

**PAMPHLETEERING:
THE ACADEMIC IN THE PUBLIC DEBATE**

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AUSTRALIAN ASSOCIATION FOR RESEARCH IN EDUCATION
25TH ANNUAL CONFERENCE
DIRECTIONS: YESTERDAY, TODAY, TOMORROW
26-30 NOVEMBER 1995
HOBART, TASMANIA.

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Self managing ('Schools of the Future') legislation, school closures and teacher reduction, plus large scale budget cuts have impacted powerfully on all aspects of state government schooling.

How academics with divergent views can engage the public debate, and influence school policy and public knowledge is taken up in this presentation.

Drawing on an old tradition of pamphleteering (Dryden, Swift, Pope) and more contemporary examples (the Hillgate Group, London, and ACT Research Network, Bristol Polytechnic, and Centre for Educational Studies, Kings College London) the Centre for Democratic Education was formed in Melbourne in March 1994 and issued its first pamphlet in September. Its purpose is to publish in clear language, enlivened comment, analysis and data on issues directly related to contemporary schooling.

A total of 3000 pamphlets in each printing run are forwarded to every state school parent association, to major teacher education institutions, some members of parliament, the education policy committee of the Labor Party, more recently the Victorian Council of Social Service, parts of the media, university faculties and members of the general public.

Membership of the group is informal and presently includes 28 academics from most Victorian universities, consultants and interested persons.

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Members of the group were recruited in an informal way, some being

approached directly, some volunteered on hearing of the group's formation.

The first 'meeting of people interested in protecting state education' accepted the following principles and procedures:

1. it was agreed that the group arranges a structure which initiates discussion of issues in education, to answer misinformation and to give alternative arguments. The use of pamphlets, "face the facts" strategies and symposiums was stressed,
2. it was agreed that the group should have a name and an informal membership. It was stressed that the group should be long term in its objectives, and based on voluntary and cooperative effort - the Centre does not have a bank account,
3. it was agreed that it may be possible to affiliate with other groups with a similar rationale. Also, that all levels of teachers, parents and students should be involved,
4. each pamphlet aims to present sound research data and analysis on contemporary school issues.

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Authors have usually been approached to write about 1500 to 1700 words in simple language about their current research which bears directly on issues relevant to government education policies and to the daily life of school communities.

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The pamphlets are distributed by the two major parents' associations in Victoria and readers are invited to reproduce their copy and distribute widely. Permission for reprinting is not required. Undergraduate students at some universities receive copies and material from the pamphlets has been used in teachers' union journals.

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- No.1. Cutting into the Bone , based with permission on David McRae's research into cuts in education.
- No.2. Kennett's Damage to Government Schools , taken with permission from an address by Simon Marginson.
- No.3 School Closures and Student Drift, group authorship.
- No.4 Just Testing, Alan Bishop.
- No.5 Who is Qualified, group authorship.
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Tony Knight
(12 October 1995)

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When David McRae's report 'Into the Bone' was released in March 1994 Minister Don Hayward suggested it could be safely ignored claiming McRae was partisan and his research was inaccurate.

However Geoff Head, the President of the Principals Association, said in a newsletter that the report was 'totally consistent with the evidence gathered by school principals' (Age 23/3/93) and 100 school principals felt strongly enough to defy Regulation 140 and support the research in the press as 'an accurate reflection' of the situation in government schools (Age 23/3/94). Tony Hill, then head of Melbourne Grammar and a member of the Schools Council of the National Board of Employment, Education and Training publically described McRae's research for that body as 'always first class' and 'accurate, balanced and thoughtful' (Age 28/4/94).

Six months after the research was published evidence from schools continues to verify the findings. The Minister, the Directorate of School Education and the Government may be 'remarkably reticent to accept circumstances that everyone knows to be true' (Age 23/3/94) but the facts speak for themselves. Reproduced is a summary of the report - You be the judge.

Cutting... into the bone

Into the Bone is the title of a recent study on funding and staffing reductions to Victoria's government schools. The study, which surveyed country and metropolitan schools, was conducted by David McRae. It

reports on what the cuts have meant for the students and teachers surveyed. What follows is an edited summary of the study's findings.

No enterprise can expect to reduce its resource base by 20 percent and maintain the same level of productivity. That is especially true in education, an area in which Australian spending is low by OECD standards. In a recent analysis Australia ranked thirteenth out of eighteen OECD countries in terms of spending on education relative to GDP.

The data from David McRae's survey show that there has been a marked reduction in the quality of education provided by Victoria's government schools. The reduction in quality is a direct result of the recent budget cuts.

How to measure school quality

What parents want from their children's schools can be roughly summed up by the following list:

- oA comprehensive program
- oCommitted and caring \teachers
- oExcellent resources and facilities
- oIndividual attention
- oSpecialist options.

The importance of these criteria is confirmed by recent studies of school effectiveness.

A comprehensive program

Approximately 72 per cent of primary schools sampled (30 out of 43) are not offering the same program as last year but around 28 per cent are. Thirteen schools have eliminated languages although two schools have added a language other than English to their program.

Approximately 70 per cent of secondary schools (43 out of 60) have not maintained last year's offerings but 30 per cent have. In general, middle school electives have been reduced, with programs abandoned in 37 per cent of sampled schools. In nearly 50 per cent of the schools surveyed, there are fewer VCE subjects being offered this year. Languages other than English have been reduced or abandoned in 70 per cent of

the sampled schools, sport and physical education in 15 per cent, and technology studies in 32 per cent.

Committed and caring teachers

The great majority of teachers are doing their best in circumstances which are trying in the extreme. These circumstances for the most part are generated by their employer. While there is no evidence that teachers are any less committed, it is clear that their capacity to provide a quality education has been severely weakened by the cuts. Teacher morale is in a most serious condition.

Excellent resources and facilities

Spending on school maintenance has been slightly increased but the task of upgrading, restoring and renewing school buildings remains.

Individual attention

Giving individual attention to students depends on the capacity to provide it. Capacity to provide it depends, in the main, on staff resources.

Only 18 per cent of primary schools and none of the state's secondary schools have maintained the level of staff resources they had a year ago.

Average class sizes have increased by large numbers in some cases. A prep class of 38 was reported.

A great many students with special needs have had their needs ignored. Support teaching to help students with difficulties in literacy and numeracy have been reduced, along with programs in English for students from non-English speaking backgrounds. Thirteen per cent of secondary schools report significant losses to their integration support and minor losses were reported to integration programs in primary schools.

Additional care and support (pastoral care) for students entering the early years of secondary school have been cut in more than; 40 per cent of secondary schools, and student counselling, careers guidance and welfare have been significantly reduced. There have been substantial cuts to programs for gifted and talented students.

Specialist options

Approximately 70 per cent of primary schools have reduced their specialist programs. The greatest losses have occurred in music, sport and physical education, art and craft, languages other than English and English for students from non-English speaking backgrounds, remediation, library and computer education.

The conclusion is unavoidable. If state schools were a private enterprise those responsible for its present management would be promptly removed.

But schools are not private enterprises and they are attended by more than half a million young Victorians, more than two thirds of the children in the state. If your child attends a school which has not been seriously affected by the cuts you are very fortunate.

David McRae has researched and published widely on education for a range of organisations including the Commonwealth Schools Commission, the Schools Council of NBEET, the Department of Employment, Education and Training & the National Project on the Quality of Teaching and Learning and the International Organisation Economic Cooperation and Development.

As a result of his experience as a secondary school council president, David McRae undertook this research project privately. The results were published in March, 1994.

Pamphlet 1 September 1994

This pamphlet is the first in a series to be distributed by a group of concerned educators in the interests of defending the quality of public education. For further information or a copy of the full study (please provide a self addressed envelope) contact the Centre for Democratic Education at 931 Drummond Street, North Carlton 3054.

KENETT'S DAMAGE TO GOVERNMENT SCHOOLS

Centre For Democratic Education
Pamphlet No. 2 November 1994

In 1992 the Kennett Government inherited a very good state schooling system, built by governments from both sides of politics over three decades

Victoria was a pioneer in school based decision making, parent participation, and equity. Victorian education had an international reputation in curriculum reform, the quantity and quality of staffing was good, and year twelve retention had reached 80%. Standards were rising in traditionally low achieving schools.

Opinion polls found strong support for government spending on public education across the whole community, including many of the parents of private school students. The education editor of the Age(27/7/11993) wrote that "education is unquestionably one of Victoria's competitive advantages...as a contributor to the skill of the workforce and the attractiveness of the state as a place to live". In two years the Kennett Government has badly wounded the state schooling system with a strategy which has four parts:

1. Cuts to Spending and Teaching Positions

The Kennett Government has removed 8200 teaching positions (almost one in every five) and reduced expenditure on government schooling by \$300 million, the worse cuts since the 1930s depression. At the same time state grants to private schools have increased by \$30 million or 15 % in real terms. Secondary school student-teacher ratios have risen from 10.8 in 1992 to 12.8 in 1993, and 13.5 in 1994. The recent McRae survey

found secondary classes with more than 25 students, and a significant number with more than 30 students.

The Age (16/10/1994) reported that according to state government figures almost 2/3 of state primary school classes are above the size recommended by the Commonwealth Schools Commission in 1984, and Directorate of School Education figures show that this year 62% of primary school classes have more than 25 students. Even minister Hayward sets 25 as an upper limit when he dismisses variations between 15 and 25 as unimportant.

In 1993 special needs staffing was cut from 2000 to 310 positions. English as a Second Language teachers were reduced by half and the 568 positions allocated to the socio-economic disadvantaged were removed, hitting schools in the north and west of Melbourne. Since then the Government has funded 258 equivalent full time Language Other Than English teachers and 181 through the new rural loading.

The net effect is a redistribution of special needs staff from working class and high migrant density areas to the eastern suburbs and National Party electorates.

2. School Closure

The Government has closed 230 school sites. Some can be justified on demographic grounds, but most were closed simply to save money. The western region of Melbourne was harshly affected. Twelve secondary schools were terminated, nine in complete opposition to their communities. In ALP held seats the rate of closures was four times that of Liberal held seats.

3. Schools of the Future

The Schools of the Future program has devolved management responsibility to schools while taking away the resources they need to exercise it, and has centralised control over school learning programs that should be decided by parents and teachers.

The Kennett Government has substituted corporate forms of devolution for the democratic forms traditional in Victorian education since the 1970s. By asking schools to raise money

themselves the Government abandons resource equality across the system. It wants the schools to compete against each other for scarce resources. Instead of all schools being encouraged to do well, the success of one school is the failure of another. David Bruce in the Age (3/8/1993) noted that after three years of New Zealand's version of Schools of the Future (Tomorrow's Schools)

"schools in poorer areas say they are worse off and schools in more affluent areas say they are flowering". The trend is certainly similar in Victoria.

4. Standardised Tests

Standardised tests will supply the ammunition for this totally unnecessary government declared war between schools. Inevitably the results of standardised tests will be a main indicator of a school's competitive standing. Test results are not only the result of school effort, but tend to favor students from wealthy backgrounds, wherever they go to school. Schools will receive little credit for improvements unless they are already the high scoring and high fee paying private schools favoured by the Kennett Government's privatisation -ethos. And testing narrows learning because teachers are forced to teach solely for the tests, leaving students ill-equipped for the demands of work, university and TAFE.

These Destructive Policies Must Stop

In a state which has traditionally accorded education a high priority, this has been the worst government education policy in Victoria's history. It is an open secret that the Government wants to build up private schools while running down government schools, although many people in private schools oppose this divisive strategy. The Government

is slashing resources to its own schools while seeking up a competitive 'schooling market' so that it will escape responsibility for the unequal outcomes which are its real goal.

It is easy to claim that the drive towards a "schooling market" is "economic rationalism" in education. But this dignifies what is nothing more than a crude exercise in discrimination.

The market is the fundamental instrument of inequality. Those with economic power secure more advantages by out competing the poor, wherever a market relationship exists or can be created.

Politically, the Government is going to pay a high price for this policy, as it should. An opinion poll in the Age (17/9/1994) indicates a major concern by the electorate about the Government's education, health and transport policies. Overall, the Government's performance was rated at 5.8 out of 10, and its education performance rated at only 4.2, lower than any other policy area.

Victorians need a quality education system, and at the moment they know that they are not getting one. Schooling should not be a dog-eat-dog competition, or a "zero sum game" in which government schools are run on a shoestring until they are not viable. schools should be cooperating and pooling their resources. Schooling should be a win win system in which all students can develop their individual confidence, their academic skills and social literacy, and learn to relate and work together.

"Kennett's Damage to Public Schools" is a summary, with additional recent information, of Simon Marginson's address to a conference on "Schooling What Future" at Deakin University's Centre for Education . and Change on 19 June 1994. His address was entitled "Anyone for a . Zero Sum Game". Simon is a senior lecturer at the University of Melbourne. The Centre for Democratic Education has been given permission to distribute this material.

The Centre is composed of educators interested in defending the quality of public education. It does not have any financial resources, and depends entirely on the generosity of parent and teacher groups for the Publication and distribution of its material. Ring 387-885 1 for further information.

This pamphlet is based on the following reports

Who Speaks for the Children?, Parents and Friends Association, Coburg North Secondary College, 1993, On the Scrapheap? the costs of school closures, Victorian Council of Social Services, 1994, Summary Statistics Victorian Schools, (1992-1994), Directorate of School Education, Victoria.

Summary Statistics Victorian Schools

*During 1992 and 1993 sixty three state secondary schools were affected by closure or amalgamation. At least thirty of these were closed outright, most against the wishes of their school communities.

*The estimated loss of former students from these schools is 60% of those above the school leaving age, representing approximately 9000 young people who have not completed their education.

*In 1993-94 government schools lost an estimated 6070 students, including 2m from year 12 and 4036 from years 11 and 12.

*In 1993-94 the retention rate in government schools fell from 85.9% to 81.3%. This followed a remarkable rise from 36.3% to 85.9% in the previous 10 years. In the non catholic independent schools the retention rate rose from 101.5% in 1993 to 102.9% in 1994. (The retention rate is a numerical comparison of enrolments between year 12, and year 7 of 5 years previously.)

Who Speaks for the Children? and On the Scrapheap? provide a human dimension to the previous figures.

Who Speaks for the Children?
August 1993

The Parents and Friends Association of Coburg North Secondary College sought to find out what had happened to the students who left their school after it was forcibly closed. They believed that many students were falling through the system with little support for those at risk. Their survey found that 63% of year 11 students had left school discontinuing their VCE, 32% of all students had left their previously known addresses, only 5% of students had jobs or apprenticeships, while the rest were unemployed. Nearly 39% of students had trouble settling into their new schools and the cost of relocation had been an added burden to students and families.

The following comments illustrate the problems:

Students mother (year 11): She left school and misses her friday at the Tech. I am concerned about. her future as there is no work about.

Student (year 11): I am just very unhappy at this school and I believe changing schools has disadvantaged me because I am

not happy, while I was very happy at Coburg Tech.

Student: I miss Coburg Tech, the new school I am at has good subjects and I have made new friends, but the cost and time involved in travelling is too much.

Student (year10): Well, I left--High. So I don't go to school any more. I would be very happy to return to Coburg North Secondary College.

Student (year 10): This is the third school I have enrolled at this year.

Students mother (year 10): He didn't like school, he has not been able to find work.

Students sister (year 11): He was influenced by peers to leave school and now can't get work. If Coburg Tech was opened he would be back at school.

Who Speaks for the Children ? recommended that the government should not close any more schools until the impact of closures on students had been evaluated and continuing support and counselling provided for students and families already affected.

On the Scrapheap?: the cost of school closures,
August 1994

A year after the recommendations of support and counselling in Who Speaks for the Children? were published, more school closures forced a number of welfare agencies to re structure. Of the agencies surveyed, 48% reported extra workloads, 28% were moving more cases onto other agencies, and 40% reported that they had redirected their activities to deal with the growing number of young school age unemployed people. The agencies reported that young people who did not complete their schooling tended to feel stigmatised by failure, were reluctant to use mainstream services, did not see returning to school as an option, particularly while the TAFE system, which has appeal for some, does not offer VCE to students under eighteen years of age. As people under 16 cannot get the dole they do not register with the Department of Social Security and therefore are not referred to the services available.

The survey sought responses from former students of closed schools under several headings:

Reactions to School Closures Mary called her school a "home away from home. The teachers were good you got on well with them. The atmosphere was better and the special programs were excellent".

Judy said: "You didn't have to hate going to school 'cos it was always good fun. School tomorrow - grouse! It was something to look forward to every day and now it's closed". Sue We weren't told. We heard it on the news. Everyone was shocked and disappointed. We knew that schools were closing but we did not think ours would dose.

George: I didn't take it seriously. I saw it on TV while I was on holiday.

Marco: I broke the news to my parents that (the school) was going to close. My parents were furious 'cos I did not want to go to another school.

Re-enrolling at Other Schools

The students interviewed reported anger and apprehension at the prospect of going to other schools and many simply gave up.

Mary: I wouldn't go to another school. Lots of the kids couldn't be bothered after (the school) closed...it was (the old school) or nothing.

Steve: It sucked that they dosed (my school). None of us knew what to do.

Judy: Most of my friends did not go to school any more. As soon as they dosed (the old school) all of my friends stopped trying. They (the government) Think its not a problem just to go to another school but it's not that easy. I hope they are happy.

Of the students who reported re-enrolling at another school, the interview responses indicate the high drop out rate. Christine, Nick and Marco only stayed a few months in their new schools. Christine illustrated their feeling when she said that "she could not settle down; it was too much of a change". Marco summed up the dislocation experienced by many students who re-enrolled at other schools: "Five of my friends transferred to another school. Two dropped out. One works in a take away. One could be on the dole"

What Do You Do Now?

Of the students interviewed, few expressed any control or direction in their lives. They reported watching television, walking around the streets and losing heart quickly in the search for work. Marco said that he was happy if he could put petrol in his car.

The following are more typical comments:

Mary: Most kids that dropped out when (school's name) closed are on the dole. Walking around. Smoking dope.

Christine: What do I do at the moment? I don't do anything. I do voluntary work for (agency) and I look for a job. I basically

do nothing. When I left (school) I looked for work for a while and then I stopped and watched Days of Our Lives and a lot of TV.

Steve: I just hang around with friends now - do a bit of smoking and a little drinking. I get the dole and do a little stealing.

Work and Future Plans Without a work history or the VCE, many early school leavers reported frustration or hopelessness at their present situation as well as their prospects for the future.

Judy: Your go down to the CES but everything needs experience or the VCE. I haven't had a full time job, I have a CV but haven't anything to write on it . So they look at me as if to say, "You're an idiot".

Steve: I have never worked. Christine: I was thinking of going to TAFE next year - I've only got about five more units to finish my VCE - but I'm not sure 'cos if I go back I'll get less money and can't afford to

live. Steve: Where will I be in a year's time? Hopefully I won't be in prison.

Jacqui: I'm not making plans 'cos something happens and it falls down and you get upset. I can honestly say that I don't control what goes on in my life-after a while you just give up.

The Government Does not. Care

Education minister Hayward said that falling retention rates and rising class sizes were irrelevant. " I am not interested in output indices. I am essentially only interested in what goes into schools and making schools more relevant Outcomes, measures and indices...are a lot of rubbish." (Age 21/9/1994) The Age commented the "most worrying aspect of the Minister's response is the implication that the government has no idea how funding cuts and structural changes have affected the quality of education. It is astonishing that a government ostensibly dedicated to performance and excellence has...no credible measures by which to judge what it is doing, other than its accounting yard sticks. Even more astonishing and disturbing is Mr. Hayward's exclamation that 'outcome measures...are a lot of rubbish'." (Age 22/9/1994) Nevertheless, Director of School Education Geoff Spring said two days later "I am not particularly interested in assessing the impact of the cuts". (Age 24/9/1994)

While government spokesmen are prepared to dismiss the impact of cuts ant school closures, students, parents and teachers are not. The reports show that school closures have significantly decreased the opportunities of the young people who speak from their pages. Most have found their experience disruptive, time consuming and unsettling. Some have tried several schools in an attempt to pursue their education and many have just dropped out of school, hoping to find work. But employment eludes them, in part because they have not finished their education. Too few support networks and stretched welfare agencies leave some of the young people to fend for themselves. They are left between school and work, many being marginalised, denied the conventional rites of passage and are often tempted to make positive decisions of their own which are likely to lead to risk taking behavior. No society can tolerate the development of such an underclass.

This pamphlet has been written by some members of the Centre for Democratic Education. The Centre consists of researchers, most of whom are linked with the universities wish to protect the interests of government schools. Permission of the Centre is not needed for the reproduction of its material.

For further information contact 931 Drummond Street North Carlton 3054 tel: 387-8851 or 819-4002

Professor Alan Bishop

The Learning Assessment Project (LAP) will begin in May 1995 when all students in Years 3 and 5 will be tested in English and mathematics. One other curriculum subject will be included in each subsequent year, with the exception of languages other than English (LOTE). So begins a program of state wide, compulsory standardised testing in Victoria.

My recent experience from the United Kingdom has set me firmly against the idea of using this kind of assessment. I have seen the damaging effect it has had on all parts of education in the UK, and the enormous amounts of stress it has caused for teachers and everyone else in the system. I don't want to see the same thing happen in Victoria, or anywhere else come to that. People here need to learn from the experiences of the UK, and from elsewhere, where valuable educational resources have been poured into expensive and harmful nation wide assessment.

If we look at a range of reasons for assessing students' learning there are some which to me are acceptable, genuine and worthwhile, but there are others which are questionable, contentious and unacceptable. They are:

- *formative feedback to students
- *formative feedback to teachers
- *formative feedback to parents
- *to enable school comparisons to be made
- *to control the curriculum
- *to provide system accountability

Formative Feedback to Students, Teachers and Parents

I have no objection to assessment which provides formative feedback to students, to teachers and to parents. Assessment of student learning is a normal and essential part of the teaching-learning process, and if parents are to play their full part in educating their children, they need detailed information from the assessment practices used in schools.

This is of course one of the main purposes put forward for the Learning Assessment Project. Unfortunately, the quality of the information gained from the LAP scores is likely to be of

limited value to parents, and is not worth the huge amounts of money being spent on it. Scores and simple diagrams are impossible to interpret without other contextual information.

The government should put the money instead into improving the quality of schools' reporting and teachers' assessment procedures. Schools and teachers are the best sources of information for parents about their

child's learning, and if the government's prime concern is the quality of information going to parents (and I did say if), it should seek ways

to increase and improve teachers' assessment, not put forward a plan to bypass teachers altogether.

However, it is when we move to the other reasons for assessing on the list above that I begin to have very serious concerns. Assessing students' performance with tests in be done quickly, and it can seem to be a very easy way of collecting data which can then be used for all kinds of purposes. But there are serious problem which I believe people should know about.

School Comparisons

Firstly, let us consider the area of school comparisons. I know that this has not been stated as one of the reasons for introducing state wide assessment, but I have a

suspicious mind in these matters. Mr. Hayward has given certain guarantees about the confidentiality of test score data coming from the Learning Assessment Project in order that 'league tables' will not occur; but many people are unconvinced about this.

Given the number of people involved in the process, leaks will be likely and the media will be eager to know the results. There will, in my view, inevitably be comparisons made between schools, both publicly and privately. This happens to a certain extent already, and test result data will only add fuel to the fire. Once again simplistic test result data will be interpreted simplistically, and there will be 'winners' and 'losers'. This is no way to help schools develop to serve their community's needs.

Curriculum Control

A second problem area relates to the curriculum. It is claimed that the Learning Assessment Project will be closely connected the Curriculum and Standards Framework (CSF), but this framework is also in its very early stages, and it is still very unclear how it will function. My concern is not just that the assessments will narrow the curriculum, as many others have argued, but that the real purpose of the Learning Assessment Project is to begin to enforce the Curriculum and

Standards Framework. This is using student assessment as a form of curriculum control and is in my view a most pernicious abuse of student assessment. There are other ways to achieve quality controls on the curriculum at the school level and they should be used.

System Accountability

My third concern relates to the abuse of student assessment by employing it as a means of evaluating how well the education system is

functioning in general. System accountability is not just a matter of testing the students, it must take into account a whole range of factors. Using student assessment of the quick and easy kind is an example of a bureaucratic rather than an educational approach to accountability. Education is not naturally a bureaucracy and we should resist the government's attempts to turn it into one. It is a people enterprise and we should emphasise the 'people' aspects throughout.

The other concern I have with this kind of accountability is in regard to ethical and indeed legal considerations. It seems to me that using student assessment as a means of evaluating the performance of the education system requires at the very least students' (and their parents') permission. Why should all students have to sit yet another assessment for a purpose which has nothing to do with their learning?

Conclusion

So I come back to my starting point-I would like to see student assessment assuming its key position at the heart of teaching and learning, and other means used for doing the other monitoring and quality assurance tasks. We don't have to subject students to increasing numbers of tests which give us dubious data. What really needs to happen is to increase the teachers' professional competences with assessment and reporting, and to increase the accountability processes within the whole system. The Learning Assessment Project is not going to help with formative feedback to students, teachers and parents. All it will do is increase competitive anxieties and cause yet more stress for everybody. Compulsory state wide assessment is an old fashioned, ineffective and potentially abusive bureaucratic instrument. It should not be used in the name of educational development.

(Professor Alan Bishop, Associate Dean of Education (research) at Monash University, is a distinguished educator who moved to Australia in the UK after spending several years as a senior lecturer in education at Cambridge University)

Others also oppose statewide, compulsory standardised testing:

Professor Per Dalin, the Norwegian Director of the International Movement Towards Educational Change and former head of the OECD's research and development centre, said standardised testing around the world had been a total mess. "No other country invests so heavily in testing as the United States, but American schools lie at the bottom of international standards...American students have been tested all their lives and its achieved nothing. To think testing will improve schools is nonsense." He added that Germany had no tests or final exams yet enjoyed the highest educational and productivity standards in the

world. He believes that standardised tests do not measure students' abilities and there is no evidence that they improve schools or educational levels. (Herald/Sun, 16/6/ 1994)

Professor Margot Prior, of the School of Psychology at La Trobe University, making a comment on resources said "Research with Victorian school children has shown that teachers are quite accurate in picking out children who are not working at an age/grade appropriate level, or who have serious problems with basic literacy and numeracy.

Assessment might sharpen up teachers accuracy but it may not add very much to what they know from daily contact with a child... If a child is found to be performing well below the expected standard what resources will be offered to schools and families to bring the child up to standard?... If assessment does not lead to help for disadvantaged children it is of limited value." (Age, 24/5/1994)

Mr. Michael Flynn, General Secretary of the Victorian Independent Education Union, said that 90% of teachers and principals in the catholic system in a response to a union survey opposed the tests partly because of the potential for comparison of results. "No matter what guarantees are given, parents are going to talk in the car park and in the streets. ... There is no guarantee schools won't start to use the outcomes themselves in the market place." (Age, 25/11/1994)

"The major government school parent, school council and teacher bodies in Victoria, along with education academics, curriculum consultants, bureaucrats and non government school teachers, have strongly opposed (stateside, standardised testing) for several decades". (School Bell,

May 1994)

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Pamphlet 4 February 1995

INTRODUCTION

It must seem inappropriate to write about teacher shortages when the government has cut teacher numbers by more than 8,000 and it is claimed that there is still an oversupply. However, there are principals in Victorian secondary schools who are unable to find fully qualified

applicants to teach in some subjects. McRae identified 25 in his sample of 60 schools where principals reported a shortage, and another 26 schools reported teachers working out of their subject area. (D. McRae, Into the Bone, 1994).

There are usually difficulties in accurately matching teacher supply and demand but now there are some shortages which stand out as being particularly serious and must be redressed otherwise Victoria may replicate the situation in the United Kingdom where recruiting agents are being sent abroad for qualified teachers.

TEACHER SHORTAGES

There is an indication of a teacher shortage whenever a school has a vacancy it cannot fill with a qualified applicant, and the school is forced to make less than satisfactory staffing arrangements to maintain its program, thus affecting standards.

The major areas of teacher shortages in Victoria appear to be in languages other than English (especially Asian languages), mathematics, physics, chemistry, music, computer studies, commercial and business studies and technology studies.

Consider the following which show school responses in areas of shortage:

Case 1.

A school has lost a teacher in a subject area in the middle of the year. Efforts to obtain a replacement have been unsuccessful and the principal suggests that a student completing teacher preparation might be able to take classes. Alterations are made to the school timetable to allow the unqualified student to continue classes for several months.

The teaching is completed with some extra support and supervision from the school and the tertiary institution which the student is attending. The principal maintained the program despite a critical shortage of teachers in this subject area, but standards were probably affected.

Case 2.

A principal is satisfied that there are no qualified applicants to teach an allotment in a language. A first year qualified teacher from another subject area, with some experience in the language but no appropriate specialist qualification, is employed to take the

allotment. In this case the teacher will cope and may even take up opportunities to gain qualifications in the language. The school has managed to maintain its program, but its quality has been jeopardised.

Case 3.

A principal has spent a great deal of time trying to find a teacher in a language area. To maintain the language in the school a person is appointed who has not completed any teaching qualifications nor formally studied the language. Some background experience allows the unqualified teacher to maintain the program and negotiations commence to enable the teacher to complete a teaching qualification. Again the situation is rectified but the teacher shortage in the area has threatened the continuation and quality of the language program.

There are increasing numbers of cases of one and two but examples of case three are rare in Victorian schools.

GOVERNMENT STRATEGIES ON REDUCING STAFF COSTS

The cases cited are not merely oversights or incidental. They are a direct result of the government's policy of reducing teacher numbers and the abolition of the compulsory registration of teachers. While in-service and upgrading arrangements can allow a good teacher to adjust qualifications they are really only emergency measures and are no substitute for encouraging fully qualified new teachers to enter the profession.

The use of contracts which vary teachers' terms and conditions, combined with the possibility of employing under trained or under qualified teachers, means that principals, as they receive the power of teacher appointment, and recruitment by default, could be tempted or forced to save money by paying such staff less. As a widespread practice this would lead to the de-skilling of teaching and weaken the authority and status of the profession.

The requirement for all teachers to be registered on the basis of their minimum qualifications was removed early in the term of the Kennett government. Instead the Standards Council for the Teaching Profession (SCTP) was established to set and monitor qualification standards for teachers. The SCTP however is only an advisory body and its decisions, unlike those of the Teacher Registration Board which it replaced, are not legally binding.

High quality planning of state education needs careful monitoring of demographic trends, student preferences, and changes in community and family needs.

MAINTAINING QUALIFICATION STANDARDS FOR TEACHERS

However, the move to school based staffing and the attempt to provide more flexibility is acceptable if two conditions are met:

1. There are sufficient qualified applicants available in the subject

areas needed by schools. This requires a central register of teachers to establish proper qualifications, and provide a list of prospective teachers Recruitment campaigns to alert teachers of vacancies would also be needed.

2. There are upgrading opportunities for existing staff who may need to adjust their qualifications in order to fill vacancies.

The standards for teacher registration set by the SCTP are at least as rigorous as those previously required by the Teachers Registration Board. As from January 1995 the guidelines require four years of tertiary study, including an approved course of teacher education for applicants to any new primary or secondary on-going or fixed term appointment.

The problem lies, however, not with the 'requirements' but with their advisory nature. The 'Guidelines for Assessing Teacher Qualifications' issued by the Personnel Operations of the Directorate of School Education dated 16 March 1995 immediately dilutes the 'requirements'. For example, the requirements need not apply to teachers employed on a one year contract in 1995, casual relief teachers, or instrumental music teachers. 'Requirements for specialist areas such as ESL, library or special education may be waived by principals with staffing problems if they consider someone suitable. Principals may also employ some primary teachers in secondary schools and vice versa without the need to undertake additional appropriate study.

While the SCTP has no executive power principals in times of under supply will be forced to accept unqualified teachers for their schools important programs - clearly a lowering of standards and possibly a return to the secondary school problems of the 1960s before the Registration Board was established in Victoria. The SCTP standards approach will only be effective if there is sustained effort by teacher employers to attract properly qualified applicants in all subject and teacher areas.

CAUSES OF TEACHER SHORTAGES

1. There are insufficient enrolments/ in relevant tertiary courses. Physics is one example of a school subject which requires more teachers

than the numbers studying in the universities at present.

2. There is a limit to the number of pre-service training positions available. In the case of languages other than English a small number of teaching practice places means there are quotas on the numbers of applicants who can be enrolled. Alternative methods of preparing teachers needs to be explored if we are to train sufficient numbers in a short time.
3. Teaching is financially less rewarding than other career options. This appears to be an important factor in areas such as computer or legal studies. In these areas it is essential that opportunities in teaching are promoted.
4. School location can be a factor in teacher shortages especially when only short term contracts are offered. These discourage teachers from relocating, particularly to and from the country.
5. Difficulties in finding teachers who may be available. The present government has shifted responsibility for hiring teachers to the local school

level but many principals appear to have difficulty identifying qualified teachers because there is no up to date central register.

6. The government system no longer indicates its new teacher employment requirements at the end of each year as intending teachers are completing their qualifications. Non government schools tend to be better able to offer positions late in the year, and so have first choice of the graduates in areas of shortage.

TRENDS IN TEACHER SUPPLY

Three trends are a cause for more general concerns about the future supply of teachers:

1. The average age of Victorian teachers is approaching the mid forties, which points to a need to recruit young teachers.
2. The number of pre-service teaching places has decreased significantly in several institutions with a consequent reduction in the number of graduates.
3. There is a wide spread perception in the community that there are few career opportunities in teaching. A decade of decreasing employment followed by the recent reduction of 8000 in the state's teaching service has meant that many prospective candidates have not considered teaching as a option. That misperception must be altered if teaching is

to attract good people, especially in areas of shortage.

CONCLUSION

In combination, the dilution of qualifications, the reasons for teacher shortages and these new trends in teacher supply clearly illustrate the need for the central coordination of the employment of teachers. The Kennett government has deliberately turned away from this to introduce free market principles into schools' management. This can easily lead to the haphazard application of teacher qualification requirements, poorer conditions of employment, a disgruntled teaching community and lower teaching standards in the schools.

A return to an institution similar to the Teachers Legislation Council, established by a Liberal government in 1,973, (also Labor Party policy now) would help allay many fears about the employment of unqualified teachers.

Planning for a state system of education has to be the responsibility of a central authority and cannot be driven by employment practices in individual schools which have no state wide perspective. Failure to discuss and implement long term planning based on acceptable standards puts the whole state education system at risk.

This pamphlet has been prepared by members of the Centre for Democratic Education

In consultation with academic staff from Monash University.

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The Issue

One of the tests of an education system in a democratic society is how it copes with difference. This pamphlet focuses on the treatment of children with disabilities and should help parents make a useful contribution to the development of their school's charter. This will in turn indicate how inclusive or exclusive the school and its curriculum are of children with differences.

School curriculum and organisation should give all children the chance to achieve as much as they can from education and enable them to make their fullest contribution to society. We are accustomed to thinking about the curriculum as gender inclusive and culturally inclusive, but rarely disability inclusive. Why?

Segregated Schooling

Around the turn of the century governments in most western countries became interested in how to educate children with disabilities, especially those with intellectual disabilities. It was found that having made schooling compulsory for all children to the age of fourteen or fifteen there were some who learned more slowly and needed special assistance in order to make the best use of their time at school. The 'slow learners' were often treated poorly by other children, and there was a general belief that poor performance at school was genetically based with these children holding others back.

The development of an intelligence test by the French psychologist Alfred Binet offered an apparent solution. If those with measured low intelligence could be diagnosed early then special programs should be developed under the guidance of special teachers in special schools. As the twentieth century went by intellectually disabled children were joined in special schools by the physically disabled, the emotionally disturbed and then by children who were socially disadvantaged or exhibited behavior problems.

Parent Concerns

Despite increasing specialisation of schooling for children with disabilities some parents felt that when their children were placed in special schools they had little hope of becoming independent and making their own way in the community. Some parents felt, and some even accepted, that their children were not challenged at special schools and did not learn as much as they might if they went to mainstream school like the other children in their neighbourhood.

The International Year of the Handicapped provided parents of disabled children, their advocates, and the human rights movement in general, the public attention they needed to challenge the system which had operated in a benevolent, yet often discriminatory way against the best educational interests of children with claimed disabilities.

Integrated Schooling

In 1983 the Victorian Labor Government conducted an inquiry into the

education of disabled children. The Report of the Ministerial Review of Educational Services for the Disabled (1984) stated that children with disabilities had an equal right to be educated in mainstream schools and declared that parents should be able to enrol their children at the nearest state school.

Through an Integration Support Group (ISG) schools could apply for additional equipment and support staff to enable disabled children to participate in mainstream school curriculum and activities.

Some schools were better than others at welcoming children with disabilities. The number of success stories began to increase as the practice of integration was accepted and understood by school communities. Many children fulfilled their parents' expectation that they could do better at a mainstream school than at a special school, and by 1993 there were nearly 6,000 children with disabilities attending mainstream schools. Other parents were not so sure about their children's development leaving nearly 5,000 in special schools (Education News Supplement, August 1993). The figure of 5,000 could have been inflated by the re-definition of the range of children eligible to fill places in special schools vacated by those entering the mainstream schools.

Inclusive Curriculum

A major problem for the segregation and the integration eras was the assumption that the mainstream curriculum was not negotiable. During the period of benevolent segregation mainstream curriculum was for those who would go on to mainstream employment or higher education, unimpeded

by children who were labelled different or disabled. The integration movement saw many children with disabilities relocated to mainstream schools where their participation was negotiated with the assistance of their ISG and experienced teachers who had developed their 'inclusive' teaching skills.

Unfortunately the mainstream curriculum continued to develop without enough consideration for children with disabilities. A new category of student was created with a new label, 'integration student'. Children with disabilities were in the mainstream but not always a part of it.

Current Government Policy

It is obvious from its omission that the policy of the Kennett government is not to take up the issue of the inclusive school and curriculum (Education News Supplement, August 1993). Instead, we have entered a period in which parents of children with disabilities are apparently able to choose the best school for their child.

'Regular schools which have new students with disabilities will be given funding at one of six levels' on a scale from \$3,000 to \$23,000 (Directorate of School Education, School Global Budget 1 995).

That sounds simple but the process is not and is very confusing for schools and

parents alike from comments by integration teachers it seems that funding is allocated by adding numerical values from one to eight, assigned to skill covering mobility, communication, self care, vision, hearing, behaviour, medical requirements and cognitive ability.

So a child with no mobility problems gets one, while a child in a wheelchair gets six, and one who cannot propel the chair gets seven and so on. Parents and teachers must highlight all difficulties to get the best funding and must subsume all relevant information into a number

while trying to gain access to a mainstream school.

But the English and American experiences show that in reality schools rather than parents often make the choices (S.Ball, Education Reform, 1994 and D.Moore & S.Davenport, 'Choice...the New Improved Sorting Machine' in W.Boyd and H.Walburg (eds), Choice in Education, 1990). Many schools with financial interests, or certain educational philosophies, such as homogeneity, might deliberately avoid taking children with disabilities or select children with particular disabilities. The careful manipulation of enrolments can allow for greater financial flexibility or greater income. Also, children not accepted by one school may find that other

schools know of their case and exclude them, often without proper assessment.

Public education is meant to be for all children, however, the random exclusion of disabled children defeats this democratic purpose.

Curriculum and Democratic Education

It is time we made the connection between school curriculum and the responsibilities of democratic citizenship. Simply making changes administrative arrangements is unlikely to achieve improved educational outcomes for children with disabilities whether they are inspired by benevolent humanitarianism, human rights, parental choice or some other set of administrative arrangements which aim to integrate or segregate children 'in their best interests'. Society is made up of all sorts of interacting people and personalities, including children and adults with disabilities, and so schools should reflect this condition.

It is unlikely that teachers of 'severely disabled' children will be immediately enthusiastic about arguments on democratic education. Many are swamped by the day to day tasks of toileting, feeding and other personal needs of disabled children. These are legitimate

concerns and must be debated in the search for teaching strategies which will lead to more secure community membership and greater independence for more young people. The task is one for the whole school community and should not just be passed on to isolated classroom teachers. An inclusive school and curriculum, envisaging a society where everyone's contribution is important, can be devised with cooperation and good will.

The Future

This is not a time to stop debate, stand back and wait until stability returns after the current set of radical and often unpopular changes imposed on education by the present government.

For the parents of children with or without disabilities it means an examination of what they want for their child and how that could be achieved in partnership with the schools. Teachers should question their programs, methods and evaluation procedures to find out how they can achieve an inclusiveness. In this way all children gain through contact with a more diverse range of peers and can become more responsible citizens in a democratic society.

At the heart of the problem outlined in this pamphlet lies the definition of parent choice.

Parents of children with disabilities do not have a choice if school budgetary decisions and curriculum mean those children cannot go to the local school with their friends in the neighbourhood.

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Pamphlet 6 June 1995

THE RESPONSIBILITY OF MARKETING YOUR SCHOOL

Material in this pamphlet is based on a research project called Marketing Education in the Information Age, 1993-94

Associate Professor Jane Kenway
Deakin University, Geelong

Introduction

Much has been said to encourage schools to enter the education marketplace and to adopt its culture. Much has been said about why this is necessary and advantageous and how this should be done. However, with so much said it is difficult to find any research which shows what actually happens in schools when they adopt market forms and culture. Schools know the market is no panacea. It raises many educational and ethical difficulties which need to be explored to allow schools to behave in a socially and educationally responsible manner.

School Activities

Our research into marketing education in schools shows there are different ways in which principals respond to pressures to change school operations.

There are currently two sides to the marketing coin. On one side schools are increasingly privatising, promoting activities and searching for sponsors while developing the infrastructure to support these activities.

Some examples are:

- *increasing the amount of the 'voluntary' levy on parents,
- *developing 'user pays' courses (for example overseas students),
- *hiring out school property and services,
- *establishing money earning businesses such as catering.

To promote themselves schools are:

- *developing glossy brochures and letterheads,
- * liaising with the local media to print good news stories,
- * lifting their image through physical means such as the school

entrance, uniforms and various sorts of impression management activities.

Sponsorship from business is sought for letterheads, billboards and newsletters.

Schools are also:

*looking for exemplary models from industry which can be transferred to education,

*developing marketing plans and establishing fundraising

committees, accepting goods and services from business in return for certain activities.

These are not necessarily negative but indicate a shift in resourcing and a

diversion of education's energies to marketing. They need careful monitoring.

On the other side of the school marketing coin is the commercial world of business and industry. Some school sponsors are local such as real estate agents, newsagents and hotels, while others are national and international like Alcoa, Ford and Coles. One primary school principal received over 100 items of advertising mail in eight weeks. This bombardment included:

*competitions with prizes,

*free gifts/samples for students, *commission for selling products to and through the children.

The post is just one way marketers are getting into schools. Other ways are via the home and even the school system. The McDonald's deal with the NSW Education Department is an obvious example.

The Market Culture in Schools.

It is possible to sustain a case that both schools and businesses are in a market research phase. They are learning what is possible and what is preferable.

Schools are casting around to work out where to put their budgets and energies, and how to organise and present themselves. Some principals are enthusiastic, some reluctant, but most do not see a way of avoiding the market, thereby creating a self-fulfilling prophecy.

Businesses are also trying to work out the ways into schools, which deals work and the best ways of tapping, into a promisingly lucrative market.

Marketing literature shows that schools are good investments as they offer convenient groupings of young people in an environment which is still relatively free of advertising glut. School involvement allows corporations to promote a good philanthropic image and allows businesses with doubtful reputations to practise reverse psychology or

advertising, and develop a stock of goodwill and brand loyalty. The broad purpose behind commerce in schooling is the production of generations who are active consumers.

We are seeing the emergence of a market culture in schools, but what are the implications?

Overseas research indicates that market practices put schools' educative purposes at risk. They blur the line between education and advertising. They privilege image over substance, convert the role of the principal from an educational leader to a marketing entrepreneur, divert scarce resources to non-educational purposes and create for students and teachers moral and ethical dilemmas. Also at stake are:

- *the purposes of education and the sorts of people schools will produce,
- *the survival of the best of what is public about public education,
- *the ethic which says that all children, no matter what their class background, should have equal access to a good education.

A great deal more is at issue than economics or administration

Towards Responsible Marketing

A key question for principals, teachers, students and parents is this: 'If the market is the only game in town, is it possible to play and at the same time be socially and educationally responsible?'

In 1993 the Australian Education Council published a National Code of Practice for Sponsorship and Promotion in Schools which includes some useful ethical principles. Unfortunately it received very little publicity. very few principals knew of its existence and those who did were cynical about a government application of its own codes.

Is socially and educationally responsible marketing possible? Hugh Emy, *From the Free Market to the Social Market*, (Pluto Press 1993) argues for the attachment of alternative social and moral values to the free market agenda and wants state institutions to promote these values. He calls this a social market. He asserts that people need to be protected from the unintended consequences and excesses of the free market, that the market must rest on ethical as well as economic principles and that economic security and cultural integrity can go hand in hand. He also encourages the principle of solidarity and businesses are encouraged to collaborate and to develop a strong ethic of public service. Individual responsibility goes hand in hand with collective responsibility.

Schools can readily subscribe to the idea of a school.! market. It

allows them to meet their specific needs, but also to recognise their responsibility for an education system which does more than produce workers and consumers.

Codes of Behaviour

But school communities would have to develop their own codes of practice and ethics communities to protect their schools and reputations from the risks and worst excesses of the market.

The National Association of Head Teachers in the UK developed a code to restrict disruptive and destructive competitive behaviour and to explore collective solutions to shared problems. These allow room for co-operation at local and regional levels, with schools pooling resources and ideas, and have the benefit of keeping down costs and reducing wasteful competition, while

demonstrating a reasonable social ethic.

A code of practice should include a commitment to the use of educational rather than market language since language helps to shape behaviour and human identity. For example:

Market/language
client/consumer
product
enterprise
manager
image
performance indicators
educational language
parent
student
school
princial
school profile
assessment and evaluation

Such a language code would be a reminder that schools' primary responsibilities are educational. There exists a very grave danger that schools' critical creative, moral, cultural and aesthetic agendas will become marginal as they are required primarily to produce workers and consumers.

Questions Worth Asking

Our research shows that although some principals expressed concern about students being manipulated and used by commercial forces, only a few principals looked at the curriculum implications of the

commercialisation of schools. Only one of the principals interviewed referred to ensuring that the curriculum of the school should develop students' knowledge and critical understanding of the market. Why is this an issue? If business sees schools as providing a concentrated youth market unencumbered with too much 'info glut', in which they can develop brand loyalty and repair corporate images damaged in the greedy '80s, their marketing agenda should not control schools.

Schools have a duty to explore and develop an educationally responsible market model; to ask 'What impact do my school's forays into the marketplace have on the curriculum, teaching and assessment and on the roles of principal, teacher, parent and school councillors?' They need to ask such questions as 'What are the implications for student learning when my school adopts market models? What are the messages marketing endeavours give to students about who they are, what they should value and how they should behave?'

Conclusion

Schools should strive to model the most humane ways of being in the world. This should be remembered when they decide who sponsors their school who sends materials to their school, who they will allow to promote themselves in their school publications. They should insist on an educationally responsible entry and should not sell themselves cheaply. Equally, schools should not take and offer nothing in return. Exploring what the school can give beyond cheap advertising and brand loyalty is another key question. Teaching children to be active and critical citizens who give as well as take is part of the job of schools. To this end an educationally responsible approach to school

marketing is one which identifies, models and develops humane, wise and just citizens.

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Pamphlet 7 August 1995

LAP Fails
the Test

Material in this pamphlet is based on: The Victorian Learning
Assessment
Project Reading Test (LAP) 1995

David Hornsby and Lorraine Wilson

(Independent Education Consultants)

Introduction

In May of this year, all Year 3 and Year 5 children in state and catholic schools in Victoria were required to sit tests of English and mathematics. Not all did. For example, less than two thirds of the schools in the North West Region, and few schools in the Warrnambool area participated. There was questioning of the tests' educational value, and much lamenting of the waste of money in implementing state wide testing.

Now they are over it is important to examine the tests themselves.

Evaluation of the tests

Definitions of literacy change over time. When the convicts first arrived in Australia they were considered literate if they could sign their name. Today any definition of literacy includes both empowering and critical literacies. Empowering literacy is being able to read and write to make decisions about your life in society. Critical literacy includes looking beyond the text and asking, "who wrote this?, what did they value? and why did they write it?" Today literate people generate new ways of thinking and have learned how to learn.

In Ministry of Education documents, including the Curriculum and Standards Framework (CSF), it is acknowledged that readers construct meaning from the text by sampling, predicting and confirming (or correcting) predictions based on visual and non-visual information. Test items to be useful should be consistent with definitions of reading as meaning-making, and should test significant reading behaviours.

After close analysis of the LAP reading tests we draw the following conclusions:

Faulty and invalid test items

1. Often it was impossible for literate adults to identify the correct answer from multiple choice possibilities. Sometimes the correct answer was not available in the options, or there were two or more correct answers. We include just one item as an example.

Children had to read the text and select answers from choices offered.

GO-GO

Simon and his father had found GoGo one day when walking in the scrub. He was a baby goanna, no more than thirty centimetres

long. One of his front legs had been hurt, perhaps because he had been fighting with a snake, or a fox, or another goanna. "He can't run properly," Simon's father said. "He'll be caught and eaten up before long." "No," Simon cried. "Oh no." "I'm afraid so." "Then we have to save him." His father smiled. "He won't like it, but we can try." He took off his jumper and advanced stealthily. Go-Go tried to hobble away quickly on three legs but he couldn't run fast enough. Simon's father threw the jumper over him and snatched him up, even though Go-Go wriggled and flickered his tongue angrily. Then they took him back to their house. Simon's mother rolled her eyes when she saw Go-Go. "Not a goanna," she cried. "Don't you dare bring that scaly old thing inside." "Ahh, Mum," Simon answered, "He's beautiful."

The children were asked:

Question 5. Why did Simon's father throw the jumper?

- to frighten the goanna.
- to keep the goanna warm.
- to protect the goanna's leg.
- to stop the goanna running away.

There is no information in the text explaining why Simon's father threw the jumper over the goanna. Professor Ball of the Board of Studies identified the correct answer as "to stop the goanna from running away." This cannot be the answer for the text says: "He can't run properly", he could only "hobble". So Simon's father did not need to throw the jumper over the goanna to stop it from running away.

A child would have to use knowledge outside the text to answer this question. Therefore, this is not a true test of the ability to read the Go-Go text. Readers generally want to

answer, "to protect himself from the goanna". However this response is

not available as an option.

Question 8. Simon's mum said that the goanna was a scaly old thing. Simon said "He's beautiful."

This shows that:

Simon was teasing his mother. Simon's mother was wrong about Go-Go. Simon and his mother looked at things differently. Simon and his mother disagreed about many things.

There is no obvious answer. We do not know the answer to Question 8.

2. Other test items had obvious answers, but these answers were not offered in the multiple choice options.

3. There was confusion between text types and their purposes. While it may be appropriate to test information on a bus timetable with multiple choice items it is totally inappropriate to test a poem in the same way. Literary response has many shades of meaning and there is no

single absolutely correct answer

4. There were grammatical errors in some text items, for example, singular/ plural confusion, making it difficult for children to read for meaning.

5. Non authentic texts were used. The Year 3 reading magazine had a table of contents on the last page, and the Year 5 reading magazine had an index in the middle, neither in the normal place.

6. Some test items included culturally specific information. One item was about how the sandwich got its name. Children with a knowledge of the British system of nobility were advantaged.

7. Some test items used unsound reading strategies. Children were asked to predict words which would make sense in a given text from words supplied. The only rigorous way of assessing children's ability to predict text is to have them supply their own words. Since the test provided two, three or four words from which to choose, the children had a 25% to 50% chance of getting the item correct, even if they could not read the text.

8. Children were required to select a correct spelling from several misspellings of a word. This contravenes sound teaching practice. Visual memory is one of the three major spelling strategies. Good teachers do not deliberately destroy visual patterns. Moreover these spelling items (which have nothing to do with reading) fail to

establish how children would normally spell these words.

The purpose of test items

1. Only one of the test items for each year concerned meaning at the whole text level.
2. The other items were concerned only with the language or the print the children could see, that is correct of the surface features of language and comprehension at the literal level only.
3. No test items showed any serious concern for deep language structure and meaning.
4. No items related to literary response with children required to construct and negotiate meanings.

The test items were not authentic assessments of reading. The majority of items were concerned with surface trivia which had little to do with the process of constructing meaning when reading. Critical literacy and literacy for empowerment in our society were not tested. One must ask, "Are critical

literacy and empowerment literacy off the curriculum for Victorian children?"

LAP and the Curriculum and Standards Framework (CSF) matched
The CSF describes the outcomes (skills and knowledge) expected of Year 3 and Year 5 children. We have looked at each item in the tests to discover the match between CSF outcomes with the purpose of each test item.

Total number of CSF outcomes: 20

Not assessed by LAP at all: 17

Number partially assessed by LAP: 3

There is negligible match between the reading outcomes and the test items.

Individual children's reports

The Ministry of Education consistently maintains that the LAP and the CSF are linked. On the back of each child's report card is a list of statements beside a vertical bar indicating CSF levels. Parents would assume that these statements are from the CSF. They are not. But where did they come from? Who wrote them? How do we really know they relate to the CSF levels shown? Were they validated, and if they were, how?

The LAP, the CSF, and Standards

As a result of the LAP reading tests there is now discussion of year level standards in reading. We know of no research which has established standards for Year 3 and Year 5. Furthermore there was no rigorous validation of the LAP reading test. As late as February 1995, the LAP reading test was rejected by various consultation groups. Many items were totally abandoned and new ones found in a hurry to replace them. There was not time to trial the new items adequately, let alone the test as a whole, because the tests were administered in May. As well, there was no rigorous validation of the

levels in the CSF, as there was no rigorous validation of the National Profiles upon which the CSF were based.

The Age (16 September 1995) reported that the next round of LAP tests will be held on 26-27 March 1996 and that the new contract had just been awarded to RMLT's Assessment and Research Centre. This leaves only a few months to design and write the tests, to consult with advisory groups, to trial the tests with children, to revise after trialing, to edit, format and print.

Conclusion

Nothing has been learned from 1995. Concerns about concept and detail expressed before the testing are well founded on the basis of our study.

- *The majority of test items were faulty.
- *The tests were not educationally valid.
- *There is virtually no connection between the LAP and the CSF.
- *There has been no rigorous validation of the levels of the LAP reading test or the CSF. The test information given to parents had little educational value. Schools provide more detailed and educationally meaningful information.

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