

Letters from an educator

THOUGHT FOR THE MONTH (#11)

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Publ 12 Dec 06 AUS
LET SCHOOLS HIRE TEACHERS

Kevin Rudd's vow to raise the standard of schooling is music to my ears (*Rudd puts teachers on notice*, Aus 9-10 Dec). The greatest defect of our commonwealth is that low-income children are forced into low-achieving schools. But can Labour defy its own unions? Will Rudd replace weak teachers with strong teachers? We are talking about replacing teachers who are not confident in literacy, numeracy or effective classroom management.

The best hope of raising teaching standards in all suburbs is to give schools the advantage that independent schools have long enjoyed – self-government, which enables them to employ the best teachers they can get to meet their students' needs. POC

Sent 16 Nov 07 AGE
LESSONS FROM THE PAST

Richard Teese (Opinion, 14 Nov) proposes a wall-to-wall state-run school system that would 'concentrate resources'. He is ignoring the history lesson that where there is no choice and no competition, a state monopoly can consume huge resources and deliver poor quality (not to mention political indoctrination and suppression of other values).

In his eagerness to deny parents the right to choose who shall teach their children, Teese would lock every child into a union-dominated system that refuses to recognise individual teacher quality. He need only remember the huge funding boost provided by the Whitlam government. Lots of cash, but no gain in quality.

Another simple test is to look at the Catholic system. It operates on a lower budget per child, yet achieves higher outcomes. Wider parent choice would deliver more opportunity to children of all income levels. POC

Publ 14 Sep 09 AGE
THE STATISTICS DON'T ADD UP

I SUPPORT the push for better standards of literacy and numeracy in Australia. So I must comment on the report that one in ten students is below basic standards ("Students don't make the grade", *The Age*, 12/9).

The report says that 5.1 per cent of year 9 students failed the basic standard in numeracy. What a joke! This actually implies that 19 out of 20 are up to standard in maths. If only.

To add a decimal place to such a fake percentage figure may seem to add an air of scientific precision. But these figures have no basis in reality, except what some education-industry window-dresser thought they could get away with. The whole point is: the so-called "standard" has been set ridiculously low. Many countries have a more numerate population than we do.

The vast majority of Australians would just swallow this report without realising that there was no real-world floor to the figures at all. The first step is to select trainee teachers who are good at maths and English. POC

Publ 14 May 11 AGE
EDUCATION vs IGNORANCE

Our children live in a multicultural world. At Fitzroy Community School, we teach our students about religions – Christianity, Islam, Judaism, Hinduism and Buddhism.

Religion is a powerful factor in the lives of most humans.

To know nothing about it is to be ignorant – a poor basis for understanding and co-existence. What is needed is a recognition of the phenomenon of religious and non-religious beliefs, an overview of the major beliefs, and a display of respect and tolerance for others' views. POC

Publ 21 Jun 17 AUS
FUNDING WITHOUT PROGRESS

The federal government's big school-funding spend will produce no improvement in Australian education. It's simply a handout, with no strings attached.

And it is not, as some have claimed, "needs based". Multi-millionaire families attending high-achieving state schools in posh suburbs will still receive 100% funding, while poorer families in lower-budget non-state schools will still get only a percentage of such funding.

What's worse, it is not "sector blind". The percentage increase is not across-the-board. State-run schools will get a higher percentage increase, other schools a lower rate.

Figures that sound big now will quickly become standard recurrent spending, non-state schools will have to charge higher fees to keep up, and more families will be financially forced into the state school system.

So in fact, the entire spend-athon adds up to an attack on parent choice in schooling - the one and only factor that will raise the national standard. POC

Sent 10-11 Mar 18 AUS

HOSTILITY TO NAPLAN

The teacher unions are hostile to the NAPLAN because it informs parent choice, which is the only effective – and democratic – mechanism for the advancement of schooling in Australia. They protest that the NAPLAN can “shame” schools. But that its virtue! Schools that lift their students higher should gain the enrolments. That is progress. We fund schooling by the billions every year for the benefit of children – not for those who run the unions and the school bureaucracy. POC

Publ 29 May 18 AGE AUS HS

PARENTS NEED CHOICE

It’s dreadful news that the Victorian Education Department will no longer let their better schools grow to the point where most students are from outside their ‘zone’ (Age, 28/5). This is a direct attack on parent choice, which is the natural driver of improvement in our school system. POC

Sent 4 Jun 18 AGE

CRAVING for GOVT MONOPOLY

It is extraordinary what childlike loyalty some people show towards heavily-centralised state schooling. David Ball (Age 4 Jun) wants to force all children into the state system and expects “the best education possible”.

Have we forgotten the banning of phonics and other mad fads imposed on teachers? Have we forgotten how low Australian schooling outcomes are amongst prosperous countries? Without the competition between school sectors, our standards would be even lower.

He wants a “Finland” system, where all schools are government owned. But unions would never allow the replacement of thousands of our teachers by people with the Finnish level of qualifications. And the state

bureaux would never allow the independence that Finnish schools have from government bureaucracy. Our best hope for progress, given the education industry we have, is allowing diversity in schooling coupled with a parents’ right to choose. This way lies progress. POC

Publ 1 Oct 18 AUS

SEEDING THE ELECTORATE

I am astonished by the faux innocence of Professor George Williams’ in proposing (Aus, 1 Oct) that 16 and 17 year-olds be given the vote to “extend the franchise”.

He knows perfectly well that students’ politics will overwhelmingly reflect the propaganda that is channelled to them through their teachers’ influence.

This is the very reason that the green-left faction is so keen to maintain their control over teacher training, school funding and school registration.

Whichever faction dominated education, student voting would not serve democracy. It would simply mean that curricula would include yet more indoctrination seeding votes for that faction. POC

Publ 18 Oct 18 HS

NO CHARACTER TESTS

I agree with Jon Charlton (“We must find new ways to measure students’ growth”, Oct 17) that character is the most important aspect of development for young humans. And yes, it cannot be tested by NAPLAN.

Many parents seek out a school that recognises that “character is destiny”. I say allow more parent choice in schooling. It is my experience, as a school founder, that where character is the focus, academic and other performances automatically rise. But I balk at the idea of an **official** character assessment of students. Politics is so embedded in school curricula that state

agencies could not distinguish character development from political allegiance. POC

Publ 25 Jan 19 AGE

REPUTATION TO UPHOLD

Providing quality education to international students is a great tertiary industry for Australia. But we must protect the credibility of the degrees that we confer. Perhaps we could offer affordable, high-quality, one-year, advanced English language courses designed for students of a particular native language. Such courses could be tailored towards a subject area. We could confer a one-year diploma of Advanced English for specified subject areas. Help the students, uphold our reputation. POC

Publ 12 Feb 19 HS

PICK RIGHT PARENTS

I understand the recent reports of stress for school principals. Parents naturally feel they have a say in what a school does with their child. But one parent’s demands conflict with another’s. Here’s an example.

My wife Faye and I founded a primary school in 1976. We provide more outings, camps and other adventures. At first, we thought everybody would love it. Most did. But we got caught up in conflicts with some parents who were highly risk-averse. We soon learned the importance of interviewing all prospective parents and explaining exactly what kind of service we provide. And that we did not want to exclude any child from the adventure program.

Since we implemented the 100% explicit interview with prospective parents, we have enjoyed far more harmonious teacher-parent relationships.

We don’t select children - just parents. There would be happier parents and teachers all round if schools explained and upheld their school philosophy. POC