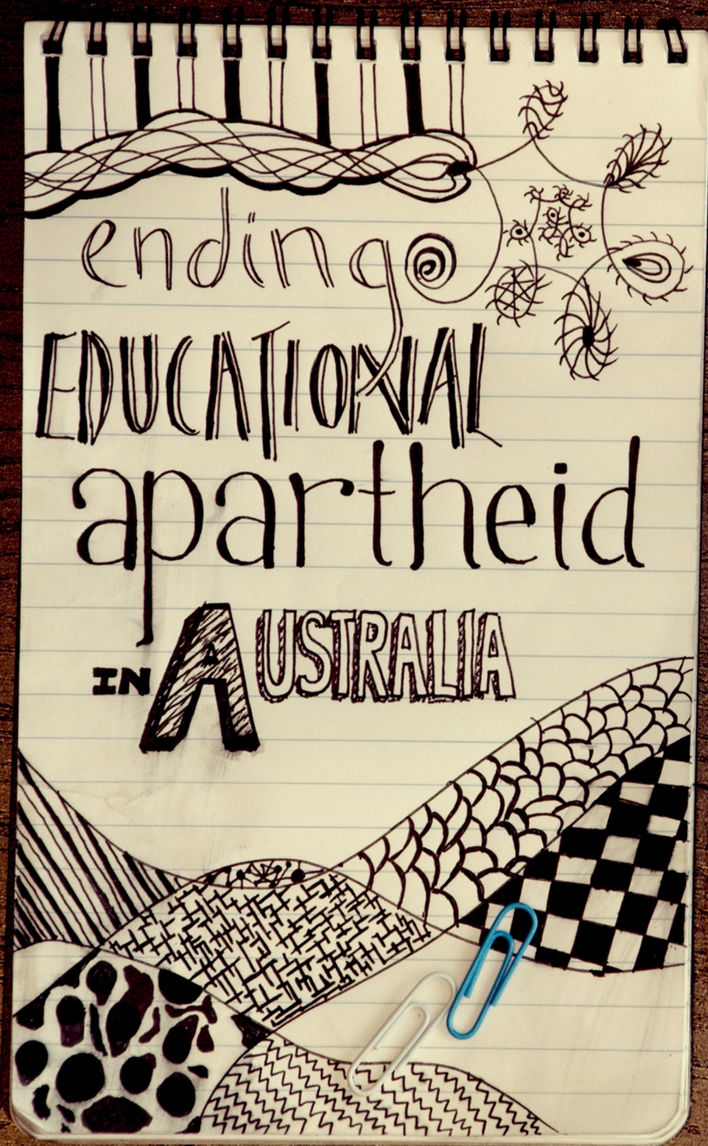
EDUCATION REVOLUTION?



NOEL GUERIN

EDUCATION REVOLUTION?
Ending Educational Apartheid in Australia

NOEL GUERIN

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Preface

Foreword

Educators, politicians and most of the thinking public in Australia are aware of what the Prime Minister called the ‘patchy nature’ of schools in this country.

Evidence continues to emerge that many schools, especially government schools, are not matching the achievements of students in countries with which we compete. There are concerns that disturbing numbers of primary students are not reaching sufficiently high standards of literacy and numeracy and that many secondary students are increasingly alienated from studies which fail to engage their interest. The majority of schools which escape these criticisms are independent schools, where parents pay sometimes substantial fees, where students gain a disproportionate share of academic awards, school leaders have a larger degree of autonomy and teachers are thought to be more highly motivated and caring than their colleagues in the public sector.

In the United Kingdom, such marked disparities are attacked publicly and in the press as educational apartheid! They engender fierce debate and calls to action. In Australia, on the contrary, they cause scarcely a murmur!

The key problems – unfairness, lack of professionalism, dysfunctional and often irrelevant schools – cannot be solved by tinkering at the edges. The Rudd Government’s so-called revolution, measurable in terms of some extra computers and other minor improvements rather than significant, completely misses its target. Nothing less than a real revolution in the financing and governance of all schools and the management of teachers and learners will suffice.

Above all, education needs to flourish on a level playing field, where all schools compete in an open accountable situation. Schools need to be exciting, innovative and high quality providers, engaging the

interests of students and preparing them with the knowledge, skills and entrepreneurial insights to significantly contribute to the cultural and economic life of our nation, while enjoying the riches and fulfilment of a good education.

The ideas discussed in this book would, I believe, transform Australian schools, making them enjoy world leadership rather than the mediocre status they currently achieve on many measures. They do not require extra expenditure, only open minds on the part of educational decision makers, and a determination on the part of all Australians to demand schools equal to the best in the world.

About the Author

Noel Guerin has spent half a century teaching and involved in educational administration in four states. An experienced mathematics teacher, he has had more than thirty mathematics books published. He has been widely involved in developing mathematical curricula and in promoting innovation in mathematics teaching.

After a career working in schools and adult education, Noel founded two senior secondary colleges, aiming to combat the boredom and frustration experienced by many students in traditional schools. The second of these colleges was established as a joint venture with the University of Adelaide and, like its predecessor, has proved enormously successful. In terms of academic excellence, successful examination results, virtually universal tertiary entrance by the students and their extraordinary levels of enjoyment and satisfaction with the tertiary-style educational environment, the College is unique in Australia. Students share the university campus, with its wonderful facilities, moving freely between secondary and tertiary studies. Indeed, students from the college have gained top places in university courses. Close links exist between the College and many university faculties.

Currently, Noel is involved in establishing facilities and support for people with disabilities, while maintaining links with the Senior College and with the University of Adelaide.

Acknowledgments

After a lifetime of teaching and educational administration, I have reluctantly concluded that the Australian education system is unfair and, by world standards, second rate. Teachers, currently participants in a pseudo-profession, need to regain control of education, making schools competitive and relevant.

To combat the boredom and frustration experienced by many students in traditional schools, I founded two senior secondary colleges. The ideas trialled successfully in these colleges form a basis for a wider transformation of education. Though associated with the development of curricula and syllabuses in senior mathematics, I am not expert in curriculum development. My experience in educational administration and conducting successful educational businesses, however, does allow me soundly based ideas on how organisations and systems can be improved.

Because many parents, educators and politicians see the problems but need practical direction in solving them, it has been my intention in writing this book to provide a blue-print for parents, educators and politicians for transforming our dysfunctional educational system into the world leader that Australians need it to be.

The ideas developed in this book are the result of many years spent in schools and in adult education. Many concepts have been refined in the crucible of interaction with colleagues, who have usually weighed them against passionately held views, sometimes from long-held ideologies. I thank them all for the help I have been given in arriving at the positions I now hold.

Special thanks must go to Dr. Milton Haseloff, who has kindly edited the text, assisted with research, and acted as a sounding board for my theories. Though we have attempted to retain an informality of style, sources are acknowledged in the text and a list of references concludes the book. I passionately believe that a real educational revolution is needed. Even more disconcertingly, I have become convinced that neither the political parties nor the entrenched educational establishments around this country have any ideas about how it can be brought about. We preferred, therefore, to write the text so that it flowed easily, making reference only to the most important and significant sources used.

The most important influence confirming my views about the very unsatisfactory state of much of our schooling was the study conducted by Malcolm Slade and Faith Trent and reported in their article 'What the boys are saying: An examination of the views of boys about declining rates of achievement and retention' (*International Education Journal*, 1 (3), December 2000).

Ideas relating to Educational Apartheid and the enormous and disgraceful difference in standards between the best schools and the worst in this country were reinforced, surprisingly, by comments from our political leaders. The ideas were fanned vigorously by the debate raging in the United Kingdom, where data establishing that some

schools were six times more effective than others, sparked my egalitarian principles.

Experience in dealing with governments, educational bureaucracies and unions, working in both independent and government systems has led me to the conclusions outlined in the book.

Finally, I offer sincere thanks to my long-suffering wife and family for listening to my sometimes over-long expositions of my views.

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1

Educational Apartheid

Prior to the 2007 election in Australia, both major parties referred frequently to the patchy quality of schools in Australia. Euphemistically, they were referring to the enormous gap which exists between the best schools and the worst in this country.

The education system in Australia is fundamentally unfair and undemocratic. It fails the fundamental test of giving a fair go to every student, because access to the best education is not equally available to all young Australians. Instead, it depends on parents' capacity and willingness to pay. Discrimination for the privileged elite is based, not on race, but on financial resources. In the United Kingdom, where a similar situation exists, there has been much public debate about 'educational apartheid'! There is little reason to believe that the situation in this country is fairer.

On the face of it, progress towards equal educational opportunities in this country has been hard-won and significant. Since the closing decades of the nineteenth century, wide-spread improvements in facilities and resources have been evident. There are better provisions for student learning, particularly for girls, indigenous people and the children of immigrants. Nevertheless, we have a long way to go to repair a system that is fundamentally flawed.

The notion of fairness and equality of opportunity does not, of course, require equal outcomes. A society of conforming robots is the antithesis of what is desirable, but the fair start that young people need in their education means equal access to good facilities in good schools. In turn, this also means good teachers and an environment that is

conducive to learning. The starting line should be the same for everyone.

It should be noted, too, that opportunities can be equalised at various levels ranging from excellent to unacceptable. Indeed, government schools have sometimes been criticised for applying standards of attainment so low that everyone can easily access the same level of outcomes. It is no surprise that so-called ‘outcomes-based’ education has been a major issue in recent years. Fairness demands a level playing field, but not by compromising standards.

There is a basic dichotomy in Australian education that has historical roots. The system of government schools set up in the nineteenth century to provide universal education was a wonderful achievement. But the secular nature of these schools was not acceptable to some churches, especially the Catholic Church. They felt so strongly about the importance of religion in education that they established their own, quite separate, system of schools, conducted largely by religious orders. Other churches also developed their own schools, though on a much smaller scale and often at a more elite level. Eventually two separate systems evolved: government and non-government or independent.

Over time, independent schools, mostly religious, have evolved to a point where they are popularly perceived to provide an education superior to that in government schools. Many Australians are prepared to pay for what they see as a better education, with about one third of parents with school-age children accepting sometimes fairly steep fees to educate their children in an independent school. At present, the number of people wanting to have their children educated in these schools is increasing, especially at senior secondary level, where enrolments rise well above one third to about 40 per cent for the last year or two of school. This willingness to pay for independent education certainly confirms that parents, rightly or wrongly, perceive that these schools do a better job.

This is not to say, of course, that all the best schools are independent and that all government schools fall into the worst category. What is acknowledged, even by politicians, is that the gap between best and worst is enormous. In the United Kingdom, where comparative data is publicly available, it is estimated that educational outcomes can differ by a factor of six to one between schools. In this country, however, it is quite difficult to ascertain just how accurately public perceptions about the superiority of non-government schools match the facts. Very little data to allow comparison is made available. The Australian Government does not group according to school systems the results of literacy and numeracy tests given in Years 3, 5 and 7 across Australia. Similarly, assessment bodies such as the Senior Secondary Assessment

Board of South Australia have a policy of not making public examination results available on a school by school basis. With little apparent justification, disparaging reference is made by these Boards and by the Government and the Australian Education Union to the advisability of publishing League Tables, whereby the performances of students in different schools can be compared. The Australian Education vice-president, Marcus Knill, said recently that the union is absolutely opposed to public comparisons between schools, and that any breach would result in widespread industrial action. Despite this defensive attitude by the authorities (What have they got to hide?), it is possible to glean some idea of the relative performance of students in the two sectors.

There is no question that students in independent schools vastly outperform those in government schools in the Year 12 merit lists published in each state every year. Few students in the government sector ever get a mention whereas, year after year, independent school students dominate the top honours.

Rates of entry to university by students from each sector also provide a clue to relative standards. Although we are not told the percentage of private school students enrolled each year, some indicators suggest an imbalance. The University of Adelaide, for example, conducts a Fairway Scheme which is designed to provide students from schools in Australia that are under-represented in higher education or rurally located with additional opportunity to study at that university. The scheme, details of which are reviewed and adjusted annually, automatically adds six bonus points to the Tertiary Entrance Ranking of all applicants who completed Year 12 in the Northern Territory, or a country school (post code 5200 or greater), or who attended a secondary school in the greater Adelaide area that had been identified as sending smaller numbers of students to South Australian universities than might be expected from the size of the school population. While confidentiality is generally maintained about information regarding these schools, unsubstantiated reports were leaked some years ago, that only ten secondary schools in South Australia were not included as part of the Fairway Scheme and, therefore, were not significantly under-represented in entry to university.

There seems little doubt that the deliberate withholding by governments of comparative data between schools hides an ugly truth. Nearly two thirds of Australian school students probably do not have the access to quality education enjoyed by the remainder. As indicated earlier, data is difficult to find, but there is no doubt at all about the perceptions of parents and students alike. State schools would be

deserted in droves if more people could afford private schools, most of which are no longer considered to be elite or bastions of privilege. Parents simply see the sacrifice of finding the necessary fees as worthwhile.

This attitude is quite understandable. Results obtained by students at school, and the learning and skills that go with them, influence, probably more than any other single factor, how well people are likely to do in later life. Entry to the professions and to the trades is determined largely by how well they perform at school. There is plenty of data to show that the greatest determinant of getting a job is the level of education. The same factor also relates to level of income attained in later life. It is, therefore, quite contrary to the Australian concept of a 'fair go' that inequality of educational opportunity is rooted in our culture.

Proponents of public education argue that there are many factors, mainly sociological, which determine how well students perform at school. State schools do not, they maintain, perform as well as non-government schools because they must accept everyone who applies. Their students are more socially and financially disadvantaged.

This argument is at odds with the facts. There is no evidence that one cohort differs markedly from the other on either of those parameters. On the contrary, there is ample evidence that factors associated with students' background and disadvantage play a relatively minor role in education outcomes. Studies have shown that approximately 70 per cent of these outcomes are affected much more by professionally competent, caring teachers than by any consideration other than personal ability. Students from dysfunctional backgrounds can indeed, with the best teaching, overcome their disadvantage and out-perform those who may appear to have more going for them, but whose teachers do not provide care and support. It is generally accepted that only about ten per cent of outcome is dependent on sociological factors.

If the key determinant of vocational outcomes for most individuals is education, and a higher quality of education is available to those who are able to access independent schools, then more than 60 per cent of our school population is seriously disadvantaged, chiefly because of the bipartite system operating in Australia. Concerned people cannot tolerate a situation so unfair.

An example illustrating the disparity in quality between the two systems was given prominence in the media recently. A government secondary school in a suburb of one of our capital cities was characterised by, it was alleged, discord and chaos. Teachers were frequently on strike or refusing to perform various functions in the

school. The Principal would not, or could not, enter the staff room because of the hostility displayed, especially by a group of militant members of the Australian Education Union. Students had an appalling record of truancy. Academic standards were considered very poor. Certainly the area from which students are drawn is regarded as having some socio-economic problems, but a special ministerial task-force was necessary to alleviate problems, and several teachers had to be transferred to other schools to try to establish a situation where some learning might take place. An independent school, quite close by, attracts students largely from the same area. It is seen by both parents and students to offer a very high standard of education. It is a low-fee school, but parents in the locality are prepared to pay fees that make a significant dent in their incomes because they enjoy such different outcomes for their children and such different opportunities are provided. Functional or dysfunctional — independent or government? That is how parents in the area see the schools. Examples like this can be replicated around the country. Parents' perception is that independent schools generally have better discipline, more committed teachers and less union control over teachers and curriculum. The last point is important, because parents are often wary of the influence of unions and the dumbing-down of learning, emphasising an 'outcomes-based' curriculum rather than objective standards, and avoiding any sense of accountability and quantifiable results for teachers and students, which they believe unions advocate.

Apologists for state schools often argue that an increasingly successful school attracts increasing numbers of compliant students, thereby leaving less successful state schools in the area to deal with students who are less compliant, or whose parents are not able to find the necessary cash. The success of any independent school, it is said, exacerbates the ongoing decline of neighbouring state schools. What can be done?

The point is, of course, that this situation will continue to exist as long as second-rate institutions are allowed to drift along in an uncompetitive environment. The compliance of students has to do largely with their enjoyment of the educational process. It also has to do with things like pride in their school, being engaged in their studies, relating to teachers and experiencing genuinely successful learning. If the school is working well, there will be very, very few non-compliant students. The answer, clearly, is to make all schools successful. I believe this can be done. Of course, it would be foolish to assume there would never be any difficulties. There will always be a small percentage of people who do not fit into any normal education system. There is always a role for government, and that is to provide a safety

net for those who slip through the cracks. Some will always need special arrangements. If the system is working well, however, this number should be minimal.

It has already been pointed out that it would be foolish to argue that there are not good government schools, or that all independent schools are better. There are, nevertheless, a number of perceptions that persist in the popular mind. For example, most believe that in government schools:

- classes are larger;
- facilities are poorer and less well-maintained;
- students have less successful outcomes;
- standards of teacher care and professionalism are lower;
- there is less parental involvement;
- schools are unable to select the staff they want;
- government educational bureaucracies absorb huge resources at the expense of students; and
- non-compliant and disadvantaged students must be accepted and this is not the case in independent schools.

How important are these perceptions?

- Class size, according to the research available, has little effect on outcomes, within reasonable limits. Many factors have much more effect on educational outcomes, despite the protestations of unions.
- Certainly, older, well-established independent schools often have extensive ovals and lovely buildings. Some government schools do too, but many have transportable buildings dominant, lending an air of transience.
- Government schools probably service remote and disadvantaged students more effectively than independent schools. In fact, 69 per cent of independent schools are located in metropolitan areas and 28 per cent are categorised as provincial, leaving only three per cent in remote areas. Independent schools are often located in more affluent areas, while government schools, with a more universal charter, are located in a range of geographical areas.
- State schools are rarely able to select their teachers. Understandably, governments are keen to ensure a fair distribution of teachers across a state. Schools, therefore, have to accept the staff they are allocated, with little input into their selection.

- Most independent schools do not systematically select students. While they expect a high degree of compliance, most independent schools do not conduct aptitude testing for their enrolees.
- When the costs of bureaucratic administration are taken into account, the total resources available to government schools probably far exceed the financial resources available to independent schools. In one state of Australia, a Government Head Office staff of less than ten grew to more than three hundred in less than five years.
- Ownership of their children's education is much more evident among parents in independent schools. Payment of fees seems to be a major factor in assessing accountability in schools. Clearly this has implications for poorer families.

In summary

Government school students are generally perceived to be disadvantaged simply by the fact they attend a government school. More than one third of Australian school students are considered to be unfairly advantaged simply because they can and do choose to attend an independent school.

Social class division is created by and perpetuated by the dual system of education, and by the huge gap in standards between the best schools and the worst.

2

A Fairer System

The dual system of schools in Australia is patently unfair. Why does a nation which espouses equality of opportunity for all allow such an anomaly?

The first problem originates in the historical demarcation between state and federal governments in education. Australian schools fall into two quite disparate groups — government and non-government. Government schools are funded primarily by the states, non-government primarily by the Commonwealth and by fees. The larger group consists of the government schools (66.8 per cent of total enrolments in 2006), which are administered centrally by an arm of state or territory government, and receive recurrent funding either directly from the federal government ($2.1 billion in 2004/5) or from the state governments (drawing from their own resources and the GST allocation from the Commonwealth — $22.1 billion in 2004/5). Parents contributed about $1 billion in 2004/5. The average government recurrent funding for these schools in 2004/5 was $10,715 per student.

The second group is made up from two subsets – Catholic schools and other independent schools.

Catholic schools (20.1 per cent of total enrolments in 2006) draw their recurrent funding partly from fee-paying parents and partly from federal and, to a lesser extent, state government grants. The schools are centrally administered by the Catholic Education Office in each state, which also distributes government funds to individual schools. In 2004/5, these schools received $1.8 billion from state governments, $4.8 billion from the Federal Government and $4.4 billion from fees

paid by parents. Average government recurrent funding was $6,054 per student.

Other independent schools (13.1 per cent of total enrolments in 2006) are often defined as non-government and non-Catholic, although, in 2006, about 70 of the 1,078 independent schools in Australia were associated with the Catholic Church. These schools are funded largely by fee-paying parents ($2.9 billion in 2004/5), but with grants from the Australian Government ($1.6 billion in 2004/5) and also state governments (0.6 billion in 2004/5). The average government recurrent funding for independent schools in 2005/6 was $5,055 per student. Because of the application of the Socio-Economic-Status (SES) funding scheme, the per capita funding for secondary students in this group of schools ranges in 2007 from a maximum of $6,524 for an SES score of 85 to a minimum of $1,277 for an SES score of 130 or more. Independent schools, therefore, fall into categories of low-fee and high-fee.

Although, according to our constitution, education is basically a state responsibility, a funding crisis in Catholic schools led to federal government involvement. When the Catholic Bishop of Goulburn threatened to close his schools and send the children to the local state schools, which obviously could not cope, the combination of state and federal funding for independent schools which persists today was generated. The state aid battle was won long ago, but federal government involvement in education funding has spawned pressures that generate much passion in federal/state relations and power demarcations.

The dual system of schools is patently unfair because of their unequal quality, at least in popular perception. Can a better system be devised which gives a 'fair go' to every Australian student?

Basic expectations need to include:

- equal resources provided on a per capita basis to all schools;
- all schools having equal access to the best teachers. Determining the best teachers may seem difficult. Actually it is not too difficult. Ask the kids!
- minimising existing inequities. Some schools have much better resources and facilities which need to be equalised over a period of time. In fact, most resources in schools are devoted to teacher salaries. Equalising other parameters is financially a relatively minor problem. Other inequities, such as regional differences, resources for disadvantaged groups, and so on, also need to be addressed.

Do fairer educational models exist?

There are several models that this country might well emulate.

In the United States, relatively few independent schools exist and most students attend a single type of neighbourhood school. These vary in quality, so strategies such as bussing have been developed to address the situation. It would be difficult to show that similar educational opportunities are not equally available for young Americans.

In New Zealand, all schools are autonomous entities managed by boards of trustees! They are funded according to the same model. Each board is responsible for meeting the objectives specified in the school's charter and for managing the funds provided by the government. There are several schooling options available to students and their parents. The most interesting to Australians are integrated schools. These:

> ... used to be private and have now become part of the state system. They teach the New Zealand curriculum, but keep their own special character (usually a philosophical or religious belief) as part of their school program. Integrated schools receive the same government funding as state schools, but their buildings and grounds are privately owned so they charge attendance dues to meet their property costs. (The Ministry of Education, 2003, p.7)

There are various components that combine to determine the sum of money provided to New Zealand schools. Three core components are base funding, per-pupil funding and decile-related funding (related to socio-economic background of students). Additional amounts are provided on an individual school basis to support special needs such as Board of Trustee elections, set-up grants for new facilities, targeted funding for out of hours music and art classes, English as a Second Language, resource teachers and so on.

The New Zealand model has a number of positive benefits, but as it has been implemented in that country, independent schools still exist and still receive some government funding. The following model might be a better solution for Australia because it virtually eliminates the two-tiered system and has built-in incentives for all schools to aim for excellence.

The general tenet that all schools be funded according to the same formula has great merit. By itself, it virtually guarantees that all schools compete on a level playing field and goes a long way towards eliminating the concept of schools for the elite.

Making all schools government schools, which the New Zealand model promotes, has the unfortunate effect, however, of levelling down rather than encouraging competition and higher standards. It makes more sense to free up all schools from government administrative control so

that all can operate more efficiently and with better outcomes. The best equal opportunities educational model needs to have at least the following characteristics:

- First, diversity and variety in the types of schools is needed. Equal opportunity must not be about having uniform schools. Australian society is based on equality of status but also on tolerance of difference. Our multi-cultural background accepts all manner of creeds and customs within bounds of reason and tolerance of opposing points of view. Parents should be able to choose whatever type of school they want, provided it satisfies registration requirements and is available.
- Secondly, schools need to be competitive to ensure quality. This necessarily entails that schools will be able to select their own staff and largely manage their own day-to-day administration and policy making. They also need to be exposed to market forces by being required to attract their own enrolments.
- In the third place, schools need to be accountable. Parents, students and the public need to be able to access student outcomes in an understandable form over a variety of parameters. In other words, there should be league tables i.e. results, not pointless statistics, but clear information. People need to know how well individual schools are performing and what standards their students have attained. It is quite reasonable, also, for parents to understand the background of teachers and how much professional development they undertake. Facts of this kind enable parents to assess the health of a school, what it stands for, and whether it is the best available place to which they will entrust the education of their child. Schools need to be accountable at other levels too. Finances and published results should be audited to ensure honesty and integrity.
- Finally, the education system and individual schools should provide good value for money. Universal education is extremely expensive, so dollars need to be well spent. This, in turn, means that most resources should be directed to students rather than wasteful bureaucracies.

The point has already been made that a fair system of education can only exist in Australia if all schools are funded according to the same formula. The best way to do this is to adopt the New Zealand model by funding all schools that wish to be part of the mainstream education system. Schools that choose to remain outside the system should receive no funding whatsoever. All funded schools should be funded on a per-capita basis, but according to a socio-economic status formula

similar to that used currently in independent schools. This allows for greater resources being allocated to those with the greatest needs, an idea that will be elaborated later. Government schools and independent schools would compete for students in an open situation. Good schools and popular schools will thrive; unsatisfactory schools will drastically improve or close. In either case, the needs and rights of the clients will be safeguarded. Teachers also, as real professionals, will compete in an open market, ensuring that only truly competent and caring teachers will flourish and enjoy the highest rewards. This idea will also be developed later.

Who should conduct schools?

Any legal entity that, for whatever reason, wishes to establish a school should be permitted to do so, provided it can meet the conditions and standards set by the body that registers schools. Traditionally, more than 80 per cent of independent schools are conducted by religious groups, but entities with particular educational philosophies should also be considered — Waldorf Schools that follow the principles of Rudolf Steiner and Montessori Schools are examples. Entrepreneurial groups may wish to be in the field in the same way that, for example, ABC Learning Centres is operating efficient pre-school centres. The involvement of entrepreneurial groups might help diversify educational opportunities, especially in niche markets where there is a demand. They might specialise in schools ranging from technology and trades to academic. One particular group who might well consider running schools is teachers themselves. Lawyers conduct law firms, doctors often control hospitals. Why shouldn't groups of teachers band together to own and administer their own co-operative educational ventures? Those with particular philosophies and interests should relish the opportunity. Why shouldn't those that can, do and teach?

How should these schools be run?

Rules need to be associated with the establishment of schools. Standards should be set by a professional body responsible for their registration. Founding bodies should be responsible for financing the operation. The risks involved will ensure that frivolous ventures are not pursued and that unpopular schools do not survive. Those applying for registration need to provide an acceptable business plan and the institution needs to reach minimum enrolments before receiving government funding. This already happens in non-government schools, but similar rules should operate for government schools. Educational rather than political criteria should determine the establishment of all schools.

Should individual schools have the right to refuse admission to certain students? Should all schools be required to accept any person wishing to enrol if they have the capacity? In a situation where virtually all schools are funded the same way, no student should be refused a place unless the reasons are pertinent and reasonable. A school specialising in high academic standards might demand proof of a student's capacity to undertake the level of studies required rather than being condemned to almost certain failure. A school emphasising skills-based courses might likewise insist on certain basic aptitudes.

Clearly, a religious school should be able to refuse enrolment to a student inimical to the religious aims of that school. All schools should be governed by the same admission rules. Nevertheless, governments have, in the end, responsibility for catching and supporting those who fall through the cracks. This may require their provision of special schools or special units within other schools. Again, this situation will be examined at greater length later.

What would happen to current government schools under these arrangements? Would they be greatly disadvantaged? Good schools, obviously, would have few problems. What about the others? All government schools would need to be controlled by a Board, similar to those in New Zealand. Probably a number of different models would evolve.

Neighbourhood schools, particularly at the primary level, would very likely continue to manage quite well. The popular perception is that the difference in standards between government and independent schools is not as marked at primary level. This is supported by the fact that only 25 per cent of students attend independent primary schools as opposed to about 40 per cent at Year 12. Students themselves show high levels of satisfaction with primary education in both government and non-government schools. In a situation where all primary schools could select their own staff and set their own standards, government neighbourhood schools would probably compete quite well. Those that did not, of course, would close. This is entirely the situation which needs to persist for the good of the client students.

A consideration of costs

An obvious objection to funding all schools on the same basis is cost. This, of course, was the reason that governments initially provided some funding to independent schools. They simply could not find the billions of dollars needed to fully fund the education of every Australian student, until the Catholic Church called their bluff and threatened to flood government schools by closing their own.

In fact, the cost of educating all students, which is clearly their right, is not necessarily prohibitive. The first point to observe is that someone has to pay for education – it is never costless. In government schools, parents and the Commonwealth Government each pay a small proportion of the costs, even though most is paid for by state governments. Costs in independent schools are covered by fees from students, but also, significantly, by Commonwealth Government funding, and, to a much smaller extent, by state governments.

What would it cost to fund all schools the same way?

For the financial year 2002/3, costs in government primary schools varied from $7,347 per student in Victoria to $8,715 per student in New South Wales — on average, in that year, about $8,000 per student at primary level.

At secondary level, costs ranged from $9,643 per student in South Australia to $11,773 in the ACT — in round terms, about $11,000 per student on average.

If the average across the board is taken as $10,000 per student, the total cost for the 3.3 million students currently attending schools comes to about $33 billion.

Federal and state governments together already spend about $27 billion in funding schools and independent schools add approximately $6 billion. This also totals $33 billion, so the figure seems fairly accurate, though it does not include the costs of government educational bureaucracies.

Governments, national and state, currently provide an average of just under $6,000 per student for the approximately one million independent school students. If the total average cost for these students is set at $12,000 per student, again the cost of funding all students at today's level comes out at about $6 billion. This, then, seems to be the total cost of funding all schools in the same way. Can governments find an extra $6 billion?

It should be noted that Australia currently ranks at twenty fourth in the list of OECD countries' expenditure on education — a disgrace. More importantly, Australia currently runs nine huge government ministries and bureaucracies in education. In addition, the Catholic Church, other denominations, independent schools and various others, conduct educational bureaucracies throughout the country. In terms of highly paid bureaucrats, infrastructure, buildings and so on, the total cost probably approximates $10 billion. If most of these bureaucracies were fused into one federal body, all students could be funded for their

education with no additional cost to the taxpayer – indeed education could look forward to a windfall.

The role of governments in education needs to be reduced in any case. Education should be managed by a professional board, with government representation, certainly, but with majority control in the hands of professional teachers. This body should be responsible for the registration of schools and teachers, and for the setting and assessment of curricula. Regular inspection of schools, teachers and students should be part of their duties. Again, this idea will be developed further in a later chapter.

There is a case for parents making a direct contribution to their children's education. According to the Constitution, education should, of course, be free, but the days are long gone since that dictate was honoured in state schools. There are strong psychological reasons to support a small parental contribution. Parents are much more likely to be involved in their children's education if they have the sense of ownership that comes with the payment of a fee. This is one of the strengths and advantages of private schools. The payment of fees generates, automatically, greater expectations and, indeed, demands, on the part of parents, teachers and students. Even a fee of $1,000 or $2,000 per annum would make a significant difference. This sum could be fully tax deductible and means tested, so that the actual cost would be negligible or non-existent. But the effect on the value all the stakeholders place on education would be huge. Why shouldn't the commitment to the school and to the child's education that comes with the payment of fees be a characteristic of every school? The amount of money raised would not be insignificant. A payment of $1,000 per annum by every one of the 3.3 million students in Australia would raise $3.3 billion. A fee of $2,000 would raise nearly $7 billion, which would more than pay the extra cost of government giving to every child their right to equal opportunity in education.

Clearly the issue of funding all schools equally can be resolved in a number of ways. By effectively limiting the ridiculous number of educational bureaucracies in this country and by charging a small tax-deductible fee, the system could change virtually overnight. Indeed, if both these measures were introduced, significant resources could be poured into education with little or no extra pain to the taxpayer.

The whole point of the suggested system is to create a level playing field at the highest level of excellence. This would not happen if independent schools were permitted to continue to charge extra fees. In New Zealand, Integrated Schools are permitted to charge a small extra fee to support their buildings, grounds and infrastructure. There is no

problem with this provided there is comparability between the funds spent on these areas by government and non-government schools. Schools might be able to raise funds by indirect means. Parents and community groups often support schools by running tuckshops, functions and so on. These activities help build a community and are to be encouraged, but no extra fees or contributions should be allowed other than those common to all schools. Likewise, there is no problem in charging for non-compulsory activities that fall beyond the core curriculum. Schools offering expensive sporting opportunities such as, for example, rowing might charge a fee to cover the required facilities and equipment.

In the first few years of the scheme, governments would need to equalise, as far as is possible, the physical resources and facilities of schools. This is not likely to be especially expensive, since by far the greatest cost to schools is staff, and most schools already have good libraries and computer facilities (these can be leased using recurrent funding). Decisions that need to be made about resources necessary for particular schools will depend on the nature of each school and the specialist directions each takes.

Some schools, for reasons of elitism or philosophical outlook, may wish to opt out of government funding. Since the whole rationale for funding all schools according to the same formula is to create equality of opportunity for all Australian students, these schools should receive no government funding whatsoever. A few schools which wish to be elitist will choose to charge high fees and carry on separately. In a democracy, that is their right, provided they continue to satisfy the demands of registration, but governments should not financially support them.

While not developing the idea of social engineering too far at this stage, it is well accepted today that disadvantaged groups and disadvantaged areas need more funding. There are several models which might be followed. Probably the best and most easily understood is the Socio-Economic Status (SES) system used currently to fund non-government schools. It is very fair, because it takes into account the socio-economic background of every student in the school, according to data obtained from small census districts throughout the land. This would allow schools with larger numbers of relatively disadvantaged students to use their extra resources to offer higher salaries and better conditions to attract the best teachers and facilities. This is probably desirable and certainly achievable.

The most likely obstacles to the plan would stem from the conflict and jealousy inherent in federal and state relations. The constitutional

situation is that the states currently are responsible for public education. The balance of financial commitment by the states and commonwealth would need to be worked out. The best way to proceed would be to elect first a central Board with representation from each state and territory.

The issue of equalising resources between schools has been touched on. Older buildings and extensive grounds in many schools, while charming and often very attractive, cost more to maintain. Nevertheless, as has already been stressed, staff costs vastly outweigh all other expenditure in every school. Schools do not need to all look the same or have the same area of grounds. The value of capital resources does need to be equalised over a period of time. Real estate values, however, vary according to location, so need to play only a minor role in the equalisation process. Non-government schools are already inspected regularly to ensure that their facilities are safe and up to standard. State schools are sometimes more run down and state governments should be obligated to get them up to at least the average standard of independent schools over a period of time. Schools that are too costly to bring up to the requisite standard should close. This was, indeed, the aim of governments when establishing schools in areas where the population of school-age students was likely to fluctuate. Many were set up with transportable buildings which could be removed when the student population declined. When the population boom subsided, it was always intended to downsize or close these schools.

In short, for the scheme to work equitably, governments would need to set aside funds for the rational equalisation of essential capital resources over a certain period of time. Whether independent schools could charge a small extra fee for the maintenance of their physical resources (as is the case in New Zealand) would need to be determined. It would certainly be fairer and more efficient if all such costs were subsumed into general recurrent funding (once equalisation of resources was realised).

To make the new model work, it is important to emphasise some of the changes that must be concomitant:

- It is imperative that parents be able to choose any school they wish. Unless a competitive element exists, there is no incentive for schools to perform at a higher standard.
- All schools, government and independent, should be managed by a Board, as is the case in New Zealand. Schools should all be incorporated bodies, and the Boards that manage them should

represent parents, teachers, government, owners and, at least in the case of senior schools, students.

- To ensure competition between schools is fair, relevant educational data need to be published. This should include public examination and national literacy and numeracy testing results, measures of teachers' competence and their engagement in professional development activities, and other measures of the success of a school. In countries like England, this information is used by parents to choose places for their children.
- Measures need to be available which show how well schools are performing in disadvantaged areas. These need to include measures of innovation and adaptability to the needs of particular communities.
- The model can only work if schools are permitted to choose their own staff. Schools should be able to attract the best teachers they can afford within the limits of their budget. This system would particularly advantage financially the best teachers. The greatest obstacle to outstanding teachers being properly rewarded is union insistence on teachers working within the confines of an award.
- Remote schools and those with numbers of disadvantaged students need to benefit from a socio-economic advantaging system to ensure that all students have an equal opportunity to succeed.
- Schools need to manage their own budgets which, of course, should be audited each year. School boards should oversee everything, including salaries and capital costs. Budgets and financial data should be publicly available in the interests of transparency.
- Any interested body, which has the capacity to have a school registered and the financial resources to establish and conduct it, should be able to set up an educational institution.
- Special funding might be available from governments to assist bodies setting up schools in remote areas and those servicing disadvantaged groups.
- Groups such as teacher co-operatives should be encouraged to lease government or independent schools which become redundant through the new arrangements.
- Governments always have the role of providing a safety net. Where no other educational institutions are available and no entrepreneur can be found to establish one, governments must step in.

- In small communities where an independent school exists, it should allow all students in the locality to attend that school unless they have a philosophical or moral objection to attending that school. In such cases, students should have the right to be absent from classes where they have an objection to attending.
- Distance education and boarding schools provide an alternative for students where schools cannot economically be provided. The former might work in association with block attendance in face-to-face situations from time to time.
- Bussing continues to be an option for more efficient use of resources in semi-remote areas.
- Hostels might be set up in conjunction with regional schools, allowing students to return home for weekends and holidays.
- Government schools, run by councils, might be transferred to groups considered able, by the councils in consultation with government, to improve them. The teachers in a particular school might manage it themselves, under the council, as a business enterprise. Such schools are likely to be well attended and popular. In the end, these groups might end up leasing or purchasing the school, bringing revenue to governments rather than acting as a huge drain on the popular purse.
- The greatest advantage of the model is the fact that one system creates equal opportunity for all, thereby eliminating the two-tiered elitism which besets the education system at the moment. The model also encourages diversity within the system, because it creates a real opening for niche markets. Schools would be encouraged to specialise and to diversity into all sorts of areas. Systems where all schools look or feel the same are to be avoided. Currently government schools often portray a kind of grey uniformity. The new situation, on the contrary, will encourage entrepreneurial groups to set up new schools of all kinds. Once teachers become more professional and take back control of education, many will fit comfortably into this entrepreneurial group. Teachers, like lawyers, doctors and other professionals, while maintaining their traditional conservatism, need to start working outside the square.
- All schools under this system will share similar resources – not the same, but over a period, financially equalised. Only quality schools which are in demand will survive. If they do not attract popular support, they will fold, as is entirely proper.

- There is no need, under this model, for costly, bloated educational bureaucracies other than one central body, with, perhaps, small ministerial offices in each state and territory.
- Parental choice controls the system. This has been an important principle, especially in independent schools, for more than a hundred years.
- One final advantage is that the new model allows for a certain amount of engineering to help balance social disadvantages. Identical funding only allows those already advantaged to become further advantaged. Real equality of educational opportunity means giving disadvantaged schools the resources to attract the best teachers and facilities through the allocation of greater financial inputs.

In summary

Summarising all this, the idea is that all schools, government and non-government, become independent schools, governed independently by a school council and competing openly in the market place to survive. Funding in this model is on a per-capita basis according to some system which balances social advantage. The SES model, for example, which is operating quite efficiently at the moment in non-government schools, is very fair in the sense that more commonwealth funding goes to those with access to fewer financial and sociological resources. A disadvantaged school, in this system, is defined as one whose students, on average, come out with an SES level considerably lower than other schools.

Many issues remain to be worked out, preferably by a central body containing government representation but controlled by the education profession. The actual shape and tasks of this board would obviously be determined through wide consultation. There are a few principles which probably apply to any board. First, it should not be too big or it will be unmanageable and little will ever happen. The board should register all new schools, and its officers should regularly inspect and assess all existing schools, insisting on proper standards and financial accountability. In a country of 21 million, it beggars the imagination that multitudes of bureaucrats do this and do it so badly. Estimates of the cost of Federal and State bureaucratic duplication are something like $9.3 billion per year. I suspect that this figure only touches the tip of the iceberg.

The board should also oversee curriculum and provide clear guidelines about at least the core areas taught in schools. Australian schools must

provide a rich educational experience for every student, but they must also provide a sound foundation for the knowledge, skills and insights that this country needs from its population, both to remain at the forefront of the economic global village, and to ensure that our high standard of living is preserved and enhanced.

Better educational outcomes will result only from better schools!

3

Teachers as Professionals

Michael Chaney, President of the Business Council of Australia, said recently: ‘Imagine a society where teachers are revered as the fundamental source of our ultimate prosperity, where parents encourage the brightest children to enter this noble profession, and where our education system is recognised as the best in the world!’

Regrettably, our community is quite ambiguous about how it views teachers. Among the professions, teachers rank with the most poorly paid, yet they’re also among the best educated and most highly qualified. Why do people who study for at least four years for their qualifications opt for a career with relatively limited financial rewards? Traditionally teaching has been seen as a very special vocation. The Greeks held scholars in high esteem and their schools were so highly regarded that even the Romans chose to send their children to Athens to be educated. Down through the centuries of European history, teaching was largely associated with the education of clerics and most schools were operated by clergymen or by nuns and brothers associated with monasteries.

It is interesting to note that, even when teaching became secular, teachers were held in high esteem, because they were usually among the most educated people in the communities. Remember the charming description when Oliver Goldsmith reminisces about the village school master:

> Yet he was kind, or if severe in aught,
> The love he bore to learning was in fault;
> The village all declared how much he knew;
> T’was certain he could write and cypher too; …
> …

> In arguing too, the parson owned his skill,
> For even tho' vanquished, he could argue still;
> While words of learned length, and thundering sound,
> Amazed the gazing rustics ranged around;
> And still they gazed, and still the wonder grew,
> That one small head could carry all he knew.
>
> The Deserted Village, 1770

It wasn't until the latter years of the nineteenth century that education became available to most people. The purpose at that time was largely to complement the advances of the industrial revolution that required people to have basic levels of literacy and numeracy. That, in turn, defined the basic purpose of schools in the nineteenth century. As elementary education became compulsory, schools began to take on many of the methods that were being used in the new industries. Large numbers of children were mustered in one classroom, occasionally with a monitor or two, and so teachers needed to be strict disciplinarians to manage the many students committed to their care. Nevertheless their area of vision was unchallenged and respected, and most of their charges had insufficient knowledge to question the pronouncement of the teachers. Because teachers have been held in high regard throughout history, that's probably one reason why many people still opt for teaching despite the comparatively poor remuneration.

It's interesting that there is now rather a dichotomy of views about how teachers should be valued. The community certainly views them very highly. A Morgan Gallup poll reported in 2003 that the image of teachers was not only good and positive but improving in terms of ethics and honesty. For instance teachers were ranked fourth, almost equal to doctors and behind only nurses and pharmacists. As a point of interest lawyers, on the other hand, often seen as well remunerated, ranked near the bottom ahead of only politicians and real estate agents. Not only did teachers rank highly but in 10 years their approval rate had risen from 55 per cent to 79 per cent, the biggest jump of any profession. So teachers certainly do enjoy the glow of approval and trust that they receive from parents. The teachers' union attributes this to their first class dedication and commitment to the kids. One union responding to the Morgan poll said that the quality of relationships between students and teachers has been a priority. There is, however, another side to the story that will be considered later. Certainly, among parents and within the community generally teachers do have very high esteem. Why then is teaching often seen as a pseudo-profession?

Characteristics of professionals

This is an opportune moment to look at what characteristics are normally expected in professionals. The first parameter to examine is their qualifications. Professionals are expected to hold one or more university degrees and they are expected to keep up with current developments in their profession. In other words, it is expected of professionals that they will have a life-long interest in educating themselves, particularly as far as their profession is concerned. Doctors, for example, are expected to keep up with the latest movements and discoveries in medicine. Surgeons are expected to attend conferences, usually on an annual basis, to keep up their skills and see what new ideas are being promulgated. Lawyers need to be *au fait* with all the latest movements in the law in the areas that they deal with.

The second characteristic of professions is that they are usually very well remunerated. Doctors, dentists, lawyers are all very highly paid, and their income usually flows from the degree of skill they have and the esteem in which they are held by their fellow professionals. A lawyer for example who has become a Senior Counsel can charge much higher fees than someone who hasn’t got those qualifications. A doctor who has specialised in a particular area can usually charge more for his or her services than someone who hasn’t got those special qualifications.

The third characteristic of a profession is that its members offer a service which the community values and for which it is prepared to pay often quite large amounts to share the professional expertise of the person offering the service.

The fourth characteristic is that professions are expected to have high ethical standards that are usually established, applied and maintained by the profession itself.

The fifth characteristic one normally expects of professions is that they have peer governance. Professionals normally regard it as outrageous that someone who did not share their expert knowledge would be put in a position to judge how well they’d carried out their professional duties. So they would say normally that the only reasonable governance should come from within the profession.

The sixth characteristic is the esteem that professionals have in the community. Professionals offer a key service in the community but, on top of that, they normally have a higher degree of community esteem.

The seventh characteristic is that advancement in the profession is not normally through length of service but through the skills, knowledge and achievements that the professionals display. A relatively young

doctor who has very high qualifications will quickly advance to a higher position within his or her profession. Someone who has less skill and less ability normally will find it very difficult to advance very far.

The eighth characteristic of professions is that normally professionals have a degree of entrepreneurial skill on top of their professional expertise, because many of them in effect run a small business which is offering their services to people. Often they charge their own fees so, although there are usually general parameters set by the profession, professionals generally maintain the right to operate outside those parameters. Some may work for governments and other organisations — some doctors for example work in government hospitals, but that is not the story of the great majority.

Another characteristic is the autonomy that professionals have. Their professional activities are largely determined by their own decisions based on their professional training, experience and expertise, and informed by the code of ethical practice to which they have, presumably, committed. For professionals, then, freedom of action is finely balanced against peer governance; their autonomy exists within an agreed and accepted code of conduct. In cases of malpractice, it's interesting that the profession itself is usually very keen to act because they see it as a slight on their professional integrity. If some person within that profession lets the side down (and that's particularly obvious with doctors who work in unethical ways with their patients), other practitioners will condemn the misconduct very severely and there is no doubt in any doctor's mind about what standards should pertain to those relationships.

Finally, professionals tend to have an ownership of the profession. Doctors, for example, may not own the hospitals in which they operate, but they would say they do own the services that they provide within those hospitals. They would expect to have complete say in everything to do with the way they offer their services and would not brook any interference other than perhaps, in exceptional circumstances, from their peers. Now that those characteristics of a profession have been enumerated, it is immediately clear that some of them give rise to big problems for teachers.

Do teachers share the characteristics of other professionals?

The first and greatest problem is the fact that teachers are not promoted according to their skills or knowledge or abilities as teachers. Their advancement in the profession, at least in the early stages, comes purely through length of service and the application of a rigid schedule

for remuneration. Normally the teachers' awards have something like ten steps and teachers progress on an annual basis through those steps from bottom to top, from step one to step ten. It doesn't matter how good or how brilliant or how dedicated they are or how well they relate to their students, their promotion comes regularly unless they do something very, very out of order and lose their position. In fact, that movement along the salary scale isn't promotion, it's a financial improvement. It's something that happens inevitably. To get a promotion to a position of head of department or senior or deputy head, one usually needs to be well down the career track. It depends a little bit on historical factors, too. There have been times when there's been a great shortage of teachers and promotion came very quickly, as it did when the baby boomers hit the schools back in the 60s and 70s. Nevertheless, because of the system that brings career progress through length of service rather than ability, there's little incentive for teachers to display excellence. Many of them do, of course, but that is not because of the system. It's in spite of the system. There is little financial inducement to perform at a level of excellence.

The third big problem for teachers is that they are among the most highly unionised groups in the whole economy. One does not expect that from professionals who should stand on knowledge and ability and care and all the other characteristics that have been enumerated. One does not expect them to need to be protected by unions yet it is a fact that they are very highly unionised. That's uncharacteristic of professionals.

Another problem for teachers is that about two thirds of them are employed by state governments and the remaining third generally are employed by large organisations such as churches or incorporated groups that are trying to operate in a particular educational way. These include Waldorf Schools, Montessori Schools, ABC Learning Centres and so on. That is to say, very few teachers operate autonomously. They work within an industrial framework and that makes them different from virtually all other professions, except perhaps nurses. This in itself — the fact that most are employed by a state government or by other large groups — means that there is strong pressure against high salaries being paid to them as professionals, because clearly it's to the advantage of their employers to keep costs as low as possible. In most professions the professionals themselves are in a position to set their fees within certain boundaries and are able usually to benefit quite well financially by the operation of their profession.

There are other problems associated with treating teachers as professionals. Most professionals operate independently, often hanging

up a personal shingle, operating an autonomous business. Others group into partnerships where this sense of independence is preserved at least to a degree. Even where professionals use an institution, such as doctors using the facility of a hospital, they often operate as an autonomous individual within the hospital. Teachers are really the only profession where everyone is employed by an institution, the school. Virtually all teachers are employees who work for salaries fixed, not in terms of expertise or skill, as is the case with other professions, but on years of experience. Furthermore teachers more than other professional groups work within hierarchical structures that are more akin to a company administrative tree or even the military. Principals are usually the responsible executives serving a remote head office with whom they have little interaction. Under the principal, authority devolves through deputies, heads of department, seniors and the like. By the time we get down to the level of ordinary teachers little real autonomy is left and professional parameters are severely restricted.

Even the classroom situation itself is quite different from the situation in which other professionals work. Most operate in a one to one relationship with the client where respect for each other is easy and indeed necessary. Contrast this with the situation of a secondary teacher working with five classes each of thirty or more young people. What is more, far from seeking out a teacher’s expertise and input, students often don’t really want to be at school and they have little interest in what is being taught. Indeed the students may see the whole scene as irrelevant to their lives. Warm personal relationships are scarcely likely to emerge in such a situation. It could be argued that professional respect cannot exist among the formal procedures and the discipline and the controlled atmosphere of a classroom. Maybe that’s taking it too far, but it’s a very different situation from what normally operates between the professional and his or her clients. Whatever happens in the classroom, there’s always that element of mass production and that brings with it problems of discipline and organisation. Even the close relationships between adults and students can themselves be a problem. Doctors are immersed in respect and even adulation by their clients. Instances of doctors overstepping the line of what is acceptable in relations with patients are not rare. Likewise in a situation where teachers do not wear to the same extent the mantle of professional respect and respectability, close relationships determined by the personal nature of intellectual communion can and do lead to situations of physical and sexual abuse. Teachers are well aware of this and can react with a caution that precludes close academic relations and even a coldness that resembles unfriendliness. Physical and sexual abuse of children by teachers is of course rare. When it does

occur it is now likely to be widely reported and that situation helps to prevent its occurrence. Teachers are well aware, however, that they in a very vulnerable position and signs of affection and indeed touching of any kind are no longer acceptable where once it was common, especially in primary schools. There used to be lots of examples where a teacher would put her arm around a crying child, but you can't do that now. That personal element has been put in some jeopardy because of the climate in which people work. One can understand the restrictions; nevertheless they have made a big impact on relationships with children, particularly younger children. In this climate the teachers will err on the side of professional distance rather than encouraging friendship and close personal relationships. Respect may survive on the part of the student but the barrier of formality may seem unacceptable and the teacher too removed from reality.

There are other aspects of teachers that are unprofessional. Their body language often is an indication of the poor esteem they frequently accord to themselves. Without doubt teachers are the most poorly dressed group of professionals within our community. Many show little pride in their grooming or appearance. It is difficult to be taken seriously if one does not at least look the part. In these days of whiteboards, overhead and Powerpoint projectors and copying machines, there is little excuse for the casual wear so often exhibited in classrooms by the teaching profession. Teachers no longer need to be doused in chalk dust. Professionals are judged to be without pride in themselves if they do not dress to the appropriate standard. This can only happen in the situation where morale is low and self confidence is missing. This poor image is one reason why many of our best young students are no longer drawn to teaching. This is particularly true of those who aspire to teach in senior classes. Tertiary entrance rankings required for admission to teaching courses are now among the lowest for any of the major professions.

One feature of teaching is that its practitioners are rarely called to account. Besides being the one profession where promotion is dependent on experience rather than expertise, teaching in both government and private systems generally provides tenure for its practitioners who cannot be made redundant except in quite exceptional situations. There is little assessment of the performance of teachers. Understandably they and their unions — remember teachers are the most unionised of all the professions — strenuously resist assessment of any sort. Long gone in this country are the annual inspections of every classroom. In a few schools some form of peer assessment is in vogue. This is rarely well informed and few consequences result if the assessment is negative. Even where students are assessed by means of

public examinations they, rather than the teachers, generally bear the blame for any failures to meet standards. Again it is no surprise that teachers and unions are generally against public examinations and certainly the publishing of any data that could expose particular schools or teachers as underperforming. If teachers are rarely or never held to be accountable, how is there any incentive to improve performance?

The influence of the school context

Schools like hospitals generate mountains of bureaucratic red tape and procedures. The work of teachers includes huge amounts of paperwork, attendance records, curriculum and lesson plans, reports and the like. It almost results in a full time job on its own. The famous '*Yes, Minister*' episode where staff were frantically busy with administration despite the fact that the hospital had no patients is a situation that can easily be related to schools. When people are too busy with mundane but essential record keeping, the personal element in education and the freshness and enthusiasm teachers need to bring to their work can be dissipated. Too many teachers succumb to this pressure with a resultant loss of appreciation by students witnessing a less than professional performance in and out of the classroom. Teachers sensing this respond by blaming students for their poor response, and the vicious cycle continues. The patients of *Yes, Minister's* hospital were a pest that simply got in the way of good administration. Teachers can see students in the same light; pests that get in the way of all the bureaucratic demands placed on them, rather than clients who need and deserve the best teachers can give them. The mass production situation peculiar to education among the professions can produce a control mentality more akin to the defence forces. Military discipline evolved down through the ages as the method of dealing efficiently with large groups of people. This way of doing things is quite inappropriate at the human level where we would expect education to be pitched. A fine balance is therefore needed between group management and individual needs. This balance can only be achieved by the very best and most skilful teachers.

Many of the problems experienced by teachers lie not within themselves but in the system within which they work. Teachers can own many aspects of the curriculum especially in primary and middle years of schooling. They can also control many aspects of discipline at least within their own classroom. Finally they can manage most of the education processes operating within their classroom. Nevertheless there's plenty of evidence that teachers often feel impotent and crushed by the system and the institution within which they work. The ordinary classroom teacher is usually far removed from the upper echelons of

the extended hierarchy within the school and the system. Contact with principals, deputies and even seniors is often rare yet these classroom teachers set the major directions for the school. The implementation of corporate change is difficult or impossible because of their exclusion from managerial decisions. Where it is difficult to have a voice and be heard, there is little incentive to perform or to institute innovations.

Another problem besetting teachers is related to promotion within the profession. In the past it was often the best teachers who were promoted to administrative positions in schools. Despite the advent of special positions for advance skilled teachers this is still largely the case. In other words the best teachers are often promoted outside of teaching. Now that doesn't happen in medicine for example where most of the administration is carried out by medical professionals, not by doctors. And this is a situation that probably could start to take place more in schools.

Other professionals flourish as a result of knowledge, skills and expertise. Teachers however are protected from disciplinary measures, even in quite major situations and from accountability generally, because they belong to unions. Principals and even education departments are often reluctant to pursue disciplinary measures against teachers because of the cost and the burden of proof that must be presented, and the process of dismissing even an incompetent teacher is expensive and uncertain. Most educational authorities have numbers of unemployable but qualified teachers who are paid large salaries to carry out other duties or who simply linger on extended sick leave because they cannot be put into a classroom. In any case the quantity of data relating to individual students and teachers or even the performance of schools allowed by unions into the public domain makes even the identification of poor performers difficult. Finally because most teachers work for a wage negotiated by the union through enterprise bargaining on a basis that is dependent on experience rather than performance, there is an inbuilt financial problem for the education profession. Where teachers are public servants, governments have a vested interest in keeping wages of teachers low. In private schools similar pressures are exerted. Because there is no open market for teachers, as there is for other professionals, the best do not necessarily receive remuneration commensurate with their skills and education. Until this happens the profession of teaching will remain in the doldrums and change will be resisted by unions, governments and even, sadly, by many teachers themselves.

In terms of pay, teachers do not rank highly in comparison to other professionals. A good plumber or electrician who manages his or her

own business is likely to earn a good deal more than even a senior teacher. Certainly teachers are supposed to enjoy excellent working conditions with long holidays and a short working day. Here again the reality often differs markedly from the perception. The load in terms of preparation and marking of work, professional development and extracurricular activities is often very heavy, and increasing with the advent of new technology and the rising expectations of parents and students alike. On a personal level teachers rank very highly among workers who suffer stress. The ideals implied in helping develop the minds, attitudes and values of youth sadly, at least in the minds of many teachers, do not match the reality. Teaching is respected as a profession but other professionals generally enjoy far more autonomy and importantly greater financial returns. It is no accident that teaching is so unionised among all the professions.

Teachers often feel a lack of respect from those in the educational hierarchy themselves. Governments and churches all try to limit wage increases and the enterprise bargaining process regularly puts teachers in a position of conflict with their employers when they have little with which to bargain. The authority structure within schools is often quite remarkably hierarchical for a professional organisation. Conflict rather than harmony and mutual support are often the result. Despite parents expressing high satisfaction levels with teachers in repeated studies, the only parents many teachers ever see are those disgruntled and bearing a grievance. There was a time when parents usually accepted the actions of teachers in relation to their children even if they personally disagreed with them. Parents now are much more aware of their rights. They are quite prepared to resort to taking matters to higher authorities, government or even litigation in support of their children. Teachers can feel that parents, far from supporting them are challenging their professionalism in a variety of ways. Under the stress of managing a class of young people trying the boundaries of the classroom environment, teachers can say and do things which they might later regret. Many parents today would hold them to account. Acceptance and the respect for teachers once almost universal now seem to the weary practitioner no longer attitudes that they can take for granted. Even so, with all these limiting considerations education is still generally seen both by teachers and the community as a noble vocation, and possibly the most worthwhile of all careers. What students, however, think of teachers is quite another matter and that needs to be examined.

Students' perspective on schooling

It is time now to consider the opinions students have formed about their teachers. We've seen that generally parents hold teachers in very high regard, while teachers themselves are a little ambiguous on how they see themselves. They feel they have some control of areas like curriculum and discipline, but in other ways they feel quite impotent in exercising their professional judgement within the school.

It is little wonder that teachers generally prefer to deal with compliant students. Because they've got so many students to deal with and often have discipline problems in their early teaching years, they appreciate students who cause little trouble and conform readily to the directions set out for the class. Those who question what is being taught and who stand out in any way from the group norms are a potential threat to the authority of the teacher. Much is at stake when that authority comes in question. If discipline in a classroom breaks down too far, learning cannot take place and the teachers' very survival can be on the line. It is to be expected, then, that teachers relate better to, and lend acceptance more readily to those who do not resist the system. This is one reason why girls relate better to teachers than boys. The situation may be gradually changing but there is no doubt that in the past young women more easily accepted the boundaries set down in the classroom than young men. It is probably a major reason why girls consistently out-perform boys in virtually every academic discipline, especially in senior classes. Males argue that girls, and the nerdy boys whom they continuously group with girls, don't have a life. The end result is certainly that female students more often and more readily receive the respect of teachers than males.

Problem students feel they are not respected by teachers and their behaviour at school often reflects this attitude. In class they tend to lack interest, are noisy, inattentive, destructive and even hostile. Their attendance at class is often very poor. In the ongoing struggle for classroom discipline, therefore, teachers are dealing with the predominantly male group of trouble makers. Often both teachers and students act with self protective stratagems which simply compound the vicious cycle. Frustration and even despair can result for both parties. Mutual respect cannot survive in this climate. Often there is a progressive decline in relations between teachers and male students. In primary schools there's very little evidence of students not working together and good teachers in primary school often establish positive relationships with all students, boys included, and few problems emerge. Once students get into secondary school the decline seems to accelerate somewhat. Teenage boys tend to be much more disruptive.

Girls can be disruptive too, but in different ways and usually go through those crises a year or so in advance of the boys. The males generally tend to be at their worst as a group during those critical years in the educational cycle when they are in the 14 to 16 age range. That is one factor that may explain why males are not doing as well as females in senior schools in terms of measurable results, even though, in the earlier years of schooling, girls already seem to be out-performing the boys in literacy and numeracy tests

From the point of view of students relating to teachers, the research findings are quite alarming. While the Morgan Gallup poll and other measures tend to indicate that teachers as a profession are held in fairly high regard by the community generally and parents in particular, that's certainly not the case with their children. Among senior boys, especially those from Years 10 to 12, more than 90 per cent have little or no respect for teachers. The data gathered by Slade and Trent (2000) present nearly unanimous views that are very, very disconcerting. The boys acknowledge that there are a few good teachers in whose classrooms the problems evident elsewhere seem to disappear. The boys say that the other 90 per cent of teachers just don't seem to care:

> All of the boys, to varying degrees, resent what they see as largely ineffective, out of date teaching by people who they think cannot teach, shouldn't be allowed to teach, have lost interest in teaching, and who are unnecessarily, inequitably, inconsistently, and usually unsuccessfully, authoritarian. (Slade and Trent, 2000, p.219)

Interestingly, from a survey of students' views, 83 per cent of both boys and girls agreed with the statement, '*There are too many bad teachers*', and 92 per cent of both girls and boys agreed that '*Friends can often explain the work better and quicker than the teacher*'.

Students believe that most teachers have not worked in the real world and would not survive in it; teachers (they say) have themselves been brought up in the educational system and have never left it; teachers themselves have no idea how to change the system even if they think it needs change; teachers must know just how dysfunctional schools are. Students have contempt for teachers simply because they try to keep schools functioning. Why, they ask, would teachers take on such a worthless career? Students understand why frustrated teachers cease to care. Relations with teachers vary from passive acceptance of the inevitable to hostile resistance. In the students' experience nothing is further from reality than the picture of dedicated teachers, warm and friendly, interacting with eager, enthusiastic minds and the common pursuit of learning. Teachers, they say, don't even look like professionals. Their dress and daggy appearance indicate their own lack of self respect, and they don't deserve the respect given to doctors,

nurses and lawyers who at least look the part. These views came from a very wide cross section of boys and there was an extraordinary degree of unanimity within the results.

The interviewers from Flinders University gathered information from 1,800 boys randomly selected from 60 state, Catholic and independent secondary schools, and followed up with similar focus groups with a smaller number of girls. The results were nearly unanimous. Almost all the boys and girls said the same thing, the only exceptions coming from two senior secondary schools that operated quite differently from the conventional secondary school. Whether the views of the students are soundly based or not, the perceptions they depict are totally unacceptable. The educational system especially in senior classes has broken down and is in urgent need of surgery. Billions of dollars are being wasted in a system that is despised by the great majority of male clients yet governments, educational bureaucracies, principals, teachers and parents press onwards, apparently oblivious to the almost unanimous views of students that the system is a shambles.

Tinkering around the edges is a waste of time. A complete revolution is needed and urgently, but the community continues blissfully with the same failed structures. Inquiries and committees follow each other with monotonous regularity trotting out ineffective panaceas that do not begin to come to grips with the problem. Virtually the whole cohort of senior students, especially the boys, is saying the same thing. The so called professionals who operate and control the education system, which is the basis of our society and economic well being, are uniformly held in contempt by their clients, the students. The essential criteria by which professionals must be measured — care, competence, skill and passion for what they are doing — in the view of the students are generally missing from teachers.

Can the situation be resurrected? Is it possible to bring about such radical change that students will respect their educators? Can schools operate in such a way that students enjoy attending them and delight in the process of learning? Can teachers and learners in a climate of mutual respect and common endeavour make school worthwhile and effective?

Until the community realises that many or most students generally feel that schools do not operate effectively, renewal, rehabilitation and revolution cannot even begin.

Strong words! But they are based on the Flinders study that was totally unambiguous and was broad enough to justify the conclusions. There is plenty of complementary evidence to suggest that secondary schools are floundering. In 1998 *A Class Act*, the report of the Senate Inquiry

into the Status of the Teaching Profession, recorded a predictable mix of students' comments about teachers. While some were appreciative of conscientious, hard-working teachers, few were interested in seeking their own career in such a stressful occupation. The report indicated, too, that students who were "resentful, alienated and lacking motivation … exacerbate[d] student-teacher tensions" (Senate Employment, Education and Training References Committee Inquiry, 1998, p. 68). It may be significant that no section of the report addressed directly the issue of quality learning. The Senate report of 2001, *The Status and Quality of Teaching and Learning of Science in Australian Schools* (Goodrum, Hackling & Rennie, 2001) is more explicit on this topic, acknowledging some successes (chiefly in a few primary schools) but describing a larger picture of uninteresting routines, drawing particular attention to the prevalence in secondary science classes of "the chalk and talk lesson in which learning is centred on teacher explanation, copying notes and working from expository texts" while the "minds-on and hands-on [activities] at the heart of scientific literacy have not penetrated the traditional implemented curricula of many schools" (Goodrum, Hackling & Rennie, 2001, p. 155). It is sobering to notice the repeated demands of educational commentators in the print media for schools to arrest the disastrous decline of enrolments in mathematics and science by returning to the supposedly abandoned teaching methods of earlier decades! Those methods are being revealed as dysfunctional for this generation of students. The report of the current Senate inquiry into education will be awaited with interest. Stenhouse (1975) argued that outstanding teachers make a huge difference to the schooling outcomes of their students, but students are lucky if they meet even one of these outstanding teachers in their whole school career. Recent research takes us a step further in lamenting the absence not just of the outstanding teachers but even those perceived to be competent and caring. It is interesting that in the Flinders study the students said that where a teacher did show care, all the problems disappeared. Unfortunately it happened very rarely, perhaps (they indicated) in about ten per cent of all cases.

This, then, is a basic theme of this book. If we can create a climate in which teachers are encouraged to operate professionally rather than just progress through the steps, then the situation is certainly salvageable, but it needs radical surgery. There's no doubting that research should result in action. It hasn't so far and it must. The solutions need not be all that difficult.

Solving the problems

The basic problem is that promotion for teachers depends on seniority rather than performance. Now, if that situation were changed so that progress depended on competence and skills and learning, and teachers were made much more accountable, change could be brought about very rapidly.

All teachers should be employed on contracts for some period between three and five years initially. If schools wish to offer tenure to teachers after that and teachers are prepared to accept tenure — which may not, in the conditions that have been discussed, be in their best interests at all — then that could happen. If, however, teachers entered into contracts and they had to reapply for jobs after a period of time, they would have to take steps to look after their own professional development and improvement.

Furthermore schools should be competing for the best teachers. If teachers are applying for positions and schools are in a position to offer good salaries to them, and there are ways of measuring which are the best teachers, both teachers and schools will be in a competitive situation. That will greatly advantage the best teachers who will then be able to claim higher rewards. That entails also that clauses in awards that relate to wage levels would be eliminated. This doesn't necessarily mean that minimum wages will not apply to teachers. That's something that may merit investigation; in a sense, it is not very relevant because in the time that it takes to generate more teachers, good teachers would be rewarded much better than they are at the moment.

Finally a situation is needed in line with what has been talked about previously in terms of fairness. Schools in disadvantaged areas must be compensated by some process in order to have more money to offer in salaries than other schools. So, schools in country areas or socially disadvantaged areas should have their income supplemented by a voucher system or by some scheme similar to the SES model that currently operates for the non government schools. An SES model would have to be modified to cater for country schools which are not necessarily financially disadvantaged, but there do need to be incentives for teachers to go to them. If those things are in place, the market will determine the wages and conditions for teachers. Schools will pay as much as they can to get good teachers, and teachers from a financial point of view will be in a much more professional type of situation. This might have implications for the overall costs of running schools. This does not necessarily need to be a problem. Australia spends a very low proportion of its GDP on education compared to other OECD countries, and as has been mentioned before, a huge

amount of money that should go to education actually ends up funding educational bureaucracies. If those bureaucracies were cut down significantly, very large sums of money would be available to schools to offer higher wages to teachers. It's very much a question of priorities

It was interesting to hear the prime minister of Finland on her recent visit to Australia say that in her country the schools, which generally rank among the best in the world, are funded very well from a relatively high tax base. There are very few private schools in Finland. They have virtually one government system, but within that system education is very competitive and there are great incentives for teachers to operate well and get very good results. Because the students are very well educated in the schools, Finland has a very good economy. Their schools do not feature the disparity in standards found in this country. Nor do they support multiple education bureaucracies.

Accountability

Along with the professionalising of teachers, there must exist a system both for ensuring their accountability and for measuring their performance. As with other professions it needs to be based largely on some combination of peer and client assessment. One of the measures that might be in place would be peer review where fellow teachers make some sort of report about their perceptions of a colleague's work, and the teacher has the chance to discuss, respond to, and learn from the peer assessment. The results would not be published but it's something that they can have in their portfolio so that, when they apply for a job, they can say these were their peer assessments from other teachers in the school. Similarly principals should review the performance of every teacher in the school on an annual basis and again the same procedure should happen. The principal should talk to the teachers, give them a copy of their review and give them an opportunity to respond and learn. This need not happen in an adversarial atmosphere but as a formative experience in which teachers can use the principal and their other peers as mentors to improve their performance. There also needs to be a summative element because the teachers need to have something they can put in their portfolio so that when they apply for their next job in two or three years, they've got relevant material to show to a new employer. The records need to be something that the teacher has access to and can, if he or she wants to, produce them as supporting material when they apply for jobs. If it isn't to their advantage to do so, they obviously have a right not to put the material forward, but employers might then ask questions about why it wasn't available.

Student review is also important. At the end of each year a principal or some senior manager could go into the class and give students a chance, in a confidential way, to fill out a form or make some comments about how they saw the performance of the teacher. Again that should be reported to the teacher so that he or she has a chance to improve. The outcome of the process might well end up as some sort of rating or number. Again, the teachers would have opportunity to hear that they've got on very well with their students, their students have appreciated what the teacher has done, and the students felt that the teachers cared, were competent and knew their subject.

Resources to guide the evaluation of learning and teaching have been in abundant supply (but largely neglected in schools) since the 1980s. A mere handful is mentioned here. The SOLO Taxonomy, described by Biggs and Collis (1982), provides a model for assessing how successfully students have been learning — important information when assessing teachers' work. Evaluating people — whether in a formative situation or for summative purposes — can be an extremely delicate process. Under the headings of Propriety, Utility, Feasibility and Accuracy, the Joint Committee on Standards for Educational Evaluation (1988), based in the United States of America but with universal relevance, has provided definitions, principles, criteria and a conceptual framework for teacher appraisal in The Personnel Evaluation Standards. In his *Handbook of Teacher Evaluation*, Millman (1981) gathers useful articles on the sources and uses of evidence obtained for teacher evaluation. Other useful perspectives are presented in such books as Simons' *Getting to Know Schools in a Democracy* (1987), Bridges' *The Incompetent Teacher* (1986)*, and Teacher Appraisal: Issues and Approaches* edited by Lokan and McKenzie (1989). These and many other sources provide insights into the necessary but sensitive issue of measuring teachers' effectiveness.

There are other forms of measurement that might be used both for accountability purposes and to produce the other materials that the teacher would need to submit when applying for a job. One would be evidence of professional development courses that have been undertaken. Another might be the extra qualifications that have been earned. Both of these approaches emphasise to teachers the value of furthering their professional qualifications and taking extra courses. With a portfolio that reviews their qualifications, their professional development activities, their reputation among peers and students, and an appraisal by their principal, they're going to end up with a curriculum vitae that will ensure that the best teachers get the plum jobs and earn the most money. Like other professionals when they apply for a job, they negotiate their wage with the school, and if the

school isn't prepared to offer them what they're worth they can try in other places. It also means that the very slack teachers who haven't done these things are not going to be in very high demand and there's going to be a huge incentive for people who are just occupying a space to do something about it. Otherwise, if they manage to get a job, it will be very low paid and lacking in prestige. That said, the basic solution that I propose for this situation is that teachers be paid not on the basis of their years in the service, but according to their performance and the prestige that they've developed, just like other professionals. The best teachers will get corresponding rewards under this system. Experience will be one factor taken into account, but a lot of time in classrooms and not much performance will not get teachers very far.

Tenure has been discussed earlier. It would not be an advantage for a superb teacher to have tenure unless that teacher particularly wanted to stay in a particular school or in a particular area. In terms of unionisation I think awards should go and the only thing that needs to stay is maybe some sort of minimum wage agreement. Awards are remnants of an industrial milieu and they're not something that normally would apply to professions. If teachers are able to argue their own wages, it's likely that many of them, certainly the best teachers, will be in great demand and will be able to command very high salaries. Some of those salaries might be commensurate with those in other professions and therefore it would make teaching much more attractive and encourage the best people to go into teaching.

Another thing that would help with the professionalisation of teachers is to release them from managerial tasks. Just as in other professions a lot of the administration is done by professional administrators, this should also apply to schools. The best teachers should be teaching. That was the purpose of the Advanced Skills Teacher idea. Few would suggest that principals should not be teachers or from a teaching background, but most of the other administration in schools may well be done by professional administrators rather than professional teachers. Teaching would be something that's valued for itself and the best teachers as far as possible would be kept in the actual operation of teaching.

If much of the administration in a school is done by professional administrators, there's no reason why teachers might not be released even from things like supervision of students outside of class. A teacher's job is to teach. It is to prepare and mark work, to relate to students, and allied activities. Many of the other functions, even many of the jobs the principal now carries, should be devolved upon financial and property people and other types of administrators, just as hospital

administrators run hospitals. This has been happening successfully in some independent schools for many years.

In brief, all schools could, in effect, be granted the autonomy and decision making powers of the private system, which I think is more effective than our current government system. Finland and New Zealand, however, stand as models of government systems that work very well because these competitive things are in place.

Young teachers should serve some type of internship after their training and perhaps under mentors in a particular school. They might not expect to be very highly paid for their year or two as interns. They would be just like young doctors who spend a year or two in a hospital on low pay, but they actually learn how to apply what they've been taught during the course. Once that happens, however, they're on their own. They're out there in the market and market forces take over. Then it's up to the teacher, just like the young doctor, to profit as far as possible in the market.

In terms of managing grievance procedures, I think teachers should be the same as other professionals; in other words the process should be managed by the professionals themselves. The registration of teachers should be largely controlled by the profession itself so that registration bodies might have government and other representation, but largely they'd be managed by their peers, by the professional teachers, so that standards are kept high. Where teachers run into problems it should be managed either by the law, if it's a serious matter (just as a medical problem would be in similar circumstances) or more generally by the profession itself, if there has been a breach of the professions code of ethics, that can be resolved by a disciplinary sub-committee of the controlling professional body.

Advantages of a professionalised teaching force

A heightened sense of professionalism seems to be the solution to the problems in schools. There are a lot of benefits to be gained from what has been proposed. The main benefit is that the clients, the students, (and they, surely, are what the profession is all about), are being helped. They have access to committed, competent and caring teachers — the most important single factor shaping success in schools. But even disadvantaged students in disadvantaged areas can still perform at a very high level if their teachers are very professional.

Another benefit is that students themselves would have a much higher regard for their teachers. That would eliminate the very worrying data that suggest teachers are often despised by the students. The profession would be rid of the hacks and incompetent teachers very quickly,

because they would not survive in a competitive situation. At the moment they're supported by the unions no matter how bad they are. It would be possible under this situation to get rid of people who are not performing, and it would encourage many of the people who are not operating as well as they might to lift their performance, lift their standards, and qualifications, in fact lift their whole approach. At the moment there's no incentive to improve, but the rewards of enhanced esteem and higher pay would give them an incentive to improve everything.

The third obvious advantage, over time, would be to encourage the best minds into teaching. Teaching was seen in past times as one of the noblest of the professions, up there with medicine and health. If the rewards are commensurate and the environment is stimulating, the best people would be attracted into teaching and of course you would raise standards across the board. Accountability would be promoted, because it would be in the interests of the teachers themselves to be accountable rather than in the interests of the unions to deny accountability so that teachers are protected from reality. A huge amount of professional development would also be encouraged. A whole professional development industry would arise out of this type of situation because it would be in the interests of experts in various areas to offer courses that teachers would find valuable and relevant.

Indirect benefits to the profession from this system would be, first of all, ownership of the profession. Instead of being servants of the great institutions in which they work at the moment, teachers would be much more in control of their profession and of their professional work. The best teachers would be valued a great deal more and they would be rewarded much more handsomely for what they do.

School councils need to establish a range of salaried professionals within their budgets. We've mentioned before that at the moment the funds available to schools average about $10,000 per student per annum. With the elimination of bureaucracies and maybe a greater emphasis on the importance of education, it will be possible to lift the amount of funding per student across the board to schools. Problems are not solved just by pouring money into schools. They require as much money as is needed to operate at a very high level. If the outcome is not measurably better then what's the point of pouring money into them? If a system, in the view of the clients, is clearly failing in many respects — and certainly there is a great dichotomy in outcomes between government and independent schools — then pouring more money into education won't solve anything. The system needs to be fixed and then funded appropriately. Get the system right and then fund

it as it needs to be funded so that Australia has the best education system in the world rather than one which, on most measures, isn't bad but certainly is not right up there among the leaders.

What sorts of qualifications and skills might teachers need? Clearly they need a basic degree in their area of specialisation, so that they have a depth of knowledge within the subject areas that are to be taught. Then, in order to be registered, they need a diploma of education or the equivalent. That is something that needs to be looked at very hard by the professional body itself as it considers the best way to train teachers and for how long. The teaching qualification entitles a young teacher to provisional registration, but as with other professionals that should not be the end of it. A teacher who's got a higher degree or specialised diplomas or specialised training of some sort is obviously going to be advantaged when applying for a position, so there will be a big incentive for teachers to undertake postgraduate studies. Then, of course, quite apart from job opportunities, there is the need to stay abreast of new knowledge in the subject specialisation field, to keep pedagogy fresh and up to date, and to apply new technologies as appropriate. When the professional work force is highly educated, it would be expected that the standard of teaching would eventually improve. As well as the qualifications, an apprenticeship or internship type of learning on the job is needed, because a university environment alone will not show how to manage a group of students. Theory is important, but there also needs to be a practical element that can only be acquired on the job. When teachers apply for a job, their portfolio should display competent use of technological aides and show the skills they have acquired.

Most schools will now assume competence with modern technology because mobile phones, computers, power point projectors, ipods, MP3 players and so on are such common elements in the lives of students. Teachers who can't (or won't) use them to engage the minds of students are so out of date that they are as culpable as a cardiologist who hasn't studied the use of stents or the surgeon who has not attended the seminars on keyhole surgery. It's so easy to demonstrate the importance of keeping up to date in medicine, but it's equally true of other professions and grossly overlooked in education. That's why teachers themselves should be learners and should be learners all their lives. There are plenty of teachers who probably have not done anything significant in terms of developing their professional skills since they left teachers college or university, or if they have, it's been what Huberman (1992, p. 131) called 'tinkering', and others might describe as mere nibbling at the edges of practice, or making a few adjustments here and there each year.

The reality, however, is that there has to be an educational revolution. What the students, the boys in particular, are saying about their teachers is frightening. They're virtually alleging that the whole profession is a waste of space and it's not an accident that a huge number of boys are disaffected and the retention rates to Year 12 are actually down a lot on what they were 20 years ago. Boys, and girls too, are expecting a great deal more. And certainly they have a right to expect at least that teachers care about them. A teacher who's just there to earn a salary — and under the present system there's no other reason why they or anyone else would be there — is doing incredible damage to a whole generation of young people. The findings from data from Slade and Trent (2000) are hard to dispute. That situation can't continue. It has to change. And it could be easily changed. The whole system could be fixed very, very quickly. Some believe that the kinds of change advocated in this book constitute a complex paradigm shift and must be approached gradually. In fact, if the structures change, the situation will rapidly improve.

How can teachers, who think they're on a permanent job, be told, 'Right, sorry. It's going to stop. You're now on a three year contract and you're going to change'. That would be a political problem. It would be a huge problem with the unions of course who, in the final analysis, represent the interests of teachers not students.

In summary

To sum up this chapter, our secondary schools are broken and have to be fixed. Quickly! It's time to revisit the purposes of schools, and to devise solutions to the problems identified in schools. Since probably 70 per cent of school effect is attributable to teachers, they must be the starting point by creating structures and learning opportunities that enhance their professionalism.

4

Dysfunctional Schools

Politicians promise billions of dollars to create a smart nation so that the economy will be boosted, society will be integrated, and individuals will lead richer and more productive lives.

In a competitive global economy our schools should be among the best in the world if we are to survive and prosper. Australia is not currently among the nations that spend most per capita on schools, though Commonwealth and State Governments do provide finances amounting to about $30 billion per year for educational institutions (exclusive of educational bureaucracies).

Australian schools and educational systems already pride themselves on the quality and relevance of the courses they offer. Students, they argue, are well prepared for the ‘real’ world after school. Whenever the notion of a national curriculum has been broached, each state has acknowledged the advantages in such a move, but each has argued that its curriculum was best and the national curriculum would need to take cognisance of that fact. In other words, improvement means either accepting one state’s curriculum or tinkering round the edges of already well-established norms.

Teachers and their unions argue that the way to improve education is to spend more money. Most of that money, they contend, should go to teachers, because higher salaries will attract better qualified and more professional teachers. Also, they believe that more money for infrastructure and resources will result in better outcomes. If only it were that simple!

In the previous chapter, we discussed the very disturbing finding that adolescent boys, in particular, generally feel that 90 per cent or more of their teachers are unprofessional and uncaring. The most significant research conducted in recent years to reinforce this view is the work carried out by Slade (2001, 2002). Approximately 1800 boys from Year 9 to Year 11 were interviewed about declining rates of achievement and retention. These students were drawn from 60 secondary schools in South Australia, with representation from State, Catholic and Independent sectors, and were located in rural and urban sites. Though the work was confined to one state and the data are now at least six or seven years old, I believe that their results portray an accurate picture and warrant due consideration.

The boys spoke openly and with remarkable uniformity. They revealed a situation that is quite unacceptable. Most of those interviewed did not value their schooling. Indeed, they generally loathed school and everything associated with it. In the colloquial language of the alienated young male majority, '*School sucks*!'

It should be noted that there was an extraordinarily high degree of consistency in the results of the research. The great majority of boys, when asked the same questions, shared the same views. Very few did not share a very black picture indeed of these years of school. Indeed, most indicated a similar detestation of most of their experience of the whole secondary school.

Boys' criticisms of schools

The key points made by the boys interviewed in the Flinders' Research Project can be summarised as follows:

- Students say, quite openly, that those who think that schools achieve the objectives they publicly state they are trying to achieve, are not only deluded, but obviously so. Most of these objectives are so far from the reality that pervades schools that their publication is laughable. School administrators may believe that they are pursuing and often accomplishing the goals they set themselves. Students believe that teachers must be totally blinkered and removed from reality, because every student knows — and it should be obvious to anyone who isn't blind — that teachers fail miserably to fulfil their aims.
- To listen to principals, as they talk about their schools to parents enrolling their children in their schools or to the community generally, is to believe that schools are happy, vibrant places of

learning. Students themselves, however, do not value school. On the contrary, most hate it.

- In the eyes of the community, schools are about learning! Students are supposed to gain the knowledge and skills necessary for them to take their place in society, to earn a satisfactory livelihood, and to be able to engage culturally in society. Students, however, believe they learn little of significance at school. They go to school primarily, not to learn but to gain the credentials essential to their careers. For most, real learning takes place outside of school. It is their opinion that what they learn within the institution is not related to the world in which they live and has little connection with anything that really interests them. They know that, to be able to undertake their careers, they need certain qualifications from school. Most who can, proceed to Year 12 to gain the certificate necessary for tertiary entrance. But it is the piece of paper itself, rather than what they learn, which engages them.
- Students, when they enter the grounds of their school, see themselves entering an esoteric, unreal world, totally isolated from anything that has meaning for them. Scarcely anything that happens within the school can be connected with what affects and interests them in their lives at home and in the community. School is an artificial world, which students are forced to experience before they are allowed to take their place in society. But what happens at school seems bizarre and often totally unconnected with the rest of their lives.
- Boys especially often react against being subjected to a regimen they feel is irrelevant to them. They feel that schools unfairly advantage girls and compliant boys, who are prepared to accept the school environment uncritically. Girls they see to be more compliant and ready to accept, unquestioningly, the *status quo*. Even if they dislike the process of schooling, girls are more likely to put up with it than aggressively reject it. The same can be said of the relatively small number of boys who, uncritically, put up with school. These boys are called ‘the nerds’, and they are treated with contempt by their peers, who, nevertheless, fear that one day they will work for one. Nerds get on, because they understand, tolerate and progress through the system, despite its artificial unreality. But boys generally despise the school system as unfair to them and disadvantageous to ‘real men’.
- Boys see the curriculum they are forced to endure at school as boring, repetitive and irrelevant. The curriculum throughout secondary school is, indeed, usually concentric in its development.

This means that an area of learning is introduced in early years, and then progressively developed through secondary school, reaching real depth in senior classes. Algebra, for example, is introduced in the first years of junior secondary school then taught in progressively more detail each year. Because some topics are not understood by some, they need to be re-taught, to the infinite boredom of those who already grasp it. The real point is that very few areas of learning are indeed new and exciting for secondary school students. Even if they haven't understood things very well, students feel that they have studied everything before. Everything they are supposed to learn, they feel they already know, even if that knowledge is not very deep. All this, of course, begs the question of, 'Who needs algebra anyhow?' Boys would say the same for almost everything in the curriculum – physics, chemistry, most history, social sciences (their personal experience is more relevant here than what some out-of-touch teacher is trying to pass on) and so on right across the timetable. Reality exists only outside the school. Within the institution, boys find only sterility and mind-blowing irrelevance.

- One of the worst features about school-based learning is that students are forced to take it home. Nearly all students agree that homework is unnecessary and intrusive. It is one thing to be forced to spend their days at school following out dull and seemingly pointless routines. But making students undertake further pointless learning in the sanctuary of the home is seen as just too much. Many students are engaged in a range of commercial activities, which bring them real financial returns. This money, in turn, feeds their interests, their hobbies, and importantly, their fun. Homework is a hated chore, not a welcome complement to a valued learning process. It is not surprising that it is so often neglected or so poorly done.
- Boys are almost unanimous in their assessment of the worth of the middle years of schooling, especially Years 8 and 9. Once again, the evidence is startling, disquieting, but generally ignored. Their opinion, stated without reservation or modification, is that middle school is a total waste of time. Nothing of any significance is learnt, and there is a multitude of alternatives that would serve as better pastimes than the servitude of school. Nothing in the middle school curriculum is seen as having worth or depth. Everything that is taught they already know. The perspective of the teacher only shows how out of touch is the older generation. Teachers have a firm grasp of the obvious, and what boys are forced to learn in middle school is either obvious or not worth learning in the first

place. This view is almost universal among boys in senior secondary school.

- The mention of teachers invokes consideration of a further alarming attitude common to boys, especially in senior secondary school. Most feel that the majority of their teachers are either incompetent or out of touch, or both. In a situation where many teachers, especially at middle school level, are not specialists in the areas they are asked to teach, students may have a point. Whatever the reality, there is no question that most boys in Years 9 to 11 generally lack respect for their teachers' competence, an attitude which further compounds their unwillingness to engage positively in the learning process at school. There is much evidence that respect for teachers is very high among parents. Among students, however, especially boys, it could not be much lower.

- Another attitude of boys common among this age group (Years 9 to 11), which emphasises this dissatisfaction with teachers, is that boys believe that 90 per cent of their teachers don't care either about their students or their jobs. They see teachers as, themselves, undervalued workers labouring in often impossible conditions, with students who are uninterested and either passively, or even actively, resistant to what is happening in the classroom. Pure self-defence makes teachers erect barriers of self-protection between them and their students. The conditions for a caring relationship cannot exist in such a situation. Teachers quickly lose their enthusiasm and youthful ideals. Students see them as often cynical victims of a system that frustrates them, but which they are impotent to change. The worst thing about this is that the students say they understand why teachers don't care. Given a similar situation, their response would be the same! How can a caring relationship succeed in such a hostile and dysfunctional environment? This lack of care results as much from dissatisfaction with their jobs as with anything personal. Students consider that it is the school that creates the problems. Teachers need, as much as students, to find their fulfilment outside the school. The crushing evidence indicates that schools contain large numbers of disaffected students. One practical consequence of this is that many are filled with anger and frustration. Most students can control this, but, in many cases, it boils over into vandalism and non-compliance. An inquiry in New South Wales found that about five per cent of students were responsible for most misbehaviour in schools. This usually took minor forms such as swearing, confronting behaviour, rudeness, disobedience, inattention, inappropriate clowning and refusing to co-operate. With increasing frequency, however, some students vent their rage in the form of

> graffiti and even the extreme act of arson. Violence is not uncommon; the Senate Inquiry into the Status of the Teaching Profession (1998, p. 69) recorded the Institute of Criminology's extraordinary finding that 'between 5,000 and 6,000 teachers were assaulted each week in Australia. Fortunately it is a minority of students who react in this way. For most, passive resistance and turning off is as far as they go.

From the point of view of the students, this attitude is almost understandable. Most of the things that adults cherish, schools penalise. Adults often spend much of their time looking for outlets to fulfil themselves. Students on the other hand, can be punished severely to the point of temporary or permanent exclusion from school, for attempting to indulge in conduct that adults take for granted. Again, students see school as unreal, isolated from the world in which they live. One young man, in a survey, summed up the common experience of students with the words: "School is like a prison, but even prisoners get toilets they can use. " (Slade and Trent, 2000, p.215). The boys, also quite universally, indicated that, when their teacher really cared about them, listened to them and treated them as equals, then virtually all of their grievances and alienation dissolved and vanished. In schools generally, the evidence is clear that boys from Year 9 to Year 11 level feel that their teachers do not care.

The main conclusion from the Flinders' research is that, when teachers are really committed, relate well to the students and support them well, all the problems boys find with school suddenly vanish and real learning takes place.

The Flinders University results are at odds with popularly held views, especially among teacher unions, many academics working in the area of education – often left-leaning, overly concerned about political correctness and usually well removed from what actually occurs in schools – and most state school teachers, that problems start in the primary years and that most issues are reducible to matters of gender difference, gender equity or literacy and numeracy. These were not issues that affected school retention rates, certainly in the perceptions of the boys. Rather, they consider the primary years of schooling to be good times when they liked school and learnt a great deal. These views are at odds with recent criticisms that the primary curriculum is overcrowded to the detriment of core studies in English, mathematics, science and history (Ferrari 2007c, p. 3) and that primary mathematics is in a parlous state (Ferrari 2007a, p. 3; 2007b, p. 3). Nevertheless, the students' perceptions are no less real. It is during Year 8 that boys consider the wheels begin to fall off and the process deteriorates

progressively, until they withdraw or survive to complete Years 11 and 12.

Principles for improving schools

Australians, generally, have a passionate belief that our future lies in the education we provide to our young people. Teachers and their unions loudly proclaim that the education budget is chronically under-funded. This may be so, but it is patently obvious that many basic structures will need to be made right before extra expenditure in education will be very effective.

First, the division of schools in the popular mind into good and mediocre (independent and state) makes the notion of equal opportunity for all young students absurd.

Second, until schools and teachers are put into a situation where excellence and professionalism are demanded by making them accountable and competitive, extra money for education will usually be largely wasted.

Finally, it is clear from consideration of the views of students themselves (there is evidence that the views of adolescent girls largely support the attitudes of boys) that schools and teachers are largely ineffective to the point of being dysfunctional. Ways must be found to make the educational experiences of school students relevant, exciting and valued. Certainly this is possible and instances can be cited — sadly too few — where real education with really positive outcomes for students, is taking place.

The following chapters outlines what needs to happen to bring about this educational climate.

Unless this happens, the mere injection of more funding will have minimal effect.

5

Specialist Schools

Whatever parents and teachers may think about how well our schools are functioning, secondary students have severe reservations about their experiences at school. The attitude common among many students, especially boys, is quite alarming. They consider that schools are unrelated to what happens in the real world. Particularly in senior schools they focus on obtaining credentials rather than valuing learning for its own sake. They use colourful language to describe conditions in schools such as it's a prison to be endured. They say that most try to survive until Year 12 but many don't, and some of the available data tend to bear this out. For example less than one third of males in the 16 to 24 year age group are currently in full time study. That is a very alarming statistic. So, if the dropout rate in schools, particularly among boys, is unacceptable, all is not well with schools. The school system is broken and definitely needs real attempts at fixing.

The problem is well known in educational and government circles and various measures have been tried in order to do something about it. The usual response has been to simply water down courses. Committee after committee has been set up to put together a curriculum that has often been described as 'dumbed down'. There's been a proliferation, mostly in the social sciences area, of what I would call soft courses. The students find many of these quite irrelevant and quite unchallenging.

The importance of relevance

What people associated with schools generally have not realised is that the problem lies not in the degree of difficulty of courses but in their irrelevance to the students. It's a very depressing situation and one

would be arrogant to suggest that there were simple solutions to fixing it. I have no doubt, however, that schools can do much better, and we need to set up an educational environment that encourages them to do so. One of the most outstanding educational experiences that I've been subjected to occurred when, just for interest, I did a motor mechanic apprenticeship course by correspondence. Part of the course was to attend a full day seminar together with other, mostly young, males and we spent the day stripping down a motor and putting it back together again. Now, most of these young people did not look like academic students. Their hair came in various assorted colours, they were mostly covered with tattoos, and yet I've never seen more concentration and more attention. Obviously these young men could not wait to get back and work on their own motor cars, perhaps build new motor cars of their own and get machines that perform much better. It's interesting too that in the Flinders study that we've referred to previously there were two exceptions to the general depressive picture that was set up in the interviews with male students. Both of those exceptions were senior colleges. These colleges have only Year 11 and Year 12 students, there are no rules about uniform, teachers are addressed on first name terms and there is a relaxed atmosphere in relation to discipline. It's interesting to note that students not only appreciated the school environment in which they worked, but the academic standards in those schools were very, very high. It does seem that there are some successful models for developing schools more appropriate to the interests of young adults and which are more successful in maintaining students' educational attention.

It is time to look at some schools which do things differently and see how they work. At the moment there is an enormous amount of uniformity amongst schools; indeed, core school activities have probably changed very little in the last 50 years. The research indicates that students from Reception to Year 7 think that school is okay. They say that school is in fact fun, that they learn heaps and their reflections on their primary years of schooling are usually very positive. It's during Year 8 that they say the wheels begin to fall off. And somewhere during that year their attitude goes from being very positive to negative and then very negative. So it looks as though it's from Year 8 on that we need to concentrate our attention. From the point of view of the boys interviewed, Years 9, 10 and 11 are disappointing and frustrating years at school. They say that they learn very little, that what they learn is very repetitious, there's very little new learning and the experience is generally very negative.

Now that, of course, is not surprising. We're talking about young adolescents who are going through puberty and all the problems

associated with it, and you would expect that there would be particular problems that need to be faced with these young people. Nevertheless schools generally differ very little in format from one another, and the special needs of students at this stage often don't seem to be taken much into account at all. By Year 12 you probably have a group of survivors. In some states it's only about 70 per cent of students that get through to this level and those survivors generally are very keen to obtain credentials. Their vocational choices for the future are very proximate. Those who want to enter the professions, especially, need to obtain very high marks in academic courses to get there. Even to get into TAFE, students will generally have to do fairly well at Year 12, so there is an amount of external pressure for students to perform better at that level and generally there seem to be fewer problems associated with students, and fewer negative attitudes among Year 12 students, though they're not entirely absent.

Part of the story is that their subject choice funnel has led them to a concentration on the subjects that they believe they need. In academic schools students who are going, say, into a business course generally would have focused on business subjects; the same principle applies to the other professions. Often students who want to go into TAFE courses will have done subjects that are more akin to their area of interest, and so what has in fact happened is that some specialisation does automatically take place by Year 12.

While on the subject of interest, we should consider what things actually interest students and to ask whether some or all of those interests can in fact be incorporated into the courses they do so that the students will become much more deeply involved in the educational process and get out of it what they want. Some of those interests are very obvious. Among boys particularly, cars rank very highly. Music plays a central role. Sport is very important among both boys and girls. Money is quite important. It's interesting that a surprising number of young people have part time and often very responsible jobs, in contrast to school where they're expected to behave in a quite subservient way. Often in their jobs they're very responsible; they handle finance, they mingle with people, and deal with all sorts of situations. Even though (or, perhaps, because) work can be quite demanding and challenging, they often get more out of their part time jobs than they get out of their education. Many young people are very interested in the internet, in IT, and spend hours communicating with others. In fact much of their social life centres on the computer. A lot of students are interested in the arts, drama, dance and painting particularly. For many young students, particularly girls, fashion ranks very highly among their interests and they spend a surprising amount of

time discussing fashion and even designing and making their own clothes. Young people find it very important to try to get a sense of their own self worth by trying to accomplish something which stands up as important in the eyes of their peers and themselves. It's a time when they think a great deal about their future careers and the vocational directions that their lives might take. They're very, very interested in relationships, and that includes relations with the other sex but also very importantly with their own friends who are often of the same sex. Generally they want to learn more about the things that they find interesting but, unfortunately, that does not include much of what happens currently in the school curriculum. Now the question is, 'Can these interests be integrated with schools and with education or is there some sort of fundamental conflict?' That's a question that we need to look at, at some length.

Primary schools

Let's start with the situation in primary schools. Throughout Australia the states are undecided about what constitutes primary years of schooling; some states have six years, others have seven. I think it makes sense to have seven years of primary schooling because those are the years they look back on favourably. During Year 8, however, they think the wheels start to fall off. What happens in those formative years probably should not change too much because students generally think that they learn heaps and that what goes on at the moment is quite satisfactory. Nevertheless, government concerns over standards of literacy and numeracy have led to nation-wide testing. Unfortunately the testing program reveals problems. According to the federal Education Department's submission to the parliamentary inquiry into literacy and numeracy (Anderson, 2007), students in other countries are surpassing our levels of attainment while Australia's "literacy and numeracy results are stabilising or even declining … [and] impacting on the futures of Australian students" (p.8). In other words there are some problems.

Some things need to happen. First of all we need to be much more aware of students who are underperforming in those areas and take remedial action much more quickly. It is very important both that students be tested regularly in these areas so that the problems are known, and that funding is available in all primary schools to ensure that appropriate remedial action is successful. There's a great need, too, for specialised services such as SPELD to support people with specific learning difficulties. It should be the aim of every school that at the end of primary school every student without a learning disability will have reached at least a satisfactory standard in the areas of literacy and

numeracy so that they can proceed confidently to their next stage of education. If that doesn't happen and if students continue to fall through the cracks, our education system is failing very badly.

The catch cry of the 50s or 60s was: Every teacher in English is a teacher of English. The remedy applied then was to have every teacher aware of the need for students to achieve literacy in each of their subjects. That principle applies today through the Writing Based Literacy Assessment (WBLA) for senior secondary students. Certainly, there needs to be more work to ensure that every teacher in every classroom is doing a good job in these areas. Nevertheless, it's inevitable that some students will fall behind and that's when specialised services need to be available in the secondary school, too, to support teachers in bringing the students up to speed. Now, the story doesn't end with literacy and numeracy of course, but there does not seem the same pressing urgency in other curriculum areas to insist on total uniformity in courses. Indeed, there seems to be some argument for making a curriculum locally applicable within general guidelines. That seems appropriate because it's not in those other areas that a child is going to have severe problems in changing from state to state, provided their literacy and numeracy skills are up to par. Certainly, in addition to literacy and numeracy, there should be proper attention to science for example, social studies in its various forms, and the other areas of learning. Languages should play an important part right from the early years and in a fun way so students actually learn to speak with reasonable fluency, rather than grapple with vast amounts of grammar. I don't want to get into the business of indicating how the curriculum should develop or even what particular details should be taught because that's an area for experts to get together and work out.

Middle schools

When children get to middle school, we have to change the environment and attitudes. We must try something new because the students see what we're doing currently as not working. They see the wheels really falling off somewhere during Year 8. I'm not suggesting that there's a single answer; on the contrary, we should encourage lots of schools to try lots of different ways to do something about it. We need a situation where schools do change what they try to do in various ways, where a great variety of approaches is available for students and we thereby get the chance to see what works best for different people and different groups. Schools need to take risks. Some schools will do very well and succeed; other schools won't and may in fact close. That seems a very healthy situation, not one to be avoided. Unless we try new things, we'll never change anything.

At the moment students feel that the middle years are largely wasted. I'm suggesting that specialist middle schools be set up. How many, initially, doesn't really matter but certainly some need to be set up so that new approaches can be tried. Some might have a core academic curriculum which is taught for part of the day while the rest of the day would be given to some specialised area that was of particular interest to the students. An obvious example of this is the motor mechanics course that I mentioned earlier. In such a school they might concentrate on core subjects until 2 pm, but devote the rest of the day to specialist areas. Since that school had an orientation towards motor cars, some of the mathematical problems might be associated with things that they do in fixing up motor cars. Some of their reading might be associated with the heroes of the racing track, and so on, so that the interest of the students is maintained. Then, for another part of the day they go into a workshop and groups of them build their own super car, or they learn all about souping up cars. They would be doing things that they are totally focused on and totally interested in. While they're doing it they might have an entrepreneurial interest too so that if they were to fix up a vintage car, it might be quite a saleable item by the time they've finished, and if they make any profit out of it, they might well give it to their own charity. You could imagine a situation like that; young people, who may have found school very hard going, might in that particular situation be very focused. There are examples of a few secondary schools in Australia where this sort of approach has been tried and those schools have indeed been very, very successful. Another school might have an academic focus and cater for young people who want to go on to the professions and are driven in that direction. So the middle school might have quite an academic focus with a good variety of subjects, much the same as most schools operate at the moment.

In terms of the common curriculum that all students would learn in the middle school, I'm suggesting that at least five major areas constitute part of what they do: mathematics, science, literature, social sciences and languages. Other areas including the arts, physical education, music, and so on also need to be part of it. I'm suggesting, however, that some of those subjects could be given more detailed treatment in specialist schools. That is to say, all major curriculum areas might form part of the program in every middle school, but some would specialise in particular areas. In addition, specialist schools might offer courses in all the areas of technology and trades. A young person who's very interested in plumbing, for example, might go to a school that spends part of its day in academic work but also part of the day in teaching the young people how to be plumbers and allow them to actually do plumbing. Again, they would be encouraged to develop some

entrepreneurial flair and entrepreneurial activities associated with the specialisation.

Obviously there's a place for specialist sport schools. These are common throughout countries like China and America. There might be several different types of schools that perhaps specialise in football or athletics or basketball. Again they would focus on a core academic curriculum for part of the day and the rest of it would be associated with developing sporting ability and related skills. That might be done in conjunction with professional sports teams and their support structure. There are lots of possibilities. You can imagine a young student who was very keen on sport, say netball for example, going to a school where she could really develop her netball skills and play competitively at a very high level and perhaps make a future in that area. Likewise I could see a specialist middle school focusing on fashion where young people would learn how to design, make and market clothes, and benefit from any profits. Various types of arts colleges might be created, where students might specialise in art and drama and dance and so on. I imagine these schools would be very popular with students who are not inclined towards sport. Some may not just stay at one school, but might spend a few years at one and then try another. Remaining in one school has some advantages in establishing a relationship with your peer group and making friendships, but it's not something that has to be fixed in stone. Other middle schools might specialise in computing and IT for businesses. Again an entrepreneurial flair might be encouraged because they might be engaged in developing and marketing games or various sites and so on. Some colleges might emphasise business. Others might emphasise cooking. In other words there seems to me a vast array of niche market schools that might make middle schooling not just something to be endured but something that is exciting and really relates to the interests of those young people. There are many other areas: crafts of various kinds, horticulture (particularly in country areas where it might be very important), and the environment — some young people are very involved in and concerned about environmental issues that can be studied in depth and a lot of entrepreneurial activities can be done to benefit the environment.

So it seems to me that, if some of these schools were set up, some would prosper and become very popular. Some wouldn't do so well. After a period of time people would know what they wanted, what worked, what was important. It is crucial in all of them that good academic standards be maintained especially in the core curriculum areas. Furthermore, there has to be the possibility for students who want to transfer from less academic to more academic courses to be

able to do so. Since obstacles to change are most likely to be found in the areas of mathematics, physics and chemistry, there need to be special bridging courses at about the Year 10 level for people who decide that they would like to head back into a more academic type of institution. In fact we might have specialist schools to provide that facility.

Now, the conventional approach to middle schooling has been to specify a broad curriculum where everybody tastes a little of everything. I don't oppose that concept, but I am saying that in some particular schools it may not happen to the same extent. There will be other emphases. What is done in the core curriculum area is something that I wouldn't really want to be dogmatic about, because I don't consider myself an expert. The students themselves see a lot of what happens in Years 8, 9 and 10 as complete waste of time so I think you'd have to call into question what is currently taught, and how it's taught. Students in those years find school a very boring, repetitive, static environment. Given some of the innovations I am suggesting, you might have some schools at least that become very exciting places where students actually achieve real learning in the areas that interest them. That doesn't mean that the other key areas get ignored at all. In fact it may prove that students who are very happy in their environment won't switch off from core learning at all but find the whole process positive and encouraging and so do the whole thing a lot better. A lot of the bad results that currently occur, particularly with young males, are due to being completely tied in a knot by the process which they have to endure. It seems to me that we must get interest back into school.

There are other areas that might be incorporated in some schools too. These might involve, for example, community service activities. It's a very good thing to take students to elderly citizen homes, or to hospitals and give them the opportunity to show a little concern for the elderly and disadvantaged people. I think in small rural communities where you're unlikely to have access to a great range of schools you may nevertheless be able to offer some special activities, sport for example, that will be of real interest to the students. I've worked in schools where for half an afternoon a week the various teams from one school competed with teams from another school. It is quite appropriate that a small country secondary school — the whole school pretty well — might form a number of sporting teams in various sports, and compete with neighbours and make it a real social feature as well, with one school entertaining the other school, perhaps with after-sport entertainment and afternoon tea, or perhaps having a barbecue together. Actually sport already works very well in a lot of country areas.

Of course, opportunities will arise for other areas of learning to be accessed through the sport. Something that comes to mind is a careful study of the rules of the game that is the current focus. In areas like literacy, some of their reading, writing and research might be about the heroes of their particular sport. That would not be the sole topic. I'm not suggesting that they ignore Shakespeare or great literature, but for their ordinary reading, perhaps they could focus on areas that they find really interesting. Likewise, if they're interested in horticulture, as many country students will be, a certain amount of their reading could be directed there. It will be very helpful if their various activities have a practical outcome; let them grow something, and then sell the things they grow. Why can't a small rural school, perhaps in co operation with local farmers, take over part of a plot and work it for a farmer. All the time they could be learning the science that underpins the project, and be involved in meaningful learning about advertising, book-keeping, accounting, and all the things that go towards running a small business successfully. And that will involve a great deal of these things.

Some fear that the resourcing of small specialist schools is going to require more dollars than are available at the moment. I'm not so sure. I'm suggesting that entrepreneurial groups, not the government, set these schools up. These are very good businesses that would do very well financially. I am confident they would attract quite considerable numbers of students. Governments might try them too but probably the best place to start setting them up is through entrepreneurial groups of various kinds. In earlier chapters we have looked at the various groups of people who might be interested in setting up schools. For example, it's quite conceivable that the AFL might want to start a sporting school in Adelaide that develops young footballers. There are certainly groups in the community that might want to set up these schools and, provided they went through the registration process and were accountable at every level and were regularly inspected, I don't see any problems. In fact the majority of schools might eventually become more specialised. The only way you can work that out is to try it. At the moment there is virtually no experimentation. All schools are monotonously and drearily similar in their offerings and operating modes.

There's one special feature that I would like to see become a widely used part of middle schooling: outdoor education. For many years some particularly well endowed schools have set up outdoor education centres like Geelong Grammar's Timbertop. Students are taken into a rural environment where they learn to be a little more self sufficient. It also seems to me that young people need the opportunity to expend some of their enormous energy. I'm not suggesting a boot camp

situation where students are dragooned into some awful route march type of activity and flogged by a sergeant major as they go along. It would certainly have to be done on a voluntary basis, and the special outdoor education schools might be set up in mountainous areas or by the sea or in some areas that have special attractions. The students would be encouraged during their middle school years to work towards a tangible qualification, similar to the Duke of Edinburgh Award that might lead to gaining special entry to a course, or provide extra points towards another qualification. I'm not suggesting that such a course become compulsory for SACE, for example, because some people are not particularly attuned to outdoor education, but a lot of young people, particularly boys, love the idea of a challenge in the outdoors. So, students might spend some time in a school based in the Flinders Ranges for example. They might be involved in hiking or abseiling. They might even do things that are a real challenge and a real interest, like bungy jumping or skydiving. Others might go to the sea and do things like scuba diving and water skiing. Such activities would never be compulsory, but some boys and some girls would love the opportunity to try these sorts of things and work towards a qualification that might give them some special advantages when they move on to the next stage of their education. Some students will enjoy that type of thing, and welcome the chance to go off perhaps two or three times during the year for a week. But if they don't want to go to an outdoor centre, there must be some alternatives to consider. One college might set up a music school for a week during which young musicians become a member of an orchestra; others might focus on drama or film making, or on anything that is appealing to young people.

Preparing and following up these activities would be beyond the resources of most schools to do well, and the staff in a school like this would have to have special skills. For example, to conduct specialist sessions on things like rock climbing or photography demands extensive training. They should be specialist schools with specialist teachers with specialised skills. And those activities are not entirely risk free but, if they're done by experts in a properly supervised fashion, they are unlikely to lead to serious problems.

That's why specialist schools are necessary and why I am confident they would be very busy. For instance, to augment its curriculum an academic school might negotiate with a number of specialist schools so that students could choose a mountain or sea experience or attend an art or drama school for a week or two. Mainstream learning might be integrated with the practical experiences provided in the specialist context. In fact, something like this is happening now as schools contract out their outdoor education program to separate providers, or

as geography and biology topics are incorporated into the outdoor program.

These specialist schools would be set up as entrepreneurial ventures. The ones that were very well conducted and provided a really interesting, exciting and stimulating course would be in high demand. The best would survive, the others would not. That leads eventually to an outstanding educational offering. All specialist schools should be registered. They need not necessarily be residential; for there are certain problems associated with living at a school or at a camp where it's absolutely essential that it be conducted by people who really know what they're doing.

In general this type of approach to middle schooling might get middle schools out of the doldrums and into the real interests of young people. The middle years could become a great learning time filled with exciting experiences that the young people would value in later years as some of the best years of school instead of the complete waste of time they see at the moment. We should keep in mind, however, that students also felt that if the teacher was great, cared for students, and made learning interesting, everything changed. In general, the curriculum itself should be exciting, interesting and related to the interests of young people — not completely tied of course, because you have to go beyond the interests of young people, otherwise you just leave them at the level they're in, and that's not the point of education. You have to start from where they are and the process itself needs to be an interesting process.

Senior colleges

So far we've looked at strategies that might make school more interesting and productive for students in Years 8, 9 and 10. Now, I also suggest that there is room for trialling a number of senior colleges to cover students in Years 11 and 12. In most states a certificate is usually given for performance over those two years, so it seems appropriate that schools dealing with Year 11 and 12 be treated separately. I'm not suggesting that all schools immediately break into small sections at all. What I do recommend is that a range of experimental senior schools be set up to see what works well and what doesn't.

One type of specialist college already exists in several places in Australia. Academic colleges, as data suggest, are very successful in two ways. First, the students actually enjoy going to school in the environment where they feel much more like a tertiary student and where petty rules and restrictions are not in play. Second, they achieve

academic success. Senior colleges in the ACT, South Australia and Tasmania are successful in terms of both student satisfaction and academic achievement. For academic colleges there is a strong case for using aptitude tests and interviews — not to foster social divisions, but simply to ensure that people who go to academic colleges have the intellectual and academic ability to cope with studies at tertiary level.

The emphasis must not be just on academic colleges. Indeed, because fewer than 20 per cent of students are going to end up in universities, there is scope for a great range of specialist senior colleges in other areas. Some, as an extension from middle schooling, might emphasise technology or IT. Others might emphasise trades, the arts, applied sciences and agriculture. All of these specialist colleges would have a core academic curriculum, just as was suggested for the middle school, because it is vitally important for the economic wellbeing of the country that people going into the workforce be literate and numerate. It may even be more important for their basic fulfilment as human beings that they possess those skills, because without them the richness of their lives will be severely diminished.

So, at senior level, too, there's room for niche marketing on the part of educational entrepreneurs. This isn't to say that governments might not be involved, or maintain their involvement in all sorts of schools. Nor should all schools become specialised. I'm suggesting that a variety of approaches be tried initially and that experience will soon indicate whether these schools will be popular and successful with students or not. If they succeed, they will multiply. If they don't, their demise will be reasonably rapid and we'll at least learn what works in our context and what doesn't from the experience.

It's vital that Australians have the best schools in the world, schools where students enjoy learning, are encouraged to learn and to become lifelong learners, where students are excited and fulfilled by their education. We need therefore to create an environment where the schools that really appeal to young people survive and others do not. There must be scope for diversity. Some may specialise in sport; some may offer religious studies; some may have uniforms; some may not. The key to having a vibrant, exciting educational system is to have variety, and it's also important to have free market forces operating so that the good schools survive and those that are not so good don't survive. Schools won't survive merely because students enjoy going to them, regardless of whether they are learning or not. Schools will only survive if the students enjoy and also learn skills that will make their entry into the workforce and into the rest of their lives successful. Some students will like the traditional environment of uniforms and

order and fairly strict discipline and sport and all the other customary things. Other students will want something much less formal, much more adult in style, and there's scope for various kinds of schools offering all this great variety.

Finally, we get back to the theme that was developed earlier that there needs to be great emphasis on entrepreneurial and niche marketing activity in the schools as in everything else. Unless there is competition and incentive to excel and to be different and to be better, schools will never improve. This can only be achieved through creating an entrepreneurial environment. That doesn't automatically mean that governments can't be involved. Governments can of course be entrepreneurial. But if government is synonymous with boring and conservative and unchanging and grinding on relentlessly, then government in that sense is bad. It's important that schools relate well to the real world. Entrepreneurial activity should not only be involved in the setting up of schools but also in the courses in which students are enrolled.

I'm reminded of my experience, referred to previously, while learning motor maintenance. We worked in pairs on the 10 motors set up around the workshop. I must say to my shame that the fellow student I worked with knew an awful lot more about motors than I did, but I enjoyed the experience. The young people may have been green-haired and multi-pierced, but they were one of the most focused, intelligently interested groups I've ever come across. I just thought to myself, 'What an educational experience I'm sharing in here! Why can't this be happening all over the place?' The same sort of things often happen in the senior colleges that I have talked about. The students there — who aren't involved in uniforms and petty rules and are treated like adults and relate to their teachers on a first name term, and become very friendly with their teachers —love the experience of school. Because of that, they learn much better as their results demonstrate. Wherever senior colleges have been tried they've been extremely successful; that includes the ACT where there are several of senior colleges, and Tasmania where nearly all the students in the last few years of school attend senior college.

It's not enough just to learn for example how to fix a motor car. It's also important to be able to sell your skills. If you fix up an old vintage car, learn all the skills of marketing, too, because they are skills that will be essential for students in later life. Learn how to design things, how to make things, how to market things. All of this can and should be incorporated into the courses students learn, particularly courses that have a less academic emphasis. There's no reason why schools, as

some do already, shouldn't run co-operative stores where they sell their goods. Students should be allowed to keep the profits or use them to develop the business further and make group decisions about these things. They should learn about entrepreneurial activity because, if they learn those skills, they're likely to be able to use them much more successfully when they get into the competition of the real world later on.

All senior colleges should go to great lengths to establish links with the respective tertiary bodies with which they deal. Academic colleges should have extensive links with universities; that's already happened in a number of schools around Australia. Students should be involved in some aspects of university life so that they can see what it's all about and where they're going. Other students should be involved with TAFE institutions so that they can see where their trade studies will lead them. Along the way they should get credit for courses they do. By the time they get to Year 12, students who have done courses in any trade, electrician for example, should be well along the way towards some sort of diploma which will be transferable to a tertiary institution, TAFE or university. These sorts of transition arrangements are already in place to an extent and could be developed much further. There's no reason why students at Year 12 should not emerge with a diploma and maybe study one more year at a TAFE college to get an advanced diploma and then proceed directly to the second year of a course at university or an institute of technology that offers degrees in applied skills. With these links in place, students will see more clearly the relevance of their education to the adult world.

Links with universities should be strong so that, for example, an outstanding student might do Year 12 mathematics in Year 11, and then might in Year 12 take a university mathematics subject. That's happening in some schools now. There's no reason why that sort of thing can't take place more widely. There's no reason why students cannot in some areas perform outside their year level. I don't in general, recommend that schools be entirely flexible in this area, because there are social values that are important too, but I do support the general principle that bright, young people should be extended at their level. Not everyone doing Year 10 mathematics for example is operating at the same level; there'll be different classes offering different approaches, with brighter students challenged in various ways to work at a higher level within their regular class. In Year 11, however, there is a case to be made for very talented students to be really challenged by having the opportunity to take one or two subjects at Year 12 level and then in Year 12 combine some of their Year 12 subjects with some university subjects. That's well nigh impossible

under current arrangements unless schools have particular agreements with universities. A student has to complete Year 12 before starting university. That seems to me a very poor situation and one that doesn't have the best outcome for particular students.

By no means should the whole senior course be just about credentials and developing vocational directions, for there are other values that need to be incorporated. Detailed definition of these values is an area for experts and curriculum developers, but the general directions can be outlined. I've mentioned that some universities in an entrepreneurial niche marketing context may well resume the technological focus that many of them had years ago when they started as institutes of technology. I'm suggesting that there is a good case that some of them at least become universities of technology, offering degrees and higher degrees in high level skills. There are plenty of examples throughout the world of this kind of institution being very successful; places like Massachusetts Institute of Technology, RMIT in Melbourne, and UTS in Sydney come to mind.

I must emphasise the need for bridging schools. A student who makes particular choices in middle or senior school should not be condemned forever to work within the confines of what those choices dictate. Apart from the areas of mathematics, physics and chemistry and maybe, to some extent, biology, in all other areas it's possible to pick up various subjects at Year 11 level, whatever the background. That's generally accepted practice in most schools. If a student who's been concentrating on drama suddenly decides that she wants to be a nuclear scientist, there's no reason why she can't go back and do a special bridging course for a period at a special bridging school that offers the subjects that she might need — presumably if she wants to be a nuclear scientist it will be mathematics, physics and chemistry. That course might be something that she could do during the school holidays, or perhaps if she decides half way through Year 10, she might go into the bridging school for six months before Year 11. These sorts of flexible arrangements should be available. It should always be possible for a student to transfer at any level. In Year 11, Year 12, or even at university it should be possible for students who want to change direction to take any necessary bridging courses. And the need for that is probably going to be far less than would be generally imagined. In most subjects apart from the three or four areas that have been mentioned, there's no particular need for a bridging course at all. Most subjects can be picked up with little background.

Of course, we would have to agree that there is always an advantage in having done some school economics or geography, for example, before

embarking on a tertiary career in those areas. The earlier a student can see a direction, the better, and as a general principle a student looking towards business related studies, for example, should be encouraged to study accounting and economics at Year 11 and Year 12, but if necessary those subjects can be picked up at tertiary level. On the other hand, signing up for tertiary mathematics without the appropriate background is impossible for all but the most gifted students.

I would include English language in the areas for bridging schools because quite a number of students currently are going to university with poor literacy and grammar skills. It seems to me that either at a bridging school or within their ordinary schools the students who are not strong in the area of literacy should be helped to improve. Schools should have specialist remedial teachers, possibly at every level, because it's doing students a grave disservice to allow them to leave school with no appreciation of how to write a sentence or no understanding of punctuation and the basic rules of grammar. These skills, unfortunately, have tended to be neglected and are often ignored even in examinations and standardised testing situations. It's quite interesting that Australian students rank very well in a lot of international tests on the use of language, but if grammar is brought into account as part of the marking, they actually don't rank very well at all. They settle to very ordinary levels, because the grammar skills even of university students and, I might say, of teachers are often very poor. Governments are currently suggesting that teachers should pass grammar tests before they are admitted to teaching. It seems to me that a great indictment of our schools is that they're turning out people who want to be professionals and yet they don't even have a grasp of the grammar of their own language. That's not a good situation.

Precise use of language is crucial in very many occupations, but also in general communication with people. It's going to be difficult for people to go very far in any organisation or business if they haven't got those sorts of skills. If, for example, they can't write an accurate report, they're not going to get to a management position. Those things are not trivial. They really are very important and they seem to have been trivialised in the approach to teaching English in many areas over the last 20 or 30 years.

Why specialise rather than be comprehensive?

One of the motives for creating large comprehensive schools — here in Australia, as well as in the United States of America and the United Kingdom — was to minimise differences in class structures. Another was to create economies of scale within a local school that would offer

students a much broader choice of courses, and yet maintain a parity of esteem for the courses selected. The search for diversity and interest-based learning led inevitably to very large schools.

My feeling, however, is that comprehensive schools were a total disappointment, an enormous disaster. I think that, particularly in countries like England where the grammar schools have been among the best academic schools in the world, suddenly everything got watered down to make all things possible for everyone. I think that's the wrong way to go. Certainly the intention to give access to all short term educational opportunities in one institute was good, but it did mean that a place had to grow into an enormous institution, and large institutions in my experience tend to operate more and more like factories and the individual gets forgotten. In recent years we have seen some of the consequences in American schools.

We dealt with social divisions that result from different ways of funding schools in the first chapter. Our view is that if all schools were funded on the same basis, that would get rid of one major cause of social stratification resulting from schooling. Parity of esteem is more likely now that people in, for example, trades are likely to be able earn as much, or more, than professionals. Years ago, if you weren't going to inherit a fortune, the way to become wealthy was to go into a profession, particularly medicine or dentistry, because the rewards would be good and, if you studied hard and had enough ability, you could achieve your ambition. In those days a technical school was a place that was rather despised, and I think that to call a specialist school a technical school now is going to create this problem of parity of esteem all over again. But a college of technology is a different proposition altogether and development of high level skills is certainly seen today by most people to be on par with achieving high academic levels. If excellence is sought at all levels, in other words if people are stretched to develop their talents as far as they can in whatever of these levels they choose, I don't think there's really going to be a problem of parity of esteem. Even, for example, a person who goes into a sporting school and develops into a top AFL footballer is likely at the end to be certainly in salary terms on par with a doctor or a lawyer or, perhaps, well ahead. Likewise in most of these areas a person who chooses a particular trade, electrician or plumber or whatever, and develops very high level skills — maybe at a degree level, maybe at an advanced degree level — in terms of financial reward is going to be probably at least as well off as those who came through an academic stream. Nowadays with the idea of technology and high level skills replacing the old low level technical blue collar idea I think it's going to be possible to minimise class distinctions.

Even more to the point, we must make sure that we don't have A level schools and B level schools. That was much more a contributor to class consciousness than anything else. I think that if all schools that want to be funded are funded on the same formula, a lot of school-sourced class division will be largely dissipated. The commitment to having schools that transcend the initial basic skills of a trade is very important, too. That's why I've been emphasising that you don't stop at a trade level. You don't stop at being an apprentice electrician. You end up with a diploma, and an advanced diploma, with the opportunity of going on to a degree and higher degree, a doctorate eventually. There's no reason why you can't have all of these levels of skills as you do in the top tertiary institutions throughout the world. That seems the way to go, and it would be achieved in the educational environment that is being urged in this book.

Now, it's true that large comprehensive schools provide diversity of courses on the one campus. They have the advantage of keeping young people at school in the area more or less in which they live. There is the potential for specialised schools to draw students further away from home and to provoke a lot more travelling around big cities, but students already are prepared to travel quite large distances to go to a particular school that they want to attend. Initially there might be some problems with only a few specialist schools set up. Over time, however, a gradual process would bring us to the situation where there were enough of these schools spread around the city to satisfy everyone. In the meantime a number of comprehensive schools (in effect, our current secondary schools) will have to be maintained. There is no suggestion that these things change overnight. Eventually, through trial and error we may find that no specialist schools work well enough, and we revert to a comprehensive model, but I think this is highly unlikely. It just makes sense to think that, if students are doing something that they really like and can see a reason for it, they will enjoy the whole schooling experience. Students are prepared to travel long distances from outlying suburbs to have the chance to attend a senior college, for example, that's linked to a university or to go to a TAFE college.

The development of specialist schools would dramatically change the educational scene, and might result in most students having a very positive view of their secondary schooling. Certainly, the opposite is true at the moment.

6

Diversity

In the previous chapter, the notion of encouraging middle and senior schools to specialise was explored, with the aim of encouraging diversity and quick responses to changing needs.

We are all aware of the inertia that develops in established educational institutions. They plod along with an unstoppable momentum of their own, giving comfort, perhaps, to the conservative establishment that controls education, but ensuring that change of any kind is difficult to bring about. The *status quo* is almost set in stone.

If specialist schools are to succeed in competition with established schools they will need to be popular and relevant. The amazing uniformity and conformity which characterise schools today might then be replaced gradually by vibrant, exciting learning communities filled with eager, satisfied young people, whose interests, needs and vocational aspirations are largely fulfilled. Indeed, if a particular school fails to provide this kind of environment, it will, of necessity, have to close its operations through lack of support. This is entirely the situation in which all schools should operate. Why should schools be exempt from the market forces which control every other economic activity outside of government?

Society needs to understand that there is no one answer to what constitutes a good education. The needs of every individual differ, so it is important that young people have many choices in the kind of education they want, together with the ability to easily transfer to another kind if mistakes are made in the directions they choose. Comprehensive schools tried to do this by offering a multitude of choices on one campus. They largely fail for a number of reasons, but

especially because such schools need to be very large, so that many of them become like factories, losing the personal touch that is central to dealing with people. Also, in large, impersonal organisations, standards of excellence are difficult to maintain. In England, for example, large comprehensive schools, established for largely ideological reasons, never matched the academic excellence for which the English grammar schools were renowned. It is equally disappointing that comprehensive schools were also unable to deliver less academic courses at a high level of excellence. ‘One size fits all’ is not a model that can be used in developing a system of successful schools.

A solution, which is much more likely to work successfully, is for a large variety of niche educational opportunities to be on offer, the successful institutions thriving due to public demand, and those that do not fill a perceived need in the community failing. This is a healthy system, which may, however, bring some pain to individual schools. After all, schools are about servicing the needs of the students. The needs of the institutions themselves, even of the teachers and especially of the teacher unions, must be subservient to this basic priority. Over a period of time, it is likely that teachers themselves and those who conduct schools will realise that they are also much better off working with enthusiastic and motivated students in an exciting and vibrant environment.

What kinds of schools will be in popular demand?

Certainly the community would continue to support some of the current schools which might be quite conservative in what they offer. Some will always prefer the traditional school with its strict code including uniforms, prefects, competitive sport, vertical administrative structures, firm discipline imposed by authority, and so on. Others will prefer a more relaxed atmosphere, where teachers and students relate on first name terms, where uniforms are not required and where rules are developed in a co-operative interchange between staff and students. One thing is certain – systems that are accepted by clients (parents and students) will survive. Those that do not will deservedly collapse.

To succeed, all schools will need to offer the following:

- Excellent standards.
- Whether the school specialises in academic, technological or other courses, students will need to feel that the highest standards are maintained. A mobile school population will certainly ensure that this is the case.

- Courses that are relevant to students' interests and vocational needs.
- In addition to basic core studies common to all schools, particular institutions will specialise in the needs of particular clients. Academic schools will establish strong links with universities and offer courses which prepare students for university entrance. As well as maintaining the highest levels of scholarship and research skills, students will need to be inducted to a style of learning that encourages enquiry, self-reliance, depth of understanding, presentation skills and all the other dimensions that universities expect in their students. Other schools will specialise in all the other areas that have been mentioned – trade skills of various kinds, all articulated into TAFE courses. Schools offering courses in technology, especially computer technology, may emerge. Institutions emphasising crafts, the Arts (including drama and dance) may also evolve, as may those that emphasise business, sports and mechanical innovation. There is no limit to the number of niche opportunities that may present themselves to potential educational entrepreneurs. Not all will succeed. Those that survive will certainly do so because they satisfy a need.

How do students choose between so many offerings?

Despite the howls of protest which always emerge from education unions and state government education ministries, when publication of performance data is discussed, it is essential that vital information concerning the performance of schools be available to parents and students. The only people who resist the publishing and dispersal of this information are those that have something to hide.

Information that should be available to the public includes academic results, performance in national measures of literacy and numeracy, measures of student satisfaction, special characteristics and emphases of each school, facilities, links with tertiary institutions and industry, data relating to teacher qualifications and performance and the entrepreneurial and real life educational opportunities available to students. Of course, different sociological backgrounds of students will need to be taken into account in assessing a school's performance, but there is plenty of evidence to suggest that at least 70 per cent of student performance is due to factors relating to teachers rather than environment. Good teachers in good schools almost invariably result in successful students.

The publishing of data, often, denigrated as the ‘league tables’ mentality, needs to be only part of a wide ranging transparency that should characterise all schools, while safeguarding, of course, the privacy of teachers and students as far as is necessary and appropriate.

All schools receiving government funding, public or incorporated, should conform to the same basic rules. Their strategic plans, governance structures, policies and procedures, sources of funding, budgets, financial reports and auditors’ comments should be presented to an annual general meeting, open to the public. This transparency should extend to the selection of staff (while safeguarding privacy issues), ownership structures, service fee arrangements and reporting and communication with both parents, students and the wider community.

This diversity in schools, stimulating, exciting and potentially productive, can only occur where free competition for places exists between schools. Any group which can satisfy conditions of registration set down by a body representative of the teaching profession should be able to set up a school. The whole point of the model is that schools survive and prosper only if they attract sufficient students. Given the funding arrangements set out in Chapter 2 under which all registered schools receive government funding and fees according to the same formula, financial considerations need not be taken into account. Only excellence and appropriateness of course offerings for a particular student need determine choices. Only excellent schools will flourish. These will be schools which attract and employ good teachers. All teachers will have an incentive to work to the best of their ability, to try to improve themselves by continuous professional development and to give students the attention and care they need. Their employment, pay and professional standing will depend on performance and continual review. The ‘drones’, teachers who constantly under-perform, will either lift their game or be forced out of the profession. The client students must benefit.

Students are likely to choose schools, where caring and competent teachers are the norm — schools, in fact, where they can find and enjoy challenges and chances for success. The likely outcome will be students who are happy, focused, involved and enjoying special relationships with caring staff. What a contrast to the existing situation in many schools, as much damning evidence shows.

Encouraging diversity in schooling will also assist in helping disadvantaged students and those with social problems. In the first place there are likely to be many fewer deliberately dysfunctional students in vibrant, caring schools that offer courses appropriate to

students and provide a caring, supportive environment. Specialisation and diversity are likely to limit the problem dramatically. For students with on-going chronic behavioural problems, special schools might be established. Students causing problems in school might be referred to these schools, conducted privately or by government. Specially trained teachers, assisted by appropriate professional counselling, psychological, and psychiatric staff can offer a curriculum rich in challenges, opportunities for success and commendation, based on student interest and with plentiful support. Such courses should, however, be offered in an environment bounded by clear parameters, structures and discipline. For more extreme cases, there might be live-in facilities which specialise in behaviour modification. Return to the normal school should be dependent on satisfying clearly established standards of outlook and behaviour.

Students, who have some form of physical or intellectual disadvantage, should be integrated, as far as possible, into ordinary schools for at least part of the time. Of course they should have access to special care, support and resources, but it is also important that they have opportunities to experience success. It may be necessary for them to attend special centres for particular support, but this should be, as far as possible, only part-time.

The involvement of entrepreneurial groups in setting up schools may be of concern to some. On reflection, however, it is evident that special interest groups such as churches have been successfully involved in an entrepreneurial role in education for over 100 years — indeed since schools became common. There is no reason why, in addition, groups with a particular philosophical view should not sponsor schools. Examples would include Waldorf and Montessori Schools which have a following. If the educational philosophy does not take hold, the school will not survive. Likewise, professional groups such as accountants or lawyers may wish to establish schools offering a special preparation for young people attracted to those professions. Many trades, sporting groups, and arts groups may see an advantage in supporting schools which, in addition to offering a common core curriculum, give a special educational preparation for students interested in following that vocational direction. Provided allowance is made for easy transfer between schools and courses – this will necessitate special Bridging Schools in areas such as mathematics, chemistry and physics – there is no reason why such specialist schools should not cater for the special interests of their young clients.

Many other groups may be interested in establishing and conducting schools. Groups of teachers may form co-operatives in the same way

that groups of doctors own and conduct hospitals. Imagine the incentives for a teacher working in a school of which he or she is a part-owner. Many state schools might more efficiently and cost-effectively be operated by teacher co-operatives. They might start by leasing current state school buildings and transforming them into elite competitive institutions attracting large numbers of discerning clients.

It needs to be recognised that the concept of entrepreneurs receiving service fees and profits for conducting a school is perfectly legitimate. Without incentives, no-one will be prepared to take the risks and expend the energy and imagination needed to undertake the enormous task of establishing, equipping, maintaining and marketing a school. Risk takers deserve to be rewarded. The total cost of entrepreneurial groups conducting schools will certainly be far less than the costs encountered by governments. For one thing, the billions of dollars expended by educational bureaucracies, governments and churches, will be dramatically reduced. Market forces will ensure that costs are kept within bounds, while registration and inspection provisions, together with competition can guarantee that standards of excellence will be in place.

In such an educational environment, it is essential, obviously, that high standards of accountability be met by all schools. Clearly, approved structures of governance must be in place prior to registration. These should be examined and assessed each year. Schools should be subject to an annual inspection, where all functions and activities are scrutinised. Internal evaluation of staff should be mandatory, where Principal, Management Teams and peers evaluate the performance of all staff. Students should also be involved in this process. This evaluation should be shared with each teacher and the opportunity given for a response.

Teacher evaluation will play an important part in improved performance. It will also constitute an important factor in teachers being able to seek promotion and better pay. Teachers who are known to be outstanding, professional educators will be able to demand high financial rewards in an open, competitive market for places. Good teachers can demand appropriate rewards. Others will have a huge incentive to improve. Schools should be about the welfare of their clients – the students. Teachers have the role of servicing students. The nonsense espoused currently by unions, that teachers' conditions and pay should be independent of performance and based only on length of service should no longer have a place in education.

Inevitably, issues will arise about how far this diversity in schools should go. For example, should ethnic schools, as distinct from

religious schools, be allowed? In some cases, of course, the distinction is blurred. Are Jewish schools, for example, ethnic or religious? Should Aboriginal children be educated in Aboriginal schools? There may be good reason for establishing such schools. Provided they satisfy conditions of registration and are financially viable, there is no good reason why they should not exist. A proviso should be, however, for reasons of openness and transparency, that such schools be open to anyone who is prepared to conform to the ethos of the school. A non-Greek, for example, who loves Greek culture, should be able to enrol in a Greek school.

There is probably a special case to be made regarding educational provisions for indigenous young people. At primary level, it is essential to provide schools where they live. In urban situations, some schools might emphasise aboriginal culture, especially through historical and anthropological studies, aboriginal art, dance and music. In this situation, all students could be involved in a celebration of aboriginal culture. Indigenous students, by excelling in these activities, could experience fulfilment, success and status in the school, which might prove very positive.

In summary, diversity of choice in middle and senior schools especially, is likely to transform the experience of school from the current drudgery reported by many adolescents to a much more positive, dynamic and successful model. Only by trialling different kinds of schools can successful institutions be assessed. The sooner such experimentation takes place, the better.

7

Schooling for a Nation

The population of Australia has, from the earliest days of white settlement, been extraordinarily mobile. During the gold-rushes, men and their families were constantly on the move chasing the latest find. Shearers were, and still are, always on the move to the next shed as they follow work. Today, in our segment of the global village, people often travel from state to state to work in companies that have offices Australia-wide. The mining boom, too, has created jobs all over the country, often in very remote areas, with thousands of workers constantly on the move. This is one reason why, despite the vast size of this country, there is extraordinary uniformity in our use of English and in our Australian accent. In Europe, on the contrary, accents and language vary immensely from region to region. People living less than 100 kilometres apart may often barely understand each other. The ethnic groups who migrated to Australia constantly moved, ensuring that cultural uniformity exists from coast to coast.

Each year in Australia, more than 80,000 school students move from state to state. From an educational perspective, it must seem to children like moving to a different country. Each state and territory has its own education ministry and a completely separate infrastructure. Not only is a student moving to another state or territory faced by a completely different and unrelated syllabus in each subject, but even the basic structures of the educational system vary. Some states, for example, have seven years of primary schooling followed by five secondary years. Others divide the program into six primary and six secondary years. States cannot even agree on a common starting age for education, so that students moving interstate may be faced with a peer

group one year older or younger — a huge factor to be faced by a young person at an early stage of development.

Changing systems, then, is often quite traumatic, resulting frequently in students needing to repeat a year of schooling. Imagine the devastation this must cause to the young people involved. Choosing subjects is also a difficulty. Subjects offered, subject names, standards, means of assessment, all vary enormously. So many factors make the move both disruptive and disturbing. Because educational outcomes for young people are one of the most important factors in determining their whole future, this situation is very unfair for those involved. Clearly, action is needed. Everyone, including both Federal and State governments, is aware of the problem. Why has nothing been done? Certainly, there are many difficulties in the way and they will not easily be resolved.

The basic problem is historical in its origins. Extreme pressures resulted from the self-interest involved in the federation of six quite autonomous Australian colonies in 1901. The states were, tragically, given responsibility for education. For a total population in Australia equivalent to no more than that of greater London, nine separate state and territory ministries and complete infrastructures have evolved. This does not include the vast number of educational bureaucracies operated federally and in each state by Catholic, Anglican, Uniting and other Christian Churches, Jewish schools, ethnic schools, Muslim schools and so on. All have an input into the chaos that characterises Australian curricula and syllabuses in schools. Unfortunately, it is very expensive chaos. The cost of operating all these bureaucracies amounts to many billions of dollars, which would be much better spent on the students, who are so seriously affected by this nonsense.

For years, all these groups have acknowledged the problem and for years nothing has been done. At long last, at the 2007 meeting of Commonwealth and State Education Ministers in Darwin, it was unanimously decided to develop a National Curriculum to be in place by 2009.

A National Curriculum

Before proceeding with this discussion, some attempt should be made to clarify terms crucial to the whole debate about a national curriculum for Australians. Generally, the term ‘curriculum’ is used to denote the subjects that make up a course of study in a school or other educational institution. The topics covered within one of the subjects within a curriculum are usually thought to comprise a ‘syllabus’. When the Education Ministers announced that their national curriculum would address the core subjects of English, mathematics, physics, chemistry

and (rather astonishingly) Australian history, they seem to have blurred the distinction between ‘curriculum’ and ‘syllabus’. The problem is not so much one of agreeing the general aims, scope, and areas of study, but of specifying the content, methodologies and assessment processes for each particular subject within the curriculum.

Unfortunately the Darwin discussions degenerated into a farce, as comical as it was unedifying. The Minister from Queensland, Rod Welford, argued that a common ‘curriculum’ was certainly needed. Since Queensland already had the best curriculum (he probably meant syllabuses) in all these core subjects, the rest of the country should simply adapt theirs. This was particularly rich, since it is well known that Queensland’s mathematics syllabuses in Years 11 and 12, for example, are in need of modification simply because students are so poorly prepared in earlier years that they can no longer manage the content of current senior mathematics syllabuses. In that state, as well, after years of an outcomes-based approach to education and the abolition of Year 12 public examinations, the perception among other states and the education community generally is that the Queensland model may not be the best way to go. All the other ministers, of course, agreed that Queensland was correct except in one regard – it was, in fact, their ‘curriculum’ which was the best. One after the other – Victoria, New South Wales, Western Australia and so on, all agreed that one Australian ‘curriculum’ was the way to go – provided it was theirs. The Premier of South Australia, Mike Rann, didn’t want the State to “drop down to the average and to be just the same as the rest of Australia” (Ferrari, 2006).

Sadly, this may be all we can expect from those currently charged with the administration of Australian education.

The ministers agreed to set up a panel of ‘education experts’ to draw up the common syllabuses. One can imagine the chances of the states agreeing on the membership of such a panel, and then accepting its findings, where they differed from current practice in each state.

Other major players in the curriculum debacle are, of course, the professional education associations. Kevin Donnelly, a prominent conservative commentator on education, argues that

> … the Australian Curriculum Studies Association (ACSA), the Australian Council of Deans of Education (ACDE), the Australian Association for the Teaching of English (AATE), and the Australian Education Union (AEU) are committed to using education to transform society in light of what they see as politically correct. (Donnelly, 2007, p. 13)

He asserts that these associations have used their influential positions to shape curriculum development towards their own political goals, hence the steady, but unacknowledged erosion of student attainment in areas of literacy, mathematics, science, history, and other traditional areas of the curriculum.

At the local level, because of the inefficient size of each state government educational administration (and also, because of the inept performance of state education ministers who are generally ill-equipped, in terms of educational background and experience, to manage their portfolios), teacher associations have been able to kidnap the curriculum debate. Their concerns have been mainly ideological rather than educational, teacher-centred rather than student-directed. This has resulted in syllabuses light on content, subservient to political correctness, dumbed down and unaccountable in terms of assessment and reporting of results. State governments and teacher unions clearly believe, as does the general public who are deserting state schools in increasing numbers, that state schools have something to hide. Why, otherwise, would they be so averse to measuring and reporting the performance of both teachers and students?

It bears repeating that the federation of Australian states is in many areas, quite dysfunctional, and absurdly expensive to maintain, in a country with such a small population. John Howard is on record as saying that, if we were starting again, the states would not exist. Of course, he is correct.

This dysfunction is particularly true in relation to health and education – two of the most important areas of government responsibility. The health system lurches from crisis to crisis, with too few doctors, nurses, other medical professionals, hospitals, aged care facilities and so on. Billions of dollars are wasted in duplication of administration and resources. Nevertheless, there is little chance that the states will co-operate in a more efficient system. At all costs, they cling to their constitutional rights. Power, rather than service, is what they are about.

The situation is even worse in education. The states preside over public education systems which are popularly perceived to be under-funded, poorly equipped, and low in both teacher and student morale. Debates about education are dominated by aggressive teacher unions that divert any press for improvement into the lowering of academic standards, the abrogation of public accountability, and the concern primarily for the welfare of the service providers — the teachers — not the clients for whose welfare the system exists.

Establishing a National Curriculum

Can anything positive possibly emerge from the black hole created by the states and teacher unions? How far is it possible to go, in practical terms, to establish a National Curriculum? Some breakthrough may be possible, at least a compromise in core subjects, though agreement will be difficult about what constitutes a subject, and, certainly, which subjects are core or basic. The education ministers have already decided that core subjects should be English, mathematics, physics, chemistry and Australian history. There can be endless debate about why these subjects would be core rather than many others, but it is important to move on.

For mathematics, physics and chemistry, it may be possible without too much difficulty, to agree on a national syllabus. In these subjects, already, there is common ground (varying between 80% and 90%) in the content of Year 12 syllabuses between all states. There is scope, therefore, for significant rationalisation. For example, no fewer than 40 different mathematics syllabuses exist at Year 12 level in this country, but still, at the highest level, about 80 per cent of content is the same between the states.

English may be a more difficult proposition, where agreement on texts and emphases is going to be almost impossible to achieve. One solution might be to have a common subject at every year level throughout Australia called ‘English expression’, similar at Year 12 level, to the subject taught currently in Victoria. This might be a compulsory subject from Reception to Year 12, ensuring that all students completing Year 12 have fundamental skills in spelling, grammar, reading, writing, listening and public speaking.

The case for Australian history is rather more ideological in nature. Whether it should be a core subject, and at what level it should be studied, needs to be argued within a broader consideration of history in general, and the claims of other subjects such as geography, economics and civics. In this context, a reappraisal of the much-maligned compromise provided by Studies of Society and Environment (SOSE) might take place, in conjunction with a discussion of the articulation of subject content across the primary and secondary years.

In short, it may be possible to work out common syllabuses in mathematics, physics and chemistry to be taught in secondary schools throughout Australia. These might be acceptable to all the states. Clearly, however, these particular subjects will not be studied by all students, and at senior secondary level, probably not even by the majority. English expression might possibly be taught as a compulsory

subject throughout all years of schooling. Agreement on content and assessment would be incredibly difficult, but might be possible. Australian history is a more difficult case and agreement between all the competing interests would indeed be hard won.

Core subject uniformity, therefore, is at best only a partial and unsatisfactory solution to the conundrum which exists amongst the states. Can a more far-reaching situation be achieved which benefits all Australian students? The national curriculum debate should not be driven merely by concern for itinerant students. Two larger issues — a balanced learning experience within an already overcrowded curriculum, and the careful delineation of the knowledge and skills that all Australians should share — require expert attention and wide consultation. The national significance of these questions is too great for them to be abandoned to political power ploys.

The Education Ministers agreed in Darwin to set up a group of experts to devise common syllabuses in the core subjects they identified. They need to make a major further step, albeit in the same direction. The Commonwealth, all the States and both Territories need to cede their education powers and responsibilities to a central education authority that includes representation from each of them. How this might be achieved will be addressed in the next chapter.

Probably, states, territories and especially teachers' associations will resist this idea, but at least the education ministers have espoused the principle of an expert body being appointed to establish syllabuses in the core subjects. In the end, the nation needs to realise that there is no other logical way forward. Teachers themselves, as they adopt a more professional approach, will want to take back control over their profession. Ultimately, they and their representatives, in consultation with all interested parties, should control the content of what is taught in schools.

These reforms cannot take place in isolation. So far, the following essential changes have been discussed in this book:

- All schools should be funded according to the same formula, as discussed in Chapter 1. There can be no fairness in a situation where two different classes of schools exist, one perceived to be better than the other. The billions wasted on multiple education bureaucracies would not only allow all schools to be funded fairly, but would also allow much more money for resourcing schools, without necessarily adding to the burden of taxpayers. Current problems facing state schools such as low public esteem, lower standards and poor morale would be eliminated.

- By employing all teachers on contract (unless offered tenure by the school on agreed terms), giving schools the power to employ their own staff on salaries negotiated by individual staff with the school and publishing sufficient data for teachers to be able to demonstrate their quality, professionalism will return to teaching. There is evidence that good teachers are at least twice as effective as poor teachers in assisting student learning outcomes. The latter must be eliminated from schools and the former suitably rewarded for their expertise and dedication.
- Schools themselves need to be specialised, so that they cater better for the needs of individual students. Comprehensive schools tend to bring everything down to a low common denominator. Every school should be a centre of excellence, with specialised offerings taught at the highest levels, with links and pathways to tertiary learning.

Given these reforms, how might a national curriculum evolve?

Responsibilities of a National Curriculum Board

A National Curriculum Board might be composed of a relatively small number of curriculum experts. This board would be required, (by establishing expert sub-committees), to examine all current Australian curricula and syllabuses, but, more importantly, world's best practice. They would be responsible for developing a curriculum and syllabuses to be used in every school in Australia.

How far should the common curriculum and syllabuses be legislated? Does every subject at every level of schooling need to be set out in minute detail? Clearly this would be restrictive and frustrating for professional teachers. What needs to be done?

The first task required of the National Curriculum Board would be to set the basic structure of primary and secondary classes throughout Australia with a common age of commencement. Since research seems to suggest that it is during Year 8 that the so-called 'wheels fall off' in terms of student satisfaction with schools, there is an argument for seven primary years followed by five years of secondary schooling. The Board would carefully need to consider all the evidence — including, in particular, issues relating to middle schooling — both from Australia and from the rest of the world before making these decisions.

For the core subjects of mathematics, physics and chemistry, there is already wide agreement on acceptable Year 12 standards for courses proceeding to tertiary level in science, engineering and mathematical

sciences. These rigorous subjects, suitable only for students pursuing academic courses leading to these disciplines, need to have detailed syllabuses developed at each level from Years 8 to 12 together with an order in which topics will be treated. Students transferring to another state will, therefore, be disadvantaged only minimally. There will be some inconvenience for teachers, but that is a necessary price to pay to assist the many thousands of students on the move.

For the core subject of English expression, the National Curriculum Board may well set up syllabuses for all years from R to Year 12. Probably an option model would be followed, where certain core skills and outcomes would be expected and assessed at each year level. Students could develop their skills further through the study of optional topics. Those failing to meet required levels of attainment would be assisted by remedial work until they met the required standard.

Rather than make Australian history a core study throughout more than twelve years of schooling, the National Board might develop a course which was taught for one or two years. Students do not react positively to being forced to study materials which they feel they already know.

The National Curriculum Board, through sub-committees of experts, appointed by them on the recommendation of Specialist Subject Committees in each state, would need to establish detailed secondary syllabuses over a wide range of subjects. This would include academic subjects suitable for those wishing to proceed to university. Other courses, including those in technology, business, the arts and the skills-based areas, would be set up for those wishing to proceed to TAFE and to other areas of learning and skills development. For the Years 8 to 11, a core and options model might be established, where essential learning and skills are set in the core, and studied in sequence to allow for students transferring interstate.

The whole structure seems cumbersome, but remember that the total number of students in Australia approximates to those in Greater London. In that city, all students follow the same syllabuses in the core areas.

For the primary Years R to 7, where the content of some subjects might be more flexible, the National Curriculum Board might set core syllabuses in English expression, mathematics and science. For Years 8 to 12 science might expand to include physics, chemistry and, perhaps, biology and geology. The National Curriculum Board would decide the content of all core subjects and the sequence in which they would be taught. Options would need to be submitted to the National Curriculum Board for registration to ensure that high standards were preserved. Schools might have the right to teach subjects not registered by the

National Curriculum Board, but this would need to be made clear to parents and students.

In all schools and at every level, all learning and skills need to be assessed. Students transferring interstate, however, would be assessed only on the core syllabus and those parts of the options that they had fully attended.

Advantages of a National Curriculum

A National Curriculum established according to the guidelines outlined in this chapter would have many benefits for Australia:

- The 80,000 students (approximately) who transfer interstate each year would no longer be seriously disadvantaged.
- Many cost savings and efficiencies would be gained by eliminating the huge number of educational bureaucracies operating in Australia with its relatively small population.
- World's best practice would be open to every student in Australia.
- Resources currently wasted in the development of a vast plethora of courses could be focused into a single national curriculum and its attendant syllabuses.
- Students could be easily assessed across the whole country, making it possible to identify areas of disadvantage and to do something about them.
- The Tertiary Entrance Result (TER) currently used for tertiary entrance based on Year 12 results could be based on knowledge and skills rather than the statistical considerations currently used. On the face of it, the fairest method of determining tertiary entrance is on the results of public examinations on national syllabuses. All students in Australia, by law, have equal rights to enter any university in any state. Transparent fairness requires the same tests across the same curricula.
- Local content can be included in syllabuses through options approved by the National Curriculum Board, which will ensure standards are met.
- Schools offering an academic focus can offer a curriculum worked out in partnership between the National Curriculum Board and universities.
- Other schools can specialise in courses in trades, less academically oriented courses in the arts, sports, fashion and so on, in partnership

with relevant and appropriate organisations, for example, TAFE, NIDA, Tertiary colleges for the Arts, sporting and business representatives, and so on. All these courses would be co-ordinated throughout the country and qualifications would be accepted and transferable nationally.

The National Curriculum Board, representing the teaching profession, would ensure that the highest professional standards applied in all schools and in all courses, and that they were appropriately assessed. Their task would be to make Australian schools the equal of any in the world. Australia cannot afford to settle for any less.

8

Controlling the Standards

Ceding control

It is inconceivable that state governments would cede their constitutional powers over education to the Commonwealth Government (or vice-versa). So, is it realistic to suggest that the ludicrous situation of Australia supporting dozens of often bloated educational bureaucracies be changed? The national interest is usually the last consideration of state politicians. A solution is needed which:

- leaves the funding and control of education in the hands of the states as the constitution demands;
- allows the education profession itself to manage education rather than politicians;
- eliminates the costly nonsense of maintaining large numbers of educational and ministerial bureaucracies in a country with only 3.3 million students.

The following suggestions just might work to resolve the conundrum.

- The states agree to continue funding education at the same average rate as at present but making a CPI adjustment automatically each year.
- The states dissolve their educational bureaucracies, sending those that are capable back to teaching. An independent audit be taken of the total costs of running these bureaucracies and the amounts saved committed by the states to education (with automatic indexation according to CPI).

- The states reduce their education ministry departments to a minister supported by a very small staff. The education minister in each state picks a single outstanding educator with appropriate administrative background to represent the state on a central National Board of Education.
- The education profession in each state also picks one outstanding educator to serve on the National Board of Education. The education professionals in the two territories also nominate one representative between them and the Commonwealth Government also appoints a professional educator. None of these representatives can have links with any political party. The National Board of Education needs to be totally focused on educational issues and quite divorced from political posturing. The National Board of Education consists then of sixteen members, each representing a state, territory or the Commonwealth Government, but, in every case, representing primarily the education profession and the interests of students.
- The National Board of Education is funded mainly by the states through the three sources i.e. current average per capita spending, bureaucratic savings and ministerial office savings, and these amounts are indexed to the CPI each year.
- These sums are supplemented by the Commonwealth Government by an audited amount equivalent to their total current expenditure on primary and secondary education together with their costs in operating the Commonwealth educational bureaucracy. Again this amount would be indexed automatically according to CPI. Finally a set fee of $2,000 pa (again indexed to CPI but tax deductible and means tested) be charged to every student in the country to ensure ownership of education by parents and families.
- In this way, funding for education would be removed from the political arena and guaranteed automatically. Total funding would be well in excess of that currently available and controlled by educators rather than politicians. The National Board of Education would control a single bureaucracy managing education throughout the country. Every school would be totally independent and an autonomous organisation, funded on a per capita basis according to a socio-economic status system administered by the National Board of Education.
- Control of education would still be in the hands of the states through their representatives on the National Board of Education. Ultimate control, however, would be with the education profession

itself, which clearly is to the benefit of the nation. The childish posturing of individual states would no longer have a place and would certainly not be missed.

High standards

In the global village, economies can no longer be sheltered. High standards of living entail the ability to compete in global markets. This in turn necessitates a highly educated and creative workforce. Our education system cannot afford to be mediocre – it must be a world leader.

How do Australian schools stand against those of other countries? The answer is difficult to gauge. On some measures, for example the PISA 2000 test, Australia ranked second out of 32 in literacy and fifth in mathematics (Donnelly, 2007, OECD, 2000). This sounds wonderful until it is realised that this test does not take into account factors such as spelling, grammar or punctuation. Another study, the World Economic Forum Report, which found one third of our 15-year old students to be functionally illiterate, ranked Australia 29th out of 125 countries in mathematics and science, well behind South Korea, Japan, the Netherlands, the Czech Republic, Hong Kong and Singapore (Ferrari, 2007d). In the *Weekend Australian* in May of this year, Dr. John Ridd, a scientist, described science courses in Queensland as being pre-Newtonian, because they were mainly descriptive and taught no mathematical science in Years 8, 9 and 10 (Ferrari, 2007). The TIMSS results (IEA, 2003) found that a large proportion of Year 8 students lack background skills. Clearly, the answer to the question that began this paragraph must therefore be, 'Not very well!'

More is needed in this country than just affluence. Australians want a fairer society, where everyone has an equal opportunity to succeed. Our communities contain many disadvantaged groups — the poor, the disabled, many indigenous people, some migrant groups, and so on. The only hope of a fair go for these people is through access to excellent schools and excellent teachers. A better system should cater for all of these. This is certainly not the case at the moment.

Where schools have had difficulty in catering for students who — through lack of ability, lack of interest, inability to access competent and professional teachers, poorly conducted schools or whatever reason — are unable to reach required standards, their response, especially in the government sector, has often been to drop standards to the lowest common denominator. Much has been written about 'outcomes based learning' where the learning outcomes of individuals rather than objective academic standards form the basis for student assessment.

The national literacy and numeracy tests are set at a very low level so that most students receive a satisfactory result. Nevertheless, approximately one in every five students in Year 7 does not have the basic numeracy skills required to succeed in secondary school. The situation appears to get worse as students progress through school: at Year 3, the number of students not meeting the numeracy benchmarks is six per cent; by Year 5 this increases to nine per cent, and by Year 7 the figure is 18 per cent. This must say something about the effects of the schooling system. In the TIMSS 2003 study, Singapore's Year 8 students out-performed Australian students at the advanced mathematical level by a factor of 44 to seven. In science, the comparison was 35 to five (Donnelly, 2007).

Australia has one of the lowest secondary school completion rates in the developed world with almost one in five 20-24 year-olds neither finishing secondary school nor still in education. The supply of trained mathematicians and statisticians is inadequate and decreasing. Secondary school mathematics is often taught by teachers with inadequate mathematical training, yet research shows that one of the determinants of successful learning is a teacher's mastery of the subject. It has been shown there is neither a strong nor consistent relationship between the volume of resources invested in education and student outcomes. In other words, the system is not working well, especially in the basic areas, and extra resources alone will not fix it.

The real situation is probably that Australia has a reasonably adequate education system by world standards, but lags significantly behind the best. In an internationally competitive environment, this is simply not good enough.

It is little wonder that Year 12 retention rates in this country are so low. Many students are not challenged in their learning. Many more study courses in which they have little interest, in schools that have little idea of what they are about.

In earlier chapters, an educational environment has been described where a diversity of offerings is available in schools which specialise in a range of areas of interest. These institutions would survive and prosper only by being committed to the highest standards of excellence in their field, by helping and encouraging their students to obtain quality results and by gaining the approval of students and parents. Schools that do not satisfy the needs and aspirations of their clients do not deserve to exist.

An important factor in the superior esteem given to independent schools is the involvement of parents in these institutions. Parents are much more likely to be concerned with the educational process if they

have a financial stake in the outcome. Even low-fee independent schools attract a good deal of parental input, which is reflected in the attitudes of students. A financial outlay leads to a sense of ownership of the education taking place. This is not so evident in state schools, where parents often see education as entirely the business of the school. Of course, it suits teacher unions to avoid parents interacting too closely with teachers, because accountability might be demanded for children's performance.

Quality can only be assessed by careful measurement. The achievements of students need to be measured for at least two reasons. On one hand, students need to be reassured that the academic standards they have reached are satisfactory on objective measures for progress to the next step of the ladder. On the other hand, if their standard in any area is below par, then it is important that this is apparent from results so that remedial action can be undertaken.

The results achieved by students with particular teachers also need to be assessed. A truly professional teacher needs to know how well his or her students are performing. Critical feedback will ensure that standards and methodology employed by teachers are always carefully assessed, so that professional improvement is always happening. Obviously, teachers will take into account the sociological background of students and other factors that might affect their performance. They will, however, be well aware that at least 70 per cent of student performance depends on the quality of the teacher and only 30 per cent on the background and environmental factors related to the students. Students should be given the opportunity to assess their teachers – their competence, dedication, care for their students, and ability to inspire – and the feedback given to teachers so that they can use the information to improve their performance.

One of the worst things that ever happened for teacher professionalism was the unionisation of the profession. Teachers' institutes became teacher unions. Professionals became industrial workers. Now, incompetent and uncaring drones demand the same financial rewards as dedicated, highly competent and caring professionals. Length of service determines pay rather than expertise but, surely, a top teacher is worth as much as a top doctor or lawyer. Good teachers would be served much better by negotiating their own wages and conditions. If all teachers had to prove their expertise to obtain their jobs, and tenure was not guaranteed, inadequate teachers would be eliminated from the profession, to the great advantage of students.

Schools also need to be assessed. Data relevant to the performance of staff and students should be publicly available so that parents can make

informed choices about the schools their children attend. Surely it is to everyone's advantage to know how schools rate. Australia needs to have schools which rank among the best in the world. In a competitive environment, where schools need to demonstrate their standards of excellence over a broad range of parameters, the best will flourish and those below standard will fail, which is exactly what should happen.

High standards will be reached only when every aspect of student learning is rigorously and objectively assessed. Many different methods are available and will include public examinations, written tests, multi-response assessments, research projects, oral presentations, essays, entrepreneurial ventures, creative performances and so on. Teachers should put in place those that are most appropriate. The standard must never be what an individual student is deemed to be capable of, but one appropriate for the whole national cohort. Everyone needs to be encouraged to operate outside their comfort zone to achieve at a high level.

Not all students will be able to achieve high standards in academic schools. Nor should they need to. Fewer than 20 per cent of students will gain entry to a university, where they will pursue academic studies on the way to a professional career. The majority of students will wish to develop high level skills in trades, the arts, fashion, design, sports, and so on, taking them through TAFE College, an apprenticeship or other form of skills training. In all of these situations, it is equally important to maintain the highest standards. Just as it is important for specialist academic schools to maintain close links with universities, schools emphasising skills-based courses need to liaise with TAFE Colleges and other skills education providers. Wherever possible, these institutions should also provide training in entrepreneurial and marketing, and provide authentic assessment underpinned by a sound grasp of theory.

For many students, the opportunity to attend an institution offering courses at the highest standard may involve a willingness to be mobile. Specialist schools of every kind, providing the best resources, will probably be limited in number. Market forces will help determine a spread of locations, but some travel may well be required of students. In the United States, students expect, as a matter of course, to travel to a university or tertiary college to which they can gain access and which satisfies their needs and aspirations. For such students, a range of suitable accommodation is provided – boarding houses, home-stay, and student apartments. Some students — people from remote areas, some with a disability or special need, those with specialised interests — have always needed boarding schools of some kind.

Students in the last year or two of secondary school may need sometimes to be mobile to have access to the standards they ought to be able to find in every school. No institute of education can be allowed to exist which does not operate at a high level. Fairness to every student and the good of the nation require nothing less.

9

Resolving the Challenges

Four challenges that schools must resolve provide the structure for this chapter and include:

- De-institutionalised Learning
- Conformity or Creativity
- The Claims and the Reality
- Homework

De-institutionalised learning

Learning is something quite different from schooling. Learning can, and often does, take place outside of schools, while, sadly, it is probably true that, in some schools, very little learning takes place.

In 1971, Illich startled the world by claiming that our common experience of schools indicated that what happened there influenced little in our lives directly or profoundly. Schooling was not only inefficient in terms of education, but also profoundly divisive. Schools retained their prestigious place in society because they were the major means of preserving the *status quo*. School appropriates the money, men and goodwill available for education and in addition discourages other institutions from assuming educational tasks. What happens in schools is referred to by Illich (1971 p.19) as "instruction ... in a curriculum of conditions which the candidate must meet if he is to make the grade". School links instruction – but not learning – to these roles.

Illich's view of schools was certainly extreme and has generally been rejected. The consensus is that learning is more likely to take place in institutions of learning (schools) than in their absence. In the same way, public health is more likely to be served best in institutions of medicine (hospitals). The more likely truth is that, while schools assist learning, and an excellent school system underpins a modern, progressive society, much learning takes place outside schools. No society can afford to neglect opportunities for de-institutionalised learning.

In order to live life to the full, we must begin with the premise that education should be a life-long process. It follows, then, that much learning should take place outside institutions. Indeed, it is during our earliest years, well before we proceed to a pre-school institution, or school itself, that learning takes place at its fastest rate. Children learn to eat, to speak, to walk, to relate, to feel, to absorb and accommodate a whole range of values and emotions — in fact to operate as a functioning human — well before they attend any form of school. This astonishingly rapid learning takes place, almost unconsciously, with parents, the wider family, siblings and others, of all ages, with whom they come into contact. This earliest and, in most cases, most efficient learning takes place, commonly, in a most unstructured way, even though young children may demand and impose their own structures.

The media play an important role in education and learning, inside but mostly outside schooling. Through ubiquitous television, radio, newspaper, magazines, film and the internet, young people are faced with a wealth of information, views, attitudes, mores and values that far outweigh what can be taught in educational institutions. It may not have the form and logic of the schoolroom curriculum, but in sheer volume, breadth and depth, it constitutes a vast body of learning, all encompassing and all embracing. Never before has the entire population been exposed to so much information. Never has the entire culture of nations been so formed by the modern media. At one level, this has resulted in a cohesive society, sharing, within quite narrow parameters, views, information and even values. At another level there is unquestioned opportunity for cynical manipulation of entire societies by those who control the media. Far and away the most effective, and the most dangerous, instrument of learning and education is the media, yet it is controlled by very few individuals, who brook no interference in the way they use their power.

For young people, one of the most important formative influences is the world of entertainment. The music industry, in particular, influences teenagers especially. Their lives often revolve around the stars of the industry. Their views on life are coloured, in a most dynamic way, by

the lyrics of songs, which are continually churning about in their minds. Their role-models are the singers and groups that have captured their innermost beings and their total discipleship (even if it is often temporary). These high-profile artists blaze across the sky like comets at night, profoundly influencing their group of devotees who constitute the comet’s tail. Most stars of entertainment are not noted for the profundity of their philosophy or understanding of life, but they certainly have more influence over the young than the wisest of teachers, at least in the short term. The entertainment industry creates a whole peer mentality, resisted by only a few, and by these only at the cost of exclusion from mainstream culture. Some entertainment groups, realising their power and influence, do try to influence teenagers towards ideals that they consider worthwhile – ecological and social issues, for example – but most simply reflect a hedonistic view of life, which is almost totally at odds with what schools would usually hold as the values they are trying to teach.

Governments are also heavily into the business of influencing the knowledge, learning and values of society. All governments cynically attempt to control the way people think. If this is not done, then their opponents will be able to make their views dominate and governments will lose their power. One would expect, then, that the populace would treat the pronouncements of governments with great caution. Surprisingly, for perhaps the majority of people, this is not the case. Perhaps people have grown weary of the all-encompassing, constant barrage by media and other powerful forces, continually pressing their views, edited information and values. It is easier to accept rather than challenge the irrepressible surge that confronts us everywhere. Governments surround themselves with advisers, who monitor carefully every strand of information fed to the public. The views of government are continually presented, in simplistic and whitewashed form, to a populace that grows ever wearier of questioning the data. In the end, distrust becomes so rampant that, in a democracy at least, the government is thrown out, and the whole cynical exercise begins again with a new government.

Certainly, whatever the problems, individuals learn much more outside school than within. The place of schools within the total perspective of education is therefore limited at best. Certainly Fidel Castro’s promise, in the early 1970s, that by 1980 Cuba would be able to dissolve its university, since all of life in Cuba would be an educational experience, became a sick joke. Educational institutions are an essential basis for learning, but it is also true that their mere existence does not guarantee learning, or at least effective learning, within a society.

The greatest benefit for schools is their efficiency in making education happen. They ensure that virtually everyone in the population receives a given basic standard of instruction (not necessarily learning – Illich's distinction). Despite early promising results, especially in the area of literacy, Cuba's experience — once the excitement of the revolution subsided — emphasised that little learning takes place in societies that have few schools. Illich (date, p.17) bemoaned the fact that

> countries are rated like castes whose educational dignity is determined by the average years of schooling of its citizens, a rating which is closely related to per capita gross national product.

The fact is that modern economies do depend on their schooling system. Even impoverished nations usually have some basic form of schooling, but the better the system, usually the better the economy and, consequently, the better the standard of living of a nation. There is certainly a connection between schools and the wealth of any country. The nature of that connection is, however, rather obscure.

But the institutionalisation of education through schools produces a number of negatives. Learning should be an intensely personal experience. Every person, in the intimacy of one's own mind, views and understands the world from a different perspective. Learning in the classroom, on the other hand, necessarily entails a degree of uniformity. Certainly, a good teacher can, to a degree, cater for individual differences. By the same token, the influence of a good teacher, especially in senior classes, should diminish as the capacity of students to learn independently increases. How often does this happen in practice?

The mass production of education through grouping students into classes of a size that precludes much interaction or sharing of ideas, has other less desirable effects. Grouping people necessarily implies some erosion of individual rights and liberty, because — to the extent that people share in a community of any sort — they lose personal freedom and autonomy. Learners, who wish to think with originality and independence, need strategies whereby they can learn outside the classroom. Form and structure in learning can do battle with insight and innovation. Strategies must evolve whereby schools can cater for individuals, even eccentric and non-conforming individuals, because these qualities can themselves bear the seeds of genius.

The dignity of the person needs to be preserved in the classroom situation as well as the quality of relationship between the teacher and learner. Too often, where discipline problems exist and students lack motivation, an authoritarian dimension can creep into the educative cauldron. Inevitably negative emotions will be unleashed, which will

effectively disrupt all meaningful learning. Can an appreciation of individual rights survive the process of institutionalised education? This will require much thought and reflection, because the practical reality is that it rarely does.

The problems associated with schools as institutions can be ameliorated to an extent as they become less closed to outside influences. Some schools, for example, make a real effort to be more integrated into the community. This operates in two ways. In the first case, various members of the community are invited into the school, and integrated into the educational processes within the school. This can happen with parents, various businesses, social workers, professionals with valuable insights into aspects of life, services such as police and ambulance officers, politicians, celebrities and the like. All of these can offer insight into learning different from those available to the teaching community. With careful selection, preparation and organisation, students can gain much greater breadth in the appreciation of their universe. In the second case, students can be taken, or encouraged to go themselves, into the community, by teachers who realise what sorts of effective learning can take place there.

Vast resources exist outside the school. It is important that students be exposed to many rich experiences, which must then be carefully integrated by skilled teachers into the learning fabric. Schools can encourage learning by working closely with a multitude of groups outside the institution. Young people can spend time gaining work experience in local businesses and in industry. Spending time in community service organisations can be a real eye-opener for young people, secluded from the harsher realities of life by home and school. The barrier between secondary and tertiary education is as artificial as that between primary and secondary. To defer reality to the last years of secondary school, this transition must be managed much better than the shambles that exists at present.

Finally, school students need to spend time working in the social support systems which are supposed to operate as a safety net at the fringes of mainstream society. Contact with the sick, the poor, the disabled and the disadvantaged is essential to a rounded education and a realistic view of the world. Effective schools need to move out from their narrow, sheltered enclaves to become engaged with the real world outside. Students will reject an education, which they see as unrelated to their experience. Most schools, I suggest, fail to measure up, when judged by those criteria.

Advances in technology have given rise to further possibilities in de-institutionalising education. The content of education can be easily

organised into computerised segments, which can lead to quite rich investigations and the acquisition of deep understanding. Methods of computerised instruction are improving constantly and are now an essential adjunct to classroom teaching. Because highly motivated students can access information quickly using computers, learning can take place anywhere, especially at home. Furthermore, the internet has made resources for research, at any level, available to everyone. Technology can make real, personalised, learning take place, increasingly, outside schools. Can schools be flexible enough to engage students in the learning process inside and outside the campus? Motivation can be a problem for self-paced learning, as can organisation and assessment. If students are to emerge from institutions of learning as mature scholars, responsible for their own learning and with a love of and commitment to, enquiry and development of their knowledge, the emphasis must devolve from the institution to the individual. Good schools will need to incorporate all manner of revolutionary ideas to re-engage a generation of students thoroughly alienated from what happens at school.

Conformity or creativity

The question of just what do we want from schools to prepare an educated workforce deserves to be examined in more depth. Modern economies make demands that are quite different from those of 50 years ago. Yet, how much have schools changed during that time to accommodate those demands?

Today, workers must be very flexible, able to incorporate a number of different skills into their job, since the nature of what they are doing is constantly varying. Work that is important and mainstream today may be redundant and no longer in demand tomorrow. For this reason, schools need to prepare people to respond quickly to a variety of demands, to adapt to new and demanding situations, and, above all, to be willing to re-train when necessary. Nevertheless, they must possess a set of basic skills, especially in the use of computers and technology, so that the retraining process does not always need to begin again at the most basic level.

Schools in the past were very successful in instilling the discipline needed to work for long hours in sometimes unchallenging tasks, without the prospect of short-term fulfilment (apart from wages). This result remains true to an extent even today. More and more, however, people are able to choose the times and even the locations of work. Many jobs allow for quite flexible working hours; most computer-based jobs, for example, can be done at any time convenient to the

workers, provided they have access to computers and the appropriate software. Often there are advantages in such workers operating at home. Communication remains easy using mobile phone, fax and e-mail, while costly office space becomes less necessary, if the home can be an extension of the workplace. Production-line type jobs still exist, and in many others, a disciplined workforce remains critically important. This discipline function of schools, therefore, remains important, but no longer the central basis for education that it once was.

Perhaps the greatest change in the nature of work has been the increased need for operators who are creative and innovative. Modern economies engage great numbers of people in service industries, professions and support work for these areas of employment. Because countries with a high standard of living generally cannot compete with emerging economies in the manufacture of basic goods, they need to invent niche specialties, artefacts that, because of their quality, style, presentation and difference, make them desirable to consumers. To preserve a manufacturing base, these countries must rely on the production of creative articles developed by creative workers.

All this means that many of our young workers must emerge at the cutting edge of development in their area of production, especially if they work in an area associated with scientific innovation. Large profits can be made provided they can think outside the square. Scientific research, therefore, needs to be concentrated in areas where financial rewards will follow discovery. Indeed, the emphasis on science courses today, especially in tertiary institutions, is much more on development of new sciences such as biochemistry and nanotechnology. Schools, however, persist with studies of physics, chemistry and biology, that certainly provide the required basic knowledge for young people wishing to embark on scientific careers, but even at secondary school level, the courses need to have a flavour and direction in tune with the economy.

Engineers and technologists, too, from their earliest encounters with their studies, should be encouraged to search for products and new ways of doing things that will distinguish their work from that available, cheaply, in the developing world. Only by working in niche markets and developing a worldwide reputation in specialist areas, can we expect this country to compete against the much lower costs of those offering mainstream services abroad. Builders, architects, artists and designers must all learn, from their earliest years, to emphasise new and exciting ways of doing things. The very survival of our nation and our way of life ultimately depend on our education system producing innovators and entrepreneurs.

The conflict between the contrasting educational aims of conformity and creativity is not as clear-cut as it might seem. Both are seen as desirable outcomes in different educational models, with strengths and weaknesses in each.

The Japanese education system, for example, took over many of the features of nineteenth century English schools. Emphasis is on rote learning, a mechanical process not often associated with deep understanding. Students take copious notes, but seldom ask questions. Interchange of ideas between teachers and students is rare. In the more than one hundred English Language schools conducted by one Japanese company, every student in every school, at the equivalent level, was studying the same page of the same textbook at the same time. As the company had spent millions developing this book, teachers were expected to follow it, lesson by lesson at exactly the same pace. All students were assessed in the same way at the same time. The library in each school consisted of less than twenty books. Since most students passed the course successfully, the company saw no reason to change any aspect of their method of instruction. Interestingly, the majority of teachers in those schools were from English-speaking countries. Japanese students expect an emphasis on conformity, on rote learning, long hours of instruction and private study, demanding but predictable exams and assessment, with a clear dichotomy between success and failure. Students, who study in secondary schools abroad, generally find re-entry into the Japanese system at tertiary level very difficult.

Japanese industry often reflects this education system. Great attention is given to detail and getting things uniformly excellent. As a result, the products of Japanese manufacturing are legendary for their longevity and quality control. On the other hand, it would be wrong to argue that the Japanese are not innovators, but only copiers of ideas. Certainly, many of their top scientists and engineers do further training abroad. But it seems that at some stage of their training, their technologists do create new ways of doing things. Perhaps the system of rewarding workers for suggesting better ways of producing artefacts leads to incremental improvements. At any rate, because of or despite the conformity valued at every level of enterprise, the Japanese system has been amazingly successful.

Many schools in the United States emphasise creativity far more than conformity. Understanding and enquiry are much more important than rote learning, and students are encouraged to enquire and seek answers. Assessment at school level is not so important. Tertiary access, through a common College Entrance Examination Board assessment, ranks

American students according to aptitude. Discipline is often not a priority, to the extent that in some schools, disorder reigns and armed guards have to patrol corridors.

It should be noted, however, that this picture of education applies within the big cities rather than outside them. The great majority of Americans live in small towns of less than 100,000 people. Their views are often amazingly conservative. In southern states, especially, religiosity pervades the culture. More than half the people, for example, believe in the Bible account of creation rather than the theory of evolution. In schools outside the city, more traditional attitudes to education, and especially to discipline, persist. Conformity is probably as important as creativity, therefore, in the education of the greater number of young Americans.

The products of the two educational systems, Japan and the United States, at the workplace level, are surprisingly similar. In both countries, the workforce is very disciplined, accustomed to working long hours, enjoying only short holidays, and displaying great commitment and loyalty to their jobs. Both countries display enormous creativity at the technical level. There is a culture of ‘can do’ rather than the lack of confidence displayed by many less successful economies. Both countries reward quality, creativity and innovation.

Elements of conformity are very evident in Australian schools. Every state and territory promotes a different curriculum, but, within these states and territories, most schools vary little in what is taught and, often, how it is taught. Discipline is valued highly in all Australian schools, even if independent schools are often perceived by the community to inculcate good order more successfully than government schools. Timetables vary little between schools, which operate, usually, only between the hours of approximately 8.30am and 4.00pm (other than for sport and extra-curricular activities which are generally in decline). Most schools, even government schools insist on students wearing a uniform. This gives rise to issues of how, and if, the uniform is worn, since students are not always committed to high standards of personal presentation. Sadly, this is sometimes true also of teachers, so students’ attitudes in this regard are, perhaps, understandable. On the whole, few schools are really innovative or different, though some are far more effective than others in accomplishing the rather mundane and well-trodden standards, which characterise most of them.

Australian schools, nevertheless, do produce a significant number of inventors, entrepreneurs, scientists, engineers, architects, artists, fashion designers and so on. The question must be asked how many of these result from, or despite, what schools are about. In specific areas,

such as art, design, drama and music, schools often promote creativity. Amazingly high standards are frequently found in drama productions, rock and roll eisteddfods and exhibitions of art and design. But how creative are our teachers and students in mathematics, sciences, and technological classes? Is the emphasis continually on not only solving problems, but inventing new problems needing solutions? Certainly, basic ideas and skills need to be taught and absorbed, but always in the exciting contest of practical relevance and commercial applications. The earlier our school students recognise the importance of manufacturing and services being at the cutting edge, the better. Part of student assessments should indicate the creative nature of the students' work. Much thought needs to be given to how this can be brought about.

If schools are to be centres of creativity and new ideas, then teachers themselves should be interesting and creative people, and educational administrators should be promoting an environment where such people are valued and encouraged.

Are teachers generally creative people? Are dynamic men and women, able to think outside the square, attracted to the profession of education? Are such people encouraged to try new ways of doing things, and rewarded for doing them differently? Do principals promote and expect best practice from teaching staff? Is continuing professional development expected from all teachers, and are they required to demonstrate their use of new approaches to teaching the curriculum and encouraging new ways of assessing creative outcomes?

Until a teaching profession evolves, where excellence and innovation are valued more than experience (which is often just a poor excuse for doing things the same way and refusing to change), no improvement is possible. Such teachers need to work in an exciting school environment, where new ideas and ways of doing things are encouraged. The system must be rid of tired old principals, who thrive on mediocrity. Teachers, who never had, or who lack, dynamic qualities and leadership, should not be allowed into contact with young people in school.

To be frank, the current situation in our schools is nothing like that which the country needs, and which young people deserve. Nothing short of a revolution is needed in the way schools are conducted. It can be done. Examples exist of groups of young people, taking apart motor engines in a TAFE class and assembling them again, so that they work better and more efficiently. Total interest and exciting collaboration characterise such educational encounters. So, too, does a group of geography students studying environmental issues among rain forests

or seashores — totally involved in their studies, and keen to work together to change and to improve. It takes flair. But it is achievable.

The claims and the reality

Schools are generally quite articulate in expressing what they are about. Most publish a range of aims, objectives, goals and mission statements indicating at least the broad directions which they wish to follow. As can be expected, most of these documents are heroic, to say the least, in what they promise. Fortunately, they tend to be broad enough in their scope to ensure that the schools are unlikely to ever be brought to account for their achievement or otherwise. The vision may be set down, if not in stone, at least in public, printed form, but the intended outcomes are usually vague and difficult to measure.

If schools were able to produce the effects on individuals which they promise to attempt, then some amazing people would be emerging from our educational institutions and society would be radically transformed. Let us examine some of these statements, taken from actual printed sources.

Schools usually portray themselves as promoting social values that are accepted as integral to a healthy and flourishing community. These social aims usually include

- creating an environment of mutual respect,
- promoting a climate of positive encouragement for the young,
- giving personal and vocational guidance to students,
- providing an atmosphere within the school that is open and friendly,
- making students independent,
- encouraging students to pursue their personal interests,
- preparing students for the world of work, especially by liaison of the school with business and industry, and
- emphasising pastoral care.

Schools usually claim that they are preparing students for adulthood, participation in democracy, and participation in enterprise, and fostering responsibility, development as individuals, and a range of similar ideals.

Whether schools honestly believe that their aims are achieved with the majority of their students, or are simply unachievable ideals towards which they strive, the facts seem to suggest that the products of

educational institutions are not always the well-rounded, highly motivated and brilliantly skilled individuals that might be expected from 12 or more years of schooling.

Without being too cynical, let us briefly examine the reality in most schools.

- Does a climate of mutual respect really exist? If so, why is bullying among students a major concern in so many schools? Do students generally respect and have regard for the rights of other students? How well do teachers show respect towards the students they teach? What data is available about regard for teachers by students? There are many examples of situations where all these questions can be addressed positively. There are a few schools, where a climate of real harmony exists and a community has been created where individuals have their rights protected and promoted. The evidence and common experience indicate, however, that these aims are rarely achieved in schools. Indeed, in many if not most schools, individuals – staff and students – have to survive in a climate of stress and even trauma. Teachers find their relations with students are far from the friendly, co-operative situation expressed in the school's goals. The negative attitudes of students towards teachers, backed up by a very large body of evidence, are a sad indictment of the lack of success of schools in promoting a climate of respect.
- Do students feel they work in an environment, where they are encouraged to excel and are supported positively in their development? Or is it a more common situation for them to find themselves in a crowded classroom, with a harassed teacher in front of them, struggling to impose order and discipline? The latter situation necessarily engenders poor relations, which flow through to a sense of helplessness among many students. There are certainly good, caring teachers, who are constant in the encouragement they bring to their charges. The perception of students, supported by a great weight of evidence, however, is that these teachers are in the minority.
- Most schools do have in place counselling support for students for both personal problems and to investigate vocational directions. In most schools, by the same token, the resources are severely limited. Counsellors, faced with huge demand for services, must, of necessity, make choices and limit the time they can give to each individual. Sometimes the cases dealt with must be limited to those in crisis, so that large numbers of students are denied service. With the escalation of factors such as illegal drug usage and teenage

suicides, counsellors have to establish priorities. The fact is that counselling cannot be done in a hurry. With the best will in the world, resources in this area will never be sufficient to cater fully for everyone. The goal, while clear and accepted, is very difficult to accommodate to any substantial degree.

- Schools usually advertise themselves as open and friendly places. Many students do, indeed, relate well with their peers. Nevertheless, a significant minority are subject to bullying and intimidation from others. This can be physical and quite brutal. More often, though it is verbal, intense and constant. The result is usually severe depression, reluctance to attend school and, in extreme cases, suicide. Teachers and parents may often be the last ones to know the situation, since a victim mentality is often created, whereby the young person bullied may blame his or her own inadequacies, rather than the perpetrator, for the bullying. Teachers are often not totally secure and in control of their classroom. In this situation they find it difficult to be warm and friendly. Schools, then, can be unhappy places, where many students feel uncomfortable and not accepted. No wonder that a large number of students vote with their feet and non-attendance can be extremely high. In some schools absenteeism is chronic. This does not happen in happy schools.
- Many schools claim to promote independent learning among their students. The idea is that upon graduation to tertiary studies, students will be able to pursue learning in a mature way, understand how to use the tools of technology to promote research, be skilled in using libraries and self-motivated to undertake high academic goals. The situation in schools is usually very different. In the first place, the majority of students, even at senior secondary school level, are not dedicated learners. Many of them consider much of what they learn irrelevant and not related to the real world in which they live and work. Secondly, most school students lack the research skills to progress far without a good deal of direction. Finally, teachers themselves often find the easiest path, one that produces the best short term results, is to present the content of the curriculum in the clearest and most concise way that they can. ‘Spoon-feeding’ is often the best description of what takes place in classrooms. It requires the least effort on the part of teachers and produces the best immediate results. For the most part, schools produce few independent learners.
- Whether the pursuit of the real interests of teenagers by teachers is the best way to go is, of course, arguable. Most teens have a real

interest in relationships including sexual relationships. They love music and the culture that surrounds it. Fashion is important, as are cars. Many have some experience of drugs, including illegal drugs. A very large proportion of students are engaged in part-time work, often in positions requiring real responsibility. Money is a key concern, since it can lead to the realisation, at least in part, of their dreams. Teachers find it very difficult to amend syllabuses to include consideration of these matters. Yet syllabuses that are not related to students' real interests will usually seem irrelevant and not attract their interest. Teachers need to consider how the seemingly irreconcilable can be made to come together. Insofar as they fail to do this, schools will fail for the majority.

- Schools claim that one of their major roles is to prepare students for the world of work. This means, presumably, that students receive training in one or more of the following areas – business, industrial training of some sort, and development as entrepreneurs or preparation for a profession. These are very broad categories, certainly not all-inclusive, but basic training for young people wishing to enter the world of work.

In fact, very few schools produce graduates who are ready to take their place successfully in employment. Questions must be even asked about their preparation for further vocational and academic studies. A modern, global economy demands flexible young entrepreneurs, skilled at seeking out business opportunities, with creative ideas and the confidence, knowledge and skills to develop and activate them. Is this the picture that employers have, generally, of young people seeking jobs? Have schools created an environment where people like this flourish?

The academic area is where schools would usually argue that they do a good job. Even though fewer than 20 per cent of graduates from secondary school enter university, universities have traditionally dominated choices about what is taught in senior secondary school classes and syllabuses are heavily weighted towards academic studies. The final years of schooling have been very much oriented to maximising the chances of students for entry to tertiary courses and for successful post-school studies. Reading the academic aims published by schools, one is confronted with a list something like this:

Academic Aims:

- ❖ Preparation for university,
- ❖ Maximising chances for academic success,
- ❖ Teaching skills and strategies for learning,
- ❖ Passing on knowledge,

- ❖ Developing motivated students with a self-directed approach to study,
- ❖ Supporting student learning with caring teachers,
- ❖ Teaching students to manage study routines,
- ❖ Helping students to motivate themselves to achieve academic aims,
- ❖ Assisting students in the transition from secondary to tertiary studies,
- ❖ Accelerating the learning of gifted students,
- ❖ Supporting less able students,
- ❖ Developing technological skills,
- ❖ Developing habits of life-long learning, and
- ❖ Encouraging depth and breadth of scholarship.

How do schools achieve these lofty ideals, even in the academic area? Suffice it to say, that an examination of the situation in the majority of schools reveals a situation much at variance with the stated aims. Rather than producing a community of scholars, schools send most young people into the post-school environment with very negative feelings about what they have learnt and a profound relief that the ordeal is over. Many see their academic studies completely divorced from the real world, which they experience every day. Most put up with the agony so that they can further their career goals, but few love learning for its own sake. Is this situation endemic to schooling, or can schools become vibrant centres for new ideas, based on a culture gleaned from the great advances of the past, and fostered and developed by the challenges of interaction with fresh ideas and enquiring minds?

Finally, schools aim to accomplish many other aims. These include religious formation – the stated reason for existence of all Catholic schools and most other Independent schools. How far this aim remains at the forefront of goals for these schools today is a matter for much debate. The centrality of theological study and the cultivation of religious experience seem, in practice, to be far from central to their practice. Nearly all private schools were developed by separate denominations presumably to enrol students from families committed to that religious denomination and to centre their education on the values and beliefs of that particular group. Many of these schools now enrol students from all religious groups, and seldom make membership of a denominational community a necessary basis for enrolment. The development of a climate within a school, which centres on that religious tradition, becomes, generally nonsense. Reasons other than religion become, in many cases, the *raison d'etre* for the school. One

has to seriously question whether many religious schools are sufficiently different to justify their existence.

Other schools have been established in response to particular educational theories. Some of these emphasise music as a basic theme in education. Others have few administrative or educational structures, believing that students develop best when left to their own devices. Some parents distrust schools so much that they educate their children themselves at home rather than subjecting them to schools, which, for all sorts of reasons, they see as pernicious.

In any case, there is a huge gap between what schools say they do (or at least aim to do) and what they actually achieve. Upon close examination, this gap is so alarming that only radical change to the system will justify the faith we, as a community, put in education and the vast amount of resources that are committed to it.

Homework

The head of a Secondary Principals' Association was quoted recently in the press as saying that "homework is a waste of time and should be scrapped for students under 15". In the same newspaper article, the president of a Primary Principals' Association said that "far from being irrelevant, homework was vital". Clearly the debate rages and the reasons for homework need to be given as do the perspectives, both of those who support it and those who say it is irrelevant and unnecessary.

A major reason for setting homework is to consolidate the learning that takes place in class. There is an irrefutable body of research that proves that revising work learnt in class before the next class in that subject means that about 80 per cent of the work learnt (if initially understood) is remembered. If this revision does not take place, much of what has been taught in class is forgotten and needs to be re-learnt. This, of course, means that it is an incredibly inefficient way of learning not to re-visit work between classes. The question needs to be asked, however, whether this revision is undertaken in homework set in most schools. Revision is an intangible thing, difficult to measure other than by testing. Good teachers normally begin class by briefly questioning the class about what was learnt in the previous session. This can take either oral or written form. Lazy or incompetent teachers often neglect this fundamental method of reinforcing learning, neglecting, in the process, to inculcate sound learning skills to their students. These skills should incorporate short term revision as well as the habit of regular long term revisiting of topics so that they are remembered. Good teachers will encourage these habits in a variety of ways.

Another reason for setting homework is to give students practice in the presentation of work. Time is increasingly limited in the classroom because of a crowded curriculum, so it is important for students to supplement the applications of their learning outside as well as in class. Essays, summaries, preparation for oral presentations, practising mathematical algorithms and writing up results of observations and practical experiments can all be undertaken at home just as well as at school. Many other tasks do not need the immediate presence of a teacher to be accomplished well. Reading obviously falls into this category. Whether for pleasure or research, reading should be an integral and important part of the life of every individual in our society. The love for and habit of reading widely needs to be encouraged in students from their earliest years. Again, reading quality and quantity are somewhat difficult to assess. It is vital that follow-up happens in class to reinforce the importance of reading and to give students the opportunity to reflect on and discuss what they have read. In this area, as in all others, the fundamental requirement is for teachers to integrate homework into the learning structure and to ensure that work undertaken outside class is always re-visited and reinforced in the classroom.

Creative teachers will go to great lengths to make homework interesting, relevant and even exciting. Of course, in classrooms where learning is associated with drudgery, homework will be treated with hatred and neglect. The attitude of students to homework is probably an excellent gauge for parents of the competence, commitment and professionalism of their children's teachers.

There are many other interesting forms that learning outside the classroom can take. The advent of the internet and its accessibility to most students creates many opportunities for creative, independent research. Similarly, individuals and local groups can undertake certain field and experimental work outside of class. Teachers will need to provide a structure and follow-up to all this, but a great deal of important learning needs to take place outside the classroom and outside the direct supervision of the teacher. Only in this way can responsibility and love for learning be accepted by individuals.

Homework can incorporate rich experiences such as visits to the theatre, film venues and art galleries. Dramatic performances need to be experienced on stage or on the screen, not just studied in text books. Routine applications in mathematics and science can be practised at home. The writing up of field work and experimentation can be well handled outside the classroom.

Two important principles need to underpin homework. First, a crowded curriculum demands that some learning take place outside the classroom, but that learning needs to be relevant and integrated into a structure enjoyed and owned by students. Secondly, homework should never be set unless there is follow-up in the classroom. This will make demands on teachers, especially with regard to marking loads. There is no room in the profession for people who are too disorganised or too lazy to make this happen.

The computer age has brought about new and exciting ways of learning outside the classroom. This by no means suggests that primary or secondary students can research broad topics independently and carry out research without guidance from their teachers. Few tertiary students have this ability and then usually only after many years of study at this level. It is important then that learning via computer technology be carefully guided, certainly in terms of broad outlines. Given this situation, students usually thrive, enjoying the challenge of obtaining their own insights. Of course, they do not need to confine their quest for knowledge to those sites suggested by the teacher. Once they are started, their scope is vast and they can pursue their own special interests and directions within the framework set out for them. The job for teachers, of course, is not made easier. Countless hours must be spent by them in establishing the parameters for the research of their students. Further, their work must be constantly updated, because knowledge is constantly changing and expanding in every field. Nevertheless, the rewards, in terms of student interest, excitement and love for learning, are very real.

Technology, of course, raises issues of equity in terms of student access to computers and to the internet. It will still be many years before poorer homes have this access. Two solutions present themselves in the short term.

1. Schools need to provide banks of supervised computers with internet access where students can both learn and complete assignments. In terms of total school expenditure, the cost of providing this technology today is not great. This access needs to be provided outside normal school hours so that all students can use these facilities. In special areas, consideration should be given to setting up supervised homework centres, where disadvantaged students can gain access to computer technology for study purposes.

2. Another way of helping poorer and disadvantaged students with technological access is to subsidise the cost of computers for students on a means tested basis. Free access could be given to

> certain learning websites to ensure that internet availability was not abused. This can be done through the school website, allowing checks to be made that students are using this cost-free facility only for legitimate study purposes.

Opponents of homework argue that it interferes with valuable social and family activities. After a hard day at school, they say, students need leisure time to unwind and relax. Social interaction among the young is vitally important and homework, it is argued, interferes with this. Younger children, particularly, need time to play and find enjoyment in games. Families need time together to maintain their bonds and lend stability to the young person's life. Increasingly, ill health is arising with long term adverse effects from obesity in the young. This is recognised as an urgent national problem. Homework interferes with the love of sport and exercise, which students need to develop for health reasons. Finally, and probably most important for senior students, many are engaged in part-time work. This is incredibly important as an introduction to the real world of commerce, money and responsibility. Very large proportions of young people engage in work, and generally find it more relevant to their lives than school. For all these reasons, many argue that learning should be confined to the classroom and that homework should not interfere with all the other things that students like and need to do.

Two points need to be made. These arguments suggest, in the first place, that learning is not an important, basic and integral part of living. Living is learning. It is, above all, the spirit of inquiry and curiosity which makes us human and advances our race. Teaching may be confined to a classroom, but learning is something that needs to take place in all our waking moments and throughout all of our lives. Learning at home, or homework, is something that we should eagerly pursue. The important thing for schools is to show that learning is exciting, basic to our lives and enjoyable. This certainly is not the situation at present.

Secondly, in addition to necessary reinforcement for what is taught at school, a reasonable amount of homework teaches important lessons for students to incorporate into their lives. Employers expect from their workers a degree of discipline, organisation, time management, focus of effort and preparation for tasks. Homework can inculcate these habits. In reasonable quantities, it need not distract from the social and family issues that need to take place concomitantly. Seen in this light, a school week of about forty hours in total – 20 to 30 hours in the classroom supplemented by 10 to 20 hours of homework and private study – can be seen as a social induction to the working world. Most

workers expect to engage in similar hours of employment. There is ample time for young people to carry out all of the other activities associated with the family, leisure, exercise and social needs. No matter how much time is available, many young people will allocate too much to watching television, playing computer games and the like. Homework may help engender the discipline and motivation to integrate all the other important areas into their daily and weekly activities.

The role of parents is crucial in all of this. Nearly one in five of school-age children belong to families with no member in full-time employment. We need a society, where all adults able to do so, are, as one political leader says, "learning or earning". It is too socially destructive for the young to have role models in their families who are permanently on welfare. Young people will be more motivated to engage fully and enthusiastically in life when their parents are similarly motivated and engaged.

There was a time when mothers had the responsibility for supervision of the child's progress at school and of out-of-school activities, including homework. Society has, fortunately, progressed from that situation, so that today only one quarter of women are not engaged in either part-time or full-time work. In this situation, however, there may be no one either present, or with the energy to train young people to use their out-of-school time creatively and effectively. This is the reason that so many children are allowed, even encouraged, to become so-called 'couch potatoes', entertained in what is often (but by no means always) a non-stimulating situation. Whatever their own working and family situation, parents do need to be involved with their children. From their earliest years, they need to inculcate curiosity and inquiry. They need to develop both their use of the internet and their skills in reading, numeracy and language, which are basic to supporting early learning processes.

Parents need to spend time helping children learn from their earliest years. They need to be involved with homework, not taking responsibility for its completion, but being available to answer questions and to help with basic research. It is important for books to be available in the home. Internet access is vital for students today, and its provision in every home with children at school needs to be a government priority.

Through helping with homework, parents can find out how their children are progressing with their learning and whether they need special attention in certain areas. They can work out problems together and deepen their child-parent bond.

Because it is important for both academic and social reasons, homework is an essential part of the educational process. Those who oppose it show little understanding of the fact that learning is basic to living. It is not something that can be switched on and off like a light. But learning is only effective if it takes place in a structure. This is as basic outside the classroom as within.

Answering the challenges

This chapter has drawn attention to four important criticisms of current school practices:

- the failure to maximise learning opportunities outside the conventional classroom,
- the need to achieve a proper balance between justifiable claims, on one hand for conformity with conventional, syllabus-driven learning and, on the other hand, for student-centred activities that enhance individual creativity,
- the disparities between the glossy rhetoric of most school advertising and the drab realities of most students' lives, and
- the tangled understandings of the learning process revealed by the homework debate.

If there is one thread running through this chapter, it is the recognition that the pursuit of excellence and the restructuring of education in the manner advocated earlier bring with them important implications for how students should be learning, and consequently how teachers should be teaching. Suitable pedagogy is long overdue for bridging the entrenched positions of conservatives and progressives in the education debate.

In fact, several sound models already exist. *Dimensions of Learning* (Marzano et al. 1997), for example, shows how to plan for effective student acquisition of both procedural and declarative knowledge, while also providing guidance for teaching students how to extend and refine knowledge and to use it meaningfully.

It is possible to reconcile effective conventional learning with strategies for encouraging higher level student thinking. It is time we did so!

10

Making Education Real

For too long, secondary education has tended to operate in a world of its own, little influenced by the realities of business, commerce or even the interests, astonishingly, of students in schools. Syllabuses, long dominated by academic institutions, have been designed as a preparation for some professional future, but have certainly not been closely related to an actual career. Students can spend twelve years studying mathematics, as an instance, without ever applying their knowledge to scientific or engineering situations. The real world and the world of secondary schooling often exist in parallel but quite separate universes. This is probably a major reason for the widespread disaffection with schooling which characterises the majority of students, especially those in Years 9, 10 and 11.

One way for schools to operate in a real-world milieu is for major operators to be stake holders in the ownership of schools. Tertiary institutions, for example, or particular faculties, might operate specialist academic colleges. These could prepare students to enter courses within that university or tertiary institution. Examples exist already where this situation has been tried. At Murdoch University in Western Australia, a senior college has been built on campus to cater mainly for international students. The Australian Mathematics and Science School has been built on the Flinders University campus in South Australia. Probably the best example of this situation is University Senior College at Adelaide University. Here the students share the campus with university students and have full access to the library, laboratories, lecture theatres and computer system. The

majority graduate to the university already sharing great empathy with that institution and exposed, on a daily basis, to its professional focus. The University of Adelaide, through a Joint Venture arrangement, has part ownership of the College, with the aim of breaking down artificial barriers between secondary and tertiary education. Year 12 students, for example, frequently complete university subjects where they have passed a matriculation subject in Year 11. In such an environment, it is not at all unusual for students to move between secondary and tertiary subjects; in fact, a Senior Secondary College student recently topped First Year University mathematics. It makes sense for many academic senior classes to have close links with universities. Universities may see a real advantage in ownership of such educational enterprises, for it is their best guarantee that secondary graduates will have the best possible preparation to undertake tertiary studies at their institution.

In the same way, certain faculties of universities within a state or region might set up senior secondary colleges with a special focus. At a time when engineers are in great demand, for example, engineering faculties in a major city might set up a Senior Secondary College specialising in engineering studies. A curriculum emphasising mathematics and science might be complemented by a range of practical options and field work guided by different engineering specialist fields. Some might undertake structural projects, some environmental, electrical and so on. Surely this is a practical way of satisfying the constant complaints of universities that students entering their faculties are often poorly prepared, needing a great deal of remedial work.

TAFE Colleges, too, might combine to operate Senior Colleges specialising in such fields as plumbing, electricity, building, metal fabrication, carpentry and so on. During their courses, students, while receiving a sound general education, might complete work towards apprenticeship, certificates and diplomas. There is an obvious benefit to the institution to conduct such colleges, which might be situated on or near their campuses, and share facilities. Students would benefit enormously and lose the sense of *anomie* and alienation which possesses so many of them at present.

Secondary schools already in existence should be encouraged to forge links of this kind with a variety of tertiary institutions. Accreditation arrangements need to be extended, where necessary, to ensure that students receive credit towards tertiary certification for the studies they undertake.

Taking this idea further, industries themselves should be encouraged to own secondary schools which have a focus on the particular type of

skills needed in that particular industry. Clearly, this must never be at the expense of a sound general education. Industries will know, anyhow, that it is to their advantage to have potential employees who, in addition to possessing the kinds of skills needed in their production houses, are articulate, literate and numerate. They need people who are personable, creative and with interests in the humanities and the arts. Employees with a rich cultural background must be of more benefit to an organisation than those who merely possess skills.

There is really no end to the range of people and organisations that might see a benefit in conducting schools. In the context of registration and supervision of standards by an appropriate professional central board, there is no reason why this should not be encouraged. If the idea behind a particular institution has little merit, schools will not flourish. Those that offer a valuable service will prosper. Other schools will need to improve their programs to survive. Compare this with the current drab, rather grey situation in which many schools operate. Australia needs a vibrant, entrepreneurial, creative environment where excellence and innovation triumph and where mediocrity fails. If a large number of interest groups are prepared to set up specialist schools, there is no end to the excitement and benefits that can come to education in this country.

It needs emphasising again, that specialist schools can only validly exist in a situation where students can find a path through the system that satisfies their needs and aspirations. Young people cannot be expected to make choices at an early age to which they are forever bound. Transfer between institutions must be easy and without educational cost. With a national curriculum, this should present few problems in most subjects. Problems occur mainly in mathematics, physics and chemistry. If students need these subjects for a particular pathway and their background, for any reason, is poor, really the only way forward is through bridging courses. These should be offered, especially at Year 11 level, but at other levels where necessary. They might take place in ordinary schools situated conveniently about major cities, with boarding facilities to cater for students from remote areas. Alternatively, special bridging schools might be set up. Intensive courses should result in those with sufficient ability being able to transfer into courses like science and engineering.

In this specialist school scenario, career education becomes a hands-on experience. During their secondary school years, students should not only be able to sample a number of careers attractive to them, but accumulate credits towards a tertiary level certification. This will apply

across a whole spectrum of careers from trades, sports, arts to academic pursuits.

For the success of this scheme, national co-ordination of qualifications is essential. This is made easier by the adoption of a national curriculum. Again, the huge noose around the neck of education due to the constitutional impost of state responsibility becomes apparent. States and territories, for the good of the country and its young citizens, need to co-operate by ceding their control of education to a central professional authority, certainly with representation from the Commonwealth, states and territories, but finally accountable to the education profession and through them to the Australian community.

Education for the real world means close rapport between secondary and tertiary institutions but also between education and the world of business and industry. The incredible wealth of facilities and personnel contained in the whole community — in schools, tertiary organisations and business and industry — can, if shared, result in a wonderful richness in the educational experience. This will increase greatly if all three sectors share ownership of the process. Students who are able to move more or less freely between school and TAFE, university and business organisations will share a much clearer vision of what their education is about and where it is heading. Dull, boring, isolated school classes producing alienated and directionless students will largely be a thing of the past. Joint ventures between these groups will certainly result in a more pertinent and meaningful curriculum, better use of resources and facilities, and higher standards leading to better outcomes.

The involvement of business and industry is likely to have another positive spin-off. By studying partly in a commercial environment, students will be exposed to the entrepreneurial mind-set that underlies our commercial well-being. Even in the school context, students, either individually or in groups, should be encouraged to develop the skills of the entrepreneur – manufacturing, marketing and selling. Some schools have already ventured into this very rewarding area with positive results for the students involved. Successful businesses in the future might have their roots in the schools of the nation.

Another concept underlying a real-world education, is parity of esteem. In an earlier and more class-conscious world, the professions were held in high esteem and trades and skilled occupations did not occupy a high profile in the community. At the school level, this resulted in the old trade-oriented Technical Schools having low esteem among schools. More recently, however, the technological revolution has resulted in high-level skills gaining equal status with academic pursuits. Experts in

trades and technological skills can command financial rewards every bit as rewarding as those in the professions. Australia's booming economy demands that our youth be equipped with the ability to enter into high-tech occupations with creativity and expertise. In such an environment, schools specialising in the whole range of career preparation can share equal status in the community. Where high standards of excellence pertain, students of dance or building can hold their heads as high as students of law or engineering. In an Australian society enjoying cultural richness in an expanding economy, all are likely to have marvellous opportunities to succeed, especially if they bring creativity, energy and entrepreneurial flair to their career endeavours.

The biggest problem in bringing about a real-world revolution in education is, of course, our current teaching force. Unfortunately the baby boomer generation has been subjected to the ultra-conservative and enervating world of unions, awards and public service mentality. Length of service, not enthusiasm and ability, has been the criterion that has deadened and emasculated the workforce. The importance of having educators reclaim the profession cannot be emphasised too strongly. One idea that bears canvassing again is that groups of teachers might form co-operatives to set up or take over schools conducted according to their own values and ideas. Such entrepreneurial ventures, common among other professions, would help teachers regain pride and direction. The best minds, not now attracted to education in spite of the satisfaction of interacting with young minds as they develop into rich personalities, will be encouraged to enter the profession. The best teachers need to be able to access appropriate financial rewards – an impossibility in the current situation where teachers are employed by governments and independent (usually church-sponsored) groups with a strong incentive to pay the lowest wages possible, and where the whole situation is limited by awards.

Other benefits would flow from ownership of schools by a range of interests in the community. Owners will then be keen to share their ideas with students – something that would be of immense benefit for young people trying to understand how the real world outside the school works. People from businesses, academia and trades will have a strong incentive to communicate with students, especially if they have a financial and commercial interest in the school. Business people will be more likely to lend sponsorship to schools and students. An accounting firm, for example, might offer incentives and prizes to good accounting students. This might include work experience and payment of school and university fees with the hope or expectation that the student will be attracted to work in that firm after graduation. The firm

is rewarded by having access to highly qualified and experienced employees; the student receives financial incentives and guaranteed employment for a specified period. Altogether this is a win-win situation.

Other ways of integrating schools into the wider world should also be explored. Even the architecture of future schools should emphasise their integration into the community. School libraries, theatres and gymnasia can always be used by responsible community groups at weekends and after hours. Sporting teams, arts, drama, dance and music groups might be centred in school facilities. There is no longer any place for rigid lines of demarcation between secondary and tertiary institutions, or, indeed, between these institutions and the wider world in which they exist.

11

The Way Forward

Every young Australian has a right to a first class education. In order to maintain our place in the world and to continue to enjoy one of the highest living standards in the world, we should expect no less. How does our education system measure up? There is disquieting evidence that, although on some measures we do quite well overall, we are far behind many nations that compete with us in the global market.

Furthermore, a dual system of education has been introduced into Australia, not exactly by stealth, but slowly, in a way that has led to its general and unquestioning acceptance. Few realise the real consequences of operating a system of government and non-government (independent) schools. Yet, at least in the public perception, one system vastly outperforms the other. In other words, our system does not provide equality of educational opportunity for all. Many of our children do not get a fair start in life. Money and privilege help determine the outcomes young people face.

Worse, there is evidence that students themselves, especially in the middle years of education, regard schools very negatively. Sadly, they perceive their schools to be operating in a way that can only be described as dysfunctional. Their venom is directed, in particular, to a very large number of teachers, whom they see as uncaring and uncommitted.

Strangely, teachers, traditionally appreciated as dedicated professionals, are among the most highly unionised groups in the workforce. Other professions own their work in a way teachers do not,

and usually govern themselves through a College of peers. Teachers, on the contrary, act much more like trade unionists in industry. Teaching is much more about awards and promotion by length of service than about rewards for outstanding work, care and innovation. Until teaching ceases to be a pseudo-profession, our students will be badly let down.

Schools themselves, especially government schools, often portray a dull, rather grey drabness, quite at odds with the exciting, innovative experiences bombarding youth from nearly every other quarter. Why don't the forces that make children's lives operate at such a pace and with such mind-blowing technological stimulation, extend to the monotony of school?

We can do much better. Australia needs a fair, quality education system, geared to producing our smartest, most innovative generation yet, enjoying challenge and high standards. Learning needs to be undertaken with love and enthusiasm, under the guidance of highly competent, caring professionals.

It can be done, I believe. Vast new resources are not needed to turn the situation around. What is needed is for teachers to reclaim their profession and re-introduce challenge and competition into the system. Unless the best schools and the best teachers are rewarded and under-performers either stimulated to improve or driven from the education system, essential radical reform will not take place.

This book promotes a vision of education that would make our schools the best and the fairest in the world. Our schools can be thriving, vibrant centres of learning filled with eager, satisfied, motivated learners, focused on excellence, striving to achieve, in touch with the real world around them and geared for the future. It does not need more funding, but it does involve a major shift in priorities towards the clients – our most precious resource, our children. Political interference and expensive bureaucracies need to be replaced by an education system that is managed by professionals and in touch with the aspirations of parents and students.

It can be done. All it needs is a major re-think. Our nation must demand the best.

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