In principle, to give principals more power and autonomy sounds logical but it comes from a flawed belief that the principal is the cleverest person in the school, struggling vainly to improve educational outcomes whilst stymied by the lack of power to sack incompetent staff. And indeed, the principal mentioned above as the only one to have his head and actions around all five leadership domains is currently on sick leave due to a lack of support from the region in attempting to make his school more professional. Why wouldn't that be supported? It might have had something to do with the fact that the very matters he was confronting had been put in place by the previous principal who was now the person he had to report to at regional level!

Many disappointing principals actually believe that they are doing a good job, blissfully unaware of what they don't know about teaching and learning and unaware of what's truly going on in their school. They implement new structures which are counter-productive because they don't understand how they are going to impact on outstanding teachers or other staff. The principal can write in glowing terms about the new structure for an annual review.

Selection and review processes

You would think that the selection process would determine that not only was the successful applicant the best candidate but that they were supremely qualified in the five leadership domains. Sadly neither the white album nor all the posturing around Merit and Equity can necessarily deliver on either of those assumptions. The candidate writes, the candidate speaks, the candidate provides referees and the panel ticks off boxes for each criteria. They don't necessarily know what's important but they do know the key phrases to look out for which mean the candidate has

addressed the criteria. If the applicant was to write or speak about an achievement without using the language of the criteria they would most likely be found not to have met it. (I've actually done that, written two principal applications outlining my achievements in each domain of leadership. Only the one where I used the language of the criteria resulted in my being shortlisted).

Should the appointed principal then seem totally lacking in leadership across any of the domains it's basically too late. They're now a respected school leader with a support network around them. As long as they're playing the paper trail game of accountability with their line managers everything remains all right. Governments now want to give them greater power so that they can realize their full potential. Outstanding teachers know whether someone is a good principal or not because they know the environment which needs to be created to be conducive to teaching and learning.

Principals are on the panels to select their staff. As with the principal selection procedure much is made of the process being one of Merit and Equity. If those guidelines are breached a candidate can have a grievance heard and the position might have to be readvertised. No panel wants to have to go through it all again so observing the protocols of Merit and Equity becomes of the utmost importance. Should an unsuccessful candidate actually know the successful applicant, and be aware that that person is lacking considerably in experience, knowledge and achievement compared to them, they will find that Merit & Equity has nothing to do with merit and everything to do with saying that the panel treated everyone equally and properly and therefore the decision is valid. That means that the principal and his/her panel can select whichever candidate they want, not necessarily the best one, perhaps one with whom they feel confident or perhaps one who is already at the school rather than one who will cause an awkward staffing situation. A popular decision is to hire graduates because they're at the opposite end of the pay scale to the experienced teachers who should be better teachers. Of course an inferior candidate can also be successful by having been better at satisfying the criteria, and it's not likely that anyone on the panel has known what questions to ask to determine if the candidate really knows how to teach or lead.

One of the key components of local selection is to consult the provided referees and other external referees. While the candidates are being checked to validate whether they meet the criteria no such checking is done on the credibility of the referees. A panel is not going to question the integrity of the candidate's principal. And in one of the many examples of the simplistic which inhabit school culture, a type of pseudo-professionalism, it sets alarm bells ringing if candidates don't nominate their principal as a referee. The principal will be consulted. Now, what if the teacher had argued with the principal about the budget not reflecting the school goals, NAPLAN not being analysed effectively, Physical Education being ignored, a two-hour literacy block being archaic and inappropriate or the colour of the school bins? The principal, or any other referee from the candidate's network of school involvement, only has to

say, "S/he can have some communication problems", or "S/he's not a team-player", and the candidate will fail to meet the criteria. They will lack highly-developed interpersonal skills or lack the ability to work effectively as a member of a high-performing team.

So for the career-orientated teacher the smartest thing to do is not work to become an outstanding teacher whose results will never be asked for or looked at but to curry favour with everyone with whom they work, especially the principal. When the principal says that the kids don't need much training for the athletics carnival because they had a fair bit last year, the smart response is to just nod your head sagely. When the principal announces that there's no APT today, usually provided by him/her, because it's the first day of the term and it's important for the students to have their classroom teacher all day on the first day of the term in order to settle in, don't have a grievance, or even a comment, about it being your right and his/her responsibility to ensure that you have that time. The system is a cleverly constructed bureaucracy to reward those that embrace it and to marginalise those who would dare to confront it. A bit like what happens to police whistle-blowers.

It's much easier to be a career person compared to becoming an outstanding teacher. And career people get more money. Being an outstanding teacher requires a lot of training, a lot of reading and a lot of time spent analysing, planning, preparing and evaluating. Outstanding teachers are often naïve to what's required to progress because they're too busy being outstanding to care about the new buzz word or new program or new principle to which everyone is being asked to swear allegiance and have reflected in their work programs. They are less likely to have the time to complete their Master of Education or spend hours writing an application for a promotion position. Not being an outstanding teacher would also be advantageous for prolonging your time in the workforce with far less chance of burning out.

You would think there were checks in place to prevent incompetence, incompetence which stems from filling a workforce with inadequately trained people, but they exist on paper and are examined largely by other people who were inadequately trained. In fact the whole system revolves around surveys, reports, data, strategic plans, goals and reviews with each one showing the progress that's been achieved or the areas of concern which will now be addressed, again, in the strategic plan. Principals and teachers are constantly kept busy completing documents that prove they're doing the right thing that it takes a lot of time out of doing the right thing. Principals regularly need assistance from region to ensure that they are writing plans and reports which respond to reviews and data appropriately. If they deserved to be principals and were producing something relevant there wouldn't need to be such a support mechanism.

It makes perfect sense to have all these things, a competently trained workforce of high-performing, or at least satisfactory, teachers would implement them. But they would implement them so that they were real and meaningful to the people there. As

it is they are imposed on people who don't know how to really achieve learning improvement and it's like a game of hiding and masking what's really happening while constantly proving that they are accountable. Governments seem to think that by having more forms and reports to complete that schools will be more efficient and professional when they are actually counter-productive. Apart from the time wasted they produce a type of person as principal who is more comfortable doing these things and discourage the people who had more potential to be an effective leader.

When the teacher with a doctorate wasn't actually attempting to teach a student a meeting was arranged with the parents where he admitted such and concluded that he'd have to try and make time for it. No improvement resulted and another meeting with the doctor followed and there was still no improvement. The parents had a meeting with the AP who offered that that's why his son was in the other math's class and asked for suggestions on what he should do! The idea of having different ability levels within the same class is what satisfactory teachers do but it clearly wasn't in the experience of the doctor who had the idea imposed on him. The expectation is that the school review process would expose how phony the principal's implementation had been but the reviewer praised the school for its innovative and effective math's program where children worked at ability levels. When reviewers came to my school I asked how that could have happened and they said that largely the reviewer would rely on what the principal told them!

Of course, that didn't happen at my effective and efficient school with the principal who was across the five leadership domains. Our reviewer said the school marked the students too hard and he wanted to see them being awarded higher grades. Now, why would he want that? And our principal, who had staff morale at a high because our work ethic and individual expertise was recognized, utilised and supported, was told by the region that staff morale was too high and that he clearly wasn't working us hard enough!

At another review undertaken at my school none of the staff were present and the reviewer didn't ever seek our opinions on the principal, opinions which would have been damning.

The DEECD bureaucracy has perfected line management. When the minister or deputy secretary comes up with something like the Premier's Reading Challenge its importance filters down the line through Regional Directors, Regional Network Leaders and finally principals. To witness children being hounded at the weekly assembly and threatened with having to be kept in at lunch-time to complete the required number of books is an experience I'll never forget. To read schools falling over themselves in the rush to praise what an enormous positive influence the PRC has had on its students leaves me totally bewildered. Are these statements part of playing the game and getting your name attached to something which will be approved of by regional superiors or are their reading programs so deficient that the PRC really does seem good?

Principals are instructed to do things like, "Tell everyone that the New Super scheme is a good one and that they should leave the Revised Scheme and go into it". If you're a principal with some integrity who replies, "I'm going to tell my staff that I think the New Scheme exists to get people out of the better Revised Scheme and that they should examine each one closely to see which best suits their financial needs", then you're not playing the game. As far as careers are concerned it's not about being the best teacher but about being compliant and embracing every new slogan and program which is designed to create positive perceptions in the community.

School culture

If there's one thing that's modelled successfully from above and applied rigorously in schools it's creating positive perceptions, even if there are no realities to substantiate them. The newspaper will have a photo of children on the new playground and proclaim how much they're enjoying the new equipment when the truth is they're missing their old superior playground and saying there's nothing to do. The principal's message will state how lucky we are to have a new building under BER and how excited the staff and children are about it when the truth is that staff morale is at its lowest point ever due to being in a building which is far less practical than their old one. Teachers too, learn that the way to get on is not to be an outstanding teacher but to put an outstanding spin on every situation. The AFL Auskick day was extremely valuable rather than a complete farce which should never be repeated. John is easily distracted rather than John is a disruptive influence in the classroom. I'm finding the interactive video sessions with other schools a fantastic opportunity to share with others and overcome geographical disadvantage rather than we wasted a lot of time preparing for this and a lot of time waiting for it to work just so that the school could say it's making use of the interactive video equipment. The system is so full of hypocrisy and so lacking in integrity that it's hardly surprising that so many seek a private school.

I experienced seven years as a parent of children attending an independent school. The Head Master was regarded as a man of the highest integrity, and quite rightly so. He didn't waste time being accountable to politicians, he wrote to the parents and told them the truth. He was a visible presence at functions and activities and seemed to know the names of all the students and parents in a school of about a 1,000 students. (Compare that to a state principal who struggled with the names of children in a school of 70 pupils because she was absent from such functions and activities). He provided leadership across the five domains of leadership. The emphasis wasn't on the great results, of course there are going to be great results when the school can choose to whom it grants and denies access, the emphasis was on pastoral

care. The school is loved. It loves back. The Head Master didn't serve political masters, he was at the top, and so the school direction is from an educational viewpoint from the top down. It doesn't change with a change of government and a new Education Minister, who is administering schools from a political point of view rather than an educational one, wanting to stamp his imprimatur on the system. The school changes and evolves but it has an institutional memory to keep what's good and valued rather than compliantly conform to the notions of someone who knows far less.

It's a little bit different than the principal of an underperforming school which had had a Literacy Coach assigned to it followed by a Teaching & Learning Coach.

Principal (addressing parents at school assembly): Our school continues to perform strongly. It's known how well we're doing here and that's why we get asked to trial these initiatives. We've already been given a Literacy Coach and now we have a Math's Coach.

T&L Coach: (speechless).

Australian Education Bill 2012

School-level leadership is crucial, all principals will meet a professional standard.

How will that be different from the poor leadership some schools get when the principals already meet a professional standard?

High quality schooling for workforce, economy, productivity and prosperity.

What about wellness?

Schools need to adopt new evidence-based methods of Teaching & Learning.

That will mean that a currently outstanding teacher might be forced by one of the leaders in schools with greater powers to do something which is a backward step. It won't be the outstanding teacher's evidence which carries the day, it will be the principal who has it in a document that s/he got from the state principals' Big Day Out. Outstanding teachers are always years ahead of the Ministry for Education but the Ministry for Education thinks that anyone outstanding would be someone who can document compliance with whatever they've come up with lately.

Teachers will be renewed annually to demonstrate their teaching reflects rigorous professional standards that are based on the evidence of successful teaching methods.

And just who will conduct that review and determine whether professional standards have been met? The principal?! That would be logical if the principal was a person of integrity and could provide educational leadership. I wouldn't like my career dependent on such an assumption. A principal I knew used to send someone from

the office to teachers asking them to sign a document. When one asked what it was she was told it was her annual review. There were no real reviews for years but the documentation was there and that was all that mattered.

And who will determine those standards? Professor John Hattie?! I don't know if Hattie has been simplistic or whether politicians have been simplistic in using his research. It's just a matter of common sense to realize that it's the quality of teaching which makes the difference as it is common sense to realize that the number of children in a class will be an important consideration. An incompetent teacher might do better with fewer students, depending on how it is that they're incompetent. An outstanding teacher will have a tipping point in class numbers where something has to go; whether it be providing individual feed-back, co-operative teams or the amount of lesson time that's devoted to consolidating what was intended to be learned. There's also the issue of how many hours the teacher is going to work. Outstanding teachers don't get outstanding results working the 38- hour week for which they're paid. They work over 40 hours at school and more hours at home. Every student adds more time in analysis and planning and reporting. If the teacher has other duties; Athletics Sports Co-ordinator, Swimming Program Co-ordinator, Student Welfare, Literacy Plan, etc. then either more hours have to be added on or the class program is going to be modified so that the tasks and work required for outstanding results are placed on hold until the other obligation is fulfilled.

Support provided to schools to improve continually.

Sometimes teachers need to stop improving so that they can consolidate and establish and institutionalise a component and make it sustainable before moving on to something else.

Accountability to deliver a School Improvement Plan

That's what happens now and it's ridiculous in its implementation. Principals set targets in terms that are meaningless, "By 2015 60% of Yr 2 children will be at or above the expected standard for Reading." Then if it's not reached they explain why and set new goals and standards for the next plan. No teacher is actually ever working to meet the plan's goals, they're just doing what they would be doing anyway.

Equity for all

Members of your committee, and the government, probably wouldn't be able to imagine some of the students for which schools cater. Children from dysfunctional families who are already psychologically damaged and learning impaired. Teachers know immediately that such children will need an aide with them every moment of

the day but they rarely qualify for such a level of assistance. If the prime minister is going to make a difference for these children, when it hasn't already been done in the first five years at home, she will have to spend a lot of money.

Top 5 in Reading, Science and Mathematics

It doesn't matter if we're 3rd or 17th. What matters is that students have had outstanding teachers who have allowed them to fulfil their potential, enabling them to have options for how they'll play a positive role in the community, be it local or global. One country might be superior to another at the expense of something important which hasn't been mentioned such as intra-personal skills. The government reaction to international testing is a political one, not an educational one, and like all such responses it is designed to appeal to the ignorant.

Conclusion

The state system would have some chance of achieving the sorts of goals Ministers of Education claim they want it to achieve if it was run by outstanding teachers appointed to a Board of Education. The Board of Education could then put into place what was necessary and point the finger at government for being irresponsible if it failed to budget for it. State schools should have an educational agenda which governments are responsible for funding rather than having political agendas which schools are responsible for implementing.

Prediction

State and federal governments will continue to use education for political gain. The people who are best suited to serve their purposes are those who are more likely to be in positions of influence. The filter down effect ensures that people who are the worst suited to leading schools have a very good chance of "leading" them. Prime ministers, premiers and education ministers will proclaim that it was their government which introduced increased accountability through annual reviews and rigorous professional standards while regional leaders and school leaders work out how to complete the documentation which shows they were compliant. Outstanding teachers will continue to be outstanding but with little recognition of the fact beyond some grateful students and parents and, depending on sheer chance, colleagues and the principal. I expect a lot of them won't qualify for a "performance pay" bonus if and when that becomes a reality.

Philip Henseleit