



# Fellow travellers

IN THIS, HIS LAST COLUMN FOR *TEACHER*, **DAVID LOADER** LOOKS BACK ON HIS 'REFLECTIVE PRINCIPLE' JOURNEY.

There's something to be said for viewing life as a journey, not a destination. I've all too often focused on the destination, be it in my personal life or work, and consequently missed the vital, sustaining and even fun aspects of the journey.

I was focused on the destination, for example, when I introduced compulsory school laptops as a school principal in the early 1990s. We were in a DOS environment, while later adopters of technology, in the mid-1990s, went straight into a more user-friendly 'windows' environment. I hadn't foreseen the technology change as I was totally focused on a destination – making DOS work – that turned out to be unhelpful. I would've been better off enjoying the journey of discovery opened up by personal computing, and 'windows' would have been a natural extension and not an enforced hyper-jump.

The dichotomy between journey and destination is happening again for me with this column, 'The reflective principle.' I started writing for *Teacher*, then published as *Educare News*, in my last year as a principal. I figured I'd write a few articles, but I hadn't imagined that I could possibly write 96, as I have done. When I began writing, each article was a personal journey exploring my experience or investigating an issue that was important to me. As time passed, my focus moved from the journey to the destination, an article to meet the deadline.

But now this writing is to end with this last edition of *Teacher* – or is it? From the feedback I've received, I know that the column has been helpful to many, but it's been even more helpful to me. My writing does lead to a product, 'The reflective principle' itself, but it also sets me on a journey that helps me clear my mind and get a sharper focus on the issues.

*Teacher* has provided a wonderful vehicle for many, including me, to publish, but today there are many more places where we can do this. It's time for another hyper-jump into a new electronic medium. The closing of *Teacher* is a timely reminder to focus on the journey, the reflection and writing, and not the destination, published articles.

Life as a journey properly focuses our mind on the present. The Eastern idea of 'mindfulness' is beginning to take a proper place in our Western thinking. Mindfulness is a focus on this minute, what we are doing now, what we are feeling and seeing. It's not an invitation to do five things at once in a task-focused way. It encourages us to experience the journey and not to be lost in contemplation of some future, as important as that is in setting directions. And experience tells us too that any useful destination dream has to be securely anchored in the present.

Personally I believe that taking time out for reflection, and then writing about these contemplations which we then share with others, is immensely helpful. This process helps us at a personal level. It helps others, encouraging dialogue with colleagues and information sharing within our own school communities. Finally, it also helps develop the broader profession.

Metaphors have limitations, though, and 'life as a journey' is no exception. While it properly conveys the idea of movement, based as it is on our experience of travel, it suggests that life is linear; we progress from one place to another. This can be misleading as it inclines us to linear and incremental thinking rather than preparing us to look for radically new thinking and potential hyper-jumps into new spaces. As I reflect on my history, a better descrip-

tion of life experiences is that suggested by chaos theory which prepares people for the apparent disorder of events and living. While chaos theory emanates from mathematics, it has applications across other disciplines and beyond, in my view, to personal living and strategic leadership. We see ourselves living one unified life but in fact we move in and out of multiple, often conflicting lives. Chaos theory accommodates network relationships that are portrayed not by linear maps but charts of circles and a variety of complicated interacting networks. Importantly chaos theory also accepts that events in distant places can have a major impact on what we are doing, the so-called 'butterfly effect.'

An important door closes, with this last edition of *Teacher*, for those who seek to publish their ideas and share their experiences in education. An influential vehicle of inspiration and information now ceases and we'll have to look elsewhere for stimulation and encouragement, but in a chaotic world, this is the norm; life is not linear and life moves on in new and creative ways. So its thanks to the Australian Council for Educational Research for its past support, and now we look to our readers to pick up the challenge and move forward, using many other forums for information sharing and inspiration.

Enjoy your travels. **T**

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