



I was wrong!

YOU READ IT HERE FIRST: **DAVID LOADER** ADMITS HE WAS WRONG.

In my October column, I encouraged educators to have their say in the development of such matters as the national standards for teaching and school leadership, a project managed for government by the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL). By implication, I was supporting the development of these standards and their application to all in schools. As well, by implication, I was accepting Julia Gillard's assertion, in a 'Letter of Expectation' to the AITSL as Commonwealth Minister for Education, that, 'The single biggest priority for the (AITSL) will be...to finalise and oversee a set of national standards for teaching and school leadership.'

In retrospect, the main thrust of my column was wrong. What is needed in education is not a universal standards statement but opposition to such a statement. By allowing a newly created, politically driven central organisation to define standards, we lessen the power of local communities, be they families, schools or even states to decide important things such as values, priorities, aspirations and derivative standards. More important than a centrally determined set of standards is the development and support of communal and professional responsibility. There is an alternative view of schools and communities to one where they are simply vassals of the government; schools and communities can be vibrant, intellectually engaged centres envisaging a future and working to deliver that future.

The idea that standards can be defined and then measured is attractive to many, but what are the implications of such a view? Is the goal to develop standardised, 'teacher-proof' schools where spreadsheets demonstrate success and determine who can be employed and what their salary will be? Are we assuming that there is a science that

can reduce complicated ideas and values concerning the education of young people to formatted data that can be measured and controlled in every setting? If the organising intelligence of schools and their communities is to come from government bureaucracy, then the local input can only be into the little things, the asides, and the people in those communities and schools will be managers, never leaders.

According to Andy Hargreaves, addressing school leaders in Australia in 2009, 'inspiration will come before intervention,' 'professionally shared targets...will far surpass bureaucratically imposed ones' and administrators will need 'to set aside their spreadsheets to build better relationships with their schools.'

I'm not against standards and I believe in accountability, but whose standards ought these to be and to whom are we to be accountable? Ultimately we are accountable to students and their families, not to government.

I commend the government for its commitment to education and for its willingness to invest in it, but why is so much of this investment spent on support for the existing system when it's evident that the current system is, in its management style, a direct by-product of the Industrial Revolution? The more we keep the focus on teaching, the more we miss the point that life in a post-industrial era within a knowledge economy supported by rich technology is all about individual and collective enterprise. The focus needs to be on the learner. The goal is not to teach dependency, much as we want good teachers, but to facilitate and support individual and collective initiative and responsibility. As the Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians acknowledges, schools are 'to com-

mit to supporting all young Australians to become successful learners, confident individuals, and active and informed citizens.'

We live in times where parents can be threatened with jail if their children don't attend school, but is the non-attendance problem to do with parents and their children, or could it be that the school doesn't address what is relevant to students and their community? Even the most recalcitrant students are good learners, but not of what they call 'boring school stuff.' This is why we need local initiative and control in schools, both in curriculum and style of management, if schools as institutions are to survive. This is why we need government money, our money by the way, to be spent on looking for new models for the delivery of learning and support for grass roots initiatives. We need to be encouraging new thinking, and the standards for this could be different to those appropriate to existing schools.

The single biggest priority for the AITSL is not to finalise and oversee a set of national standards for teaching and school leadership, but to seek out, encourage and foster new initiatives in learning for school-aged students in diverse settings. **T**

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