



bluyonder:

Greg Whitby on Learning & Leadership

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Author: Greg Whitby

Dedication: To Greg's family.

Introduction

For more than two decades, Greg Whitby wrote candidly about schooling in a changing world, leadership, learning spaces, technology, teacher professionalism, and the dignity of each learner. First shared on his *bluyonder* blog, these short musings trace a consistent message: relevance, relationships and relentless focus on student learning. Collected here in one volume, Greg's reflections move from the practical to the philosophical, how to build professional culture, why pedagogy matters more than hardware, and what it means to lead learning rather than simply manage schools. This book is a snapshot of an educator's mind at work. . . curious, optimistic, and grounded in evidence. It's also a tribute to the teachers and leaders who, day after day, turn big ideas into better learning for young people. May these pages remind us of Greg's invitation to fresh ideas, to provoke courageous questions, and to remind us why schooling, done well, changes everything.

bluyonder – Collected Posts

Collected from <https://bluyonder.wordpress.com> on 2025-09-08

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2007 Writings

Evangelising 2007-05-21

In our practical commitment to the learning agenda we must never forget that this sits firmly within our broader Catholic educational philosophy. Our Catholic understanding of the nature of the world and the human person informs our beliefs about the nature and purpose of schooling, and the most appropriately curriculum, learning environment and pedagogies that we employ in the pursuit of our shared mission.

We recognise the inherent dignity of every one of our students as a child of God. This leads us to a positive view of the learner and to a commitment to helping all of them to become active contributors to their own learning, to developing autonomy and self-reliance. We talk about the personalising of learning as a process for serving this intention.

For us, the school is not a business enterprise serving individual students. Rather, it is a learning community which is located within a wider community of faith. Hence, our commitment to teamwork, interaction and partnership. An essential component of Catholic pedagogy is found in the powerful relationships that are built on mutual respect and trust.

Our religious belief in the wholeness of the human person – body and soul, mind and spirit – leads us to pedagogies which transcend artificial barriers between areas of knowledge and experiences, as we seek to enhance learning and help our students find personal meaning in integrated ways.

Our commitment to the pursuit of truth motivates us to explore new ways of processing and sharing information and ideas, as in our application of the emerging technologies. And the life-giving values of the Gospel provide us with foundations on which to build a curriculum which has the potential to humanise and socialise our students in the most profound ways.

Our Catholic schools share the common commitment of all schools to quality learning and teaching. Our learning agenda, however, reflects an integrated worldview which provides special meaning and significance to our shared work.

Delivering on our strategic intent *2007-05-23*

We have just finished a two day workshop with our school leaders exploring how we will deliver the quality schooling needed in today's world. It was both a challenging and exciting time as we gathered to develop a framework to deliver on our commitment to make schooling relevant and meaningful for every child in our schools.

This process requires new ways of working together and new ways of collaborating and communicating. As I explained at the beginning of the workshop yesterday, we need to rethink how we go about our planning processes because to make our schooling relevant in a knowledge era requires ensuring as much support as possible at the level that makes a difference, that is each and every learning space in each and every school. Supporting the teachers as they go about the business of learning and teaching is critical.

We've tried various models over the years. Central Offices mandating and legislating for learning, schools taking complete responsibility for improvement and the like. What we have come to agree on is that it's both the central office and the school working as a collaborative community of learners that will provide the way forward.

This has given us all some energy as we begin the exciting work of fleshing out the base framework which we developed over the two days. We are going to call together a project group consisting of school leaders, teachers and system people to work on this in the early stages. We'll be using blogs and wikis to help in the broader consultation process within our system.

Innovators & Leaders 2007-05-29

In the last month, I've had the opportunity to met some innovators and leaders. In May, I had the pleasure of introducing Jimmy Wales at an *education.au* seminar in Sydney. Jimmy is still causing controversy but the wiki is a powerful tool in the democratisation of learning. I think he delivers an important message to teachers everywhere. The capacity to construct, edit and publish knowledge is at the heart of 21st century learning and web 2.0 and beyond capacities.

I was also in Melbourne for the *iNet Australia 2007 National Conference* and met one of the keynote speakers –Professor Yong Zhao. Yong's understanding of the rapidly developing Internet and its impact on learning and teaching is outstanding. It's well worth a visit to his website. He is sensible, clear and articulate about the possibilities.

Why bluyonder? 2007-05-30

For too long we have looked to the past to find the future pathways for schooling. I think it's about time we looked to the future and the great blue yonder for our direction. This requires courage, daring and the willingness to be innovative. If I were looking for words to describe today's learners in schools these three would be touchstones! You know why, well I think if we don't schooling will become even more irrelevant in young peoples lives. The knowledge age has ushered in fantastic new possibilities for schooling. Everything about the schooling process should be up for review and change. The world of web 2.0 and beyond beckons us on – that's why I've started this blog. . . .

Bulletin Smart 100 2007-05-30

I have been included in the top 10 finalists for the *Bulletin's Smart 100 Award*. This is a great honour and reflects more on the people who I have worked with over the last several years. Together we have been driving an agenda of making schooling in today's world relevant to all kids. It is good to know that some of my peers recognise this as a critical issue for all involved in schooling.

There certainly is a broad cross section of people in the finalist list. It's good to be in such company and makes you realise how complex the work we do in schools and the education sector is, when you see the diversity of people in the list. It is great to have such passionate people working for students.

Where the difference is made *2007-06-03*

For the last several months we have been working towards new ways of supporting schools in the work they do. This work is based on the conviction that the key to helping students improve their learning depends on the quality of the teaching they receive on a daily basis.

The literature for the last decade is very clear, teachers make the difference to student achievement, and they need to be well trained, well resourced and well supported in ongoing opportunities for professional growth.

This is a task that requires locating this support as close to the learning spaces as possible and in collaboration with the each individual school community. In this way we need to rethink the popular current models of support for schools and teachers. No longer should we think in terms the head office at the centre of decision making, nor is decision making only the responsibility of the school. The challenge is to find out what it is sensible for each to do for the benefit of the system. This implies therefore that the expertise resides across the system. We have to build new ways of communication, collaboration and setting strategic priorities. It is an exciting task and one we are now significantly committed to.

To this end we have developed a metaphor for embedding learning at the centre of the work we do. It is called 'the learning web'. Its construct reflects a web 2.0 world as well as the intricate patterns and connections implicit in delivering quality schooling today.

Cooltown 2007-06-05

Recently I visited HP's Centre for Innovation called Cool Town. It was a fascinating place and one of the innovations that struck me was the design of the future office. These are works in progress as HP explores the boundaries of how people are going to work in a knowledge economy. I think it's interesting that the design is minimalist and mobile, edgy and exciting; stretches the boundaries of how we might work. I'm not sure how practical it will be but it's good to see this thinking. As educators, it leads me to ask the question of how we are stretching the boundaries in school design and the tools we need to do the work in schools??

A Chinese Experience. . . . 2007-06-05

Recently, I was invited to speak to representatives of the Shanghai Peoples' Committee for Education. This Committee has responsibility for K-12 schooling in a city of 22 million people with over 4.6 million children in schools. The Chinese Government is committed to improving the quality of their schools to ensure that all students are prepared to contribute to making China an economic powerhouse.

I was asked to talk about the nature of learning and teaching in the 21st century – in particular the work I've been doing in my jurisdiction around driving change and innovation into the system. The Chinese curriculum construct is very narrow in the sense that there is a focus on core skills of mathematics, Chinese and English and a pedagogy that is still largely instructional in nature. There is a realisation however that working in a knowledge economy provides new challenges to the existing paradigm.

The interesting thing for me wasn't the focus on the nature of pedagogy in the 21st century but more on how you change a culture that has been prevalent for so long. The discussions we had on this were very interesting and certainly opened my eyes to the dramatic change that has taken place in China in recent years; their willingness to embrace western approaches to their thinking and doing.

On the road *2007-06-08*

On Tuesday evening I was in Canberra for the ACT Public Education Showcase Series 2007 . The ACT Department of Education hosts these forums on a range of issues relating to the provision of schooling in today's world. My specific topic was "the built environment" but as usual I spent most of the hour discussing learning in a knowledge age. It was a great experience and engendered some good discussion and reflections from the floor.

ACT DET should be congratulated for staging these forums for the general public. They are serious about improving public sector schooling across the spectrum. Key to doing this is the engagement of community in the discussion. It seems to me to be a good way to inform and obtain feedback at the same time. Too often education administrators ignore these sorts of opportunities.

Innovators in learning 2007-06-12

Today a group of my colleagues visited two outstanding schools in Christchurch, New Zealand. Tomorrow we are visiting two in Auckland.

is a K-6 special charter school which means it has a dispensation from the Ministry to organise its delivery differently. This is because of high parent involvement. The school is located in Cashel Mall in the centre of Christchurch CBD.

It is amazing from every point of view. Innovative design, collaborative teaching and an integrated personalised curriculum. All staff, parents and students are involved in the teacher appointment process! The kids run some amazing projects for the city including the NZ Nurses Association's annual conference.

Across the mall is the secondary school. It is in a leased high rise building and has amazing design features. It has a focus on democratising learning by which they mean staff, kids and parents work closely. They are most unlike any school you'll see but both are doing amazing things in a very simple way.

Great leadership, reflective staff and a passion for trying different things. It gives you a real shot when you see such a simple formula applied. The key to these successes from my observation is an absolute commitment to two key things:

1. kids are at the heart of what they do and how they do it
2. employing teachers who see themselves as learners and who know what doesn't work and are prepared and encouraged to do things differently

Take a look at their websites – Daniel, the principal at *Discovery 1*; Vince and Gil the co-principals at *Unlimited* are very engaging and proud of what their schools are doing.

Leading Edge schooling in New Zealand 2007-06-12

If you want to see a school that has been designed solely from what good learning in today's world is like then **Alfriston College** is the place to see. I've been here several times and each visit refreshes your spirit. The College began in 2004 and was the result of a commitment by principal **John Locke** and his beginning team to place the students at the centre of the schooling experience.

They wanted to build a school that personalised learning in a knowledge age and strengthened personal relationships. For me the single most important value that underpins the school is "joy". The community wants the schooling experience to be joyful, fun and life giving. The college is structured around the "whanau" (pronounced farnnow) which reflects a family environment. And it really works.

The built environment was designed to leverage the learning experience. You can see a one metre square granite block in the play area. All paths and horizontal and vertical walls have measurement spaces broken into metres. If you want to see what 4 metres looks like in a physical sense, just look down where you are walking! the point is that every aspect of the schooling experience has to add some value for the learning and teaching.

At the heart of Alfriston College is a commitment to change the culture for schooling today. An integrated curriculum, flexible delivery, recognition of diverse learning styles and an ICT rich environment is fabulous. John says he didn't want an industrial age school but a fundamental shift – a school for the knowledge age!

After Alfriston we visited Summerland Primary in west Auckland. Recommended to me by a great NZ principal **Mike Anderson** – boy was he right. The principal, **Luke Sumich** and his team are passionate about teaching.

The key thing for me was the way the staff learned together and worked on PD in teams. They think about how the school design can support them in their work. The energy in the school is like a tornado. Another example of how outstanding leadership and good practice makes all the difference.

what good leaders say 2007-06-13

Everyone knows that after good teaching, good leadership is at the heart of improving student achievement. On my travels I have had the opportunity to talk with several school leaders who I believe are setting an agenda for schooling in today's world which all leaders should take note of. They are diverse in their experiences across the k-12 continuum. Yet they have several key similarities. They...

1. are "curious" people, that is, they are not afraid to ask questions. This is an essential ingredient for good leadership.
2. are prepared to take risks in what they do and are brave enough to reflect on the outcomes of their initiatives.
3. have a passion for what they do. At heart they love the work of schooling and want to do the best they can for the schools in which they work.

Listen to *John Locke*, *Luke Sumich*, *Mike Phillips* and get inspired!

Simple insights on learning and teaching 2007-06-14

Had the opportunity to catch up with **Marco Torres** over the last two days. *Take a look* at the work he has been doing with teachers in our schools.

He and I are currently planning the next stage of his work with us; it has been good to spend time just reflecting on the core issues of schooling today. For those who don't know him, visit *his site*, his work with kids and teachers is amazing.

Marco is a teacher's teacher. He is passionate about learning and loves working with young people. His skills as a photographer, filmmaker, musician are fantastic but nowhere near his ability to plan great learning opportunities for young people.

Listen to what he thinks is important. He makes it all sound so simple, which in essence, it really is!

collaboration in Canada 2007-06-14

I had a fabulous day today with the folk from *York Catholic District School Board* in Toronto, Canada.

They are doing some great work and are recognised as one of the best performing districts in Canada. It is easy to see why when you listen to the director, **Susan LaRosa**.

She has a real passion for what she does, for her staff and the kids in schools. They have a well aligned system strategic focus. It is centred around a simple and clear statement of purpose which talks about strategic purposes and expected strategic. They're really committed to "closing the gap" between their shared vision and the shared reality.

The system strategic framework involves deep collaboration with school leaders. I had the opportunity to meet with secondary and elementary school principals who spoke powerfully about their capacity to be heard and to have input into the system agenda.

They were meeting today, as they do once a month, with their superintendent who acts a coach and mentor to them and serves as a direct link into the senior level system leadership. The level of professional respect and trust was a joy to see. It shows what can be done when you focus on issues, not personality; on purposes not regulations; and on good data not perceptions.

I will take back much wisdom and some good practices as well a good dose of common sense. We hope to start some inter-cultural collaboration between systems in the near future!

York District with Michael Fullan *2007-06-15*

I have been in discussions with **Michael Fullan** about some ongoing support for the work we are doing in developing a system agenda for our schools. His expertise and insights are wonderful.

Michael arranged for us to visit the York Region School Board's annual Literacy Fair – an amazing event. The District references all learning as a form of literacy in a way of sharing a “precise” focus for the schools.

The Fair is an opportunity for teachers to gather and share successful programs over the course of the school year. It is as team effort with several staff talking about what has happened. They must demonstrate (by use of hard data) the difference the program has made. Here's what Michael Fullan says. . . .

I also spoke with **J. Philip Parappally**, the principal of Fossil Hill Public School who told me the Fair is now an integral part of the school's culture.

Although it is held at the end of the Canadian school year, I didn't see any tired or jaded teachers. In fact as several said to me they can't wait to try out some of the programs they saw during the day. Something must be right.

Director of Education, **Bill Hogarth** (above) shared his perspective on the importance of the day. It was obvious that Bill's leadership and support is welcomed and recognised.

It was a privilege to attend; to see teachers sharing their craft with colleagues is powerful learning and reflects a culture of trust, collaboration and support. It was a celebration!

Bulletin Smart 100- top award 2007-06-20

I attended a lunch in Sydney for the finalists of the *Bulletin Bayer Smart 100*. I was honoured to be named the winner in the education category.

There are some outstanding Australians on the list, any of whom would be a worthy winner. The recognition for the work we all do in schooling is great and I have been fortunate to be constantly challenged by so many colleagues over three decades in the education sector. All contribute to this award.

The diversity of the work that is being done in Australia is amazing to see at such events. We have so many talented and passionate people in so many fields of endeavour. They are young, old (like me), male and female. It just shows that everyone can excel when they set their mind to it.

There is no doubt that a major theme for all the 10 winners is their recognition of how Web 2.0 is reshaping the world and the challenges this presents in their fields of expertise.

For me, it is about making schooling relevant in such a world. Young people in living in a knowledge age need a schooling experience that reflects this reality. This demands that our profession explore and try new ways of going about schooling.

Much is happening already, but it has to become a universal commitment so that all can benefit. The award is made all the more special as it was judged by **Professor Hedley Beare** – one of Australia's icons in education and has been so for some years.

Reflections on a Canadian experience 2007-06-21

Of the many professional learning experiences not too many reflect the time spent in Toronto. The school district (Catholic and public) are doing some truly great things. The district leaders shared the journey they have undertaken over the last ten years and can now look back with some pride on the achievements made. They say that they have turned their systems around and have the evidence to prove it!

In the late 1990s teacher morale was low, there was suspicion and mistrust of the system administration, low student achievement and some considerable public concern about the quality of schooling in the districts. The districts are now seen as some of the best performing in Ontario. There are strong system/school relationships, high levels of trust and collaboration with school leaders and administrators. Good learning and planning frameworks focus on improving student achievement and ensuring there is strong investment, building both capacity and sustainability.

It is great to spend time with educators who are driven by enthusiasm and passion for their work. They are honest and open about the journey and the time it takes to bring about such change. They also recognise the value of transformation that has taken place.

It is easy to oversimplify how this was achieved, or to reduce it to a basic formula. People like Bill Hogarth from York District Public District and Susan DeRosa from the York Catholic District give an honest picture of the hard work, complex planning and single mindedness in the face of opposition that such changes demand.

Their advice is:

1. be precise about the nature of the problems
2. use data to inform planning
3. don't 'drive' change
4. build a collaborative culture among the district leaders
5. place student learning at the centre

One of the most significant initiatives was to use critical friends external to the system. **Michael Fullan** has filled this role for sometime and has provided solid feedback continuously for the districts (see left Unlocking Potential for Learning).

I think it is critical to get the right relationship between system administration and the schools. Each acting by itself cannot provide the direction, support and strategy to deliver the change. Together they become a powerful learning network.

Leading 2007-06-26

There has been so much written about leadership that I sometimes think it impossible to add anything more substantive to the discussion. The academic paddock of leadership theory has well truly been ploughed and lead to a rich harvest in many domains. However the issue of leading is a different proposition all together – there is a big difference between the two.

Leading is “doing leadership”

Professor Patrick Duignan

And leading schools in a web 2.0 world is extremely demanding. Schooling in today’s world demands a new toolkit for “doing” leading. The web 2.0 world has replaced old certainties with new ambiguities and trusted processes with diverse paradoxes. Most importantly these technologies now provide wonderful opportunities to reframe the schooling experience in some extraordinary ways which meet the possibilities of both a physical and virtual schooling experience. The opportunity to move from a learning paradigm based on a “just in case” model to a “just in time” paradigm demands innovation, diversity, clarity, flexibility, boldness and rigour. I express this challenge as six elements of pedagogical leadership and welcome your comments on the following questions:

Precision how do you know you’re delivering on your school’s intent?

Velocity how do you maintain a relevant schooling experience in a web 2.0 world?

Curiosity where might curiosity about emerging technologies lead in re-imagining schooling?

Radical what current assumptions about learning, teaching and leadership might be challenged in a knowledge age?

Resilient what leadership examples can you offer which displays resilience, especially around emerging technologies?

Relentless how can leaders maintain their focus on schooling amid the everyday distractions?

Radio Interview *2007-06-28*

I'll be on the **Conversation Hour with Richard Fidler** (ABC Radio) on Friday, June 29 at 11am discussing 21st century learning and teaching.

For those in Australia, you can tune in to your local ABC station or listen to the podcast at <http://www.abc.net.au/queensland/conversations/>

LRNING 2DAY 2007-07-02

I was amazed at how fast an hour goes when I did the interview on the **ABC's Conversation Hour**. I have been thinking about what I said and the questions asked. One thing really stands out for me. There is a **strongly held perception** that these new ways of thinking about schooling are less demanding than in the past. I was asked directly about what the kids would learn and that surely there are certain things that all students must know. Somehow there is a fear that personalising learning, giving greater control to the student and using diverse methods of teaching will lead to students not having a "real education".

How do you explain to people that creativity is as important as teaching literacy if young people are to make a difference in their world?

This is so far from the truth that it defies logic. This approach to schooling is extremely demanding and rigorous on both the teacher and the learner. At every stage of the schooling process the student and learner have to be constantly engaged in an interactive process that builds on itself and stretches and challenges them. Each interaction is unique of itself and therefore a new experience. The teacher has to see every engagement as a different learning opportunity. No more repeating of the same lesson in the same way until the student gets it. The student has to take responsibility for his or her learning and become active participants in the process not passive recipients of information. Teachers have to continually craft and recraft for the individual, not the group. This places enormous pressures on them in terms of time and opportunities for professional growth. This is often made more difficult when the process is squeezed into a traditional curriculum model.

It is hard to get this point across. Teaching in today's world is more demanding than it has ever been. Good teachers know that but also know it is well worth the effort. I think that **Sir Ken Robinson** had something challenging to say about this when he spoke at the T.E.D. conference in 2006. Every educator should bookmark this site.

gr8 deb8 – is txt spk 2 blame? 2007-07-04

Technology (for those of us educated in the pre-digital era) cannot be an excuse for poor spelling! So why are people concerned about student literacy in the digital era?

Mobile phones have replaced the pen as the ‘tool’ du jour and SMS is the new digital shorthand. Most of us with a mobile have used SMS (even if it takes 10 minutes to compose a msg) because it’s a short, inexpensive and instant way to connect with people. Telstra says it carried more than 1.1 billion mobile text messages in the first half of its 2004-05 financial year! Businesses have been quick to embrace SMS as a communication tool but what about schools?

There was a lot of fuss when a number of Victorian high schools decided to introduce txt msging into the English curriculum. I thought Professor John Frow’s comments on the ABC’s World Today program made a lot of sense :

English has literary languages of different kinds, it’s got technical languages, it’s got professional jargon, it’s got sub-cultural languages, it’s got dialects, the kind of language that’s used in chatrooms. > Kids are exposed to a much bigger range of languages than we were in the pre-digital era. > Thinking about SMS is actually a way of thinking about English, standard English and about the way it works, the way it’s different from these other languages that students are very familiar with.

Professor Frow is spot on – we need to look at the merits as well as the challenges of schooling in the 21st century. Communication and learning are not linear. The theorist Marshall McLuhan was on to something when he said back in 1964:

The point is, we need to take note of the wisdom of the past. For educators the challenge is designing appropriate curricula and assessments for learning. Afterall, the medium has changed but has our thinking??

MCEETYA forum: a framework for evaluating ICT in schools 2007-07-06

I recently participated in a MCEETYA forum that has been given the task of drafting a framework to help schools and systems understand how Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) are “adding value” to the work that schools do. The search is on across the world to find ways to determine if ICTs are making a difference to student learning and outcomes (some examples: BECTA, Qld Dept of Education).

This is a legitimate and necessary approach as web 2.0 web continues to influence schooling today. Given the nature of learning today and the increasing investment schools and systems are making in ICTs, it is important that we have a framework for evaluation.

Approximately 30 educators from all jurisdictions across Australia and New Zealand worked on a draft over two days. As you can well imagine it is a difficult and complex task, not the least of which is trying to gain a consensus on a common conceptual framework. There is common agreement that such a framework must be of benefit to schools as well as systems and must not be a stand alone framework which will be viewed as another distraction or burden for schools.

I think that there are a number of key elements to be considered in any such framework such as:

- implementation of a coherent learning framework(s) * evidence of professional learning and collaboration * evidence of student achievements * building system capacities in the areas of strategic positioning, building leadership distribution and infrastructure upgrade

Such a framework must not be over and above the existing school planning framework. It should allow for the development of subsets under each to cater for the range of work that schools do in improving learning for all students.

For example, ICT integration must be referenced to a coherent learning framework which makes explicit what and how students will learn, and thus the appropriate tools needed.

It was a great experience to work with senior representatives across Australia who have passion and commitment and hope for the future of schooling. Diversity of ideas, professional critique and sharing of expertise were hallmarks of the discussions.

I asked Ross Treadwell, Lynne Davie and Kevin Richardson if they'd mind sharing their views on an ICT framework. Each is a respected educator with recognised expertise and leadership in schooling in a digital age. My thanks to them for their comments.

Crafting a framework for Catholic schools 2007-07-12

One of the most difficult tasks for leaders in schools today is to develop and work within a framework that gives precision, coherence, structure and direction for ongoing improvement. It is not so much a question of which framework is used as the fact that you have a framework. Far too much energy goes into stand alone, one off methods that ultimately absorb precious resources, overtax staff and under-deliver. The result is that the school community is often left with a sense of frustration and a maintenance of the status quo.

I think **Jim Collins'** work in "Good to Great" is an excellent example of what can be achieved by using a good planning framework. The common quality in the framework of Collins and others is a focus on Intent.

Understanding the core task is very important in Catholic schools which are both faith and educational communities; everything they do is in the context of a Catholic culture and worldview. From this comes the school's vision and mission. These are usually clearly expressed. What is often unclear, however, is the school's understanding of what it actually intends to do – it's intent.

Collins' makes the point that successful organisations have a very clear understanding of their intent as well as their vision. Our ongoing challenge in Catholic schools is to clarify our purpose and strategies which will serve it.

To help us all address this challenge, we need to stimulate a wide discussion on the intent of Catholic schools.

The business of blogging 2007-07-20

I read a great article by **Ian Grayson** in *The Australian* this week on blogging in the corporate environment.

I think the education sector can learn a lot from industries who are embracing these tools to develop more productive, resource sensitive and creative ways of working. We should not adopt them uncritically, nor should we ignore them out of hand because they are being adopted by business.

One point Ian makes is that a BIG cultural shift is required within organisations as they work in today's world. He says the advantages of using these tools (e.g blogs and wikis) is too great to ignore and the "march of Web 2.0 into the corporate space will continue to gather pace."

These tools are no longer fads. They use proven technologies that are readily available and becoming increasingly more ubiquitous for the simple fact that they assist organisations in improving the way they work.

Why is the education sector lagging behind? Why isn't our industry leading the thinking and application of such capabilities. Surely we must be on about questioning, challenging and innovation, isn't this part of our core business? Aren't things like communication, collaboration, personalisation central to the work we do in schools?

I am beginning to suspect it's because educators rarely venture out of their own networks or jump into this world themselves. I don't think you can effectively engage in this agenda in the abstract, you have to be an active participant. This means that educators have to blog, use wikis, have a facebook page, use del.icio.us and the like. I don't think the contemporary educator can take this as an optional preference. Just like the picture above – this is the reality in which we live.

Perhaps it's time to invite industries (who are our students' future employers) into the learning space to exchange ideas and to demonstrate educators how Web 2.0 is influencing more than just today's learners. Why shouldn't we be open to learning from other experts?

The question I have is where are schools at in their thinking about Web 2.0 and how these tools can be used not only in a classroom environment but to establish powerful networks and ultimately robust learning communities between educators?

Directions in leading learning 2007-08-02

I recently chatted with **Jenny Lewis**, CEO of the *Australian Council for Educational Leaders* (ACEL). We've been planning some work on leadership development and how we can work more collaboratively to leverage the resources on some very specific development opportunities for school leaders.

One of the key challenges for leaders in schooling today is the need for an updated “toolkit” or “skillset” and a sharper focus on the core work of leaders in schools. Leaders have overall responsibility for improving student outcomes. Any professional development should focus on equipping leaders for learning. This is not just a semantic distinction – it directly challenges our current leadership frameworks.

Listen to Jenny's reflections on how to attract good educational leaders.

Archbishop Miller on Catholic schooling 2007-08-02

Archbishop J. Michael Miller CSB, Secretary, Congregation for Catholic Schools spoke to over 400 participants at the Australian Catholic University's *Leadership Conference* held in Sydney.

****The Archbishop is an engaging speaker and has some important things to say about the nature and purposes of Catholic schooling. He recently wrote an illuminating book called the "Holy See's Teaching on Catholic Schools", which brings together the thinking and directions behind a range of Church documents for over four decades.

I had the opportunity to chat to him after the conference about some of the points he made. The thing which inspired me was his focus on the dignity of the human person as the centre piece of what we should be on about in our Catholic schools.

It resonated so much since I am of the view that the essence of all learning lies in the fact that it is a relational process which is essentially linked to human dignity. If this is not at the heart of what we are doing and is not a touchstone for our work then we will struggle to be authentically Catholic.

A further point of the Archbishop's relates to the concept of education as a *process*. In an age when consumerism so affects all of our lives and thought patterns, what a welcome reminder that education is not a commodity, that our schools aren't shops, that parents aren't customers. We don't sell a product but rather invite families to join a learning community where their children experience education as a life-giving process.

About Catholic schools 2007-08-06

I am often asked why Catholic schools exist? Quite simply, Catholic schools are good schools. We have a long history in Australia (175 years) and currently, one in five Australian students attend at Catholic schools. Aside from giving parents a choice in the education of their children, Catholic schools provide a rich experience for students, staff and families.

It's an wholistic approach to the development of the child not just academic, sporting or social but one nurtures spirit and imagination. In an age where consumerism and materialism threatens our core human values, it is vital that our students develop a sense of citizenship, stewardship and solidarity.

I've started a series of short podcasts, which will be posted here as links over the coming weeks on some of the important issues such as:

1. why Catholic schools exist?
2. what is a Catholic school?
3. what is the intent of Catholic schools?
4. what Catholic schools have to offer the wider community
5. Catholic school leadership in a digital age

Project-based learning 2007-08-17

I had a great meeting with a group of very passionate and excited teachers and their principal who are embarking on an exciting innovation to change the whole approach to learning at their secondary school. The school has been questioning what they are doing for the kids and can they do it differently to help improve student engagement. This has been done in a spirit of collaboration and professional dialogue.

They have been concerned that the boys are too often disengaging from learning particularly in year nine. They arrived at the conclusion that the problem lay not with structure of the school in year cohorts but with the nature of the curriculum construct and the approaches to learning and teaching that resulted from such constructs.

The staff from Parramatta Marist High School are going to focus their work in 2008 on Year 9 as a pilot and have taken a radically different curriculum model and teaching practice. Their aim is to improve the learning outcomes for all boys in the year. They believe these students are not learning as effectively as they could under the existing model.

Their principal is also a driver of innovation and doing things differently. This is a school to watch. Their approach reflects what we know makes a difference to kids learning; that is good teaching supported by leadership which works from a framework in partnership with those who can support them in their efforts.

Raising the bar 2007-08-24

We've been having a great conversation recently on why only a handful of teachers are using our system blog to exchange ideas, challenge one another and ask the critical questions. I was a little surprised that so many of our teachers are so busy blogging in their own school communities or as part of a global community. These teachers are so busy getting on with the job they really don't have the time to promote those connections at a system level. As a system, our challenge is how do we establish and sustain these connections and how can we all share in the wisdom?

One of our primary schools is raising the bar with its professional development. Staff have created a blog as a way of motivating each other to improve the learning outcomes of its students. They had to find a creative way of engaging teacher interest and they're using Web 2.0 tools to undertake research, deliver findings and keep each other up to date and motivated with what is happening in this dynamic learning community.

Every class has its own blog and the most inspiring is that the mother of one of the challenged students who set up a blog to share their learning with classmates was motivated to create a blog of her own.

The staff at this school are taking risks, being curious and asking the critical questions. The principal is focussing on creativity and says the professional conversation has been ignited.

Ultimately the issue comes down to one of quality. Teachers will use blogs that help and sustain them in their work on a daily basis. So I guess when we blog we should all keep this fact in mind and ask how our posts help teachers on a daily basis. The great thing is that, as this schools shows, blogging is supporting some vibrant learning communities in our system. This develops a culture of trust and professional respect, and we need to make it the norm not the exception.

The business of schooling 2007-08-29

The Business Council of Australia has just released a discussion paper on 'Making Australia's Education System its Next Competitive Advantage'.

Perhaps this is the wake-up call school systems need in order to radically re-think schooling. I don't think the BCA wants to commodify or corporatise schooling but rather to ensure all Australian students are well-equipped with the skills needed for a 21st century workforce.

The paper identifies two main areas of concern:

1. the number of students failing behind in literacy and numeracy (and the lack of early intervention)
2. the number of students lacking effective skills and knowledge for the workforce

In most schools, the wheels are already in motion and these issues are being addressed, which will, in time, lead to sustained change.

The BCA has developed a five point action plan for broader discussion: greater early intervention, customising learning, strengthening the teaching profession, increased investment and improved governance.

The question we need to ask is how we make schooling relevant in today's world and does the BCA's paper give valuable insight in moving things forward. I think it does. What is missing in the BCA paper is the need for a greater alignment and cooperation between the classroom, school and system. What is needed is a more coordinated and strategic approach in harnessing the resources needed to support and sustain this search for relevance. We know that in isolation the teacher, the school and the system cannot sustain change. It is too complex and the variables too broad for one level to do it all. The work of Grossman et al makes this very point in their study on 'how to manage urban school districts' published in the Harvard Business Review (Nov 2006).

Broader collaboration is the only way forward but are we truly open to it?

Listening and learning 2007-09-05

We're always being challenged to find new ways of engaging and teaching today's learner. I don't think we can do that successfully unless we begin to understand the spaces they inhabit both physical and virtual.

A colleague was recounting a conversation she had with a young teacher who told her how grateful he was that his teenage students had invited him 'into their world'. He never presumed he was a part of it or that as a teacher, he deserved right of entry.

Perhaps we all need to be examining schooling from a new perspective: as co-learners. The futurist Alvin Toffler said:

The illerate of the 21st century will not be those who cannot read and write, but those who cannot learn, unlearn and relearn.

I was interested in the creative approach the University of Rochester (US) took in upgrading its library facilities. Rather than consulting the 'experts', they asked students. A group were asked to identify their favourite place to study, what they carry to class and something they see as high tech. The administration team was surprised by the results. They found for example the library hours were 'out of synch with student needs'.

In July, I had the pleasure of meeting some Year 9 students who are really engaged with their learning and with Web 2.0 tools. They've actually begun working with their teachers to create podcasts of lessons which are then accessed by the school community. I asked them about their perceptions of learning and teaching in today's world.

As leaders and educators, we need to be willing to include students in the collaborative process of making schooling relevant. Perhaps we need to be following in the footsteps of the University of Rochester by asking students first – imagine the possibilities if we harnessed the wisdom of both generations!

The future of the profession 2007-09-10

Last week, I was invited to speak to the B.Ed. cohort at the University of Wollongong to discuss where learning and teaching is heading.

I had a great time with the group and it was interesting to note the number of mature age students who are changing professions to work in schooling. It gives us all great hope and energy to see people feel they can make a real difference by becoming teachers.

I am amazed by the energy and passion of these soon to be graduates. We had some terrific discussions around how to make a difference in young peoples' lives today.

The point I made was not to wait for permission to experiment and change current practice. In fact, personalised learning demands such an approach. At the same time, they should develop robust teams with their colleagues so as to test ideas, share experiences and reflect on good practice. De-privatising teaching has to be a cornerstone for building a sustainable learning culture in our profession.

One thing I can say is the future of schooling is in good hands!

Teaching isn't rocket science 2007-09-24

Professor Richard Elmore from the Harvard Graduate School of Education was in Australia recently working with Victorian teachers on leadership issues to improve learning and teaching. While here, he wrote a letter (published in the Age on August 27) responding to an opinion piece claiming that 'teaching is not rocket science.'

Essentially, Elmore argues that current perceptions of teaching and its professional 'value' is a result of 19th century schooling when it was largely 'women's work supervised by men.' What remains is a under-valued and lowly paid profession, which is struggling to keep up with a burgeoning knowledge economy.

As an objective observer, Elmore believes Australia must re-build its education system into one that is highly professionalised. He suggests that if you invest **across** the system, you'll improve the results **across all** classrooms.

I think Elmore makes a very good case. We know that learning and teaching is in period of exciting change. Given the digital revolution over the last two decades and the resultant effect on the nature of the young people who come to our schools; never before have we needed a more capable, professionally well-equipped workforce.

Good teachers in any age have found teaching demanding. It involves not only the science of teaching but the the art of building complex relationships that establish trust, engender respect and encourage young people to take risks in order to grow and to learn continually. This is demanding enough without the need to continue and maintain a commitment to ongoing professional growth.

The learning space of the 21st century is not a classroom, it is more like a studio where learners enegage in "ensemble pieces" either alone or in groups in collaboration with the teacher. The skills required by the teacher in this environment would test the best professional in any field. So rather than trivialise the task, why not help contribute to supporting this critical work.

I love Elmore's quote in which he says:

Teaching is not rocket science. It is, in fact, far more complex and demanding work than rocket science.

Changing the DNA of learning and teaching 2007-10-02

One of the major reasons why it is so difficult to change the prevailing curriculum construct and pedagogical approach is because it's so embedded within the schooling process and has been so for the last 150 years!

Generations of students and teachers have such an industrial experience of schooling that it is part of their very DNA. But, if we are to seriously address the need to reframe the schooling process in a knowledge age then we need to re-develop the DNA. Superficial and cosmetic changes are unsustainable and do little but raise the frustration levels of all involved.

We need substantial changes based on several key understandings:

1. the knowledge age has shaped a new generation of learners
2. there is serious literature over the last decade supporting the direction we need for new models
3. the teaching profession has to engage and provide leadership
4. more testing and more resources aren't the single solutions
5. innovation and diversity is critical to driving change

Pedagogical sentiment 2007-10-04

We have been fortunate to have recently been working with Dr Yoram Harpaz, Director of the Mandel School for Educational Leadership in Israel. He is an extraordinary man with a fascinating take on learning in today's world.

For Yoram, the approach to schooling is how the digital world has spawned generation Y and therefore demands a fresh new approach. Yoram says there are three competing pedagogical “ideologies”:

1. *socialisation* – getting kids to fit into society. This leads to a direct-instruction pedagogy.
2. *aculturation* – school is about understanding the world and the responsibility of children to contribute. This leads to a more collaborative pedagogy, which leads to an understanding of how you fit into society.
3. *individuation* – the individual is the starting point and the individual view is critical. This leads to the personalisation of learning.

In reality, the three are always in competition with each other and the predominant one emerges given a range of local, national and international pressures and contexts. The important point he makes is that these **ideologies are given life by teachers**; that every teacher has a “pedagogical sentiment” which, is a reflection of the interplay of the competing ideologies.

Yoram argues teachers must recognise and break out of the constructs so as to meet the needs of young people today. His insights gave me a new perspective in relation to what I have been calling the ‘pedagogical DNA’ and the difficulty in changing this ‘code’ in teachers. His wisdom challenges us to look deeper at the issues involved.

Time to rewrite schooling's history *2007-10-17*

Last week, the Prime Minister announced a national agenda on school history (linked inevitably to funding agreements), which would make Australian history compulsory for Years 9 and 10 students.

Historically, schooling was the responsibility of teachers and the profession at large. These days, it has moved out of the classroom and into the political arena. It seems that we now develop strategic education policy direction by focus group! This trend ignores the need to ask some critical and difficult questions about schooling in today's world.

No-one would argue against spending more on education but how will today's students and history judge us if we continue investing in and perfecting an industrial model of schooling?

It would be refreshing if debate focussed on asking the right questions such as are schools meeting the learning, social and technological needs of today's students?

There's no doubt that schooling is complex and it's made even more so by competing political agendas, greater accountabilities and of course, the digital revolution. Nonetheless, its core value has and will always be around quality learning in whatever shape or form that may take.

It's easy to promise more education funding but there are often too many strings attached. Governments, educators and administrators need to work together in addressing how young people learn in today's world and what processes best leverage learning outcomes for our young people.

New imagery for schools and schooling 2007-10-24

Recently I joined 1400 educators at ACEL's International Conference titled 'New Imagery for Schools and Schooling' in Sydney. It was an outstanding conference in all respects. The quality of the input was amazing. Peter Senge gave a presentation that I believe set a benchmark in its content and delivery. This was my experience throughout the conference.

We, as a profession, are lucky to have the intellectual capacity on show at conferences such as these. What I found outstanding was the honesty of the presenters who named the challenges we face in delivering schooling in today's world. They tackled the issues squarely without blame or excuses and provided concrete strategies and practical directions.

My second observation was the obvious rigour in the research that underpinned the positions of presenters. These were not the shallow musings of academics removed from the day to day reality of schooling. This was quality thinking based on sound evidence and excellent theory.

Finally, I was heartened to see there is an obvious "narrowing" of the gap between the "theory makers and the practitioners". The workshops, led by teachers showed the same rigour – referenced to good literature and evidenced-based theory. The dialogue and debate were robust and strong and I was proud to be a part of it.

Michael Fullan's secrets of change 2007-11-01

This week, **Michael Fullan** presented the 2007 Ann D. Clark Lecture to an audience of 380. It was great to see such a diverse cross section: teachers, system staff, academics, politicians and administrators from public education and health.

He spoke about the *Six secrets of change* for effective schools and systems:

1. Love your employees
2. Connect peers with purpose
3. Bullying backfires
4. Learning is the work
5. Transparency rules
6. Systems learn

Michael is no stranger to Australian educators, many of whom have drawn insights from his books on educational change and leadership. We have been fortunate to have had Michael with us over the past three days, working with school leadership teams and senior staff. It's been a wonderful opportunity to work with such a respected educational leader who has offered his vision, insight and inspiration. [Click here to listen to the 2007 Ann D. Clark lecture.](#)

Michael believes schools must compare themselves with themselves and other schools to ensure effective performance. He also referred to a study by Michael Barber for the McKenzie Group that found highly professional teachers were the key to top performing schools and systems.

These sentiments were also echoed by **Michael Chaney** of the Business Council of Australia, last week. His concern is the brightest students do not chose teaching because the profession has been de-valued by society and the remuneration provides little incentive.

There has been a tendency to focus on student learning at the expense of teacher learning. Investment in teacher training and professional learning is critical in building successful schools and systems particularly if we want to see real improvements in literacy and numeracy.

We continue to expect the very best from our teachers, I think that it is critical that we support them by exposing teachers to the best thinkers and writers on schooling today. Micheal certainly fits this criteria!

Sign of the times *2007-11-13*

The University of NSW recently launched its own channel on YouTube – the first Australian institution to do so. It's no surprise given most students entering university today have virtually grown up online.

While it's a great marketing strategy, it recognises where today's students are. Although the channel will broadcast some lecturers in an attempt to reach potential students, it captures the ubiquitous nature and popularity of Web 2.0.

This is the democratisation of knowledge – no longer contained within lecture theatres or classrooms but shared. Learning becomes accessible, anywhere, anytime. Transportable, transparent, relevant and exciting.

The University of NSW is to be applauded but we still lag behind. iTunes has developed a store dedicated to education called University. It's 'the campus that never sleeps' – allowing universities across the US to upload audio/video lectures, interviews, debates, presentations for students – any age, anywhere. And it's free. It's astounding and exciting to think that a cohort of students and teachers from a school western Sydney can watch a biology lecture from MIT.

The challenge for us is to open our K-12 classrooms to a new audience – to share knowledge as professionals and to showcase quality learning and teaching as we move from isolated classrooms to a connected global learning environment.

The business of improving schooling 2007-11-13

I'm impressed that **Michael Chaney** from the Business Council of Australia is appealing to our governments for better schooling and better pay for teachers. One of the greatest challenges today is creating education systems and practices that are appropriate for a knowledge age. This demands a re-imagining of schooling. It is always attractive to present simple strategies for solving complex problems: differential pay for teachers, widespread measuring and ranking of students etc. But the consequences of both may be less appealing. The teachers that our students need and whom the BCA and the rest of us want must demonstrate certain qualities if they are to be truly effective in schools of today and tomorrow. This involves working collaboratively within a sharply focussed learning community and being committed to continuous professional learning. As Richard Elmore observes, the challenge is about building a 'highly-professional education system'- raising the standards in line with the demands of the knowledge age. Good salaries will help to attract the brightest people to the profession. But, more importantly, they will get their greatest rewards when they belong to a profession which is esteemed by the community. A focus on the teaching profession as a whole, on instructional (learning and teaching) leadership of the highest order, and on an expanding, intelligent, national conversation on what schools can yet become, will highlight the complexity of educational reform. This is the pre-requisite for any simple solutions to have any chance of success.

Broadband and beyond *2007-11-19*

Education has been high on the political agenda in recent weeks although the issue of highspeed broadband (which is integral to the re-imagining of schooling) seems to have dropped off the radar.

Economists and educators all agree that broadband cannot be an optional preference in a knowledge age. The speed and robustness of our infrastructure will separate economies and push the boundaries of schooling as we know it. In South Korea 'ultra high-speed' is a given. Its government is committed to 'edutopia' which has seen 10,000 schools connected to the net and teachers and classrooms given PCs. This investment is driving innovation and their economy.

Politicians of all persuasions must view highspeed broadband in the same way as water or transport. If we are to utilise the vast array of virtual educational, informational and networking tools available, we must not only provide affordable and equitable access but high-speed access.

Hopefully, we won't have to wait five years!

Revolution of the Mind 2007-11-29

The ALP's much publicised 'education revolution' is a welcome approach to supporting quality learning and teaching. However, we undersell the promise of a 'revolution' if it is simply about more 'hardware' in schools. As important as hardware is in a knowledge age, it fails to address the fundamental challenges of learning and teaching in today's world.

What is required is a revolution of the mind based on new ways of thinking that lead to new ways of schooling. We know good teaching, not computers, is the major factor in improving the learning outcomes of all students, which is why it is critical to build teacher capacity and capabilities.

If we are to prepare students for careers in the knowledge-age, then we need to support teachers in their capacity to "develop high level knowledge and skill in their work." (Elmore, 2007).

A true revolution in education will only succeed if schools become true learning communities and education systems and governments have a clear and unified focus, a sharp vision and the commitment to support innovation and ongoing teacher professional learning.

We have already begun a revolution in our system of schools. We are bringing our resources to bare on supporting the teacher in every learning space in every school. This means a clear alignment between what the teacher does, how the school is led and how system resources are delivered in supporting schools. This is underpinned by a commitment to ongoing professional learning and conversation, critical reflection on what is good learning and teaching and collaboration across learning networks (both physical and virtual).

If the Rudd Labor Government is to deliver on its promise to Australian students, then we must work together to develop new models based on sound theory and research (respectful of past experience) that captures the imagination of learners and teachers alike.

Kids Congress 2007-11-29

Last Thursday, I officially opened the *2007 Kids Congress*. This dynamic event is held every two years and is an opportunity for students from more than 55 primary and secondary schools to come together to develop a social justice campaign using technology.

I started out by thanking kids for their approach to learning. They were excited about sharing and developing their ideas using contemporary technologies.

It was terrific to watch primary students teaching others about podcasting and graphic tablets. Initiatives such as Kids Congress empower students and provide opportunities for authentic and purposeful learning.

Connected, engaged and inspired by relational technologies, these future leaders will be entrusted to work collaboratively locally and globally to find solutions to global challenges such as climate change and poverty.

A love of learning 2007-12-05

As we strive towards a “deprivatised” profession, we are all becoming collaborative learners. In fact, one of the defining characteristics of a good teacher is that he/she is willing to learn continually and to share that knowledge with their colleagues and the learning community.

Recently, I presented an award to **Elizabeth Bryant**, a teacher/librarian whose passion and commitment to teaching enriches the learning environment and empowers her colleagues. It was wonderful to see the entire school community out in force to celebrate good learning and teaching. I asked Elizabeth to describe why she does what she does:

I believe my role as teacher librarian provides me with a powerful opportunity to encourage all students to embrace the transformative power of reading. Reading is fundamental to all that we do. I have always wanted each of my students to love reading, to be inspired by the power of story. > > Working as a teacher librarian is a privileged and unique position, as I have the opportunity to work with all the students and with all teachers. The teacher librarian sees every child in the school each week. This is what makes the position so powerful. I believe I am able to make a positive difference to students' self-esteem, confidence, and independence and to develop a sense of responsibility for their own learning.** > > I believe information literacy skills can improve students' mastery of content and the information seeking process, through the integration of those skills into the school's curriculum. The development of independent and life long learners is enabled when information skills are embedded across all year levels and teaching programs. > > *****I believe a constructivist pedagogy encourages students to take control of their own learning, builds on what they know and allows them to engage with a range of text and electronic resources in independent, integrated resources-based and technology-based inquiry learning.****In my experience these things are best achieved through collaborative relationships between classroom teachers and myself with planning instructional units, assessment procedures and resource collection to have a significant impact on students' learning. We are all learners together.***** > > *****Finally I enjoy doing what I do, I have fun with the students and the teachers exploring stories and learning about new technologies. I want every student in our school to be readers, be moved by stories, to love learning as much as I do, and to be life long learners with the potential to make a difference.*******

I get to hear so many stories of teachers who are pushing the edges in their teaching, engaging the kids where they are at, using today's tools to stretch and challenge young people. Most importantly they use their professional expertise which they continually hone to create these opportunities. Liz deserves her peers recognition, she however thinks it just fun and great to do!

Caldwell's challenge 2007-12-17

The former dean of education at Melbourne University, Brian Caldwell is to be commended for his recent piece in the SMH. Caldwell rightly questions the longevity and the impact of Rudd's education revolution, if it fails to ask the right questions and fails to address the 'big issues'.

Caldwell observes that despite the trebling of our education expenditure, there has not been a significant improvement in the learning outcomes which you might expect given this fact. While an advocate for improving public education, he does identify issues facing other education sectors such as the increasing gap between high and low performing students, an ageing workforce and ageing infrastructure.

Money is only a temporary fix but it won't buy us a long term solution. This is because increasing levels of expenditure is only ever focused on the "easy to do" parts of the problem. Caldwell's strategies (some of which are validated by international experience) recognise these complexities. They are aimed at raising the status and skill of the profession. Only then, we will see sustained practice and improved learning outcomes.

This takes time, long term commitment and has to be sustained over time, not just a one off event. For me, part of the answer to this lies in building teacher capacity. This is done most effectively through collaboration among colleagues. We have known this for some time but the idea of working as team-members, sharing responsibility for one's own learning, the learning of colleagues and students seems to be too challenging or too demanding. The Rudd Government would be wise to draw on the depth of experience of educational leaders like Brian Caldwell.

Reflections *2007-12-17*

In the past two weeks, I have attended several award and speech nights at our schools. This is a wonderful opportunity to meet with students, teachers and parents and to reflect on what we do and what we're trying to achieve.

I was particularly moved during a recent student performance (right) at the level of trust between students and teachers. While infrastructure and pedagogy etc are important aspects of the learning agenda, I truly believe building strong, healthy relationships is what teaching is all about.

On that note, here are some of my observations and thoughts as another school year draws to a close. . . .

2008 Writings

Authenticity 2008-01-23

As educators, we understand that schooling is not simply about ensuring students have the appropriate skills for the 21st century but they become *better* people. Every school system has a responsibility to articulate and integrate its values into the learning and teaching. Over the Christmas break, some of the headlines made me think of the current state of the world and the enormous challenges we face in overcoming poverty, global warming, terrorism and burgeoning first world debt.

It seems imperative to me given the above that every school and school system (no matter what its worldview) has to be even more committed to ensuring its students become more tolerant of others, understanding of the challenges we face as a global community, more socially responsible and to be change agents for a better world. As we begin another new school year, one of the important issues for me as a system leader, is to continue the work of strengthening the Catholic identity of our schools. This must be something very tangible in our Catholic learning communities – not an add on but an integrated experience for all.

I have always said that Catholic schools should be good schools – places of quality learning and teaching where the reign of God is present. Authenticity becomes then an experience not an expression (simply identifying something as ‘authentic’ doesn’t necessarily make it so). The work of Catholic schools is to ensure its worldview and values permeates every aspect of school life through the:

1. quality of relationships
2. quality of learning and teaching
3. liturgical and prayer life of the school
4. strong relationship with the parish
5. symbols and spaces in the built environment
6. contribution of the school to the local Catholic and broader communities

For me, being authentic is not a call to perfection but a challenge to be become a better person in one’s personal and professional life.

Relevancy or retention? 2008-02-03

As students returned to school this week, the State Government revealed plans for all NSW students to stay at school until 16 or possibly 18 from next year. The rationale is simple enough – a higher level of education means broader job prospects; but belies an understanding of the complex issues challenging schooling today. The answers to these complex issues are not about the age of school-leavers or how many computers a school has, but whether schools are meeting the needs of today's learners.

If they were, then perhaps we wouldn't have so many students 'dropping out'. This topic generated heated debate and I was able to weigh into the argument on ABC local radio and in a piece for the Sydney Morning Herald. I maintain that our biggest challenge in the knowledge age is to make schooling relevant for today's learners. If we worked at improving the learning outcomes for all students not just the academically gifted or those who are struggling then we create an environment where life-long learning flourishes. The primary goal of schools should be on the development of the 'whole person' not just one aspect.

Good educators recognise the strengths and weaknesses of each student, understand their needs and to use the learning tools available to stimulate deep learning – this is what personalised learning is all about. As a result of the piece in the Herald, I received an email from a second year university student who wanted to share their own views on the nature of schooling and their own experiences:

I think the biggest realisation I had when I was at school (I am now a 2nd year university student) was that there was such uniformity and constriction within work and life at school. Although rules and regulations are important, I don't think teachers to some degree should restrict students in the way they grow and learn. I think schools need to focus on gradually progressing student to expose them to how it is really like to finish school because what they don't realise is that you have access to options. You don't need to go to university to continue your studies nor should it be viewed as being looked down upon. Senior leavers are focused on achieving highly and having admiration for their UAI but once you enter university, the UAI has no significance and university is a whole new ball game. You spoke about students needing to think imaginatively, with creativity and to be open to all opportunities. Schools should not be purely focused on students having to do well academically especially under a traditional curriculum.

We are continuing to work with our school leaders to ensure we deliver on our strategic intent to improve the learning outcomes for all students. As part of this ongoing collaboration, we invited David Eddy from the Faculty of Education at the University of Auckland to address 350 of our system leaders. He told our group that good leadership demands that leaders engage in the business of leading the learning agenda for their school.

He and others call this "pedagogical leadership" and this has been a theme I have been focusing on for some time in developing our own system agenda. David mapped the challenge for us when he observed that "Leaders of learning schools constantly inquire to and take action to improve the achievement and well being of ALL their students. They support and challenge their teachers and the school community to do the same". Failure is not an option for our schools.

What's our biggest challenge? 2008-02-12

Governments across the world are seeking the so-called “magic bullet(s)” to improve the quality of schooling and learning outcomes. Organisations such as the OECD has published studies on building leadership capacity as well as various initiatives to tackle ‘school failures’. There is also a plethora of other professional associations, systems and sectors who are investing a good deal of resources into the collection and analysis of data on improving schooling. But how does this make a difference to the work that is happening in classrooms each day?

Over the last ten years, there have been many approaches to “fixing” schools. The discourse has been around the need for improvement. Therefore much effort has gone into improving; school administration, organisation, leadership, school design, student capabilities and more recently, pedagogy. These are all important elements and are a part of a complex puzzle. But for me and others such as John Connell, there is a critical question that has to be answered; how do you engage today's learners in a Web 2.0 world? In other words how do you make schooling relevant?

As I've said before, we need to be where today's learners are and that requires an explicit understanding of how they learn and what they require to engage in deep learning. It requires us to listen to and learn from our students and teachers – those at the very centre of schooling. As systems, we need to be supportive of the work and to facilitate the exchange of ideas and good practice across schools.

At the end of the day there are no seven simple steps to success because the issues are so complex. This is a work in progress in which we learn from past and present experiences of what good learning looks like. It's about being prepared to engage in the deeper issues instead of getting bogged down by superficial arguments and concerns.

I believe that educators have to change the discourse and develop a new set of ground rules for the ensuing discussion. At the heart of the discussion is an unrelenting commitment by every teacher that ALL children can learn and can experience success through their schooling experience.

Federal Government policies: gifts or curses? 2008-02-20

The Rudd Labor Government has moved at some pace to deliver on its election promises in relation to secondary schooling. They have set an ambitious agenda for implementation and this has led to some unease and concerns within the education community.

This is particularly so in the area of trade centres and its digital education revolution. For me, the current promises are great resources for schools. We have actually got what many educators have been asking for, for some time – a recognition that we need to focus our funding in the right areas in order to make our schools more relevant.

The two policy initiatives surely fit this case. Let's separate the policy initiative from the implementation processes needed to deliver on the promises. There has been some concern and indeed some negativity in the education community at both the pace and methodology for implementation. This unease has some solid basis but I hope that this does not translate into suspicion and opposition.

Systems and schools are right to raise issues and sometimes curse the pressures put on already strained agendas, but let's focus on the real benefits to be derived for our school communities.

One of the real challenges for the education community from such policy agendas is to work more collaboratively with other systems and sectors on implementation processes. This is critical given the ever increasing costs for providing schooling in today's world. We have to be creative and imaginative in how we build new relationships and partnerships to deliver to schools.

I have long held the view that we need to move our thinking about schools as little isolated entities operating much like a "cottage industry", to an "enterprise" operation. This also reflects the change from an industrial to a knowledge age and schooling today requires the same shift.

Y a national curriculum? 2008-02-27

The move is on to establish a national curriculum. Barry McGaw and Tony McKay have been appointed to lead the implementation of this curriculum. My question is “what is a national curriculum?” Depending on the answer, I’d have to ask do we need a national curriculum?

The current argument for a national curriculum seems to be on the basis of mobility of people moving between states and the need for a common assessment framework for all schools. Of themselves these are things that need to be addressed but I’m less sure that they justify a national curriculum.

Ask two people what a national curriculum is and you are likely to get four different answers. There is a public perception that all students will learn the same content and will be assessed in the same way. But is this what we really want to happen and will this help improve the learning outcomes for every student?

You will remember that we couldn’t even get agreement on the content of a national Australian History curriculum. There were more opinions than proposals! My sense of the discussion is that there is a definite need for a national approach to schooling and the need for much more dialogue on what is a national curriculum and the nature of learning in today’s world.

I spoke at a secondary education conference in South Australia recently about the search for relevance. The other speaker was Prof. Yong Zhao (pictured on far right with DECS Barossa District staff Yvonne Cloke and Scott Draper).

He explored this issue in some detail. He located his discussion in the global/local shift in recent decades.

In short he argues that what we really need is a global curriculum that is given life, substance and form at very local levels.

Yong further argues that schooling should move beyond a primary focus on logic based learning which leads to a reductionist curriculum model, to focus on creativity and an openness to innovation, change and well being. It is a compelling argument I think.

This is what I know to be good learning theory 2008-03-05

Over the past five weeks I've been talking to school leaders about where we're heading and how they're travelling in relation to their individual school goals. It's important for schools to have measurable goals but these are simply a means to an end.

In my discussions, I have been reflecting on Bransford et al's theory about building on what people know. For our school leaders, it's about good learning and teaching. We know our conversations are enriched by good theory into practice and a solid framework on which to develop our goals.

Everybody wants to get to the end using existing paradigms but we need to first remind ourselves what is good learning and teaching in today's world. These 'informed' goals become the touchstones for delivering our strategic intent: improved learning outcomes for all students and a rewarding working life for teachers.

Good leaders know the value of building their professional skills and knowledge through reflective dialogue with peers and participating in ongoing professional development that benefits student learning. As a system, our goal is to ensure all schools hit their mark.

Welcome to never never land *2008-03-12*

I had a chance to spend some time talking to Stephen Heppell this week at the annual CoSN K-12 School Networking Conference in the US.

As usual, you get more in five minutes with Stephen than a week with some others. He is passionate about the future of schools and intensely positive about their future. However, as we know the nature of schooling has to change dramatically if they are to remain relevant to young people.

Stephen makes the point that we are in an ‘in between time’ at the moment. We know that the industrial model of schooling has had its day and the future will deliver substantial change. He describes schooling being “...like Peter Pan, caught in a never never land and not wanting to grow up”.

Also have a look at what Stephen Heppell is doing with Microsoft. Visit www.learnometer.net – it’s well worth the visit.

Who is the learner in a Web 2.0 world? 2008-03-12

We've just had a day at the CoSN conference with international educators discussing the challenges for schooling in today's world...and guess what, they are global!

Every country is asking questions about the nature of schooling in a Web 2.0 world. So far there are a lot of questions being asked in search of some intelligent answers.

Charles House is the Executive Director of Media X at Stanford University. He gave a great intro that set the context of the 2.0 world and its challenges. He observed that learning today happens "...after school, between friends and **not** in schools." He also observed that web 2.0 lets people into "the dialogue" and this single fact has yet to be grasped by educators.

This capacity to dialogue is critical as we meet the challenges ahead. It speaks to how we understand learning today and how students learn. It also provides a real and dynamic democratising of learning.

Who is the learner in today's world as we move from a paradigm of schooling as a consumption of information process to the creation /construction of knowledge?

Leading change: a UK perspective *2008-03-14*

It is always inspiring to visit schools who are driving change and pushing the boundaries of schooling. One of those is Varndean School in Brighton, UK. The school has a long history (founded in 1884) and an outstanding reputation not only within the UK but worldwide as a specialist music and technology college.

What impresses me about Andy Schofield (Head Teacher) and Sara Spivey (Deputy Head) is that they are open-minded and honest about what needs to be done to transform schooling – that is, how we take schooling to the next level. [Click here](#) to watch Sara Spivey talk about the challenges.

New York Initiatives *2008-03-25*

When I was in the US recently, I had a full day meeting and workshops with Celine Azoulay who is the Borough Director – Instructional Technology (Staten Island). The New York Department of Education is the largest in the US and looks after over 1.4 million students.

Celine's team of leaders are approaching the challenge of supporting learning in today's world using enabling technologies through a great global project on climate change. The web 2.0 technologies are linking nearly 30 schools in New York with schools around the world in a secure environment engaging teachers and students in significant and complex learning experiences.

It is a great leadership initiative that recognizes the physical and virtual capacity of schooling today.

An international educator *2008-03-25*

It's sad to hear a passionate educator like Andy Schofield talk about the UK leading the world in under-achievement especially when there are so many resources physical and Web 2.0 to engage students. Andy makes the point that the nature of learning is about understanding students. In fact he says it is all about the learning!

The focus for all good educators is on creating dynamic learning environments and sustaining them well into the future. It's a conversation we have already begun in our own system of schools.

It doesn't matter where you go in the world, this is a global challenge, which requires us to work collaboratively by drawing on the wisdom and experience of educators like Andy. As he rightly observes this process requires new ways of doing things and especially new ways of leading to deliver this agenda

It's not about the technology! 2008-03-25

Alan November is a passionate practitioner and advocate for pushing the boundaries of learning in today's world and he is the first to tell you that it's not about technology! It's about creativity, innovation and using the right resources to help students develop critical thinking and global communication skills.

If you look around, it's not schools leading the world in innovation and creativity – it's business and industry (think Microsoft, Apple, Toyota etc). And if we're not careful, they'll be stepping in to deliver what schools can't!

Take a look at Alan's website – it's a treasure trove of resources for educators and anyone who wants to see how Web 2.0 can be used to build powerful global networks.

[Click here](#) to listen to Alan talk about what's happening in NYC schools.

Building Leadership Capacity 2008-04-09

It was great to see our colleagues in the Victorian Department of Education and Early Childhood Development commended in a recent OECD Report.

The Report, 'Building Leadership Capacity in Victoria, Australia', is part of a larger project designed to provide educational leaders, worldwide, with data that will help in developing school leadership policies and improving learning and teaching.

It concludes that 'Victoria provides a working model of system-wide leadership development from which other systems can learn'. Of particular note is the system's alignment of evidence-based theory and school-based opportunities, and its emphasis on school leaders being aware of themselves as learners who belong to learning communities, observing, mentoring and networking with each other.

An interesting exercise for us would be to cross-reference the underlying principles and strategies of the Victorian system with our strategic intent and learning framework. I'm sure there would be similar validation.

This is a good reminder that we are a learning organisation whose professional perspective is certainly local and national but becoming increasingly global.

Real learning is not copying 2008-04-14

I came across a great quote by American choreographer Twyla Tharp in the Harvard Business Review (April 2008):

Real learning is not copying. Copying is taking somebody else's solutions. Learning is taking someone else's problems.

I'm often asked where my real learning comes from; how I know the things I do; and how the learning frameworks I subscribe to are shaped. It is pretty simple really; it is through the exchange of ideas with colleagues, peers and good literature.

For me, good theory is good practice. I find you cannot hope to absorb everything you need without something to stretch and challenge your existing mindsets and assumptions. That's why good literature is so vital to good educators.

I've recently been reading some excellent literature, which explores the challenges for educators. I highly recommend *How People Learn* by Bransford et al and the OECD's *Think Scenarios, Rethink Education* as a source of real learning.

And for anyone wanting to understand the social and economic impacts of a knowledge age, should read Daniel Pink's *Whole New Mind*. This is a sensational read that really gives a great lens with which to view today's world. It is challenging in the extreme!

It's an international phenonomen *2008-04-15*

Earlier this year, I spoke at the CoSN annual conference in Washington. It was a great experience (see my earlier blogs). During the conference, I was interviewed for a public service campaign video to highlight the challenges of schooling in today's world. It proves the point that the challenges we face are global and urgent.

Take a look at the video.....

Discernment vs digital 2008-04-17

I was interested to read an article in the Sunday Telegraph, (Criticism for Rudd school plan, 6 April) in which (public) school principals expressed concern that the Government's Digital Education Revolution had "failed to address a number of issues: funding for the ongoing maintenance and eventual upgrade of computers... associated infrastructure of traditional classrooms... professional development for teachers..."

These are certainly valid points and given the short time-frames involved in the first phase of the Digital Education implementation, I believe the government's 'promise to deliver' has obscured some fundamental questions, which all educators should be asking. We have, for decades, been lobbying governments for more resources and support especially since the technology revolution. There is no disputing that our schools need to be well equipped for the reality of living in a knowledge age.

However, it seems that the first stage of the government's agenda misses some fundamental points of why schools need ICT and how it can best be used to improve learning for all students. The government has responded to the question of 'how' do we give every child a computer and seems to assume that computers for each student will of themselves improve the learning and deliver the schooling society is now demanding.

We must learn to walk before we begin to run. Therefore, we need to ask and answer six critical questions before we flood our secondary schools with computers. I believe these are:

1. What is today's world like?
2. How do young people learn in today's world?
3. How do you make schooling relevant?
4. How do you support good learning?
5. What are today's pedagogies?
6. What tools are needed to support today's pedagogies?

No-one wants to waste increasingly scarce resources; everyone wants the best outcomes for school communities. But simply handing over equipment as the solution to learning has never worked as a stand alone strategy. Why should it be different in the knowledge age? Let's ask the intelligent questions and take some time to develop some intelligent answers.

Informing our practice 2008-04-22

John Connell's blog is worth reading.

He's running a discussion on *teaching at a crossroads* and has, in my view, made some excellent observations about the challenges facing us all in schooling today. Judging by the comments he has tapped into some key issues. As hard as the comments may seem they have to be named and it's an approach that I believe needs to be encouraged.

This year, we embarked on a learning conversation with school leaders, which is the core approach to delivering our system intent. We purchased a book called 'How people learn' by Bransford et al, which serves as our touchstone for continuing dialogue.

As I've said in previous posts, it is important that this theory informs our practice. I don't think we are going to get anywhere delivering the type of schooling needed in today's world unless we engage in a serious, rigorous investigation and reflection using contemporary educational literature.

Our literature base is well recognised and respected: Fullan, Eddy, Hargreaves, Sergiovanni, Hill, Caldwell, Timperley, Robinson, Beare and so the list goes on. These educators approach the business of schooling from a unique theoretical view point with profound implications for practice.

We have to move beyond "I think", "I know", "this works for me" as the only basis for informing good practice. Too often, the approach in my experience has been to maintain the status quo and to avoid the hard issues in creating a relevant schooling experience.

I believe there is an element of anti-intellectualism that exists within the education sector and it is now time to name it and deal with it. It certainly doesn't imply that the work of teachers and their involvement in the change process is irrelevant.

In fact, I would argue that never before have we needed greater teacher involvement and active participation in the work of creating knowledge-age schools. However, participation must be informed by good theory not just personal opinion.

It is up to each learning community to identify the theoretical framework, which will inform practice and then engage regularly in intelligent and reflective dialogue on the important issues. This is done by reading, dialogue and exchange. In other words, professional learning at its best.

Bogged down by accountabilities 2008-04-29

To an outsider, the education sector must seem bogged down by accountabilities. If you follow any of the debates on funding or schooling in general, it always seems to revolve around accountabilities.

We know schools are accountable to governments, the Board of Studies and parents but this view has really grown out of the 19th century model of schooling. Richard Elmore believes that if the key decision-makers are not teachers then the profession will always been in a 'politically subservient position'.

I believe that accountability is far too often about blame rather than responsibility. Schools have a responsibility to ensure the learning outcomes for all students improve – this is what parents/community entrust teachers to do. The future of societies depend on it.

Far too often, we have outsiders, often ill-informed, prescribing what needs to occur within the learning space, and even worse, developing accountabilities, which are often linked to funding arrangements. Simplicity usually wins out on engagement around theory and practice in such approaches.

If we demand that schools become relevant in a knowledge age, then we need to refrain from imposing 'accountabilities'. Rather, schools need robust frameworks from which good decisions about learning and teaching are made.

Helen Timperley and co. from the University of Auckland states that when these so-called outsiders develop 'recipes for teaching' these processes have little impact on student outcomes and cannot be sustained long -term. So, how do we wrest back some professional ownership of this critical and substantive agenda?

Priorities 2008-05-07

The last several years has seen the emergence of a growing consensus on what makes the difference in student learning. This consensus is often arrived at from different perspectives yet the foundations for improving learning outcomes is clear.

Angus James, Director of the Business Council of Australia has written about the link between economic prosperity and quality education systems published in the Australian Financial Review (30 April 2008).

Angus believes that 'education is not an isolated process... rather a continuum'.

It's great to see the business sector supporting our efforts to make schooling relevant and to acknowledge that learning does not stop in Year 10 or 12.

Angus is in favour of principals recruiting their teaching staff as a way of improving the quality of teaching and therefore student learning outcomes. Principals are like coaches, each wants to be able to select the best player for the team but what happens when there isn't enough talent in the pool to draw from?

The BCA believes the most important educational reform is to improve the quality of teaching by creating initiatives to attract and retain the best staff. This a key part of supporting good learning.

We have to always remember that our educational strategy does not miss the star player – the teacher. We must focus on our teachers if the quality of teacher is the key influence in improving student outcomes. This means a well crafted professional learning strategy involving the teacher at the centre of the strategy, not peripheral to it. It also means ensuring teachers have greater control over their working lives. Tough challenges but very doable.

As I've said before, raising the professional bar requires a national strategy. We need to start by:

- ensuring our universities reflect learning in today's world * developing whole of school professional learning programs * building local and global learning networks * investing in world-class leadership programs

Ed Speak *2008-05-19*

Our schools are fortunate to have worked closely with global educator – Marco Torres. Marco is passionate about the capabilities of Web 2.0 in the learning space and is able to engage and inspire not only students but our teachers!

Marco's strategy for learning is simple – it's about process not final product.

Marco has been capturing his work with our schools on a site called Flick School. It's a terrific resource for educators who are dipping their toes into the Web 2.0 pool!

Sowing the seeds 2008-05-27

Interesting to read that the average age of teachers in Catholic schools is now 40. This is nearly 10 years below that of their colleagues in government schools.

It's predicted that in the next 5 to 10 years, 40% of government school teachers will retire. This will mark a significant generational change, one that will be delayed in Catholic schools for yet another decade.

Any acknowledgement of generational change in the teaching profession is a reminder of the importance of attracting, selecting and developing the type of teachers who will best serve schools in the future.

I think if we are to attract the best and brightest to the profession, the seeds are usually sown during the years of schooling by example of staff and, often, by personal suggestion or invitation.

Good educators and school leaders shouldn't hesitate to invite the most committed students to consider a future as teachers and help shape innovative learning communities for the 21st century.

Do we speak positively about being a teacher?

Sharpening our saw (focus) 2008-05-28

Our leadership team recently met with the Victoria Department of Education and Melbourne Catholic Education Office. This peer to peer professional learning was invaluable.

Firstly, it provided an opportunity to hear what other educators/leaders are doing to improve their system's learning and teaching and teacher-learning. Secondly, it allowed us to participate in a professional dialogue and critical reflection on our own work.

Stephen Covey (author of *Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*) refers to the process of continuous improvement as 'sharpening the saw'. For me, the recent visit helped us to 'sharpen our focus' by adding to our collective wisdom and commitment to improving learning and teaching across all schools. We listened to our colleagues, we were challenged, inspired and learnt something from their experience.

I think as leaders we are often distracted by the process, at the expense of purpose of school improvement. We need to continually remind ourselves that the success of school communities, networks and systems depends on **people** and how they are 'sharpening their own saw'. Covey speaks about the need to feed the spiritual, physical, emotional and social side of ourselves – the very things we aspire to do for our students.

Perhaps the question school and system leaders need to be asking is how are our processes improving our people?

Learning from each other is critical to our success. After all we now expect our students to do it.

Teaching for Uncertain Futures 2008-06-05

Teaching Australia has published *Teaching for Uncertain Futures* – a scenario building project involving teachers and leaders from across Australia. It describes four future scenarios for schooling and asks the provocative questions:

1. what will the Australian teaching profession have to do to be successful in the environments in which it will have to operate in 2030?
2. what are the implications of these challenges for school leadership?

We must accept that our classrooms do not represent today's world – they are products of the 19th and 20th century. One of the defining characteristics of the 21st century is the rapidness of change particularly with technology. So what implications does this have on the teaching profession?

Whether we like it or not, teachers and school leaders will have to become 'futurists' if schools are to survive beyond 2030. We can no longer think about schooling locally but globally. And we must be planning in years not in weeks or terms.

How is this done? It means asking the right questions, monitoring global trends, building sustainable partnerships, understanding technology, managing risks and seizing opportunities.

If these 'future scenarios' do not become part of our reflective practice now, schools will certainly be obsolete before 2030.

Wisdom of the Young 2008-06-12

Recently, we invited senior students involved in project-based learning (PBL) to address a meeting of our principals. A daunting task for anyone but these three students were able to clearly and honestly reflect on their learning experiences.

It was an important wake-up call to hear from today's learners who could just as well have been from any school in Australia.

Their message to leaders of learning:

1. Involve students in the planning
2. Learning must be challenging and worthwhile (relevant)
3. Ensure opportunities to share and celebrate their work with others
4. Don't think copying and re-copying material is good learning

It's a pretty powerful message and reason why we need to change our learning paradigm. It was also interesting that they did not see technology as the rule but a tool to engage in deep learning.

Democratising the learning space 2008-06-19

I had an interesting conversation with a colleague recently about how we reconceptualise/redesign the learning space. It's not simply about shifting furniture or painting walls but looking at how we fundamentally strengthen the relationships within those learning spaces. Can designing new learning spaces facilitate this?

Mary Featherston is an Australian interior designer with a long standing interest in learning spaces. She has documented her work with Wooranna Park PS in Victoria on her website. The report is fascinating and I was struck by this sagacious quote from the Reggio Emilia Project in Northern Italy:

can the physical environment be a teacher in itself?

If it is true, then we have deprived students of the 19th and 20th century of the opportunity to engage with their physical environment by building factory-like schools where the traditional gate-keepers of knowledge stand sentinel at the front of the classroom.

What I liked about the Inside-Out project was that students and teachers were asked to identify the activities which were to take place and the qualities they believed were important to them. The result is flexible, functional and dynamic learning spaces, which evoke 'democracy and respect'.

It's not often 'democracy' and 'respect' are used by students and staff to describe their learning spaces but this is what happens when your design is built on good principles of learning, understanding how students learn and today's pedagogy.

A Timely Reminder *2008-07-04*

I have just delivered a paper at the Patrician Brothers Education Seminar in Maynooth, Ireland. It's amazing how so many of the same satisfactions and challenges are shared by teachers right across the western world.

The Irish Catholic bishops recently published a Pastoral Letter on their vision for Catholic education. Titled Vision 08, the letter makes observations that are applicable to Catholic schools everywhere.

One of the distinguishing features of an authentic Catholic school, say the Irish bishops, is that they reflect 'a distinctive vision of life and a corresponding philosophy of education'.

It's a challenge not just for Irish teachers but for Catholic educators everywhere. What does a philosophy which reflects the Catholic understanding of life and its purpose actually look like when put into action? How does our Catholic vision of life, for instance, determine the types of relationships that exist in our classrooms? How does it affect our approaches to learning and teaching? And how does it provide a religious dimension in every subject that is taught?

This last question is the most challenging of all. How does the Catholic understanding of the human person affect our exploration of literature, for instance? How does the Church's social teaching affect our teaching of the social sciences? How is the vibrant partnership of faith and reason reflected in the teaching of Science? And how does the Catholic imagination, so enriched by allegories and symbols, affect the Creative Arts?

These are just-in-time questions which take us to the core of our work, beyond accountability requirements and pragmatic responses that are linked to the daily pressures of school life. They are questions which challenge Catholic educators everywhere.

Changing pedagogies 2008-07-10

Professor Sidney Strauss is the Chief Scientist, Ministry of Education in the State of Israel and is responsible for research into learning and teaching particularly in the area of cognition and appropriate pedagogies.

We were recently discussing the imperative of changing educational models to reflect 21st century society and the needs of today's learners. Sid made the point that if you can change the 'mental models' teachers bring to the classroom, then you open a whole new world of learning opportunities.

I also caught up with Anat Zohar, Director of Pedagogical Affairs in the Ministry of Education who is driving a change process across their system of schools. Every system leader can relate to the challenge of how you embed innovation and how you create a larger network of innovative schools that are relevant in today's world.

They are looking at a three pronged strategic approach that focuses on teacher-learning and development. [Click here](#) for Anat's explanation of how they are re-focussing teaching for understanding.

World Youth Day 08 *2008-07-23*

Sydney has just hosted a most amazing celebration of religious faith: WYD08. This uninhibited public display of religious conviction has surprised and challenged a nation that is secularised in so many ways.

We have been part of the largest public event ever held in Australia – a religious event. And the main participants have been members of that generation – Generation Y – that so many people had been fearing was lost to organised religion.

For a week in July – the middle of our winter – hundreds of thousands of Catholics came together in a deep expression of faith, sharing what has truly been a transforming experience.

Polish pilgrims enjoying Sydney Harbour

They were warmly welcomed into our schools and homes. In the Parramatta Diocese alone some 8000 pilgrims from Africa, North and South America, Europe, the Caribbean, the South Pacific, Asia, and various parts of Australia were accommodated in 47 Catholic school sites.

We also had volunteers supporting their parishes and school-centred activities with hundreds of staff lending a hand.

The event has been life-changing for so many participants – both local and from overseas – and a marvellous antidote to a sad cynicism about ‘the youth of today’.

The Pope prayed with the pilgrims that WYD08 would contribute to ‘a new Pentecost for the Church and for humanity in the third millennium’.

We can be confident that a great number of pilgrims left the experience with a deeper relationship with the Risen Lord, with their youthful idealism revitalised, with a strong sense of purpose in their lives and with a new responsiveness to the call to Christian discipleship.

The transforming experiences around WYD08 provide opportunities for Catholic educators that must be grasped.

For so long teachers and catechists have struggled to present the riches of the Catholic faith, with its Gospel of hope, to young people whose development has been so intensely influenced by consumerism, individualism and the moral relativism of the age in which we all live.

WYD08 provides a window of opportunity, a new moment of readiness, in which many young people will be more open and attracted to a life-giving religious world view and an authentic experience of Catholic life and culture. We must embrace this opportunity.

At a very practical level, we must ensure that our Religious Education programs are strong in content and taught with renewed enthusiasm and conviction. Important though our teaching is, it is less significant that our witness. We teach, first and foremost, what we are!

It is timely, too, to reconsider the quality of school liturgies and the significance of school prayer. Through religious symbols and rituals we enkindle and nourish the Catholic imagination of our students. And we must never forget the vital importance of the intrinsic connection between school and parish life, a connection which reinforces the communal dimension of our Catholic culture.

The confluence of rich opportunities presented by WYD08 is not something that comes often. The event itself can be seen as a catalyst for personal and communal renewal, and for nothing less than generational change.

Thinking outside the box 2008-08-04

Interior designer, Mary Featherston has just spent two days with us; sharing insights and experience with our system and school leaders. *Interestingly, there was an article in the SMH's Essential Lift-Out on 31 July by Andrea Jones on the design work of Mary and Grant Featherston.*

We were most grateful to her for providing a fresh perspective on designing learning spaces for today's schooling. In education as with very other sectors, there is a strongly held belief that we 'own the game', we know best and anyone 'outside' the game is too often viewed with scepticism.

Mary's vision for creating purposeful learning spaces for children grew out of her respect for the Reggio Emilia project. Her perspective on learning spaces has challenged our thinking and pedagogical frameworks.

She views the learning space not as the sum of its parts but as an organic and complex whole.

It's interesting that we speak of schools as being family like places where children can learn, play, share, reflect and collaborate. Yet, how many of our schools look and feel like homes or even workplaces?

How much time do we spend articulating the purpose of schooling, what feelings we want to evoke in these learning spaces and most importantly what we want our students to learn about themselves, others and their environment? If our homes can offer something valuable to the process of schooling – what other areas/social experiences/sectors can we incorporate into school design?

Stephen Heppell often talks about schools particularly high schools as artificial and punitive 19th century environments that some how we continue to replicate. The environment then shapes the learning. Since most schools are designed around how you manage the business of schooling you get factory models that see schooling as an automated process. We know and are committed to the understanding that the business of schooling is learning; therefore the question for school design is how does the environment enhance the learning of the school community?

As a designer, Mary accepts the complexities and challenges but believes we have reached a level of urgency, which forces to act and act now. We can't wait for greenfield sites to begin the process. Schools can do much with existing classrooms if they question and change existing factory models of curriculum and pedagogy and then design accordingly.

As educators, we need the courage to challenge our own educational precepts; to step outside the classroom. In otherwords, think outside the box. Wouldn't it be good if schools looked different from one other – reflecting the distinct and unique educational needs of each learning community?

Building connections 2008-08-11

If you ask me to define a key hallmark of schooling in today's world in just one word it has to be about *connections*. It became crystal clear after listening to designer Mary Featherston and internet whiz Michael Furdyk talk passionately about how they are facilitating connections between students, their environment, teachers, the internet, local communities as well as the global challenges.

Michael Furdyk

I discovered Michael Furdyk at the ACEL International Conference in Sydney last year. He is a 26 year old Canadian who has taken his passion for the internet and making a difference in the world to a global level by creating a website called TakingITGlobal. Michael refers to it as social networking for social good and social learning.

This not-for-profit website is giving students a voice through technology by connecting them to other like-minded students to grow ideas, share knowledge and collaborate on local and global projects. One company donated digital cameras and scanners so that students in Afghanistan and other developing countries could 'speak' to the rest of the world. It forces us to ask what we mean when we talk about student voice!

An interesting point that Michael made in his presentation was that in a study (I think this was by Robert Epstein 'The Case Against Adolescence'), teens in the US are on average as competent as adults when it comes to decision making. This may be surprising for some of our teachers but we have students who are already experts in using the tools. What they need is the opportunity to become leaders, peers, mentors through collaboration with other students on projects that really matter to them.

How many of our schools are prepared to take a great idea and turn it into something like TakingITGlobal? What I always find is that the work that students do when challenged in such ways always outstrips our expectations. Why not start with something that has currency such as designing relevant learning spaces? Which of our schools is prepared to take on the challenge and make the relevant connections?

Fear of the unknown *2008-08-20*

There are educators and school leaders who are paralysed by fear of a web 2.0 schooling experience, and others like Angus King, ex-governor of Maine who recognise that to do nothing is a wasted opportunity.

Angus was one of the first 'leaders' to make the connection by realising schooling had to change if students were going to be skilled for life and work in a knowledge economy. He set about developing a strategic plan to implement a 1:1 laptop program in Maine in 2002.

At the time, he was quoted in Wired Magazine saying "I think we're going to demonstrate the power of one-to-one computer access that's going to transform education."

The large-scale roll out of computers over four years was a clever way of gaining change-momentum by not only illustrating the need for schools to 'keep up' with technological change but ensuring the wider community were committed. At the heart of the strategy was a clear recognition that the schooling experience for every child had to change

Angus was in Parramatta this week sharing his experiences of leading change with many of our leaders and teachers.

Sharing the stage 2008-09-01

Society is changing rapidly and as educators, we understand the complexity of schooling in this world. As I have recently discovered, explaining those complexities to the media and a broader audience is even more challenging!

Creating a schooling experience that is relevant is not as simple as knocking down walls or changing timetables. If it is to be sustainable, then it requires a cultural change – a re-thinking the whole experience. It requires teachers, parents and the wider community to think and talk differently about schooling in today's world. It also recognises that we are (as I have said many times before) ready to move forward because of the work of talented educators over the decades.

To say that some educators in the past took the approach of a 'sit down, shut up and I'll teach you what you need to know' educational philosophy is understandable given size of classes, lack of teacher training and little or no professional development. Seen through this lens they did a marvelous job!

If we call ourselves a genuine learning community; working in solidarity with our colleagues, then we must not be afraid to challenge each other and to challenge our own mindsets as we improve the quality of learning and teaching in schools.

Solidarity is strengthened by an ongoing professional conversation that is open, collaborative and respectful of diverse view points. We have the 2.0 tools to facilitate this yet there a few who accept the challenge of expressing their opinions, sharing their experience beyond staff rooms.

If we agree that learning is a responsibility we *share*, then why aren't there more leaders and teachers contributing to our professional conversation in virtual spaces?

I look forward to hearing many more voices in the future!

Sharing the love (of learning) 2008-09-06

I recently visited one of our primary schools and spent time chatting to students and teachers. What is evident when you're in a vibrant learning space such as this, is a real buzz around teachers who are taking greater control of the learning space and continually innovating. I think this reflects a culture where risk-taking is the norm, reflective dialogue with colleagues is a support not a burden, and everyone accepts accountability for the learning.

Far too often the teaching profession is admonished for what it isn't doing right. I see it as part of our professional responsibility to celebrate the achievements and showcase good learning and teaching beyond the school gates. If we raise the overall quality of teaching, then we raise the status of the profession.

As you'll see below, when teachers talk openly and enthusiastically about their work, you cannot help feel inspired and encouraged.

A national curriculum 2008-09-17

Another thread of the Rudd Government's 'education revolution' has been the establishment of the National Curriculum Board to oversee the development of a national K-12 curriculum in the key areas of English, mathematics, sciences and history (many will remember similar initiatives in the 80s and 90s).

Any national curriculum pathway, created without the full collaboration of States and school systems, is guaranteed to be a very rocky one – which is why the need for extensive discussion and cooperation now.

Quite apart from the present initiative, I believe it's important Catholic educators, to participate in – and even initiate – a widespread conversation on curriculum. We must never become mere agents of someone else's educational agenda.

The first challenge is to establish a clear and shared understanding of the term 'curriculum'. Some definitions confine themselves to subjects and content, or teachers' intentions and specific learning activities, or, more recently, expected learning outcomes.

Narrowly interpreted, such definitions have been the starting point, and ongoing preoccupation, of the curriculum debate for a long time.

My argument is that given the social and technological realities of today's world, these narrow understandings of curriculum have reached their used-by date. The key is convincing those outside the education sector of the need for a new, dynamic curriculum construct that is responsive to today's world.

I come back to Daniel Pink's hypothesis that in a conceptual age, we need a curriculum that reflects creativity and empathy, and above all, one that is grounded in a coherent world view about life and learning.

This is the time for educators and systems to challenge curriculum constructs that are basically content-driven or, even worse, assessment-driven – especially when such assessment is confined to those aspects of learning which are easily measured.

Let's support any move to bring curriculum into sharper focus by giving it an important place in our ongoing professional conversation!

Hooray for Miss Bonkers! 2008-09-24

I had “another moment of grace” (ie where you see the extraordinary in the ordinary) at one of our schools this week. . . .

I was asked to speak to the parents about the direction of 21st century learning and the impact on current practices. I thought I was well prepared and even had some of the theory we are using to underpin our system direction to help explain to the parents.

A teacher began the meeting by reading *Dr Seuss' Hooray for Diffendoofer Day* (see the What I'm Reading Link). I was immediately struck by this wonderful story because it was able to convey everything I had wanted to speak about that very night. It was done with Seuss' unique humour, creativity and integrity.

Seuss actually began working on the idea of Diffendoofer School and their fabulous teacher Miss Bonkers in 1989 (two years before his death), long before the digital education revolution!

For me, this story captures the quintessential elements of schooling for today's world:

- relationships are central to quality learning and teaching * great teachers are the most powerful influence on student learning * imagination is more important than knowledge (Einstein) * if teachers are passionate about their teaching, students are passionate about their learning * each school is challenged to be as creative and diverse as it can be (ie. we cannot afford to maintain the status quo) * school leadership has to encourage, trust and support their teachers and students * celebrate learning * well taught students will pass any standardised test(s) * the environment must reflect the approach to learning * there is no one size fits all

This book should be compulsory reading for all educators – you'll understand why when you read it! It reinforces our educational narrative in ways that touch our hearts and minds.

A learning conversation *2008-09-29*

I had the opportunity to sit down with one of our school leadership teams recently while they were discussing how to provide a relevant 21st century learning experience for their students.

Several things struck me while I was listening to their discussion:

1. The passion that everyone brought to the table and a desire to deliver quality learning and teaching
2. They are seeking collaborative solutions. I heard questions like ‘how do we... what if we... can we try...’. There were no questions such as ‘well the problem is...’
3. We have such a diverse pool of talent in our schools. It is important that we tap into, challenge and engage our talented teachers if we are to continuously improve the learning and teaching.

The leadership team at St Anthony’s, Girraween have captured some of their conversations on leading, planning and learning with other educators. [Click here to watch.](#)

Counting the cost 2008-10-05

I caught up with Keith Krueger in Parramatta this week. Keith is the CEO of the Consortium for School Networking in the US and was in Australia to give a presentation at the *Australian Council for Computers in Education* conference.

I asked Keith what his views were on the digital education agenda and the challenges that educators and school systems face in a knowledge age.

Keith says CoSN members accept that technology is not the panacea for improving educational outcomes despite the fixation by OECD countries on 'high stakes tests', which in turn leads to data-driven decision making. There has to be a greater focus on the nature of learning in today's world and the new pedagogies to support this understanding.

The observation that Keith and many other critical thinkers make is that currently the US is home to innovative giants like Google and Microsoft and yet there is little focus on creativity, collaboration and community within classrooms. Given the rapid developments and new approaches to learning and teaching in emerging economies, how long can the US or Australia maintain innovation?

As usual some good food for thought.

A principal perspective 2008-10-09

A group of our principals recently visited Silverton Primary School in Victoria. Silverton is one of many inspiring examples of where there are clear and continuous connections between people, environment and curriculum. And where each learning space has an unambiguous purpose. As the principal Tony Bryant says, “it has taken a ten year journey of learning together to become an overnight success!”

As you will have read on my blog, designing fit for purpose learning spaces is a focus for many of our principals as they re-think schooling for today’s world.

This is a reflection from one of our principals on the Silverton model:

I must say I was impressed by the way the school (Silverton) staff encouraged us to explore for ourselves. We were given the opportunity to discuss with staff and students, take notes, photos etc as well as clarify observations and ask questions of the leadership team. Silverton was a great advertisement for ‘learning can be both purposeful and fun’. The students were involved in reflection, and goal setting to plan what they wanted to learn. > > The outdoors was used in an amazing and versatile way – there was a stage area, a pond, a cubby house and chalk boards, ‘café’ style furniture at the school canteen and areas dedicated to water and sand play. > > Students interacted with technology (laptops, software, digital cameras, recording devices etc) in a relaxed and competent manner. The school used the community creatively to support learning eg employing a local artist or dance teacher to teach specific skills. > > Silverton was testimony to learning happening within a more relaxed and flexible space which enabled opportunity for formal, informal, presentation and play.

There are many “Silvertons” across Australia and we can learn so much because they have pioneered much of the territory. What strikes me is the generosity of staff to share their story with colleagues in such open and honest ways.

This is the foundation for creating powerful professional dialogue and establishing connected learning communities to both support and challenge each other. A great byproduct of this openness is the celebration of and for learning.

We are each committed in our own way to doing the best for the students. I think Tony and his staff are on the mark, it’s not the end but the journey that has got them to where they are now!

School is not for adults 2008-10-20

The pre-eminent Professor Viviane Robinson from the University of Auckland delivered the annual Ann D Clark lecture last week. It was a great honour to have both Viviane and Michael Fullan working with us last week.

Prof. Robinson's presentation was *Five Dimensions of Effective Educational Leadership* but perhaps I can summarise the key point in one sentence: school is about students and their learning outcomes not about adults. This is a very powerful concept I believe since it is evidenced based and substantial.

Her research confirms that it's not about the tools, technology, class-sizes or classroom configuration – it is simply the quality of the teacher and the strength of the leadership team supporting them. It is about principals leading the learning within and for their learning community and teachers sharing their own practice(s).

Too often the role of principal has been preoccupied with 'bins, buses and bells' yet Prof Robinson's research showed that effective schools have leaders and teachers who are courageous enough to initiate the difficult conversations about learning based on evidence of student achievement and then make the difficult decisions in order to achieve the goal of improving learning outcomes.

What should our response to this evidence be?

The wow factor *2008-10-28*

I've been involved recently in an online 'think tank' on teaching in a web 2.0 world. The discussion has been very far ranging and interesting to say the least and centred around the 'digital revolution' and its impact on learning and teaching. It is widely agreed among educators that hardware on its own is not the revolution. The revolution is how Web 2.0 is being used, adapted, moulded and applied to learning by creative and innovative teachers. But there are far too few such teachers!

One suggestion for the slow uptake of ICT in schools is that many teachers are asking 'what's in it for me?' We can no longer support learning environments that cater to the whims and demands of adults. In a contemporary learning environment, the question should be 'what's in it for students?'

A major part of the problem, is that many teachers have not been exposed to the 'wow' factor of Web 2.0. The reality is that the innovation and application of Web 2.0 is not being controlled by tech companies but by users – teachers and students.

The more we find ways of sharing the 'wow' factor across the profession, the more likely teachers will adopt, experiment, adapt, share and lead other teachers in this journey.

John Connell has a post on a new project called Social Media Classroom, which has been co-created by Howard Rheingold – author, virtual sociologist and lecturer in collaborative media/digital journalism at UC Berkeley. It is well worth spending eight minutes listening to Howard talk about a new toolset for teachers and the potential of cooperative (online) classrooms. He shows just what inquisitive teachers are capable of!

How can we expose more teachers to the 'wow' factor?

Cracking the DaVinci code 2008-11-02

Recently I met with a group of principals who were still relatively new to the role.

In a general discussion about the challenges we all face, a predictable question arose: Given the incredibly busy context within which they work, how can school leaders sustain the effort necessary for getting the job done and for maintaining professional satisfaction? In other words, what's the secret of professional survival?

I suppose the question reflects the feelings we all have as a very busy year begins to burn itself out. But there's more to it. If they are to thrive in today's climate, leaders have to be adept at working smarter, not harder, all year round.

Smart leaders who have mastered the art of keeping their energy levels high have a valuable little compass – a moral purpose – which keeps them on track. It helps them to make sense, to determine priorities and to make good on-the-run decisions.

These leaders are quite radical in that they have the capacity to go back to basic principles, maintain continuity and then push the boundaries.

They persist relentlessly with the tasks that really matter. And when things don't go according to plan, they adapt with resilience, coming back to the task from a new and fresh angle.

Connecting all of this is an essential simplicity – a precision – which enables the leader to conserve energy for the few things that really matter. These set the agenda, not the thousands of distractions that vye for our attention – distracting us from the essential tasks of the day.

Leonardo da Vinci cracked the code when he said, 'Simplicity is the ultimate sophistication!' It's the distinguishing quality of the smart leader. A clear moral purpose with a precise focus on what really matters each day plus a relentless and sharply focused persistence.

How many of us work hard at maintaining personal energy and professional satisfaction?

Aspiring leaders 2008-11-02

Michael Fullan recently spent a day with a group of ‘aspiring leaders’ from our primary and secondary schools. These are teachers and coordinators, identified by their principals as leaders of learning.

There was an incredible buzz in the room; a sense that all things are possible when teachers share the responsibility and accountability for learning. What surprised and touched the leadership team was an expressed empathy for the role of principal. Fullan likens school leadership to the expeditions of Shackleton and Scott. Both heading for the same destination but each driven by different ambitions.

Shackleton was a true leader: single-minded, egalitarian, responded well in a crisis and was committed to preserving the team. On the other hand, Scott was the antithesis: ambitious, arrogant and prepared to risk the lives of his team for personal glory. It is fascinating that the history books are now questioning Scott’s status as a hero.

The point that Fullan makes about building leadership capacity is that it requires us to be non-judgmental – we focus on continuous improvement in our work rather than labelling weaknesses. We build on the strengths of the team and support each other in the journey.

That is what we are working hard to do within and across our system of schools and I was excited by the enthusiasm and talent of our aspiring leaders. [Click here to watch my discussion with three primary teachers: Kylie Clark, Jodie Milligan and Megan Owens.](#)

As one said, ‘it takes a team to educate a child’.

Shaming the under-performers 2008-11-10

If we can believe recent media, the Rudd Government is pushing ahead with a competitive schools agenda; despite many leading academics warning against the introduction of comparative report cards for schools.

This month, the Chancellor of New York's public schools, Joel Klein will be here extolling the benefits of its school reform agenda, which after six years, has only seen moderate improvements in learning outcomes. Klein believes that schools can 'learn from each other' when you create a competitive environment between schools of similar socio-economic status.

This agenda is flawed because it is driven by an egalitarian desire to raise the levels of improvement in disadvantaged schools by naming (and inadvertently shaming) the under-performers. It fails to grasp the complexity of schooling and the need to improve the quality of teachers across the board.

Under Klein's model, great teachers working in affluent areas would be sharing their expertise with colleagues in similar schools. Where is the equity or the access in such a model? Besides, good teachers by definition are always prepared to be held accountable for the quality of student learning.

UK education academic Peter Mortimore was here recently to stimulate broad discussion on 'school accountability' and believes the model we should be examining is Finland. While we are culturally and economically different, the Finnish government has made a huge investment in teacher-training. As Mortimore says the Finnish government 'trusts' and 'energises' its teachers.

To borrow a line from president elect Obama, when good teachers are asked if they can improve learning for all kids they simply answer, "yes we can. . ."

I am not sure linking federal funding to teacher, principal or school performance will produce smarter and better students in the long-term. It may just disempower more teachers, diminish the hopes of aspirational leaders and produce students who can 'perform' on cue. While the results may be impressive, is that how we want to define good learning?

Candid conversations *2008-11-15*

I'm reading an enlightening book by Bennis et al called 'Transparency'. It's timely given the state of the global economy and a perceived lack of transparency in government and large corporations.

The partnership of Warren Bennis, Daniel Goleman and James O'Toole is an interesting one given Bennis' long history in theory-based leadership and Goleman's work on social and emotional intelligence.

The argument Bennis et al puts forward for greater 'candor' in organisations is by no means a revelation. It is one of the basic tenets by which all organisations (large and small) attempt to operate. Some more successful than others.

What is interesting in this book is the effect of social media or Web 2.0 on corporate transparency. Bennis explains how the CEO of Starbucks is using blogs to find out what employees are thinking and doing.

The point that Bennis makes is that Web 2.0 has heightened the need for organisations to be proactively transparent with its stakeholders. For the education sector, this means that many school communities are connected beyond the confines of the classroom and sharing their learning in new exciting ways. Blogging provides the capacity to respond, react, contribute and critique all at the same time to multiple audiences. Such a powerful tool cannot be ignored.

Engagement is the secret 2008-11-18

Stephen Heppell was in Melbourne last week for the Curriculum Corporation Conference where he delivered (with his customary wisdom and wit), a keynote address on learning and teaching in the 21st century.

There are three things you quickly discover about Heppell: his passion for learning, his understanding of technology and his optimism for the future of schools. And when you combine all three, you realise that anything is possible.

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Yet despite the technological revolution, Heppell says we (parents, teachers and governments) still value conformity and predictability. For example, he asks why we still group children in classrooms by year of birth, why not by interests? Why do we still build factory-like schools with corridors when students prefer small learning communities?

Heppell believes it is ‘catastrophic’ to impose an industrial model of learning on today’s students when their learning is being shaped and influenced by events that have never gone before e.g global warming, global financial crisis, record oil prices, digital revolution etc.

For him, the key to creating relevant learning is engagement and the question we all need to be asking in a Web 2.0 world is ‘how is what we’re doing engaging our learners when everyone else is vying for their attention?’

Admittedly, many educators struggle with this but Heppell says ask students what engages them and you will see how ambitious they are to learn and to make a positive contribution to the global community.

I have said often at conferences and in writing that while schools today face many challenges, the most significant challenge is making schooling relevant in the lives of every student – not just those who attain high marks or who have adjusted well to the school environment.

Young people are actively and deliberately disengaging from schooling as the primary place for learning when they discover new ways of learning and sharing ideas (often well mediated) in an on-line world.

What I do see is an increasing willingness and capacity of teachers to face this challenge head on and with outstanding results. Stephen Heppell’s work points to many other areas to seek this re-engagement with evidence based results. Some of these are really “outside the square” but we won’t find the answers in the past!

Theory into practice *2008-11-26*

As the Rudd government strives to make schools more accountable (and transparent) to parents and the community, we are challenged to justify new approaches in schooling – new pedagogies, learning spaces etc.

The questions I'm often asked is, 'is this a new fad' and 'are we pursuing our personal preferences here at the learner's expense?'

And my response to these increasingly common questions is that our educational agenda is shaped by quality research on how students learn best and how good teachers teach.

It is important to be able to refer parents and those with an interest in schooling to our research base, which reflects the best educational theory and research available, which in turn, is supported by the reflected-upon experience of our best teachers.

In their own words 2008-12-01

A few weeks ago, I invited the kindergarten teachers at John XXIII Catholic Primary School, Stanhope Gardens to share their observations following visits to innovative schools such as Silverton PS. These teachers returned re-energised and excited by the possibilities.

For me, their journey demonstrates a professional maturity; a willingness to work openly and honestly, sharing the accountability for their own and their students learning. It also confirms that we are delivering on our strategic intent to provide teachers with a rewarding working life by exposing them to exemplary practice and solid research.

This year we have been on a journey. Our 'thinking' as teachers has shifted and we have reaped the rewards of seeing just how creative, independent and capable our students can be. Our thinking has moved from what we should teach and when, to how the children learn best and how we can support this learning. > > We have learnt so much about learning from each other; from the children; from our shared reflections on the learning that's happening; from visiting other schools and from taking a few risks ourselves and letting go. > > Initially our discussions were about developing the 'flexible learning space' and how we would teach in it. We designed the room as a 'teaching environment' and challenged ourselves to work as one. We didn't want to see three separate roll groups working within the space, so we set up the room to look like one class with all the desks together and whiteboards, data projectors, dress ups and equipment placed around the edges. > > Though the 'space' doesn't look like this anymore and our thinking about the space has changed, we're glad that we at first did this and not just from an organisational perspective. If we hadn't, we may have retreated to our own corners and done our own thing and that was not what we wanted. Instead it encouraged us to work together as a team, it helped us monitor the children and importantly it helped the children get to know each other. > > The 'space' now has really become a 'learning environment' that, we believe is stimulating and exciting for our children. We have spread out those desks and instead developed contained, defined spaces that allow for quiet time, individual learning, small group work, whole group instruction, role plays and explicit teaching that suits our learners and their emerging needs. > > For example we can have a teacher working with a small group of 5 or 6 children for explicit modelling or interactive writing, while other groups may be larger. > > Groupings are flexible and the teaching and learning is different, because it needs to be to meet their needs. The children seem to understand that they all need different learning experiences and they don't question why other groups may be doing different things. > > These changes have come about because we, just like our children have been learners this year and have benefited from the professional learning we have encountered. The input from others, the dialogue amongst ourselves, the visits to other schools, the conversations we've had, our own readings and research into best practices for our students has enhanced our ability to differentiate or personalize the learning. > > We take time each week as a team for reflection and planning. We constantly talk, evaluate and refine what we are doing together. We share ideas and problems and together come up with new possibilities and solutions. In our earlier meetings we focused very much on the routines and organisation required to help make the space work and as a result have developed real strengths in organisation. Our reflections now however have shifted to focus more on their learning and how we as their teachers can improve it. We have provided the children with a 'thinking space' and have begun teaching them how important it is to think, take time to plan and reflect on their own learning, just like we do. > > We have realised the powerful impact we can make to their learning by allowing them the opportunity to follow their own passions or interests. We've seen firsthand that in a self-chosen activity, students are most engaged. Their learning is richer and our teaching becomes more purposeful and timely. We have made this a priority and have dedicated time to student centered learning each week. > > Over the year we have learnt so many things. We have learnt to collaborate, take risks and trust in our colleagues. We have built relationships with each other, all our 90 children and their parents. We have shared in all our student's joys and challenges and have witnessed some wonderful gains. Every day three home groups come together to sing and pray as one, it's hard not to be touched by the reverence of the children. It's not the 'space' that matters. It's what we do in the space, and for us that's about doing what we can to improve all our children's learning.

ACEL Podcast 2008-12-04

Check out the ACEL Podcast series from the National Conference in October. You'll find engaging interviews with speakers such as Jean-François Rischard, former VP of the World Bank and Hedley Beare and Jerry Starratt. Jan Heyworth and I also discuss our quality learning framework and the challenges we face in delivering our strategic intent of improving learning outcomes for all students and ensuring a rewarding working life for teachers.

Visible learning and teaching 2008-12-09

Over the past few months, there has been vigorous debate over Joel Klein's New York model for school improvement and the indications that it will serve as a model for improving schooling here.

It is clear when you read the for and against arguments that we each have a different understanding of quality education. Teachers want to develop the whole person, governments want to ensure schools produce competent citizens.

The tension exists when you attempt to apply a one-size fits all model. We cannot take a 'shot-gun' approach to improving schooling, hoping to hit as many targets in the process. We need to look at hitting the most important target – the one that delivers real results in the long-term.

John Hattie, Professor of Education at the University of Auckland has just published *Visible Learning: a synthesis of over 800 meta-anaylses relating to achievement*.

Hattie has spent the past 15 years researching effective models of learning and teaching. And what is known is 'what teachers **do** matters'. To quote Hattie:

What is most important is that teaching is visible to the student, and that the learning is visible to the teacher. The more the student becomes the teacher and the more the teacher becomes the learner, then the more successful are the outcomes. (p25)

If governments seek an education system that is equitable and accountable, then we must start with 'visible learning and teaching' in every classroom.

As Professor Ken Robinson says 'raising academic standards alone will not solve the problems we face'. We cannot undermine our investment in teachers or students by introducing school report cards and high-stakes testing as key drivers for improvement.

The major focus has to be on teachers' learning and this needs commitment, resourcing and recognition that it is the most critical piece of an improvement strategy. The data then is contextualised as it becomes an integral part of teachers' learning not a narrow judgment of them. Our students, teachers and school communities deserve much more.

Teachertube 2008-12-15

Jason Smith, creator of *teachertube* is passionate about giving teachers an opportunity to share their ideas and practice with educators from around the world. You'll see that *teachertube* has become a powerful learning community.

For Jason, engagement and collaboration are the key drivers to improving schooling. He told me he longs for the day when parents will plead with children to stop doing their homework!

To come and learn *2008-12-22*

If you are looking for some brain-food over the holidays, I recommend watching TED for some inspiring and insightful talks on just about any topic imaginable.

One of TED's most popular presenters is American astronomer Clifford Stoll. What I enjoyed about Stoll's presentation aside from his brilliant, agile mind is that he believes in the power of teachers to profoundly influence the lives of students. He recounts his journey of discovery as a student and challenges 'experts' to return to classrooms to share their knowledge and passion with a generation of budding scientists, just as he does.

He concludes with an amazing story from his university days, recalling how he stumbled upon this inscription etched on a bell. It's worth watching his presentation for...

All truth is one. > In this light, may science and religion endeavor together for the steady evolution of Mankind: > From darkness to light, > From narrowness to broadmindedness, > From prejudice to tolerance, > It is the voice of life that calls us > To come and learn. > – Anonymous

2009 Writings

Teaching's 'Holy Grail' 2009-01-13

In December, I briefly mentioned Professor John Hattie's book 'Visible Learning': a synthesis of student achievement over 15 years, so it's gratifying to read that his study of 83 million students has recently been lauded in the UK as teaching's 'Holy Grail'.

This is one of the most powerful and challenging texts to be published in the last decade and it deserves our close analysis and attention.

In my view Hattie's work gives education systems and governments a yardstick to measure the often ill conceived and short term methods that are imposed on schools.

In an interview with the New Zealand Sunday Star Times (4 January 2008), Hattie says parents should worry less about class sizes, curriculum and computers and more on the quality of relationships between teachers-students. In particular, he notes the quality of teacher feedback and trust in classrooms.

Hattie's research confirms a universal truth: the quality of the teacher makes the difference to student learning; yet this evidence seems to have been buried in populist debate and recent election promises to improve schooling by introducing school report-cards, a national curriculum or the latest overseas quick fix.

It's no surprise that Hattie wants to see more money spent on rewarding teacher excellence rather than experience. While "twenty is plenty" may be a good slogan to garner populist support, it hardly passes for rigorous evidence-based scrutiny.

We all have some hard truths to face as a result of Hattie's research. I just hope that as more educators, politicians, unions and parents begin to digest the evidence, we see greater consensus on where resources should be spent and less energy arguing over issues at the edges.

Food for thought 2009-01-21

The Curriculum Corporation has published the vodcasts from its 2008 conference held in Melbourne.

There is a broad spectrum of influential speakers such as Stephen Heppell, Chris Wardlaw (former Deputy Secretary for Education in HK) and Michael Stevenson (VP Cisco Global Education) who introduced Education 3.0.

One of the most thought-provoking keynotes was from Valerie Hannon of the Innovation Unit in the UK. Valerie challenged participants to think about schools not as institutions but as dynamic ecosystems contributing *to*, learning *from*, engaging *with* the wider community.

Valerie provided examples of some schools in the UK where parents and local experts are involved in the learning and teaching. See East Feast.

This ‘ecosystem’ represents a kind of educational nirvana in which *everyone* shares responsibility for the learning; school is an integral part of the community and learning reflects real-life experiences.

Now that’s food-for-thought!

Building from the ground up 2009-02-06

The Federal Government is making a huge investment in improving/modernising school infrastructure as part of its \$42 billion jobs and national building plan.

Most Australians would agree that education is a sound investment for our country's future as industrial sectors decline and emphasis is placed on creativity, adaptability and technology.

While we welcome the Federal Government's investment to ensure the built environment meets contemporary standards, we shouldn't let this distract or replace the work that is currently happening in our schools to improve learning outcomes. The focus must be on people – new ways of working, collaboration, sharing, publishing and learning.

It's interesting that Stephen Heppell (who will be visiting our schools this month) in his *learnometer* project is seeking answers as more governments make significant investment in education.

Heppell says two fundamental questions recur – “is the investment taking schools in the right direction for today's world and if so how do we know how effective the investment has been?”

While Heppell and other educational leaders are seeking the answers – we have to ask are teachers also on the same journey of discovery?

I believe if we are to build a level of trust within the profession and contribute to the national agenda, we must each be prepared to ask the hard questions and seek honest answers.

As Professor John Hattie says, we need to create a culture of trust within learning spaces so that the questions can be asked and answered and meaningful feedback given.

We have been encouraging teachers to share their practice and experiences through virtual and physical networks. Our goal this year is to widen the reach of the learning conversations.

Mike Anderson, principal of the Waimairi School in Christchurch explains it this way. . .

I believe we are heading in the right direction but bricks and mortar alone won't deliver the change we seek – it has to be built from the ground up.

Seeing eye to eye 2009-02-11

I was reading Dan Pink's blog recently in which he refers to a survey by the *American Association of School Administrators* and *Americans for the Arts*.

The table draws from the 'Ready to Innovate' report which asked employers and school superintendents how they would rank particular 21st century skills. Interesting to note that two areas in which there is greatest disparity are communicating new ideas and the ability to solve problems.

If you look closely at the survey responses, it seems that US educators place a greater emphasis on the 'what' (e.g. what is the issue/identify the problem) while employers are looking at 'how' to solve it.

How should our syllabus documents and the learning frameworks that flow from them deal with this dichotomy?

Despite a rhetoric about an integrated and balanced curriculum I believe there is still a perception within the broader community that an academic path is more valuable in today's world than a vocational one.

Just look at attention given to the Higher School Certificate and its high achievers every year.

I support the argument that the skills acquired through vocational education courses like problem-solving, use of technology, collaboration, communication etc encompass many of the fundamental skills required for today's world.

Vocational courses are as intellectually demanding as most other traditional subjects. In fact, they are often more demanding given the practical requirement which demands mastery.

They need to be seen as not just easy options or alternatives for schooling as a child-minding exercise. It's interesting to see the Tasmanian Government's solution has been the creation of three separate facilities: a skills institute, academy and polytechnic.

My point is that the best schooling experience we can provide for today's learner is one that does not separate but rather is a synthesis of academic subjects and vocational courses. It is bridging the gap between content and context.

Do our schools and employers really see things so differently?

Dateline – New York *2009-02-12*

This Sunday night at 8.30pm, the Dateline program on SBS goes inside one of New York's worst ghetto schools to see the dramatic improvements made in learning gains under Joel Klein's model.

The program also interviews education researcher Jennifer Jennings who has questioned whether the reforms are achieving the results that Joel Klein is claiming. She warns the Australian Government to think twice.

Heppell's wisdom 2009-02-22

Stephen Heppell has spent the past two days visiting some of our primary and secondary schools. The feedback I have received from staff and students has been overwhelmingly positive. I think he struck a chord with teachers everywhere when he immediately affirmed the work of schools.

As part of his visit, Stephen presented a keynote which was beamed live into every staffroom. I've received emails from principals saying how refreshing it was for staff to hear someone of his calibre confirming that teachers don't need to be experts in technology – they just need to be aware of what technology is available out there and then allow students to become the experts.

For the first time, we hosted a webcast to give Stephen the widest coverage. Like all this technology it worked well in many places and not so well in others. We know the limits of our bandwidth and cost and are working to improve this technology into the future. But the point has been made, anywhere, anytime learning is here.

Stephen concluded his keynote by saying that we have the opportunity to do with learning what our forefathers achieved with medicine. A very powerful challenge indeed.

We look forward to our long term engagement with Stephen.

Practice what we preach *2009-02-24*

When you spend time in a classroom some simple and obvious truths are brought home to you. People in positions of leadership have a responsibility not only to engage in a professional discussion on learning and teaching but to really ‘practice what we preach’.

By this I mean, we need to be aware of what is happening in classrooms if we are to develop the frameworks that support teachers in their work.

I had a wonderful experience last week in a Year 2 class. We were engaged using technology not as teacher to student, adult to child but as learner to learner.

I was actually more nervous than they were – “you just press this button!”

For me, several things were evident. These students had an intuitive understanding of the technology they were using, they understood their subject and there was celebration when they completed their work.

And the result? This is what good learning looks like.

Building on the hedgehog's back 2009-03-02

Last weekend, I re-read Chapter 5 of Jim Collins' *Good to Great* in light of the Federal Government's education stimulus package.

The Hedgehog Concept in which the 'fox knows many things but the hedgehog knows one big thing' is not about complex plans or highly-developed strategies but about simple ideas.

Collins talks about the intersection of three ideas: what can we be best in the world at, what drives our economic engine and what are we passionate about?

In the rush to obtain significant amounts of funding for school infrastructure, it may be very easy to lose sight of our core work – improving learning outcomes for every student and providing a rewarding working life for teachers.

Therefore the game for us has to be about maintaining a discipline and a focus on what makes a difference and what is important to the school. Our school communities certainly know this.

The Federal Government's education stimulus package is an almost once in a lifetime opportunity. We have a one off chance in which to hit the target by designing/constructing buildings and learning spaces that will support schools in their work of providing a contemporary learning agenda. By taking on this agenda schools will move from good to great learning communities, the commitment we all have made together.

To do this, our system must focus on what each school does well and abandon what doesn't work or isn't relevant.

Listening to all voices *2009-03-14*

This week, I was invited to share the system's strategic direction at a school forum and to explain why 'agile' learning spaces support contemporary pedagogies.

While acknowledging the diverse needs of every school community, some of the concerns and issues expressed by participants have many common features.

At first glance, some parents and teachers prefer the security of traditional classrooms because they think that new learning spaces that are agile denote noise, chaos and student anarchy.

There is also concern about new ways of working and teacher unfamiliarity with such ways. Quite often, I am asked why we are "experimenting" here with children's learning in the new models that are emerging.

The point is, I understand how difficult it is to make a conceptual shift between traditional and contemporary models of schooling. However, what we and other educators are doing is striking a balance between what we know works (good practice) and what learning sciences has found (good research).

When we see this working well, as a principal and parents explain in the links below, we see good practice as theory and good theory in practice. It is a seamless, transparent and democratic process.

I say democratic because we are striving to improve the learning outcomes for every student, not just the best and brightest. Democratic in that the responsibility for learning is shared by the entire school community not just teachers or principals. It is a collaborative process that requires team-teaching and team-learning.

Each of us do must do what we can to support the process; to share experiences (and where necessary express concerns) but most importantly, to listen to all voices – principals, teachers, parents and students with an open mind.

Engaging Parents 2009-03-22

As schools are becoming more embedded in their local communities, partnerships become more critical. There are growing examples where parents and local experts are contributing to the learning agenda in practical ways.

As I said in a previous post, it is understandable that parents often feel left behind in the learning journey (probably symptomatic of their experience of an industrial model of schooling in which teacher was seen as expert).

As all educators know, parents can be the harshest critics or the greatest supporters. It's not always easy to maintain healthy partnerships with parents when there is a divergence of views and so much angst around aspects of the learning agenda. As Frances Manning says, the focus should be on process not packaging!

So why isn't always about process?

In Visible Learning, John Hattie says that the inability of parents to 'speak the language of learning' can be a major barrier to student achievement.

If we are adopting new ways of learning and teaching, then perhaps we need new ways of engaging parents. If we were to develop some universal protocols then my top five would be :

1. engagement with parents from the beginning
2. regular community forums and walk-throughs (parents need to see learning in action) – what about the use of blogs as a way of educating and engaging parents in the conversation
3. involve students in giving feedback to their parents on their learning 4. demonstrating the difference new approaches to learning are making 5. finding ways of celebrating good learning and teaching 6. ensuring an outlet for parent feedback

Learning in today's world is a journey, not a destination. As we build on what we know works and respond to teacher ingenuity and innovations from their own learning we need to ensure that the whole school community is on the same journey!

Virtual campfire 2009-03-31

Stories define who we are and help shape both how we act and what we do. As teachers in Catholic schools, the education we provide has to be about the creation of life-giving narratives.

It is interesting that Daniel Pink cites ‘story’ as one of the six aptitudes for the conceptual age in *A Whole New Mind*.

Pink writes that ‘*stories help sharpen our understanding of something by showing it in context to something else.*’ Isn’t this what good learning does?

I believe our educational narrative needs to reflect human experience today not 100 years ago and we can only bridge that gap when we share our learning stories.

The education tribe has great wisdom and we must find ways of hearing and sharing those voices.

What astonishes me is that there is still great resistance to Web 2.0 as a ‘virtual campfire’ for sharing the learning stories. How do we get the tribes to see the potential and to ensure those stories continue to give life?

Surfing the web 2.0 wave 2009-04-07

Is the tide finally turning?

A recent study by the University of Melbourne has found that employees who browse the net are 9 percent more productive than those who don't.

The study's author Brent Coker found that staff who used social networking sites like Facebook, watched YouTube or read online news for short periods during the work day have greater concentration.

It is quite amazing that many organisations (corporate and government) still see the internet as a distractor , when in reality it has become a source of information, ideas, innovation and collaboration. Moderation is the key here.

Educators and leaders around the world are working very hard at making schooling relevant to today's students but what about making work relevant for employees?

There must be a continuum of creativity and ingenuity between school-life and work-life. If the education sector sees the web as a powerful tool for learning, sharing, connecting and publishing than why aren't corporations and industry?

Are we preparing today's students for a draconian workforce? How do we maintain this creativity continuum between school and work?

Any thoughts?

Cisco Webclass 2009-04-14

Last Tuesday I participated in *Cisco's Webclass for Education series*. It is yet another example of the power of virtual networks – anywhere, anytime.

Michelle Selinger, Cisco's Director of Education facilitating the Webclass

The Webclass was on collaboration in education and how teachers/systems can work to improve their own and student learning.

You can listen or download the webinar by clicking [here](#).

Joy of Learning 2009-04-23

John Connell gave an excellent presentation at the ACE Digital Fair in Geelong last week. As always, his depth of knowledge and understanding about schooling is thought-provoking.

What struck me about John's presentation on the Joy of Learning is the broad theory base that we draw from in re-shaping schooling for today's world. What we are doing today in reframing schooling and making this schooling more relevant in the lives of young people draws heavily on those who have gone before. We have to be mindful of the past, not victims of it. We add to this wisdom base when we challenge existing processes and practices in both intelligent and realistic ways.

John quotes two important 20th century thinkers: social critic Ivan Illich and educator James Darling and reveals a common thread in their approaches to learning. The true purpose of schooling is not merely educating productive workers and good citizens but the whole person; one of the dominant features that Illich and Darling recognise is the centrality of relationships and community to human identity.

In his blog, John explains that the current model of schooling (created in and for an industrial age) has has:

served to smother the spark and spontaneity that should be the constant hallmarks of good teaching and enjoyable and effective learning.

It bolsters the argument that Sir Ken Robinson makes in his book, *The Element*. Robinson strongly believes schools have a responsibility to provide the encouragement and conditions for students' talents and passions to flourish. He says that most people's talents are buried deep and unless that support is provided in the critical years of schooling, students will never discover their true talents and end up leading unfulfilled lives.

Discovering and nurturing our hidden talents really is the joy of learning. Who are the wisdom givers who shape your schooling world view?

Hot-house of Innovation or Not? 2009-05-07

You may have read about the University of Queensland's new interactive lecture theatre in The Australian (Touchscreen lectures speed feedback, 5 May).

The theatre has a high-res touchscreen for instantaneous feedback; linking to students' mobiles, laptops and iPods and is being used across disciplines. The university says the interactive facility encourages student collaboration, feedback and engages them using their own technology.

While this has been funded by Commonwealth money, I think the really important issue here is why aren't our schools hot-houses of innovation – we aren't we adopting some of this technology to improve student learning outcomes and engage students?

We are working so hard to give students a relevant schooling experience but the critical issue is how do we challenge teachers' thinking/practice? If we can't answer that, we can't expect our schools to be hot-houses of innovation.

In his latest book "*Instructional Rounds in Education (2009)*" Richard Elmore (et al) addresses the same issue from a different perspective:

The problem is not that schools are worse than they used to be...the problem is not that educators aren't working hard... the challenge is that we are asking schools to do something that they have never done before – educate all students to high levels – and we don't know how to do that in every classroom for every child. (p2)

Elmore says it is critical that educators develop a set of "*explicit shared practices*" which reflect new approaches to improving student outcomes. In other words, sound theory informing our practice = innovation.

We have the theory, so why is it difficult to change practice?

Even the Pope's Got an iPod 2009-05-19

I co-presented a workshop at the 2009 National Catholic Media Congress in Sydney called 'Even the Pope's got an iPod'. It was a great opportunity for our Church community to gather, discuss and explore how new media and social technologies can be used as a medium for evangelisation.

What was fascinating was that the last Catholic Media Congress was held 25 years ago! The cultural and social context has changed dramatically but none more so than the technological change, which has undoubtedly influenced the way we work, live and communicate. Just have a look at the Time Magazine Cover from August 1984 (right).

Would today's learners know what a floppy disk was? We live in extraordinary times when innovation is now driving demand (Apple had sold 100 million iPods in 2007 and possibly 10 million iPhones). It's all about smaller, faster and lighter.

I began my workshop by giving a quick introduction into social technologies and the rapid rise of virtual communities/tribes. Blogs promote individual comment on topics of common interest whereas now we are seeing the proliferation of sites Twine and Epicurious that are building communities of common interest (see John Connell's post on a Canadian study on Internet and social isolation).

Apostolic Nuncio Archbishop Giuseppe Lazzarotto and Archbishop Wilson with an iPod Touch

While the workshop provided participants an opportunity to learn more about and experiment with new technologies, it raises the important question of how the Church can use social technologies to engage the Catholic tribe in spreading the Good News. A very concrete way of responding to "the signs of the times."

And by all accounts, our participants enjoyed playing with iPods – perhaps a new generation of technology converts!

Leading Learning 2009-05-19

It is heartening to find principals who are using the tools of Web 2.0 to share information and ideas, openly seeking feedback from parents and peers and in doing so re-energise themselves through collaboration and exploration.

In my experience, great school leaders absorb new perspectives and embrace a changing world with creativity. They engage others and set high-standards for themselves and their staff. And they *model* contemporary practice!

Toni Sillis is a Catholic school principal who has been an early adopter of social technology in classrooms. Her blog is an example of what innovative principals are doing and thinking. A great resource.

Educators leading not following 2009-05-24

I was invited to speak to a group of 250 educators in the Dandenongs recently who have willingly formed and developed a structured professional learning program. To me that reflects an integrity and commitment to the art and science of teaching.

Whenever I speak to large groups of educators, I more often than not asked about the ‘how’ – how do you create contemporary learning environments, how do you improve the learning outcomes for each student in our care, how do you build a sustainable learning communities?

My response is always that there is no single road map for taking schooling forward in today’s world. We need to see it as part of a jumbo puzzle; it is the challenge and joy of working on the individual pieces that defines the HOW.

Despite the fact that educators understand the WHY of having to change the way we think about contemporary learners and learning, one question still plagues the profession:

What do I do about my colleagues who aren’t supportive of continuous improvement in the profession and who question why there is a need to change the way we work anyway?

It is a valid question; one that has been scrutinised by educators like Elmore, Hargreaves and Fullan et.al. The only wisdom I can offer towards answering this question is that you cannot sustain change unless there is shared understanding and a shared framework for improving schooling. This means robust dialogue and discussion within the profession that stretches and challenges existing practices and frameworks, and acknowledges all voices.

What I have noticed in my travels is that good educators do not follow trends – they don’t take walls down or give every child a laptop because that’s what the current fad dictates.

Good educators find meaning and purpose in their work; they articulate a shared understanding of what is important, they connect with each learner and they use what is available to them (good data, feedback, theory, practice, experience base) to improve on what they are currently doing. Great educators act on the discussion in decisive and practical ways.

Today’s schools need educators who aren’t prescriptive but proactive and are prepared to take the road less travelled.

Marco's Magic 2009-05-26

Leading US educator, Marco Torres is back in Parramatta this week working with 90 Year 5, 6 and 7 students from three local schools.

The students are undertaking project-based learning; exploring an issue that impacts on their local environment using multi-media.

It is immensely satisfying watching students learn but when you pause to reflect you realise that watching Marco in action is seeing a teacher who has a profound understanding about people learning.

For Marco the art of teaching is in the learning, focusing on the learner not the process or the structure. As he points out “*schooling is a noun, learning is a verb.*” When this happens the line between the teacher and the learner becomes more permeable and collaborative.

When I look around the room, I not only see students engaged and challenged but also teachers, principals and team leaders. And that's really the point – great teachers inspire learners of all ages.

More of Marco 2009-05-29

We had around 100 staff at a twilight session on Tuesday night to hear Marco Torres deliver an abbreviated version of his keynote at the Apple Leadership Summit in Hong Kong.

Here's Marco's presentation in a nutshell:

1. teachers don't like taking risks
2. George Lucas (Star Wars genius) doesn't know how to use email (see pt 3)
3. teachers don't need to know everything – build a powerful learning network you can draw from
4. majority of 9th graders think school is boring – what would businesses do if clients described them as boring and out of touch?
5. knowledge isn't enough in the google age – it's what you do with it
6. Mythbusters is so popular with 14-16 year olds (9th graders) because kids are watching learning happening – it's the process that's important not the end result
7. despite the introduction of 'digital tools' into classrooms, kids are still receivers not producers of information
8. kids want to create – digital cameras have given them opportunities to make mistakes without consequences (think back to your schooling when writing outside the lines was a no no)
9. 21st century skillset: communication and complex cognition
10. our students will solve the crises of this century

The Question of Intelligence 2009-06-01

I'm reading Ken Robinson's *The Element*, which explores how one finds or develops their passion/aptitude. It has particular ramifications for the education sector because as I wrote in an earlier post, Robinson believes teachers/schools have a social and moral obligation to cultivate students' unique gifts and talents.

Early on in the book, Robinson explores the notion of intelligence and how our measurement of 'academic' intelligence emerged during the Enlightenment, which held scientific and verbal reasoning as the pinnacle of intellect.

Robinson argues rightly that public education in the 19th century was built on a limited understanding of knowledge and intellect. Schools existed to meet the demands of the Industrial Revolution and therefore depended on a quick one-size fits all approach of assessment.

A good read on this world view is given by Raymond E. Callahan in his book "Education and the Cult of Efficiency" who shows how the industrial model was codified in the first two decades of the 20th century.

Of course if we know this to be true, then why do we continue to validate standardised testing? Because as Robinson writes, we are framing the question incorrectly. It is not about how intelligent you are, rather how *are you* intelligent?

Mathematical and verbal reasoning while important are two elements of intelligence. It encompasses much more and while teachers may recognise the special skills and gifts in their students, they are restrained by a draconian system of assessment.

There is a pervasive and powerful view that still exists in our own society that students who don't score high marks in the HSC are somehow less capable.

If we want to personalise learning for every child, then we need to seriously examine the way we assess student learning otherwise we will fail another generation of learners.

Teacher learning 2009-06-03

We've been pursuing a rigorous intent in our system over the past few years. At the heart of the agenda is our 'theory of action', which places student learning at the centre of our work influenced by good teachers who continually reflect and improve their practice. We refer to this as teacher learning.

We have many examples across our school communities where our theory of action is permeating our collective understanding of what quality Catholic schooling is and looks like in today's world.

Recently, there was an opportunity for teachers and students from a handful of schools to come together; utilising the tools available to enhance the learning experience.

These opportunities are challenging and rigorous as teachers reflect on their practice and question long held assumptions on how students learn and in what learning settings.

My feedback is that teachers enjoy the freedom 'learning about learning' provides. It is and can be transformative when you can let go of what is not working and embrace working in new ways that engage learners at every level.

This is how one teacher responded to the process of working in new ways with students, teachers and experts.

Our work is the art of the possible.

Winning formula 2009-06-12

A thought-provoking article (*The New Yorker*) written by Malcolm Gladwell (Tipping Point, Blink etc) using basketball analogies to demonstrate how substituting effort for ability can be a successful strategy particularly for the underdogs.

The points that Gladwell makes are:

1. be relentless – don't give up
2. think outside the square – always question the norm
3. trust that your team can step-up
4. the end result is never as important as the strategy because these strategies when implemented give rise to other opportunities (Henry Mintzberg).

For schools it means being courageous, proactive and willing to examine what can be done differently and better when it comes to student learning.

Seven Principles 2009-06-19

On a glass panel in my office I have written the seven principles of the instructional core from Elmore et al's Instructional Rounds in Education. I have done this to keep right at the forefront of my thinking on a daily basis, what I believe to be the best articulation of a foundation for 21st century pedagogy.

The seven are: (the italics are mine)

1. increases in student learning occur *only as a consequence* of improvements in the level of content, teachers' knowledge and skill and student engagement
2. if you *change any single element of the instructional core*, you have to change the other two
3. *if you can't see it* in the core, it's not there
4. *task* predicts performance
5. the real accountability system *is in the tasks* students are asked to
6. we learn *to do the work by doing the work*, not telling other people to do the work, not by having done the work at some time in the past, and not by hiring experts who can act as proxies for our knowledge about how to do the work
7. description before analysis, analysis before prediction, *prediction before evaluation*

Novelty aside, the principles have become a talking point for curious colleagues and visitors. It's interesting to listen to the conversation outside my door as teachers and non-teachers discuss which of the seven resonate. This is an important point because we need time to discuss and reflect on the importance of these principles.

Quite clearly they place the work of the teacher squarely in the centre of improving learning for all kids. They also make the point that the tasks teachers set for students is more important than the process of assessment.

These principles challenge some long held beliefs that the student is usually at fault if no improvement takes place and that by nature of their training and in-service course attendance, teachers are always equipped to provide outstanding learning experiences for all students.

The best surgeons are the ones who are in theatre everyday dealing with new and complex challenges as they occur and discussing them with the team. Tiger Woods knows all the theory of the perfect golf swing, but after every tournament he goes straight back out the next day to practice. The work of golfing is golfing. In the same way the work of teaching has to be more teaching.

Numbers 3 and 6 are the two that hit the mark for me and are the ones I'm talking to educators about. Which ones resonate with you?

Getting it right 2009-06-25

Mark Kelly, the global head of education for architect firm Woods Bagot has joined the chorus of public school principals concerned about the federal government's school rebuilding program.

In Tuesday's *Australian*, Kelly urged the federal government to move away from traditional one-size-fits-all templates to more innovative and sustainable school designs that promote collaborative models of learning and teaching.

I believe these comments have helped move the debate on contemporary school design forward. By bringing light to this issue, it forces school to think about what kinds of learning spaces are needed to promote/encourage collaborative learning.

However, buildings and laptops are only resources used by good teachers to enhance learning and therefore improve learning outcomes.

We know that if you begin with the fundamentals: good models of teacher development and you understand how today's students learn, you can design agile spaces that support and empower teachers in their work.

Unfortunately, what is always missing from these debates is a fundamental element – pedagogy.

Contemporary learning spaces depend on contemporary approaches to learning and teaching. Sadly, it is futile building innovative learning spaces if teachers continue championing 20th century pedagogies.

Challenging the Norms *2009-06-26*

Embracing intellectual rigour and professional integrity, a powerful change dynamic

Time to Agitate *2009-07-01*

Brian Caldwell's Agitation Hill Lecture delivered in May is worth reflecting on.

In his address, Caldwell urges educators and parents to adopt 'the language of radical dissent' and wrest back control of education before our government take us down the path that England has chosen. Interesting to see Gordon Brown's refreshing approach to educational policy and reform!

Exploring intellectual rigour *2009-07-03*

The education landscape is rich with contemporary theory that serves as a solid base for contemporary practice.

The following is a sample of the theories I am currently using to inform my work as a system leader. It challenges and stretches you as a professional and gives rise to those 'lightbulb' moments.

As educators, we owe it to our school communities to be up to speed with contemporary theory, research and best practice.

What I personally think, prefer or believe provides a lens through which I view these theories but it should never replace it.

The most recent work of Sir Ken Robinson who questions the purpose of schooling, Brian Caldwell who calls for a more balanced curriculum and John Hattie whose evidence on what makes the greatest difference to student learning provides diverse yet sound approaches to school improvement.

This is why intellectual rigour is so important – it requires an engagement on the part of everyone to be discerning and critically reflect on current theories and research that informs practice. What can you add to the list?

Exploring professional integrity 2009-07-09

Teachers have long claimed to be a profession. However, I'm not too sure this claim can be universally substantiated.

I think that there are two key elements for asserting professional status. The first is that the profession has a significant voice in shaping policy and agenda, which not only empowers those already in the profession but it also makes the profession more attractive as a career choice.

The second is the capacity to drive both change and innovation while maintaining a focus on the core business.

Too often the voice of the teaching profession is at best muted, at worst missing in leading broad educational change. At the moment, the teaching profession is not self-determining and its ability to self-govern is extremely limited (see Brian Caldwell's 2009 Agitation Hill lecture).

Different voices have dominated the debate in recent decades. In the 1990s, the business discourse dominated: schools had clients not students, customers not parents. Industry needs determined the shape of the curriculum and so on.

The first decade of the new millennium has been dominated by governments of all political persuasion implementing their pejorative 'reform' agenda to drive and then demonstrate school improvement particularly in those schools that are deemed to be failing.

These intentions trigger another round of education revolutions in which schools not the business model of the 1990s are blamed for failure.

It is easy to understand how educators often feel so marginalised by the current process. This is no easy challenge but it will be the hallmark of a strong profession.

The second is equally important and sits closer to the profession's circle of influence.

I believe one of the major blockers to change and innovation in schooling is underperformance by some teachers. Teachers who are resistant to change, are reluctant to become team-players for the good of the learning community and fail to innovate. They are easy to spot and difficult to engage in meaningful dialogue and it is an issue we have found hard to address in a fair and honest way.

The profession needs to look at under-performing teachers in the same way coaches manage high-performing teams.

It is the responsibility of systems to support all of their teams by ensuring they each have access to the best available resources, experts etc. It is the responsibility of principals to develop an appropriate strategy for improving learning outcomes by developing team strengths and addressing weaknesses. It is the responsibility of each team member to support one another in the process and to challenge themselves as individuals to continually improve their performance as teachers.

If a team member is under-performing, then I believe there are only two viable solutions:

1. the individual takes personal responsibility for improving, seeks collegial support, finds a respected mentor and in doing so open themselves to "relearning"
2. the individual decides not to improve performance or practice, in which case they make an honest decision about pursuing another path

This may appear to be harsh but as Andy Hargreaves says 'teaching is not for the faint-hearted'. Unless we get tough on ourselves, we will always be shouting from the side-lines. The profession needs professionals if we are to revolutionise education.

Adaptive leadership 2009-07-14

I am often looking for new perspectives on leadership and find the Harvard Business Review valuable professional reading. There is a good article in the July-August edition by Heifetz et al on 'Leadership in a (Permanent) Crisis.

The article examines three key tasks for leaders today that I believe can be adapted to schools and systems:

1. foster 'next' practice while maintaining good practice. This is about blue-sky thinking. What can our schools become in a twenty-first century world and how can we leverage off what we are currently doing well to create the most desired future?

2. use the chaos and confusion of change to your advantage. Getting staff to confront the realities/dangers of maintaining the status quo, routine is the enemy of innovation. Viviane Robinson also encourages school leaders to create cultures where 'courageous conversations' occur regularly. Conversations that lead to sustainable and improved change instead of allowing fear and personal preferences to derail the process. It's really about Covey's habit of beginning with the end in mind!

3. looking for leadership at every level of the organisation. This is critical in school environments because good teachers enable and empower their colleagues. They contribute to building and sustaining powerful and adaptative communities of learning. They are not fearful of questioning their own, and their colleagues practices. Organisations can only grow when communities, groups, individuals share and celebrate best practice.

Finally, and perhaps the most important point is:

4. leaders taking care of themselves. They take personal responsibility for their wellbeing. Schools need strong leaders who are around for the long-haul. Great leaders work hard at the things that make the difference and not the things that detract from their work. They take their professional pride in so doing,

It is something worth reflecting on as we prepare for Term 3.

Publish and perish? 2009-07-16

There has been fierce debate between both sides of the political fence over the decision by the federal government to publish the results of national league tables. With no white flags on the horizon, the unions have now threatened industrial action.

The point is parents, students and good teachers already know which schools are under-performing. And they know the factors causing this under-performance. League tables quantify what local school communities already know.

Sometimes as Member for Chifley, Roger Price pointed out, the name and shame approach applied in particular to the Mt Druitt Class of 1996 forced those responsible for students' learning to be more accountable for their learning outcomes. It's not the children who failed here and as the Member for Chifley rightly asks would a cultural change have happened at the school if not for the Daily Telegraph's front page story?

As an educator, I would ask why our profession has to rely on governments and others to tell us that we are falling short of the mark. The profession has to build a culture where improving student outcomes is the defining factor no matter how challenging it may be to many entrenched practices, approaches and beliefs. New cultures are not easy to build and sustain. However, cultural renewal is at the heart of continuous improvement in any profession or sector.

Accountability exists within the parameters of good professional practice; good teachers have always been responsible and accountable for their own and their students' learning. Good teachers use data intelligently to inform their own practice and in turn inform parents of their child's learning progress.

Educators have an enormous social responsibility for making a real and positive difference to students' lives. For too long, our professional gaze has been on what we can get out of the schooling experience instead of what our students are getting out of it. Schools exist first and foremost to meet students' needs and give parents choice.

Reframing schooling is about teachers working smarter (on the right things) not harder (on the wrong things). We cannot have a national conversation on publishing league tables without first asking ourselves how we address the critical issue of under-performing teachers and under-performing schools if we want the credibility we seem to expect as a right.

Education for the common good *2009-07-21*

A great resource from Edutopia with Howard Gardner – Harvard psychologist and author of ‘Multiple Intelligences’ discussing some of the ethical challenges facing the digital generation and their use/misuse of digital media.

I concur with Gardner’s comment on the need for teachers to be role models providing ‘judiscious guidance’ in a digital age!

The 'teacher effect' 2009-07-28

Last Friday, the Sydney Morning Herald published the results of a University of New England Study claiming 'teacher effect' only plays a minor role in student learning.

In response, I refer again to John Hattie's book *Visible Learning* in which he claims: 'what teachers *do* matters'. As educators, we should no longer be satisfied with simply reaching minimum standards or getting over the line. (Read Adele Horin's powerful comments from 25/7/09 on teacher quality)

As Hattie says, rather than asking 'What works?' we should be asking 'What works best?'

We do know there is a growing body of research showing that excellent teachers positively influence student learning outcomes. Why? Because expert teachers don't simply teach: they recognise when learning isn't happening, then employ and monitor personalised strategies that as Hattie says 'work best' for each learner.

My views on teacher quality in last Friday's Sydney Morning Herald is really a call to action. This is the time to step-up to the demands of the profession by addressing the core issues preventing us from making quantum leaps not just superficial steps.

Is teacher selection a game of chance? 2009-07-30

Malcolm Gladwell has written an excellent article for the New Yorker.

Gladwell draws a comparison between the dilemmas faced by NFL selectors and school principals in identifying talented young recruits. It's a critical issue that school systems grapple with. How do we attract and retain excellent teachers and leaders?

For me, the article raises several points worthy of professional discussion and debate:

- are good teachers born or can these qualities be developed? - is university the best training ground for teachers? - should beginning teachers be apprenticed for 3-5 years? - should we pay teachers a more competitive salary to retain quality teachers? - should there be a new understanding of what teaching is in today's world?

Since the mid 60s, the teaching profession has undergone significant changes as university training and a basic degree became the minimum standard. While welcoming the academic approach and rigour, I feel as though we may have actually lost something from the learning that took place by working in the classroom with highly experienced teachers for significant periods of time.

It's interesting that this latter approach follows Bransford et al's research in which powerful learning happens when there is a focus on content, context and meta-cognition. I think teachers learning about learning is the key to continual improvement.

Peter Singer *2009-07-30*

Princeton Professor of bioethics, Peter Singer has written in Melbourne's Age newspaper this week about the importance of teaching university students to think for themselves – a convincing argument.

Schools as global institutions *2009-08-07*

Britain's Prime Minister, Gordon Brown delivered a powerful speech at the TED forum in Oxford about the creation of a truly global society connected by powerful communication technologies.

In essence, this was a call to collaborative action in tackling global challenges like climate change, terrorism and human rights abuse.

Gordon Brown made a persuasive plea for the creation of global institutions that are underpinned by a shared moral duty to alleviate the challenges we all face whether in developing or developed nations.

As we think about re-imagining schools for today's world, I wonder how long before schools become truly global institutions – where children from around the world are active agents and partners in projects based on finding solutions to global challenges.

How many children would dis-engage if there was real meaning and purpose to their work?

Ticking the right boxes *2009-08-13*

Dr Ken Boston, former director-general of the NSW Dept of Education and former head of England's curriculum authority has been in Australia sharing his views on national testing and league tables.

While he supports national testing as a diagnostic rather than deterministic tool, Dr Boston believes league tables are in themselves a 'crude' methodology – lacking depth and failing to capture the diversity of schools and the context in which they operate.

Speaking to the Australian Primary Principals Association this week, Dr Boston said he favours:

"... rich reports which explain why a school may be performing less well, not just simplistic league tables. Don't massage the data, no jiggery pokery, no smoke or mirrors, just present the data as it is. My belief is this would offer greater public accountability than league tables."

No-one is opposed to greater transparency in education so long as it makes a real difference to students and their learning.

What has become evident is that league tables are more a measure of government performance in educational reform. It may tick the boxes for voters but does little to address the substantive issues and challenges facing Australian education today.

The comments of two western Sydney principals in the Australian (12/8/09) strikes at the heart of this matter.

'They [NAPLAN results] don't show how the school is performing in terms of how it's providing for the local community.' (Phil Walker, Kings Langley Public School)

If you don't work on their social and emotional wellbeing to start with, then they don't have the facilities to learn.' (Cheryl Walsh, St Bernadette's Primary, Lalor Park).

League tables indicate which schools are meeting national minimum standards (or not) but they don't offer explanations or provide solutions to improve the quality of learning and teaching.

For me, the focus on school improvement needs to be on the collection and analysis of a broad set of data including school participation in the community and student well-being.

To do this well, systems and schools need the skills and instruments to be able to effectively analyse data and frame questions that lead to improved practice and learning outcomes.

They need a practice of inquiry and reflection on learning which is too often ignored in a climate of test test and test. Testing then drives the learning agenda, not the nature and quality of the teaching. I referred to Elmore's idea on this in a previous post. A school community committed to improving outcomes for all students know their students' performance in both broad and deep ways. In their professional kit bag you find data on a range of areas but in particular:

- student performance and learning gain - student satisfaction - teacher performance and satisfaction - parent satisfaction

Walk into any high-performing school and you will see an openness to inquiry, public accountability and a willingness to inform parents on their child's progress. Providing teachers and schools with the skill set and tools to improve learning will score ticks in all the right boxes.

Excuses vs Innovation 2009-08-18

I've been exploring the need for professional integrity and intellectual rigour in previous posts and why exercising these within the profession would lead to a culture of innovation instead of excuses.

We too often judge the quality of schooling on the results of students as if the onus and responsibility is on their shoulders to improve learning outcomes not the teachers.

How often do we hear this statement "if we had more money, more time, more resources....we could improve student learning" or "you have to understand where these children come from...".

It is time we looked at schooling through a different lens because for the past 100 years, we have assumed that there is only one lens for us to look through; one way to teach; one way to design classrooms; one way to structure timetables; one way to assess student knowledge etc.

This sort of innovation comes when teachers learn to stand with their students not apart from them. We know that good learning and teaching is at its heart, a relational process.

This relationship is strengthened when we understand as much about the student in all of their rich and diverse ways. Rather than preparing students for tests, why can't we ask ourselves or colleagues what information would help this student make the necessary connections and then develop the structures to help them achieve deep learning?

The answer may not be an end of term test, it may be very different.

Teacher conversations #2 2009-08-26

I was out at one of our primary schools yesterday talking about working in agile learning spaces. It's great when you hear practitioners reflecting on their practice and to see the obvious pride they take in their own professional contribution.

Kids online 2009-09-03

Researchers from Griffith university have recently published some interesting conclusions about young people and internet usage.

The authors have found ... wait for it... kids are often logging onto the net to do research for school projects and homework *before* logging onto social networking sites. (I am not sure we would have seen children in the 1970s eager to flick through Encyclopedia Britannica!)

It's important that we remind ourselves constantly that young people, when properly instructed and informed can use the internet in ways that enhance their learning and social experiences.

In addition to supporting guidelines and advice for parents and teachers on keeping students safe in an online, the report's co-author, Margee Hume also believes parents need to get more involved in their children's online activities to ensure a balance between virtual/physical activities.

For me, greater parent participation on the internet represents greater transparency between schools, parents and the community. There are many schools who communicate with parents, share information about lessons and student progress and publish student work via blogs.

Most of the worries about the potential inappropriate uses of the internet come from a lack of understanding about the net or a fear of its potential reach. These fears can only be overcome by being proactive and, wait for it, learning about it yourself. The kids will be good at helping with this.

There is no greater tool for transparency than being able to watch and monitor learning and feedback in real-time. Who knows, blogs may replace the need to publish league tables!

Parent feedback 2009-09-11

As the league table debate simmers, I've been giving thought to how we build greater levels of understanding about student achievement between schools and communities; especially parent communities. This way we build a culture of trust and enquiry.

I believe that all too often our definition of a school community is predicated on the notion of teachers as expert and parents as carers. This places parents at the periphery of the school learning experience as if it were something quite distinct from the learning taking place within the home. Too often parents defer to the "expert" the teacher because they feel that the teacher always knows best.

Our goal has to bridge the gap between what we know about schooling based on contemporary theory and exemplar practice and what parents know about schooling.

For me, part of the process of school accountability and performance relies on feedback from students and parents. Too often though we dismiss negative feedback – depriving ourselves of a valuable tool for seeking broader engagement, gaining trust and finding new and effective strategies for learning.

I have referred to schools in the UK that, like Reggio-Emilia exist and thrive as an eco-system, a global village where everyone whether it is the cook, parent or teacher has something value to contribute to education.

A quote to ponder from Carina Rinaldi, executive consultant for Reggio Children:

... the school-family is practised not only as an individual relationship between parent and teacher, and certainly not as a relationship of subordination in which the teacher tells the parent what he or she should do, what is right or mistaken. > > Rather it is a common journey for building together – parents and teachers – values and ways of educating in contemporary society, inside and outside school. > > We have a responsibility therefore to join the parents into the same learning journey that their kids are experiencing. We have exciting new ways to do so

Talent magnets 2009-09-15

The issue of how to attract and retain talented teachers is an issue that education systems around the world are grappling with.

The Centre for Skills Development has produced a white paper on teacher attraction and retention titled ‘Talent Magnets’. It’s worth reading given the impetus to re-frame schooling.

For me, staffing the 21st century school is one of the tallest hurdles we need to jump. The attrition rates particularly of young teachers is of concern given the difficulty the profession has of attracting the best and brightest to the profession.

There is no denying that the quality of school leaders and the culture of learning communities contribute. We know that schools are only as good as 1) their leaders and 2) the systems that support schools to respond to challenges with creativity.

As a system, we are building the capacity of our leaders in order to develop our aspiring leaders. Because without strong leaders, old practices and cultures do not change; creativity is stifled and learning outcomes do not improve.

Leaders of today’s schools will need to be the architects of a new way of working, thinking, doing in which structures are more flexible, practice is evidence-based, each member contributes equally, collaboration is the norm and creativity is encouraged.

Like any profession, teachers have a right to ask ‘what I am getting out of this’? It comes back to professional and personal satisfaction, and recognition – when these are lacking, people look elsewhere to be challenged, rewarded, affirmed etc.

If we can create the right conditions for learning to happen for students, we should be able to create the right conditions for teachers to remain engaged and inspired in their work. Teachers deserve greater control over their professional working lives and this should look and feel like the working lives of other professions.

What are those conditions?

Learning with Technology *2009-09-23*

I had the pleasure of co-teaching a Year 6 class at one of our primary schools recently. The effort, enthusiasm and energy of today's learners always amazes me. It has been a long time since I was in classroom with young people. I enjoyed myself thoroughly but have to say I found the experience really exhausting!! You forget what it takes out of you when you are constantly working with young people; it continues my admiration for teachers who do this on a daily basis.

We spent the time discussing stories and then how you might share them and the kids and teachers came up with a project that we put together and captured in a very short time using an iPhone as the tool.

You'll see what kids can do in a short-time when they are on task and in control of their own learning.

Independent learners 2009-09-29

One of the things we know is that if you can develop your process for learning, then learning becomes deeper and more powerful.

I see this in so many learning spaces now as teachers begin from where the student is rather than what needs to be taught.

This is particularly challenging in the post-compulsory years particularly for students facing the HSC examination in subjects with clearly defined syllabus outcomes.

Occasionally this is used as a reason for maintaining the status quo instead of embracing new ways of learning and teaching. Katherine, an Ancient History teacher in one of our schools recently shared with me how she had been working with 17 HSC students.

Katherine shared the syllabus outcomes with her students at the start of the year and asked them to devise a suitable learning framework to cover the required areas. What the students came up with is absolutely fantastic. Their year 12 Ancient History course was conducted using Facebook (the students were using a technology they were familiar with and adapted it to their learning needs).

When you watch the clip, you see a teacher open to new technologies and excited by the level of student engagement.

Tweetback 2009-10-03

I'm amazed by the power of Twitter to turn one thought or comment into a million directions.....

Reporting on how the Twitter phenomenon has changed the rules of engagement and social commentary, Steven Johnson writes (Time, June 2009):

We are living through the worst economic crises in generations... and yet in the middle of this chaos...ordinary users are figuring out all the ingenious ways of putting these tools to use...here we are – millions of us – sitting around trying to invent new ways to talk to one another.

A few weeks ago I was at a conference in Perth where participants were engaged in a Twitter conversation within and outside of the conference regarding my keynote.

Last weekend, I was introduced to someone for the first time who told me they had been following me on Twitter for sometime.

How's that for instant feedback!

As more people tap into the wisdom of the Twitter crowds, I am interested to see how it will be applied in learning spaces. Here are nine reasons why teachers should use twitter and twenty-two interesting ways to use Twitter in classrooms.

Twitter has the capacity to be a powerful tool for feedback (or Tweetback) particularly student to teacher feedback, which Hattie says is the most powerful form of feedback: teachers observing what students understand, where errors are made and when they are not engaged.

Motivation 2009-10-06

Dan Pink has been working on a new book “Drive” about what motivates us. As an educator and system leader, What motivates me and many of my colleagues is a desire to give young people the best opportunity in life by giving them the gift of education.

Good teachers would work for pittance and often do when they are working with a team of committed professionals who are passionate, committed and aspire to reach the same goals. This is what Pink refers to as intrinsic motivation – doing something greater than ourselves.

According to Pink, 20th century businesses and organisations work on extrinsic motivators – pay for performance, carrot and sticks approach for 20th century tasks. It is also how governments and policy makers believe we can improve schooling. . . reward teachers for preparing students well for high-stakes tests.

Pink claims that scientific evidence shows that those extrinsic motivators like financial rewards narrow our focus to left-brain, mechanical tasks. When we remove extrinsic motivators from the table, we give people autonomy to move in every direction and therefore find creative solutions.

Good teachers deserve an adequate and fair pay but this cannot be the carrot for motivating or punishing them. All this does is detract from the real work by making teachers compliant and schooling rigid. What’s more, it kills creativity and forces good teachers to leave the profession feeling defeated and exhausted.

If the general population were to hear less from unions and politicians linking schooling to extrinsic motivators and more from teachers about what really motivates them, then we would see the real value in education. This requires what I call a “new honesty” from the profession itself since everything has to be open to change. The past defines the present and shouldn’t be allowed to restrict the future.

It may even give us the energy to move beyond jack-in-the-box schooling (no surprises there) to something never seen before.

Tribes 2009-10-08

I've just finished reading marketing guru Seth Godin's latest book *Tribes – We Need to Lead Us*. Godin's book picks up on themes explored in *Wisdom of the Crowds* and *The Element*, in which the authors explore the notion of tribes and the need for each of us to find like-minded people.

It is a move away from individual and groups to something that is energetic, ephemeral, engaging and exerts real leadership. It signals a new way of thinking that is just-in-time, bold and bucks the status quo.

As Godin says,

We're embracing a factory instead of a tribe. . . . Fear of change is built into most organisms, because change is the first sign of risk. (pg 9) > > Leaders. . . don't care very much for organisational structure or the official blessing of whatever factory they work for. They use passion and ideas to lead people, as opposed to using threats and bureaucracy to manage them. (p 19)

This thinking must pervade our classrooms and educational institutions if we are to liberate our schools from factories to tribes. Our ability as teachers, leaders, employees, students to take risks will be made much easier when we are working with and among those who share our passions and are willing to push the boundaries further into the unknown.

The internet has become a tribal marketplace for people to connect. Twine and Epicurious are examples of social networking sites that brings people with similar interests together.

Ken Robinson writes about Mick Fleetwood and Sir Paul McCartney's search at school for their tribe. Of course, each one found it in a musical group but their initial experience of school and learning was sadly shaped by the factory mentality: conformity, security and predicability.

In cautioning schools, Godin writes

“training a student to be a sheep is a lot easier than the alternative. Teaching to the test, ensuring compliant behaviour, and using fear as a motivator are the easiest and fastest ways to get a kid through school. So why does it surprise us that we graduate so many sheep? (p 83)

So what will it take for every teacher to be tribal leaders who can lead instead of train?

The moral purpose 2009-10-12

Innovation expert, Charles Leadbeater was in Australia recently sharing his ideas on why we need better models of schooling to improve social cohesion.

In moving towards greater efficiency, Leadbeater believes that our societies have focussed not on people but on processes, systems, structures and yes, technology.

The work of public institutions like schools is not simply to provide a service but to build and nourish relationships in which people feel valued; are motivated to do well, have opportunities to work collaboratively and in doing so feel they are making a positive contribution to their community.

History shows that throwing more money at education doesn't solve the problem of student disengagement. We know that at risk children and their families need greater support before starting school and during the early years of schooling.

Leadbeater suggests two new approaches: finding ways of schooling that is motivational and bridging the gap between school, family and community.

Both Leadbeater and Stephen Heppell see the dismantling of large secondary schools as the first step in creating smaller, personalised learning environments in which students are recognised and feel comfortable within their space.

This is what the Victorian Department of Education and Early Childhood Development has aspired to with their massive redevelopment of the Broadmeadows site.

Under the old model, Broadmeadows was facing a dim future: high youth unemployment, schools seen as 9-3pm institutions, parents not involved in the learning.

After a significant period of planning and redevelopment, the Broadmeadows site has become a contemporary educational village. Students learn in smaller hubs connected by communal resource areas. Parents are invited to use the facilities.

Sometimes those of us in education are at risk of forgetting that improved learning outcomes are a result of our investment in people not our systems.

The great American pedagogue, John Dewey is as relevant today as he was one hundred years ago:

When the school introduces and trains each child of society into membership within such a little community, saturating him with the spirit of service, and providing him with the instruments of effective self-direction, we shall have the deepest and best guaranty of a larger society which is worthy, lovely and harmonious.

Heppell Part 2 2009-10-16

We've had the pleasure of welcoming Stephen Heppell back to the diocese. Stephen spent three days during the last week of term 3 at one of our secondary schools to challenge teacher thinking and deepen student engagement.

It's always engaging to hear someone as passionate as Stephen talk to teachers about the opportunities and challenges of learning in today's world. Ask Stephen and his response is that students can do anything if they are challenged, engaged, inspired etc. Ask many secondary teachers and they will tell you how constrained they are by rigid timetables and syllabus requirements.

These are the realities faced by teachers everywhere and until governments change the policy from testing and assessing to learning and teaching it will stay the same. This is a clarion call to stop playing the game – to develop our own policies and use the expertise, experience, and professional judgement to look beyond what has always been in schooling.

We don't need excuses, we need action. The government wants an education revolution then let's give them a real one. As someone once observed, a crisis is a terrible thing to waste! And let's start with teachers sharing their own practice of what is good learning and teaching. This has to be our policy framework.

I am not sure why there is still such trepidation to change schooling – perhaps it is the fear of not having all the answers or a single road-map! The good news is we have the tools, the experience of innovative teachers and the voices of students to forge our own paths.

As Stephen says the curriculum requirements are just one corner of the classroom so what is happening in the other three? I believe the greatest challenge for systems and leaders and the profession itself is giving teachers the green-light; supporting them to take risks and to experiment with new learning tools.

There is great liberation in realising that you don't have to be an expert in IT to be a good teacher. Good teachers will continually look for new ways of improving learning outcomes using the tools available including the design of learning spaces.

Stephen told our teachers that the only way to move forward is to work in partnership with students – to involve them in decision-making; to challenge them to set (and reach) their own targets and to see what is possible rather than what is expected.

John Hattie 2009-10-23

The task we have set ourselves of building a high performing system has been challenging but our work has been enriched by the ideas and input of great educational change agents like Michael Fullan, Stephen Heppell and most recently, John Hattie.

On 19 October, more than 600 educators came to hear John Hattie deliver the 2009 Ann D Clark lecture in Penrith. It was a tremendous opportunity to hear John talk about his seminal research, *Visible Learning*.

John's message is practical and powerful: focus on feedback especially student feedback of teachers. John says that if you ask students they'll tell you when their teachers aren't up to scratch. So why are many teachers so afraid of hearing the truth? Is it too difficult a challenge to change what we have been doing?

Further he says that we set the bar too low for student learning therefore we'll never really know what students are capable of. Despite how this may seem, it is not a criticism of teachers – it's just that it is time for an honest look at the evidence of student achievement and action on that evidence. We have to see the urgency for action and act now!

Hattie affirmed our strategic direction but cautioned about the need for an unrelenting focus on the evidence. As he said it is about two key questions, "show the evidence and then do what needs to be done as a result."

The 'f' word 2009-11-03

Michael Fullan recently addressed 100+ of our aspiring leaders in the context of leading change and learning in their schools.

This was a marvellous experience for leading teachers to be exposed to someone of Fullan's calibre – armed with research and case studies on what makes an effective school leader.

It is evident that one of our greatest challenges as a system is how we continue to recognise leading teachers, how we develop their leadership and more importantly connect them with similar cohorts to expand the depth of talent across the profession.

Part of the process of challenging and empowering teachers is ensuring that core messages around instructional practice, collaboration, effective use of data and feedback etc are being disseminated across all levels. As one of the principals of Fullan's 'turnaround schools' explained – you need to know the message is getting past the usual bottle-necks. To ensure teachers are across the agenda requires constant..... 'feedback'.

I know many leaders and educators are uncomfortable with the 'f' word but it is critical to how we lead and plan. It begs the question of how we encourage principals in every school (large, small, primary, secondary) to seek honest feedback and evidence of their own school improvement strategies? Why do we too often feel uncomfortable getting and giving feedback?

For Fullan, building strong communities of practice comes from building communities of trust. As a system, we need to continually measure the temperature of trust and progress if we are to see what is working and what needs to be done next. This is the way to overcome this "uncomfortableness." Learning becomes the focus of the work not individual performance.

In raising the bar, we need to be rigorous in our approach to gathering feedback and presenting evidence. It requires not only a common language of learning but as John Hattie recently said 'a common indicator of progress that is applied across every school'. This 'common' but sharply focussed lens provides schools, systems, parents, governments with an honest snapshot from which we can understand, monitor and promote good learning rather than judge school performance.

Taking this approach builds the credibility of the profession as well, and will place the profession in the centre of developing education policy – not at its margins

The case for video games *2009-11-05*

If you haven't bookmarked the website Edutopia, you are missing out on some terrific educational resources and stimuli for classroom and staffroom discussions.

I know many teachers are getting their head around the use of technology in classrooms but if you ever needed convincing of the benefits of video games in education – spend 10 minutes listening to Professor James Paul Gee of Arizona University.

Compelling stuff!

The science of learning 2009-11-05

How many of us have fond memories of Year 9 science? I suspect most of us don't unless we had a natural aptitude for the subject.

The reality is it probably had something to do with the way the subject was taught – a one size fits all approach to science that was far removed from our lives and yet integral to understanding the world around us.

For John Hattie, a good teacher is able to turn on the challenge of physics, chemistry or Year 9 science for every student.

Greg Whitby and Year 9.3 Science at Parramatta Marist

Last week, I was invited into a Year 9 science class and saw young men challenged and engaged in their learning. Their teacher, Br Anthony is using a project-based learning (PBL). [Click here to listen to Br Anthony on PBL.](#)

I found it an engaging experience to watch two students (whom I later discovered have been struggling) stand in front of their peers and deliver a presentation on “Energy and Ecology”.

The subsequent class discussion of which I was a part, on global warming and alternate energy sources was lively and well-informed and it's encouraging to know that these students see themselves as part of the solution!

I saw a science teacher who was passionate about his subject and committed to using PBL to engage and challenge students in a real-world context and showcasing their work.

Teaching is a science and good teaching is about the continual examination of the evidence of what you are doing and how it is impacting on learning outcomes. At its very core is a fundamental understanding of the learner.

There are many more examples like this – we just need to share them.

GregMeet 2009-11-13

On the subject of the ubiquitous nature of social technologies – I recently attended a dynamic event in Scotland arranged by a great colleague, John Connell called GregMeet.

I wasn't quite sure what to expect but it turned out to be two and a bit hours of intellectually stimulating discussion connecting educators around the UK using video conferencing and twitter.

Within hours of the event, one of my colleagues in Australia was watching excerpts of GregMeet on YouTube.

The potential for schools to link up via the web with other exemplary schools here and overseas is enormous. It is a great medium for teachers and leaders to collaborate and share their practice very simply and easily. I like the way you can listen, engage in side discussion, tag certain items and share resources – all at the same time.

Yet, we still face a major challenge – how to encourage schools to establish their own networks and share expertise locally across K-12 and across education sectors.

I still see resistance at a local level around having broad conversations on data and evidence. We need to be having those collective conversations on what is working, what isn't and why, what does it look like elsewhere and what can we learn from our own and others' experiences.

How do you increase the amount of time teachers spend talking about teaching?

Stephen Heppell suggested setting up a web-cam in school libraries so that teachers and students could be continually interacting with another leading school.

It's a simple, low-cost initiative aimed at de-privatising practice on a global scale.

Tapping into twitter *2009-11-16*

It's interesting to watch Twitter move from just another social networking tool to a powerful tool for professional conversations, social commentary and in some cases social change.

I started using Twitter this year and am amazed by the number of educators who are reflecting on their practice, expounding ideas and seeking answers to challenging questions.

Clif Mims recently shared a link in his tweet: letters page from the NY Times on "What Makes a Good Teacher". It was a great piece that I would have missed and which may have only ever reached a handful of readers if not for the universal reach of Twitter.

Stairs and umbrellas 2009-11-19

One of my former colleagues sent me a great example of how you can change people's habits by turning something seemingly tedious into something fun.

On the same day, I also received an email from the principal of one of our secondary schools who wanted to share photos of some of their new learning space (below).

These spaces are not a response to the high cost of building and refurbishment but to careful planning and reflection by teachers on how to improve student learning.

Students working in teams on integrated, rich and diverse tasks require freeing up how teachers work as well. So new possibilities are emerging (try spotting the teacher – she is definitely there and working purposely with all the students!).

What struck me is that the stair and umbrella example are simple, practical and appeal to our imagination by making existing infrastructure (and learning spaces) interesting. It's low cost for high returns.

As we respond to crafting relevant learning experiences for today's world, we must continue to remind ourselves there are simple and effective ways to inspire and challenge learners.

Imagination is key. Does anyone have similar examples to share?

Getting wise **2009-11-23**

The World Innovation Summit for Education (WISE) has just concluded in Doha. Policy makers, educators, politicians, academics and NGOs discussed a broad range of educational issues with a focus on how education can bridge global inequality.

The website features short interviews with leading thinkers and innovators such as Lord David Puttnam – Chairman of Futurelab UK. Lord Puttnam makes the point that education is not simply about producing smarter graduates but innovative and responsible global citizens.

Reflections – part 1 *2009-11-26*

We often talk about educational change in the abstract as if we can manage each part separately.

As schools contemplate the end of another year, I want to share the reflections of some of our principals and leading educators.

Michael Hopley, principal of St Monica's Primary, North Parramatta recently reflected on his professional year in the midst of construction of their new buildings (thanks to the Building the Education Revolution stimulus package).

For me, this aptly illustrates how educational change is a dynamic process and how good leaders and teachers can navigate their way through the uncertainties by remaining focussed on the important things: personalising learning and improving learning outcomes.

It is terrific to hear Michael talk about how the system's agenda is supporting and enriching their learning journey and how it has contributed to a greater understanding of the role of learning environments.

151 2009-12-02

Parramatta Marist recently introduced Year 10 students to 151 – the extension of the Problem Based Learning (PBL) model into the senior curriculum.

Unlike PBL, the 151 model gives students an introductory period (1), whole day (5 periods) and a follow up period (1) per subject over a two week cycle. This allows teachers to work intensively with senior students on real-world problems.

As part of their introduction to the PDHPE module, the students were asked to do a test of 12 multiple choice questions based on the information they were going to learn for the day. The average was 58%.

During the follow up period, the class was asked to complete the same test – the average was 75%.

While the increase in the test average is important, I think the feedback from students (see below) is key in predicting 151's success:

In my honest opinion, today's five periods of PDHPE were the most enjoyable I have ever experienced, I had the opportunity to work with classmates that I do not usually work with. I found the case study method of working, one of the most effective methods of educating young people.

Innovations in the secondary school often falter around the post compulsory years due to the prescriptive nature of the syllabus and HSC examinations. In recognising the obvious limitations, staff at Parramatta Marist have worked collaboratively and creatively to address this curriculum construct and improve the learning outcomes of students.

Teachers talking about new ways of learning teaching always beats the alternative.

Reflections – part 2 2009-12-04

The Building the Education Revolution has allowed many of our primary schools to closely examine the dynamic between contemporary pedagogy and learning environments. New opportunities to reflect on how teachers work together, plan and teach is resulting in positive outcomes for learners.

Throughout 2009, staff at St Monica's Primary, North Richmond have been exploring ways in which student learning is enhanced within different learning spaces (e.g a Church) using the quality teaching framework.

It is enlightening to listen to staff at St Monica's reflect on their professional journey and to admit that working as a team of two or three has brought a new level of enthusiasm to their daily practice. Even the principal is amazed at the level of calm within these new learning spaces as students work collaboratively on tasks – engaged and happy in their learning activities.

Another shared reflection. . . .

Are we too protective? 2009-12-08

Are we stifling creativity and expression in schools by being over protective of children?

Of course there is a duty of care to protect but at what cost to deep learning, imagination and self-expression? Are our rigid regulations the reason why there is such a deep disconnect between school and home?

Valby Skole Denmark

In wanting to do the best for children, we have forgotten that their first learning environment is the home: kitchen, garage, backyard etc. It is the communal dimension of learning with and from others.

Many schools are beginning to design learning spaces that support and enhance student learning but it is not as pervasive as countries with a strong design research base.

In Australia, there is great work being undertaken by Clare Newton from the University of Melbourne and designer, Mary Featherston.

The challenge is how we expose classroom teachers to the research and then how we engage them in the process.

Reflections – part III *2009-12-17*

As another school year comes to completion, I think it appropriate to leave the last word to one of our secondary teachers, Jill Harrington.

Jill's reflection on her role as a team-member and on her own professional journey as a maths teacher exemplifies a new understanding of student-centred learning and teacher-learning.

Without good teachers who can reflect on practice, mentor one another, work collaboratively, interpret feedback and data and change strategies when necessary, we will not achieve the learning outcomes that every student deserves.

It is disheartening to read on the day the HSC results are published that our highest achievers and brightest students have not chosen to pursue studies in education.

Teachers are the greatest ambassadors for the profession – it is time to raise the status by encouraging teachers to talk about the rewards of a profession that directly impacts on the lives of young people.

Space Unlimited *2009-12-21*

Space Unlimited is a great concept that brings together students, educators and industry to solve real-world problems.

Schools should be a microcosm of society – not an isolated experience but part of communities and open to the input and experience of other educators whether it be parents, professionals or experts.

2010 Writings

The Saber Tooth Curriculum 2010-01-12

Nothing like a good holiday to refresh the brain cells and to allow for some solid reflection. I came across an interesting article by Kent University sociologist Frank Furedi on why education in the West is no longer working.

Furedi makes some valid points – namely that education systems are risking losing the ‘intellectual legacy of the past’ by following educational fads that are responding to rapid social and technological change.

He claims abstract thought and knowledge are viewed by contemporary curriculum engineers as outdated. The curriculum for the new generation of digital learners with its focus on devices and access to rapidly expanding information sources therefore requires learners to be ‘trained’ not ‘taught’. This is a very different curriculum focus!

What is an appropriate 21st century curriculum and what needs to change/adapt to today’s world?

The curriculum cannot be reduced to a preoccupation with courses, content and accountability. The curriculum should be holistic – designed to develop the mind, imagination and character of students. It is grounded in values and strengthened by supportive relationships. It is built upon the bedrock of schooling: literacy, numeracy and socialisation.

When we teach children to read, write, add and subtract we give them the tools to think, critically reflect, act and adapt to a constantly changing world. It is the moral of the satire, *Saber Tooth Curriculum* by HRW Benjamin and the argument Furedi makes:

The discussion of the relationship between education and change is frequently overwhelmed by the fad of the moment and with the relatively superficial symptoms of new developments. It is often distracted from acknowledging the fact the fundamental educational needs of students do not alter every time a new technology influences people’s lives.

Students inevitably become the casualties as teachers attempt to respond to these fads: changing curricula, increasing government accountability, parental expectations etc.

Teachers need to teach not train. It requires a continual reminder of the purpose of schooling and where the effectiveness of teachers’ work lies.

Good and relevant pedagogies personalise learning, enable the learner, highlight the interpersonal nature of learning and contribute to building the learning community.

Reading the *Saber Tooth Curriculum* reminded me of the *Grain in the Stone* chapter in J Bronowski’s *Ascent of Man*.

According to the author, one of the most important developmental steps man has taken – the move from technical to intellectual... ”the distinction between the moulding action of the hand, and the splitting or analytical action of the hand.

Bronowski explains that the splitting of wood and stone becomes an act of discovery about the world and the nature of things.

The notion of discovering an underlying order in matter is man’s basic concept for exploring nature. The architecture of things reveals a structure below the surface, a hidden grain which, when it is laid bare, makes it possible to take natural formations apart and assemble them in new arrangements. It is as native to the way man conceives his own communities as it is to his conception of nature. (p 95)

This insight supports Furedi’s point that education should help students understand the ‘influence of the legacy of human development on their lives’.

It is only then that we can look to the future.

Happy New Year.

The role of schools *2010-01-18*

If there is any institution needed by modern societies to guarantee its future, it is education.

It is often convenient to ignore the importance of schools in the development of humans and society as we argue over the nature of the curriculum.

Since their inception, schools have transmitted society's values and culture, been repositories of shared wisdom and knowledge and powerful agents of change.

At times individuals, organisations and governments have sought to use schools to further their own particular agendas and purposes and at others, allowed schools to carry on the work they do – free and unfettered from external influences and pressures. Regardless of the approach, schools have still maintained their centrality of being an important part of the development of society and the common good.

If schools are to serve their communities and the wider society, they must be relevant to today's learner. This is a very different view from past generations.

Schools exist to contextualise the nature of the world in which young people live.

Certainly, it requires an understanding of the past and the forces that have shaped the world. The platform on which we base our curriculum for today's schools should challenge and open the mind rather than constrain knowledge into discreet subject boxes.

I believe this is why we struggle to find an appropriate curriculum. It requires a philosophical discussion on the purpose and nature of schooling before we can move towards a national curriculum.

Art of precision 2010-01-28

Professor Helen Timperley from the University of Auckland was working with our school leaders last week. It was a great professional learning experience and builds on the work we have been doing for some years now on how continuously improve student learning outcomes. Helen has such a sharp and pragmatic focus.

For me, it is about teachers learning about the art of teaching. They do this best by engaging in substantive conversations with colleagues at every level on what students are actually doing not on what teachers think they should be doing. It requires precision on the language and nature of learning and a daily focus on professional learning and teacher practice.

As Helen says, teacher learning is powerful and schools are places for **both** student and teacher learning.

Out to pasture 2010-02-02

In 2010, we find ourselves peering over the edge of a great chasm that has to be crossed if we are to get to a world of new potentials. We move forward with a sense of excitement and possibilities

Technology has given us a window into the future. Just look at the hype and excitement around Apple's release of the iPad. Who knows what technology we will be using in five years from now? At this point in time anything is possible and there is a sense of excitement in that.

Contrast this with current discussion and publicity of ACARA's MySchool website and the use of a narrow data set to form judgements on school performance and student learning. As the world continues to open up new ways of doing things, there are countervailing forces using reductionist approaches that may stifle innovation

The point we are at in education reminds me of the beginning lines in Dickens' *A Tale of Two Cities*, "it was the best of times it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness".

We seem to be in an in-between period in education. There is so much possibility yet little consensus on ways forward, there is confidence in schools as institutions yet there is a lack of trust in the teaching profession. How do we make sense of it all and determine our way forward?

I was thinking about this yesterday and realised that we are currently working in an in-between space: a place of ambiguity and opportunity – it is the convergence of the past and future. The word I coined to make sense of this space is *Pasture* – a blend of both the past and future.

I see *pasture* as a wide fertile space for learning and innovation – full of potential, optimism and opportunities, open to anyone who wants to create the future by taking the best of what we know.

In meeting the challenges of schooling today, we should never lose sight of what we are striving to do overall. A national website comparing NAPLAN results should never be the driving catalyst for improving schooling. That responsibility lies squarely in the hands of good teachers.

Leading learning 2010-02-02

I've just finished reading Tom O'Donoghue and Simon Clarke's 'Leading Learning: process, themes and issues in international contexts' – a great book for reflective practioners.

O'Donoghue and Clarke map the territory for learning and leading with brief descriptions of the significant themes, trends and innovations from around the world.

The real strength of this book is its bibliography – an invaluable resource of work from leading practioners and academics.

The chapter on teachers leading reinforces (again) the fundamental link between teacher quality and student learning outcomes. It is what drives our system agenda and our work with system leaders.

Teachers, therefore, need to be powerful learners if they are to maintain a high level of professional performance in an occupation that has become increasingly difficult. They also need to be powerful learners so that they are able to present role models to their students as well as the community as a whole. In this sense, a teacher's capacity to learn constitutes an important form of leadership in itself.

And therein lies the challenge we face – the re-education of teachers who 'eschew professional learning because they have been 'done' on completion of their initial training'. (p93)

Learning doesn't end after four years of university – it just begins as a classroom practioner.

What makes a great teacher? 2010-02-04

I've just read an illuminating piece by Amanda Ripley in *The Atlantic* called 'What makes a great teacher'. Although the article details the American experience, the message about teachers and teaching is universal.

For more than a decade, Teach for America has been looking at the data on what makes teachers successful – that is the difference between the teachers who improve student learning gains and those who can't. This article is compulsory reading for parents and teachers because it is referenced back to data not opinion and perception.

As parents arm themselves with MySchool data, ready to tackle principals of low performing schools, the paragraph below should be signposted at the front of every school in Australia:

Parents have always worried about where to send their children to school; but the school, statistically speaking, does not matter as much as which adults stand in front of their children. Teacher quality tends to vary more within schools-even supposedly good schools-than among schools.

But we have never identified excellent teachers in any reliable, objective way. Instead, we tend to ascribe their gifts to some mystical quality that we can recognise and revere – but not replicate. The great teacher serves as a hero but never, ironically, as a lesson.

I asked some of my colleagues what they believe makes a great teacher – their responses are below. Interesting to see how it compares with Teach for America's findings.

- passion / fun * engagement * compassion * patience * knowledge * personality * relentless * relationships * learner * collegial

MySchool 2010-02-08

The MySchool website is still making news as the media herald it as the single source of educational truth. It is a great hit with parents and the broader community.

For me, the obvious flaw of the MySchool website is that it focuses our attention individual schools and not on the work of teachers as a whole.

We know from research that the greatest variance often lies within schools not between schools. Naturally, parents will take the data on face value but it is afterall one part of a much broader data set.

Removing a child from an under-performing school does not guarantee a consistent level of teaching across grades in one school. That is the challenge school and system leaders face – how do we ensure a high standard of teaching in every classroom and every school?

Michael Fullan in *Motion Leadership*:

In terms of the link between a principal's action and student learning, there is one finding that stands out in time as more powerful than any other, and it is this: the 'degree to which the principal participates as a learner in helping teachers figure out how to get classroom and school-wide improvement.'" (p36)

At the end of the day – teacher learning transforming student learning is what we are accountable for.

The work we do 2010-02-11

When Professor John Hattie visited our diocese last year, he mentioned something quite astounding and profound. When teachers are together in staff rooms, they only spend five minutes on average, talking about teaching.

We know that when teachers are in learning spaces they ‘do’ the business of teaching, but we also know that it is just as important to ‘talk’ to colleagues about what they do when they teach.

Bransford et al make this point powerfully in “How People Learn” when he talks about meta-cognition or put more simply learning about learning.

The work of teachers is more complex than rocket science (Elmore). It takes place against a background cluttered with noise – diverse views, fragmented policies, competing agendas and is mostly characterised by an environment of mistrust and suspicion.

How do we support, sustain, develop and drive the continuous shift needed to ensure a relevant 21st century schooling experience if we don’t reflect and talk about what good learning and teaching is in today’s world?

I think there is a very simple and obvious answer – look to the theory and the good practice that stems from the theory. Since the beginning of the 1990s, there has been a wealth of research linking theory to practice.

The work of Andy Hargreaves, Michael Fullan, Richard Elmore, Hedley Beare, Viviane Robinson and John Hattie demonstrates the link. The problem with our current educational approach is that it relies too heavily on what I call the ‘opt in/opt out’ model. That is, what a teacher thinks or feels about a learning strategy defines the implementation process.

It is the antithesis of evidence-based decision making. Elmore calls this a ‘theory of volunteerism in education’. That is, if I like it I may choose to participate, adopt or implement otherwise I will stay the current course – often to the detriment of the learner. If we accept responsibility for our own and students learning, then we cannot tolerate volunteerism.

Schools exist as places of learning for students as well as teachers. The work of the above authors shows how we can improve learning and teaching. While each comes at it from different perspectives, they share common themes. These are:

- teachers make the difference - teachers get better at their work by doing the work - teacher collaboration is critical to influencing practice and sustaining change - leaders must support and participate in teacher learning - data and feedback must inform decision making - the implementation process needs to be localised We call our change imperative, the ‘theory of action’ and it is underpinned by two decades of theory and research into what makes the difference to student learning. Teachers drive change by changing what they do. School leaders sustain change by identifying what teachers need.

This simple approach is powerful in practice.

The razor's edge *2010-02-11*

The Federal Government has just caught on to the power of blogging and social technologies.

Read the Federal Minister for Finance's OpED.

Good to see our politicians and bureaucrats are catching up to the electorate.

The responsible manager 2010-02-16

Good school leaders share the same qualities as good managers. They are as CK Prahalad says ‘custodians of society’s most powerful institutions’.

Reading Prahalad’s column in the Jan/Feb edition of Harvard Business Review, I was struck by the timelessness of Prahalad’s notes for managers (written in 1977) and St Ignatius Loyola’s principles for leaders (written in 1500s).

For Loyola – successful leaders:

- cultivate self-awareness and seek to understanding one’s strengths and weaknesses * innovate and adapt to a changing world * engage others with a caring attitude and tapping into their potential * energise others by setting the bar high

For Prahalad – responsible managers:

- are committed to their own learning and development * display humility, care and courage * are inclusive * realise the importance of loyalty * assume responsibility for outcomes as well as for processes and people * balance achievement with compassion and learning with understanding

What lessons can principals learn from good managers and vice versa?

Crosswords or colouring? 2010-02-19

In embracing an evidence-based educational model, schools in Wellington NZ are ditching traditional homework in favour of more real-world and fun activities like crosswords, boardgames and reading comics.

The move away from ‘homework for homework sake’ is aimed at nurturing children’s interest in reading and other creative activities.

The principal of Karori Normal School has told parents there is no ‘evidence’ to suggest that homework has a positive impact on student learning.

This move has been applauded by John Hattie who says for most kids, homework is a waste of time.

I think it is terrific that schools are finally seeing the links between enjoyment, engagement and learning.

Small steps lead to great change.

Teacher learning 2010-02-22

I spoke to over 100 teachers on Friday at a Mindful Learning: Mindful Teaching meeting. ML:MT is our system's response to the federal government's national partnership to improve literacy and numeracy in primary schools.

I stressed two key points to the cohort:

- Although MySchool has dominated the media in the last three weeks, it is not our primary focus and never will be. Individually and collectively, we know much more about our schools than any website can tell us. * No matter what the achievement levels of our students, we can ALWAYS do better – we know what makes a difference to student learning.

I don't believe another strategy or website will show teachers what to do and how to do it. Improving student learning outcomes is a direct result of improving teacher practice. We build the capacity of teachers by creating regular opportunities to work and share together.

This is what happened on Friday – teachers coming together, committed to improving literacy and numeracy; using contemporary theory and resources to inform their practice.

I've often written that teachers need to take charge of the education agenda. Friday's meeting reminds us how powerful teachers learning about learning is.

Alchemy or science? 2010-02-26

I am often asked why many teachers are so reluctant to share their work particularly on blogs and other social networking sites. The answer eludes me despite what we know about the influence of teacher learning on student learning.

I believe it stems from the historical and cultural context of teaching. Since the 19th century, teachers have spent most of their time working alone in classrooms; pursuing their own agendas and developing their own knowledge and skills from whatever sources were available.

We know the practice of collaboration and reflective dialogue is critical to improving the quality of learning and teaching. It is one of the necessary conditions of building leadership capacity and transforming schools.

In responding to the Edge's World Question Centre – *'how has the internet changed the way you think'*, Clay Shirky' wrote this: (thanks to John Connell for the link)

The Invisible College, the group of natural philosophers who drove the original revolution in chemistry in the mid-1600s, were strongly critical of the alchemists, their intellectual forebears, who for centuries had made only fitful progress. By contrast, the Invisible College put chemistry on a sound scientific footing in a matter of a couple of decades, one of the most important intellectual transitions in the history of science. In the 1600s, though, a chemist and an alchemist used the same tools and had access to the same background. What did the Invisible College have that the alchemists didn't?

They had a culture of sharing. The problem with the alchemists had wasn't that they failed to turn lead into gold; the problem was that they failed uninformatively. Alchemists were obscurantists, recording their work by hand and rarely showing it to anyone but disciples. In contrast, members of the Invisible College shared their work, describing and disputing their methods and conclusions so that they all might benefit from both successes and failures, and build on each other's work.

The Internet's primary effect on how we think will only reveal itself when it affects the cultural milieu of thought, not just the behavior of individual users. The members of the Invisible College did not live to see the full flowering of the scientific method, and we will not live to see what use humanity makes of a medium for sharing that is cheap, instant, and global (both in the sense of 'comes from everyone' and 'goes everywhere.')

We are, however, the people who are setting the earliest patterns for this medium. Our fate won't matter much, but the norms we set will.

Given what we have today, the Internet could easily become Invisible High School, with a modicum of educational material in an ocean of narcissism and social obsessions. We could, however, also use it as an Invisible College, the communicative backbone of real intellectual and civic change, but to do this will require more than technology. It will require that we adopt norms of open sharing and participation, fit to a world where publishing has become the new literacy.

So are today's teachers alchemists or chemists?

Technology's sixth sense *2010-02-26*

This TED talk is a a year old but the technology is still astounding. What impact will this have on the nature of learning and why are we still so afraid of technology in classrooms?

Don Tapscott describes Gen Y as the 'digital echoes' – these young people have never known anything other than 'digital '. Just as we are an echo of the Big Bang.

I read a quote last night which said that TV is a new technology to those who have never watched it.

Throwing sheep 2010-03-02

I've just finished reading *Throwing Sheep in the Boardroom* by Matthew Fraser and Soumitra Dutta.

This is an insightful exploration of the Web 2.0 revolution – its current and future impact on individuals, communities and organisations.

Building on the foundation of social interaction, Fraser and Dutta examine three fundamental themes of social networking: identity, status and power.

A great book for parents and educators in recognising the opportunities and inherent dangers of social networking tools.

Grown up digital 2010-03-02

I had the opportunity to catch up with Don Tapscott last week. Talking to people who are pushing the boundaries really energises and stretches your thinking.

Tapscott has written the best-selling books *Growing up Digital*, *Grown up Digital* and *Wikinomics*; these are must reads for educators who want to ensure schooling is relevant to today's learners.

One of the most interesting facts in his recent book *Grown Up Digital* is that the youngest digital immigrant in our school system is 11 years old. The eldest in that generation is 31 years old, which means that two generations have passed through our schools since the dawn of the digital age.

Sadly, we are still running schools as if computers and other technologies were a recent invention!

In his presentation, Don made this salient point – we cannot act tomorrow or next month – we must act today otherwise we risk losing another generation of learners. Our teachers may not have grown up digital but they need to understand today's context to teach today's learners.

A national curriculum 2010-03-05

I find it interesting that just as the world is opening up to new possibilities of accessing and sharing information, connecting and collaborating globally, the government's strategic policy focus is defining what should be learned by all students in all Australian schools today. Perhaps the new draft K-10 national curriculum is more a response to the fear that these new capabilities will only weaken the traditional transmission of knowledge. It seems to me that there is an inherent paradox in our current situation that the more freedom we have to expand our knowledge, the more we want to protect and narrow what we deem to be valuable.

The first casualty of the initial draft is what subjects were in and what was out. No surprise that the big winners are: maths, science, grammar and phonics. Wouldn't it have been interesting if the first draft ignored this and opted for creative and performing arts, music, health and well-being and geography. Do we assume here that science is more important in today's world than music? These are the realities we face and it is no different from the ideological battles of the past 100 years in education about what should and should not be taught in schools.

Fortunately, we will have a curriculum where the devil is *not* in its detail. This is a broad curriculum mapping the essentials around content and achievement levels for the various key learning areas. The detail is in how well teachers deliver the curriculum to today's learners.

The Federal Education Minister, Julia Gillard made it clear that while the government wants to ensure all students are literate, numerate and well-equipped to contribute to the world in which they live, the central issue is bringing all states into some sort of alignment over processes and procedures around schooling. The issue of children moving interstate and readjusting to a new framework has been a key driver as has been an attempt to standardise assessment processes so comparisons can be made about school and student performance.

While these are important, we need much more work on teacher practice and how teachers improve their practice within the new ACARA framework. What ACARA does with community feedback on the draft curriculum is not as critical as what teachers do with it.

Teachers learning *2010-03-08*

I recently had a chat with Rob Muscat, assistant principal at Nagle College Blacktown and we were talking about the work the staff are now doing as part of their commitment to challenging and empowering students.

It is obvious that teachers are excited about a new way of working that is collaborative, supportive and professionally rewarding. The commitment to critical reflection and dialogue has been contagious. It has led to a new learning narrative.

Teachers talking about teaching is critical; teachers learning about teaching is powerful.

Decline of maths 2010-03-11

The pendulum has swung back with comments by the Group of Eight universities that maths education in Australia is in crisis due in part to a lack of skilled maths teachers.

I made the point recently that it would have been good to start the national curriculum with a focus on the arts, music, dance, geography. The humanities seem to go missing when we assume that economic prosperity is dependent on the hard sciences.

Is this really the case? In a post-industrial world, should there be a focus on traditional subjects. If we take heed of Dan Pink's argument in a *Whole New Mind* or Ken Robinson in *The Element* – you see another way of looking at this.

As we begin to reap the benefits of being connected in an online world, there is a drastic need for a re-imagination of the curriculum. A curriculum that does not simply transfer knowledge but one that is relevant to students, engages and motivates, challenges every learner and involves the imagination and emotions.

Do maths teachers agree?

From PD to PL *2010-03-16*

Is there a fundamental difference between professional development and professional learning? Can teachers be doing PD and teaching at the same time?

If we define professional development as a one-off activity that takes place outside of classrooms, the answer is no.

Professional development is a remnant of the 20th century when perfecting routines and tasks (productivity) were important than collaboration and innovation (creativity).

As part of the rollout of the national curriculum, the Federal Education Minister conceded the need for professional development to ensure teachers are ‘tooled up to teach the national curriculum’.

I believe that tooling teachers does not necessarily transform teachers. Effective teachers are life-long learners. They become as Bransford et al says adaptive experts who can give up ‘old routines and transform prior beliefs and practices.’

In moving from professional development to professional learning, teachers will inevitably take greater responsibility for their own and their students’ learning. School leaders take greater responsibility for teacher-learning and systems provide the necessary support and conditions to enable this to happen systematically.

Evaluating performance, seeking feedback and asking questions of students and colleagues happens on the job – as part of the process of improving teaching.

Isn’t it time governments, media and teacher unions recognised the difference between professional development and professional learning?

Heppell and Reeves 2010-03-18

I had a chance to catch up with two outstanding educational leaders this week: Stephen Heppell and Douglas Reeves.

Stephen spent part of the week working with a group of teachers – sharing knowledge and building critical mass around 21st century learning and teaching.

Integral to the discussion is how we design schools and learning spaces to support contemporary learning. Admittedly, there is still angst within school communities around this so I asked Stephen to address the questions asked by many parents and teachers – **why** change and **how** do we teach in agile spaces.

Also, had the opportunity to chat to Douglas who is in Australia as part of ACEL's travelling scholars program. Like Stephen, Douglas puts great ideas into action.

I'll post these videos in the coming weeks – watch this space.

Teaching thinking 2010-03-23

Edward de Bono, the man that encouraged us to think laterally says he's seen iterations of the Federal Government's 'Education Revolution' before.

In a recent interview, Dr de Bono argued that the Government should be focussed on the needs of young people not on constructing new school halls.

He believes it would more valuable to introduce thinking into the national curriculum because:

Teaching thinking gives youngsters the ability to take charge of their lives, the ability to make decisions, make choices...the focus should be on what you need to know now rather than what happened three or four hundred years ago...

As a leading thinker, de Bono makes a valid point – as important as the past is, we need to preparing students for today and beyond. Teaching thinking is not a soft option, it requires rigour on the part of teachers, professional conversations on appropriate methodologies and engagement with expert thinkers and the broad community.

It is the difference between knowing and understanding, between learner and expert. If young people are to thrive in the 21st century, they must have the skills and ability to critically reflect and to see that there are many solutions to the one problem.

The current poll on bluyonder suggests that de Bono's proposition has the support of the community. Let's implore governments to think outside the square.

Douglas Reeves *2010-03-24*

Douglas Reeves has been in Australia sharing his common sense approach to school leadership and learning. He made a powerful point when he said leadership doesn't need more vision or strategies just more precision on what needs to be done and how to achieve it.

He refers to this as deep implementation: leaders needing "a laser-like focus" on implementation plans, ensuring "non – fiction writing" in plans and provide multiple opportunities for success.

There was great discussion from the floor and in talking about using data effectively one participant cautioned that we don't fall for the "data in – gospel out" trap. I thought that was a great line.

I had the opportunity to ask Douglas what his advice to teachers would be. To view Douglas' presentations visit Leading and Learning Center.

Learning from leaders *2010-03-26*

I am really enjoying the opportunity to engage with and capture the conversations of school leaders and teachers.

The lived experience is a shared one and thanks to the nature of today's technology, we are widening the professional conversation and sharing the wisdom of many.

Dr Jennifer Fraser, principal of St Michael's Primary has been leading school communities for thirty years – a significant professional milestone and contribution to Catholic education.

Parents ask why *2010-03-30*

As I wrote in a previous blog, I had the opportunity recently to ask Stephen Heppell to respond to the questions most commonly asked by parents and teachers about contemporary learning spaces – why and how.

In his response to parents, Stephen addresses why we need to move on from traditional ‘cells and bells’ learning spaces. This is not about experimentation but emancipation. Parents need to let children be the judges of these spaces. Check out students talking about Grey Court School in the UK.

More videos to come including Stephen’s advice for teachers transitioning from traditional to contemporary spaces.

TeachMeet 2010 *2010-03-30*

As a system, we are looking into new ways of utilising technology to support teacher learning in situ. One of the common complaints I hear from leaders is that in leading their schools they are often required to leave their school in order to share and learn from one another.

There is an explosion in the virtual world on sites like TeacherTube, YouTube of teachers sharing their work. I think one of the real benefits is that it encourages teachers who were once reticent to open the doors of their classrooms to now share with a global audience. Wouldn't it be great if teachers shared practice locally and spread it globally! As a system, the impetus is to find new ways of connecting and building on local experience.

One of my Scottish colleagues Frank Crawford recently reminded me of the educational conference TeachMeet. TM began in Scotland in the 1990s and offer teachers everywhere the chance to tap in to a conversation on learning and teaching. There's a few happening over the coming months.

I was fortunate to attend one of these conferences last year at an impromptu GregMeet – a great experience and another powerful example of the virtual open classroom.

Teachers ask how *2010-04-01*

There are no short cuts and there are many legitimate responses to new learning spaces. Stephen Heppell's advice to teachers asking **how** they should work in new learning spaces is the simplest and clearest I've heard. The key message here is to be inquisitive, innovative, and collaborative – there is no roadmap. And that's part of the professional journey and the reward that comes with teachers taking great control of the learning environment.

Asking simple questions *2010-04-13*

On a recent visit to Sydney, I asked Frank Crawford, Chief Inspector of Education in Scotland to share his sage advice on what schools need to do to improve.

For Frank the questions we need to ask schools are simple but on the mark. Too often we frame the question – are you improving learning or have you met the benchmarks? This leads us down the deficit model, which in schools that are struggling with the learning agenda can be disastrous.

As you'll see below – Frank challenges schools to move from good to great by framing the right questions around data/feedback. Enquiry should be at the heart of good schooling and yet many principals and teachers still struggle with an enquiry-based approach.

Asking more simple questions *2010-04-14*

All too often, we spend too much time swimming in our own billabong when there is a river nearby that runs into a vast ocean of diversity, capacity and inspiration.

My thanks to Frank Crawford for bringing to my attention these links from Learning and Teaching Scotland.

These examples demonstrate the power of feedback in the continual school improvement cycle.

What we often miss is the role of parent engagement and feedback. The Scottish and UK experience provides a good blueprint for engaging parents in the learning agenda and school design process.

What makes an excellent school?

What is good learning and teaching?

There's something about data 2010-04-16

In thinking about the way we use data in the classrooms, I came across an interesting blog post in the Harvard Business Review.

In challenging businesses to loosen their reliance on data, Roger Martin writes:

We have a deep seated desire to quantify the world around us so that we can understand it and control it. We must...consider the possibility that if we can't measure something, it might be the very most important aspect of the problem.

Data should be seen as complementary to the relationship between student and teacher. At its very heart, learning is a relational process and quality learning depends on the strength and depth of the relationship since it involves building trust based on mutual respect. How do you measure these sorts of domains? How do you report on these? If we only rely on quantitative data, we are doing a grave disservice to the learning and teaching process.

I believe data gives us the best indicator of where students are struggling; it will never replace the responsibility of teachers in asking why and how based on the mutual respect.

Part of the problem with teachers and principals using data effectively is that like many in the business world, they have a natural inclination to resist the use of quantitative data to inform practice because they understand the issues above. However, it should never be an either/or – there has to be room for all forms and sets of data not just the most accessible or easily comprehensible.

Our focus is to help principals understand the data so they can challenge their own learning communities to ask why and how.

Collective improvement 2010-04-27

Stephen Heppell says that one of the most enjoyable aspects of his work is being able to see what schools and sectors around the world are doing and then adapt some of the great ideas to the local model.

We have some exemplar systems, schools and researchers in Australia and New Zealand that are thinking critically and creatively and I have often said that the Victoria Department of Education and Early Childhood Development is an example of best practice.

One of their major initiatives has been around the regeneration of the Broadmeadows precinct. Similar to parts of western Sydney, the Northern Metropolitan Region was characterised by low retention, high unemployment and migrant population and a broad disengagement by teachers and students.

A lot of work has gone into re-shaping learning and re-building schools involving everyone from the regional office to parents, local council, industry and technology partners. This is a community project, built on the premise of giving students a future by giving them a relevant education. The NMR Regional Director, Wayne Craig admits that in turning these schools around some courageous and bold decisions had to be made such as closing two under-performing schools.

Improvement is a long hard road – you cannot succeed without addressing the fundamental beliefs and long held assumptions about learning and teaching. When there is a consensus on a curriculum for learning and teaching and the accountability is unequivocal. Teachers take responsibility for improving student learning outcomes, principals accept the responsibility for improving school performance and systems take responsibility for ensuring all schools are meeting targets.

When you hear Wayne and principals like Don Collins from Coburg Senior HS and Glenn Proctor from Hume Central Secondary College talk, you see educators who are prepared for the hard conversations, who use data and feedback to inform their work and who have an unwavering commitment to getting the best out of their students and teachers.

What makes a great teacher? 2010-04-29

The Insight Program on SBS recently asked the question ‘what makes a great teacher and can you measure teacher effectiveness?’

I don’t believe we currently measure teacher quality or effectiveness well because we don’t have consensus yet around what makes a great teacher. In addition to this, the world has changed and what we expect of good teachers is very different from what was required in an industrial age.

I was disappointed with the program because it missed a good opportunity to engage with the critical issues and challenges. I was surprised that so many audience members believed teachers were great. Great people yes but what about great educators?

Unfortunately, we confuse great teaching with being nice and undoubtedly most teachers are when you rate them against this criteria. However, if we asked whether these teachers continually improve learning outcomes for all students, the response may be different.

We have many good teachers who work diligently but unfortunately don’t improve learning outcomes. Many times this is because they fail to understand the nature of today’s world, how today’s students learn and the appropriate pedagogies needed.

A good teacher needs deep discipline knowledge, deep pedagogical knowledge and adaptability – to be able to learn from your own practice and your peers.

Many teachers have good discipline knowledge but with access to vast amounts of information, can teachers ever deepen their knowledge? The point is if you don’t understand the art and science of teaching, you can’t make a significant difference to learning and the learner.

It’s difficult to open your practice to other professionals, to question your pedagogical capability and then to change if necessary. This level of maturity is difficult to find but when you do you know you’ve got a great teacher.

Beyond the horizon 2010-05-06

I've just returned from presenting at the iNet Conference in Melbourne where I had the opportunity to do a little show and tell...the iPad. I brought an iPad to demonstrate the point that learners control the device in the learning and not the reverse.

This will excite some and unsettle many educators but we cannot deny what is happening before us – technology that is mobile, content rich and multi-sensory.

The Digital Education Revolution has taught us a valuable lesson – no learning gain is made from giving every student a laptop computer. The real learning happens beforehand when teachers engage in a discussion around the appropriate pedagogies for teaching in an online world.

How do students develop the skills of discernment, research and collaboration using these tools? And can teachers help students make meaning and contextualise information if they are not themselves using the tools?

ACER released its snapshot of digital literacy last month. The results show that disadvantaged students especially in rural and remote areas have not improved over three years and metropolitan students who have, have only marginally improved.

I believe we also need a snapshot of the digital literacy of teachers because only then will we see what impact it is having on student learning, skills and understanding.

One of the must-reads for all schools is the Horizon report K-12 edition 2010, which identifies five trends that will drive the adoption of technology in schools within the next five years:

1. Technology is increasingly a means for empowering students, a method for communication and socialising
2. Technology continues to profoundly affect the way we work, collaborate, communicate and succeed
3. The perceived value of innovation and creativity is increasing
4. There is increasing interest in just-in-time, alternate, or non-formal avenues of education, such as online learning, mentoring and independent study
5. The way we think of learning environments is changing

The challenge for all schools and systems is how do we build a sustainable narrative about learning in today's world that rejects the outmoded narrative of an industrial age? How do we ensure schools are ready to deliver the new pedagogies?

Bruce Dixon is the Director of IdeasLab in Victoria. Bruce and his colleagues already see that the where, what, when and how of teaching must change and they're working to challenge teachers, principals and policy makers. [Click here to listen to Bruce.](#)

Understanding data 2010-05-11

Naplan testing begins today for students in years 3,5,7 and 9. It's good to see that schooling didn't grind to a halt – life, learning and teaching does go on.

I was pleased to read Dr Judy Smeed's comments in today's Australian – finally a voice of reason in the whole Naplan/MySchool debate.

Dr Smeed, an educator at the Queensland University of Technology believes that the real disappointment of Naplan is that not enough teachers are taught how to analyse and use the results to improve their teaching.

According to Dr Smeed, QUT is the only university in Australia that trains teachers to understand educational data. This is a serious oversight of many teacher training institutions given what we know about the role of data/feedback in improving learning outcomes.

The fear around league tables is symptomatic of a simplistic understanding about educational data. No-one is pointing the finger – what we need is rational debate and greater understanding of what the data is telling us about a particular student at a particular point in time.

Companies like Facebook and Google depend on user data – it allows them to understand their users and develop tools that are 'personalised' and 'targeted'.

If Google et al are using data to continually improve their service for users – then isn't this what contemporary schooling should be about? 'Targeted and personalised' learning for every student.

And a final thought on this issue. Good teachers never teach to the test, as is so often claimed. Good teachers make sure that students understand what the test is but spend their precious time on making sure their students can think for themselves. They also use the data from such test to help inform their practice. To suggest otherwise only denigrates the work that they do.

What poor teachers do is another matter!

Is censorship sensible? 2010-05-14

I've been following discussion of the Federal Government's proposed mandatory internet filter initiative. Support seems to be fading for the program as the public ironically gathers more information about which sites could be blocked.

With the rise of social networking sites, the net has become a kind of bastion of democracy where free speech and freedom of information reigns. Yet even in China, the internet has become a battleground between the state and the citizen.

As an educator, I am critical of any form censorship since it's a rather blunt instrument to solve a complex problem. Add to this that technologies are not as perfect as claimed and often only encourage deeper attempts to by pass them and it's easy to see why we should be more questioning.

I think we should opt instead for greater discernment on the part of teachers/students. First and foremost, students need to cognisant of the challenges and opportunities provide by access to the web and of the responsibilities this sort of technological access brings. In many ways we face the same challenges as early mankind did when they discovered how to draw on cave walls and the society did with the invention of the printing press.

History is littered with failed attempts at controlling how citizens should communicate, collaborate and express themselves. What we have learned from these experiences is, the best form of protection is a deeper understanding of how you teach people social responsibility.

A Catholic worldview puts a greater emphasis on responsibility and perhaps we should be using a Catholic imagination to discuss what is a 'virtual conscience' and how might it apply in a world of converging technologies.

Sadly, the allure of the net is anonymity. When I was at school, you knew who the bully was but in the virtual world, you often don't and there seems to be little protection against this.

Rosemary Neill has written a provocative piece in the Weekend Australian on whether we need to censor the net to contain the spread of racism, hatred etc. Neill cites recent examples of Facebook vandalism and teacher bullying.

I found author Clive Hamilton's comments in the piece interesting; Hamilton supports internet censorship:

I think that it [a filter] would send a very strong signal, because at the moment the social signal is 'anything goes' and many people are disturbed by that.

As educators, we must be addressing these issues on a daily basis with students because we cannot let the technologies define the society we become. The moral character must define social norms and behaviours.

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All systems go *2010-05-18*

All Systems Go is the latest book by Michael Fullan and a must for all interested in sustainable systemic change to improve schooling.

In the foreward, Peter Senge writes:

No institution has a more crucial role to play in the historic changes coming than school because no institution has greater potential to impact on how a society changes over the long term.

Fullan debunks many existing stand-alone strategies in favour of building ‘collective capacity’ across the system: nurturing schools to want to change and then supporting them on the journey.

Two ideas that stand out for me are: we learn from practice and accountability is internally held but externally reinforced.

Empowering teachers is a great motivator for change; as Fullan demonstrates, effective strategies are the ones that build on the collective talents of schools, systems and communities to improve schooling.

Our educational canon 2010-05-24

As our state and federal governments prepare for upcoming elections, it's been interesting to examine their policy positions on education.

As always, the incumbent party's position is rejected by the opposition with no middle ground. The rejection usually focuses on cutting (mostly) or increasing (rarely) funding for a range of programs. Never do we have a carefully crafted policy framework that reflects the best we know about good education theory and practice.

This is a poor approach to developing a sustainable and effective educational policy framework for schooling in today's world. Like all systems committed to improving student learning outcomes, we have built our own "educational canon" that informs our understanding of what makes the difference to improving student learning and builds teacher capacity.

The canon becomes our touchstone for good practice and represents two decades of good educational theory and research. It continues to expand as we learn more about student learning and teacher practice.

In most cases, educational policy is not often developed from the canon but from ideological preferences and a traditional understanding of learners and the process of schooling.

Schools learn from exemplar schools; systems learn from exemplar systems because good theory is actually good practice. While implementation may vary at the local level, the fundamental elements of improving schooling should be common to all education systems.

Our canon: Bransford et al – How People Learn Michael Fullan – Six Secrets of Change John Hattie – Visible Learning Jim Collins – Good to Great Helen Timperley et al – Teacher Professional Learning and Development Viviane Robinson et al – School Leadership and Student Outcomes MCEETYA's Learning in an Online World NSW and ACT Bishop's Pastoral Letter – Catholic Schools at a Crossroads

Marco and company 2010-06-02

Recently, I had the opportunity to sit in on a class conducted by visiting Apple Distinguished Educator, Californian teacher of the year (twice) and internationally recognised educator Marco Torres at one of our schools.

Although I was only there with the primary and secondary students and teachers for 40 minutes, it was enough time to see the level of engagement from the perspective of teacher and learner.

Using the Mac application, GarageBand, Marco demonstrated how seamless it is to integrate skills with theory, and how young people learn by doing. The children not only counted beats and learned about various instruments but they also saw how easy it was to create and publish their own original content.

Sometimes all teachers need is to see what is possible and to learn from the experience of other educators before they begin stretching their professional practice and understanding.

The school leadership team will be looking at how those teachers adapt the ideas and how they share that knowledge with other teachers.

Just before I left, I asked the children crowded around Marco's desk what they thought of technology. 'Technology', what's that? For today's learners – technology is their learning environment.

The execution gap 2010-06-08

I have always liked Stephen Covey's pragmatic approach to leadership development. In his vodcast on 'The Execution Gap', Covey admits that most organisations find it difficult to translate high-level goals into action.

This is especially relevant to schools and systems as we struggle to balance the external demands and accountabilities with our core purpose – our goals.

At times we complicate these because schooling by its very nature is a complex task – it is easy to become distracted by the 'urgent but not so important' tasks of leading a school or a system.

It would be an interesting and useful exercise for school leadership teams to survey all of their staff around the goals – what are they, how much time is spent working on achieving the goals (according to Covey only 49%), how are the goals communicated, does everyone have ownership and accountability?

Covey points out, there is often a huge gap in understanding between leadership and those on the frontline who are responsible for the bottom line.

As we know greater the alignment between system, school and teacher, the less the execution gap.

Banning connectivity *2010-06-10*

An interesting article in the weekend paper posing the perennial question: do social networking sites cost productivity at work? (N.B I recall the same question being posed a decade ago when MSN Messenger was popular).

Kath Lockett writing in MyCareer (5-6 June 2010) cites a survey of the top 500 US Business in which 60% said the biggest risk to security was Facebook followed by MySpace and Twitter.

As one IT marketing expert in Lockett's article asks, 'are we so afraid that people are going to interact with others from their desk for free instead of paying thousands to attend a conference?'

Web 2.0 strategist, Ian McKee also explores the Five Reasons Companies Should Not Block Access to Social Networks on his blog.

The real value of social networking is that information and ideas are freely exchanged and available: the power of networks over the silo. In this era of collaboration, we need to find ways of sharing expertise and practice, not looking for ways to block it.

Want teachers want 2010-06-15

I've been waving the flag for some time about teacher performance and how the profession is addressing (or not addressing) this issue.

If you haven't already done so, download the Grattan Institute's report What teachers Want: Better teacher management by Ben Jensen. It cites OECD figures in which 63% of Australian teachers believe evaluation of their work is undertaken for no other reason than to fulfil administrative requirements and has little impact on their day to day practice.

Disappointing as this is, at least there is recognition that the work of teachers needs to be appropriately assessed. While we already have measures in NSW for teacher accreditation, are there sufficient mechanisms in place to address under-performing teachers?

Recently, the draft national standards for teachers was released for feedback. Academics have already raised concerns that the proposed standards are not evidence-based; grounded in contemporary theory or reflective of the complex nature of teaching (Education Review, May 2010).

We need to look very closely at the work of teachers; what are the industrial, ideological or cultural barriers to improving teacher quality? Who is responsible for evaluating teacher performance? And if teachers don't meet the minimum standards, what happens next?

Any attempt to raise the status of the teaching profession must begin with changing the culture and focus within learning environments. I also believe that improving teacher quality is inextricably linked to the quality of school leaders (read SMH Opinion on the importance of school leadership).

In his report, Dr Jensen concludes that school principals should be given greater responsibility to evaluate and address teacher practice and be given the broad resources and support to do this.

We are in dire need of new models of teaching that have their roots in a deep understanding of both the nature of life and learning in today's world. Looking at improving teaching requires us not only to look at the ways we evaluate good teaching but how we develop new models of teaching that reflect today's world. Unfortunately our existing models are cemented in an industrial model of teaching that is process driven.

Someone reminded me that no teacher goes to work every day to do a bad job. What teachers want and need is continuous feedback, recognition and the opportunities to develop their skills in order to move from not so good to great.

What students want 2010-06-21

I like Andy Hargreaves and Dennis Shirley's assertion in the Fourth Way that 'Without students, there would be no teachers. Their voices matter a lot.'

It does seem incongruous that in a student-centred model, students have little input into process. In an attempt to rectify this, Hargreaves and Shirley include students as partners of change as one of the six pillars in the Fourth Way.

The authors admit that while students are targets of school reform and change, they are not often empowered to be agents of change despite having a good grasp of the things that help them learn.

A colleague recently forwarded me the replies from Year 11 students to the question 'what makes a good teacher':

- knows how to teach and knows their subject * can communicate – gets all students involved by asking questions * adapts to the capabilities of students * doesn't teach from the text books * good sense of humour

What is remarkable is that the comments were not only collected in 2004 but that it demonstrates a very clear alignment between what students know and what theory tells us.

What would Year 11 students in that secondary school tell us today? Probably something similar – good teachers have deep discipline and pedagogical content knowledge (knows how to teach and knows their subject), adapts to the capabilities of students (can personalise learning) and can communicate with a good sense of humour (builds respectful relationships).

For me, it is confirmation that these qualities stand the test of time and learners. We know what teachers want but how often do we ask or know what students want from their schooling experience?

Personalised learning 2010-06-24

How would students of last century have fared if their learning was personalised? It is the question asked by Ta-Nehisi Coates in his article for The Atlantic.

Coates reflects on his own education in Baltimore in the 1980s and the fine line he and so many walked between drop-out and graduate. As a journalist, able to personalise his work and see the connection to the world, Coates began wondering what schools were doing to make the connection.

The *School of One* program in the South Bronx is aiming to personalise maths by giving students the opportunity to work on various technologies based on their identified needs. Lesson plans for each student are generated by *School of One's* algorithm after a short test each day; teachers then get them via email.

While I applaud the program for its efforts to improve learning for its students, I believe it runs the risk of assuming that technology is personalised learning.

Using technology to improve test scores may get disadvantaged students through high-school and possibly into college but is there a deep understanding of maths or any subject for that matter?

Coates may not have used a laptop when he was at school but substitute this with a calculator and the experience could be the same.

For me, personalised learning depends wholly on the skill of teachers to know their learners, interpret data, respond to student questions and develop strategies where improvement is seen and learning understood.

Technology cannot assume the responsibilities of a good teacher.

Bring on the learning revolution *2010-06-29*

Ken Robinson's latest TED2010 offering has been doing the viral rounds. Sir Ken is one of the most eloquent advocates for transforming schooling. Although he doesn't proffer a blueprint for how we do this, he certainly provides a compelling case for why we (as individuals and society) must.

As Thomas Jefferson said 'every generation needs a new revolution'.

I'll post a couple of Robinson's clips here with some of the questions that I have been pondering. . . .

Ken Robinson on purpose *2010-07-01*

In this clip, Ken Robinson talks about the moral purpose of schooling. For me, the questions are what should influence our understanding of learning and teaching; how do we change our practice/thinking to meet our moral obligations to all learners?

Ken Robinson on change *2010-07-05*

In this TED2010 clip, Ken Robinson talks about the ideological/cultural barriers to transforming schooling. As educators, what assumptions do we make about learners and schooling? Why do we assume what we do? What do we need to do to ‘dis-enthrall’ ourselves from the industrial model of schooling?

Diversity should be the norm *2010-07-07*

You know an election is in the wind when the well-worn public vs private school story appears in the tabloid press and as fodder for radio shock-jocks. According to an article this week, the success of public schools in HSC and NAPLAN tests was partly responsible for an increase in enrolments.

It follows the SMH on Monday which quotes Chris Bonner, former president of the Secondary Principals Council and Richard Teese from the University of Melbourne.

They believe selective schools drain talent from surrounding comprehensive schools, which leads to an ‘academic and cultural apartheid’.

While I support Professor Teese’s argument that the aim of education is to have ‘high standards everywhere’ not just in one pocket of any system, I don’t agree with headlines like ‘academic apartheid’.

The greatest challenge facing education systems here and overseas is improving the standard of teaching and teacher quality. Success should not be judged on the number of students enrolled but as Professor Teese argues – the quality of learning and teaching.

In practice, comprehensive schools should be doing what selective schools are – offering students opportunities to excel in their natural abilities and providing a diverse range of subjects and pathways for success.

Every student has the potential to learn and to love learning – it takes the right conditions as Ken Robinson says to bring this out of every child.

We should be celebrating and supporting academic and cultural diversity in every school not looking for ways to homogenise it.

Ken Robinson on leading learning *2010-07-12*

Ken Robinson talks about the need to move from an industrial model of schooling to an agricultural model. What other agricultural principles can we apply to contemporary schooling? How do we create the right conditions within learning spaces for learners and learning to flourish every day? How do you lead learning?

The price of leadership 2010-07-21

Would you be in favour of a principal earning more than the Prime Minister if every child was engaged in learning; parents were satisfied and learning outcomes improving?

Knowing what we know about the role of school leadership – what price do we place on it?

The Guardian recently reported the annual salary of Tidemill Primary Principal, Mark Elms' – a whopping £240,000. In reality, 40% of his annual salary came from a school grant under Labour's City Challenge initiative in which he spent two years working with under-achieving schools.

Tidemill's story reads like many schools in parts of Sydney or Melbourne – high proportion of non-English speaking students and low attainment in literacy and numeracy.

In eight years, Elms' has created a turnaround school by listening to parents, including them in the learning journey and ensuring diverse learning opportunities for students – many of which take place out of school hours.

It raises an interesting point – a remuneration model built on base level qualification, time served and job title may make sense for a mass production model of schooling. Yet we now understand that quality schooling is not going to be achieved by a mass production approach.

Just as we are seeing dramatic changes in the nature of schooling why should we not see such understandings and changes reflected in how we pay our teachers and school leaders?

Whether school leaders deserve more than the PM depends on what price you put on quality learning and teaching.

Getting it wrong is good 2010-07-28

Something from France to think about which reminds me of Einstein's observation that we have to fail forward if we are to learn. In our society failure is too often associated with weakness and poor character but it does not have to be that way.

The SMH reports that this week in Paris, a group of educators and academics is hosting a 'festival of errors'. The festival is an attempt to counter a national educational culture that is 'results driven' by encouraging students to make mistakes.

The organising group believe the current model of schooling is leaving children bereft of creativity, ideas and the ability to think critically. Teachers who are eschewing the model are encouraging children to explore, take risks and persist in solving problems.

Part of the challenge we face as educators is finding flexibility within the constraints of a national curriculum and its focus on content and requirements. In other words, making the connection from A to B as direct as possible.

It is the antithesis of what we know about today's learners and only scratches the surface of developing an organic model of schooling that promotes flexibility, creativity and human error.

Where would the world be if Pasteur, Einstein and Fleming didn't get it wrong. It took Eddison over 750 attempts to develop a light globe that could burn for long periods of time, aren't we lucky he didn't give up at the 749th failed attempt!

Moving forward *2010-07-30*

From its genesis, the Building the Education Revolution was always going subject to political and media scrutiny. Yet it's unfortunate that schools get caught as collateral damage in the cross-fire of political debate and editorial opinion.

While economists and politicians seem to stand divided over the Building the Education Revolution's economic merits, there is no doubt that schools have benefited from the program. I see this on a daily basis when I visit schools and talk to students, parents and teachers.

Building and improving school infrastructure is a long-term investment in educating young people and building the social fabric of local communities. In our system for example, the BER is supporting the ways in which we are thinking about and delivering 21st century schooling. It has focussed our energies on the very nature of learning and teaching. A primary school hall becomes many things: learning space, liturgy space, community space, creative art space etc.

In moving forward, schools must take up the challenge of using the infrastructure wisely to support contemporary learning and teaching not just for this generation but future generations of learners. There will always be differing views on how best to stimulate the economy but investment in school infrastructure will pay dividends in the long run.

Sharing our stories 2010-08-04

When you meet fellow educational leaders from around the world, you realise two things: there is an enormous amount of collective wisdom to be shared and our local challenges are in fact, global ones.

As part of our ongoing commitment to system-learning, we had the great pleasure of hosting two outstanding educational leaders from Canada last week.

Susan LaRosa (Director of Education York Catholic Schools Board) and Bill Hogarth (recently retired Director of Education for York Region District Schools Board) visited our schools, spoke with staff and reflected on how they have built high performing systems (which has been published internationally).

The key learnings they shared:

- Focus on the 3Rs: relationships, relationships, relationships * The role of the superintendent is to build leadership capacity at every level * Schools are responsible for all students and each student * Every student must grow regardless of ability * Differentiated learning is an opportunity for everyone to learn * Structures drive behaviour * You can't be on the journey forever – you need to land somewhere * Good leaders need to be good managers

Systems learn and grow by sharing their stories just as schools learn when they connect into networks of communities sharing good practice. York Catholic and York Region District School Boards are two great examples of how you put good theory into practice.

L-R Susan LaRosa, Greg Whitby and Bill Hogarth

Meaningful learning 2010-08-09

One of the defining elements of a 21st century education is personalised learning. The ability to create the right classroom conditions that enable students to work independently, collaboratively, creatively and to think critically.

According to the OECD (2008) these are important skills not only for successful economies but for ‘effective cultural and social participation and for citizens to live fulfilling lives.’

However, as Hargreaves and Shirley stress in the Fourth Way, if these skills are all there is to 21st century schooling then we are guilty of ‘customising’ education for today’s world.

They assert that 21st century schools must ‘also embrace deeper virtues and values such as courage, compassion, service, sacrifice, long-term commitment and perseverance.’ This what they refer to as ‘meaningful learning and mindful teaching’.

Last week I caught up with Phil Glendenning, Director of the Edmund Rice Centre who spoke about the challenges he sees for Catholic schools in today’s world.

Academics and advocates like Andy Hargreaves and Phil Glendenning remind us of the need to develop robust, sustainable narratives that speak to the hearts and minds of all learners.

It’s a message not just for Catholic schools but for education systems committed to meaningful learning and mindful teaching.

Insight through collaboration *2010-08-13*

I had two great learning experiences this week – a visit by Professor Richard Elmore (will post something on this next week) and participating in a DEECD's Guide to Innovation webinar series.

This webinar series is a great example of how innovative educators are creating powerful networks to build deep professional knowledge and understanding.

I enjoy the opportunities to engage with colleagues who are stretching their thinking but the highlight was having Celine, a Year 7 student watching the presentation and participating in the discussion.

Celine reflected on a recent learning experience in which she got to choose what she wanted to learn. This was student voice and feedback in real-time and it is was powerful.

My thanks to Helen Otway for inviting me to participate. It reconfirms that our greatest 'guides to innovation' are our teachers.

To listen to It Takes a Village [click here](#).

The proverb of the tree *2010-08-16*

We had the great pleasure of welcoming Anrig Professor Richard Elmore from Harvard's Graduate School of Education and our colleagues Darrell Fraser and Judy Petch from the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development in Victoria last week.

Although it was a flying visit, our guests had the opportunity to meet with our leadership team and to visit two of our schools, Parramatta Marist and St Monica's Primary North Parramatta.

Professor Elmore spent time observing teachers and talking to students about their learning. He was quite impressed at how teachers were using the spaces to engage learners independently and collaboratively. The highlight for me was listening to the students talking about their learning to our guests with such confidence and passion. Also to hear teachers reflecting on their practice and openness to learn from colleagues is inspirational.

Expecting he would impart his wisdom from the 'seven principles of the instructional core', Richard Elmore left us with something more profound – this Chinese proverb.

The best time to plant a tree was 20 years ago. The next best time is now.

What we do in classrooms today charts the course for schooling tomorrow and we can have confidence in what our schools are doing for young people.

Professor Richard Elmore and Parramatta Marist students

Richard Elmore and Michael Hopley, principal of St Monica's Primary

Letting go of the past *2010-08-17*

The great American pedagogue, John Dewey, believed schooling could be summed up by stating that its locus was in the teacher and textbooks – everywhere except the child and their activities. Perhaps teachers have always been afraid of releasing control to the kind of learning tasks that are social, collaborative and chaotic.

So it was interesting to hear Anrig Professor Richard Elmore's thoughts last week on what he thinks schools should be doing to allow student learning to flourish. The message remains very simple, challenge young people and don't project your expectations on them. Is this what we mean when we say schools need to let go of the past?

In the shoes of learners 2010-08-25

The role of a principal is challenging, relentless and rewarding. You have to be committed to improving the lives of young people and passionate about learning not just students but teacher learning as well as your own.

I admire principals (and their team) who go into bat every day for their students when many teachers don't or won't.

I had a conversation this week with a secondary principal who spoke honestly about the challenges of changing cultural beliefs and teacher practice.

What impressed me was the way in which he was addressing the issues to improve quality learning and teaching by working collaboratively with his team, being honest about the challenges, relying on data and student voice to inform strategies and accepting accountability.

What I liked most about their approach was that teachers received data/feedback without any judgment. The onus is on each individual teacher to ask their own questions about the data/feedback and to reflect critically on their practice.

We shouldn't be afraid of the data/feedback because it is a useful tool for identifying where we are and where we need to be.

One of the great insights this principal revealed was that too often we assume we understand learning from students' perspective. We assume they've understood fundamental concepts in Year 7 or that transcribing notes from the whiteboard is relevant or engaging.

We cannot assume anything about our learners or the quality of our teaching without relying on good data and feedback, which includes student voice.

Children disengage from learning when it doesn't, as Sir Ken Robinson says 'feed their spirit'. So the question we must ask ourselves is how are we feeding the imagination and spirit of learners and how do we know?

Many may not want to walk in the shoes of principals but we should at least walk in the shoes of our learners.

Teacher shortage 2010-09-02

Interesting study reported in the Daily Telegraph from the University of Western Sydney and University of Technology, Sydney on a looming shortage of teachers.

We've known for a long time that our baby boomer teachers will retire in the next decade and this is one of the big challenge for all education systems.

The report warns that Australia will need migrant teachers to fill vacancies in specialist areas like maths, science and technology as young teachers head overseas to the UK and Asia because of higher pay and lower tax rates.

The solution should not hinge on teacher salary. Teaching has its own intrinsic rewards and our brightest young teachers and those considering a career change will be attracted to a profession that is well paid but more importantly, one that is esteemed.

Teachers want to be acknowledged for their work – recognised as professionals. This is strengthened when they are challenged, when distractions are minimised and there are ongoing opportunities to collaborate and learn.

Short term fixes won't work even if we attract more skilled migrants to our schools. The pressing reality is around how we reconceptualise the work of teachers in today's world.

It is all about building teacher capacity – we will still have to do this no matter where we get the warm bodies from! Let's hope we don't miss the boat on this one.

The practice of collaboration *2010-09-02*

Anecdotally at least, teachers are likely to learn when they interact with other teachers. The process of mentoring, coaching and feedback are powerful strategies for empowering and enabling teachers.

Never before have we needed more intellectual rigour as our schools respond to the challenges of a national curriculum, 21st century pedagogies and a mercurial education agenda. This is not helped at all by a distinct policy gap from all forms of state and federal governments. Policy devoid of an understanding of the nature of teaching will always fail, as the past so eloquently attests.

This rigour is enhanced by the practice of collaboration – teachers providing each other with mutual support, encouragement and reflective dialogue to continually improve the quality of learning and teaching. This has to be the core of education policy initiatives.

When I think of teacher collaboration, I am reminded of Jim Collins' flywheel principle. As more teachers engage in collaboration, we see greater ownership of the learning agenda. It is the power of the group to work together to identify the needs of the community, set and evaluate its own goals and resource accordingly.

One of our primary teachers talks here about the practice of collaboration and teacher-learning within an agile learning space.

A national curriculum 2010-09-16

Dr Peter Hill

On Monday evening, the CEO of ACARA, Dr Peter Hill delivered our 2010 Ann D Clark lecture to over 500 educators.

I have known Peter Hill for many years – he’s had an extraordinary career in education and is someone who brings great insight and experience to this role.

What is evident is that Peter understands the nature of today’s world and the needs of today’s learners. This is articulated in his vision of a national curriculum that responds to these by creating equity and quality across all states and territories.

Peter shared some interesting statistics that show a decline in our international testing results especially within the top bands. The challenge will be reducing the achievement gaps across schools and more importantly within classes.

It’s widely acknowledged that the key to the success of the national curriculum will be good teachers. As Peter says, the curriculum is only an enabler of good learning – it cannot replace the role of good teachers as moderators of learning.

One of the merits of the national curriculum will be access to a plethora of online resources such as the ABC National Archive, Australian Bureau of Statistics and and hypotheticals from Geoffrey Robertson QC.

Peter presented the national curriculum as a 3D construct made up traditional subject disciplines, general capabilities (skillset for 21st century) and cross-curricula priorities (Asia, Indigenous studies and sustainability).

What was re-affirming was hearing ACARA’s long-term challenges post roll-out and implementation of the national curriculum. These are:

- building professional capacity and accountability * moving from a normative to a standardised reporting system * personalising the learning for every student

There is a clear alignment here to Professor Richard Elmore’s instructional core – the synergy between teacher, student and high quality content to improve student learning outcomes.

I liked Peter’s 3Ps of ‘personalising, precision and professionalism’, which served as a touchstone for his work on the national curriculum. I think the traditional 3Rs may eventually be replaced by the 3Ps when we refer to contemporary schooling.

Education for its own sake 2010-09-23

Before Dan Pink's discussion of the *Conceptual Age*, there was Thomas Friedman's analysis of the impacts of globalisation on the economy – the flat world. We discovered that technology was not only making it easier and faster to manufacture products but cheaper than ever before. And so, countries like India and China with their huge labor market became enticing manufacturing bases for large multinationals.

According to SMH economics editor, Ross Gittins 'the way to ensure workers of the future have clean, safe, well paid and intellectually satisfying jobs is to emphasise education.'

Let's be clear – this is not education for the 20th century but the organic, right brain model espoused by Dan Pink and Sir Ken Robinson. This is education for and in the pursuit of happiness and the greater good.

Gittins argues that for an already prosperous nation like ours, education should not be a means to an end but an end itself. We need to see education, research and the pursuit of knowledge as an act of discovery about ourselves, our culture and the world around us not simply as a means of appeasing commercial needs and interests.

Even Professor Peter Singer lamented last year that our universities have been overwhelmed by vocational and professional training instead of giving people a solid intellectual foundation grounded in humanities, science and arts. Perhaps this may explain why in a recent study conducted, 75% of Australians enrolling in vocational training courses never complete them and why completion rates among younger full-time students is so low.

The point Dan Pink makes is that we cannot simply skill students for those left-brain jobs that can be done cheaper or faster overseas. Let's hope for all our sakes that those responsible for making educational policy are right-brainers because we need a sustainable narrative.

Why is it that economists like Gittins, philosophers like Singer and social commentators like Pink can agitate for a new narrative while the voice of educational leaders remains largely silent? Until the education profession develops a cohesive theory of practice to drive such a narrative, it will remain at the margins of the debate and focussed on building skills in favour of deep knowledge.

Rule of three 2010-09-24

In schooling, it seems the rule of three applies. Here's a few:

- Elmore's instructional core: content, teacher skill/knowledge and student engagement; * Bransford et al's theory of how people learn: connections, context and metacognition; * Dr Peter Hill's three goals for the national curriculum: personalised, professional and precision. * Susan LaRosa and Dr Bill Hogarth from York District in Canada believe high performing systems should focus on: relationships, relationships and relationships.

And Stephen Heppell's simple rule of three for 21st century learning spaces:

1. No more than three walls so that there is never full enclosure and the space is multifaceted rather than just open.
2. No fewer than three points of focus so that the "stand-and-deliver" model gives way to increasingly varied groups learning and presenting together (which by the way requires a radical rethinking of furniture).
3. Ability to accommodate three teachers/adults with their children. The old standard size of about 30 students in a box robbed children of so many effective practices; these larger spaces allow for better alternatives.

My three for pedagogical leadership are resilience, relentless and radical. Anyone else?

Abby's Flying Fairy School 2010-09-28

Has anyone watched Sesame Street lately? It's been a while since I've watched it despite being one of the longest running and probably most loved children's TV programs in the world. The success of Sesame Street is in its ability to make learning fun for young children.

Recently, I tuned into a segment at the end of Sesame Street called Abby's Flying Fairy School. The School is a wonderful example of 21st century learning and teaching in action: collaboration, diversity, project-based learning, teacher as facilitator, peer mentoring, self-directed learning etc.

Abby's students are an eclectic bunch but it offers rich learning for its young viewers and for educators. In the episode I saw, one of the students turned himself into a wooden puppet. Rather than solving the problem, the teacher, Mrs Sparklenose encourages the students to find their own creative solutions.

Mrs Sparklenose is an example of the teacher as facilitator – providing direction and encouragement to assist students to develop their skills, build knowledge and seek the answers.

In most episodes, students are active in their learning, working together to find solutions to non-trivial problems. To apply Richard Elmore's sixth principle of the instructional core – they 'do the work by doing the work' not by getting an expert like the fairy godmother to help Cinderella to the ball but by finding out how to do it themselves.

The 'Cinderella Challenge' represents project-based learning – it attempts to build the knowledge and skills the fairies will need in their daily lives. The Challenge also encourages peer mentoring as Abby, the self-confident fairy offers shy Gonnigan encourage and support to over come his nerves and participate fully in the group activity. Each member of the group benefits from the contribution of ideas and experiences.

And of course, technology is integrated into the learning with the fairy's own search engine called 'Spot'. Spot fetches clues to the students' queries but like Google you don't always get an exact answer. What the students get are the clues to be able to process information using logic and reasoning.

We can all learn something about 21st century schooling from Abby's Flying Fairy School – must-watch TV for educators.

Tea Party agenda 2010-09-29

The current state of US politics may be an important lesson for us especially in how we move our education system forward.

I always thought a tea party was something you looked forward to but in the US it's the name of a deeply conservative and reactionary political movement.

In 2009, they launched their manifesto to 'reclaim America's heritage of liberty and self-governance.' In a nutshell the tea party movement wants to undo the Obama initiatives – cut taxes, shrink government, privatise health and stop legislation aim at social reform. For education it means more testing and market driven reforms.

Interestingly, there is no clear leader of the party and no clear target to respond to. This is a grass-roots movement but Sarah Palin is not far from its centre.

From an outsider's perspective, it is a pity to see the damage being done to the current legislative program. There seems to be no middle ground or compromise and I can't help reflecting on the events of the past year in Australia and the political shift that has taken place. The politics of fear is a powerful wedge.

A lot of US educators find it hard to maintain optimism against a backward looking agenda. While there are concerns that Obama's Race to the Top program focuses on accessing funding through competitive grants, at least these grants respond to local needs. There is real concern over the state of most American schools and lack of leadership on how to fix the problems.

A new film has just been released in the US called Waiting for Superman, which takes the view that most American schools are failing and much of the blame lies with teacher unions. The film has sparked a lot of negative comment about schools. Much criticism but little by way of what to do to solve the issue.

The current US political landscape is no Wonderland; hopefully our new Minister for Schools, Peter Garrett is taking note.

America: the education nation 2010-10-01

The USA may be the home of the brave and the land of the free but its education system seems to be at crisis point. Last week, Rockefeller Centre was turned into a 'Learning Plaza' to draw attention to the challenges facing American (if not) all schools.

'Education Nation' is a community response (parents, teachers, students, corporations) to growing concern that America's schools are in decline and in need of dramatic change. It's certainly getting enough media attention (NBC happens to be a major sponsor) but will it be sustainable?

Even in NY where chancellor Joel Klein introduced his school reform agenda three years ago, criticism is deep and broad.

It appears that many people are not looking to governments to solve the problem – they're caught up in the 'naming and shaming' improvement strategy. As Michael Fullan says 'the drive to make progress in our schools can't be a fad – accountability relies on incentives more than on punishment.'

This isn't surprising when you see the Tea Party agenda but what surprises me is the lack of discussion about the nature of learning and teaching and how to support teacher learning. The focus of the debate, if you can call it that, is always on those things that are extrinsic to the instructional core and therefore 'fads'.

If anything, summits like 'Education Nation' provide valuable opportunities and outlets for broad discussion on the future of schooling. The danger is that emergent policies/solutions tend to be rooted in what has been, not on what schools can become to nurture America's most valuable natural resource – its youth.

Waiting for Superman 2010-10-03

If the success of *An Inconvenient Truth* in raising our collective consciousness is anything to go by, then *Waiting for Superman* will challenge and hopefully change long-held assumptions about schooling.

Waiting for Superman is a documentary-film about the deteriorating state of America's public education system. It is an honest, confronting and challenging expose. Essential viewing for system leaders, teachers, parents and politicians.

The documentary charts decades of failed policy agenda, escalating costs and continual decline in student achievement and participation. It follows several students and chronicles their experiences – a human face to the raw statistics.

Despite this, there is a hope. The film makes the point that after all the failed attempts at improvement we now know what needs to be done and it's not complex.

We need good teachers who are engaged in the practice of learning and teaching. And we need to be serious about under performance. Examples of the “rubber room” and the “lemon dance” (where at the end of each school year principals get together and agree on transferring the poor performing teachers to each other schools) makes me hang my head in shame that we allow this to continue to happen.

Waiting for Superman lays the blame at the feet of poor teachers, complacent and complicit unions, poor system leadership and myopic government policy. Responsibility lies with those who are accountable at every level in the school system.

The last minutes of the film will stick with me a long time. A professional in the field for over three decades laments the state of US schools and observes that he now knows why, “schools are for adults because the kids don't matter”.

Watch the trailer below.

We are the people 2010-10-06

Schooling is complicated business – if it was so simple we’d have fixed it already. > Sir Ken Robinson

I’m not sure whether anyone has seen the documentary ‘We Are the People We’ve Been Waiting For’. Released late last year, this is the UK’s version of Waiting for Superman – an honest and engaging look at why today’s world and today’s learner needs a 21st century school system.

Inspired by Lord Puttnam (Chariots of Fire), the film follows the lives of five teenagers navigating their way through the UK school system. (It was screened last week on ABC2).

As the old adage goes ‘knowledge is power’. Momentum (thanks to the aforementioned documentaries) is building across communities and its our teachers, students and parents who are the people who must lead the change to ensure our schools meet the needs of today’s learners. My only hope is that in seeking solutions, we don’t opt for shortcuts.

It's a matter of principals 2010-10-07

Thanks to Mark Walker for sharing a recent interview with John Hattie in the Melbourne Age.

Hattie is currently in Australia, continuing the Visible Learning crusade and making a lot of common sense.

Australian principals are mired in tasks that don't have much influence on how their students perform academically. Thirty-two per cent of their time is spent on administrative tasks, much higher than the international mean of 22 per cent, according to an Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development study. The proportion of their time spent on staff development, instructional leadership, and parent and community relations are all lower than international means.

We can't argue with the data nor can we continue to make exceptions and excuses for practices that evidently have little impact on student learning outcomes. Hattie is correct in saying that principals have to see themselves as the 'chief evaluators of student and staff achievement in their schools'.

For too long, we've burdened principals with the task of being factory managers, not leaders of learning. Urgency outweighed importance but the scales are beginning to tip.

It is time for reshaping the role and reasserting the responsibilities of principals in light of the irrefutable research (Hattie, Robinson, Timperley et al). And this has to be done in collaboration with the Principals, not at arms length to them. This is how a true profession builds its practice capacity. The mark of a respected profession is the rigour it applies to how contemporary theory and practice can improve the work of the profession, and ultimately the leadership it provides for policy agendas.

Improving student learning requires a laser like focus on what matters and for principals, what matters most should be learning and teaching.

Twitter value 2010-10-09

There's a good article in the June edition of Harvard Business Review on the 'Six Ways to Find Value in Twitter's Noise.' Although written for marketers, I thought how, with a few edits, these rules are just as relevant to educators. My edits in blue.

1. Learn about the competitive landscape What are fellow educators/thinkers doing, saying and reading?
2. Look for unexpected themes What are the nascent ideas?
3. Dig deeper into the stream What discussions are happening in other learning networks?
4. Look for user experiences Learn from collective practice and wisdom
5. Learn why negative words are coming up What are the barriers/challenges all educators face?
6. Learn about conversation dominators How are educators engaging students – what tools are they using; what is informing their practice?

Web 2.0 coming to a city near you *2010-10-12*

Ten years into the new millenium and Australia is about to get its first digital city – Parramatta. Good to see western Sydney is leading the way.

Parramatta Council is working in partnership with Google, business, Telstra and UWS on a strategy to introduce ‘smart corridors’ around government, education and shopping precincts.

Rate-payers and visitors will be able to access information on local events, development applications, parking availability and provide feedback to Council.

Becoming a ‘digital city’ means responding to the needs of residents, workers, visitors and students. It’s important that such a strategy benefits individuals as much as businesses. Digital cities = informed citizens = economic and social development.

Parramatta can claim kudos for embracing today’s technologies but let’s also look to and learn from other leading digital cities like Stockholm, Singapore and Seoul on how we can better inform, educate and build collaborative communities.

The future begins today and the Parramatta City Council is to be applauded for taking this leadership initiative. It recognises that the old ways of doing things may not be relevant to living life and participating in society as it once used to be. Our school system is well positioned to be an active participant in this digital city.

Transparency rules 2010-10-14

I thought I'd dip again into the work and words of Michael Fullan – author of *Six Secrets of Change* and one of the texts in our evolving educational canon.

Actually, Michael will be back in Parramatta next month, working with our aspiring and school leaders. Always challenging, always inspiring, always honest, always prudent.

I hope that in talking to our leaders, there is discussion devoted to transparency (i.e leading to improving practice). Transparency still unnerves many and yet governments are demanding greater transparency when it comes to school and student performance.

For Michael, transparency is about results (student data) and the teaching practices that influence those results (negatively or positively). This is an excerpt from an interview with the Ontario Ministry of Education on *Leading Change*.

Most examples of accountability only look at the results. All this tells you is whether you have been successful or not. You also need transparency of instructional practice.

Transparency means looking at what is (or isn't) yielding the desired results. It's not enough to simply identify what good learning and teaching looks like – we need to share it, learn from it and adapt it.

According to Michael, there are three elements (another rule of 3) for improving teacher practice:

1. Transparency – knowing about the teacher's practice and the results
2. Empathy – ensuring a non-judgmental environment (teacher learning not teacher spurning)
3. Building teacher capacity and teacher-learning (motivating success)

As professionals, we need to be more open to using data to inform our practice. This is the science of teaching, the art is in the relationships we build and the environments we create. Then, we begin to build that illusive “professional practice” that Elmore bemoans the lack of in education.

Reflections from Rome *2010-10-18*

I've had the great privilege of being in Rome with students, teachers and staff from our diocese for the canonisation of our first saint – Mary of the Cross MacKillop. Rome is such a special city – you not only see it but sense the excitement that comes from touching its history.

It has been amazing to watch as the Vatican prepares for the canonisation of six saints. Standing in the middle of St Peter's Square and seeing the potrait of Mary MacKillop was awesome.

No trouble picking out the Australian accent, it was everywhere. There was a real sense of anticipation and excitement as the canonisation approached. It reminded me of Sydney during World Youth Day and the 2000 Olympics.

Despite the dense crowds, the mood was one of pride and celebration. Italians have embraced this as well as churches across Rome prepared for this massive event. Our pilgrims have been having a great time just being part of something as significant as this.

As you would have seen on the news coverage, our politicians have been in Rome and I had the opportunity to chat with Foreign Affairs Minister, Kevin Rudd, Deputy Leader of the Opposition, Julie Bishop and Queensland Senator, Barnaby Joyce as they wandered through St Peter's Square.

This place is so special that it transcends the barriers that often exist between the secular and the religious. Kevin Rudd reflected on why Mary MacKillop is a woman and educator that all Australians can be proud of and the thought has been echoed by many others.

If you always think. . . . 2010-10-21

I'll be in Glasgow later in the week for a discussion hosted by the National Centre for Professional Development team on we get system wide change in education. Joining me on the panel will be John Connell, Margaret Alcorn and Bruce Robertson.

Perhaps by coincidence, I was emailed the poem below by Emeritus Professor Richard Bawden (via South Australia Department of Education and Children's Services website).

If you always think what you have always thought Then you will always bring what you have always brought And always teach what you have always taught and always fight what you have always fought. If you always think what you have always thought You will always seek what you have always sought Then you will always catch what you have always caught and always wreak what you have always wrought. If you always live by what is and never ought Then your power will always be nearer nought.

Systemic educational change requires moving experienced teachers from a Descartes view of 'I teach, therefore I know' to learning 'teaching expertise'.

From Bransford's How People Learn:

Teachers need expertise in both subject matter and teaching. . . . teachers need to develop an understanding of pedagogy as an intellectual discipline that reflects theories of learning, including knowledge of how cultural beliefs and personal characteristics of learners influence learning.

A metric for success 2010-10-21

If you're looking for something provocative to read, I suggest this article from the Harvard Business Review .

Clayton M Christensen, author of many books including *Disrupting Class* and Professor at Harvard Business school was asked to address his graduating students. It wasn't focussed on how to succeed in the business world but on how to succeed in life by applying his simple management theory.

Although addressing university graduates, I wondered how Year 12 students would respond to Christensen's three questions?

It's a powerful metric for us all.

Solutions-focussed schools 2010-10-21

I had the opportunity of visiting two Catholic schools in Glasgow: St Lukes High School and Our Lady of the Rosary Primary.

St Luke's is led by Patricia Scott, a really passionate and articulate leader. Patricia is also an associate assessor with HMIE and joins inspection teams in secondary schools across other education authorities. She has really taken self-evaluation to a new level. She took me on a 'learning walk' around the school and we had a good discussion about moving schools from good to great.

St Luke's drives its improvement through an 'enterprise and creativity' program that builds partnerships with businesses, community and industry to encourage teachers to do things differently. As Patricia said, *"we don't have problems – we are a solutions-focussed school!"* They are totally committed to the health and wellbeing of its entire school community. For staff this means engaging in ongoing professional learning, collaboration and celebration of achievements. Building trust and relationships provides a solid foundation for ongoing change and innovation. Staff travel within the UK and overseas to build partnerships and extending their learning.

The Scottish Government is currently rolling out its new learning framework: Curriculum for Excellence and Patricia views this as an opportunity to further personalise student learning and encourage greater teacher collaboration as they work on the implementation process.

Our Lady of the Rosary Primary principal, Laura Mclean is just finishing her first year and is energised by the challenges and changes so far. Laura ran a fantastic school in the east end of Glasgow before moving to her current school. Her agenda is to take a good traditional school to greatness!

The school community underwent a rapid transformation with a large influx of migrants, refugees and homeless people. The student population changed almost over night and the school adopted a 'solutions-focused approach' to learning and teaching. I visited every class and spoke to every teacher including the cleaner and found several common themes.

1. The students love the school because they have great teachers
2. They work hard because there is so much else to do at school besides 'normal' lessons
3. They are connected to the outside world
4. There is no bullying

Not a bad platform to move forward from. Teacher collaboration is core to the school's strategic direction. They've set up learning partnerships with other schools (and are seeking some Australian buddies) to help expand their professional knowledge and practice.

Laura and Patricia are both driven by the fact that no matter how good the school is, they can and should be doing better. Forget the problems, avoid the blame – just focus on finding solutions!

Talking about teaching 2010-10-25

A full day of discussions on the directions of education and the challenges in providing K – 12 schooling. The morning began with a round table meeting with members of Learning and Teaching Scotland.

Margaret Alcorn, Laurie O'Donnell, John Connell, Catriona Oates, Frank Crawford from HMIE and others talked through a ranges of concerns and challenges.

Not surprisingly, there was commonality in our experiences and perceptions. Central to all of us is the relationship between teacher learning and student achievement.

Scotland has a mandated requirement of 35 hours of professional development but this mandate doesn't guarantee quality experiences. More and more there is work on locating the PD in school settings with teachers collaborating and sharing practice.

More use has to be made of technologies to support this sort of professional learning both from a learning and cost perspective.

Surprisingly, ICT in schools was hardly mentioned. This is a significant shift and is indicative of the fact that technology is now a mainstream learning tool.

The focus was really on how we place learning at the centre of schooling and new ways of assessing **for** learning. This is a critical task in the new Scottish curriculum document.

I shared our work on improving teacher collaboration and personalised learning and how the design of our agile spaces can support this. There was great excitement at these initiatives and a keenness to understand how we are doing it. We only scratched the surface but it will continue online.

In the afternoon, I joined the Centre for Professional Development's panel for a Q and A with Scottish educators. This was another great opportunity for professional engagement on some of the big issues in 21st century schooling.

We explored how you provide quality professional learning; how you encourage sound educational policy; how to support innovation at school level and how to develop closer alignment between systems and schools.

Nick Hood has a summary of the discussion on his blog.

Adding value 2010-10-25

I've enjoyed my short visit to Learning and Teaching Scotland. As is often the case with these sorts of visits you get so much out of the informal discussions, some of which can go on well into the evenings!

The generosity of time and sharing of professional expertise of these busy people is always amazing. You get a chance to get some depth to the often superficial information you get on flying visits. This level of conversation stimulates and stretches your perspectives.

Click on the links for my 'Learning Conversations' with Sheena Devlin, Head of Education Early Years and Primary for Perth and Kinross Council and Catriona Oates from the National Centre for Professional Development on teacher-learning.

As I wrote in a previous post, Scotland is rolling out a new national curriculum and one of the long points of discussion I had was around external testing. In this new curriculum, authorities have resisted the move to external testing and the publishing of externally set targets and league tables.

Schools can choose to do such tests if they wish but it is a local matter only. Of course this is the path that England have now chosen to go down after a decade of rigorous external assessment with little to show by way of either improving student learning or school improvement.

The major focus of Scottish and now English education authorities is improving teachers' learning. Authorities seem now to understand student learning is greatly influenced by ongoing learning by teachers and leaders.

There is also an increasing use of technology through webinars and the like to reach all teachers. We had several discussions about John Hattie and they were very interested to hear our response to his work.

The wider involvement of the community through partnerships is another strategic direction encouraged by schools here. All schools are encouraged to build partnerships with local businesses and to find experts that may be able to add value to the work of schools. There is a real understanding of the need to open schools to the wider community in real and tangible ways.

'Education is going backwards' 2010-10-31

This was the opening comment by a head teacher at an education round table I attended in London. Several school leaders and teachers gathered to discuss the impact of the latest policy announcements of the conservative coalition government. After listening to them it wasn't hard to be somewhat pessimistic at the future of schooling in the UK.

Their education agenda is being influenced by a stringent budget; an ideological view that the national curriculum needs more substance and that governments should exercise greater control over education. While the promise is not to cut frontline teaching positions, all other services to schools will be affected.

The National Curriculum is being wound back with a greater focus on content and the Building Schools for the Future is also being cut. BECTA has already been abolished and much of its work taken over by the Department of Education. Even the national computer fund has been slashed and spending on higher education reduced by 40%. A grim picture indeed!

Where is this all heading and what sense if any does it all make? The financial situation here in the UK and across Europe is very worrying. Predictions are for higher unemployment and contracting GDP across the spectrum.

The more I talk to educators from around the globe, the more shortsighted these sorts of policy decisions become. These policies ignore attempts to improve student learning and thus improve the quality of schooling across the board. Have a look at Merlin John Online and several others like Merlin and you'll see what I mean. Governments seem to miss the point by a very big margin.

Government policy at least in the UK fails to understand the challenges of 21st century schooling - it is still locked into the input-throughput-output model of business. The thinking is that if you have control over all three elements then quality will improve. This may work for an assembly line but it isn't the purpose of schooling.

Estelle Morris wrote a column in the Guardian last week on what the cuts will mean for teachers:

...relatively few in the schools sector have done so in an environment of economic stringency. Any teacher who joined the profession, or any head who was appointed, in the last 15 years will have taught or led schools during times of increasing resources and ringfenced budgets for new initiatives. Now they will be faced with the same pressures – staffing, class sizes, new initiatives, pressure to succeed – but many will be doing so with less money than before.

There is a real frustration amongst the practitioners I've spoken to on how we get policy and implementation to reflect the reality of schooling today. Any attempt at finding solutions often degenerates into blame and a further fragmentation of positions – a claim I heard echoed in Scotland.

Of course, I've been reflecting on this as we head towards a state election in March. Is this what we want for our schools of the future?

Can \$50 billion improve US schools? 2010-11-02

The US federal budget for K-12 schooling for the 2011 school year is approximately \$US50 billion dollars. This doesn't include the expenditure of state governments who have prime responsibility for schooling.

It's no wonder there is vigorous debate here on the level of expenditure particularly with the release of *Waiting for Superman*. One thing is clear, no matter which side of the debate you are on, everyone agrees that US schools are underperforming and change is needed quickly.

You can't open the newspapers or turn on TV without someone expressing an opinion or proffering to fix the ailing education system. As the country prepares for mid-term elections on November 2, the policy differences are brought into sharp focus.

The Republicans are calling for less central control by the federal government but the Democrats want greater control. Opinion is spread along a continuum defined by these two opposing views.

Jennifer Marshall, Director of Domestic Policy Studies for The Heritage Foundation was on TV this weekend imploring the federal government to remove themselves from schooling. She even suggested the US Department of Education be abolished citing that only 60 cents in the dollar reaches schools – the rest covers administration costs.

Marshall compared Roosevelt's Education policy (less than 30 single sided sheets) with the Bush Administration's 600 double-sided pages No Child Left Behind act. As you can see, the point that education policy and expenditure are focused on compliance and justification was well made.

Marshall argues that this is a result of a lack of understanding of 'accountability to who and for what'. Too often decisions are based on whether funding applications are correct instead of whether they meet the needs of students.

Amid much of the debate there were two very important observations which both sides agreed on. The first was that whatever policy is adopted, the central principle will be to drive the education dollar as close to students as possible. The second was, "we need education policy based on the needs of students not the demands of adults!" What a powerful policy position.

There was heavy criticism of teacher unions for being focused on the demands of their members and adverse to change and innovation. It would have been interesting to hear the unions' response to this claim.

One thing that strikes me about public policy discussion in the US is public access. There are many media sites helping to shape and influence public understanding on these matters such as C-Span, CNN Schooling for Success and NBC Education Nation. These sites are having an increasing influence on the shape and direction of education policy but I believe debate must be balanced. We don't seem to have anything like this in Australia and my concern is that our strongest advocates and best practitioners don't have the same opportunities as in the US to be heard.

Re-professionalising teaching 2010-11-03

I had the pleasure of spending two days with Superintendent Jack Dale and his team from Fairfax County. Jack leads the 12th largest school district in the US with over 12,000 teachers and 175,000 students.

Fairfax is also one of the highest performing districts in the US. In the last academic year, they employed 1,200 new teachers from a field of 30,000 applicants!

After several hours of discussion on the nature of education in the US and globally, Jack kept coming back to one feature he believes is at the heart of their success. For the last two years they have been focussing on building professional learning communities within their schools, within their system and within the office that supports schools.

These teams come together around topics of interests and expertise that are aimed at improving student learning. They've been using the work of Richard Dufour as a guide for the work they are doing in schools.

Jack and his team believe the most effective way to improve student learning is to improve teachers' teaching. This requires teachers to learn about and share their practice.

Jack concedes it's difficult but challenges are shared by education systems everywhere because the current model of schooling actively works against teachers learning and reflecting on their practice in classrooms.

He describes this challenge as 're-professionalising teaching' – changing the paradigm so students are at the centre of schooling.

They are also rolling out a program where good teachers are identified and targeted to work outside the standard hours of teaching. This requires them to be available to work extended school days and during holidays for additional remuneration. These teachers are available to work with other teachers in schools to analyse and understand student data.

Part of the solution lies in the better use of technologies. Fairfax has changed the policy on banning external devices on their network and now find on any given day there are 40,000 devices accessing it.

Teachers and students bring their own devices to school and for every teacher and student in their system, the ratio of devices to people is 3:1. There is a greater focus especially in the US on using technology to support student learning and teacher collaboration.

Creative Teachers doing Simple Things 2010-11-09

I spent some time with some very innovative and creative teachers at Marymount of New York. The school is located has undergone a great deal of change largely due to a new culture of innovation and an investment in technology.

Marymount staff believe the secret to their success isn't complex. It's the combination of strong leadership, teacher learning, creativity, robust IT infrastructure with full mobility and linking all technology to the curriculum.

Principal, Concepcion Alvar says they had to change what they were doing because many students were disengaging from their learning. They encourage teachers to be creative in the way they deliver learning using today's tools. Whatever they do must be pedagogically sound.

Initially, there were security concerns about giving students access to the internet but they have adopted an open access policy to the web (including social networking sites) and students are encouraged to bring their own devices.

The school deals with unacceptable use when it happens and this approach has allowed a high level of trust to develop between staff and students. It's evident as you walk through the corridors and see students using technology whenever with little supervision.

Several staff made the comment that the technology is helping to improve students' literacy skills. Art students are able to design and publish their work to the web but it must also be accompanied by a written exposition. French is also taught with the aid of iPods so students can access programs while going to and from school and on weekends.

It's easy to see why their students are engaged in their learning.

Begin with the end in mind *2010-11-11*

Dr Jerry Weast – Superintendent of Montgomery County Public Schools. Montgomery County has 144,000 students and approx 11,000 teachers in addition to 11,000 support staff – it is the largest school system in the state of Maryland.

Most impressive is the fact that the MCPS has been the highest performing system of schools in the US for the past two years. When you talk to Jerry – you understand why.

Jerry has been in the business of K-12 schooling for over 35 years and took on his first superintendent position at the age of 28 years. His success as Superintendent of MCPS has been covered by respected newspapers like the Washington Post and the Wall Street Journal.

In his 12 years at MCPS, Jerry has implemented a coherent, consistent and strategic plan to improve learning for all students. Not only is performance data good for American students, it's good for Afro-Americans, Asians and native Americans.

Jerry says that any system of schools should be able to achieve what Montgomery has done provided you know what you want to achieve – begin with the end in mind.

Nomadic learning 2010-11-12

Technology never ceases to amaze me! The ability to engage in a learning conversation anytime, anywhere is truly remarkable. Will Richardson wrote in 2006 that the internet had allowed him to become ‘nomadic learner’- connecting to people and information that point him in the direction of what he needs to know and learn.

On Monday, I was a nomadic learner as I skyped into a conversation Michael Fullan and my leadership team were having on system-wide improvement. As always, Michael’s advice is precise and practical.

1. It’s about focus, coherence and consistency
2. There’s no point in having school goals if there’s no action driving it
3. Remove the distractions
4. Ensure your school teams know the focus and can clearly articulate how they’re going to achieve it (ie what are the strategies and tools are going to be used to deliver)
5. Instruction drives change not data
6. Instructional practice chases good data
7. Data is the catalyst for change not judgment
8. Capacity building @ the point of delivery
9. Whole school reform needs to be led by the principal and lead teacher, supported by those with expertise and orchestrated by the system
10. Resist the urge to tell schools everything all at once
11. Introduce data walls in staff rooms so that teachers can track the learning journey of all students
12. Everyone should be able to name and know the strategies being used to improve literacy and numeracy
13. Beliefs and attitudes change when teachers ‘try it’
14. The more collaborative teams you have, the more you foster leadership
15. There needs to be a causal connection between goals, strategies and assessment
16. Develop a language of raising the bar and closing the gap
17. Foster a sense of systemness at all levels of the system

It’s not rocket science but it takes discipline and a relentless focus on changing behaviours in the classroom by building teacher capacity. I particularly like points 5,6 and 7 and the timely reminder that good teaching delivers improvements in student learning, not extrinsic factors. Good practitioners know this.

I have written before about the trap that policy makers fall into when they see data as an end in itself. I was in a meeting today where I was asked my opinion on linking teacher pay to student results as it remains a big issue in the US. This is what happens when you don’t understand that data and its use is the tool not a solution.

Roxbury Prep Charter School 2010-11-19

Roxbury Prep is a middle school set in the suburbs of Boston, located on the top floor of a retirement home. It was established by two locals who were concerned at the level of achievement in local public schools. As a charter school, they enjoy some freedom not enjoyed by public schools despite being publicly funded but they are required to meet the terms of their Charter.

The school educates 450 students and has a commitment to finding graduates places in the best high schools in Boston and then supporting students through their college education. It is an ambitious program that seeks to show kids from poor backgrounds with no history of family commitment to education that they can receive a first rate education. Access to the school is by ballot.

The school leadership team consists of two co-directors. All staff work in teams and are guided by the co-directors. Faculties are led by a 'faculty coach' who organising meetings for professional learning. Year groups have 'year coaches' and students are organised in teams. Each staff member then becomes a personal mentor for up to eight students. This builds strong relationships, trust and collegiality, which influences students' attitudes to learning.

There are five staff who track and advise graduates through their high schooling and college education. They contact every graduate at regular intervals and ask for feedback on their progress. Graduates are welcome back at any time for advice ranging from how to relate to a new teacher to how to apply for scholarships. All this is aimed at keeping students at school and engaged in their learning.

Teachers have precise data on each student's progress and they use this to help personalise the learning. As a charter school, Roxbury is able to adapt the local curriculum framework (a set of standards), which they then extend and stretch to ensure it challenges students.

Quest 2010-11-23

I joined a 1000 educators recently for the annual Quest conference in Toronto. Hosted by the York District Public Schools Board, this conference is widely regarded as a ‘must attend’ event in Canada with a large international contingent.

Researcher and author, Don Tapscott gave the opening keynote and mapped the issues with precision. He spoke about the industrial model of schooling in the context of mass media, mass production and mass distribution. All of these share similar characteristics – one size fits all; recipient is passive.

The point that Don was making is that we don’t refer to ‘mass’ anymore in a collaborative world. News and information is personalised and accessible anywhere, anytime. Since we’re no longer recipients but co-creators, we need to see schooling differently.

Technology isn’t the singular cause of change, it’s the relationship between student/teacher and the learning process.

Don’s advice to educators and school leaders:

1. It’s not a blame game. Everyone shares responsibility including parents. Teachers can make the change if they are well supported and resourced.
2. Focus on life-long learning not teaching to the test
3. Use technology to get to know your students
4. Leaders are those people in your community who look for new solutions (e.g parents, teachers, admin staff). Leaders also have to engage with the technologies – become a blogger, edit a wikipedia entry, use a wiki.
5. Learn from and challenge young people – don’t make learning a one way experience.

Wisdom of the crowd 2010-11-26

As always, Michael Fullan and Andy Hargreaves were excellent at The Quest Conference. They managed to engage an audience of a thousand educators on the core work of school improvement. It's why their work resonates with so many people around the world.

Fullan and Hargreaves continue to build on the foundations of their work – solutions are found in the practitioner (shades of Elmore) and evidence-based practice is good practice.

Hargreaves talks about the five fallacies of education reform: speed, substitution, data, prescription and competition.

Fullan reflected on the need for precision, coherence and specificity and proffered this advice:

1. Focus on a process and provide local support (educational expenditure has quadrupled over the last decade but performance hasn't).
2. Identify good practice then share and apply it.
3. Once student learning starts to improve, be prepared to change practice.
4. Develop a collective plan for improvement and strengthen it through individual strategies.
5. Make innovation mainstream. Personalised learning and de-privatised teacher practice must be the norm.

It's also worth noting Douglas Reeves' comments on school improvement programs. Reeves says if we ask which program works, we are doomed.

Change is driven by people and practice not programs. If we think programs will improve student learning, we may see short term results but they can't be sustained over a long period. Reeves says continuing to introduce programs into schools is the antithesis of what focus is all about.

I suppose Reeves confirms what we already know – there's no silver bullet or easy steps to improving schooling. Perhaps the mantra is people and practice.

What I've learned *2010-12-02*

I thought I would do a video post reflecting on what for me are the three key themes that emerged during my recent professional learning experience.

Hopefully, the posts over the past few weeks from Canada, US and Scotland capture the current challenges, ideas and trends across school systems. Two things resonate across the globe – every educational system is facing similar challenges and the recognition that teacher learning is at the heart of improving student learning, and thus schooling.

How this understanding is addressed is the real challenge. The mainstream professional development models have passed their use by date and we need fresh ideas and approaches, ideas that involve the teacher and the learner and the content in a constant cycle of ongoing reflection and dialogue.

This means, I believe, that many things are likely to change. We will redefine what it means to be a teacher, we will change the way teachers work, teachers will have more control of their working life and evidence of performance and improvement will be the drivers for excellence.

McKinsey 2010 2010-12-08

The McKinsey report into 'How the world's most improved school systems keep getting better' was released last week.

McKinsey examined 20 school systems around the world that are somewhere along the continuum of fair to great. These include Singapore and Ontario but also systems in developing countries like Brazil and India. These education are considered to be making promising starts in improving student learning outcomes.

While we all aspire to achieve the success of Singapore and Ontario, I think we can be assured that we are on the right track. The report is valuable in that it identifies and unpacks the elements common to these high performing systems.

It confirms that improving student learning outcomes does not happen overnight. Singapore and Hong Kong took twenty plus years to move their schools from good to great.

For me, this school improvement model is like a tightly woven ball of wool with great control, focus and energy on improving the learning and teaching processes. As instructional practice improves and teachers begin to collaborate, analyse data and adapt strategies, the ball unravels and innovation spreads.

I think the document is a must read for all educators as we have a responsibility to ensure that we learn from each other about what works, and more importantly what doesn't.

A national goal 2010-12-15

Interesting article recently by Peter Holmes a Court on the positive changes taking place in the far north Queensland town of Aurukun. At the heart of reform measures is a focus on improving education participation and retention.

At the beginning of 2010, not one student in the township was reading 'at their normal grade level, and more than half of the children in grades 3-7 were still at kindergarten level reading, or below.'

In response, the Cape York Aboriginal Australian Academy was established and direct instruction was introduced to improve literacy levels. Holmes a Court describes direct instruction as built on on 'a belief that all students can learn and any failure is a reflection on the teaching system.'

Kids are now engaged and are excited by their progress as learners. Just being able to read aloud has become a powerful motivator for students and teachers.

As Holmes a Court says 'if we start to add the cost to Australia of releasing functionally illiterate teenagers into the world, the true costs of the old system, are much, much higher.'

It is the birthright of every Australian child to be able to read and write. And yes, there are children in large cities and regional towns who are also reading below their grade level. This is not simply a challenge for educators in Aurukun but educators everywhere.

If anything, the foundation for life-long learning is literacy and teaching literacy must be a core competency of every teacher. The old model of schooling attempts to treat the symptoms by pouring more money into programmatic solutions. The decline in the recently published OECD report of our 15 year olds' literacy levels is a statement on the quality of teaching than the ability of students.

In January this year, the Sydney Morning Herald reported that the Department of Education and Training increased funding for its literacy and numeracy programs from \$54 million to \$174 million.

These programs are what Michael Fullan calls 'try me' ideas that end up distracting teachers from their core work. Too often time is spent deliberating what is taught rather than how effective it is. Any initiative to improve literacy in our schools must be directly linked to increasing the knowledge and skills of teachers.

Improving the literacy levels of students in remote townships like Aurukun is our collective responsibility. Next year, our national goal should be improving the literacy results of every Australian student.

2011 Writings

Just a teacher 2011-01-06

Another school year has ended with some great results in the Higher School Certificate. Well done to the teachers who have laid the foundations on which our departing Year 12 students will build upon next year.

Behind every successful student is a great teacher supported by a collaborative team of other professionals and instructional leaders. This is a simple formula that is difficult to implement, not because it is intellectually complex, theoretically unproven or sound educational practice.

It is difficult to implement because it is a challenge to the prevailing culture of schooling where the schooling process is focused on the transference of knowledge by a single teacher to a defined group of students in defined classes at specific times of the day.

We know the good theory and practice, we are not strong on changing culture!

Some hard truths 2011-01-12

I have written and spoken over the past twelve months about the challenges facing schooling in today's world. As we begin a new school year those challenges have not diminished, in fact they have increased. And they will continue to do so unless the education community faces up to some hard truths.

I still maintain the biggest risk facing schooling today is irrelevancy. Most schools are stuck in a kind of parallel universe which either denies or ignores the rapidly changing world around them.

Of course there are innovative schools that are pushing the boundaries but these schools are either viewed with suspicion or explained away as experimental instead of experiential.

The industrial model of schooling prevails in most corners of the world so learning is still a sifting and sorting process of students for a world that no longer exists. As the digital age transforms every aspect of our lives, most schools are peddling hard to maintain an irrelevant status quo.

An unfortunate by-product is that teachers continue to work hard to ensure the industrial model succeeds and often feel under-valued for the efforts they make on students behalf. The teaching profession is sorely in need of liberation!

Intelligent discussions on educational change are dragged off course by trivial things – lower teacher student ratios, what content is important, school improvement plans that have little impact on really challenging students. We need to look elsewhere if we are to move out of this parallel universe.

These sorts of approaches are only barriers to change – they maintain structures that stifle innovation. The barriers that protected schools from the modern world for so long have broken down.

If nothing else this year, be sure to read Linda Darling-Hammond's latest book, *The Flat World and Education* especially pages 237 to 239. I hope this book propels many into the 21st century.

Schools have long enjoyed a competitive position that they can no longer demand or expect to maintain. In a rapidly developing mosaic for learning in a connected world, schools are now just one of many nodes for learning. In this new world of diversity and choice how are we going to ensure quality and avoid mediocrity, information overload and banality?

How are today's schools going to position themselves to become the architect of new ways of learning and teaching? What has to change, what has to be done differently? Indeed what is the work of a teacher in today's world? These are the powerful questions for all of us in 2011.

I don't know the answers to these but I do know the answers lie in every school's capacity to continuously reinvent themselves through innovation and research. Schools have to strive for excellence even if it means being different and embrace change, not avoid it.

We can be very confident that we know what doesn't work, and we have ample data on why this is so. Those one-off stand alone initiatives focusing on teacher control, external monitoring, new curriculum, programmatic solutions suck the oxygen out of schools and stifle the drive and passion teachers have for improving every student's learning.

Relevance has to be the rule not the exception.

Education schizophrenia 2011-01-18

You can easily be forgiven for thinking we live in parallel universe at times. No where is this more evident than in schooling. Over Christmas I caught up with some reading that still leaves my head spinning.

Last November England's new conservative government released its white paper entitled: *The Importance of Teaching*.

It certainly makes for interesting reading as it looks firmly to the past for solutions to our current challenges. While the sentiment about the importance of teaching is laudable it would have been beneficial if the paper followed up with sound theory, contemporary research and evidence-based practice to support the critical work of teachers.

What we get is the same tired (and tried) list of "reforms" aimed at improving the standard of schools across England. Under each of the seven headings are a set of strategies which make no reference to the world in which young people live, learn and play nor to the work of committed and professional teachers. Nor is there reference to working collaboratively or ensuring time for critical reflection on practice.

Strategies outlined include things such as cutting bureaucracy, allowing private individuals and organisations to establish their own schools, establishing an "escalating floor standard", which sets a minimum expectation for attainment. However, this one is my favourite – "trial a new approach to exclusions where schools have new responsibilities for the ongoing education and care of excluded children."

This hardly passes as mindful education policy geared towards addressing some of the complexities of changing a tired, outdated behemoth like our education systems.

After my momentary bout of depression brought on by the white paper, I was uplifted and inspired by Linda Darling-Hammond's latest book 'The Flat World and Education'.

Darling-Hammond needs no introduction to the education world. It is a shame that President Obama didn't make her US Secretary for Education. She is always insightful and ahead of the game, and this latest text is no different.

Her "white paper" starts with the simple notion that the world has changed and therefore schools need to change. At the heart of this change is the need to "design schools for teaching and learning". Her strategies for change include turning schools into smaller units, structure learning for personalisation, make learning intellectually challenging and relevant, develop performance based assessments, build professional learning and collaboration, support successful innovation and sustain change.

This book is refreshing, challenging and stimulating and speaks, I think, to the heart of every good teacher who wants to be directly involved in improving schooling.

Can anyone suggest any other good reads?

A general education 2011-01-25

Writing back in 2000, this is Edward de Bono's assessment of the education system:

In most countries there are examinations of some sort in place and teachers have to prepare students to get through those exams. This is what parents expect; this is what students need in order to pass through the gateways into a successfully and financially rewarding life. Yet the examinations are set in traditional subjects. Where is the examination in 'practical thinking'? Where is the examination in 'value creation'? So schools and teachers are locked in by existing exams and by the needs of universities. The people who run the system have grown up with the existing system and have become experts at running it, so they see no need for change.

How much has changed in eleven years? To change one element of schooling requires changing the whole system and who is prepared for that kind of radical transformation?

Our school systems are adept at teaching students what to think rather than how to think. Students leave school in search of specialist degrees and ready-made careers, with mostly a narrowing of their learning experience the further they go.

I'm not suggesting that law, medicine aren't noble and necessary professions but many like deBono argue that what our rapidly changing world needs are thinkers – generalists who can adapt to new situations, contexts and environments. John Connell also asks 'how can teachers produce independent thinkers when they themselves are simply not allowed to think independently?'

Eleven years into the new millennium and we still seem to be increasingly preoccupied with courses, content and accountability. Just read the British government's schools white paper on the Importance of Teaching.

There are many talented educators and system leaders out there chipping away at the industrial model. If nothing else, we need a schooling experience that doesn't 'teach subjects' but develops individual thinking and imagination and encourages the pursuit of wisdom. These are outcomes that are not easily measured by high-stakes testing.

As John Dewey wrote more than a century ago, when will education cease to be dominated by 'a medieval conception of learning'? Are our teachers and leaders really prepared for this new way of thinking? Can we let go of what is needed to let go and find new ways of doing the business of learning and teaching

Profession with a practice 2011-02-02

I recently viewed *A Profession with a Practice* – a series of publications from the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development. As always, the DEECD’s approach to improving student learning is inextricably linked to improving the quality of teaching.

Deputy Secretary, Darrell Fraser writes in the foreword of *Teacher Professional Leave* – these publications illustrate “action-oriented, practical professional learning experiences conducted in schools.”

The title resonates strongly because it articulates what is important to the work of schools: teacher-learning, critical reflection on practice and a commitment to sharing good practice with others.

The case studies in *A Profession with a Practice – Teacher Professional Leave* illustrate how good teachers change beliefs, strategies and practice to achieve outcomes that improve student learning.

More than anything, these publications reinforce the value of teachers working as members of a learning community that is responsive to the needs of students.

It’s great to see teachers finding professional satisfaction and success in the work they share with colleagues.

Reformers and adapters 2011-02-02

I've just finished reading two fascinating articles by Thomas L. Friedman and Marc Prensky .

There seems to be two camps when it comes to education – the reformers and the innovators who are adapters. Like the US, we spend millions of dollars trying to fix the system with programatic solutions that reflect a 20th century understanding of schooling, when the real problem is as Prensky writes ‘what is taught and how it’s taught’.

By contrast, countries like Singapore, Hong Kong, Korea and Canada are adapters. Despite being a small nation, Singapore is an education powerhouse. As the school principal quoted in Friedman’s article says they make connections between “what world am I living in,” “where is my country trying to go in that world” and, therefore, “what should I teach in fifth-grade science.”

Singapore is Bransford theory in action: context (world around us), connections (where is our country trying to go) and meta-cognition (what do our students need to know/learn/do).

What is evident from these articles is that Singapore has built its system around contemporary education whereas countries like the US and Australia have built the education around a 20th century system. As a result, students continue to increasingly disengage from learning; aren’t sufficiently challenged or are working towards achievement levels determined by high-stakes testing.

In his state of the union address last month, President Obama told Americans they needed to “out-educate and out-innovate” as a result of a rapidly changing world and its impact on global economies.

President Obama said ‘nations like China and India realized that with some changes of their own, they could compete in this new world. And so they started educating their children earlier and longer, with greater emphasis on math and science. They’re investing in research and new technologies. So, yes, the world has changed. The competition for jobs is real.’

He went on to say that ‘when a child walks into a classroom, it should be a place of high expectations and high performance. But too many schools don’t meet this test. That’s why instead of just pouring money into a system that’s not working, we launched a competition called Race to the Top. To all 50 states, we said, “If you show us the most innovative plans to improve teacher quality and student achievement, we’ll show you the money.”’

So the impetus driving US education reform is not relevancy but a competitive global job market. What is absent here is any reference to learning. Learning that develops students’ capacities for reasoning, thinking and knowing.

In his critique of the American education system, Prensky has proffered his solution for creating schools of relevance. This includes introducing a cross-disciplinary and integrated curriculum that focusses on the 3Cs: character and passion, communication and problem solving and creation and skills.

Again, it goes back to asking the right questions – how is this relevant to today’s learners and today’s world? Does ‘what and how we teach reflect current and future realities’?

One of the most confronting quotes in Prensky’s essay is from school superintendent David Engle: “Every student is damaged or cheated out of a more productive future by our continued adherence to an old, defunct system design.”

Unfortunately, there is no blueprint for making schooling relevant in today’s world because the technology we use and the global challenges we face have never existed before. We need to value the lessons of the past but not waste time and money re-creating it. We need to consider the competition but not be distracted by it. We need to design learning experiences for today’s learners not for adults.

How many of us are adapters, how many are prepared to step out of the existing comfort zones and dare to make real change?

The end of the middle manager? 2011-02-07

Lynda Gratton writing in the Harvard Business Review believes that the impact of technology, the growth of virtual teams and changing attitudes will mean the end of middle managers. If technology is having this kind of impact on business – what effect will it have on the way we staff schools?

Gratton sees that “technology itself has become the great general manager. It can monitor performance closely, provide instant feedback, even create reports and presentations. Moreover, skilled teams are becoming increasingly self-managed. What they [Gen Y workers] do value is mentoring and coaching from someone they respect.”

As these traditional hierarchical structures disappear from our workplaces, our education systems will be obliged to look at new ways of staffing schools in the 21st century.

Despite the technological advances, an industrial mindset still dominates the way schools operate and how teachers should behave. There are industrial awards and classifications, close supervision and progress reports.

This is how adults have worked in an industrial enterprise but it no longer reflects the changing nature of the world, work or how today’s students learn. We have always had good teachers but the industrial model of schooling has made them compliant.

Marc Prensky in his latest essay on school reform believes that most teachers are ‘just trying to accomplish, often against their will and better judgment, what the old education asks and mandates of them – that is, to “cover” the curriculum and raise test scores. If we take off those handcuffs and provide a better alternative, most teachers will, I believe, be eager to implement it.’

The practice of teacher collaboration, critical reflection and ongoing professional learning is forcing us to search for new ground rules around how we employ and develop teachers as professionals.

Some of my ground rules would include:

1. providing the right conditions and support for teachers to succeed
2. encouraging teachers to work, learn and plan together
3. implementing flexible teaching arrangements, timetables and uses of technology
4. using contemporary theory and research to inform practice
5. connecting with other learning communities, industry and government to improve student learning outcomes
6. ensuring an integrated curriculum and eliminating the distractors from teachers’ work

It seems a simple recipe, but how we change people’s attitudes, beliefs and ultimately the system is! Cultural change takes time

Digital Media *2011-02-11*

My thanks to Mike O'Brien from Cisco for the link to an upcoming PBS documentary – Digital Media: New Learners of the 21st century.

PBS will screen the documentary this Sunday in the US but there are some excellent extended interviews with Dr Nichole Pinkard on re-defining student literacy and Dr John Seely Brown on the power of play and collaboration in the learning process.

Well worth a watch.

BYOT 2011-02-21

The rapid development capacities and expansion of wireless networks continually reshape the world. We now expect connectivity wherever we are and if you're like me, am frustrated when we can't get access to the net.

We understand the power of wireless at this level but this is only the very beginning of a whole new way of working. Recent developments in geo-location and the increasing power of browser interfaces on mobile phones will have a huge impact on how we search for information but more importantly how information finds us.

Julian Lee in last weekend's Sydney Morning Herald noted "the power of knowing what you want and where you are is indisputable." This technology is available and becoming increasingly ubiquitous.

Lee suggests that within three years we will be making more internet searches on our phones than our computers. So what impact will these changes have on what kinds of technology we use in schools?

In the 2011 Horizon Report, one of the key trends is the availability of resources via the Net especially mobile devices. This is a clarion call for educators to take a 'careful look at the ways we can best serve learners.'

All the work and expense over the last several years for schools, systems and governments to provide students and staff with devices and connectivity may well be a thing of the past as we see the dawn of **BYOT** – bring your own technologies!

Why duplicate technologies when staff and students have powerful personalised technologies available 24/7? As enterprise level infrastructure in education becomes the norm, the issue is not who owns and supplies the technologies but what are the universal standards needed to support these technologies.

If geo-location is one of the cornerstones of mobile advertising, then we need to seriously consider the possibility of delivering what would be truly personalised learning!

A vote for good policy 2011-03-03

In just under a month, NSW goes to the polls. There is certainly a move for change but how this ultimately impacts on our work is still uncertain.

Making an informed decision means understanding the implications of Labor, the Coalition and the Greens' education policy.

The potential impact of a Greens policy means that funding of non-government schools would be dramatically reduced. Religious schools are not exempt from anti-discrimination laws but they are entitled to the democratic right and freedom to support a particular ethos.

For me, these policies are more divisive than unifying – they are designed to appease rather than addressing the complex issues every school and system faces in improving the quality of learning and teaching.

Marc Prensky is spot on when he says governments spend a whole lot of money trying to fix the system instead of education.

Good educational policy does not favour one system over another and therefore one child's learning over another. What we want is an education policy that values diversity and innovation while promoting excellence and equity.

In his occasional address at the University of Southern Queensland last year, Professor Stephen Dinham said 'the biggest equity issue in Australian education today isn't computers, new buildings or equipment. It's each student having quality teachers and quality teaching in schools.'

There should be no differentiation in teacher quality within schools or across suburbs. Consider this when you vote on March the 26th because it's not good policy if it doesn't benefit every student.

Symbols of knowledge 2011-03-10

Interesting discussion on talk-back radio about the value of books in an increasingly digital world.

It was sparked by the revelation in the SMH that the University of NSW was discarding thousands of books, journals and papers some dating back to the 1860s. According to the university, it's in response to a demand for online resources by students and lecturers.

Some academics believe it's scandalous that the library is removing books to make way for 'space for students to sit around, have lunch and plug their laptops in.'

David Miller from the school of history and philosophy was quoted as saying 'Universities are in the business of passing on knowledge and books...still remain a very important symbol of knowledge.'

Historically and culturally, books have been a symbol of knowledge. The invention of the Gutenberg press led to the democratisation of knowledge. That's really the point – books are symbols of knowledge but they are no longer the only source of it.

Fast forward five centuries and we see an even greater democratisation of knowledge with the invention of the Internet. Tim Berners-Lee says the web evolved into a powerful 'ubiquitous tool' because it was built on egalitarian principles. Knowledge is created, shared and is available to anyone, anywhere.

This is not an either/or argument e.g. either you love technology and hate books. It's about context and our moral imperative as educators is to prepare all learners for work in a knowledge age, using appropriate tools to enhance the experience.

Much of the information students need to access is now available online and accessible anywhere, anytime. The popularity and power of mobile devices like iPads is beginning to change the way we think about learning and teaching.

This year, RMIT University and Adelaide University gave students enrolled in pharmacy and science degrees an iPad. At the touch of a screen, students will be able to access the latest scientific and pharmaceutical information.

Professor Peter Hill from Adelaide University says that providing information for students on iPads means that information is "more accessible, more relevant and more frequently updated, providing the flexible learning environment students are looking for."

The Stanford University School of Medicine is also trialling iPads in its first year and master's program to improve student learning experiences. The school's associate dean, Dr Charles Prober believes the use of these technologies will help students access the 'enormous amount of medical knowledge that is being produced constantly.'

We've come a long way since the Gutenberg press. Books brought us to where we are today but mobile devices will take us into the future.

Cisco Education Leaders Forum *2011-03-10*

I had a wonderful experience this morning at 3am with around five thousand educators from across the globe during Cisco's Virtual Forum for Education Leaders. (To watch speaker sessions, you'll need to register. Videos will be available for six months).

It is amazing how quickly technology is developing to allow 'just in time' collaboration and communication. As one of the contributors to the session on how we can improve education together, I was streamed live to the audience who could not only see me, but a panel of speakers as well as the slides that accompanied my presentation.

While all this was taking place, participants could also engage in a discussion with presenters via the virtual chat room. I was able to participate in a global conversation on 21st century learning and teaching with presenters in India, Africa, UK and the US.

John Chambers, CEO of Cisco began by saying that education and the internet are the two great equalisers for bridging the gap. He predicts that over the next decade, we won't know what is technology and what is the education process. Central to making schooling relevant will be collaboration and technology.

As I wrote in my previous post, these sorts of technologies are challenging us to re-think how we work. I believe that teachers can address the challenges of making schooling relevant by building communities of expertise. Out of this collaboration (whether local or global) will come new definitions, understandings and transformations.

Learning on demand *2011-03-17*

On his blog Stephen Downes discussed the shift from thinking education is something that is provided for us towards the idea it is something we create for ourselves thanks to a myriad of resources accessible via the internet.

I've mentioned the Khan Academy before but it exemplifies Stephen Downes' point – learning on demand. The founder, Sal Khan was one of the presenters at Cisco's Virtual Forum for Educational Leaders last week.

He demonstrated how easy it was for students to work at their own pace using the free resources available on his website. Using student data and feedback, Sal is continually reviewing the content to ensure students are able to understand core maths and science concepts.

This process is counter to the current pressures on teachers and students to 'get through' the curriculum. Do we ever question what this superficial treatment of the curriculum is doing? Are we displacing effective strategies in place of 'getting the job done'?

Websites like the Khan Academy are not competing with but rather trying to work with schools to build the instructional core – the connection between student, content and teacher knowledge.

Viva la revolucion *2011-03-23*

Living in a digital age, it's hard not to focus our attention on technology. Every newspaper has a section devoted to it and there is always worldwide interest when Apple launches its latest gadget.

What we seem to miss in all of this is the social revolution that is taking place. Like the French or the counter-cultural revolution of the sixties, technology is being used to affect political, social and economic change. Just look at the number of stories on the role of social media during demonstrations in Tehran, Egypt and Libya.

If you can access the internet, you are a global citizen in a global village. In a world of rapid change, the need to make personal connections and establish connections with communities of common interest is becoming increasingly important.

Even the Vatican has recognised the power of social media saying sites like Facebook don't just share information, it creates communities.

One of the distinguishing features of this revolution is that knowledge and information is in the hands of its users. And everyone is a user no matter what our age, race or background – there is something to contribute to the global conversation.

There will always be concern about misuse – telephones are used to make prank calls and emails are used to scam people out of money. But consider how these things changed and improved our lives.

Viva la revolucion!

No barriers to learning 2011-03-24

Last night I attended the Brother John Taylor Memorial Prize, which recognises outstanding achievement in the NSW HSC by students who have some disability or have overcome major challenges in life. The Award is sponsored by the NSW Board of Studies.

It was a moving experience listening to the stories of the three recipients. It is hard to comprehend how they coped with disability and severe trauma. Their stories are ones of personal courage, relentless commitment to demonstrate their talents and a refusal to take the easy option at any stage. Each has settled into tertiary study and one I am happy to say is in their first year of a teaching degree.

These students acknowledged the support and love of family, friends and the schools which they attended. What struck me the most was that they each made special mention of, and expressed deep appreciation for their teachers. They each believed that teachers made the difference and admitted they couldn't have done what they did without their good teachers who challenged them, stretched them, supported them and were always there when they needed them.

I have written much about improving student achievement and providing a relevant and engaging learning experience for every student. Events like this reinforce the centrality of good teachers in the learning process. There are no barriers to learning when there are good teachers working in classrooms; we're lucky to have them because they do make a difference!

Why is education reform so hard? 2011-03-29

I recently attended the Whitlam Institute Seminar to debate the question of ‘why education reform is so hard?’

The three speakers, David Bartlett MP , Hon Nick Greiner and Professor Brian Galligan from the University of Melbourne all gave similar reasons as to why education reform is needed.

The perspectives presented called for greater transparency around outcomes, higher levels of accountability for schools, a focus on the early years of learning and VET pathways.

I find these forums stimulating and frustrating. There is certainly stretch in the propositions presented, yet there is rarely time to depth the issues. I suppose this is the nature of the beast.

I found myself getting increasingly annoyed – not at the presenters but at the proposition itself, which influenced and constrained their responses. I don’t think the issue is about reform. For me, the reason why education reform is so hard is because we’re asking the wrong questions.

As Marc Prensky intelligently asks ‘why continue to reform an outdated system?’ You need an entirely new approach to schooling.

For the past several decades, education around the world has been undergoing some sort of reform. Successive governments continue to pronounce reform and go as far as introducing a ‘revolution’.

The resignations of two high profile US reformers late last year – Joel Klein in New York and Michelle Rhee in the District of Columbia is further evidence that reform is not producing the transformation of learning and teaching.

On the home front our schools are still operating from a 20th century model of education which, as we know, has seen little change over time.

I think a more powerful question to ask is ‘what is the nature of schooling in today’s world?’ or even ‘how do we need to rethink schools in a contemporary world?’

We need to engage in a broad conversation and collectively build a new narrative for schooling that is focussed on how students learn best in today’s world.

The prevailing culture of structures, industrial conditions and competitiveness does not serve contemporary schooling well. We live in a connected world where schooling is but one option for learning. We live in a world where schooling now extends beyond the traditional boundaries of the building and the school day. In short, we need to move from a narrative of schooling to a narrative of life-long learning.

I’m excited by how school communities will respond to this challenge because in time, we will see widespread innovation. The profession will accept greater responsibility for shaping this narrative and policies will support not stunt this new approach to learning and teaching.

CoSN Conference 2011-03-30

The Consortium of School Networking (CoSN) is a professional organisation for technology leaders working in school districts across the US. CoSN also brings together peak agencies from around the world to engage in dialogue on schooling in a digital age.

This year I was invited to speak at CoSN's annual conference: *Mastering the Moment: A Guide to Technology Leadership in the Economic Crisis*.

To put this into context, US schools are required to lobby their district boards to raise school funding so much of their time and energy is spent looking for effective ways to do this. As you can imagine, it is difficult to juggle the learning and lobbying agendas. Fortunately, we don't face that situation so our responsibility is to use government funding effectively to raise the quality of learning and teaching in all schools.

The CoSN conference was an opportunity to listen to educators and leaders from diverse school backgrounds talking about what matters most and how today's tools can be used to deliver a relevant learning experience.

The focus of my presentation was not about the tools per se but what these tools enable in the learning environment when they are used to develop skills and deepen student learning. If we are thinking about the possibilities of schooling, then we should be in the cloud!

To hear more perspectives from the CoSN conference go to eSchool News TV.

A New Culture of Learning 2011-04-04

I mentioned a PBS documentary that was airing in the US called *New Learners of the 21st Century*. One of those interviewed was John Seely Brown who has been researching the role of emerging technology and learning particularly the aspect of play and collaboration.

Brown and Douglas Thomas have recently published a *New Culture of Learning* in which they propose a new paradigm for schooling which does not separate the learner from the world but looks at what schools must do to adapt to this new way of learning. The paradigm is built on access to a rich virtual world of resources and information.

While I haven't had a chance to read this yet, I did read Steve Denning's Q&A, and believe the authors have been able to articulate what is a relevant and innovative 21st century education. Cathy Davidson, co-founder of HASTAC calls Thomas and Brown the 'John Dewey of the digital age.'

One of the critical points they make is that learning is not about the answers but the questions, it's not about the knowledge but the experimentation. It is not about control, it is about liberation, and chaos theory may be a better building block than a structural functionalist approach.

This isn't about looking at schooling through a new lens but turning everything we know inside out and upside down. The answers to the pressing challenge of providing a relevant contemporary schooling experience are not to be found in the past.

They will be found today and tomorrow by professional groups of practitioners committed to ongoing learning and reflection on that learning. This builds innovation and capacity. Why are we fearful of the unknown when we have the potential to find new ways of schooling?

CCD 2011-04-06

One of the challenges facing educational leaders today is the ability to conceptualise how we go about reframing schooling and then articulating the key drivers for change.

Many educational leaders suffer from what I call ‘conceptual construct disorder’ (CCD). This is a condition in which we define and develop responses to schooling by what has gone before and not on what is to come.

Edward de Bono classifies this mode of thinking as traditional – it is dominated by the left brain (logical and linear). What educational leaders need to do is more right brain problem solving. de Bono calls this design thinking – based on perception and possibility.

From *New Thinking for the New Millennium*:

We need more thinking. Not more of the traditional judgment thinking but more design thinking. More of ‘what-can-be’, not more of ‘what-is’. We need not only to develop more and more technology but to design value concepts to deliver value from the technology.

Dan Pink refers to the same problem as “functional fixedness” that is, the inability to see another way to solve a problem

What we need is to design a new construct for 21st century schooling that is based on three new pillars; diversity, enterprise and cloud.

Diversity acknowledges that every learner (both student and teacher) is unique. It accepts that everyone can learn and recognises the role of education in developing the full potential of individuals (ref: Maslow’s Theory of Society). It challenges previous assumptions that learners are the problem rather than the pedagogy. It is liberating and challenging.

Enterprise accepts that the world has changed and no one operates in isolation. For schools to embrace diversity, we need capacity to deliver on a large scale. It requires us to build partnerships with organisations who understand the new construct of schooling. When everyone has access to the highways and networks, we will bridge the equity gap.

The cloud is the present and the gateway into the future. The tools for sharing and collaborating will be accessible to everyone who has access to the internet. Public and private clouds will be the new ways of both “doing and being” school.

If we expect students to be creative thinkers able to imagine their future, then what should we expect from educational leaders? No less than design thinking!

Insights from a student teacher *2011-04-12*

I was at one of our primary schools recently and met a student teacher from the Australian Catholic University. Shay Currey was on her first round of prac teaching and happy to chat about her experiences. Shay's main observation was that prac teaching at this school was very different from what she was learning at university.

I wondered whether student teachers who have not had the experience of working alone in classrooms are more willing to embrace new ways of teaching and in new settings ie. agile learning spaces? Shay found working this way very positive because it enabled her to discuss, plan and learn from her colleagues.

As this cohort of student teachers prepares to enter our schools, we may find they are more comfortable collaborating, sharing and looking for new ways to improve their practice.

Hybrid schools 2011-04-19

The Harvard Education Letter (Vol. 27, March/April 2011) recently published an article on ‘Hybrid Schools for the iGeneration’.

These schools are springing up across the US, combining traditional face-to-face teaching with virtual learning, earning the nickname ‘bricks-and clicks’ for its blended methodology. Students spend an average of 50-70 percent of their time in front of computers (I hope other mobile devices as well).

Like the Khan Academy, students work through the curriculum at their own pace. Their progression is tracked and feedback is given to both student and parents. In theory, the hybrid school is the confluence of the physical and virtual learning space and gives students an opportunity for independent and self-directed learning as well as group projects.

One of the proclaimed benefits is that teachers working in Hybrids can spend more time with their students because they don’t need to plan curricula or manage classrooms. Yet some educators are concerned that this model of schooling may not suit every learner especially those who aren’t self-motivated.

As these new models of schooling gather momentum, how do we ensure which innovations are pursued? The highway to educational reform is littered with the wreckage of narrow attempts to change schooling.

I wonder whether we are lulled into a false sense of reform by the ‘bricks and clicks’ and the schools of the future? For me, it’s not so much the model of schooling but the practice of teaching. Innovation and improvement happens when we encourage a culture of evidence-based teaching and build the capacity of teachers.

Succeeding at failure 2011-04-27

John Dewey recognised its importance when he said ‘failure is instructive’. Most success stories are crafted from failure, which is why organisations are beginning to recognise the intrinsic rewards that come from understanding and learning from it.

Harvard Business Review Magazine has devoted its April issue to the ‘f’ word – failure. There are some pearls of wisdom for schools in the articles by Rosabeth Moss Kanter, Amy Edmondson, Francesca Gino and Gary Pisano.

Kanter suggests that teams ‘that are immersed in a culture of accountability, collaboration and initiative are more likely to believe that they can weather any storm.’

These are the cornerstones of successful school communities – the ability to discuss (without judgment) what went wrong and why, to accept and respect differing points of view and to lift the capacity of team members.

When I read this, I thought of a comment Michael Fullan made last year about success and schools: ‘if the model of success isn’t working for a school then change it. Once teachers feel part of something successful, they will feel valued and they won’t think data is being used to judge. Data will then be used to unpack what is or isn’t happening and new strategies (and success) will follow.’

Failure is as much a part of education as any other life pursuit and yet there is a prevailing culture of wanting to avoid, defend and judge failure. Unfortunately, this message filters down to students.

Many school communities don’t test theories, investigate what went wrong and potentially mitigate future mistakes. Perhaps they don’t know how and that is something school and system leaders need to address. Perhaps we have something to learn from business but as HBR illustrate, the lessons are universal.

If we think the lessons learned from failure make better businesses and education systems, then what would it do for our students?

Sir Ken Robinson speaking at TED answers that:

“Kids will take a chance. . . they are not frightened of being wrong but if you’re not prepared to be wrong you’ll never come up with anything original. By the time they get to be adults, most kids have lost that capacity. They have become frightened of being wrong. We stigmatise mistakes and we are now running national education systems where mistakes are the worst thing you can make. The result is that we are educating people out of their creative capacity.”

Can we afford not to succeed at failure?

What price common sense? 2011-05-06

On Monday night, I was fortunate to attend a lecture hosted by Sydney University by Professor Linda Darling Hammond from Stanford University. Professor Darling Hammond is one of the leading educational thinkers today.

Listening to Darling Hammond, I was struck by the simplicity of her message and the common sense approach to schooling. In a very short time, she contextualised the nature of a changing world and the demands these changes will place on citizens of today and tomorrow.

She then went on to debunk many of the supposed silver bullets to improve schooling that have now been relegated to the dust bins of irrelevancy. Take for example, her view on what we need to do to improve teaching:

1. have professional teaching standards guiding evaluation and development
2. have strong clinical preparation
3. have expert mentoring and coaching
4. have sustained professional development in collaborative professional communities
5. have career ladders that develop and spread expertise

Notice, there is no mention of merit pay for teachers!

Obviously this common sense requires some strategic implementation processes but if we don't follow this advice we will continue to de-skill our teachers.

Darling Hammond also broadened the debate on school improvement by pointing out what the high achieving nations are doing to support schools. These are:

1. having societal supports for children's welfare
2. ensuring equitable resources with greater investments in high need schools
3. substantial investments in initial teacher education and ongoing support
4. have schools designed to support teacher and student learning
5. ensure equitable access to a rich thinking curriculum
6. performance assessments focussed on higher order skills

Common sense lessons from a common sense educator.

I also believe Professor Darling Hammond will be interviewed on Stateline tonight at 7.30pm on ABC One.

A concert and a cook-off *2011-05-17*

Many years ago I saw a powerful film called *Mr Holland's Opus*. It was a moving portrait of the thirty year career of a high school music teacher whose passion for music influenced the lives of so many students. I think it ranks alongside *Dead Poets Society*.

What prompted me to think about *Mr Holland's Opus* is a new Australian film called '*Mrs Carey's Concert*'. It follows MLC Burwood music director Karen Carey as she prepares her students for a major concert. The film is receiving terrific reviews.

I heard Karen Carey and the film-maker, Bob Connolly talking recently about the impact of music on the human psyche and the influence of good teachers who are able to engender an appreciation and passion for music in their students.

Mrs Carey spoke about her ability to stretch students beyond what they believe they are capable of achieving. Combines content knowledge and experience with the resources available, Mrs Carey is able to design a curriculum relevant to each learner. And what better way to showcase quality learning and teaching than a concert at the Sydney Opera House. I'll write more about instructional design in another post.

Learning is about challenging. We fail our learners when we set the benchmark too low. We send a message that aiming for average is OK and yet on TV, we see shows like *Masterchef* setting challenges for amateurs in order to produce extraordinary dishes. How many times do we hear judges telling contestants that they know the person is 'capable of much more'.

It was interesting to read last week that a top chef labelled a recent *Masterchef* challenge between his apprentice and a contestant 'too hard'. Although the apprentice was working without a recipe and lost the challenge, he later admitted that he learnt from his mistakes and knew what was needed to improve.

Good teachers like Mrs Carey set challenges whether it is in a kitchen, concert hall or learning space in order to cultivate one's ability to think creatively, to express themselves confidently and to embrace life-long learning.

What I know 2011-05-30

I consider myself an informed system leader who understands the complex issues of providing relevant schooling in today's world for all students. Over the past few years I have used this blog as a way of expressing my views about learning and teaching and some ideas around a way forward.

A few days ago an idea popped into my head uninvited, which has really intrigued me. I was thinking of my next blog post when I thought "why do I think the way I do about schooling and when did I learn the things I know about 21st century schooling?" I naturally assumed that I had always known these things but I realised that wasn't the case. Everything I know is being updated, challenged, enriched and stretched on a daily basis. Your expertise changes every day as the connections strengthen.

On Friday evening, I saw the most remarkable and uplifting performance at the Seymour Centre in Sydney by over 30 young secondary students from our Captivate program.

It was an improvised dance performance work-shopped over three years in partnership with the talented Shaun Parker and his team of collaborators who brought to life the very best of what we can expect from young people when they are taught well.

How often are we brought back to earth by such experiences! We can easily assume that we know everything there is about schooling and just when we think we do, our teachers and students challenge our thinking (again).

The performance on Friday night was Richard Elmore's instructional core in action – the relationship between student and teacher in the presence of content. It was a powerful learning experience for the student, teacher and the audience. As Elmore says 'if you can't see it in the core, it's not there.' It's what I saw and what I know.

Leadership Insights *2011-05-30*

I was interviewed last week by John Chesher from Trak Recruit – a recruitment consultancy company. The Q&A is on their blog if you're interested in my advice to aspiring educational leaders.

A relevant curriculum 2011-06-05

Over recent decades, the term *curriculum* has been used in different ways. When I was teaching, curriculum was understood as lists of subjects, learning areas and courses of study. You had the syllabus and it told you everything you needed to teach to your class. We know this content-prescriptive approach limited the scope of teachers to really personalise the learning.

As I've often said, the greatest challenge we face today is relevance. Our students require a curriculum that provides them with meaningful experiences, that engenders deep and significant learning. It has to be relevant and responsive to the age in which we live. In other words, it must educate for life.

Marc Prensky believes that what we teach is probably harder than changing how we teach because the needed changes face so many political and cultural hurdles. Prensky is of course correct – we've had impassioned debates about what should be in and what should be out of the curriculum. But these discussions have been about content not about the broader question about what we want, and need children to *know* in today's world. Knowing, not simply as a function of intellect but the whole person – imagination and emotion.

Youngjoo Kim has written an erudite piece in KappanMagazine about the curriculum. Kim says there are many factors including culture, religion, age and media which influence the way students gather and analyse information so the success of any curriculum comes back to good teachers moderating the learning. This is what we mean by personalised learning.

As Linda Darling Hammond, author of the Flat World and Education explains there are greater expectations of schools today than ever before. We are asking teachers to ensure learning and that means figuring out as Darling Hammond says what they know and what they bring and then designing a challenging curriculum that responds.

With the process well underway for a National Curriculum that centres on standardisation and continuity of learning across all states; ensuring access to resources and data, I think we need to broaden our understanding of curriculum as a single entity and see it in a multidimensional way such as:

1. **Form** – what do we want students to know about themselves and about the world they live in and what do they already know?
2. **Function** – what learning opportunities are being created by the delivery of the curriculum?
3. **Understanding** – how are learners situating their experiences and connecting the dots?
4. **Hidden** – what are students unintentionally learning about the world through culture, custom and the media?

Teaching is undergoing a dramatic shift as the nature of learning changes – that's why we need teachers to be expert pedagogical designers, constantly refining the learning experiences for every child. And that is why we need a clear framework to guide teachers in their work.

Lessons learned 2011-06-07

Monday's Sydney Morning Herald featured an article on the learning spaces at one of our schools, St Monica's Primary, North Parramatta. Our approach as a system of schools is to ensure the provision of a relevant and contemporary learning experience for every child, and to create a professionally rewarding professional life for all our staff. To do this, means developing the capabilities of all teachers by introducing structures and processes that will encourage critical reflection of practice and reflective dialogue and analysis of data, since we know good teachers improve student learning.

Professor Richard Elmore wrote in *The Age* in 2007, "Teaching, as a profession, is undergoing a dramatic transformation, from isolated work in self-contained classrooms to collaborative work designed around challenging problems of student learning, from simple routine tasks that require continuous monitoring of how students learn, from the profoundly anti-intellectual, anti-professional culture of schooling represented by (Christopher) Bantick to one characterised by respect for the knowledge of educators."

The move towards agile learning spaces is not some sort of quasi social experiment neither is it a short-term fix; it is a response to the transformation happening in knowledge societies and in the profession itself as teachers and students develop high levels of knowledge and technological skills.

I am often surprised at the defensive position taken when attempts are made at improving learning for children. While I understand some of the shortsighted and silly attempts made in the past to supposedly improve schools should never have been entertained let alone implemented, too often we use the past experience to shape the future and doom ourselves to the same mistakes. We seem to value conformity at the expense of placing teachers in environments that will encourage and empower them to work collaboratively, to learn and plan together and to build their skills base.

The move towards agile learning spaces is driven by the goal to improve learning – student learning and teacher learning. The 1970s experiment of pulling down the walls in classrooms was doomed to failure because teacher learning was missing from the equation! The classroom may have been around for thousands of years but we need to ask ourselves whether the traditional classrooms are actually providing the kind of learning and learning experiences today's students deserve?

John Dewey wrote in *The School and Society*:

Some few years ago I was looking about the school supply stores in the city, trying to find desks and chairs which seemed thoroughly suitable from all points of view – artistic, hygienic and educational – to the needs of the children. We had a great deal of difficulty in finding what we needed, and finally one dealer, more intelligent than the rest, made this remark: "I am afraid we have not what you want. You want something at which the children may work; these are all for listening". That tells the story of the traditional education. There is very little place in the traditional schoolroom for the child to work. The workshop, the laboratory, the materials, the tools with which the child may construct, create and actively inquire, and even the requisite space, have been for the most part lacking.

We know that lower class sizes don't necessarily guarantee better learning outcomes yet somehow we equate this with good teacher practice. Good practice is teachers getting to know each student as individuals and employing flexible teaching strategies that respond to these differences. Traditional classrooms make it difficult to change the space in order to create a multitude of learning activities (group, one on one, independent learning etc).

Agile learning spaces are the response to not the reason for. We know from the research that good teachers have a positive influence on student learning outcomes. Building the skills of all teachers requires a courageous cultural shift. It is about understanding the nature of the world today and the nature of learning.

If we are to learn lessons from the past, then we need to realise that not every child had the kind of learning experience they deserved and we have to be honest about that. We can no longer rely on the ideological vending machine to deliver quality learning and teaching. We look to contemporary theory, research and best practice to guide us in our work, we rely on good teachers to deliver quality learning and teaching and we design learning environments that will enhance it.

The replacement for the ideological vending machine is I think, developing trusting relationships with teachers and their school leadership teams. This recognises that as professionals they will take responsibility for their own

professional growth which has at its very centre a deep commitment to improving teacher practices that are evidence based, reflective in nature, collaborative by choice and innovative by preference.

In my experience most teachers either do this now or yearn to do it, so let's all back them.

Choosing the wrong drivers 2011-06-23

Michael Fullan will be returning to Australia later this year and as always, it will be refreshing and stimulating to hear him talk to our leaders about improving schooling.

Michael has recently written a paper, commissioned and published by the Centre for Strategic Education (CSE). CSE has kindly given permission for me to include a precis of Fullan's paper titled "Choosing the wrong drivers for whole system reform."

In particular, the paper makes reference to the US and Australia's recent reform initiatives and why these measures are ineffective in changing the 'day to day culture of school systems.'

He makes three critical and inter-related points for me in the paper. One is that 'no nation has got better by focusing on individual teachers as the driver. Better performing countries are successful because they develop the entire teaching profession.'

This understanding has underpinned the work we have been doing and our theory of action, which has at its core, building teacher capacity, collaboratively and using evidence of student achievement to inform practice.

The second is that, 'successful system have come to trust and respect teachers.' Trust first and then build competencies instead of building competencies and hoping to gain the respect of teachers. It's about putting people before process. This is the one governments and systems often get so wrong. In their short-sighted haste to "lift standards", they ignore the people who will be doing the work – teachers.

Teachers need to know they are valued and are capable of improving their practice and lifting student achievement if they are supported with sensible, long-term strategies that engage them directly in the process of improvement.

The third point brings into sharp focus for me the issue of where technology and its increasing use in schooling fits. To quote Michael: "Ever since the laptop emerged almost 40 years ago technology has been winning the race over pedagogy: technology gets better, while instruction doesn't." He goes on to say that "no country has become good for using technology at the front."

There is no mention in our theory of action of technology and this is deliberate. Technology, like the pencil and paper, are tools for good teachers in improving student learning. These tools need to be used within the context of a sound pedagogical framework and good practice.

As Michael observes "without pedagogy in the lead technology may be driving us to distraction, with the child's digital world detached from the school world.....technology will be a dramatic accelerator if we can put instruction and skill, motivated teachers and students in the lead."

The focus of improving schools and systems must as Michael says be on student-learning and teacher-learning. It must be done in a culture of trust and it must foster the motivation and build on the capabilities of all teachers and students. There are no short-cuts or magic bullets.

In addition, it is the responsibility of every member of the learning community to support, encourage and provide opportunities for continual improvement.

Moving forward 2011-06-28

I had the opportunity of visiting Northern Beaches Christian School last week and spent almost three hours with the principal, Stephen Harris and his leadership team. You could not find a team of professionals more committed to improving the learning for the young people in their care. The school runs a range of programs and research projects through the Sydney Centre for Innovation in Learning (SCIL) to challenge thinking and transform professional practice.

Over the past few years, I've heard a lot about the school and it certainly meets all expectations. The focus is unashamedly on learning. Its members who learn and teach in various ways, share core goals, values and understanding. They work in collaborative partnership and share leadership functions. Relationships are supportive, structures are agile and adaptable and there is open dialogue and inquiry. Each member of the school community sees themselves as accountable to each other.

The design of learning spaces continues to evolve as their understanding of learners and pedagogy changes. It was rather remarkable to see the transformation of space and the reaction of learners to it. The school's captain, reflected on this.

The students that I spoke to want to feel at home when they are at school, they want their environments to support their learning. Stephen and his team are in continual dialogue with students about what they want from their schooling experience. It is evident that there is a collective ownership of the spaces and the learning.

For me, the success of the school is the encouragement and support for teachers to lead professional development not only within the school but with other like-minded schools. In this way they take responsibility for their own, and other colleagues, professional growth. It is this commitment to sharing resources, ideas, and experience that builds our profession and moves us from good to great. You see good theory in action as teachers de-privatise their practice and build capacity within an agreed evidence-based model.

You cannot help but be inspired and affirmed by what is happening at NBCS. What I have come to accept is that for every person that is against change, against pushing the boundary, against the idea of what might be possible, there are many others who are doing the work.

I saw a great quote on the wall in the library at NBCS – thought it was a powerful message for all of us.

A principal's perspective *2011-07-03*

As a follow up to the post on my recent visit to Northern Beaches Christian School, I have included the thoughts of principal, Stephen Harris on why they have embraced this learning agenda. Stephen redefines passion and vision and inspires both confidence and a spirit of innovation in the school community.

I believe we are building a critical mass of educators and leaders who are working from the same page; wanting to provide a contemporary, engaging and relevant schooling experience for every child. Teachers and leaders who understand that change is friend and not an enemy.

Stephen Harris shares his thoughts on what is driving their learning journey.

The danger of the hype 2011-07-12

A colleague recently emailed me a slick video on 21st century education. It certainly ticks all the boxes – clear message, simple design, emotive statements, catchy music. I was impressed but when I watched it again, I questioned whether we are succumbing to the hype of technology? Are we allowing ourselves to be distracted from the core work?

We know today's learners can collaborate, share and publish their work on the internet but are we simply skilling students to use the technology or are we challenging them with ever-rich and more complex experiences and opportunities to deepen insights?

As Michael Fullan writes, "Without pedagogy in the driver's seat there is growing evidence that technology is better at driving us to distraction...the notion that having a laptop computer or hand-held device for every student will make her or him smarter, or even more knowledgeable is pedagogically vapid."

He's right. It's easy to be seduced by the tools but it doesn't bring us any closer to answering the question of what it means to be a teacher in today's world. As we've seen throughout the history of schooling, tools change but the teacher is the constant. Good teachers have always started with each student, crafting experiences that challenge them. These relationships are built on mutual trust and respect.

Teachers in today's world need to be expert pedagogical designers who understand what tools are available and how these tools can support the learning. Good teachers have always been critical consumers of the next big thing – open to embracing the opportunities and finding ways of embedding the learning.

Videos like the aforementioned are useful in reminding us there is no more relevant a time to re-visit the key questions of what we do, why, how and for whom. Textbooks are becoming obsolete in today's world but so will schooling if we don't focus on improving instruction. That's the danger of the hype.

Tutoring: at what cost? 2011-07-16

This week it was revealed that the tutoring industry is worth a whopping \$6 billion. We've seen an exponential growth of the tutoring industry within the past five years but what impact is it having on the quality of our education system, our teachers and most importantly student learning?

The tutoring industry has certainly thrived in an age where there is an ever growing importance placed on external exams such as the HSC, School Certificate, Naplan and , most significantly, the entrance test for selective schools. Unfortunately, we tend to define quality education through narrow measures such as these.

If you can't afford the tutor, just drop into your local post office and pick up off the shelf the latest quick fix books for improving grammar, mastering numbers and so on.

Esther Han, an Australian educated student originally from Korea wrote in the SMH this week about the need for all students to have a broad, comprehensive education. Han argues that success should be multi-faceted and not limited to academic success. Although she praises aspects of the Korean education system, she criticises it's one dimensional focus on academic excellence and the detrimental affect on a students' overall well being.

I believe the tutoring industry weakens the profession because it creates hot-houses of specialist learning. The role of good teachers is to identify and respond to the needs of every student whether 'gifted' or with additional needs. The fact that parents are prepared to pay in excess of \$120 an hour for specialist tutors is a wake up call for the education system.

We need to be investing more in our teachers; developing their pedagogical skills and expertise to provide quality learning and teaching for our children, rather than increasingly outsourcing to tutors.

Professor Linda Darling-Hammond in the June edition of Professional Educator says it's about shifting the focus from quantity to quality in education, about teaching better, engaging students and preparing them for life, rather than teaching for tests and examinations.

Every child deserves a quality education delivered by highly competent teachers. Parents expect and today's world demands it but tutoring cannot be not a substitute for good schooling.

Bridging divides 2011-07-18

Next month, Professor Stephen Dinham from the Melbourne Graduate School of Education (MGSE) will deliver the 2011 Ann D Clark lecture. In 2008, I heard Steve Dinham speak at the Curriculum Corporation Conference in Melbourne and something he said struck a chord – you can have good classrooms without good leaders but you can't have good schools without good leaders.

What we need are good teachers in every space and good leaders in every school; that's why we are committed as a system to building teacher capability and leadership capacity. As Dinham states this is the best means for overcoming disadvantage and opening the doors of opportunities for every young person in Australia.

You cannot ignore the evidence although there are many within the profession who continue to defend their practice on the grounds of experience, ideology or personal preference. Are we a profession divided by ideology or united by a shared purpose?

George Packer writing in the New Yorker Magazine quotes the American sociologist Daniel Bell who makes this distinction between ideology and principle:

"Ideology makes it unnecessary for people to confront individual issues on their individual merits," the late Daniel Bell wrote. "One simply turns to the ideological vending machine, and out comes the prepared formulae." Ideology knows the answer before the question has been asked. Principles are something different: a set of values that have to be adapted to circumstances but not compromised away.

In his article 'Teachers Make a Difference', Dinham states that high quality educators use data in sophisticated ways; are critical consumers of educational research; defend the principles that underpin their practice and in the face of convincing evidence are prepared to change what they do.

I'd love to see the end of the anti-intellectualism which too often pervades the profession and excuses poor practice, so that we can focus on what the research and evidence shows makes a difference. In this way we build a robust professional practice which challenges and doesn't excuse.

If Steve Dinham's research can't convince the skeptics, what will?

Students are our best teachers 2011-07-28

John Hattie caused a stir when he gave advice to teachers to ‘just shut up’ at a conference last month in Parramatta. He said teachers need to stop spending their time talking and start listening. Stephen Covey in his *Seven Habits* talks about the need for empathetic listening and Daniel Pink recently reflected on the need for leaders to ‘talk less, listen more’.

This sentiment is picked up also in the work of Douglas Reeves and Andy Hargreaves who both make the point that too often, schooling is about adults and the way adults work than student learning.

Pink says that unlike technical skills, empathy is increasingly valued in a conceptual age and it needs to be increasingly valued in the learning environment. Empathy enables us to better understand our students, their perspective, how they learn and what engages them.

Beginning teachers participating in our system induction program recently had an opportunity to hear students voice their opinions on what helps them to learn effectively. Students were part of a panel where our teachers asked them a series of questions including: ‘what would you say to your teachers to help you to learn better?’; ‘tell us about a time when you found it easy to learn something?’; and ‘tell us about a time when it was difficult to learn something?’.

Some comments from the students were:

- wanting teachers with a sense of humour
- teachers having good control but also challenging students
- teachers being good listeners and giving students scope for input
- developing appropriate relationships
- getting to know and caring for the students

Our beginning teachers found the experience extremely helpful.

If we are serious about personalising learning for every student, then we need to heed the collective advice of Hattie, Pink and Covey et al. This commitment leads immediately to a recognition of individual differences in the backgrounds, abilities, interests and learning styles of each learner. It reinforces the importance of teachers listening and getting to know students as individual learners.

As Hattie says our job is to help teachers learn through the eyes of kids. Is the maxim for 21st century educators – talk less and listen more?

Succession management 2011-07-31

Dr Dean Fink was in Sydney last week as part of the Leading Educators Around the Planet (LEAP) program. Fink co-authored 'Sustainable Leadership' with Andy Hargreaves in 2005 and last year published 'The Succession Challenge'.

Leadership succession is a challenge faced by schools as well as business. Fink believes succession planning is too short-term. Rather, he talks about succession management, which is committed to developing teachers over a long period. For Fink, successful succession management involves strategies such as :

1. Building strong communities of professional practice
2. Establishing leadership development schools
3. Supporting and sponsoring aspiring leaders
4. Moderating and monitoring leadership succession frequency

There are a number of issues we need to address in moving from planning to management. The first is how we develop aspiring leaders and the other is dealing with underperforming leaders. Without good leaders leading, you cannot deepen the pool of competent teachers.

In the film *Waiting for Superman*, the approach to dealing with under performing leaders is referred to as the Dance of the Lemons. The consequences of poor leadership on students and school communities cannot be under-played or over-stated.

I believe part of the problem is redefining the role of a school leader. What message is being conveyed if more time is spent on running schools rather than leading schools? Perhaps all schools need to employ business managers to run schools and allow leaders to focus on building teacher capabilities and thus, deepening the pool of aspiring leaders.

We know good teaching makes a difference to student learning and good leadership make a difference to teacher learning. Fink believes we need to look at how we rethink notions of leadership in the 21st century to prepare and sustain newer generations of teachers to assume 'the mantle of educational leadership'.

A good look at Doug Reeves work on leading learning adds greatly to our thinking and understanding.

ADC 2011: the power of collective learning 2011-08-05

Last night's Ann D. Clark lecture delivered by Professor Stephen Dinham OAM was attended by over 800 leaders and teachers within our system, including colleagues from other dioceses, the Department of Education, the tertiary sector and the Board of Studies. Dinham raised a number of issues about the important work of teachers and how we should effectively recompense them.

As I mentioned in my opening remarks, the ADC lecture continues to provide a crucial, learning-based framework for our system. It is a concrete expression of our theory of action, which is demonstrated in the following ways. Firstly, it is about placing student learning at the centre of our work, influenced by good teachers who continually reflect and improve their practice. We refer to this as teacher learning. And secondly, it is about our commitment to our leaders' learning and our system learning.

We cannot underestimate the power of this collective learning experience – the opportunity to listen, reflect and learn. The ADC lecture is a quality demonstration of professional learning for our system. Professor Dinham continues on the themes that make a difference to the work we do – the simple, yet sophisticated philosophy of improving student learning by having good teachers teaching.

Dinham said the ultimate aim is to have a quality teacher in every classroom but how to achieve this is the big challenge. NAPLAN is only a small part of the bigger picture in gathering evidence and data on effective learning.

Dinham gave some examples of what we see in successful classrooms:

- focus on the student * leadership that is inclusive * clinical practitioners that assess, diagnose, prescribe and evaluate * teachers who rethink the way they were taught * clusters of schools that come together for mutual betterment based on problem solving – collaborative focus * data not used for compliance but improvement * vision important but rest on evidence

On the timely issue of recompensing teachers, Dinham said we need a major renovation of teachers' salary and career structures to take us into the 21st century. Previous attempts such as merit pay have largely failed. Dinham proposes that recompensing teachers must be aligned with levels of achievement and competence, although this cannot be mandated.

I am pleased to see the 'conversation' continuing via Twitter (#ADC2011) allowing our colleagues around the globe to contribute to their own professional learning.

The 2011 ADC lecture serves as a reminder of the power of ongoing professional learning as a community of educators.

A sign of the time 2011-08-10

Thomas L Friedman, author and columnist for the New York Times was in Sydney last week for a ‘dialogue on global trends’. He has co-authored a book *That Used to Be Us* to be published soon.

In it, he identifies four major challenges for the US, which I believe are also applicable to Australia. These are adjusting to the IT revolution, adjusting to globalisation, managing chronic deficits and energy and climate.

As always, Friedman makes some astute observations about our world and America’s response to the rapid changes. When he wrote *The World is Flat* in 2004, there was no hint of Facebook, Twitter or the Cloud. Friedman says today’s world is no longer connected but *hyper-connected*.

Friedman contends that one of the solutions to the challenges facing America is education. Not the same industrial model of schooling where being average was OK but an education that strives for above average. According to Friedman, the age of average is over in this hyper-connected world of two billion aspiring citizens.

Technology has done many things including expanding the pool of employees. Employers can now select from a pool of above average candidates. Last year, there were seven million university graduates in China. What will separate them from the university graduates from Australia, America or Singapore? Their schooling experience. The prosperity of nations will depend according to Dan Pink on how well we develop our right brain aptitudes – critical thinking, creativity, empathy, story telling etc. The very things that education systems like ours haven’t made a priority.

According to Friedman, the countries that will succeed in a hyper-connected world are the ones he refers to as HIE – high imagination enabling countries. Everything in our global economy is a commodity except, he says, ideas. Ideas and innovation can’t be outsourced or automated – it is the new currency.

This and future generations of learners will be tasked with solving our global challenges. Challenges that our generation hasn’t been able to find creative solutions to. If active citizenship is one of the greatest responsibilities of today’s learners, then ours is to re-imagine schooling. It demands a courageous cultural and intellectual shift in the face of competing narratives and ideologies.

When we look back at our education systems in 10,15 or 20 years, will we say that used to be us or will we have responded imaginatively to the signs of the times? No matter where you go in the world the story is the same. The answers to what we need to do with schooling lies in the future and the decisions we make today.

There is no better example of this than what is unfolding in the US. Policy paralysis is the norm in Congress as both sides of politics refuse to understand that the game has changed. No longer can you defend a position on ideological grounds and maintain existing positions ie find the solutions they need to address the economic crisis they face.

While they show a singular lack of leadership, education policy stagnates and denies them the very thing they now need – an innovative, creative and imaginative schooling system with graduates who can both re-imagine and rethink the solutions to tomorrow’s challenge.

Listen to Friedman or ignore him at your peril!

Why the question is more important than the answer 2011-08-19

If education is essentially a search for meaning, then should our goal as teachers be to ask good questions even when there are no clear answers?

For decades, our education systems have been built around the transmission of knowledge from teacher to student. The prescribed curriculum provided one path through the maze and gave students few opportunities to learn through experimentation – to connect their own dots.

Young Joo Kim writes ‘when transmitting knowledge from the top becomes a dominant teaching practice, students develop a habit of mind that submits and conforms to ideas of others, rather than constructing their own views and thoughts on a subject.’ My colleague from the US, Marco Torres refers to it as the single layered classroom. One question, one pre-determined answer (see Ferris Bueller’s Day Off).

In the industrial model of schooling, the teacher might have had the answers but today, it is Google. In last weekend’s New York Times, Neal Gabler wrote:

We live in the much vaunted Age of Information. Courtesy of the Internet, we seem to have immediate access to anything that anyone could ever want to know. We are certainly the most informed generation in history, at least quantitatively. There are trillions upon trillions of bytes out there in the ether — so much to gather and to think about. > > And that’s just the point. In the past, we collected information not simply to know things. That was only the beginning. We also collected information to convert it into something larger than facts and ultimately more useful — into ideas that made sense of the information. We sought not just to apprehend the world but to truly comprehend it, which is the primary function of ideas. Great ideas explain the world and one another to us.

In Singapore, teachers don’t just want their students to comprehend the world but to recognise how they can change it. Many schools have introduced action-research. As one teacher quoted in *The Flat World and Education* “Action research is concerned with changing situations, not just interpreting them. . . the aim is not only to make students learn why the world works in a certain way, but rather what they can do to improve it.” (p187).

At the heart of action research, challenged based learning (CBL) and project based learning (PBL) are the guiding questions. Questions that may lead to those elusive big ideas.

Marco uses Nokia and Apple to illustrate this point. After dominating the mobile phone market for a decade, Nokia’s question was ‘how do we make better phones?’ Apple considered the challenge and asked ‘how do we help people have a more personal communication experience?’ One focussed on the product, the other on the user experience.

In many ways we have tied schooling to the product, content to knowledge, teaching to curriculum delivery and we have allowed the answer to shape the question.

When the profession is guided by good questions, the instructional core is strengthened and we move a few steps closer to wisdom.

The vocation of living 2011-08-24

There have been some wonderful highlights for me from the recent World Youth Day in Madrid. Many of the themes extend beyond religious and cultural divides. I thought the address by Adelaide Archbishop Philip Wilson last week to 3000 young Australians contained some powerful messages for educators.

The Archbishop spoke eloquently about the symbolism of icons and their historical significance over many centuries. He told the gathering that just as icons were a work in progress, so are we.

If each of us are indeed works in progress, then our learning must be life-long.

Dewey in his *Pedagogic Creed* argues that learning is a process that happens unconsciously almost at birth and continually shapes the individual's powers, forming his habits, training his ideas and arousing feelings and emotions.

Andy Hargreaves and Dennis Shirley write in *The Fourth Way: The Inspiring Future for Educational Change* that lifelong learning is not merely learning beyond school, throughout life, but also learning *about* life and *for* life.

This notion of lifelong learning has been further cemented by scientific discovery of the adaptability of our brain and how that enables us to continue learning well into old age called 'neuroplasticity'. We have an amazing capacity to learn and re-learn whenever we allow ourselves to engage in new experiences – the saying 'use or lose it' has never been truer.

The opportunities to learn and relearn have never been more pronounced than in today's world. Our ability to access information on a range of devices means we will live according to Will Richardson 'at a moment of ubiquitous learning.'

He says kids and adults of all ages, can learn 'what we want, when we want to, if we have the desire and connection. More and more of us are finding both.' A perfect example is Stanford University which had over 58,000 people sign up for an online *Artificial Intelligence* course.

John Dewey gives new meaning to the expression vocational education when he says "the dominant vocation of all human beings at all times is living – intellectual and moral growth. . . .the discovery of capacity and aptitude will be a constant process as long as growth continues."

As educators, we must recognise that we too are learners on the continuum; students of the vocation of living.

The bottom line of funding 2011-09-02

The Gonski review panel released four research reports for public comment ahead of its final report into new schooling funding arrangements due by the end of the year.

Funding of every student is critical to Australia's future. We need to make sure we get this right. Equity is at the centre of much of the deliberation as is the issue of student achievement.

It's interesting to look at the PISA 2010 survey, which ranked Shanghai, Korea, Hong Kong, Singapore, Finland, Canada, Japan and New Zealand as the top performing nations.

According to the latest figures, OECD countries spend an average of USD 94, 589 per student from primary through to secondary. It is interesting to note that both Australia and the United States spends more than the average yet under performs, while some other top performing nations spend well below the OECD average.

The claim that more funding is needed to deliver a world-class education is only true if it focuses on improving teacher practice. Funding acts to improve student performance only through its influence on the quality of teaching.

We know that quality teachers make the difference so if we are serious about equity, then our best resources are good teachers. If we have to pay good teachers accordingly to work in chronically disadvantaged schools, then that's an investment worth making.

The learning myth 2011-09-08

I've been giving some thought this week to some of the great myths of schooling and one of the greatest myths we need to dispel as a profession is "not every student can learn."

I have experienced a deep seated belief in some schools that certain students are simply not capable of learning, or learning what the teacher purports to know they need to learn. It is often reinforced by leaders and the industrial structures of schooling that both expect, and institutionalise failure for certain groups of students.

I often ask parents if they expected their child to walk and talk and their immediate response is yes. But when I ask them whether they taught them in 45 minute periods using a whiteboard or textbook, the answer is a resounding no. They learned to walk and talk by doing the walking and talking, trying things; being encouraged to retry and so on.

Parents work with what they have to 'tailor instruction', which is why John Dewey believed that school life should be a continuation of the activities of home life.

If ever there was an example to dispel this, it would be the story of Ramona Pierson. Not only is it a powerful message about resilience and courage but about our capacity as humans to learn and re-learn. I encourage you to listen to her remarkable story and work on TED.

What I found fascinating was that it wasn't a teacher who helped re-educate her but a group of senior citizens who came together in what Pierson refers to as 'radical collaboration' to teach her to speak and learn again. The group of seniors matched their skills and talents to her learning needs. We call it personalised learning and it was the catalyst for the incredible work she is doing now in education using data and algorithms to draw down just in time content and information for individual learners. It supports the view that there is no one size fits all model of schooling.

Pierson is using her science background and interest in data to understand the processes not the outcomes of learning. How do students learn, what modalities work best and what content is needed to build progressions?

Do we need to see a radical collaboration between science and teaching? Should we be working with scientists on how we can effectively personalise learning in today's world? We have the tools but do we need to reinforce the connections between the art and science of teaching?

In her TED interview, Pierson talks about a pilot in Indiana called 'The Power of You', in which three students whose learning outcomes were not improving were exposed to multiple approaches to learning. At the end of six weeks, the students returned to school and had caught up with the rest of the class. What was unprecedented was that the three students were able to tell their teachers which modalities worked best for them. The students were not only in control of their learning but they became confident learners in the process. Personalised learning is about giving power to the learner and that is a powerful lesson for all teachers.

The myth that 'not every student can learn' is well and truly busted; Ramona Pierson is living proof.

Crowdsourcing education 2011-09-13

Could students learn from strangers or learn from lessons created by people who are not teachers? Could your next best lesson come from an outside source, someone with knowledge but not organisational authority, and delivered to the student via the web.

If so, what would this mean to teachers and students? What would this mean for teaching and learning? These were interesting questions posed by Rob Jacobs around the possibility of crowdsourcing education.

Recently, social media innovator Tom Hulme spoke at a conference in Brisbane on the topic, in which he stated that crowdsourcing is not a new phenomenon and has been around since the industrial revolution. However, its popularity gained traction in 2006 thanks to journalist Jeff Howe and the internet. According to Howe, crowdsourcing happens when an organisation takes a job that was once performed by employees and outsources through an open call to an undefined audience of people.

Hulme says crowdsourcing has evolved from a mere transactional model to something much richer – the ability to open up and engage our ‘customers’ (or stakeholders) in the process of delivering our product or service. This means that instead of just being users of our product or service, the ‘customer’ can now have a meaningful input into ‘how’ the product or service is made or delivered.

If we transfer this idea into the education system – this has vast implications not only for how educators’ network, collaborate and learn but how we approach learning and teaching in today’s world.

In Jacobs’ blog he explains how a educator’s typical network use to look like this:

Alec Couros

Now in the 21st century, it looks more like this:

Alec Couros

Crowdsourcing has enabled the ability to collaborate in unprecedented ways. As Jacobs puts it:

The person is the portal to the network. The person is an autonomous communication and collaboration node. Each member can potentially leverage not only their network, but also the network of others who are in their network. This principle is known as Metcalfe’s Law. The number of potential connections between nodes grows more quickly than the number of nodes. The total value of the network where each node can reach every other node in the network grows with the square of the number of nodes. In other words, when members connect their networks, it creates more value than the sum of networks independently.

Director of the UK’s Innovation Unit, Valerie Hannon provides an example of a crowdsourced education model, which she calls a ‘learning eco-system’. This model has far greater connections with the professional and wider community.

In her research she came across an innovative web based organisation called ‘School of Everything’, founded on the principle that everyone has something to learn, and everyone has something to teach. The website connects up those who want to learn with those who want to teach. The SOE’s premise is that learning is personal and starts not with what ‘should’ be learned but what a person is interested in – so they build a tool to help anyone in the world learn anything, and teach anything, how and when it suits them, by putting them in touch with each other and not institutions.

This is but one example of the possibilities of how crowdsourced education can broaden the way we ‘do’ schooling today and into the future for the benefit of both students and teachers. It is an idea which cannot and should not be dismissed out of hand because it mentions “customer or stakeholders”.

As I have written previously schooling is no longer the centre of the education process, it is now but one option of many places to go to learn. The challenge is to explore how to best respond and be open to adapt in doing so

From I think to we know 2011-09-22

John Hattie observed that we often think our profession is defined by autonomy or the ‘let me do it my way approach’. The problem with autonomous practice is that it isn’t informed by data and evidence but by assumptions and ideology. Without looking at student data, we aren’t looking at the reality.

I came across an article a few months back in The Atlantic on Andreas Schleicher, a German scientist working for the OECD. According to the Atlantic, he is the ‘most influential education expert you’ve never heard of’.

Schleicher is a number-cruncher and one of the instigators behind the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA). His slogan is ‘without data, you are just another person with an opinion.’

We don’t just want teachers with opinions, we want teachers who use data to frame the right questions. Student data is not a judgment tool, it is a diagnostic tool in the same way doctors use blood tests. Doctors can make assumptions about a patient’s health but unless the assumptions are tested, you cannot diagnose and treat. It’s the same rigour that must be applied to the practice of teaching. The relational aspect of teaching will not be subverted by the use of data but enhanced by it.

As a profession, we need to move away from *I think* to *we know*. We know that using data to improve practice is fundamental to being a good school. We know that one of the most powerful ways of bring about improvements is teachers learning about and reflecting on their practice. Practice that is evidence based.

That’s the work of Helen Timperley and the inquiry model. Teachers looking at the learning needs of students using the data/feedback and then identifying what they need to know in order to improve the learning outcomes. It underscores the links between teacher learning and student learning. This is what gives us the sharper focus.

A recent report by the OECD highlighted a lack of knowledge among teachers ‘about how to interpret information on student performance, saying they are not adequately prepared in analysing student test results and using the data to improve their teaching.’ (The Australian, 18 August). Unfortunately, we get too many examples particularly in the media of the poor use of the ‘rank and order’ data that sheds little light on student learning or teacher practice.

Part of the reason why there is fear of evidence-based practice is that becomes an accountability measure for what teachers are or aren’t doing in classrooms. When teachers set ambiguous targets, you can’t measure progress so you can’t be held responsible for the learning outcomes. When teachers set ambitious and measurable targets for students, they have something tangible to work towards.

If we are to get serious about student data then we need to make this the focus of teacher training and teacher learning. When Schleicher analysed the PISA data he found a common thread across the best school systems: teacher training schools were made rigorous and selective, systems emphasised building the capacity of leaders and teachers above ‘reducing class sizes or equipping sports teams’ and once they had quality teachers and leaders in schools, they found ways of holding teachers accountable for the results while allowing creativity to flourish.

Four years ago, McKinsey released *How the World’s Most Improved School Systems Keep Getting Better*, observing that the quality of an education system cannot exceed the quality of its teachers (and leaders). I would also argue that no teacher can exceed the quality of the data.

Creativity crisis 2011-09-29

There has been a lot of discussion around the topic of creativity. Educators and society in general seem to agree on the importance of creativity – but do our schools provide a fertile ground for our teachers and students to develop and cultivate this attribute?

In Will Richardson's blog, he argues that on the whole schools do not do a very good job at cultivating creativity. He refers to behavioural therapist, Andrea Kuszewski's article *The Educational Value of Creative Disobedience* in which she argues that children are taught from a young age at school to pay attention, watch the teacher, imitate what the teacher does, stay in your seat, don't question authority, and receive praise. This, Kuszewski argues is not teaching children to think; we are teaching them to memorize – instead of encouraging them to innovate (or create), we expect them to follow the outline and adhere to rules.

Kuszewski refers to findings from researcher, Alison Gopnik who found that too much direct instruction—showing a child what to do, rather than letting him figure out the solution himself—can severely affect his ability and/or instinct to independently and creatively solve problems, or to explore multiple potential solutions.

America is experiencing a creativity crisis as noted in Richardson's blog and Thomas L Friedman's *That Used to be Us*. In Po Bronson and Ashley Merryman's article *The Creativity Crisis*, research is showing that students' creativity levels have been falling since 1990 – particularly among those from kindergarten through sixth grade.

According to Bronson and Merryman, American teachers are overwhelmed by curriculum standards and don't have room in the day for a creativity class. University of Georgia's Mark Runco calls this "art bias" – the age-old belief that the arts have a special claim to creativity is unfounded. The following paragraph taken from Bronson and Merryman's article highlights an important point about integrating creativity into the classroom.

Researchers say creativity should be taken out of the art room and put into homeroom. The argument that we can't teach creativity because kids already have too much to learn is a false trade-off. Creativity isn't about freedom from concrete facts. Rather, fact-finding and deep research are vital stages in the creative process. Scholars argue that current curriculum standards can still be met, if taught in a different way.

Earlier this year, Rupert Murdoch spoke at the G8 Forum about how there has been innovation and progress in all areas of life except education. He calls this a colossal failure of imagination. Murdoch provides a sobering example of how in every part of life, someone who woke up after a fifty-year nap would not recognise the world around him – except in education. Today's classroom looks almost exactly the same as it did in the Victorian age: a teacher standing in front with a textbook, a blackboard and a piece of chalk.

Rupert suggests that in order to excite the imagination of our students we need to use technology as the vehicle to personalise the learning experience. He makes the point that technology will never replace the teacher, but it can relieve the drudgery of teaching by taking advantage of the increasingly sophisticated analytics that will help teachers spend more time on things that make us all more human and more creative.

Ken Robinson's argues in *Out of Our Minds: Learning to be Creative* that contrary to popular belief, being creative is something that can be learnt, and not just for a select few. Creativity, according to Robinson is a step further on from imagination. Being creative is *doing* something – it's a process of putting your imagination to work. It is applied imagination.

The question is how can educators and students develop creative potential in schools?

Understanding the connection 2011-10-04

One of the things I enjoy about blogging and tweeting are the many thoughtful comments from contributors. It says something about the effort and generosity of spirit of teachers and leaders to contribute to the broader discussion and debate. I took the opportunity recently of inviting Carmel Crevola to write a post on bluyonder. Carmel is a leading expert on literacy and I am sure you'll find her contribution insightful and practical. I hope there is opportunity for others to share their ideas and expertise here.

Recently there has been a resurgence of talk by educators and the community about 'constructivist theory' as it applies to 'play-based' learning as a way to promote oral language development and thinking skills for those students in the early years of schooling. The terminology is used so loosely at times that it has prompted me to wonder about the depth of understanding of the theory behind the terms 'constructivist' and 'oral language'.

This post outlines some of my personal reflections around the constructivist theory of learning and my own beliefs, research and theory of oral language development and its role in thinking and comprehending.

Constructivism is not a specific pedagogy but a theory of learning developed by Piaget. According to Wikipedia, constructivism is a theory of learning based on the belief that humans generate knowledge and meaning from an interaction between their experiences and their ideas. Piaget called these systems of knowledge schemata. It has had an impact on learning theories and teaching practice in education for decades and is an underlying theme of many educational reform movements, such as this recent resurgence of 'play-based learning' and 'enquiry learning'.

One area of great concern for me over my 37 years as an educator and 23 of those years as a classroom teacher, has been with the false belief that the learner being physically active, or immersed in the learning = learning the skill, knowledge or concept. It worries me when I see teachers working hard to provide the interesting and relative activities and engaging environments and then believing that by placing the students in these active and dynamic situations that the learning (language development, for example) will happen for all and worse still, at the same rate. There seems to me to be a lack of understanding that in fact, if the requirements of the concept to be understood exceeds the available processing efficiency and working memory resources and oral language skills to allow the thinking to occur, then the concept is by definition not learnable (see working memory below).

Therefore, no matter how 'active' or 'immersed' a student is in a learning activity (play, project, discovery process etc), to actually learn, the student must operate in a learning environment that meets the developmental and individual learning constraints that are characteristic for the child's age and this child's possible deviations from his/ her age's norm. If this condition is not met, construction cannot occur.

Herein lies what I believe to be the current educational misconception (not unlike a prescription trap, Breakthrough Chapter 3) in many 'play-based' learning environments, just as it was in those classrooms that had static and the same for all learning centres.

I had an experience of this misunderstanding, in a Kindergarten/ Preparatory classroom recently, with a very effective and experienced teacher who was trying to implement a new mathematics program based on 'enquiry learning' theory. She had established an inviting learning environment and instigated an engaging problem for the students to explore in pairs and groups. She had grouped the students in a thoughtful manner so as to provide support through the participants in each group. She was very aware of the students for whom mathematics was challenging and had tried to simplify their task, but nevertheless, the task was the same for all students. They had concrete materials to work with, they had concise guidance, they had time allocated and open freedom to talk and move around as needed. The two little boys who were the most 'at risk' in this class were set to work together and with the classroom assistant. For the next 20 minutes the class (well not all, but I was too focused on the two struggling learners to comment fully on the other students) worked in their assigned groups and pairs talking and working to solve their problem.

These two little boys sat in a corner of the room and talked (in fact, that is questionable, but I will come back to this later) and played and were completely off task – mainly because they did not understand what the task was! The assistant and myself tried to articulate the task again and they tried to understand, but the lack of communication was obvious. The assistant then proceeded to do the problem solving, thinking work for them and laboriously had the boys record her ideas step-by-step and letter-by-letter. They boys were bored, off task, behaving inappropriately and learning absolutely nothing for the entire 20 minutes. The assistant worked hard-

asking the question (leading questions to get the right answer, because there were little options in this case), the boys, reluctantly answered (... sort of) but in fact, the whole experience had no learning or interest connection for them.

Were they unhappy being there? No.

Was the desire to have the students engaging in the 'enquiry learning' process wrong? No.

Was the one task that they were set to do a match for 'all students' in this class? No – how could it be?

I want you to consider this: Was it appropriate or not to set the whole class to do the same activity, then encouraging choice by allowing the students to decide how they were going to illustrate and explain their answer? (I will leave this for you to ponder) because I know that this scene is not unfamiliar to many or that this teacher is alone in her struggle to come to terms with what we mean by 'constructivist learning' and 'enquiry based learning' and 'play-based learning'. How do I know that to be a fact? I know this to be true because I see it and I am asked consistently by teachers to assist them in better understanding the connectivity.

What I know about this class and this teacher is that she did know her students starting points, but she failed to use that knowledge to make the 'enquiry' 'personalized' for all. I know that she believes that it is important to know each student's strengths and challenges and I know that she wants to personalize the learning, but she was lost in the lack of understanding how. Personalization is not achieved by allowing students to work in pairs or groups and to find answers to problems themselves and thus making it 'personalized'.

Personalizing the learning means knowing each students starting point and ensuring that the tasks assigned or allocated for choice are in fact aligned to their developmental stage and cognitive and linguistic ability at that point of time... the Zone of Proximal Development [ZPD] in action (Vygotsky).

The two little boys who were most at risk in mathematics were also most at risk in language development, both expressive and receptive. Their teacher knew this, she had spent the time to assess her class and to find their receptive language capacity on entering Kindergarten / Preparatory Grade. What she did not do was link this knowledge and align with the process of 'enquiry learning' and 'constructivist' theory.

If a student cannot understand the basic structures used by the adults to explain and set tasks and if they are not confident to try to articulate their thoughts, or even recognize that what is going on in their head is a thought, then how can they be expected to use language to explore their thinking? How can they have the thoughts to know what to say or what questions to ask of themselves or others if they have not come to school with this foundation strongly established?

Will these same students' thinking and problem solving ability develop by being 'immersed' in the complex structures used by my more able peers and the adults assisting them? Let me tell you right here and now – no it will not just develop. The Kindergarten/ Preparatory student who comes to school unable to follow a simple instruction is already at serious risk of failure. Put them in a language based (assumptions) classroom where they are immersed in talk all day long but do not have the specific small group and 1:1 focused instruction in the area of language use (not skill and drill techniques or grammar and phonics), then they are going to slip further and further behind.

The Oral Language developmental level of young learners is critical information that must be part of the repertoire of knowledge that teachers need to have if they are to venture into constructivism and if they are to facilitate powerful learning environments for all students. The receptive language ability of young students must not be taken for granted, we cannot assume that all those students that arrived in our classrooms this year and who will arrive next year have achieved the same level of language development.

You may say that you are very aware that this is not the case, and I believe that for most you are aware. But then I ask you: How are you making that judgment? Is it based on the expressive or productive language of the students? Or, is it based on their language backgrounds -the fact that they are ELL or ESL or EAL students? Have you taken into account their ability to hear and understand the structures of the language of instruction? Do you know where they are on the developmental continuum for receptive language (listening) as opposed to productive language (speaking)? Have you explored the area of neurological development that is linked to problem solving and critical thinking: language development. Does the term 'working memory' mean anything to you? Do you understand that there is an entire section of receptive language development that is the foundation for problem solving and comprehending? If we are to say that we are working for developing our students to be critical and analytical learners and that the play-based, enquiry approach is the way to allow them to construct

meaning, then we must have the knowledge about how language and thinking are connected.

‘Working Memory’ is the ability to actively hold information in the mind needed to do complex tasks such as reasoning, comprehension and learning. Working Memory tasks are those that require the goal-oriented active monitoring or manipulation of information or behaviors in the face of interfering processes and distractions. Think about that in the play-based active learning ‘enquiry-based’ learning classroom. How many of your students are at risk in their receptive language and their ability to question and challenge and clarify?

I wonder why those two little boys in the mathematics session struggled to understand the task and had absolutely no hope of connecting with the learning. The concept was by definition not learnable. How many of our students find themselves in this situation day after day, no matter what the content or what the year level? It is a constant challenge to provide focused instruction in a meaningful and purposeful environment.

Once again, I leave you with my thoughts, rather than providing a silver bullet. I hope you will connect and comment.

This is why I am always so grateful to the teachers who open their classrooms to me and allow me to join their journey, their successes and their challenges. Thank you one and all for giving me so much food for thought.

I look forward to your comments, thoughts and challenges. Isn’t it great to always have something more to learn about?

** Carmel Crevola is an independent international literacy consultant, author and researcher with 23 years of classroom experience. She works extensively in Australia, Canada, the UK, and the USA. Her focus is on helping systems align their assessment processes, instructional practices and instructional leadership at the school, district and system levels, with a particular interest in the role of oral language development on critical thinking and teacher instructional language. Carmel has recently launched her own blog where she writes about and engages in discussions around all aspects of learning. You can also find her on Twitter @carmelcrevola or on her Facebook page.*

Teachers at the centre 2011-10-13

Is student-centred learning a given when we are talking about schooling in today's world? Our system's theory of action has the student at the centre but in recent times, I have begun to rethink whether the teacher should be at the centre. Without good teachers and leaders at the centre, can you improve the learning outcomes of every student?

A few weeks back I caught a TED talk by Geoff Mulgan about a new model of school called the 'Studio School', which aims to reach disengaged teenagers who didn't see any relationship between what they learnt at school and future jobs. The key features of 'Studio Schools' include smaller class size, curriculum centred on real life practical experiences, coaches in addition to teachers and timetables much more like a work environment in a business. The underlying principle of this model of schooling is based on the idea that a large portion of teenagers learn best by working in teams and by undertaking real-world activities. The result was that student performance improved significantly.

The Studio School is one example of the innovations taking place in education today, centred of course around the learner. But good teaching is the other ingredient in this and I wonder whether we are over-compensating for the deficiencies of an industrial model by not focusing enough on the quality of teaching and the role of the teacher.

We have tangible examples where investment in learning at every stage of a teacher's careers is having an impact on the quality of learning. Linda Darling-Hammond states that in Singapore, teacher education is a serious investment throughout a career. Darling-Hammond writes in *The Flat World and Education* 'to get the best teachers, students from the top one-third of each graduating high school class are recruited into a fully paid 4-year undergraduate teacher education program, and immediately put on the ministry's payroll. When they enter teaching, they earn as much as or more than beginning engineers, accountants, lawyers and doctors who are in civil service. . . during the course of their preparation, there is a focus on learning to use problem-based and inquiry learning, on developing collaboration, and on addressing a range of learning styles in the classroom.'

Countries that have invested in improving teacher quality have seen the largest gains in student achievement according to a recent article by William J. Bushaw and Shane J. Lopez in the Phi Delta Kappan Journal. Their finding was based on the conclusion reached by educators who participated in the International Summit on the Teaching profession hosted by the U.S. Secretary of Education, Arne Duncan and data from the latest PDK/Gallup poll which surveyed over 1,000 people about their views on public education.

Andy Hargreaves and Dennis Shirley in *The Fourth Way: The Inspirational Future for Educational Change* also concur that high quality learning is dependent on highly qualified teachers and teaching. Finland controls teacher quality at the point of entry. They get high-quality teachers and know how to keep them by giving teachers' professional status, support and considerable autonomy.

The New York Times featured Relay Graduate School of Education which has no campus, no lectures and graduate students mentored primarily at the schools they teach. The president of Relay, Norman Atkins, claims that vastly improving teacher education is critical in fixing the failure of America's public education.

We know that good teachers always put their students at the centre and good teaching is what makes the difference. Perhaps our theory of action requires a rethink or a tweak so that this relationship is clear. This understanding puts to rest the proposition that you don't need teachers in an online connected world.

Schools desperately need good teachers now more than ever. Invest in teachers and you'll see dramatic improvements in student achievement.

Logical song 2011-10-26

I tweeted this week about finding direction in the strangest places. I never really thought about the lyrics to Supertramp's Logical Song until I heard it on the radio recently but I wondered whether it is in fact a commentary on the industrial model of schooling.

Interestingly, the song was released six months before Pink Floyd's *Another Brick in the Wall*.

For me, it seems to capture the aspirations of the past (John Dewey's pedagogical creed) and the present (Sir Ken Robinson). Voices from different times, representing a unified plea for schooling that is not mechanical and linear but social, organic and 'magical'.

The Logical Song *written by: Richard Davies, Roger Hodgson*

When I was young, it seemed that life was so wonderful, a miracle, oh it was beautiful, magical. And all the birds in the trees, well they'd be singing so happily, joyfully, playfully watching me.

But then they send me away to teach me how to be sensible, logical, responsible, practical. And they showed me a world where I could be so dependable, clinical, intellectual, cynical.

There are times when all the world's asleep, the questions run too deep for such a simple man. Won't you please, please tell me what we've learned I know it sounds absurd but please tell me who I am.

Now watch what you say or they'll be calling you a radical, liberal, fanatical, criminal. Won't you sign up your name, we'd like to feel you're acceptable, respectable, presentable, a vegetable!

At night, when all the world's asleep, the questions run so deep for such a simple man. Won't you please, please tell me what we've learned I know it sounds absurd but please tell me who I am.

Touching the future 2011-10-31

Last Friday, Australia celebrated World Teachers' Day. As much as it is important for us to acknowledge the work of teachers, I still believe teachers themselves are the best advocates for their profession. There is much good work happening every day in classrooms around the country and too often we never hear about.

Teachers are often reluctant to promote themselves or their colleagues but as more teachers share their practice and wisdom via traditional channels and now social media, we begin to build a stronger and more skilled profession which is esteemed by the wider community.

Finland for example became an educational leader because they made teaching the most highly esteemed profession – not the most highly paid but the most highly sought after.

In celebrating World Teachers' Day, I thought I'd ask Rosana Ingrati from St Canice's Primary School Katoomba to reflect on what teaching means to her.

Why did you become a teacher?

I have been a teacher now for around 17 years. I chose to become a teacher because I wanted to make a difference to the greater community, and make a difference to our future generation. I also love working with children, and find they are so much fun to be around.

What it means for you to be in the role?

I feel responsible to continually learn about the changes in technology and teaching practices. I work in a Catholic school so I also feel responsible to help the children grow socially and morally, as well as academically.

What challenges and opportunities do you experience?

I think keeping up with the pace of change in technology has been both a challenge and opportunity. The other thing I find challenging is finding the time to put all the excellent professional training into practice and to be able to read all the great resources I am given.

I think this is also an opportunity because it means there is so much room for professional development as a teacher.

What do you find most rewarding?

Making an impact in the lives of the children is most rewarding. I think of one story of a boy I am teaching who waited until all the other children had left the class to specially thank me for teaching him about a lesson on 'time'. It is so nice to be appreciated like that.

I also love that I am a valued member of the whole school community, and know that the parents, colleagues and children appreciate what I (and other teachers) do.

I'm always mindful of Christa McAuliffe, the teacher on board the Challenger space shuttle who when asked about her career said 'I touch the future, I teach.'

Teachers have significant responsibilities and they need to be proud of the work they do. This doesn't mean we shouldn't be reflective and open to change. They are not opposites, they are different sides of the same coin. As a society, we need to recognise the valuable contribution made by teachers everywhere because without them we don't have a future.

Brick houses to huts 2011-11-02

Thomas L Friedman writes that if Singapore has one thing to teach America, it is about relentlessly asking – what world are we living in and how do we adapt to thrive? “We’re like someone living in a hut without any insulation,” explained Tan Kong Yam, an economist. “We feel every change in the wind or the temperature and have to adapt. You Americans are still living in a brick house with central heating and don’t have to be so responsive.”

How do schools adapt and thrive in today’s world when we are living in uncertain times? In Europe, leaders are in the throes of avoiding economic collapse. Our Prime Minister is hoping to build consensus among Commonwealth nations for a new global financial model. It’s time to think and do differently.

I wonder what would happen to the future of schooling if there was an across the board reduction in expenditure of 10 per cent? What would our response if there was another GFC? We can’t assume everything will stay the same or even expect gradual increases in education funding. And simplistic reforms like cutting staff or reducing class sizes would only work in the short term and do nothing to ensure viability in the long term.

Karen Hawley Miles in Phi Delta Kappan Journal has written about strategies to create higher-performing schools during these challenging economic times. Miles argues that instead of doing less with less during these fiscally challenging times, we need to think outside traditional costs structures and better align the use of people, time, and dollars with vision for the future.

Miles states that powerful transformation needs to happen in schools in order to thrive during these times, and she makes a case for linking priorities to restructuring resources in ways that can reduce spending in the short term while moving toward a new long-term vision. Miles lists seven key strategies for restructuring to free unproductive resources and at the same time move toward higher-performing designs for schools and systems. These are:

1. Restructure one-size-fits-all teacher compensation and job restructure to foster individual and team effectiveness and professional growth
2. Rethink the standardised class-size model to target individual attention
3. Optimise existing time to meet student and teacher needs and extend where needed
4. Redirect special education spending to early intervention and targeted individual attention for all students
5. Maximise use of buildings and land
6. Invest to support and develop leadership
7. Leverage outside partners and technology to maintain or improve quality at lower cost

The shift from brick houses to huts and beyond is inevitable. Until then, our education systems are going to have to heed a common sense approach of doing things very differently. We need leaders who understand the past, can work with the constraints of the present and have the courage to imagine different futures.

What should we be doing now to support these leaders?

Our biggest investment 2011-11-09

I caught an interview on CNN with Bill Gates reflecting on what he would do to change the education system in America. Gates said if he could change something about the system, he would 'hire the best teachers' and get them to learn from each other because the research on the influence of good teaching has 'become our biggest investment'.

One of the biggest investments we can make is mentoring our beginning teachers. It's an investment that needs to be shared by universities and school systems alike. It requires us to move away from 'training teachers' to taking them on a learning journey.

As soon as students enrol in education courses, they should be placed with teacher mentors and given every opportunity to practice the craft and to learn from experienced teachers. Malcolm Gladwell in his book *The Outliers: The Story of Success* found the key to success in any field is, to a large extent, a matter of practicing a specific task for a total of around 10,000 hours. Teachers learn to do the work by doing the work.

You can't blame the universities because it requires a complete overhaul of the model and I'm not sure whether we are all on the same page yet. Linda Darling-Hammond writes in *The Flat World and Education* that in Singapore, teacher education programs were overhauled in 2001 to increase teachers' pedagogical knowledge and skills, on top of their content preparation. Darling-Hammond states that practicum training was expanded and located in a new 'school partnership' model that engaged schools more proactively in supporting trainees.

Darling-Hammond points out that all the successful teacher education programs she studied develop new teachers who can teach with assurance and skill of more experienced, thoughtful veterans. The programs that are effective do this by creating a tightly coherent set of learning experiences, grounded in a strong, research-based vision of good teaching, and represented both in coursework and clinical placements where candidates can see good teaching modelled and enacted.

The New York Times reported on a new model of teacher education at the Relay Graduate School of Education which has no courses only 60 modules, each focused on a different teaching technique. According to the article, there is no campus, because it is old-think to believe a building makes a school. Instead, the graduate students will be mentored primarily at the schools where they teach. And there are no lectures and direct instruction does not take longer than 15 or 20 minutes at a time. After that, students discuss ideas with one another or reflect on their own.

This year, we began a partnership with the Catholic Schools Office Broken Bay diocese and Auckland University to start a mentoring program for beginning and experienced principals. The program focuses on public coaching and feedback designed to embed and sustain their skill set. The first cohort consisted of five beginning principals and ten experienced principals who entered into an intensive professional learning program which includes participation in workshops, in school and shadow visits, practising in teams and homework.

The more mentors we have in schools, the smoother the transition for beginning teachers and the quicker they move from routine expertise to adaptive expertise.

Does it really make a difference? 2011-11-14

The Federal Government has invested \$2.4 billion on the integration of ICT into schools. This is in addition to money our education systems have invested in meeting technology demands in schools.

My colleague, Dan Haesler wrote a good opinion piece today on the role of technology and I am the first to acknowledge that technology is a powerful tool in enabling powerful pedagogies and facilitating learning and ideas among teachers.

But what I want to know is are these tools making a difference to the quality of learning and teaching? Have our students become more reflective, creative, innovative, inquisitive, empathic as a result? Are they more literate and numerate? Where is the data and importantly, what is the catalyst for re-imagining schooling – pedagogy or technology?

I came across two articles recently that reflect opposite ends of the spectrum – one in the Wall Street Journal on virtual schooling and the other in the New York Times on the Waldorf School of the Peninsula. Waldorf's mission is to 'awaken children to their own individuality and unfold their higher capacities of thinking, feeling and willing.' And it's not extended by technology but pedagogy. Teachers help develop learners, technology helps develop skills.

As Will Richardson writes:

We [teachers] have to be about the thing that technology cannot and will not be able to do, and that's care deeply for our kids as humans, help them develop passions to learn, solve problems that are uniquely important to them, understand beauty and meaning in the world, help them play and create and apply knowledge in ways that add to the richness of life, and develop empathy and deep contextual understanding of the world. And more.

There is a lot to discern but we must be honest in asking whether the tools are supporting the learning and the teacher or whether the learning is supporting the tools. Are we really investing where it counts?

The change gap 2011-11-16

Last week I attended a “learning and leading conversations” workshop at Ravenswood School for Girls with Canadian educator George Couros. George and his brother Alec have developed a significant professional learning network on Twitter and it was good to see the physical and virtual connections converging. The more this happens, the greater the drive for principals and teachers to become a part of it and learn from it. George shared this open letter to educators – very Bueller-esque.

We spent the day working in groups on some of the big questions such as what would we change about schools/classrooms? There wouldn’t have been anyone in the room who wasn’t convinced that schooling needs to change. But in my experience, it often falls over in the next stage when people go back as lone change agents.

This is the change gap. Too often the “change gap” terrifies people and they respond with inertia or take the first up solution. I see the change gap as a great opportunity to focus discussion and collaboration. I think this is why Twitter and other social networking tools are becoming a critical part of teachers’ learning. The change gap could become our wikipedia experience. A place where we invite the wisdom of the community to help us work through the complex processes of schooling. It will also help build a culture that says we’ll find ways forward when we listen to the voices around the education table be it here or around the world.

Make learning the work 2011-11-21

Our system has been very fortunate to have been working with Michael Fullan over a period of five years. Given Fullan's vast experience and the demands on his time, it never ceases to amaze me how generous he is with his time when he is present. To sit around the table and explore issues in depth is a privilege we don't take lightly. It is perhaps at these times that we get some real depth in our own professional learning. I don't think we can ever take these opportunities for granted and I hope in some small way this post is a way of sharing Fullan's thinking.

Fullan spent time explaining how the moral imperative (raising the bar and closing the gap for all students) can be realised. For us, the moral imperative is giving every child the best possible schooling we can provide as a developed nation and this schooling is embedded in our Catholic faith and traditions.

As Fullan says:

'This work is driven by the moral imperative by raising the bar and closing the gap for all students, and doing so for the whole system – not just for some schools, but for all students; not just for some districts but all districts; and not just a one level but all levels. We call this 'whole system reform'.

In sum, the big difference between effective and ineffective school systems – and all organisations for that matter – is the 'collaborative or shared depth of understanding among members about the nature of their work'. You can't get collective depth from a workshop, or from episodic team meetings. You can only get shared depth one-way – making learning the day-to-day work.'

Realising the moral imperative is about recognising the right and wrong drivers for change. Fullan explained that professional development is a commonly confused wrong driver. This happens when educators attend workshops, conferences and take courses, which bears little relationship to classroom and school improvement. Instead, the right driver should be 'professional learning' – the learning that happens 'in between workshops' on a day to day basis with school communities. Learning becomes the work of teachers and students.

Other 'wrong drivers' include teacher appraisal, merit pay and leadership competency frameworks. Wrong in so much as they do not tackle the day to day culture within schools and systems. Fullan says the right drivers: capacity building, group work, pedagogy and 'systemness' are effective because they work on changing the culture of school systems whereas the wrong drivers focus on changing the structure. One works on the internal, the other on the external.

As we know, real change comes from the core – from teachers and leaders working collaboratively; critically reflecting on practice to improve student learning outcomes. Every teacher and leader has a responsibility not only to their own school community but to the system. One for all; all for one – the moral imperative in action.

Precision 2011-11-28

When Michael Fullan was here two weeks ago, he spent his second day in discussion with our leadership team on how we can get greater precision in our work. He suggested three key areas as a next step: the coordination of the message across the system, the coordination of work across the networks and a strong instructional focus on literacy and maths.

According to Fullan, the last area is about getting specificity and depth and precision in the instruction. You see this when principals work inside and outside of their school, teachers work collaboratively and schools see themselves as something bigger. Building success across the system builds momentum.

Fullan also mentioned the importance of social capital in school improvement and whole system reform. He explained that social capital is essentially the quality of relationships in a group focussed on the work. The example Fullan uses is the sports team that is committed to each other and works cohesively actually beating the team with greater individual talent but which lacks cohesion and social capital.

The work of school principals is to help build the social capital in their own learning communities while systems support the creation of professional learning communities across networks. It is the development of a “peer culture”, linking into bigger networks where everyone is focused on improving student learning outcomes.

As Jim Collins says it’s not the destination but the journey that gets you from good to great. In many respects, Fullan has become our coach – helping to change our own instructional practice in order to become a high performing system.

Hitting home runs 2011-12-05

I've just finished reading Michael Lewis' *Moneyball*, which has been made into a movie starring Brad Pitt and Philip Seymour Hoffman.

Finding insight in different places often provides a new perspective on the work we do. For me, the commonality was the desire to build a high performing baseball team and the desire to build a high performing school, district or system.

The book is based on the exploits of former major league baseball player and general manager of the Oakland As, Billy Beane. Beane faces the unenviable task of trying to build a successful baseball team within ever increasing financial constraints and greater expectations by fans. The tried and true method of drafting players rested with talent scouts who would scour the country identifying players based on personal perception and experience. Beane decides they need to do something differently to turnaround the team and enlists the help of a statistician who has no baseball experience.

Surprised by the amount of data that was either unused or previously unanalysed, Beane and his statistician begin analysing player by player. And like all good Hollywood scripts, the team begins to improve because Beane had the courage to challenge the prevailing culture, to use evidence to support the decision making process, to put the best players where they would make a difference and to question the existing paradigm. If the Oakland As was a case study in education, Michael Fullan would refer to this as a turnaround school. While Beane didn't dismiss the wisdom of the crowd (the talent scouts), he sought to get the best results using evidence and experience.

What are the lessons we can learn from the Oakland As? Are we hitting home runs for our school communities?

Art of teaching 2011-12-12

Over the course of the year I have written about a range of issues but the central theme has been about learning and teaching in a contemporary and connected world. The more I write about this, the more I recognise that improving student learning is about improving teacher quality. It's not pie in the sky stuff, it's achievable when we get teachers working and learning together, opening their practice up to critical reflection and setting high benchmarks for themselves and their students.

I know this has been the road less travelled in our profession for the past hundred years and I suppose it can be difficult to imagine how teacher practice could change. Opening your teaching up to comment is a huge risk but when done in the spirit of continuous improvement, the rewards are great.

I am fortunate to be able to see this in practice when I visit schools. When I hear teachers talking about Helen Timperley's inquiry cycle as a framework for reflection, it not only changes practice but culture.

Recently, I was asked to view the art work of students at Caroline Chisholm, Glenmore Park. These students are being taught by teachers who are part of a professional learning community committed to improving their own and their students' learning. I know I often say I was wowed by student work but I don't think I can capture the standard here in words.

What is impressive is that the art teachers expect their Year 10 students to produce Year 12 quality work – and they do. By the time this cohort gets to Year 12, the standard is extraordinary. Out of a class of 30 this year, 10 were nominated for the NSW Art Express and 7 have been chosen to exhibit. The teachers are charting the progress of their students from Year 7 through to Year 12.

I spoke to several of the students who acknowledged their teachers and were supportive of the stretch their teachers provided. The teachers didn't think their practice was out of the ordinary and this is when you know you there's been a cultural change.

Learning Conversations Caroline Chisholm

It's a great base from which to build and I look forward to continuing the learning conversations with teachers and leaders next year.

Lessons from Ramona 2011-12-16

Ramona Pierson is a remarkable woman. I have blogged about her after seeing her speak at TED. She has an incredible story and it's a lesson about the power of learning. I recently shared the stage with her at the !dea11 conference in Melbourne. It was a privilege to be able to speak with somebody who is committed to better understanding how people learn. By a strange twist of fate, Ramona's accident enabled her to ask a simple question yet it has such deep implications for our work as educators. That question is 'how do people learn best?' Once we understand this, we can maximise opportunities for learners and teachers.

I don't know about you but I admire people who can simplify the complex and that's not to say that what Ramona does is simple. What she is doing is finding practical solutions to empower students and enable students.

Looking back on 2011 *2011-12-23*

Earlier this week I had the privilege of attending a graduation ceremony at The University of Notre Dame and witnessed 100 young student teachers graduate. Other than feeling very old, I was amazed by their enthusiasm and energy which was clearly evident in their demeanour. To see this gave me great hope in the future of the profession and it caused me to reflect on how professionally rewarding the past year has been.

I hear a lot of talk about the pace of change and how we are living in a fast paced world. To this I say welcome to the 21st century and all the marvelous opportunities that change brings not only to how we live and work but how we learn. In the past twelve months I have seen great innovation in the schools I have visited, and I am increasingly astounded by, much of the contemporary practices happening in schools that is based on sound education theory and practice.

I believe we are at the tipping point of wide scale change. I see teachers talking, working and sharing their practice in physical and virtual spaces. This is about leaders and teachers taking control of their learning and harnessing a range of tools. Our principals' masterclass this year was one example of how communities are building the collective wisdom and expertise to not only improve one class or one school but entire systems. What started as a sharing opportunity for leaders has now morphed into a professional learning community.

All of this influences what happens in the learning spaces between teachers and students. I think of the remarkable story of one of our students who was labelled as 'special needs' throughout most of her school life. But through the dedication of her teachers and her school, produced the most remarkable HSC artwork, which will be featuring in the ArtExpress exhibition.

I think of my visit to a group of kindergarten students, and how I sat with them so they could teach me how to use an Ipad. I was talking to a colleague who shared a story about how she caught a photo of her four year old daughter with two other four year friends all sitting down in a row playing quite comfortably with their dad's smartphone. This is probably not an uncommon scene these days, and is a snapshot of how early on our children are exposed to technology.

What stands out for me is how comfortable our children are with whatever new gadget comes their way, how much they embrace it and how they are making the most of it. We simply cannot ignore the capacity of technology and if we do so, it is to our peril.

I think of all the Building the Education Revolution (BER) projects which have taken place across many schools and how the investment has provided so much value, pride, joy and gratitude for our school communities. It reminds us of how important the learning environment is and how it must always respond to the needs and interests of today's learners and teachers not last century's.

As this is my last blog post for the year, I would like to thank all my contributors who have written posts and made insightful and valuable comments. Thank you for being part of the learning conversations and I look forward to many more in 2012. Crowdsourcing is the learning tool of the future.

In the meantime, have a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year.

2012 Writings

The next big thing 2012-01-06

I think many people over forty have a problem with technology and the older you are the more technology seems difficult to understand. We always seem to be playing catch up as the NBT (next big thing) hits the market. New and converging technologies appear and we often feel powerless in the face of the tsunami of technological innovation. We look at the shiny new device and note immediately that it is smaller and much faster than its predecessors; does more things or claims; looks sexier and is relatively cheap. How can any of us keep up with this relentless innovation and development cycle?

Spare a thought then for schools. They face an enormous challenge in providing the most appropriate technologies for students and teachers. The struggle to stay current is taxing and exhausting and the probability of poor decision making is high. For the past twenty years school leaders have struggled with the challenges of providing a range of ICT tools for their learning communities.

But is this where we should be focussing all of our energies?

Over the Christmas break, I read Steve Jobs' biography by Walter Isaacson. This is a warts and all account of his life and achievements and well worth the read. One thing really struck me though as I read the book and it was something that Jobs himself came to understand in the early part of this century. He had spent his entire life pushing the boundaries of technologies – the relentless quest to build a better computer and a successful company – Apple.

In early 2000 Jobs decided to delete the word “computers” from the company name because he realized that Apple was not in fact, a technology company, it was a “lifestyle” company. Apple technologies had begun to revolutionise the way people live work and play. iTunes, iPhoto. iMovie and most importantly iTunes were reshaping the music, movie and the publishing industries. The old ways were gone and vanished quickly. All the technology did was to enable this change to take place.

If you want further evidence of this seismic shift pay attention to car advertisements. You can now personalise your car, it can match your moods or the “other you” as one car company claims. The car is incidental, it is the lifestyle that is more important. Notice how other tech companies like Apple and ACER are dropping the direct reference to computers in their names. The technology has become invisible – it's how you use it that is significant.

And the ones who really understand the shift that has taken place are young people. Technology has allowed them to live their lives very differently to previous generations. Technology allows them to express who they are, how they learn and how they communicate.

Before the arrival of Facebook, Twitter and IM, school was the place to socialise while learning. What is school to young people today, does it offer the same level of opportunities and engagement for self-expression and independent learning? Do young people see school as an integral part of their lives or is there an alternative? And is school just another aspect of their lifestyle?

As we prepare for another school year, perhaps we need to be thinking about making schooling the next big thing for today's learners.

The future is already here 2012-01-12

In 2003, William Gibson was quoted in The Economist stating ‘the future is already here’. That was eight years ago and look how far technology has brought us.

Towards the end of last year, I read an article about Apple’s plan to allow television to be delivered over the internet in such a way that we may all have one in our living rooms very soon. Although still in its infancy, this type of technology called internet television (ITV) already exists. Two of the best current examples are ABC’s free iView and the BBC’s iPlayer subscription service, which are available in Australia and many other countries.

There’s no doubt that Apple will develop something that will revolutionise the way we traditionally understand the ‘television set’ – just as they transformed the way we use our mobile phones (through iPhones), tablet computers (through iPads) and music (through iTunes). This signals the end of the ‘television set’ as we have come to know and love it.

For those digital refugees out there, I’ve been reflecting on the things that we have grown up but are becoming passe and why:

1. Letterboxes (people relying on email/text/twitter)
2. Fixed phone lines (everybody has a mobile phone)
3. Retirement (people are continuing to work with computers/laptops blurring the line between work and leisure time, and not needing to be in the ‘office’ to be working)
4. Login (turning phone on and all the information is there)
5. Car keys (sensor locks)
6. Wallets (credit card details can be on the iphone, as well as virtual cash)
7. Television sets (replaced by ipad/iphone/computers/ Internet television ITV)
8. Job certainty (globalisation)
9. Diaries (iphones)
10. Cash (ATM’s, credit cards)
11. DVD, CD’s (replaced by ipads/laptops/computers/ITV)
12. Bricks and mortar schools (replaced by e-learning, distance education)
13. Retail shops (replaced by online shopping)
14. Post Office (virtual communications)

I hope we don’t see schools heading the same way.

The world students are growing up in is very different to the world we experienced. I think it’s important to reflect on this and how ubiquitous technology is in their lives. The things they use each day don’t disappear, they just become smaller, faster and more powerful.

Society seems to have been able to adapt to these changes, perhaps with a little nostalgic yearning for the good old days. We shouldn’t see these as threats but as opportunities to enhance our lives. It has to be the same for schools. ICT is only an extension of the teacher’s toolkit; it’s how we use the tools to support learning will determine students’ futures.

Can we still manage in a crowd sourced world? 2012-01-20

The post christmas wander through the bookshops is always enjoyable and you always pick up some great bargains. Fiction is always high on my agenda but I still browse the education, management and leadership sections looking at the latest trends. It is depressing to say that nothing really has changed except that the management paradigm no longer has a place in 21st century organisations. How many large and small organisations are still employing managers to 'control and command' staff and how many school leaders are still managing the business of schooling?

Ibarra and Hansen writing in the August 2011 Harvard Business Review said:

Research has consistently shown that diverse teams produce better results, provided they are well led. The ability to bring together people from different backgrounds, disciplines, cultures, and generations and leverage all they have to offer, therefore, is a must have for leaders. Yet many companies spend inordinate amounts of time, money, and energy attracting talented employees only to subject them to homogenizing processes that kill creativity.

What is interesting in a crowd-sourced and connected world is that we still believe in some form of social determinism that says only a few are capable of leading or that the more senior you are the better your ideas. The issue we all face is how organisations and school systems make the shift from controlling to influencing. It requires an understanding that every employee or teacher is a leader in their own right.

Just by being part of the team, learning community or organisation, they have an investment in how it performs. They accept responsibility and are accountability for their own performance as well as the teams. This supports a new way of working where all ideas are to be valued and where diversity is the norm. What does this say about how we view the work of teachers in today's world? How powerful would learning be if we applied the paradigm to the learning space?

Leadership is an expression of the power of the team on the learning space as it continually reshapes itself to address areas of need.

Can technology change teacher practice? 2012-01-30

I asked my colleague John Connell if he would consider writing a post in response to the question “can technology change teacher practice?” I had the opportunity to visit Scotland in 2010 and caught up with John and his colleagues to talk about how systems can build teacher capacity supported by technology. John writes a thought provoking blog drawing from his experience as a teacher, leader, policy analyst and now consultant for Cisco. He was instrumental in the development of the Scottish Schools Digital Network.

John’s reflections below provide food for thought as we embark on another school year. I thank him for his generosity in contributing to bluyonder.

“I started university in 2005 and had a completely different expectation of technology to that which I have today. Many applications are now so user-friendly, and I use many technologies on a daily basis. . . .I have changed from using technology for social use to using it for study too.”

The remarkable thing about these words from a young Students Union official at the University of Brighton, quoted in a JISC paper entitled ‘Emerging Practice in a Digital Age’ , is the timescale she alludes to. For someone like me, who has seen the world move from resolutely analogue to pervasively digital through the four decades of my teenage and adult years, the idea that a young person today can experience such tangible change in the space of just 5 or 6 years gives me pause for thought. And it ought to give every teacher pause for thought too.

The rapid technological transformation happening right now is only one reason for stopping to think; the other is that learners themselves are changing their own study practices in response to the developing technologies. And if students are changing their behaviour, then it is surely incumbent upon teachers to look closely too at how those changes might cause them to re-think their own teaching practices.

Teachers, I feel, need to think very carefully about how the technology itself can affect their pedagogy. I groan each time I see a trite phrase such as “It’s the teach, not the tech” or “Teaching first, technology second” or any of the seemingly infinite variants. I groan because it takes only a few seconds of logical thought and a modicum of historical perspective to see that they are quite meaningless, and no more meaningful than the converse (“It’s the tech, not the teach”).

You do not have to be a technological determinist to see that there is a necessary dialectical relationship between technology and pedagogy: if we succumb to the trite phrase, we will always start with what we want to teach and how, and then think of the technology that might help us achieve that. We might do something better, faster, more productively, but we will not do it differently, at least not in any fundamental way.

The digital and networking technologies carry with them a range of affordances that can have a profound effect on the way we teach, on the way we expect our students to learn, on the very nature of the relationships that operate between teacher and student, and the overall ‘lie of the land’ for teaching and learning.

The fundamental landscape for learning is shifting. John Seely-Brown would define the learning landscape as:

“... an environment that is consistent with (not antagonistic to) how learners learn. . . an open system, dynamic, interdependent, diverse, partially self-organizing, adaptive, and fragile. . . ”

How many teachers today would even recognize this description as a desirable goal? Not many as yet, I guess. But teachers do need to understand that learners, of all ages, are increasingly able to create or find their own learning pathways, learning what, when, how and with whom they choose. Learning is opening up, and teaching has to extend itself by keeping the best of what teaching has always been but augmenting it with the skills, knowledge, wisdom and understanding needed to empower and free the learner to learn most effectively in the connected learning landscape they find themselves in today.

A revolution in every classroom 2012-02-07

The ABC's Four Corners program last night 'A Revolution in the Classroom', was a genuine attempt to re-focus public attention away from the old public vs private school debate and on to the core challenges of schooling. I don't believe quality learning and teaching in public, private or independent schools is a revolution but rather a necessary requirement in today's world. While the program focussed on the results of Year 12 students at three diverse schools: Toronto High, Knox Grammar and Hume Central Secondary College, I believe we need to move beyond this industrial mindset that intelligence and good learning is defined by HSC or Naplan results.

While the program offered great insight and certainly opened up discussion, what didn't come across to the viewer was the critical role of the principal as an instructional leader nor is there a formulaic solution to improving the quality of schooling in schools. We know from the learning sciences that core is understanding learners in their contexts – what they bring, what they know and what they need to know using and analysing student data. The more we learn about learning and the more teachers learn about their students' learning, the more important and influential teaching becomes.

This is why the current debate on K-12 funding shouldn't be focussed on the haves/have nots or public vs private but on how we make continuous investment in the development of teachers at every stage of their career. If we do this then every school benefits because every school has a team of successful teachers. Last week Field Rickard, dean of education at Melbourne University wrote in the Australian:

If more effective teacher education programs (and professional development courses) are to be rolled out across the country, serious funding is required. Simply allocating more resources to education may be necessary but not sufficient for changing educational outcomes. A serious reconsideration of funding priorities is certainly called for.

As Rickard indicates we know with a degree of certainty that simply increasing school funding does not work as a school improvement strategy. There is no one system of schooling that can claim it has the mortgage to deliver quality outcomes for students. In a democracy such as ours, parents have a right to choice and students have a right to quality teachers.

In my address to our system leaders in January, I reiterated that as educators we know that effective teacher learning leads to changes in practice that positively influence student learning outcomes and we know from Viviane Robinson's research that the involvement of the leader is critical. We know from our work with Helen Timperley that we do this by continuous inquiry so that we are all continually learning. The inquiry process enables us to strengthen the bridge between knowing and doing; between standardisation and personalisation and between novice and expert.

Over the next two years, our strategic focus will be on 'Learning by Inquiring' – ensuring that teacher professional learning leads to changes in teacher practice and that changed practice leads to improved student learning outcomes for every child in every school.

The role of assessment *2012-02-13*

I attended the Pearsons Global Research Conference in Perth last month, which brought together educators from around the globe to discuss the role of technology and assessment in system wide improvement. In the past we have viewed assessment as a tool but there is a shift in viewing assessment as a tool for learning at system, school and student level. A 21st century curriculum requires a 21st century approach to assessment, that is, assessment that provides insight not only into student learning but informs teacher instruction.

In his paper 'Choosing the wrong drivers for whole system reform', Michael Fullan states that critical thinking and reasoning, problem solving, collaboration, communication, digital base learning and citizenship will become the 'new average' for the rest of the century. The challenge for us is not only how we design assessments that enable students to apply and -reapply 'the new average' to tasks in order to understand the process as much as the facts but how we use the data to create learning experiences that stretch learners' thinking. One of the key speakers was former adviser to Tony Blair and Chief Education Adviser to Pearsons, Sir Michael Barber who provided some suggestions on what we could be doing better.

What I realised after attending the conference was the depth of experience and research currently available on how we assess and report on student performance. While the focus was primarily on system level improvement, we are moving away from the one island approach to delivery on scale.

Flat world: fair funding 2012-02-19

Those of us working in education are eagerly awaiting the Government's initial response to the Gonski review of school funding on Monday. This will be the first major review of funding for schools since the 1970s, which is why it's such an emotionally charged issue for education systems and unions, and a hot potato for the Government.

From where I sit, the debate around school funding has divided rather than unified. Old battle lines between public vs private seem to have detracted from an intelligent discussion on how we can go about the business of improving student learning outcomes by ensuring quality teachers in every classroom.

Schools are as diverse as the students who attend them so we can't talk about private or public schools as if they were homogenous entities. Not every school has the same resource levels or teacher quality as its neighbour and we know that some public schools are in a much better financial state than non government schools.

Any discussion about our education system should not be reduced to an 'us vs them' argument – its success relies on delivering value for money for tax-payers, choice for parents and fair and equitable funding for all sectors. Diversity is the new norm and any model of funding should support this while guaranteeing equity.

In the Flat World and Education, Linda Darling-Hammond states that the 'norm' in developed nations is funding education systems centrally and equally with 'additional resources' going to schools where student needs are greater.

Darling-Hammond goes on to say that high achieving nations make equitable investments that are more focussed on key elements of the education system – quality of teacher and teaching, schools as learning organisations and curriculum and assessments that encourage ambitious learning. This is how we close the achievement gap by focussing on the things that make the greatest difference to student learning.

In considering the implications of the Gonski review, Minister Garrett said they had further work to do because "it's an issue that lies right at the heart of our prospects as a nation".

Imagine an education policy environment where the discussion about funding were at the periphery and the ways of building teacher and leaders capacities to improve learning and teaching were at the centre of this discussion.

At the end of the day we all share a common goal to deliver high quality education. If the world is flat, then so must be the playing field for all students.

Collaboration by accident 2012-02-28

The release of the Gonski panel's report into school funding last week highlighted the need to focus our resources and energies where its most needed: quality teaching and teachers.

Last week I had the wonderful opportunity of visiting schools in remote NSW and speaking to teachers about the challenges that this kind of remoteness brings. It was a sobering experience but one that highlighted the point panel chairman David Gonski made last week – resources alone don't make good schools.

A distinguishing feature of any school whether in the bush or city is not the number of computers or the size of the learning space but committed and passionate teachers working to meet the needs of their learners.

We know that teachers get better at what they do when they have opportunities to collaborate together. Our approach at a local level to building agile learning spaces has resulted in teachers working, planning and learning together in these shared spaces but what happens when teacher collaboration happens by accident?

As I've often said the space supports but can never substitute for effective teaching. Teachers can still be effective in individual classrooms but collaboration provides an empowering and supportive context in which teachers can engage in the kind of teaching and teacher learning that is effective in improving student learning.

In an interview last November, Linda Darling Hammond said that when teachers have partners to help solve problems and improve practice, they become more efficacious and therefore more satisfied with your career. That was certainly evident in Cherie and Gayle's classroom.

From the outside in 2012-03-06

I'm in Singapore this week, giving a keynote and doing a workshop for the 3rd International Project Based Learning Symposium. It is easy to see why Singapore is among the world's top five performing school systems when there is such a strong focus across the education sectors on developing learner and teacher skills such as inquiry, collaboration, deep knowledge and independent learning.

Interest in PBL is growing in schools across our system but it has been a success in transforming the learning for students at Parramatta Marist High. For me, Parramatta Marist's experience is an example of our broad approach to improving learning and teaching based on the principles of inquiry (ref Timperley's teacher inquiry cycle).

Inquiry is about open-ended questions – moving from having the right answer to being comfortable asking the right questions. Brazilian educator Paolo Freire believed that:

'It is impossible to be human without curiosity, without questions. The questions is in the foundation of human existence... One of the sad things, for example, is how we sometimes become accustomed to the absence of the question. For example, pedagogy, as it is generally practiced today, is exactly a pedagogy of the answer... Professors enter the classroom on the first day of the term, for example, and talk, giving answers to questions that have not been asked by the students.'

In the case of Singapore's National Institute of Education, teachers' engage in inquiry so that they are better able to teach a curriculum focussed on 'critical thinking, inquiry and collaboration.'

We are seeing that high performing systems are committed to teacher and student inquiry. Teachers learning about student learning and students learning through discovery.

Last week I attended a talk by Dr Ben Jensen of the Grattan Institute on what we can learn from the best school systems in East Asia. What was interesting but perhaps no surprise is that these education systems have high levels of equity – there is less gap between high and low performing students in Korea, Shanghai and Hong Kong compared to other countries like the UK, US and Australia. According to OECD figures, the bottom 10% of maths students in Shanghai perform at a level that is **21 months ahead** of the bottom 10% of students in Australia. This rises to **28 months** in the USA. That is a gap of more than two years.

There are two points to make here. We know that key to overcoming issues of equity is having quality teachers and teaching in every classroom. This is what is happening in East Asia. The second is that the business of schooling is big business in the sense that economic growth is contingent on having a highly skilled workforce.

It is the second point that is the focus of the article 'Rethinking School' in this month's Harvard Business Review. It's estimated that if the US had closed its achievement gap with better performing nations, then its GDP could have been \$1.2 to 2.1 trillion higher. The figure is based on the work of Stanford economist Eric Hanushek who found that countries where students had higher test scores also had higher rates of growth in income per person.

This is why China which outranks both the US and Australia in maths and reading is a serious competitor and why the Obama administration has implemented education reforms such as Race to the Top. The article makes the point that after forty years of research we know what makes the greatest difference to student learning but initiatives to improve the quality of teaching have not yielded the desired results. In fact, according to the HBR article, 'it will take 40 years for 80% of New York city students to reach math and reading proficiency, let alone the level of excellence that Chinese students are already achieving.'

I don't believe that personalising learning using technology is the silver bullet to improving the US' education system. As I've said often enough, it's not about the tools, it's about the teacher. What the Grattan Institute report shows is that East Asia's education systems have implemented reforms that provide high quality teacher training, mentoring to continually improve learning and teaching and continual evaluation of teacher practice.

What is evident is the knowledge building that comes from inquiry – the application of new routines of practice explicitly linking learning and teaching. And it's the engagement in this collective inquiry that teachers and students will benefit from.

Big changes for NSW education 2012-03-12

The big news over the weekend were the reforms announced by NSW Education Minister Adrian Piccoli linking teacher pay to professional standards and giving principals greater control of their school funding budget. It's been described as the 'greatest revolution to hit NSW education in 50 years' and while I don't wish to disagree with the intent here, I think we need to see this policy position as the next stage in an iterative process that has been underway for sometime.

The policy recognises what we already know about effective teaching and teachers.

In some ways, these reforms are moving closer to Finland's model where for the past 20 years schools are autonomous and teachers have the authority to do what is needed to improve student learning. Pasi Sahlberg, Finland's Director General of Education said recently that this was one of the keys to their international success.

I think we have reached a general consensus that:

1. The school community is where learning is improved
2. Good teachers supported by instructional leaders influence student learning outcomes
3. The industrial model of school will become irrelevant as we develop and promote professional learning communities
4. We find new ways to recognise and reward teacher excellence by encouraging greater investment in professional learning
5. Highly centralised systems stifle innovation

The government sector is able to draw upon examples from international and local education sector experience in moving towards a model where principals and teachers are given greater autonomy where it counts – in schools and learning spaces.

As Minister Piccoli said, the reforms will set "principals and teachers with great ideas free from the bureaucracy to try them."

Alan November *2012-03-23*

Last week we had one of the world's ed tech experts, Alan November make a whirlwind visit to Parramatta. I had an opportunity to take Alan to one of our primary schools to see how students and teachers were working in an agile space. He then spent a few hours sharing his insights and expertise with a group of leaders and teachers, many of whom have been following Alan's blog and podcasts for years. We're certainly grateful that Alan could make some time in his hectic schedule to challenging our thinking.

The point that Alan made which I think is beginning to take root is that while you need technology to facilitate change, it isn't in itself the change agent. If we use technology to do the same thing we've always been doing, only more efficiently, then we miss the mark. We need to change what we teach, how we teach and why we teach it.

Alan believes the greatest challenge we face is teaching students to become 'researchers' and critical users of the internet (Alan's website has more information on digital literacy). I was surprised that Alan hadn't met one student in Australia that understands how to do detailed Google searches. You don't know what you don't know and there is still a lot I am learning about technology and the web but it's incumbent on teachers to understand the architecture of information and to ensure students have the skills to analyse information not just search for it.

Google cannot do it but teachers can in the way they ask the question – this is the value add of teachers in today's world. Alan believes we need to teach by questioning not by teaching. The focus shouldn't be on the technology but on the problem. How many schools are using technology as a \$1000 pencil? If we want to see real change in student learning, then the essential question for school leaders is – what is the process change and what will we do differently (pedagogically) with the technology? In effect we have to re-engineer the whole back end of teaching, to modernise it and refine it as we reflect on student learning. This should not frighten nor overburden teachers. It should energise them since it gives the profession greater control over this critical process.

I came across a podcast this week of film executive Peter Guber talking about 'state of the heart' not state of the art technology. It resonates with Alan's argument – technology isn't the answer but the enabler. How do we build those connections between learner and content, between teacher and student, between family and school?

I think it was the Brazilian educator Paulo Freire who said the question was the foundation of human existence – it's also the foundation of 21st century schooling.

Expert teachers and visible learning 2012-03-30

Our system's strategic intent seeks to: improve the learning outcome for all students and ensure a professionally rewarding working life for teachers.

A professionally rewarding work life for teachers is more than having a well-paid and contented workforce. It concedes that without highly professional, committed, passionate teachers who believe every child can learn, there won't be great improvements in learning outcomes. In my experience this is what drives good teachers in their profession.

I've been thinking about this as I read John Hattie's latest book 'Visible Learning for Teachers'. The path to visible learning begins with teachers thinking about the impact they are having on student learning – not annually or each term but every week, every lesson. And by learning, Hattie doesn't mean passing 'surface-level tests' but the kind of learning that develops a deep sense of wonder and recognises students as agents of their own development.

This emphasis on the connection between quality student learning and quality teaching and teachers in our strategic intent provides the motive for our work as a system. As Hattie states 'the fundamental quality of an expert teacher is the ability to have a **positive** influence on student outcomes. . . .for students to achieve these outcomes, teachers must set challenging goals, rather than 'do your best' goals.' As a system, we don't want to marginally improve learning outcomes, we want to move students as far as possible towards becoming creative and competent individuals. This means assisting teachers to be able to move into the 'expert' group.

Hattie discusses the differences between experienced and expert teachers in Chapter 3. Expert teachers:

1. have high levels of subject knowledge and understanding
2. are able to guide learning to surface and deep outcomes
3. monitor learning and provide effective feedback
4. attend to attitudinal attributes of learning (e.g self-mastery)
5. provide defensible evidence of the positive impacts on student learning

Several years ago, I used the metaphor of the web to describe learning in today's world but I believe this metaphor reflects what expert teachers do – they build scaffolds for students that allow them to connect the dots of prior and current knowledge. This builds trust and encourages risk taking, both essential to learning. Everything is organised around this; knowledge is interconnected and weaknesses are immediately addressed to ensure learning continuity. This may seem like a simplistic description of what expert teachers do but web structures are complex, flexible and responsive to internal and external factors.

Richard Elmore believes that if you can't see it in the instructional core, then it's not there. I think this is what Hattie means by visible learning – watch an expert teacher in action and you see an optimal climate for learning, you see learning being monitored, you see respect and care for students, you see passionate teachers who are working with and for every single learner, you see learners being challenged and encouraged to take risks and importantly you see teachers continually seeking evidence and feedback on the effect they are having. Is this what you see in your school – how visible is the learning?

I agree wholeheartedly with Hattie's conviction that the aim of the profession is to encourage collaboration in order to 'drive the profession upwards' – to move teachers from good to great, from experienced to expert etc. It takes a village to raise a child and a profession to ensure a positive influence on student learning.

Hattie drives one point home continually -it's about teacher professional learning not just the teacher. We all need to improve and that's a powerful challenge.

Learning from Jobs 2012-04-13

Steve Jobs had a profound influence on the world of technology. One could argue that under his leadership Apple redefined the user experience so much so that technology has seamlessly integrated with every aspect of our lives.

Jobs' biographer, Walter Isaacson has written a concise piece in this month's Harvard Business Review on the Real Leadership Lessons of Steve Jobs. While it relates to Jobs' business philosophy, I think there are always valuable lessons for educational leaders and teachers.

According to Isaacson, 'focus was ingrained in Jobs' personality' and he would often ask his top employees to identify 10 things that Apple should be doing. When the list was complete, he would cut it back to just three ideas. Jobs believed that "deciding what not to do is as important as deciding what to do." How many of those 'additions' to the curriculum or classroom over the years have had a positive impact on student learning? Michael Fullan has often told us that when schools/systems focus on three goals and commit to achieving them, you get results.

The second is *simplify*. Jobs aimed for the 'simplicity that comes from conquering, rather than merely ignoring, complexity.' He recognised the importance of understanding the role 'each element' plays. Expert teachers 'simplify' the complex in the way they organise and use content knowledge. As John Hattie says, expert teachers understand the various elements that promote or restrict student success and respond accordingly.

The third is *engage face to face*. Jobs believed in the spontaneity of face to face meetings. The article states that Jobs even designed the Pixar building to promote 'unplanned encounters and collaborations.' This is why the way we design schools and learning spaces is critical. We know that stimulus rich environments stimulate learning. Secondly, agile learning spaces offer opportunities for teachers and students to work, plan and learn together. I saw this in action recently when I visited Parramatta Marist as boys sat around a table working on project based learning. Jobs recognised the creative possibilities when people engage to solve problems.

The fourth is *combine humanities with science*. Isaacson says the essence of Jobs' life was bringing humanities and science together. This is what a 21st century curriculum aims to do – the integration of everything intended to promote students' critical thinking and learning. It balances the various aspects of learning by focussing on the practical, social, aesthetic and creative aspects of human endeavour. Isaacson predicts that the key to building innovative economies will be the intersection of humanities and science.

The last is *stay hungry, stay foolish*. Jobs was a perfectionist who continually pushed the boundaries. Good teachers continually push the boundaries because they are passionate about their work. Thinking differently and taking risks are the norm if it means understanding how to teach more effectively. At a system level, staying hungry is about keeping the momentum going – the desire to continually improve the quality of learning and teaching even if it challenges the status quo.

The science of learning 2012-04-22

The work of cognitive scientists is becoming increasingly important to the work of teachers as we seek more effective ways to engage learners. This week, I've started reading John Medina's book *Brain Rules*. Medina writes in the introduction that if you want to 'create an education environment that was directly opposed to what the brain was good at doing, you probably would design something like a classroom.' It speaks volumes about the historical chasm between brain science and teacher practice. While we are moving towards understanding how people learn, we still see as Hattie says the essential nature of our profession in terms of autonomy – teaching the way we know best, choosing resources and methods we think will work etc.

One of the most illuminating chapters is on exploration. Medina explains why understanding how babies learn gives us insight into understanding how humans learn at any age. Babies and young children are naturally curious about their world and they learn through a process of observation, hypotheses, experiment and conclusion. As he says if children are allowed to retain their natural curiosity about the world around them, they can 'deploy their natural tendencies to discover and explore until they are 101.'

The problem is our traditional model of schooling often breaks this cycle of curiosity. Sir Ken Robinson believes this model of schooling dislocates people from their natural talents. Medina supports this by adding that by the time children get to school they understand that they can acquire knowledge about the world around them not because it's 'interesting, but because it can get them something.' The 'something' is a higher grade or test score.

The good news is that many people retain their curiosity and remain life-long learners. The challenge is how we cultivate this in workplaces and schools. Medina actually proposes a 'learning laboratory' where brain scientists and education scientists would investigate learning in real-world situations.

This lab would be similar to a medical school in that it would have a teaching facility, research program and staff who work in the field as well as teach. It's probably no coincidence that Richard Elmore et al has taken the instructional rounds from the medical rounds model. This is the process of observing, analysing, discussing and concluding. For Elmore et al, this process is designed to bridge the 'knowledge gap between educators and their practice' in order to improve student learning.

What I found interesting about this idea is that teachers would be learning about brain science in learning spaces. They would be learning from cognitive scientists, applying it in real world settings and then working with researchers on what works and why.

In many respects, this idea reflects the early work of John Dewey who established a school for educational experimentation at the University of Chicago in the late 1890s. Dewey's lab was an opportunity to learn more about 'the process of education and ways of improving the conditions of teaching and learning.' It is a goal we are still committed to perhaps more so in a knowledge age where we have the tools and the opportunities to ensure learning is personalised, relevant and engaging for every learner.

I think *Brain Rules* re-confirms why it is critical that the art of teaching be informed by the science of learning.

Putting a face to data 2012-04-30

I believe data is critical to the work of improving schooling and how well we use data to improve student outcomes and teacher learning is a challenge that some of the best performing systems have had to address. I sometimes think the fear we have in using data stems from the fact that we aren't trained in how to use it effectively or systematically as part of our practice and planning.

As Lyn Sharratt and Michael Fullan say in their new book *Putting Faces on Data* – ‘some educators are really good at breaking down the data, but most are not trained or experienced at chipping away the marble in their system-reports.’ They argue that in order to build success in schools, we need to see the data not as numbers but as the names and faces of every single student. Simple concept with powerful outcomes.

Lyn Sharratt spent two days in Parramatta with our leaders during the school holidays discussing how we go about doing this. Lyn was the former superintendent of Curriculum and Instruction Services in the York Region District School Board, Canada so she understands the challenges at every level: classroom, school and district.

According to Lyn, systems have great visions on paper but most don't have a strategy for getting there. In their 2009 book *Realization*, they identified the 14 parameters that made a difference to school and student improvement. These are:

1. shared beliefs and understandings among all staff
2. designated staff member for literacy/numeracy
3. daily sustained focus on literacy/numeracy instruction
4. principal as literacy/numeracy leader
5. early and ongoing intervention
6. case management approach to monitoring student progress
7. job-embedded professional learning
8. in school team meetings as an example of collaborative examination of student work
9. literacy/numeracy resources located in a designated area
10. commitment of school budget to these priorities
11. action research – staff committed to learning
12. parental involvement in supporting literacy/numeracy
13. appropriate instruction in all areas of the curriculum
14. shared responsibility and accountability

The only parameter Lyn says is prioritised is the fundamental belief that all learners can learn. If we share this belief, then we share the responsibility and accountability for our students' learning. I'm still not sure why this belief is not universally shared by all teachers but as John Hattie says it requires us to believe 'that intelligence is changeable rather than fixed.' If we believe intelligence is changeable, then we are empowered to look for better ways of continually moving students forward on the learning journey. Surely this is at the heart of our work as teachers?

Moving students forward is about knowing them as individuals through the use of data walls. Lyn provided some excellent examples of schools using data walls such as Park Manor Public School. Its principal set up a small private room enabling teachers to see and collaboratively discuss the progress of every student. The data wall allowed them to 'narrow their focus to the key areas for effective countermeasures, or instructional interventions, and then to verify all students' improvement through data.' (p85) It is critical to identify the point of need for the learner if we are to design learning experiences targetted at student improvement.

The data wall is a powerful strategy for empowering and enabling teachers. It places them in a position where they are supported by the wisdom and experience of their colleagues; where they are encouraged to reflect on their own practice and where they can recognise their own weaknesses in terms of the skills and instructional strategies needed to address a particular learning problem. As Lyn points out, teacher learning needs to be differentiated within and across schools based on the data. Not only must we personalise student learning, we also need to personalise teacher learning if we are to continually improve the quality of learning and teaching for every student that comes through our system.

For me, the message of our work is simple – it's not about making assumptions but how we can improve lives through learning. It's about recognising that behind every data set there is a unique and diverse individual eager to learn.

The road less travelled 2012-05-07

I thought it a good opportunity over the next few months to get a fresh perspective on some of the issues and initiatives we are addressing and implementing at the coal face of learning and teaching. I've asked our Team Leaders in System Learning to share their insight on bluyonder as a way of providing a lens on some of the work. My thanks to John Gildea, Team Leader Vocational Educational and Training for his post below on the status of VET in Australian schools.

You may have come across a report released in Britain last year that appeared in the media with headlines such as "*Vocational education and training not good enough*" (BBC). On first reading this might imply that the commitment of energy, time and money being made in this area is failing. In fact when you read the Wolf Report, one of the key findings is a call to strengthen the quality and range of VET courses to ensure they give students not only solid learning experiences but carry with them realistic opportunities for career in their chosen fields. The British government has pledged to reform the area.

The direction of VET in schools in Australia and in our system in particular is doing exactly that. In 2004, the National Council for Vocational Education Research (NCVER) published a report on VET in schools. Research included canvassing over 1400 students and 300 teachers and found that:

VET plays an essential role in making the curriculum inclusive of a broader range of needs. VET was also viewed as a useful means of improving learning and giving many students a chance of success at school, some experiencing it for the first time. (NCVER report on VET in Schools, 2004, P.7)

This and other research demonstrates that students completing a VET course as part of their HSC, increase their likelihood of having life long employment to 85%. These same students also demonstrate an improved ATAR and their VET course is most often their first or second best result. This helps to dispel the myth that VET is a less academic pathway and only students who are somehow "not very capable" should be offered or encouraged into VET courses. VET courses are challenging and require a commitment of time and discernment that could be attractive to any student, which is why all students should have an opportunity to engage in VET courses.

VET provides a tremendously effective way of personalizing learning. Key aspects of VET that support this include competency based performance and assessment, where students can proceed at their own pace and capabilities and where assessment is not about just how they perform against a group of other students but fundamentally centered on whether the student can competently demonstrate the skills and understandings necessary for the qualification and success in the workforce. VET courses are founded in real world contexts and experiences and include embedded work placement.

VET courses allow students to pursue a range of pathways into university, work and further training.

Our system has extended its commitment to VET in schools through two key initiatives. The first was established some years ago and is the Cluster VET model where leadership and management of VET resources and delivery is coordinated by school clusters who through their management committees and dedicated Cluster Coordinators have allowed us to be much more flexible and responsive to change and ensure a strategic vision and direction for VET in schools.

The second initiative is the Trade Training Centre program which began in 2010 with our first Trade Training Centre at McCarthy High School and a second in 2011 at Loyola Senior College. These state of the art centres allow school students to achieve an apprenticeship pathway as well as completing their HSC. No other education system in NSW has the provision for high level qualifications and apprenticeship pathways combined with the HSC that our TTC's provide. The TTC's provide access to the 'traditional' trades such as carpentry, brick and block and hospitality but also are moving into emerging trade areas in technology, engineering, financial services and transport and logistics.

Students have the opportunity to experience some of the best VET in the state and to access qualifications pathways that very few others can. The question isn't why VET but why wouldn't a student consider it as part of their learning pathway. It shouldn't be the road less travelled.

Another revolution? 2012-05-15

The Third Industrial Revolution is underway – manufacturing is going digital. A few weeks ago, I read an interesting article in *The Economist* revealing manufacturers of the future will focus on mass customisation – tailoring products to our individual needs and specifications. The revolution will not only affect how things are made – but where, and, importantly – the skills set required to deliver products to the hands of the consumer. This is yet another example of how our future workforce will be required to constantly shift to meet the needs of an ever-evolving economy.

As *The Economist*'s Paul Markillie reflects, with the revolution firmly underway it is timely for us to consider how we will capitalise on the opportunities this digital revolution presents in order to prepare all students for work in today's world. As educators, how do we ensure schooling remains relevant and reflective of the changes happening in the world? More importantly, how can we respond to trends that have not yet evolved? And how do we deliver 'mass education' in order to meet individual needs?

The demand for tools that enable mass personalisation of education is evident in the success of researchers like Ramona Pierson who have made it their core focus to provide educators across the globe with tools to tailor instruction to meet the needs of students and teachers. It evolves the traditional, one-size-fits-all approach to teaching into a differentiated approach that adjusts content and instruction to ensure every student's voice is heard through tools which focus on the elements of:

- Real-time assessment; – Simplifying lesson planning; – Connecting with diverse learners – supporting visual, auditory and kinaesthetic instruction in individual, group and whole-class learning environments; – Encouraging participation via an interactive environment; – Providing the structure, tools and resources the whole class needs for success while providing individual guidance to students and small groups as they work to overcome challenges

I believe that combining this approach with a focus on refining online teaching access, open content, real time web delivery, independent course-work provision and virtual learning environments will provide schools with great opportunities to ensure learning not only meets the needs of every student but is in sync with what is happening in today's world.

These avenues by their nature exponentially build on accessibility. Students who may be based in remote and regional locations now have the greatest level of access to information and support that they have ever had. Retention of students in the education system who are geographically challenged will vastly improve over coming decades as we integrate these tools into all elements of our lives – and also enables the broader population to embrace life-long learning.

Delivery of content using today's tools also enables niche course delivery – none of us are confined to 9-3pm learning. The opportunity to deliver a course relevant to hundreds of students across Australia that may have only been sought by a handful of students within an individual school means students are better able to ensure their schooling experience is customised to meet their future goals. It also provides a tailored support and like-minded network for each student to tap into – broadening horizons and perspectives beyond local geography.

I came across a relevant quote by Seymour Papert in his essay *Education's 19th Century Thinking in a 21st Century world*:

The skills that you can learn when you're at school will not be applicable. They will be obsolete by the time you get into the workplace and need them, except for one skill – the one really competitive skill is the skill of being able to learn. It is the skill of being able not to give the right answer to questions about what you were taught in school, but to make the right response to situations that are outside the scope of what you were taught in school. We need to produce people who know how to act when they're faced with situations for which they were not specifically prepared.

How will instruction adapt to this "megachange" if we're not using all the available things that the technology hands out? Demonstrating that education is now as much about partnerships, innovation and engagement as about the traditional training grounds, the *New York Times* has enjoyed significant success with its *New York Times Knowledge Network*. The network offers a wide range of distinctive adult and continuing education opportunities, including online courses, programs and Webcasts. Also tapping into the revolution are Harvard and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. The universities have announced a new non-profit partnership –

known as edX – to offer free online courses from both universities.

Technology for online education, with video lesson segments, embedded quizzes, immediate feedback and student-paced learning, is evolving so quickly that those in the new ventures say the offerings are still experimental. The new platforms present dual opportunities – to build a global community of online learners and to research teaching methods and technologies. Additionally, the barriers to education which define people's ability to mould their futures will be broken down.

How will educational leaders become active drivers and leaders of this ever-shifting environment to ensure our students enjoy the greatest of these opportunities?

Crossing the social media divide 2012-05-23

The listing of Facebook on the stock exchange (now valued at \$100 billion) highlights how social media has become serious business. As we conceptualise organisations differently as dynamic, porous and self-learning, we must recognise that social media has been part of the expanded tool kit of leaders. This is no where more pressing than for school leaders and I don't think we can be observers anymore, we must be participants and contributors to the educational narrative.

In a news article last week, principals in South Australian public schools will be encouraged to 'blog, tweet and use a school Facebook page to communicate with parents and the local community.' It's part of a broader strategy developed by the SA Education Department to improve leadership in public education. While the initiative is timely, it does leave out a critical aspect of social media – the opportunity to collaborate and connect with peers.

Earlier this year I had the opportunity to address our newly appointed leaders and explained that if leaders are not socially aware and social media literate, then it's difficult to understand the context in which we are learning and teaching. Social media such as blogs and tweets are powerful tools to enable and empower school leaders. When you are continuously sharing, reflecting and engaging with people, it stretches your thinking. You learn by sharing, you learn by learning, you learn by connecting with others.

It's this ability to connect that gives leaders the confidence to draw from the wisdom of the crowd in order to share and solve problems. When leaders are networked into other, more expanded, learning communities (physical and virtual), you see best practice being shared freely and connections develop so that there is an ever expanding understanding of what is achievable.

Michael Fullan in *Change Leader* has a chapter on collaboration. Fullan cites a study of Stanford business graduates which found the 'most creative individuals had broad social networks that extend outside their organisations and involved people from diverse fields of expertise..were three times more innovative than uniform vertical networks.'(p99).

I have never proclaimed to be a tech guru but I do use social media and have benefitted enormously from the depth of professional conversation and feedback on twitter and bluyonder. Despite trying to engage and encourage my colleagues, the response has been lukewarm. I believe this is reflective of a growing gap between those who are connected and those who aren't; leaders who are taking responsibility for their own learning and growth and those who are happy to continue along the same path.

Mary Beth Hertz wrote an insightful post recently about the social media divide in education. Reflecting on her experience at a recent teaching conference, Hertz noted that she was part of a 'small group of educators who were tweeting and blogging about the sessions' and how her virtual colleagues had developed a common language, drawing from a common canon of books, articles, blog posts and thought leaders.

In recognising the growing gap between teachers, Hertz says:

We are part of a community of learners that knows no walls, that our learning has no boundaries. We can meet someone face to face for the first time, draw from the same knowledge base and even continue a conversation that may have spanned thousands of miles. These conversations are also based on current research, and on articles written by leaders in the education world. We take these conversations and this knowledge back to our classrooms and our schools, impacting our students and our colleagues. Teachers who learn together grow together. And teachers who grow together teach children in powerful ways. This silent gap, should it remain unclosed, will only widen the existing, perceptible gap in our schools.

Leaders have a responsibility to look for ways of closing the gap. As Fullan says in *Change Leaders* effective leaders in whatever field walk into the future through examining their own and others' best practice, looking for insights they had not previously noticed. Social media is one way of allowing leaders to do this. How many of your colleagues have crossed the social media divide?

Are we trend setters or chasers? 2012-05-30

The New Media Consortium will release its 2012 K-12 Edition of the Horizon Report next month. I've read this with great interest over past years as it identifies and describes emerging technologies which will impact on education over the next 1-5 years.

If you're interested, you can read through the Horizon Project preview – it predicts that mobiles and apps as well as tablet computing be adopted in a year or less. Within two to three years, game based learning and personal learning environments should be adopted across K-12. And within four to five years augmented reality and natural user interfaces will be the tools of choice for students and teachers.

For many educators, the use of technology is a significant leap in practice but for others, the future is already here. The emerging trends raises an interesting question for me: do we need to institute core competencies for teachers around use of technologies in the learning space? The answer to this is probably dependent on your worldview of schooling, its purpose and processes. If you see schools in an industrial model, you'll have a certain response. If you are pushing the boundaries and exposing students to emerging technology, you'll have a different response. Too often however, we take the default position of limit and control.

This question has been at the front of my mind this week ahead of my keynote and participation in a debate on BYOD at the Technology in K-12 Education National Congress 2012. I find it interesting that in light of the Horizon Report, we are still debating the pros and cons of BYOD in schools. Technology is only going to stretch us as educators as we look for ways of ensuring the tools can adequately support personalised learning.

I'm not sure if any of the local readers have seen a series of stamps released by Australia Post titled 'Now and Then'. These stamps depict how the 'technological revolution has touched the daily lives of most Australians' from phone boxes to mobiles from record players to iPods. What I noticed when I saw these stamps was the relatively seamless transition of technology into our daily lives – yet it hasn't occurred in every school environment.

If you think back to the seventies, there was little difference between home and school 'technology'. For example, if you had a colour TV at home and a cassette player, you would probably find these in most classrooms. Enter the digital revolution and the gap begins to widen between home and school. Most households today have multiple devices, we're connected to the web and we can access learning anytime, anywhere on any device yet in many schools the devices are limited or they are not being used to deepen student learning and thinking. We're hesitant about building connections or embracing the opportunities of online learning.

This is Prof Stephen Heppell talking four years ago about the role of emerging technologies. Will we still be having the same conversation in four years time or will game based learning and augmented reality be the norm? To quote Heppell 'if you're an eleven year old today, you've only ever experienced life in the 21st century and you're probably hearing this debate around technology and 21st century learning and thinking get on with it already – an eighth of the century is already gone!'

In the not too distant future, we have become trend setters not trend chasers.

Extending mathematical understanding 2012-06-08

Why is it that so many students struggle with mathematics? It's one of the questions I've been pondering after reading the work of MIT mathematician, Dr Seymour Papert. For me, Papert is becoming a modern John Dewey and his assessment of why children struggle is persuasive:

I think part of the trouble with learning mathematics at school is that it's not like mathematics in the real world. In the real world, there are engineers, who use mathematics to make bridges or make machines. There are scientists, who use mathematics to make theories, to make explanations of how atoms work, and how the universe started. There are bankers, who use mathematics to make money — or so they hope.

But children, what can they make with mathematics? Not much. They sit in class and they write numbers on pieces of paper. That's not making anything very exciting. So we've tried to find ways that children can use mathematics to make something — something interesting, so that the children's relationship to mathematics is more like the engineer's, or the scientist's, or the banker's, or all the important people who use mathematics constructively to construct something.

We know that providing students with a solid foundation in literacy and numeracy sets them up for life-long learning. We also know that the gap between the performance of Australian students and their East Asia counterparts is widening and has been for the past twelve years. According to the report released by the Grattan Institute, Australian students are on average two years behind Shanghai students in maths and at least one year behind students from Singapore and South Korea. As a system, we can learn from other systems such as Ontario Canada, which has made significant investment in improving literacy and numeracy. As Michael Fullan continues to remind us whenever he visits, they have focused relentlessly on literacy and numeracy and it has become the work of school principals, lead teachers, teachers and even parents.

I invited Tim Hardy, Team Leader in System Learning to share the context of our K-12 numeracy strategy. My thanks to Tim for his guest post below.

In 2008, COAG released its National Numeracy Review Report (NNRR), and for many, the issues highlighted are not surprising.

“While the overall levels of numeracy / mathematics achievement in Australia are quite good by international standards, there is an unacceptable proportion of Australian students (particularly but certainly not only amongst Indigenous students) who are not achieving acceptable standards of proficiency. Many students also lack confidence in the subject, do not see personal relevance in it and are unlikely to continue its study voluntarily.” (National Numeracy Review Report 2008 xii)

With the moral imperative well established, ‘Numeracy Now’, an initiative of our system, came about as a strategic response to the fifteen recommendations from the NNRR to ‘improve numeracy outcomes for all’. The recommendations specifically reflect the issues that were identified from the available research and include directions for teaching standards, school expectations and system organisation.

An example of these recommendations include: the development of pedagogical content knowledge of teachers; that mathematics be taught in context and ‘beyond the mathematics classroom’; the use of diagnostic tools such as interviews for mathematical assessment; systemic assessment programs to provide a research base to inform pedagogy; that an emphasis be on developing conceptual understandings rather than routine procedural tasks; specialist teachers regularly working shoulder to shoulder with classroom teachers; needs of cultural and minority groupings be identified and understood; and the building of leadership capability

An initial priority of our strategy was the development of instructional leadership capability within our schools. In collaboration with our academic partner, Dr Ann Gervasoni from the Australian Catholic University, over one hundred leaders including primary and secondary principals, lead teachers and system leaders have completed the Leading Mathematics Learning and Teaching program. The focus of the learning includes: the Mathematical Assessment Interview; identification of the most vulnerable learners; creating productive learning environments; developing pedagogical content knowledge of teachers; researched based teaching strategies; tracking and monitoring of student progress and implementation planning.

While the NNRR specifically recommends that the focus needs to be on the early years of schooling, our strategy has included secondary schools, initiating an authentic K-12 structure. The collaboration between primary and secondary teachers, specialists, lead teachers and principals has been profound, creating a shared understanding

about quality teaching and learning with a collective responsibility for all learners.

In conjunction with the leadership program, the Extending Mathematical Understanding (EMU) – Specialist Teacher Intervention program, facilitated by Dr Ann Gervasoni, trains nominated teachers from each school to teach a daily intervention program for the most mathematically vulnerable Year 1 and Year 7 students. The aim of this program is to equip teachers with the knowledge and skills to provide accelerated intervention that promotes students learning and a positive and confident disposition. To further build on our system capability, we have a teaching educator currently training to become an accredited professional learning leader in order to facilitate the accredited EMU intervention program. The ‘behind-the-screen’ facility to observe teachers facilitating an EMU group, is a feature of the program.

Schools showing parents how to support children with maths at home.

The most important outcomes of the initiative are: all Year one students assessed with ongoing tracking and monitoring; the most vulnerable students are identified in Year 1; a decline in vulnerable students in the second and third year of the project and that leaders are equipped to lead implementation plans based on credible data. An encouraging observation by our academic partner Ann Gervasoni is that of teachers applying their new knowledge into innovative practice to include the effective use of digital technologies e.g. teachers using iPads with a clear mathematical purpose, students using digital manipulatives to develop conceptual understanding, recording their thinking, with the ability to share beyond the classroom.

Parents of participating schools have expressed appreciation for the opportunity to learn about what is happening at school and importantly how best to support their children at home when it comes to mathematics.

Tim’s summary of our strategy reflects a fundamental principle from which we work – moving from an ‘I think’ mentality of teaching to ‘We learn’. This approach uses the best research and data as a base line. We focus on what works, why it works for each student and how we can continually extend teachers, students and even parents in their mathematical understanding.

The human dimension of schooling 2012-06-21

Last Thursday, our system hosted French Archbishop Jean-Louis Bruguès OP, the Vatican's Secretary of the Congregation for Catholic Education, who is responsible for Catholic educational institutions around the world. While speaking specifically to more than 1,000 leaders about the nature and purpose of Catholic education, I believe his analysis of the challenges schools face today, is not only relevant to Catholic schools but has universal application for all schools.

Archbishop Bruguès OP

Archbishop Bruguès called on Catholic schools to adapt to pedagogical evolutions and even anticipate them, saying pedagogy 'is by nature in constant evolution: one can no longer teach today in the same way as 40 or even 20 years ago' and to aim 'at excellence: excellence of knowledge, excellence of its pedagogy, excellence in transmission'.

The pursuit of innovation and excellence should be the aim of all schools as we work to reframe schooling to meet the needs of today's learners. The digital world is dramatically reshaping the way we live and we need to respond creatively as educators if we are going to keep pace with our students and provide them with the knowledge and skills to navigate and contribute to the world.

This requires new skillsets for both learners and teachers and the Archbishop encouraged educators to engage both curiosity and reason in the way forward.

'A Catholic school is essentially a school with a sense of curiosity, interested in all the various forms of knowledge and the multiple dimensions of human culture. . . one in which reason is given a privileged role in the quest for truth, the moral good and beauty. . . ' Archbishop Jean-Louis Bruguès OP, 2012.

The ability to incorporate human reason in navigating both digital and physical environments is essential to effectively prepare young people for the unknown challenges our world will face. We can harness the insatiable curiosity of our students, and aligned with innovative pedagogy, guide our students in the pursuit of knowledge about the world, about learning, and about ideas. This is achievable and should be a hallmark of all good schools.

Our own Bishop, Anthony Fisher OP, addressed our principals the following day and made the point that in a world marked by secularisation, consumerism, family dysfunction and values disorientation, many – even outside the church – recognise the challenge we have to transmit vision and values.

This is not a specifically Catholic challenge but applies to all schools in the modern world and lies right at the heart of learning and teaching. As educators, we need to approach our students with compassion and understanding of the diversity they bring into the classroom. When we know each of our students as individuals and tailor learning and teaching to meet their needs, we are valuing each student as a distinct person worthy of dignity, trust and respect.

Often the focus on schooling is around economic value, but as educators we need to shift our thinking to see the broader dimension of the human purpose of schooling. In modelling core values to students, educators – regardless of faith background – play a key role in forming the hearts and minds of the young people they teach and enabling them to thrive in an increasingly complex world.

Bishop Anthony expressed his desire that our young people be formed into young men and women of 'principle, purpose and passion'. We need teachers with principle, purpose and passion, who in the doing and living out of these qualities will strengthen them in their students.

In today's world learners need good teachers more than ever. Archbishop Bruguès nailed it when he said, 'the time of teachers has a bright future'. Indeed it has.

Mutate now, avoid the rush 2012-06-28

The education sector is not alone in the business of reshaping itself for the 21st century. It doesn't matter what industry you look at, they are all undergoing rapid change to find new ways of doing things differently to enhance their core business.

The sectors that are thriving are the ones that have faced and embraced the challenges and opportunities of a digital world and are engaging their employees and staff to work through the solutions and innovations needed to succeed. Those that haven't managed to evolve or who are dragging their feet are rapidly finding themselves irrelevant and at risk, like the dinosaurs, of becoming extinct.

Some recent examples in our Australian context include iconic brand, Qantas, who are looking to separate their domestic and international arms in a bid to make them more competitive in the new global marketplace.

The two major players in Australian media, Fairfax Media and News Limited, have both announced major restructures in recent weeks in response to the rapid uptake of new media and the impact on traditional news sources. James Packer has signalled his intentions to move away from the media business, which is a huge turnaround for one of Australia's long-time media families.

Even the banking sector, who are renowned for their conservative business practice, are looking for ways to reach customers' needs in real time and provide access to their products via new media. The Commonwealth Bank has recently launched a new suite of apps including a tool to allow customers to value a property by taking a picture on their smartphone and a way to pay 'anyone, anytime, anywhere'.

Internationally, Apple has transformed itself from a technology business to a lifestyle business. Today, Apple is not simply about selling devices, although they do in the millions, it's now focused on the business of integrating their technology into our day to day lives. Services like iTunes, iCloud and Apple TV are responsible for transforming the way we access music and video content; how we store our personal and professional data; and the way we watch television.

Nicholas Negroponte who wrote the book 'Being Digital' in the 1990s, observed that middle management were a relic of the past and middle anything would vanish without a trace. And that's been proven true. Twenty years ago, if I wanted to go overseas I would have had to visit a travel agent; now I just go online. Does that mean the death of travel agents? No, it just means that they have to reinvent themselves which means new jobs and new skill sets. So, schools need to teach differently to the way they taught 20 or even five years ago.

The point I want to make is that schools shouldn't feel like they are being singled out when faced with social pressure to change the way they go about the business of schooling. Today's world is providing new challenges and ways to do things, but it is also providing new opportunities and we need to become part of the solution in responding to the changing culture. The radical changes we are seeing in big business are signposts for us in education that we need to sit up and take notice. Or else run the risk of becoming the 'nothing in between'.

Google's not a substitute teacher 2012-07-06

Often we can make the assumption that technologists are trying to tell us how to go about the business of schooling with little understanding of learning and teaching.

Today I caught up with Tom Mills, Google's Global Director Enterprise Education in San Francisco who made the following points:

1. Google is in the business of technology not teaching – they don't want to get involved in the work of teaching, rather they want to provide a range of enabling tools that are useful to teachers to go about their work
2. The tools aren't education specific – Google want to develop tools that have a variety of business and real world applications; they aim to make them accessible to allow for a broad range of uses
3. You have to sweat to achieve equity – you can't just wake up and become the next Mark Zuckerberg in the digital stakes; unless you become literate in the tools you won't know how to make them work for you; you need to put in the work to get the best results
4. Curiosity is king – the tools are just the tip of the iceberg; teachers need to unlock the potential of the technology and enable learners to do the same; curiosity is part of the fundamental 21st century skillset for today's learner

It was great to hear this from a leading global expert in technology. For us it reinforces what we already know: as educators we can't use technology in isolation or as a 21st century substitute for teaching.

The business of learning and teaching is not Google's; it's ours. We need to put in the hard yards to unlock the potential of current and emerging technologies to better serve our work as teachers and our students.

Building connections for a sustainable framework 2012-07-10

The prevailing model of schooling is so deeply embedded in our collective psyche that it's often difficult to imagine alternate models.

New Tech Network's Lydia Dobyns and Tim Presiado with myself and Br Patrick Howlett at Parramatta Marist in March 2012

Last Friday, my colleagues and I visited New Tech Network's president, Lydia Dobyns and senior director, Tim Presiado to look at ways to build a sustainable framework beyond their 100 schools in the US and to identify opportunities to extend their approach to interested schools within our own system.

New Tech Network is a non-profit organisation working with schools, school districts and communities to reframe schooling by creating innovative learning environments using a project based learning (PBL) approach. Students not only acquire subject matter knowledge, but the skills needed to thrive in today's world such as critical thinking, collaboration, work ethic, content literacy and communication.

One of our own successful secondary schools, Parramatta Marist, has been involved with the New Tech Network for over three years and as a result has reshaped its curriculum offering, invested significantly in the ongoing professional learning of teachers and demonstrated sustained improvement in student learning. Lydia and Tim visited Australia in March this year to announce the inclusion of Parramatta Marist as the first school outside the United States to become part of the network and to share their approach with over 300 educators within our system.

It is important to understand that PBL is not a solution that can be simply taken and imposed on any school. It is a construct to support school communities committed to reflecting on and improving student learning and teacher practice in a contemporary world. Lydia describes the heart of New Tech's work as building the capacity of teachers and students as part of an educational network through a focus on quality, sustainability and growth. It is through the network – the collaboration within and between schools – that the approach is strengthened and refined.

From our meeting, we identified several issues critical to reframing schooling, including resource implications, a blend of support incorporating coaching and teacher shadowing, the adoption of rigorous application criteria as a starting point for engagement, opportunities for the creation of a PBL professional learning community and an overall commitment to working together to build a sustainable framework.

It is great to see we can broker connections with partners across the globe who are so willing to share their expertise and experience as we meet the challenge to look beyond standardised, off-the-shelf solutions and engage in a process of discovery and learning to improve schooling.

Good practice is good theory 2012-07-11

Too often, educators fall into the theory-practice trap. How many times have you heard a teacher say, 'All that theory's fine, but it doesn't work in my classroom,' or the theoretician say, 'It's a shame teachers don't use the theory to inform their work.' So it was refreshing to meet with a school leader who understands that good teaching involves both sides of the coin – you can't have good practice without good theory.

Michael Fullan, Lyn Sharratt, James Bond with myself.

Yesterday we met with Michael Fullan and Lyn Sharratt from the University of Toronto and James Bond, who is the principal of Park Manor Public School. The work James and his staff are doing to improve the learning outcomes of students is one of the case studies profiled in Fullan and Sharratt's new book, *Putting faces on the data*.

I have written about this in an earlier post, but it was great to meet with James and discuss his approach in detail.

James has an interesting background. He originally trained as a teacher but when he couldn't find a position, spent several years working in industry where he gained an insight into cultural change, particularly the application of both good theory and practical strategies to deliver sustained change.

What was really fascinating in listening to James describe his school's approach, was the space he created to do the work – the staff learning centre – where, regardless of what teaching area they work in, teachers come together to share the data, analyse it and collaborate.

James didn't start this work by leading a discussion on educational theory, rather he focused at the very centre of the teaching process, asking his teachers how they could improve their students' learning.

He clearly values his staff and knew they had the answers. It was his role as the leader to help them find the answers by 'putting faces on the data'; starting with the practice and ensuring it reflects good theory is what good leaders need to know how to do.

So what does the data look like?

There is a data panel for every student which is personalised and displayed on the data wall according to their levels of achievement in such a way that staff can see and take collective responsibility for each and every child (*see below*).

A personalised data panel for each student.

The data wall records:

1. Student achievement at varying intervals
2. Hypotheses for student performance
3. Suggestions for change in teacher practice
4. Verification process for effectiveness of change

Michael Fullan describes this as a powerful 'pull and nudge' model.

We can't ignore the evidence of James' student achievement data. For us it is a great example of how theory and practice come together to the direct benefit of each student at Park Manor Public School. It is also evident that his theory-practice model is changing the whole culture of the school.

Of course this approach is deeply rooted in good theory. Interestingly though, James never once referred to it.

Bureaucrats rock! 2012-07-20

It's a commonly-held view that bureaucrats block or resist change. When a new government comes to power, the first target is the bureaucrat. They tend to get the blame for any failings in the system and for stifling innovation and change. While I'm sure we have all experienced this first-hand, fortunately not all bureaucrats are made equal. Gregg Bethel, executive director of school programs and partnerships for the New York City Department of Education (DOE) breaks the mould.

Gary Brown, Anna Dickinson, Paul Meldrum and myself on the steps of the DOE in New York City

On meeting Gregg last week, my colleagues and I were impressed to find the DOE is informed by a powerful theory of action that places students' learning at the centre of their work. They are committed to improving student learning by building the capacity of teachers; ensuring good leadership; and using a range of data sets and evidence to drive change.

To give you an idea of the DOE context – here are some key numbers:

- 1,800 schools across the five Burroughs that make up NYC – Manhattan, the Bronx, Brooklyn, Queens and Staten Island * 1.1 million students * 75,000 staff * \$23 billion operating budget * The ratio of students in the US who attend school in NYC is 1:50 * In the last 10 years, there has been an 80 per cent turnover in principal positions

For several decades, graduation rates in NYC schools had stagnated – only 50 per cent of students were graduating and in the lowest 50 schools, only 1 in 4 students. Today, the graduation rate is up around 67 per cent and the lowest performing school graduates 50 per cent of its cohort. This is a remarkable result which looks set to improve further.

The context Gregg is working in now is referred to as the 'post Joel Klein era,' because much of the work started under Klein's leadership (2002-2011) continues today. Leaving aside some of the more controversial aspects of the Klein agenda, central to the work of improving schooling in the US is a commitment, to not only build a robust school system, but a robust system of *great* schools.

The DOE recognises the school's central role in ringing in education innovation and change and as such, gives schools the freedom to innovate and change as they do the work. The role of the DOE then lies in articulating the expectations and, as an accountability measure, in defining standards for school performance. The work of Robert McClintock (1996) helps inform the work of the DOE.

McClintock argues that it is the teachers taking advantage of the digital tools in doing the work where innovative practice can emerge and spread.

As new communications technologies take hold in practice, educators sense that new developments become feasible through them. As diverse educators act in diverse ways on the basis of this shared sense of new potential, they begin to change the character of general practice. (McClintock, 1996)

McClintock also makes the point that with technological innovation basic skills that were once an outcome of education – such as to calculate, spell, remember, visualise, compare and select – are now a given at the outset making for an 'epistemologically interesting cultural development'.

Knowledge consists primarily of cultural resources that people can store and retrieve on demand, as the need for it arises... People can use digital media both to acquire ideas and to express their thoughts in these diverse ways. As a result, educators will find it increasingly difficult to favour the linguistic modality over all others and they will need to broaden the norms of academic excellence. (Robert McClintock, 1996)

Given the digital revolution is rapidly changing the way people live and work, it is essential for schooling to keep pace with these developments. It was good to see that the essential nature of ICT is recognised in NYC schools as a powerful tool and enabler for learning and teaching. A lot of this work is being implemented using a range of mobile devices but, like all of us, the DOE face similar challenges around vendors, copyright, business models and digital ecosystems.

We found plenty of common ground in meeting with Gregg, the key themes being:

- Building great schools relies on the schools themselves
- Innovation is the lifeblood pumping through quality schools that leads to improvement
- The system has a responsibility for disruptive innovations – i.e. innovations that change the paradigm
- Systems need to remove the blockers for change

It is great to see there are educational institutions with the commitment and intent to drive innovation and change in schooling and a bureaucrat who is leading the way.

The exchange of ideas 2012-07-26

I had the privilege of opening the Building Learning Communities conference (#BLC12) in Boston last week with Alan November from November Learning – an international leader in education technology. BLC started with a group of 20 friends and has grown into an international exchange of ideas with over 90 workshops presented throughout the three days. Despite its enormous growth, BLC aims to maintain its early roots by bringing together thought leaders and educators to share ideas and create partnerships to help expand the boundaries of learning and teaching.

There was a great energy in the room on our first day with over 1,000 educators and teachers gathered from 20 countries. The opening session was designed to change the game plan and rethink our first engagement with students. Alan launched November Learning's 1st5Days project, with the aim of creating a global, online professional learning community focused on changing students' experience in the first five days of school. Using the power of crowdsourcing, Alan hopes to start an international conversation about how teachers and leaders can transform the start of each school year for learners, to focus and engage students in learning from the very first moments.

As I commented in the opening sessions, often the first five days of school, even the start of each school term, can be taken up with organisation, administration and management instead of learning. I shared the example of a New Zealand colleague who used local fire fighters to inspire his students on the first day of school. One of our own principals, Attila Lendvai from St Canice's Primary in Katoomba, does a similar thing by creating a 'wow' moment for students and staff to engage them in a new learning focus from the first day of each term.

I think the first five days project will provide a great source of inspiration for teachers and leaders and has the potential to really challenge and transform the way we traditionally approach the start of the year; certainly an exchange of ideas worth participating in via Twitter #1st5Days or to register visit <http://blc.vxcommunity.com>

My Catholic Education colleagues, Anna Dickinson, Gary Brown and Paul Meldrum and I led two workshops at BLC2012 on the theme, Learning by Inquiring, which focused on three key elements for schooling: Imagination, Creativity and Innovation.

It seems obvious for learning to *always* start with a process of inquiry. Too often perhaps, this is not the case and our traditional approach to learning and teacher learning has been focused more on recitation of facts or information gathering rather than inquiry.

Fortunately, as educators we know a whole lot more today about how people learn. Through the work of Bransford et al we now understand that powerful learning requires knowledge of the learner's context; building connections between concepts; and the opportunity to engage in metacognition or reflecting on what and how we learn. This process enables deep learning and allows the learner to apply what they have learned to a range of contexts – essential in today's world.

What does this have to do with imagination, creativity and innovation?

If we consider the learning theory in the context of making schooling more relevant and effective for today's learners we can identify a process for our own work as teachers and leaders – *'the HOW'* – through the lens of Imagination, Creativity and Innovation.

Imagination – is about looking at the current model of schooling; identifying what is relevant and what is no longer relevant to today's learner/world; and imagining new approaches = RELEVANCE

Creativity – is about exploration and discovery; playing in the sandpit; the testing and trialing of different approaches using a range of tools = ENGAGEMENT

Innovation – is about monitoring and reflecting on what works and what doesn't; sharing innovative practice; allowing innovation to take hold and taking it to scale = APPLICATION

This can't be achieved in an adhoc way. We need a clear intent, a well defined theory of action based on sound educational research and practice, and a framework for building capacity within schools supported by leadership. In our own diocese, this has been an iterative process for our schools based on their individual needs and within their local contexts.

'The HOW' is about creating the space to consider new possibilities, to tinker with those possibilities and to learn from what fails and to measure and share what works. The beauty of today's tools means sharing

innovation isn't limited to just across the classroom or the staffroom, but across the globe.

Through collaboration and the exchange of ideas with other teachers and school communities we are able to benefit from the 'wisdom of the crowd' and share our own wisdom to benefit our students' learning. The old adage says 'it takes a village to raise a child.' In the 21st Century it takes a global, connected, learning community.

In the closing session with Alan November, I presented the proposition to educators for the need to 'start yesterday'. In responding to the challenges of schooling in today's world there is a need for urgency. It's not simply a question of tweaking what we already have but looking at new models and new approaches. The only way to achieve this is through a process of learning by inquiring i.e. imagination, creativity, innovation. It is key for sustained change, engagement and improvement in learning and teaching.

A student's take on learning and teaching 2012-07-31

I'm often asked what 21st century learning and teaching looks like for teachers and students.

When I was speaking at the 2012 Technology in K-12 Education National Congress in Sydney recently, I had the chance to sit in on the student panel and was impressed to hear our own year 12 student, Mark Elias, from Parramatta Marist High School speak so thoughtfully about his learning.

Four years ago, Parramatta Marist introduced the Project Based Learning (PBL) approach which, in Mark's opinion, radically changed his learning journey from year 9 onwards.

Mark Elias and myself at the Technology in K-12 Education National Congress earlier this year

I've met Mark a few times now and thought he had some great views to share as a learner in one of our schools about how learning and teaching has changed for him and the skills he has developed as a result:

Learning has changed dramatically over my years attending Parramatta Marist. I started at the school in 2007 and was educated 'traditionally' which meant a teacher dictating information and the students reciting and regurgitating information.

After spending two years learning under this pedagogy, I was then exposed to a 21st century approach to education. This approach placed perfect emphasis on the three main aspects of a classroom: the students, the teacher and collaboration.

Students were taught the importance of adaptive thinking via discussing ideas in groups; not only strengthening their ability to think but also their ability to work effectively in groups.

The change was abrupt which forced the teachers to learn with the students, eliminating the tension between a teacher who knew everything and a student who knew nothing.

As the school and the teachers progressed with 21st century learning pedagogies, students' learning was shaped positively – not only could they know the content, they could understand and apply it.

Using technology is imperative in this learning approach as it breaks down all barriers around what a classroom is, where it starts and ends; learning takes place via Skype discussion and emails with students constantly wanting others' perspective on answers to help shape their own thinking and approaches.

It's easier to tell than to teach 2012-08-06

The release of a discussion paper on teaching last week by NSW Education Minister Adrian Piccoli was not before time.

For too long, education policy has been surrounded by myths. For instance: • lift the ATAR for teacher training courses at university and we will naturally graduate better or brighter teachers; • pay teachers more and we will automatically improve teaching practice; • give principals greater autonomy and we will certainly improve school performance; • make class sizes smaller and we will logically ensure better student learning outcomes.

While some myths are falling out of favour – e.g. the lack of supporting evidence is making it increasingly difficult to hold up the small class policy as a key improvement strategy – many are still being propagated as a cure-all to what ails our schooling system with little or no evidence to suggest they will have the intended effect. Unfortunately many of these myths are focused at the wrong end of the problem. If we want to improve learning and teaching it will be in the doing or as Elmore says, we ‘learn the work by doing the work’. Silver bullet approaches or appeals to jingoism e.g. ‘Teach for Australia’ don’t do justice to the important issue that every child in every school deserves a good teacher.

Over the past few months, *The Australian* newspaper has been running a series called ‘*Inside our Classrooms*’ and I have been reading with interest the views of teachers and education commentators on what they see as the key issues facing educators today. Some teachers believe it is becoming increasingly harder to ‘control’ students and are finding they are competing with Google for credibility in the classroom. Others are yearning for the ‘good ole days’ when scholarly excellence was the primary pursuit of the teacher. For myself, the issue goes far deeper than keeping students engaged in class or teachers having exceptional knowledge of their subject matter.

It’s in the relational aspect of teaching that the magic happens.

In the 21st century, teachers don’t just need good subject discipline knowledge; they need to have a deep understanding of pedagogical theory and be able to apply it in the classroom – it’s the profession of the teacher to know the difference and bring the two together. It’s in the relational aspect of teaching – the application of both content knowledge and pedagogical knowledge – that the magic happens; in how well teachers know each learner and personalise learning to accommodate diversity and individual needs.

We need to move beyond the myths to the practice – from the telling to the teaching. This relies on a very different framework; one that highlights the absolute complexity of teaching. And we need to take an honest look at our teacher training programs to see if we are adequately preparing teachers to meet the demands of 21st century schooling because the game has changed.

In the 21st century, we live in a connected world where students have unprecedented access to information and knowledge at their fingertips. It is no longer desirable or sustainable for teachers to be the sole keepers of information. The NMC Horizon Report: 2012 K-12 edition released in June predicts that tablets and mobile phone apps will be widely adopted by schools within the next 12 months with the potential to be prevalent across all academic disciplines because of their pervasive impact on practically every aspect of ‘informal life’. The report highlights the importance, both for teachers and students, of acquiring new skillsets such as ability to assess the credibility of resources, comprehend information, develop capacity for leadership and creativity which come about through ‘challenge-based, active learning’.

We know from Bransford et al (2000) that students are capable of discovering their own knowledge, incorporating that alongside previously learned knowledge and using that knowledge to solve real-world problems. The 2012 Horizon Report signals that those teachers who see themselves primarily as content experts will find it increasingly harder to survive, let alone thrive, in the modern classroom. Subject matter, while important, only goes so far.

On the other hand, a greater focus on accommodating new ways of learning and teaching to suit the changing context in which our students live does not necessarily equate to improved learning. Good teaching candidates require a deep subject knowledge – not necessarily the highest ATAR – and the passion to continue to learn about their subject area; they need to be able to relate well to young people and meet the learner where they are at; to understand and implement learning theory; and employ the right pedagogies to make a difference.

This requires a rigorous model of teacher training that incorporates both theory and practice; that provides quality feedback for teachers on their teaching; and one that links teachers with mentors and coaches while in training. Melbourne University has taken a step in this direction by offering a Master of Teaching where as part of the course, graduate teachers are placed in a school for a full semester and actively teach classes. Throughout the placement they receive quality feedback from experienced teachers and mentors and have the opportunity to build professional networks while learning their craft *in situ* in a real learning environment.

This model has application for all teachers throughout their careers. In our own system, we focus strongly on teacher collaboration and the use of professional learning communities with a specific inquiry focus because the research shows that teachers learn best when they learn together (Timperley et al, 2007). We need to find examples of teaching innovation and excellence and take them to scale through collegial collaboration and ongoing teacher learning. And to do any of this we need to trust the profession.

My point is that extrinsic factors don't make good teachers. We have to work on improving teacher quality from the inside out. And while we certainly have to train and prepare new teachers coming through, we also have to work with the teachers already teaching in our schools.

It's time to move beyond the myths and shift the focus from the telling to the teaching. As I commented in Saturday's Sydney Morning Herald we need to build teacher capacity, involve teachers in continual professional learning and encourage them to share their practice with each other. Teachers are the ones who have to improve and get better at their craft.

Building capacity through strategic partnerships 2012-08-13

For a number of years, we have had a strategic partnership with Republic Polytechnic (RP), a tertiary institution in Singapore that leverages problem-based learning to provide an industry-relevant curriculum to Diploma level. It is geared towards students becoming innovative and entrepreneurial professionals with global perspectives.

A number of our schools in the Parramatta Diocese such as Parramatta Marist High School, which introduced project based learning into the school four years ago, have been associated with RP in Singapore. On the way back from the Building Learning Communities conference (#BLC12) we had the opportunity to spend a few hours at the school to further strengthen our strategic partnership.

We saw instructional leadership in action with RP's Senior Director Michael Koh and Deputy Director Karen Goh very focused on student learning and on implementing processes to ensure that their teachers are continual learners, and hence improving as teachers. Michael and Karen described the needs of students in today's world as the driver for all their work as well as how the curriculum design of problem-based learning centres upon the experience of learners. We saw that their model of problem-based learning utilises many high effect teaching strategies that have been identified as such by John Hattie's research (Visible Learning, 2009) such as student self-reporting (1.44); teachers providing feedback (0.73); good teacher-student relationships (0.72); problem solving teaching (0.61); and concept mapping (0.57).

To support their learner focused model RP has created contemporary, collaborative and engaging learning spaces for students to connect, plan and reflect on their learning. They have embraced technology in every aspect of campus life – they don't have any books or papers but instead have instant messaging, wireless projection systems and their trademark Learning Environment Online. While RP is the fifth polytechnic institute in Singapore, they have broken the traditional mould in student learning, teaching and learning space design.

Viviane Robinson's Five Dimensions of Effective Leadership

We also saw that a significant strategy at RP was ensuring teacher quality is highly visible. All teachers are expected to achieve a 'Facilitator's' qualification which entails significant teacher observations and reflection, both personal and via a collegial panel. This aligns with what we know from Viviane Robinson's research on instructional leadership that promoting and participating in teacher learning and ensuring teacher quality have high effect sizes on student outcomes.

During the visit, we had the opportunity to experience first-hand one of their 'authentic' learning environments – a full-scale flight simulator located in one of the classrooms. This amazing facility is used to teach students a wide range of problem solving techniques across a range of disciplines.

A flight simulator at Republic Polytechnic used to teach students a range of problem solving techniques.

We saw the teacher, who is a former pilot and member of crash investigation units, set a series of problems that the students needed to solve by working as a team just as a pilot and co-pilot would. These start off simple and become more complex with students required to draw on both known and new information to solve. The problems required students to utilise knowledge across multiple domains including mathematics, science and geography. For example, working out what ground temperature would be using only the current outside temperature at 30,000 feet; or determining how many degrees it takes to turn the plane and line up for landing. From our experience we could see how this 'real life' learning experience was used with students to develop key problem solving strategies. Needless to say this learning environment is in high demand by all students.

Evident at RP was the importance of teachers providing real life opportunities to engage students in learning; *in situ* teacher observations and reflection to enhance teacher quality; and evidenced-based leadership to drive the focus on student learning. In other words, RP use good theory to support good practice to deliver the best learning opportunities for each and every student.

This is why we have a strategic partnership with Republic Polytechnic because they understand that all students can learn, that good teachers make the difference and that leadership is pivotal in driving continual improvement. Robust partnerships like this build everyone's capacity and leads to real change and improvement.

The mind has moved 2012-08-24

Recently I attended the third Biennial National Education Forum, convened jointly every two years by all state and territory Australian governments to track and share progress in education from around Australia against the 2008 Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians – an agreement between state, territory and commonwealth Education Ministers on a shared set of goals to work towards to improve education.

A key part of the 2012 program was a Ministerial Round Table featuring Federal Minister for Education Peter Garrett and each state and territory Minister for Education. Each of the Education Ministers highlighted ways in which they have been working to achieve equity and excellence in education in their respective state such as the ‘Strong Start Bright Future’ program in the Northern Territory and the ‘Launching into Learning’ program in Tasmania for 0-4 year olds.

What struck me was the coherence and alignment of the Ministers’ understanding of how to improve students’ learning. Sadly in my experience this has not always been the case. For the last several decades, each state has pursued its own, often unique, educational policy agenda aimed at their understanding of how to improve learning. This has led to a veritable smorgasbord of approaches, often reflecting the latest fad internationally. Ultimately none of these short term fixes survive in the current policy mix – for that we should be glad.

Every child matters and every child can learn.

What has changed is that while the Ministers have locally based policy frameworks, all of them start from a common and simple premise: **firstly, that every child matters and every child can learn; secondly**, that the key to ensuring that every child is learning is having good teachers who continue to commit to build their own capacity; and **thirdly**, that we need to support those teachers in the schools by good school leaders who bring data to bear on that process.

We now have a global consensus that to improve students’ learning, we have to improve the quality of the teacher. The McKinsey and Company (2007) report states that the available evidence suggests that ‘the main driver of the variation in student learning at school is the quality of the teacher.’ Top-performing systems – as defined by the OECD’s Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) plus those systems which McKinsey and Co recognise as having ‘strong improvement trajectory’ – manage who enters the profession by choosing candidates from the top 5-30 per cent, as well as through a rigorous selection process. Attracting the right people is also closely linked to the status of the profession, the report said. To sustain the quality of the teaching, top performing systems deliver interventions across the system to improve learning, which occurs in the interaction between student and teacher such as ‘coaching classroom practice, developing stronger school leaders, and enabling teachers to learn from each other’.

From their quantitative and qualitative research, the McKinsey and Co (2007) report concluded the following:

‘To improve instruction, these high-performing school systems consistently do three things well: – They get the right people to become teachers (the quality of an education system cannot exceed the quality of its teachers) – They develop these people into effective instructors (the only way to improve outcomes is to improve instruction) – They put in place systems and targeted support to ensure that every child is able to benefit from excellent instruction (the only way for the system to reach the highest performance is to raise the standard of every student)’ (McKinsey and Co, 2007, p.13)

We need to take heed of this analysis, because we also now have a global understanding that improving teacher quality needs to happen at a national scale, not on a school by school basis. And countries are starting to do this. In Leading System Transformation (2010) Alma Harris outlines how Wales, for example, is breaking the mould and leading the way in implementing a ‘tri-level approach to the systemic reform of the education and training system in Wales’, where ‘tri-level’ means that ‘all schools must be involved in the change process and that the district or local level must act together along with the state to align itself to the reform process’ (Fullan, 2009, in Harris, 2010).

It’s an ‘all-in’ approach that’s needed. In Wales, ‘the recognition that large scale change can only occur is if all professionals work collaboratively and in partnership’ (Harris, 2010), which means that collaboration within the profession, across government and school sectors is a make-or-break ingredient. But professional learning communities alone are not the solution, Harris says. They need to be supported by leadership ‘in every school, in every local education authority and in every classroom’ (Harris, 2010). ‘The central idea here is that to achieve

system wide reform will require a particular type of leadership; one that brokers, resources, supports, challenges and makes connections across the system,' (Harris, 2010). And system level change, as Harris says, can only be achieved by 'changing the way people connect, communicate and collaborate'.

In 'The Flat World and Education' (2010) Linda Darling Hammond noted that high-achieving countries realise that 'a comprehensive framework for developing strong teaching and new resources in the system' is the most effective way to maintain professional learning and in turn sustain strong teaching practice.

"Creating a strong profession in education is not a task that can be tackled school by school or district by district. And creating uniformly strong schools cannot be accomplished without a strong profession. Ultimately, a well-designed state and national infrastructure that ensures that schools have access to well-prepared teachers and knowledge about the best practices is absolutely essential," (Darling Hammond, 2010 p 197).

In a very short time we've come to a general understanding that what is needed to improve students' learning, is to improve the quality of the teacher. We need to think local, act national and global. We don't need a one-size-fits-all model – we need innovative and creative ways forward. What we need now is a coherent policy framework based on sound theory and practice and most importantly an intelligent implementation and reporting process. And this is urgent. We cannot keep delaying action. We need to start yesterday.

Policy muddle stifles innovation 2012-09-06

I, like many, eagerly awaited the Prime Minister's response to the Gonski recommendations at the National Press Club earlier this week with a degree of certainty that a new funding model for Australian schools would be announced.

But when the Prime Minister made no announcement about the funding model, the quantum of funds and the processes to support and introduce it, we were all left scratching our heads.

All schools need to forward plan. This planning requires funding certainty. Instead of steering a clear path ahead backed up by detailed funding measures, the Prime Minister's speech on Monday only seemed to stir a pot of growing frustration. In the absence of providing any details, the void is mostly filled with questions. I can only hope that clarity around funding levels comes soon.

I was also concerned by the issues the Prime Minister raised and her call for us to join her 'national crusade'. In one sense, her speech was very Whitlam-esque; forward looking and spoken with passion, filled with case studies and imagery to tug at even the hardest of hearts. While a good crusade always rallies the troops and builds momentum, it is a call to the wrong thing.

The simple assertion of the need 'to improve schools' doesn't stand up to scrutiny; nor do the simplistic international examples that reduce the complexities involved to a 'race to the top'. The literature and the practice are clear on this matter.

Professor Anthony Welch made the point in an article in yesterday's Sydney Morning Herald that a narrow focus on improving Australia's rank on international league tables avoids real and persistent problems in education. He says if the government places too much emphasis on test results, we'll have teachers teaching to the test, children learning but not understanding and a widening gap between the 'haves' and the 'have-nots'.

This narrow focus does nothing to raise the overall standard of learning and teaching in Australia.

The proposed scheme to hold schools to account based on a new school improvement plan that is checked and published demeans the work already going on in schools and the good work that our teachers currently do.

'Irreplaceables,' a great way to think about good teachers.

We know that the most effective way to improve student learning and thus improve schooling is to invest in good teachers and leaders. I recently came across *The Irreplaceables*, a report from the US addressing the 'good teacher retention crisis'. It struck me that the term 'irreplaceable' is a great way to think about good teachers, and highlighted how we need to support them by building their capacity and providing ongoing feedback. The report found that top teachers who were provided with a mix of feedback and development, recognition, leadership opportunities and access to professional learning resources planned to remain at their schools longer than those who didn't.

We already know how to do this.

Building teacher capacity is the way forward. Why is the government focused on implementing a policy aimed at measuring teacher capacity rather than building it?

Good teachers make the difference. Building teacher capacity is how we will improve student learning in Australia.

From local to global 2012-09-16

Recently I was interviewed by students from Holy Family Primary in East Granville for their 24/7 internet news station, HFSTV. I was blown away by the questions they asked, their level of engagement with the big issues and their passion for learning.

It's vital that we engage students with the big issues.

These students who were in Years 4 and 5 launched HFSTV this week with an impressive array of content including interviews with local police officers, CEOs and politicians. They even secured an interview with Federal Minister for School Education, Early Childhood and Youth, Peter Garrett, who they questioned about government funding.

This goes to show that today's learners are acutely aware of the social, political and environmental influences impacting the world around them and they are capable of discussing these issues. The technology at hand is providing access and scope for students to go beyond their local communities for ideas and paves the way in building connections beyond the school gate.

I believe it is vital that we engage students of all ages in the big issues – they have opinions and perspectives to offer the world, and relish the opportunity to share and celebrate their learning. Gone are the days when students would submit items of interest for a weekly school newsletter. Gone are the days when end-of-term reports kept parents informed about how their child was learning.

I invited the students at Holy Family Primary to put together a few thoughts about what they are learning through their internet TV project. I think their responses demonstrate how engaging with the digital tools has extended their learning. My thanks to Holy Family Primary for their contribution below and for the opportunity to be part of HFSTV.

How did you come up with HFSTV and why?

HFSTV was started as a way of showing our parents what we are learning in class and to use technology in the class in a meaningful and fun way. (Payton, Year 5)

How did you make the Challenge and Project Based Learning Movies and why?

We made the Challenge and Project Based Learning movies with the help of technology such as cameras and a green screen, Apple Macs, Ipad apps such as Garage Band and iMovie. We created HFSTV to show our parents and the wider community what we are learning about. (Jayden and Jason, Year 5 and Paris Year 4)

How are you going to run the station?

We are going to run the station through a link from our main school website: <http://www.hfgranville.catholic.edu.au> New movies showing learning and special events will be uploaded regularly. (Christopher, Year 5)

Do you find that it is easy or difficult to make learning movies for the station?

It can be both easy and difficult to make learning movies for the station because we have to plan, record, delete unwanted scenes, add music and text, check the film and then publish. If you are committed, persistent and focused the process is easy. (Talisha, Year 5 and Helena, Year 4)

What do you love about the project?

*I love that we can watch what others are doing and learning. (Sandra, Year 5) I love the logo for HFSTV. (Christopher, Year 5) *I love making and editing movies and using these movies to tell stories.** (Jasmin, Year 4)**

Who will be regular presenters?

The staff and students of Holy Family School will be the regular presenters on HFSTV. Our presenters have interesting and creative ideas. (Talisha, Year 5 and Jeremy, Year 4)

What have you learned?

I have learned different ways to use technology and to be more focused and confident. I have also learned the value of teamwork. (Sandra, Year 5)* I have learned how to set up the green screen and make and edit movies. (Jason, Year 5) I have learned how to work as a team to achieve a goal. (Jeremy, Year 4)*

What are you learning?

We are learning how to interview people using clear voices. I have learned a lot about researching real world problems and presenting a solution. (Jayden, Year 5) I am learning how to use different forms of technology. (Payton, Year 5) I am learning how to film using a camera and edit using iMovie. (Helena, Year 4)

There is nothing more powerful than young people taking responsibility for their learning and then learning about that learning

Learning without a licence 2012-09-21

It never ceases to amaze me how when confronted with challenging issues we tend to default to our past experiences. Perhaps it's because hindsight provides 20/20 vision or because it gives us a sense of security to cling to what we know. But in a knowledge age, when it comes to solving today's problems and anticipating tomorrow's challenges, we have to talk about a new paradigm, and look to change our habits. No time like the present, let's start today.

I was recently asked to comment on an idea floated by Australia's leading child and adolescent psychologist Michael Carr-Gregg who suggested bringing in licences for young people to use mobile phones and tablets at school; giving students access to use the devices only once they'd been taught what was safe and responsible and agreed to abide by a set of rules and conditions.

Licensing use of itself does nothing to change practice or encourage innovation and creativity. In fact it can do just the opposite. The retreat to regulation raises more issues than it solves. I can understand why there would be some fears for students' safety but the suggestion to license students doesn't make any sense; once students get outside the school yard and classroom, they freely use their personal devices in all other areas of life, just as freely as they can draw water from a tap.

I recently came across this blog post highlighting an interesting list of quotes from Collins and Halverson's (2009) 'Rethinking Education in the Age of Technology' showing that this fear for new technology in education is not a new phenomenon.

- From a principal's publication in 1815: "Students today depend on paper too much. They don't know how to write on a slate without getting chalk dust all over themselves. They can't clean a slate properly. What will they do when they run out of paper?"
- From the journal of the National Association of Teachers, 1907: "Students today depend too much upon ink. They don't know how to use a pen knife to sharpen a pencil. Pen and ink will never replace the pencil."
- From Rural American Teacher, 1928: "Students today depend upon store bought ink. They don't know how to make their own. When they run out of ink they will be unable to write words or ciphers until their next trip to the settlement. This is a sad commentary on modern education."
- From Federal Teachers, 1950: "Ballpoint pens will be the ruin of education in our country. Students use these devices and then throw them away. The American values of thrift and frugality are being discarded. Businesses and banks will never allow such expensive luxuries."
- From a science fair judge in Apple Classroom of Tomorrow chronicles, 1988: "Computers give students an unfair advantage. Therefore, students who used computers to analyze data or create displays will be eliminated from the science fair."

It doesn't surprise me then that the knee-jerk reaction to technology in schools is to want to restrict students.

What will schooling look like in the future? I often think about this question and I have come to realise that we won't find the answer in the past. We'll find the answer in the very work we do today; work that is based on good theory and good practice. Learning and teaching has to be driven by innovation, entrepreneurship and creativity. We need to have a willingness to look outward rather than inward, a willingness to look forward rather than backward, especially in Education where learning means constantly being open to discovering new ideas and information, wisdom and understanding.

Shaun Parker says students were learning dance moves from videos on YouTube.

I believe that to limit students' use of technology is to limit their possibilities. For the last four years, our schools in greater western Sydney have been working in collaboration with Shaun Parker – a well-known talent in professional contemporary dance. The result of our collaboration in 2012 was *The Yard*, a 60-minute performance exploring school yard issues using contemporary dance forms.

In this STUDIO Art Break video, Shaun makes a few interesting points about how the students constantly watch videos on YouTube to work on their moves. 'They teach it to themselves, they learn in the schoolyard,' he said. 'They think and move very quickly with ideas because they access that many ideas when they click on YouTube or when they chat to their friends'. He said while he has utilised that, he has also tried to crystallise and channel it 'so it isn't just a series of fast ideas' – this proves how pervasive and essential technology is to students' learning.

When new technology is faced with fear of the unknown and from a 'that's the way things have always been done' framework, we miss out the creativity and innovation that springs forth. Sure, we need to learn from the

past, but we also need to seek answers to the future in the present work we do. If we base all our work on past experience, we are never going to move forward.

We know what makes a difference. We know that from birth, today's students live in a Web 2.0 world, a world which is only going to get increasingly more complex as the technology matures. Rather than default to a 'limit and control' mentality, we've got to ask the question: how do we deal with these issues?

The cornerstone of success in the information age comes from understanding how to learn and a willingness to continue to learn. It's about being responsive and adaptive to change and having a sense of openness towards the future. We need to learn how to take advantage of the new tools for learning as they fast become available and make the most of these learning opportunities.

Building Professional Capital 2012-10-05

Recently, YouTube in partnership with the Khan Academy put the call out for educational content creators to train and mentor a growing online learning audience. In many parts of America, mandated participation in online courses as part of students' K-12 schooling is on the rise. Massive online open courses (MOOCs) are emerging in the higher education sector, challenging traditional approaches to tertiary education, which is evidenced by declining enrolments in some tertiary courses. Senator Stephen Conroy last week challenged Australian universities to rethink their business models to incorporate MOOCs or risk becoming irrelevant. This raises alarm bells for me about the quality of instruction and students' engagement in learning.

If we agree that teachers make the biggest difference to student learning outcomes, we need to ensure online learning models are not harnessed in such a way as to reduce education to a self-serve product.

While the proliferation of online educational content certainly provides an opportunity to influence the delivery and engagement of contemporary learning and teaching, we cannot lose sight of the important role that teachers play in engaging students in deep learning. We know the relationship between the teacher and the student in the presence of content (Elmore, 2009) – the instructional core – is paramount to the learning and teaching process. If technology supplants teachers and students become learners in isolation, this is not only detrimental to the development of critical thinking skills, but also for their capacity for deeper learning and understanding.

Andy Hargreaves and myself at the 2012 ADC lecture.

The focus for education, then, needs to be in building teachers' capabilities: individually and collectively. We were privileged to have Andy Hargreaves deliver Catholic Education's annual Ann D Clark lecture recently to over 300 educators. He warned of the increasing prevalence of the 'business capital' approach to education i.e. short-term investment (e.g. online delivery models) for quick return, saying the education sector had become a lucrative market for investors.

'When we begin to move the whole profession of education to serve the short-term interests of business capital, it comes at an immense price and carries dangerous assumptions about the nature of the teacher and whether or not this is even a profession,' (Hargreaves, 2012)

In their book *Professional Capital: Transforming Teaching in Every School*, Hargreaves and Fullan (2012) identify three components of 'professional capital' – human, social and decisional – which he says, when developed in concert, will build the teaching profession.

- 'Human capital' refers to highly qualified teachers having the content knowledge and an understanding of child psychology, individual pre-service training and preparation, emotional intelligence and capability in relationships
- * 'Social capital' refers to trust, collaboration, collective responsibility, peer pressure and support, mutual assistance and networks
- * 'Decisional capital' (a term coined by Fullan and Hargreaves) refers to the teacher's judgement, in case experience and lots of practice, in a teacher's ability to reflect alone and together on their practice and to adjust their practice to improve students' learning accordingly.

Building professional capital needs to take place throughout a teacher's career in various ways at various stages because Hargreaves suggests it takes around eight years or 10,000 hours to develop expertise in the profession of teaching through practice and concerted effort.

Hargreaves says quality teachers need to:

- understand that teaching is technically difficult
- * know cognitive science
- * understand a range of special education abilities
- * know about differentiated instruction
- * be able to assess in a sophisticated, diagnostic way
- * have massive emotional intelligence
- * have high levels of education and long periods of rigorous training
- * be able to use judgement, wisdom and discernment to know what's in the spreadsheet of data to connect it to the students and to the knowledge they're trying to acquire.

Teaching is not an individual task, but is something that is done collectively with other people as a community that takes time, investment, conditions and support. These human capabilities and the collaborative aspect of teaching (social capital) cannot be substituted with an online learning system alone.

I was pleased to read Khan Academy founder, Salman Khan, tackle the concern that the Khan Academy was a way to replace teachers:

'Human teachers will become far more valuable in the future because [the classroom] will be a more interactive

place and they are going to be doing the things computers cannot do, which is form bonds, motivate, mentor, diagnose,' (Salman Khan, 2012).

I couldn't agree more. There is, and always will be, a role for teachers.

It's a small 'virtual' world 2012-10-09

I'm not sure if you have had this experience, but the last thing I expected while travelling in Greece on a pilgrimage with Catholic Education colleagues was to be approached by two fellow Australians who recognised me from my Twitter profile.

A 21st century encounter with my colleagues developed through social networking.

It was a powerful moment to connect 'face to face' with people who had become my professional colleagues in a very 21st century kind of way. Social media is a phenomenon that's here to stay and one that has made it possible to connect with people outside your physical sphere on a daily basis to share thinking, learning and ideas. This chance encounter helped me realise that the professional learning community we are a part of via Twitter or other online tools might feel mostly 'virtual' but it is real. It's not just a world of ideas, it is a community of educators who share a common interest to improve learning and teaching. What we share online has the potential to encourage, inspire and stretch us to improve the work we do and the way we go about it.

Recently George Couros (@gcouros) wrote about the importance of using Twitter to not only share information, but to listen and to engage. He made the point that it's not good enough for schools, organisations and businesses to just 'be online' and share information alone. They must listen to those they serve. If we don't use the tools effectively to engage, to collaborate and participate in the conversation, we risk using a 'Web 2.0 tool in a Web 1.0 way' and never take full advantage of its capabilities. Online tools shouldn't be used as a monologue stream, because the technology is designed for dialogue.

For myself, tools like Twitter and Bluyonder allow me to be part of a global professional learning community and is an opportunity to share my own ideas and engage with the ideas of others for my own professional improvement in the work I do as a system leader.

Bumping into my colleagues in Greece demonstrates the power of this online community and is a good reminder that what we share and do in the virtual world does have an impact in the physical world.

What makes a good teacher? 2012-10-24

Recently, Australian Catholic University Vice-Chancellor, Prof Greg Craven, spoke at the National Press Club on the issue of teacher quality, arguing that the ATAR (tertiary admission rank) is a deficient indicator for selection of candidates into teacher training degrees.

His comments were made in response to the NSW Department of Education's *Great Teaching, Inspired Learning* public discussion paper which cited that in NSW in 2012, 'more than 20% of entrants to undergraduate initial teacher education courses had ATAR scores below 60 and education was the least popular course for students with ATAR scores of 90 or above'. Prof Craven made the point that the ATAR lacked the sophistication to measure the 'human qualities' required for teaching.

A good teacher is a contributor.

Everybody's got an opinion of good teachers. In most of the current literature, there are descriptions of the qualities and characteristics that make a good teacher.

When I think about what makes a good teacher, the following comes to mind.

A good teacher is:

Curious – they want to know more about their craft and know more about the students they work with. They are open to new ideas, new ways of thinking and they take responsibility for their own personal and professional growth and development.

A contributor – they give of themselves and their expertise and, in most cases, without any thought of what they receive in return.

By nature collaborative – they don't work in isolation and are open to feedback from students and colleagues. They know that by sharing data, practice and experiences with others they will build their own capacity and the capacity of their colleagues.

Daring – they are willing to do things differently, to step outside their comfort zone. They are willing to ask the big questions without knowing the answers. They're not afraid to fail because they know that's often when learning occurs.

An expert – they understand that you're not at the top of your game until you've got years and years of good theory and practice under your belt. Throughout their career, they hone their craft because they want to get better. In turn, they become the coaches and mentors for the next generation of teacher to build their profession.

These are a few of my thoughts; I'd be interested to hear some of yours. Let's see if we can build up a more comprehensive picture of what makes a good teacher.

The Next West Wing 2012-11-01

An opportunity to discuss education policy on the eve of a Presidential election. (Courtesy [BostonBill](#))

Recently I attended a meeting with Marc Tucker and Robert Schwartz, two senior education researchers and US government advisors on education policy. Hosted by the new Centre for Education Statistics and Evaluation in the NSW Department of Education, this high level briefing provided an opportunity to discuss education policy in relation to worldwide trends and a broader understanding of the current US state of play on the eve of a Presidential election.

For the last few decades Marc Tucker and Robert Schwartz have been important contributors to this discussion, advising US policy makers including Presidents Clinton and Obama.

They made the point that the educational agenda over this period has been largely driven by policies to:

1. evaluate teachers on a narrow set of criteria to identify and remove the bottom 10 per cent of under-performing teachers
2. introduce Charter Schools giving parents greater choice and to harness business capital to help fund schooling
3. set narrow educational standards through basic skills testing

Tucker and Schwarz believe this has been a process of reform by attacking the system. Interestingly, the evidence shows that despite a 270% increase in expenditure on education in real terms under the last two presidential administrations, US schools have gone backwards on all indicators.

Clearly this agenda doesn't work.

When they went looking for what did work, they found high performing countries (including Australia) had policies that were almost opposite to those in the US.

These countries shared similar characteristics which they identified as a:

1. strong instructional core, rigorous processes and diversity around assessment of student performance
2. robust curriculum framework and related standards identifying what students should be able to know and do
3. focus on building teacher capacity

It was refreshing to hear the discussion go beyond the limited comparisons that are so often made in relation to PISA and the usual top four performing systems in the world. Schwartz and Tucker highlighted Ontario, Canada as one of the best examples of a sustainable approach to education policy around these three areas, particularly in their focus on building teacher capacity. They also found evidence within these successful systems of what Richard Elmore calls 'reciprocity of accountability for capacity'.

'Accountability must be a reciprocal process. For every increment of performance I demand from you, I have an equal responsibility to provide you with the capacity to meet that expectation. Likewise, for every investment you make in my skill and knowledge, I have a reciprocal responsibility to demonstrate some new increment in performance.' (Elmore, 2002).

For the last 20 years Australia has been responding to the changing world predominantly through the expansion and integration of technology into schooling – the Digital Revolution. What the US experience shows us is that the real drivers of change are not tool driven, but rely on a deeper understanding of the nature of people and how they learn; a worldview that informs learning and teaching; a strong foundation of theory and evidence; and finally an investment in building human capital.

Rather than attacking the system (teachers, curriculum, and so on) or making changes at the fringes, we need to look within the profession to build the capacity of our teachers and leaders for successful education reform.

Time to Tinker 2012-11-08

The idea of school as a workshop for ‘tinkering’ isn’t new. John Dewey and others like Reggio Emilia, were early exponents of experiential learning and a great believer that schools should be an extension of home-life and society. Dewey writes in the *School and Society* (1912):

There is little of one sort of order where things are in process of construction; there is a certain disorder in any busy workshop; there is not silence, persons are not engaged in maintaining certain fixed physical postures; their arms are not folded; they are not holding their books thus and so. They are doing a variety of things, and there is the confusion, the bustle, that results from activity. But out of occupation (not akin to work), out of doing things that are to produce results, and out of doing these in a social and cooperative way, there is born a discipline of its own kind and type. But the school has been so set apart, so isolated from the ordinary conditions and motives of life, that the place where children are sent for discipline is the one place in the world where it is most difficult to get experience – the mother of all discipline worth the name.

Some years ago, Gever Tulley created the Tinkering School. It began as a six day program to “explore the notion that kids can build anything, and through building, learn anything”. Tulley saw that new insights often emerged when problems become puzzles to be solved. It’s a powerful reminder of how capable children are – especially ones with power tools!

The best-selling Australian children’s author, John Marsden, has also created a school, which is philosophically similar to Dewey’s approach to education. Candlebark challenges traditional approaches to learning and teaching by emphasising the importance of experiential learning within meaningful social contexts; where the learner is not an observer but an active and valued participant within the learning community. From its website:

Candlebark believes that children flourish by experiencing life at close quarters. We regard first-hand experiences as generally superior to second hand experiences. We try to say “Yes” as much as possible – yes to new ideas, yes to experiments, yes to innovations. If the school has a motto, it is “take care, take risks”. We encourage an active engagement with the world. According to our assessment of students’ maturity and abilities, we may teach them to use axes, log splitters and chainsaws. During maintenance activities students may be up ladders, on roofs, changing light globes, using hammers, saws, mattocks, vacuum cleaners and electrical tools.

What seems to separate these schools from the traditional mainstream approach to schooling is time. Students at Candlebark and Tinkering School have time to tinker, explore, problem-solve, build and reflect. These students are ‘learning by doing’ or in the case of the Tinkering School, ‘learning by building’. When students tinker with materials and ideas, ideas develop in a process that begins by being open to ideas and can end in a ‘happy accident’ as the doodle illustration below shows.

Doodle by @giuliaforsythe drawn during @grantpotter’s presentation on Tinkering, Learning and the Adjacent Possible

Noone knows the importance of ‘tinkering time’ more than the creator of the BlackBerry. Mike Lazaridis has not only been described as the father of the smart phone revolution but is founder of the Perimeter Institute for Theoretical Physics, whose alumnus includes Stephen Hawking.

In his recent address at the Association for the Advancement of Science meeting, Lazaridis admits that his most prized possession is his education. According to Lazaridis, the basis of a great education is one that provides students with opportunities to tinker with ideas, take risks and even fail. He believes that nothing beats “creating, hands-on learning and teaching” and speaks warmly about his own high school education.

In Singapore, giving students more time to create and innovate was prioritised nationally when, in 1997, the ‘Thinking Schools, Learning Nation’ initiative was launched. As a result, Singapore’s curriculum and assessment have been changing; for example, Ng Pak Trak from Singapore’s National Institute of Education explains:

Syllabi, examinations and university admission criteria were changed to encourage more thinking outside the box and risk-taking. Students are now more engaged in project work and higher order thinking questions to encourage creativity, independent and inter-dependent thinking. (Ng, 2008 in Darling-Hammond, 2010).

The results of this national step are evidenced in the example of Ngee Ann Secondary School:

Among other things, students are given seed money to start their own small business, and the funds they make go back into the school. They prepare a concept proposal and a business plan. Those that are selected can use the small stalls lining one walkway to sell their wares, which may include everything from creating and selling baked goods to designing and selling computer or video games. The businesses are licensed; if they violate regulations, they can be closed down for a week, as in real life, so students learn how the world operates (Darling-Hammond, 2010).

Lazaridis believes that while we are now surrounded by very powerful devices, these are just ideas and it will be new ideas that will take us even further in the future. Admittedly these ideas may come to fruition in 20 years from now but we have a responsibility today as educators, to encourage the ideas of students, to promote tinkering and to ensure opportunities for blue-sky thinking that could one day hold the key to solving complex health, ecological, economic or social challenges.

The challenge for schools is to move learners from desks to workshops; from classrooms to learning spaces; from wielding pens to ‘power’ tools. And while we can only imagine what the future will bring, I’d like to hope we are close to seeing every school as a place where children and ideas flourish simultaneously and where there is time to tinker.

Steven Johnson developed this interesting presentation on the concept of ‘where good ideas come from’. In thinking about how to develop ideas in collaboration, it’s worth a look.

Honoured to be in schooling *2012-11-10*

I was surprised and humbled last night at our Silver Jubilee Celebration when presented with a Papal Knighthood in the Order of St Gregory the Great. I am not often lost for words, as this blog attests, but I was quite moved by the significance of the honour presented by our Bishop, Anthony Fisher OP. The citation read by Fr Arthur Bridge said I was being acknowledged, not just for my contribution to Catholic Education over the past few decades, but also for my work in reframing schooling in a contemporary age.

As I said last night – when I was finally able to string some words together – our work in the area of making schooling relevant for today's world is only possible through the support and confidence of the Bishops with whom we work. Some might think it's remarkable that the Catholic Church is so willing to lead a progressive agenda in schooling – I disagree.

Catholic schools are called to be different. The Catholic Church is by nature counter-cultural; it follows, then, that Catholic schools must also be counter-cultural. It's in our DNA. If Catholic schools simply mirror the existing landscape and become extensions of the 'norm', we will have failed to fulfil our moral imperative which is to 'have life and have it to the full' (John 10:10). This doesn't mean we hole up and forget the secular world. On the contrary, we have to be an integral part of the world we serve, but we must also seek to transform that world – to make it better – by challenging the status quo and continually looking to improve the experience of schooling for the young people in our care.

In the Diocese of Parramatta, we are working collaboratively to find new ways of learning and teaching informed by what we know is good theory and practice; we are trying to embed that at every level of the system; and to continue to build the capacity of our teachers and leaders so they can prepare the next generation to go out and transform the world for the better.

This Papal honour is an acknowledgement of the work WE, as a diocese, are doing to ensure Catholic schooling is relevant, meaningful and transformational for our 43,000 students; and of our responsibility to share this work with our colleagues across sectors and across the globe.

To my colleagues, thank you for your ongoing commitment to Catholic education and happy Jubilee.

Sir Greg

Enterprise schooling: towards interdependence 2012-11-16

One thing that seems to annoy educators is the intrusion of “business” terminology into the work of schooling. When terms like key performance indicators and data driven are introduced, we fear that business is going to take over the work of schooling, which has its own unique language and narrative.

For too long we’ve seen the “business of schooling” as unique to each school or system; a stand-alone process. We have operated as some sort of small cottage industry and worked to provide schooling within its own context. As we know, this isn’t sustainable in a world that has become connected and flatter.

Michael Fullan and myself on his recent visit to meet with our school and system leaders.

If we’re going to find ways to continuously improve schools, we have to move from a cottage understanding of schooling to an enterprise understanding of schooling. Michael Fullan has been working with us recently and made this point when he talked about the need for interdependence not independence.

I’ve been thinking about this point in relation to the history and growth of technologies in our schools. One of the reasons we’ve been able to link schools together and take advantage of the world wide web is that we understand the need for standards. These standards reflect a universal agreement on what it takes to run the system and run it efficiently.

Standards in technology can also be applied to the business of schooling. As I’ve said before, we need an agreed set of standards around the fundamentals of learning and teaching to ensure all schools move forward. I call this enterprise schooling– the move from isolation to connectedness, from local to global, from pockets to widespread engagement, from some schools to all schools sharing success.

Michael refers to it as common sense approach and shared five points or standards when it comes to widespread improvement of learning and teaching.

1. Literacy and numeracy is the bread and butter of primary schools
2. Capacity building must be continuous
3. There has to be a consistency of practice in how literacy and numeracy is taught
4. Momentum builds when we learn from each other (within schools and increasingly across schools and clusters)
5. Leadership teams must be obsessed with ‘making it happen’

While these points may be simple enough, the execution isn’t always. ‘Making it happen’ is complex work – it relies on school leaders building a cohesive group and teachers being ‘irresistibly engaged’. Engagement happens when there is ‘buy in’ – when every member of the team accepts the standards and takes responsibility for improving the learning and teaching.

According to Michael, we tend to do a lot of work on collaboration and teamwork but without traction – without results. Teamwork comes with an obligation to continuously drill down to get better learning to engage students, which engages teachers at the same time.

In thinking about schooling as ‘enterprise’, we should think about school implementation plans as mini ‘declarations of interdependence’. Written by the people and for the people and when successful, the work is shared among the people.

The 21st Century Textbook 2012-11-23

Don Tapscott's latest book is not actually a book but an iPad app *New Solutions for a Connected Planet*. It was created in partnership with Thinkers50 and sponsored by the Rotman School of Management at the University of Toronto.

What makes this app innovative is that it is an evolving 'book' full of real-time, rich media content that allows readers (users) to navigate and interact in a way that a hardcopy or even eReader book couldn't accommodate.

This is the start of a new breed of reference books that shows what you can do to take digital content to the next level. Think of the potential for learning and teaching... a 21st century textbook that allows the learner to navigate, press, wipe, slide, watch, listen and share all in the one place. It's served up in a highly interactive and engaging way for a digital savvy generation.

The app itself is well worth a look offering Don's latest thinking on how we can rebuild 10 institutions, including education, for the networked age.

In his Ted Talk, Four principles for the open world Don talks about the notion of sharing IP (intellectual property) to provide the rising tide in order to 'lift everyone's boats'. He sees the potential of the digital, global economy as a 'turning point in human history' requiring organisations and businesses to become more open, porous and fluid. It's likely this thinking is the reason why he has made his new book free via iTunes.

There are some tools already available like iBooks Author app for users to create something similar with text enriched by multimedia and the ability to publish/share the book via iTunes and other channels.

I'm sure we can expect to see even more sophisticated 'books' like this in the future. I would love to hear your thoughts on the 21st century textbook?

Beyond the black-belt 2012-11-30

There is a saying in martial arts that when a student makes it to black-belt, the real learning begins. We should be seeing teaching through the same lens. When teachers enter the classroom for the first time, the learning begins and it must never stop.

Professional learning and feedback go hand in hand to improve teacher effectiveness.

Research shows that ongoing professional learning is critical to improving teacher effectiveness but so too is the role of teacher evaluation. Without evaluation, professional learning cannot be individualised to improve teacher practice.

Last year, the Grattan Institute published its report into teacher appraisal, *Better Teacher Appraisal and Feedback: Improving Performance*, which shows that a system of teacher evaluation can increase effectiveness by 20 to 30 percent. The problem in the past has been the ad hoc nature of teacher evaluation – often infrequent or failing to provide teachers with valuable feedback and/or strategies to improve student learning gains. By integrating teacher evaluation into every aspect of teaching and learning, we create a culture of success for teachers, which leads to success for students.

Linda Darling-Hammond discusses the role of teacher evaluation in an article in the November 2012 edition of *Kappan* and states that systems must ensure “teacher evaluation is connected to – not isolated from – preparation and induction programs, daily professional practice, and a productive instructional context.”

Darling Hammond outlines five key features of a teacher effectiveness strategy:

1. Common state-wide standards for teaching related to meaningful student learning and shared across the system (*what should teachers know and do to be able to support the learning of every student*)
2. Performance based assessments based on these standards (*linking teacher effectiveness to student learning gains*)
3. Local evaluation systems aligned to the same standards for on the job teaching based on practice and student learning (*creating a continuum of competency for professional learning at every stage of teachers' careers*)
4. Support structures to ensure trained evaluators can mentor teachers
5. Aligned professional learning opportunities

These points illustrate the need for the teaching profession to work collaboratively to develop a common language around learning, a common understanding of what good practice looks like and a common process for measuring it.

Jason Culbertson's article, *Putting the value in teacher evaluation*, also reflects on a teacher evaluation system called TAP which is currently being used in 380 schools around the US. The TAP evaluation system includes a number of classroom observations every year by experienced evaluators. This is followed by conferencing in which the evaluator and teacher examine an observed strength, weakness and an individualised plan for improvement.

According to Culbertson, the most important result from this process is the common language developed around what effective teaching looks like. The standards provide teachers with a very clear understanding of what “performance looks like at various levels of expertise in a range of classroom practices and skills” which led to the most accomplished teachers ‘recalibrating their expectations’.

What appeals to me about the TAP method is that strategies are not only selected by ‘master teachers’ based on analysis of student data but are road-tested and refined in classrooms before teachers introduce it into their own classrooms. In this way, teachers are not dropped into the deep end to ‘sink or swim’ but are given a solid foundation on which to trial, collaboratively reflect and if necessary, refine strategies to improve student learning.

It is easy to assume that teachers should instinctively know how to improve their practice or that they begin their career armed with all the knowledge and skills required. But as Darling-Hammond and others point out – teachers just like students, need clear objectives, constructive feedback and opportunities to succeed.

No easy fixes – just good teaching 2012-12-13

In monitoring the commentary yesterday on the release of Australia's latest rankings in PIRL and TIMSS exams, there was general agreement that our performance was well below par. A country like Australia cannot tolerate poor performance. We must lift our standard of learning and teaching and do so as a matter of urgency.

In noting the response, there was the usual long line of experts, policy makers, academics, teacher union and parent representatives across the various media channels all pointing the finger at the other saying teachers need to do better, spend more, get paid more, be smarter, get better training, work better with parents, and so on.

Glaringly absent in the commentary was the voice of the professional teacher.

If everyone agrees that good teaching makes the biggest difference to student learning why aren't we looking to the profession to help drive the changes needed to ensure continuous school improvement?

We spend so much time and energy in the education sector adopting, adapting and applying – or arguing against and avoiding – yet another shortsighted, secondhand or unproven reform or initiative. As a veteran in the educational game I have lived through many of these reforms before and know they don't work, so yesterday's commentary about why Australia's performance is below par and how we can 'fix it' made me throw my hands up in the air. When will we ever learn?

There are no easy fixes here. We have to be brutally honest if we are to substantially change our existing practices. We know they are not delivering the best for every student, so we need to stop tinkering at the edges and start transforming schooling. Old mantras need to be tested; everything must be scrutinised.

And the only way to do the work is for teachers to do the work. And if they don't know how – to learn the work. The simple fact is we need to get the distractors out of the way so good teachers and school leaders can get on with the job.

It would be nice if we all got paid what we thought we were worth. Additional pay might get a teacher up in the morning but it certainly won't be the reason why they persist with a student who just doesn't seem to be making progress. All the good teachers I know do the job because they love the job; even when it's difficult and demanding. They persevere; they try everything in their toolbox and then some, to ensure that the kids in their class are getting it. And more than that – that they are thriving.

Think about the teachers you know that inspire you or challenge you. They aren't doing the same thing they did last year or even last month, they change and flex to suit the needs of their students. They spend much of their time finding new and better ways to engage students; to make learning interesting, relevant and meaningful for their students. The learning experiences they create range from using pen, paper and string to fully charged, connected, digital experiences. Like the teacher from Northern Beaches Secondary College featured in last week's *Sun Herald* who dug up half the school yard to create an archaeological site for her students. What motivates this breed of teacher? What makes them tick?

Often in the teaching profession we mistake complacency with collegiality. We convince ourselves it is better not to celebrate excellence or elevate a few shining examples for fear of denigrating the whole profession. This is wrong thinking.

Imagine the outcome if the medical profession didn't push the boundaries, risk failure, dust themselves off and try again? Forget organ transplants, brain surgery or even penicillin. None of these life saving techniques or treatments would be around today if the few hadn't persevered and looked for new and better ways of doing the work, and they wouldn't have perfected and improved these techniques and treatments if they hadn't shared their learning with their colleagues.

The same needs to happen in teaching. The best thing the profession can do for itself is identify innovative practice – excellent practice – and showcase it, celebrate it and share it. In essence good teachers need to teach other teachers how to do it too.

As I mentioned in a recent post, thought leader Don Tapscott says we need to share our intellectual property in order to 'lift everyone's boats'. This is true of the teaching profession in driving school improvement. Not one individual has all the answers. Good ideas require more than one head, great ideas even more heads. One teacher won't improve the learning in their school in isolation... nor will two teachers. They might make a difference to the kids in their class but without the collective responsibility of all teachers in the school working together to lead the improvement agenda their influence will be limited.

I know I run the risk of alienating some of my colleagues, but that's not my intention. After yesterday the last thing I want to do is point the finger.

What I do want to do is challenge the profession to take back the agenda; to work together with their colleagues and school leaders to drive change and improvement; to challenge the status quo; to find new ways, better ways; and to make *that* difference to the lives of their students. There is no other way to improve learning except through good teaching.

If we can reflect honestly on Australia's performance, we can identify new possibilities rather than rehash old programs or experiment with new ones. We just have to focus with determination and precision and address the central issues related to the practice of good teaching.

Every child CAN learn 2012-12-19

As we come to end of the 2012 school year in Australia, I wanted to reflect on the work of our system of nearly 80 schools and in particular our focus for the year – learning by inquiring. This, in essence, means learning about the learner, learning about learning, and learning about teaching, in order to meet the needs and improve the learning outcomes of each and every student in our care. At its heart, it's a simple proposition but the nature of the work is ever complex and challenging.

As I said to our system leaders at the very start of this year, there is greater student diversity in our schools today than at any time in our history. Our schools represent, in microcosm, the diversity that in exists in modern society. Coupled with this, is the expectation that every child can learn – not *should* learn – but *can* and *will* learn.

One of the great joys of my work as an Executive Director of a large system of schools is that I get to observe some absolutely outstanding examples of learning and teaching. Last month I was privileged to officially open our second Catholic Trade Training Centre at Loyola Senior High School in Mount Druitt funded largely through a \$9 million investment by the Australian Government.

For those of you who don't know Mount Druitt, it is about 40 kms west of Sydney and has a high migrant population with 48% of residents coming from countries where English is not their first spoken language. The median age of 30 years is about 7 years younger than the median age for Australia. Mount Druitt is one of the lowest SES (socio-economic status) areas in Sydney and has double the national average unemployment at over 12%. * 2011 Census

This is a hugely diverse community with a great many challenges, but I don't provide these statistics to garner sympathy for the teachers at Loyola. Rather, I provide them to paint a picture of the community Loyola serves. In fact, Loyola's principal Rob Laidler is adamant that his students' postcode doesn't equal their potential.

We know from the work of John Hattie this is true. The greatest effect on student performance is not socio-economic status or family background, the greatest effect is the quality of the teacher.

Over the course of the year I have traversed a range of issues via *Bluyonder* with the central themes of:

- Identifying new ways of learning by starting with the kids – knowing who they are and what they can do and responding to their diverse needs; and
- * Investing in our teachers so they can deliver the learning and teaching needed to see every student succeed

Loyola is an outstanding example – a lighthouse – of just what a school community can achieve when teachers take this responsibility seriously. In terms of meeting the needs of each and every student they 'walk the talk'.

They meet the kids where they are at, value them, identify and use their talents and interests and ask the question: 'how can we help you?'. They provide depth and breadth (diversity) in their delivery of schooling.

Loyola provides multiple pathways for learning. Every student can follow a curriculum that meets their needs, not just the requirements of external examinations. Whether through the traditional academic route, the University Hub, the Step Up Into Teaching program, the Nicholas Owen vocational program or now the trade training centre – Loyola finds a way to meet the needs of the kids in their care and give them the best possible opportunities to succeed.

Caption: Remy Low from the University of Sydney speaking about Loyola's University Hub

This can only happen with great leadership and vision, and the continuous development and willingness of teachers prepared to go outside the square and ask the question: 'what do I need to learn to help you learn?'. I was reflecting on this point at the end of the opening and blessing ceremony when a group of Loyola's students stood up and sang 'Amazing Grace'. They looked like they could have represented the United Nations the diversity was obvious.

When one of the students, Ida, started to sing a solo piece she simply lit up. There was so much passion in her voice; so much confidence in her song and I know her school – our school – has contributed to that. What an awesome example of our work.

Caption: Ida (far right) and Loyola's Choir singing 'Amazing Grace'

There are many, many more and it makes me so proud as an educator and leader to be in the business of

schooling today.

Thank you for being on the journey with me this year. Have a joyous Christmas.

Greg

2013 Writings

NAPLAN: friend, foe or on the fence? 2013-01-03

Late last year, the University of Western Sydney's Whitlam Institute commissioned a national survey of over 8,000 educators on the impact of the annual National Assessment Program for Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN).

There were very few surprises in the results which found that many teachers believed NAPLAN had negatively affected their practice and narrowed the curriculum:

- More than 70 per cent of respondents agreed that NAPLAN means they 'teach more to the test' and spend more class time on areas they knew would be tested * Just over two thirds believed the focus on NAPLAN had led to timetable reduction for other subjects outside of literacy and numeracy in their schools * 64 per cent agreed that there had been a reduction of 'face to face' time with students * 55 per cent thought NAPLAN had narrowed their range of teaching strategies.

Parents can buy off-the-shelf practice tests. Is this sending the right message?

We should be shocked and dismayed to learn that over half of our primary schools are preparing their students with weekly practice tests five months in advance of NAPLAN. It's not the test that counts but the teaching that is critical here and good teachers know this.

The most depressing thing for me about the survey was the fact that less than 50 per cent of teachers spent any time looking through the data at their school to drive improvement.

It defies logic that we have introduced a national assessment measure designed to diagnose students on basic skills to drive improvement, when over half of our schools aren't actually using the data.

The obvious question is why are we spending an inordinate amount of time focusing on preparing kids for NAPLAN when many of our teachers and schools don't actually use the data to inform their practice?

At our 2012 Ann D Clark lecture, Professor Andy Hargreaves warned educators to 'beware the tool':

'Beware when you bring in a tool, even if you think you are using the tool optimistically, because, at some point in the future, people will take the tool and use it for a completely different purpose that you never imagined it would be used for.'

This is true of NAPLAN. We have to put the tool (the data) in its rightful place. We have stigmatised NAPLAN and turned it into something it is not. NAPLAN is given far too much emphasis on judging school performance rather than on helping to inform the bigger, richer picture of how our students are tracking. And, most importantly, how we are helping them to improve.

I want to make this point which seems to get lost in the discussion of declining performance, withholding some students from sitting the tests to boost school scores, and so on: These tests, particularly in our NSW experience are to test basic skills. They are located within the curriculum and are designed to determine what a student should be able to achieve in literacy and numeracy at a particular age level. We are not asking kids to sit an astrophysics test for MIT here. This is to check to see if they have attained the skills they should have attained through the teaching of the curriculum. Again, it's not the test – it's the teaching that's important here.

The general agreement by State and Federal Education Ministers last year to move NAPLAN testing online in 2016 will hopefully improve the usefulness of the data to inform learning and teaching. 'Just-in-time' data can provide teachers and leaders with the means to better diagnose students' learning needs and areas for improvement so they can be more responsive in the areas of literacy and numeracy.

But we are beginning from a narrow starting point. We need to find new tools to assess our students across a broader range of areas including the development of key 21st century skillsets like critical thinking and collaboration skills. I will be very interested to hear what new ACARA head Rob Randall presents this month around this very idea.

The point I want to make here is that regardless of how good the data is, if we aren't using it it's no good.

Data, in and of itself, like technology or any other tool in a teacher's kit won't make the difference – it's neutral. If we want to get serious about school improvement, we need to actually use the data to inform our work and change our practice.

Hopefully, UWS's survey will help influence the necessary changes so our schools can use NAPLAN data to this

effect.

What do we want our schools to be? 2013-01-07

Despite the fact we are on school holidays in Australia, my last post generated a very lively debate over the validity and usefulness of NAPLAN which got me thinking about the overall purpose of schooling in Australia.

A recent edition of *New Yorker* magazine ran an interesting opinion piece regarding French President François Hollande's decision to ban homework. If you have a subscription you can read it here, but the crux of the article was that the battle over homework was not really about homework, but about 'what people wants schools to do'.

The same could be said about our recent discussion over NAPLAN – it's not about the test or even how it's used – it's about what it represents for schools.

President Hollande's decision to ban homework and make the school day shorter echoes Finland's approach. However, as the article demonstrates, Finland and the no. 2 country in the world, South Korea, are almost polar opposite in their approaches to schooling, yet on international measures are achieving similar success.

The author believes the success of these countries lies in a clear vision – a shared narrative – about what citizens in these countries want their schools to do i.e. the purpose of schooling.

In the educational debate in Australia, currently, there is diverse range of views about what our schools should be; what they should teach; and, of course, how we measure success. There is a lot of policy noise and yammering on all sides of the debate trying to introduce sometimes opposing strategies for improvement, without answering this very fundamental question.

So let's throw the doors and windows open here and address the question. For Australia:

- do we want our schools to be hothouses of study where achievement is grown on steroids? * do we want our schools to communities of comfort and nurture for kids? * do we want them to be geared around achieving a University entry score? * do we want to narrow the focus to ensure high achievement on a few simple benchmarks? * do we want them to pump our kids full of facts and figures? * do we want them to open kids up to questioning and reflection?

I also came across a great blog which in many ways raises the same questions and talks about the assumptions upon which we construct our schooling experiences. Are these assumptions still valid? Well worth a look

<http://thefischbowl.blogspot.com.au/2013/01/in-just-six-short-years.html?m=1>

What do you want our schools to be?

School Autonomy: Use Responsibly 2013-01-15

The old Chinese proverb, ‘be careful what you wish for’, comes to mind when thinking about the new autonomy agenda for schools.

With autonomy comes great responsibility. This can be said of many sectors but is particularly true for the work of schools. For the school leaders in our Catholic system, local school autonomy has traditionally been a feature of leading their school communities.

Strengthening local school autonomy is now a key agenda for governments – both state and federal – through the Local Schools, Local Decisions initiative and the Empowering Local Schools (ELS) National Partnership.

The work of the Australian Institute for Teachers and School Leaders (AITSL), who released the first National Standard for Principals in 2011, is supporting the ELS national partnership through its flagship professional learning program, *Local Leadership*.

These initiatives aim to enable participating schools to make decisions within their local contexts in order to better meet the needs of their students and the school community, and lead the learning and teaching within their communities to improve the quality of teaching and students’ learning outcomes.

While the focus on strengthening local leadership is an important one, we must never mistake autonomy for independence. Schools, like all contemporary organisations, don’t exist in isolation. Isolation in the third millennium is death.

Our school leaders have been fortunate over the last few years to work with Professor Michael Fullan to further develop our shared understanding of how to improve students’ learning across the system. Late last year, Michael – who has just received a prestigious and well-deserved Order of Canada for his work – spoke to our leaders about the concept of ‘systemness’. ‘Systemness’ has a few aspects to it, but is essentially the ‘buy in’ you get when individuals identify with the bigger picture.

Within the local school context, ‘systemness’ means each teacher isn’t just responsible for the learning of their own students, but for each and every student in their school. At the system level, ‘systemness’ means all schools work to improve the learning of each and every student across the system and so on.

Fullan says the importance of ‘systemness’ or system coherence is the shared mindset. Initiatives such as the ELS national partnership and frameworks like the AITSL standards are only as good as the people using them. We have to work to build the capacity of all colleague leaders and teachers across the system, not just focus on our own backyard.

Nine of our primary schools are taking part in the ELS national partnership funded by the federal government which runs for 18 months from mid-2012 to end of 2013, and will be followed by a year of evaluation in 2014.

In line with our own system strategic focus, the schools have formed a professional learning community (PLC) to challenge and support each other in decisions they make around improving school leadership, teacher and student performance with a particular focus on improving numeracy.

The PLC has discussed teacher goal setting practices and the importance of feedback and accountability to improving school leadership and teacher performance; and have established learning conversations around these lines of inquiry.

Each school is reflecting on their own school effectiveness through a variety of data (e.g. Quality Catholic Schooling data, NAPLAN, attendance rates, locally collected school data, etc); identifying areas of improvement; and asking the tough questions these present. This is then presented within the PLC to share reflections and test conclusions. It’s an iterative process. School leaders collaborate, share experiences and work together to find ways to best respond to changing circumstances for their own schools.

This is a practical example of what I call ‘enterprise schooling’ – our teachers and school leaders in this context are moving from isolation to connectedness from independence to interdependence. Our school communities have identified what is “core” for each and how this core can be strengthened by ongoing collaboration. In this core there are such things as personal responsibility professional learning for all staff, commitment to an evidence base for improving student learning and teacher feedback to colleagues. How this is done in each context differs and gives a rich experience set for all.

This doesn’t negate local autonomy or responsibility, rather it strengthens it by providing opportunities to build

capacity and benefit from the work of other school communities, while contributing to their learning as well. In a connected world, we have never needed interdependence more than we do now.

It's imperative that... 'the whole is greater than the sum of its parts'.

‘Sew’ your own success 2013-01-24

There is a proverb that says ‘borrowed garments never fit well’. This is particularly apt for education systems on the journey from good to great. I believe there are two roads that can be travelled when it comes to school improvement – pay someone to do it for you or ‘sew’ your own success. One of my favourite quotes is from Richard Elmore and co’s book *Instructional Rounds in Education: A Network Approach to Improving Teaching and Learning: We learn to do the work by doing the work, not by telling other people to do the work, not by having done the work at some time in the past, and not by hiring experts who can act as proxies for our knowledge about how to do the work.*

Many education systems from around the world look to Singapore, South Korea, Shanghai, Hong Kong and Finland for the answers but if it were as simple as borrowing their models, then educational improvement would literally happen overnight. Countries such as Finland have taken years if not decades to build a high performing education system. What we can do is look at what works, learn from their success and weave some of these ideas into our own educational narrative.

As Pasi Sahlberg, author of *Finnish Lessons: What Can the World Learn From Educational Change in Finland?* acknowledges that “the Finnish school system cannot be transferred anywhere else in the world. Many of the successful aspects of Finland’s education system are rooted deep in our culture and values.” He goes on to say that “what we can do... is take a look and learn from one another.”

Earlier this month Sahlberg was interviewed for the Huffington Post – the responses were ideas worth thinking about:

1. Primary school teachers put well-being and happiness of their pupils before measured academic progress
2. Urge parents to take more responsibility for their children e.g giving more time and attention to them at home
3. Flexible learning pathways that provide personalised options to study what individuals believe will help them become successful in life
4. A universal standard for financing schools so that resources are channeled to schools according to real needs
5. Align the vocational schools curriculum to the standards of academic high schools
6. Elevate schools as places for social learning and development skills
7. Celebrate national achievements, rather than high rankings in global education league tables
8. Ensure a universal standard for teacher preparation that follows standards in other top professions

Systems around the world can learn from each other about what makes the most difference and while each system reflects its own political, economic and social context, the key driver I think, is a relentless focus on quality learning and teaching. This learning recognises the needs and capabilities of every student and the critical importance of good teaching and teacher capacity building.

We will never bring about the changes required in building quality schooling by continuing to use the stale rhetoric of the school improvement agenda. With its narrow focus on high stakes test scores, programmatic of the shelf solutions, driving achievement through competition and so on, this agenda ignores the experiences that do make a difference.

Knowledge work 2013-01-31

Several years ago I attended a conference where Daniel Pink was one of the keynote speakers. I had never heard Pink speak before but I remember being impressed by his ideas and thinking. Not long after that I read ‘A Whole New Mind’ and to this day it remains one of the books in my professional canon.

It’s hard to believe Pink wrote *A Whole New Mind* in 2005. So much in the world has changed in that seemingly short period of time and yet many organisations including schools still seem to operate within an industrial paradigm. According to Pink (p50):

We’ve progressed from a society of farmers to a society of factory workers to a society of knowledge workers. And now we’re progressing yet again – to a society of creators and empathizers, of pattern recognizers and meaning makers.

I’ve been reflecting lately on this notion of a knowledge age – are we a knowledge society? Have we really embraced new ways of thinking and working smarter? If you read job ads for example, it doesn’t look like any significant shifts have been made in the way we recruit, hire and train people. Using social media to advertise roles that are 20th century in their design is as futile as using iPads to teach a 20th century curriculum. How many organisations in Australia are redesigning knowledge work but more importantly how many school systems are? How long before we actually fulfill Pink’s prediction of a conceptual age?

One of the biggest problems as outlined in the article “Redesigning Knowledge Work” is there aren’t enough knowledge workers across the private, public and social sectors. According to the authors, this is only going to get worse based on research by the McKinsey Global Institute which suggests that by 2020, “the worldwide shortage of highly skilled, college-educated workers could reach 38 million to 40 million.”

The article cites a number of organisations redefining the jobs of experts, transferring lower-skilled work to other people within the organisation. Reading this article prompted me to think about schools in a knowledge age. If principals are our most skilled, then what work could they transfer or outsource to enable more time to develop the talent of teachers? Do we see this as the most important task for principals?

Richard Elmore says, a knowledge based economy requires a knowledge based teaching profession. The way to get there is to invest heavily in the knowledge and skill of all teachers. And yet in the past, it has been the norm for lower-skilled people (ie teachers aides) to work with students who need the greatest intervention. We know now that we need our most skilled teachers working with those students to ensure improved learning outcomes.

Historically, we have often begun with the staff and adopted the strategy rather than looking at what critical skills our strategy requires and identifying the best talent to deliver it within classrooms, schools and across systems. Why can’t schools look beyond their communities for the most skilled teachers? Shouldn’t we be deploying the best people to get the best results whether it is around a learning strategy or capacity building?

While most education systems want teachers to become knowledge workers, it is much harder to change industrial processes and cultures. The authors suggest three points that would underpin new ways of working:

1. Excel at attracting, motivating and retaining specialists
2. Develop mechanisms for cultivating specialists who have the potential to take on leadership roles
3. Capture the knowledge so that others can benefit from it

In some ways, our system is working towards these but change doesn’t happen overnight. The question many educators and systems need to ask is whether we want teachers to have a working knowledge or do we want teachers to be knowledge workers? If the answer to the latter is yes, then what are we doing about it? Are we that afraid of the possible answers and the need to redefine what it is to be a teacher in today’s world

The great divide 2013-02-10

I noticed a number of news articles last weekend on school funding prompted perhaps by the announcement of a federal election in September. I've always stated that we need a common sense approach to school funding. Australia is not the only nation to be facing tough economic times so we need to become smarter when it comes using funding to improve the learning outcomes for every child.

In education, we strive to achieve an alignment between the work of schools and the central office and a coherence in what we are working towards. This must also apply to state and commonwealth funding. As the Grattan Institute's Ben Jensen points out, in recent years the federal government has substantially expanded its involvement in education to "good and bad effect." Jensen admits that while some federal programs have been significant milestones such as a national curriculum, many have had little impact on learning outcomes and therefore our rankings internationally.

The school laptop program is just one example of the great divide between state and federal government. The five year program cost taxpayers around \$2.4 billion, however the NSW state government is now seeking a funding guarantee to begin replacing more than 250,000 outdated computers and to ensure the 1:1 ratio is maintained beyond 2013. The federal government will not commit to extend the funding which is why principals are now asking where the money is going to come from.

Jensen is correct in saying that Australia scores poorly when it comes to linking policy design to implementation. The above example demonstrates putting the cart before the horse, or the tool before the teaching. Countries such as Singapore, Finland and South Korea have drive education reform with a strong framework for improving teaching; a revision of curriculum/assessment and finally how technology could support this. All this located in a cohesive and comprehensive values base reflected in policy.

Jennifer Hewitt also wrote in the Financial Review that:

The education system is failing students because of fundamental flaws in the approach to teaching and teaching methods, rather than inadequate funding models. The problems are less about money and more about policy choices.

While these countries don't have two tiers of government, it may be that our federal government needs to articulate an educational vision for today's learner in today's world while state governments work together on developing system wide strategies. Funding could then be directed into the ongoing training of all leaders and teachers so that implementation becomes effective at the local level.

In explaining its "Thinking Schools, Learning Nation" initiative, the Singaporean Ministry of Education said the initiative: will be the cradle of thinking students as well as thinking adults and this spirit of learning should accompany our students even after they leave school. The capacity of Singaporeans to continually learn, both for professional development and for personal enrichment, will determine our collective tolerance for change.

To tackle this divide, we can't rely only on numbers and comparisons. Great learning theory (Bransford et al) tells us that learning is about context, connections and meta cognition. We have to learn how to do the work of improving student learning outcomes. A coherent framework will enable us to deliver on our rhetoric of quality schooling for all students.

Re-phrase it *2013-02-12*

One of the things that I enjoy when attending conferences is meeting like-minded and passionate teachers.

Last month I presented at the Re-think and Re-imagine Conference at Deakin University and ran into Thom Fraser. Thom is a Year 6 teacher at Warrnambool Primary in Victoria and has developed a literacy program called Re-phrase it. The program allows students to set and track their own learning goals. Tom says it's in response to thinking about how 21st century students learn.

I see Thom as a teacher who has not only taken up the challenge of improving the learning outcomes for all students but who is learning and sharing about his practice along the way. He tells me that he has done several radio interviews on how the literacy program works.

What you see when Thom speaks is his passion and his energy for teaching and his commitment to challenging each student. Could Thom could be our benchmark?

It's a matter of trust 2013-02-18

When Billy Joel wrote the lyrics to *It's a Matter of Trust*, he probably wasn't thinking about the Finnish education system. Yet the more I read the literature on high performing systems, I am convinced that trust is at the core of the cultural change needed to reshape schooling. It's not new nor is it rocket science.

Michael Fullan says that you build trust through behaviour. John Hattie tells us that the ability for teachers to develop trust within the classroom is key to making students feel OK about making mistakes and asking questions. In *Visible Learning*, the highest "effect sizes within teacher student relationship came from empathy, warmth and encouragement of higher order thinking." A report on a teacher education model for the 21st century by Singapore's National Institute of Education emphasises the need for teachers to create cultures of care and trust.

As noble a calling as teaching is, the profession has been tarnished by a lack of trust, suspicion of teachers' work and a top down approach to school improvement. Richard Elmore wrote in 2007 that a "non-professional teaching force is a compliant and easily managed workforce." This view of teaching according to Elmore grew out of the late 19th and 20th century.

What differentiates high performing systems from others is trust. Trust permeates from the highest to the lowest levels: governments trust schools to deliver quality education, parents trust teachers to meet the learning needs of their children and teachers trust students to set and achieve their own learning goals.

I know Finland is the system du jour and some may be tiring of hearing about the Finnish way but I read a superb reflection in February's *Phi Delta Kappan* magazine by its editor in chief, Joan Richardson. When I re-read the passages I highlighted in the article I am still astounded by the culture of trust that has been built not in one school but in every single school. How is this done? By driving responsibility down to the classroom and school level. This is similar to the principle of subsidiarity and it's a term we don't often hear in discussions about school improvement or teacher quality. Teachers have control over what they teach and how they teach and how they assess students.

The rationale behind Finland's competitive teacher education program is quite simple: there are no mentoring or teacher evaluation programs and that's the way they want it. Teachers are trusted to do their best not in their first year of teaching but throughout their careers. This is a quote from an education official from the Finnish National Board of Education:

We trust our teachers. They will find the best solutions, or they will create their own. They are doing very well without inspections and testing. If students are not happy, they go home and tell their mothers, and the mothers call the principal. That's a fine inspection system."

It exemplifies the level of trust between schools and parents and reinforces the critical role parents play in education. It is not just the responsibility of teachers or parents or governments – it is a collective responsibility in which the accountability lies with the professionals – teachers and leaders. Imagine knowing that if you sent your child to any school in Finland they would receive the same level of care and personalised learning regardless of academic ability, learning style or background.

For me, the gold standard is the fact that teachers are free to work from home when they are not teaching. As Richardson observes, the working conditions of Finnish teachers are closely associated with being professionals instead of the highly regulated working environment of American teachers. Can you imagine this happening in our schools!

Where does trust begin? With our students; believing that each one is capable of learning and will become life-long learners. It is on this belief that teaching begins.

If we are to build the same culture of trust then we need to face the facts and look at the evidence. This is a call to be courageous; to recognise that what was once off limits or sacred is now open to critical reflection and change. All this represents the fact that interdependence has to be the new norm. Isolation and mistrust are death to innovation and change.

To paraphrase an old song, "trust changes everything."

Know your learners 2013-02-25

Here's a question – do you believe all students can learn? If you said yes and you're a teacher or leader, are there examples at your school of students who aren't achieving gains in their learning? How do you reconcile the two? Here's another question – if you were asked to list ten things that knew you about each learner in your class or school could you? More importantly, would they know you knew these ten things about them? If you said yes, then you are doing well at knowing your learners. If you said no, then you would be wise to read Lyn Sharratt and Michael Fullan's book "Putting the Faces on Data".

These are the questions that Lyn Sharratt asked us to reflect on when she was here earlier this month. This is Lyn's second visit to Parramatta and we are grateful for her assistance in helping us put faces on our own data. It's a strategy that takes personalised learning to a much deeper level because it requires us to continually and collectively analyse student learning and plan the next sequence. Sounds simple but as Lyn says it is hard hard work. It requires a relentless focus on a shared goal.

As former superintendent of Curriculum and Instruction in the York Region, Canada, Lyn says that literacy became their goal and their system mantra. They asked themselves what they expected of their literacy graduates and once they determined this, they worked backwards. Stephen Covey refers to this as beginning with the end in mind. It required coming up with a definition that everyone could live with from K-12. "Literacy" was defined as language and mathematical competency. They then asked what were the foundational literacy skills necessary in the 21st century? These were the ability of graduates to think, understand, analyse and to critically reflect.

Lyn says they worked hard at embedding the definitions and professional learning so that every single teacher was working toward the same goal – literacy. It paid off; they achieved significant gains in Year 1 reading levels. They analysed data relentlessly and looked closely at what was working in the 'high focus schools'. As Lyn and Michael drilled down, they discovered these schools hadn't taken their eyes off literacy. In the midst of flux, they were able to stay focused. The other schools blamed everything from a change in principal to a leaky roof on why they couldn't maintain focus.

Lyn's experience shows that implementation is often our Achilles' heel. We have a tendency to move on to something new every year than stay the course. As Lyn puts it, we need to move beyond the modelling stage to the doing otherwise nothing actually happens in schools. This means looking at the data, knowing the learner and asking what comes next. We want our learners to be independent but we need teachers and leaders to be interdependent when it comes to implementation. If something is fully implemented in your school, it means that 90% of teachers, according to Lyn, are doing it as part of their practice. The short of it is we all need to know the same things about our work. We all need to know our learners.

On the last page of Lyn's workbook is the quote: *You can't lead where you won't go.* Lyn has given us permission to say no to the things that won't make a difference to students and to go where we may not have been before.

It's about good teaching *2013-03-01*

We have begun the shift from success for some learners to success for all learners. This requires all teachers to be effective not just some.

Our system focus this year is on good teaching. As leaders we are responsible for ensuring that teacher professional learning leads to changed practice and changed practice leads to improved learning outcomes for all students.

I could spend the next few paragraphs restating why it's about good teaching but I think this video expresses everything I wanted to say.

Learning leaders 2013-03-12

As I've mentioned previously, our focus as a system this year is on good teaching and good teacher practice. We know what the research tells us about good teachers and student learning outcomes. This of course is based on a very important assumption – the quality of leadership. Michael Fullan calls the principal the “nerve centre of school improvement” and while they may not have a direct impact on student learning outcomes, what they do is critical to large scale and lasting improvement.

Schools without quality leadership are like orchestras without conductors. Sure teachers can teach but an effective leader knows the research, develops the knowledge and collaborates with others to bring it all together. Clive Gillinson writing in the Guardian in 2009 reflects on the role of the conductor:

Any player who has worked with great conductors knows that what they bring to their performances is the difference between competence and inspiration. It diminishes and completely misunderstands great music-making not to think there is any difference between the two.

Sometimes when we talk about effective teachers, we assume that we already have effective leadership at the helm. This is not always the case. Fullan in his paper *Quality Leadership, Quality Learning* states that reviews of research literature on school improvement highlights the “key role of the principal, for better or worse, i.e there are no examples of school-wide success without school leadership; all examples of school failure include weak or ineffective leadership.”

How do principals account for a lack of school wide success? How do we deal with this as a system? Past attempts to improve leadership have been ad hoc or too focused on individual attributes.

Over the weekend I began reading *Leading with Inquiry and Action* by Matthew Militello, Sharon Rallis and Ellen Goldring. The foreword was written by Richard Elmore. I have always respected Elmore's grounded approach – a good mix of common sense and encouragement. In reflecting on the American education system, he says this:

Every generation of American educational leaders, from the end of the 19th century onward, promises that it will be the generation to transform the practice of leadership into the practice of instructional improvement, and so far, every succeeding generation has failed at that fundamental task. The leadership of instructional practice has been consistently and systematically displaced, generation after generation, by the bureaucratic demands of “running” schools and the by the “real-world” demands of school bureaucracy.

This summation could equally apply to education systems in other parts of the world. Why? Elmore says the answer lies in the observation that “education is a profession without a practice” or more accurately, “an occupation aspiring to be a profession that has not yet discovered its practice”.

He goes on:

We do not, as a field, define a set of practices that everyone who enters the sector has to master as a condition of being able to practice, nor do we insist that people who practice in the field continue to learn their practice at ever-increasing levels of competence and expertise over time.

I agree with Elmore's observations. Systems have failed because there has been little investment in school leadership. We have focused our resources and efforts on the periphery without seeking to change the culture and structure of schools. We haven't insisted or enabled leaders continue to learn their practice. Building system leadership capacity leads to greater accountability.

In addressing the core issue of leading schooling too often we start from the outside and work in. Right on the edge, we usually find things like judging school leaders using blunt instruments like student performance, data and rankings. Further in you find things like “taking things off” leaders to allow them to do their job. This may free up time but it does little to address the inherent problem. Such approaches only serve to demean the complexity of the leadership challenge.

A more constructive approach is to start from the inside out. This means a sharp focus on the core requirements for leading a contemporary school. The research and data show us that the key responsibility of leading has to be around the work of teachers, how they teach, how we know they are effective and how we can continue to build their capacity. If the leader doesn't know how to do this then they have to be taught how. It requires

leaders to be effective practitioners with a deep understanding of learners and pedagogy.

Last year our system focus was learning by inquiry. Inquiry is critical to how we understand our learners and their contexts in what and how we teach. Yet there is little point in learning by inquiry if we don't apply it. Leaders need to be inquiry minded AND action oriented. This is how we become a profession with a practice.

Delivery or design 2013-03-19

There is no doubt that globalisation has created a greater demand for quality education and there are pressures to rethink the nature and rationale of our curriculum. It leads us to ask questions such as how can we continue to confine knowledge within old frameworks? What possibilities are opened up by the availability of new tools for learning? What and how can we teach in a way that offers students a variety of new and challenging experiences?

Earlier this month I was invited to speak at a workshop hosted by the Association of Independent Schools South Australia (AISSA) on how the Australian curriculum could create the capacity for transformation. Also speaking was Rob Randall, CEO of ACARA who provided an update on the national curriculum.

While the national curriculum signals a shift from text book to e-resources and from prescriptive to a more flexible delivery, my point is that it is the teacher and not the curriculum that creates the capacity for transformation. If we perceive the purpose of teaching as simply delivering a curriculum, then we not only perceive students as passive recipients but we diminish the purpose of education. Our role is to teach students how to think not what to think.

When I was at University I majored in European and Australian history with a minor in English Literature. I trained as a History teacher but my first job was as a full-time English teacher at a secondary school. As you would expect, I was concerned because I was not a 'trained English teacher.' On the first day, I met with the English master who told me it didn't matter because all I needed to know was contained in the English syllabus. The document listed the content, the prescribed hours and the specific texts I was to follow. The syllabus became 'the bible' and I wasn't to deviate from it. These approaches were ill conceived even as we used them.

Dewey said 'the notion that some subjects and methods and that acquaintance with certain facts and truths possess educational value in and of themselves is the reason why traditional education reduced the material of education so largely to a diet of pre-digested materials.'

When we change the construct of the curriculum from content to learning, we change the nature of teachers' work. Teachers move from being deliverers to creators, from sages to learners and from cogs to critical thinkers. If we think about the relevance of a curriculum in today's world as everything intended to promote wisdom and learning then we give teachers freedom to be creative and responsive to helping students make connections between their lives and the world.

The less prescriptive a curriculum is, the more opportunity there is for experiential learning; giving students space to discern information and construct their own knowledge. Personalising learning means finding out what matters to students and then designing a curriculum that invites them to deepen their understanding, ask questions and importantly fail. Diane Laufenberg, an American History teacher at the Science Leadership Academy in Philadelphia discusses this in her TED talk.

I know I've written about Singapore's skinny curriculum before but we should all be working towards a goal of 'teaching less, learning more'. When the curriculum is centred on learning, students become active participants rather than passive recipients. Their focus shifts from why do I need to learn this to how can what I have learned make a difference. What better way of empowering students to become active citizens then giving them a voice in their own learning.

Albert Einstein said: "I never teach my pupils; I just provide the conditions in which they can learn." I hope the national curriculum is an opportunity for teachers to see themselves as designers and therefore critical to the process of improving education for all students.

Schools of inquiry 2013-03-28

In March the NSW Government announced its blueprint for improving schooling. The action plan includes raising entry requirements for teaching courses at universities and ensuring the quality of initial teacher education is regularly assessed. This is a positive move.

Attracting the best and the brightest is something that all education systems desire. Yet attracting is one thing, retaining teachers is something else when we continue to operate as Richard Elmore says as a profession without a practice.

I believe the most important work is preparing teachers to teach in today's world. The demands on schools are great, the work of teaching is complex and the needs of students are diverse. Add to this the ubiquitous nature of technology and the need for a rigorous teacher education model is apparent.

Some time ago on bluyonder, I raised the idea of an apprenticeship for teachers. Students would be able to connect the theory in practice by continuous exposure to models of good teaching in classrooms. Observation, inquiry, reflection, analysis and collaboration become the norm. As knowledge and skills develop, student teachers under supervision either by a teacher educator or mentor actually learn to teach.

Coincidentally the British Government is promoting 'higher apprenticeships' for professions such as law, accounting, engineering and possibly teacher education. British Education Secretary Michael Gove has recently said he was keen to move away from higher education providers determining how teacher education was delivered: "The best people to teach teachers are teachers."

The best people to teach teachers are effective teachers.

Kevin Donnelly also reflects that since "former teachers colleges closed and education become the preserve of university-based faculties of education, teacher training has become overly theoretical and divorced from classroom realities."

Linda Darling Hammond in her excellent paper asserts that schools of education must design programs that "help prospective teachers to understand deeply a wide array of things about learning, social and cultural contexts, and teaching and be able to enact these understandings in complex classrooms serving increasingly diverse students; in addition, if prospective teachers are to succeed at this task, schools of education must design programs that transform the kinds of settings in which novices learn to teach and later become teachers. This means that the enterprise of teacher education must venture out further and further from the university and engage ever more closely with schools in a mutual transformation agenda, with all of the struggle and messiness that implies."

I can't help but notice how many educators refer to experts who are either providing ideas or visiting schools. Why aren't we looking to our teacher colleagues for guidance, support and ideas? Elmore says you do the work by doing the work not having experts do it for you. I wonder whether this is a symptom of below par teacher training courses? Are we training teachers the way we want students to be taught as they do at Singapore's National Institute of Education?

The Australian Institute for Teaching School Leadership (AITSL) is about to begin assessing the quality of instruction at universities to ensure that all graduating students meet common standards. AITSL chairman Tony Mackay has flagged that new national standards for accrediting teaching courses would see a "shake-out" of programs offered by higher education institutes.

If the work of teachers is to be continually re-evaluated and shaped in response to the needs of learners and a changing world, then so must teacher training courses. It is absolutely essential that the next generation of teachers are proficient practitioners; good clinicians and diagnosticians.

We must move away from a commonly held view that anyone can teach fairly well. Teaching is highly specialised and complex work. As Darling Hammond says teacher training programs must help teachers "develop the disposition to continue to seek answers to difficult problems of teaching and learning and the skills to learn from practice (and from their colleagues) as well as to learn for practice. These expectations for teacher knowledge mean that programs need not only to provide teachers access to more knowledge, considered more deeply, but also to help teachers learn how to continually access knowledge and inquire into their work."

In a previous blog I reflected on leadership from the inside out. This is another example where this maxim applies. We have never needed better teachers than we do now.

In moving towards a culture of wide-spread excellence, perhaps we need to stop referring to schools of education and start referring to them as schools of inquiry. Afterall, isn't this what learning and teaching is about?

A global village 2013-04-10

I've just returned from the UK where I had been invited to participate in the CSCLeaders conference. CSC is an annual global conference that brings together about 100 leaders from across the Commonwealth. The conference is run in partnership between Common Purpose and HRH The Duke of Edinburgh's Commonwealth Study Conference which began in 1956.

Aside from being a great privilege to participate, the conference was very much PBL for leaders. Here were 100 culturally diverse leaders from all sectors including government, military, police, education, banking and finance, not for profits, religious groups, activists and the arts coming together to tackle a global challenge. This year, the challenge set for participants was *how do you get disparate communities spread across the world to become bridge makers in the global networks of the future?*

The conference spanned eight days and was structured in three parts. The first three days we had input from prominent speakers on the political, social, economic, cultural and environmental challenges of the 21st century. This was followed by discussion within our groups. The next three days included site visits to one of five cities in the UK which contextualised the challenge by giving us an opportunity to see how local communities were tackling the challenge of becoming 'bridge-makers'. Groups were able to then meet with local community, educational, business and faith leaders. I was fortunate to have spent my study tour in the London borough of Tower Hamlets because Hargreaves and Shirley include it in their book *The Fourth Way* as a turned-around district for its schools.

Tower Hamlets is one of the most culturally diverse boroughs of London and a stone's throw away from the financial and media district of Canary Wharf. There is a huge population of Bangladeshi migrants – the largest community in the UK. It also has the highest rate of child poverty in London but as Hargreaves and Shirley state the schools in TH were able to dramatically turn around in a decade from one of the worst performing to performing above the national average. The reason for this dramatic turnaround was the community coming together to create and build new capacity.

According to Hargreaves and Shirley, the schools improved because services were integrated, school leaders were visionary; they were able to attract high performing teachers who stayed and positive partnerships have been developed between schools, business, community and religious organisations. The Tower Hamlets schools became responsible for each other by setting their own ambitious targets for students. One of the directors quoted in the *Fourth Way* said "poverty is not an excuse for poor outcomes."

I spoke to the Mayor of Tower Hamlets, Lutfur Rahman and the head teacher at Swanlea School, Brenda Landers. Swanlea has 1000 students enrolled and was judged by OFSTED to be 'outstanding in all areas'. Brenda attributes the school's success to a sharp focus on the data and an investment in building the capacity of teachers.

The final three days were spent in Oxford where groups shared their reflections of the study tours. We synthesized ideas and data then tried to identify innovative practices that the Commonwealth nations might adopt to build leadership capacity at local and global level. We also reflected on how we could collectively try and tackle some of these 21st century challenges.

A major element of the conference was networking opportunities which included lunch and dinner engagements with HRH The Duke of Edinburgh and HRH Princess Royal and business leaders. These networks aside from creating the opportunity to bring more people into an ever expanding network of critical thinkers, problem-solvers and exceptional leaders will hopefully sustain the work in years to come. The next part of the conference takes us to Mumbai or Johannesburg in June where we get to explore the challenge in the context of a vastly different city.

In reflecting on this experience, two important things struck me that were neither obvious or explicitly stated. The first is that CSCLeaders brings together culturally diverse people who share a common purpose of leading organisations into the 21st century. Despite the diversity, there are common threads uniting us all. These threads include a passion for the work we do, a drive to seek new ways and solutions to challenges and the recognition that in this century you cannot do this alone, interdependence demands collaboration at every level.

The second is that depending on which nation of the Commonwealth you were born in, your perception of

the world is vastly different. Members from developing nations are looking for the recognition that they have something valuable to contribute. They do not seek “a leg up” but want to be active citizens in building better societies.

The above made me think about how we go about the work we are doing with our school communities here in Parramatta and raised so many questions for me. Have we have tapped into the rich diversity of our school communities and started from where they are rather than where they should be? Are we stifling innovation or failing to nurture it? What are the new models we need to explore to build leaders capacities and so on.

This conference taught me many things but key was the value of multiple data sets and the evidence it draws as well as the critical need to interrogate the data from several different points of view. Listening to other leaders and hearing what the data and evidence says to them was a real eye-opener and often altered my own understanding.

For me the most important message I can share is that no matter your experience or expertise base, there is always something to learn. Living in a global village demands that I need to be a life-long learner as well.

Teaching the educators 2013-04-17

Jal Mehta, assistant professor at the Harvard Graduate School of Education wrote recently that we “have an almost endless list of things that we would like the next generation of schools to do: teach critical thinking, foster collaboration, incorporate technology, become more student-centered and engaging. The more skilled our teachers, the greater our chances of achieving these goals.” Building teacher capacity is both a school and system responsibility.

The role of the teaching educator in our system is similar to what Michael Fullan refers to as coaches. They are experts in literacy and numeracy who work with the lead teacher to plan, model, observe, reflect and challenge with the intent of improving the learning outcomes of all students.

In the early days the arrival of a TE in schools was often met with resistance and in some cases, their expertise was under utilised. Over the past few years we have worked tirelessly to articulate and communicate the what, why and how of the TE in schools. Their role is not to obstruct schools but to build instructional capacity. The focus shifts from building individual capacity to community capacity. Once we build community capacity, our schools will be able to link into an ever bigger system of inquiry, learning and knowledge.

We now understand that the most powerful way of building capacity is in situ, in context around the real problems and challenges that arise on a daily basis. Previous models of withdrawing teachers from their context and transmitting information did little to improve their practice and only served to further frustrate them. The best approach is to learn the work by doing the work and having someone that you can share and reflect with. I think teachers respond well to the immediacy and collegiality of this approach.

In 2011, Michael Fullan and Jim Knight wrote an article titled Coaches as System Leaders. They state that if “teachers are the most significant factor in student success, and principals are second, then coaches are third. All three, working in coordinated teams, will be required to bring about deep change.”

Some may call it the power of three – we refer to it as the instructional triad (TE, principal and lead teacher) or the teacher-learning triad (teacher, lead teacher and TE).

Our TEs are an important part of our system strategy to improve the learning outcomes of all students and ensure a professionally rewarding working life for teachers. The how and why of their work represents a shift in education from “I know to we learn” and success for some learners/schools to success for all learners/schools.

Australia – educating globally 2013-04-29

On Friday, the Age newspaper featured a story on how foreign fee paying students have become a lucrative income source for cash-strapped Victorian schools. It's coincidental because I've just caught up reading the February report by the International Education Advisory Council on the challenges and opportunities of Australia's international education sector.

While the focus is predominately on expanding tertiary and VET sectors, there are some interesting statistics on the demand for quality education both regionally and internationally. For instance:

- Education is the fourth largest export industry – \$15.7 billion in 2011 * In NSW – international education and training is the second top export earner after coal * As a result, Australia has internationalised the design and delivery of its education systems * China, Rep of Korea and Vietnam had the highest student enrolments in schools in 2012 * Australia is likely to host more than half a million students in 2020 studying across all education sectors. This will be worth \$19.1 billion to the local economy. * Australia needs to focus on providing high quality education

The report identifies seven key issues to be addressed if Australia is to remain globally competitive. Three of these are relevant to the work of school systems:

1. Provide the highest quality education
2. Develop strong and diverse partnerships that encourage exchange, capacity building and collaboration
3. Inform educational policy through accurate and timely data analysis and research

In the book 'That Use to be Us', Thomas Friedman explains why an average education won't suffice in a hyper-connected world. He uses his wife's old college in Iowa as an example of how competitive education has become. When Thomas' wife attended Grinnell there were 1600 students. He says if you want your kids to go to Grinnell now, they'll be competing against 250 applicants from China. Even Bill Gates admitted he'd rather be a genius born in China than an average guy born in the US because these days multinational companies look globally for the best talent.

This is the reality of living in today's world and it's something that every educator needs to be mindful of. Education is global, it's big business and technology has made the farm, not just the paddock, the new environment. Those things that used to be barriers are now opportunities for new ways of working in a knowledge age.

Metacognition and the digital age 2013-05-10

I spent Monday in masterclass so to speak at the ACARA national roundtable on curriculum for the 21st century. The roundtable was an opportunity to hear from international experts and educators in the context of how we are responding at a national and local level to the rapidly changing world and how jurisdictions are responding to, and planning for, the nature of schooling in a contemporary world.

It was good to see ACARA looking over the horizon as we move our focus from implementing practicalities to imagining possibilities. Charles Fadel from the Center of Curriculum Design delivered an fascinating keynote on how we pursue depth of understanding in today's world. He began with examples of the exponential rise of technology and how it is both a source of disruption (see Dan Pink chapter in *Whole New Mind* on abundance, Asia and automation) but also huge possibilities.

The challenge then for schooling is how do we keep up with technology given the rapid growth we are witnessing? Fadel warns about falling into the trap of playing catch up because we never will be able to, a fact that he demonstrated so profoundly. We should let the race to catch up distract us from the core issue, that is how to construct relevant learning experience for young people.

We know that what we have been teaching isn't relevant to today's world but the assumption is that we need to revisit what we teach. What are the things that could be taught that are of value today?

Fadel suggests subjects like journalism, entrepreneurship, psychology, linguistics, philosophy, robotics and 3D printing but he warns that it's not an argument between teaching STEM or humanities. Both are equally important in today's world. Employers don't want employees with knowledge or skills – they want both.

Interestingly the SMH ran an OpEd piece today examining whether the supply of university graduates exceeds demand in a world of MOOCs and off-shoring. The piece referred to OECD figures showing the number of young people without work globally has risen by 30 percent since 2007. The author goes on to say that:

Many professions have outsourced the training of young people to universities, expecting the higher-education sector to provide ready-made graduates who can step into corporate jobs. Heaven help our teenage and graduate recruitment markets if economic growth deteriorates, companies more aggressively cut costs, or new technologies lead to some graduate jobs disappearing. It would be an economic and social catastrophe to have so many young people sit idle.

We know the stakes are much higher today than they ever have been. The demand on learners is great and even greater on schools and education systems. We also know that we must bridge the gap between what is taught and what is actually needed. But who decides on what is needed or relevant? Who defines the curriculum and are students part of the design process? These are questions we must answer but I don't believe we have defined the elusive 'we' yet? Are students part of the design process?

While I don't have all the answers, I liked Fadel's response to the question – what is the role of a teacher in today's world? To teach children how to learn.

The entrepreneurs 2013-05-21

Amid the current school funding cyclone, Naplan, international comparisons of our schools performance and students grilling the PM on national television, too often, there has been little discussion on the role of the teacher in today's world. I believe this discourse is central to school improvement.

I only wish that we could step back and look afresh at the work good teachers need to do in a knowledge age. I hope I'm not alone in believing that we need to re-think the role of the teacher.

Socrates used the metaphor of teacher as the midwife at the birth of knowledge. Is this metaphor still relevant? If so, what happened in the industrial age when instead of overseeing the birth of knowledge, teachers became owners and transmitters of that information?

Or is this more a question of what value we place on information vs knowledge? Have we come full circle from the attainment of knowledge in ancient Greece to the transmission of information in the industrial age to the creation of knowledge in today's world?

Can the role of a teacher remain the same but the context change? Is everything old somehow new again?

Parker Palmer claims "good teachers are able to weave a complex web of connections between themselves, their subjects, and their students, so that students can learn to weave a world for themselves." This quote resonates with Elmore's instructional core and the premise that good teaching is the relationship between the teacher, the student and the content.

There are two areas that I see as critical. The first is what is the content and whose content? The real learning lies not just in remembering content but applying and creating it. The concept that students and teacher work together in this process provides a window into how we might see the work of a contemporary teacher. That students can construct their own learning is a bridge too far for some but this should be the end point.

The second is re-conceptualising the work of teaching. It's time to retire the old descriptors of teacher as sage on the stage, guide on the side, meddler in the middle etc. These do little justice to the complexity of good teaching.

I have begun to think about re-defining teachers as entrepreneurs. In a recent Forbes article on re-defining entrepreneurship, the definition of entrepreneur is seen as the "innate mindset of a person who sees opportunities and pursues them." This is what the role of a teacher in today's world – they are professionals who take calculated risks using good data and research. They understand that being professional means being accountable and responsible. They create networks to build collective knowledge and are willing to share that knowledge with beginning teachers. Perhaps one of the most distinguishing features is an inherent understanding that learning and teaching is dynamic – it requires new sets of inter-dependencies and understandings of learners and their technology.

Is this how you see the role of teachers in today's world?

Schools as global enterprises 2013-05-27

A few weeks ago I had the opportunity to chat with Yong Zhao. Zhao is Presidential Chair and associate dean for Global and Online Education at the University of Oregon. He is also the author of *World Class Learners* – a must read for educators.

The book according to Zhao is “really about the human dimensions. It is about respecting children as human beings and about supporting, not suppressing, their passion, curiosity, and talent. If schools can do just that, our children will become global, creative and entrepreneurial.”

There’s that word entrepreneurial again. I referred to re-defining the role of teacher as entrepreneurs in today’s world but Zhao goes further in explaining why we need a new paradigm in which the entrepreneurial spirit is nurtured in students and schools become global enterprises.

It may seem like a radical idea especially to parents but Zhao presents a valid argument as to why everyone in the 21st century needs to be entrepreneurial. Entrepreneurial is simply a new way of thinking about knowledge work and knowledge skills. Zhao sees entrepreneurial as the ‘desire to solve problems creatively’ and says that creativity, curiosity, imagination, risk taking and collaboration are the foundation of entrepreneurship.

Like Ken Robinson and Linda Darling-Hammond, Zhao argues that the traditional educational paradigm reduces “the possibilities of cultivating uniqueness by forcing children into the same sausage maker.” In the age where technology has enabled us to personalise just about everything – why shouldn’t schooling be personalised?

The new paradigm proposed is one that expands and enhances what students are interested in and want to be. Zhao calls this the freedom to learn. It unshackles children by allowing them to self-select what they want to learn and then how to use the available resources. Within this learning environment, Zhao sees students being able to select from a diverse group of adult talents – who serve as models, mentors, counsellors, teachers, assistants, collaborators etc. Such a model requires flexible structures and opportunities for students to actively participate in the decision making process. Zhao admits that the new paradigm presents greater challenges for teachers than the traditional stand and deliver method of teaching but the opportunities are rich.

In addition to cultivating an entrepreneurial spirit, schools must also cultivate the skills necessary for today’s world. The final chapters are devoted to this fascinating idea of school as a global enterprise using the example of High Tech High where students are not consumers (of information) but makers, creators and entrepreneurs. This is referred to as product-oriented learning.

Zhao hopes schools will be able to create services and products for other educational institutions such as tutorials and the global market. By allowing students to own and manage their projects, Zhao argues they become “engaged in entrepreneurial activities and provided the support that can help them become globally competent.” In this way, students and teachers not only learn by doing but are doing what interests them.

Too often when these ideas surface, the response is, “yeah that’s all right for the business world but schooling is different.” I think it’s time to jettison such narrow-minded and false dualities. The work of education is a work of business. Schooling has business processes, relationships and procedures that may be referred to differently but ultimately they are very similar.

Use by date for schools? 2013-06-14

This week I'm in South Africa for the second part of the CSCLeaders conference. While en route to Johannesburg, I had time to think about whether schools have passed their use by date. And if so, where do we go from here? I don't believe the answer lies in dissolving or deconstructing schools but rather morphing them into something smaller, more organic, innovative and community based. It's more evolution than this long awaited education revolution.

In 2008, I heard Stephen Heppell talking at the Curriculum Corporation Conference about re-designing schools. He was in the throes of co-designing a school with students in the Cayman Islands. Heppell spoke about the need to move away from these industrial factories of 250+ students to small communities of learning with 10 or less students. He explained how agile learning spaces could be re-configured to meet particular learning needs but what if schools were re-configured to meet students interests?

This is the evolution of schooling. It is the convergence of personal interests, partnerships and technology (think big data and the ability to personalise learning). Last week Dan Pink was in Australia at the EduTech conference talking about the rise of specialist schools. He mentioned something called Big Picture Learning or Big Picture Schools, which have sprung up across America. Even President Obama has recently announced an initiative that challenges school districts across America to redesign high schools and 'transform the high school experience'. The initiative is underpinned by a strong desire to prepare students for a knowledge age and a global economy.

What is interesting about the High School Redesign initiative is a focus on personalised learning and on providing career related experiences or competencies. This is about taking PBL out of the classroom and into the real-world. It places greater focus on developing partnerships with community, business and industry to enable students to complete internships and/or mentorships. This is the evolution of schooling as John Dewey saw it – schools as microcosms of society. The US Department of Education states, 'students learn best when they are engaged in complex projects and tasks aligned with their interests.'

This is the foundation of Big Picture Learning schools. As Dan Pink explained these schools configure the entire curriculum around each student's interests. Pink gives the example of a student who say was interested in martial arts. One component would involve an internship at a martial arts studio and then the academic component would be learning about the origins of martial arts, the Japanese language and the physics behind the martial art.

I found a podcast of Elliot Washor, co-founder of Big Picture Learning and collaborator Charlie Mojkowski discussing their educational philosophy. They pose an interesting question – we have expectations of students but what are their expectations of schools? In addressing these expectations, Washor and Mojkowski believe levels of student engagement will rise. Rather than developing students interests, schools have traditionally developed skills and knowledge. Is this radical change or have we must missed something really fundamental – developing a sense of who students are?

The concept of bringing students into the real-world to deepen their learning is why partnerships with business and industry will become critical in the evolution of schooling. In this model, I envisage schools as conduit between identifying students' interests and connecting them with their 'adult-world' tribes. In this sense, nothing is fixed. In an article on Innovation, Washor and Mojkowski reflect that they are:

'learning what variations of our design contribute to student success and we are adjusting the design and its implementation on the fly in order to realize immediate benefits to students. Big Picture is legitimizing the creation of fundamental alternatives in teaching and learning. That the Big Picture Company, advocating a design that substantially pushes the envelope of what a high school should look like, has been invited to work in so many districts testifies to the potential for true entrepreneurial behavior.

There's that word again – entrepreneurial. Perhaps it's the reason why innovation and entrepreneurial behaviour aren't the hallmarks of our educational systems. When we talk about student-centered learning is it in the context of a modernised industrial model or in the context of schools adapting to students?

According to Washor and Mojkowski, if you want to create disruptive innovations rather than merely sustain mediocre ones, you need to have ideas that are 'crazy enough' at the edge to make a difference to what happens in

the middle. There is value in looking at the Big Picture model especially in how we create valuable partnerships that bring students into the world and the world into schools.

Big data buzz 2013-06-21

A few months ago I came across an ad for IBM in the Harvard Business Review. The title was “The more we know, the more we want to change everything.” Ads don’t normally capture my attention but this one did. As I’ve written before, there are many things that schools can learn from business. We share the desire to continually improve our product (learning and teaching) and to use technology in smarter ways to understand our students (clients) in order to deliver a better experience. The ad says:

Across the world, a distinct group of leaders is emerging who possess both a wealth of data and an acuity of analytical insight that their predecessors never had. So they feel freer to act – with a calculated boldness – to lead the big shifts that are reverberating through their organisations. They are making bold decisions and advancing them on the basis of rich evidence; they are anticipating events, not merely reacting to them; and they are toppling the conventions that stand in the way of thinking and working smarter.

The adage is knowledge is power but data is knowledge. The more we know, the more we can do and in this age of personalisation, big data is big business. I think however its impact on education is yet to be fully realised. We’ve always known that data is critical to our work but it’s been the case of what to do with it and how to use it effectively to anticipate [learning needs] rather than merely react to them.

There is obviously a buzz in education now around big data or learning analytics. The 2013 K-12 Horizon report includes learning analytics as one of its mid term trends. According to the report, “learning analytics leverages student data to build better pedagogies, target at-risk student populations, and assess whether programs designed to improve retention have been effective and should be sustained.”

This is taking personalised learning to a whole new level. As more and more schools move to online learning, this will make it so much easier for teachers to examine students’ progress in real time and to respond accordingly.

The Khan Academy is one organisation that has been developing its metrics in order to understand learners’ progress and performance. Two years ago I met Ramona Pierson who used her own extraordinary journey to develop tools for blind people, which then segued into education. Ramona is now the CEO of Pierson Labs, which is developing tools to help teachers create more personalised lesson for students that combines learning analytics and social networking platforms.

Learning analytics will not only significantly impact on students’ learning but also on teacher learning. Imagine as Ramona says mapping the learning progression of teachers against the needs of students – this means being one step ahead instead of five years behind.

As Lyn Sharratt and Michael Fullan write in *Putting Faces to the Data*, effective teachers combine emotion and cognition in equal measure. Teaching is a balance between art and science, data and humanity. The proliferation of learning analytics will enable every teacher to make decisions based on rich evidence not assumptions.

I’d like to think that the more teachers know about their students, the more they want to change everything. These teachers don’t see artificial divides between performance data and student well being, they see it as a symbiotic relationship that gets richer the deeper you dive. The test is how feedback is given and it’s used to improve our core business – learning and teaching.

Green Bronx Machine *2013-06-25*

I'd never heard of the Green Bronx Machine or Stephen Ritz before last week. A colleague who attended PBL World in Napa, California sent me the link below and told me that Stephen was simply inspirational.

This is what education is all about. Jamie Oliver and Yong Zhao would be proud.

A learner's voice 2013-07-02

I have often asked my colleagues to write guest blogs as a way of sharing expertise from those at the coalface. In reality, those at the heart of schooling are our students.

In May, we hosted the Council of Catholic School Parents' Conference. The theme was iConnect and the weekend was in part an opportunity to assuage the fears of parents by allowing students to showcase the technology being used in many of our classrooms. It was a case of students teaching the adults – a wonderful thing to see.

Among the senior students at CCSP was Lois from Loyola Senior High at Mt Druitt. I asked Lois if she would write a guest blog on how technology has helped enrich her learning. Lois jumped at the opportunity to share her reflections on the use of technology:

As students we are actively engaging and learning with technology to enhance and support our learning. Educational tools, such as the iPad (which many schools have rolled out an implementation program for) are not only simple to use but the availability of apps helps us learn and enables us to present our work in a variety of ways.

Of course, "What apps are there really out there that can truly be deemed educational?" and "How is it really benefiting the learning of students?" are questions that deserve an answer. There is never a clear, concise answer or a right or wrong answer. However, as a student who has firsthand experience with growing up in an education system that focuses strongly on technology and uses iPads in the classroom, I would like to share from my perspective as a young learner about educational apps for learning and the real benefit technology has on students.

Many have heard of iMovie, Garageband, Popplet, Pages, Creative Book Builder etc where students have created work based on Challenge Based Learning projects and present their findings through a chosen option such as mind maps, short film clips, songs and possibly even their very own iBook creation. The highlight about learning with the iPad is that it potentially allows every student to express their learning as they like it best. An auditory learner can effectively showcase their learning by creating songs and clips just the same as a visual learner can through creating mind maps and iBooks.

With technology expanding and growing, I see the role of a teacher in a technology rich world as someone who is able to use technology wherever and whenever appropriate and applicable. A number of educators I have come across have not only supported our use of technology in learning but also took the initiative to create their own resources for their classes that students can access on their iPad.

As a senior high school student, an app I recently came across called 'Prelim Legal' was designed by a senior high school teacher which involved videos packed with straightforward, uncomplicated material along with annotated pictures to make it much easier for any student to grasp the content and understand it easily. Filled with hours of videos including mp3 audio with clear explanations, the syllabus can effectively be taught and be accessed at any time, not restricting learning to only take place in the classroom.

Other teachers have created their own iBooks for distribution to students. The content is straight to the point and focuses on what needs to be learnt in the most effective way possible. This allows students to comprehend the information at their own pace and in their own way as each student absorbs and remembers content differently.

Lessons that involve technology suddenly become more exciting, and students tend to become more engaged. It may be that when we hear 'technology' we immediately think of lessons being appealing and stimulating, or it could possibly be that we acknowledge and appreciate when teachers incorporate the use of technology in the classroom. Then again, it may just be that with technology at the touch of our fingertips and all these resources suddenly available to students, we can begin to take charge of our own learning.

I don't think Lois is an atypical high school student. I meet so many like her. These are students who understand the world in which they live and the tools needed to enable them to learn, communicate and contribute. Are schools good at listening and learning from these voices?

A powerful weapon 2013-07-13

Last month I returned from South Africa where I participated in the CSC Leaders program. I arrived in Johannesburg around the time former president Nelson Mandela was hospitalised. Wandering through the Apartheid museum one afternoon I was stopped by a BBC cameraman asking for my reflections on Mandela and his legacy. My comment was that South Africans will continue the legacy of trying to build a more unified and just South Africa even after he is gone. I made the point that Mandela was just an ordinary man who did extraordinary things simply by standing firm in his convictions and not seeking revenge or retribution.

South Africa is an extraordinary place for two reasons. The first is its natural beauty. The second is the sense of hope that abounds when you speak to people. I expected apartheid would have left people bereft of hope but South Africans are optimistic about the future.

There's no doubt that the challenges South Africa face are significant but what has been achieved so far has been no small feat. The week I spent in Johannesburg with my CSC colleagues was a great conclusion to the study tour that began in the UK. We had time to focus on leadership in dynamic circumstances and it was the perfect venue.

I spent much of the time visiting local schools – reflecting on the challenges of leadership and equality. As I have found in the past, the challenges schools in South Africa face are not dissimilar to those faced by school systems around the world. Equity in education and the search for a new narrative that equips all young people to be active participants in today's world are key themes wherever you go. Over several days I visited schools with diverse student populations and aspirations. From elite schools where 90% of the graduates go on to university in Cape Town to the struggling public schools in Alexandra Township.

While the socioeconomic divide between these schools was deep and wide, I saw four common threads that exist in all these schools. These were passionate school leaders, the love and care shown by teachers, the respect shown by students and a fundamental belief that education is as Mandela said “the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world.”

I'll share my observations on the school visits in the next post.

Aspiration and opportunity 2013-07-17

Whenever you visit schools overseas, it is hard not to look at the experience through your own cultural and professional lens. When I was in South Africa it would have been easy to suggest strategies and ideas for improvement but you can't do this without looking at the country's history including its political context.

The biggest problem in South African education is not class sizes or computers but language. It is staggering to think that under a post-apartheid constitution there are 11 official languages. Black South African students coming into the system are entitled for the first four years to be educated in their vernacular. They then transfer into a second language and onto senior grades. If they are lucky they go on to matriculation but in order to matriculate they must sit the exams in English.

The frustration for many teachers and principals I spoke with is two-fold. The first is the obvious language disadvantage. One principal told me that you rarely hear English spoken in Soweto's primary schools. These students are not starting from a level playing field so the system actually works against them. The second is the sheer complexity of training and hiring teachers in the 11 official languages!

Every student I spoke no matter whether they were black or white, rich or poor, all want the opportunity to be active participants in their society. They want to play a part in shaping South Africa's future. Education as Mandela said is a great weapon for change and it is the thing that gives these students hope. I saw the same aspirations in the UK as I have in my own diocese. Aspiration and opportunity is a powerful mix.

The students at Pholosho Secondary School told me that "without teachers they are nothing – their education relies on them." It reminds us of the enormous responsibility we carry.

Listening to the students and talking to my educator colleagues reminded me that there is more that connects us than divides.

One of the most memorable events was the last day of our CSCLeaders conference. We were joined by three black South Africans. One was a social activist, the other a banker and the third was an entrepreneur. All in their twenties and from diverse social backgrounds. They told us they have little memory of apartheid so they don't share their parents' memories or this part of their country's history. They were more interested in South Africa's future – because that is what they could change and contribute to.

This experience in South Africa reminded me of how lucky we are here and how our challenges pale in comparison.

Pedagogy v Education 2013-07-29

The first chapter in *Educating Gen Wifi* is a brief summary on the origins of schooling. I have to admit it was a late edition in the drafting process but in hindsight the chapter is critical. How many parents or even teachers for that matter have an understanding of the factors that have shaped modern schooling? I find it interesting that we spend 13 years at schooling without ever really getting a lesson in the history of schooling. Why were schools designed like factories and primary schools seen as a vehicle for transmitting social norms?

To understand why schools are as they are is to understand why the prevailing model is 'out of date'. Not everyone would find the origins of schooling as interesting as I do but there are many who have been able to succinctly explain this through various analogies like Stephen Heppell's railways vs cars or Sir Ken Robinson's industrial vs organic model of schooling. Different analogies but the outcome is the same.

Our ability to re-imagine schooling (including parents) is weakened if we do not understand something of the origins of schooling and why we have diverged from a path of education that is humanising and stresses deep understanding to one that has largely served the needs of the economy.

We ask teachers to critical reflect on their practice but I believe we need to be critically reflecting on the language of schooling.

In June this year, the Hon Barry Jones delivered a brilliant paper to the Australian College of Educators on how creativity fell off the agenda. Barry Jones is described on Wikipedia as a polymath – he is one of Australia's most learned politicians, a former high school teacher and lawyer.

In his ACE address, Jones succinctly reasons why creativity has fallen off the agenda by highlighting the distinction between education and pedagogy. Jones admits that pedagogy 'is one of his least favourite words' because the 'pedagogue' was the 'slave that escorted children to school.'

Jones asks what the purpose of education is? Is it instrumental (ie. an emphasis on training and predictable outcomes) or is it developmental (ie. focus on imagination, creativity, wisdom, values)? He writes "the measurement controversy asserts that in education/training/pedagogy the only things of importance can be recorded precisely (while creativity cannot)."

The paper explains that the philosopher Isocrates saw education as a commodity and is therefore associated with the word pedagogy. Plato on the other hand rejected pedagogy and viewed education as 'the drawing out of individual talents, and encouraging the search for truth, value and meaning in life. In one system, the outcomes are predictable; in the other, they are uncertain.'

In reflecting on our current state of education, Jones writes:

In Australia in 2013, Pedagogy is the overwhelming dominant model but in practice it inevitably leads to self-limitation. Pedagogues are enthusiasts for measurement and precision and look for certain outcomes. Educators assume that the most important elements in human life are uncertain and speculative, defying precise calibration.

We talk about the need for a cohesive narrative in education but I wonder whether we actually understand the genesis of old narratives. Are we pedagogues or educators? Can we be both in today's world? Can Plato and Isocrates' models of education co-exist?

These are the philosophical questions that I hope will generate discussion at schools and among school communities. Just as Jones' paper uncovered certain truths for me, it is in the discussions that we will discover new truths and new ideas that will help create a blueprint for 21st century schooling.

Understanding discipline 2013-08-12

I observed something interesting recently regarding a question I tweeted. To provide some context, I read a blog post called the ‘Myth of Motivation’. The post contained a quote by Fred Bucy, former president of Texas Instruments who made this point:

What is effective in motivating people at one point in their careers will not be effective in motivating them later. People’s values change, depending on what is happening in their personal lives as well as their success with their careers. Therefore, one of the most important things that a leader must do is to continue to study how to be effective. This takes discipline. It is much easier to assume that what worked yesterday will work today, and this is simply not true.

As an educational leader, I thought the point about discipline to stay the course was compelling. So I tweeted: “is discipline the most important quality for becoming an effective school leader?”

I left out “self” from discipline because I was interested to see the responses.

If you asked a professional athlete, writer or business leader about discipline, it would be evident that self-discipline was what you were referring to. It’s also a word that probably has positive associations in relation to achieving goals.

And yet, when used in the context of schooling, it more often than not implies something very different. Discipline is grounded in an industrial model where the norm was to ‘control’ students and ‘manage’ staff. It probably evokes negative feelings in many of us but it again illustrates the point I was making in the last blog post on the meaning of pedagogy and education.

Michael Fullan in his book ‘Six Secrets of Change’ reflects on the importance of capacity building over judgmentalism. It’s the paradigmatic shift from industrial to contemporary from process to people.

Fullan writes “the route to implementing change lies in building the capacity of teachers – their knowledge and their skills. The opposite – and a big mistake – is if you convey a negative, pejorative tone. A big mistake is to focus on accountability first and capacity building second.”

Richard Elmore who visited our diocese three years ago shared his long term goal.

Unfortunately the prevailing model of schooling, which views discipline pejoratively, is still the dominant model in many schools in many parts of the world. We’re still looking at education through the lens of control and management. Take for example, the first year teaching (secondary grades) course being offered by New Teacher Centre on Coursera. The blurb says “establish and maintain behavioral expectations, implement classroom procedures and routines, and use instructional time effectively.” I was shocked that the course promotes four low effect size strategies on discipline and only one high effect strategy on student learning. Is this teaching by accountability or capacity building?

As members of professional teams, we find that our most authentic achievements grow out of a common vision, shared intentions and collaborative practices. We learn with and from each other, and we expect our colleagues to support and, where appropriate, to challenge us.

Often the highest expectations we have to deal with are the ones we place on ourselves. That’s why it is so important to cultivate a reflective (self) culture where each of us takes the necessary time to stand back and re-balance our agenda so we can focus our energies on what really matters for our students, ourselves and our school communities.

It’s time we all started speaking the language of challenge and self-discipline.

'Connected' learning 2013-08-20

Canadian principal George Couros spent last week sharing his 'connected' learning with our teachers and leaders. Several school leaders said they felt 'inspired' after hearing George talk so passionately about his students, profession and his professional learning.

The workshops with George and our Principals Masterclass may look like 'stand-alone' or 'one-off' events but they are actually part of a learning continuum that began seven years ago. The mere fact that our leaders have an opportunity to collectively engage in deep conversations on learning is powerful learning.

At the start of the 2012 school year, we set our collective focus to 'learning by inquiring' – how we could engage in the inquiry and knowledge building cycle within schools and across the system. It builds on the work of Helen Timperley by responding to the emerging needs of 'our class' – whether it be school leaders, teachers or learners. It requires a commitment to engage in continuous learning through collective problem solving and data analysis to improve the learning outcomes for each student.

For me, the principals masterclass was a high point in this journey to improve learning and build capacity. When we started we relied heavily on outside experts but last week we had our own leaders sharing their learning. Although the context of the school communities may be different, there is a shared vision that transcends physical and virtual borders.

As I listened to the keynotes, three things became clear. The first is we are beginning to get the language right – we are crafting a new narrative shaped by the best of what we know when it comes to improving learning and teaching. The second is we are developing greater precision around the work by getting rid of the 'noise in the background'. We are focusing on the things that make a difference – the high effect strategies to drive change where it counts most. Thirdly after listening to our school leaders, we are now seeing tangible evidence of building teacher capacity and its impact on student engagement and learning. It's starting to make a difference.

All of this leads into new areas for discussion and new ways of working but we are doing this together. In the past we've "intellectualised" the process of improvement but ignored the implementation process. Competing narratives haven't led to sustainable change – the discussion was broad and shallow. Yet what I saw and heard last week was a significant shift at the point of delivery – system leaders working with school leaders working with teachers – everyone as George said 'elbows deep in learning.'

If there is one thing that resonated with me when listening to George it was the importance of modelling the what, how and why of what we do. It challenges us to lead in the way we ask our leaders to, teach in the way we ask our teachers to and learn in the way we ask our students to.

The science of learning 2013-08-27

Fortunately we now know a lot more about how people learn from the learning sciences and while there is still more to learn and uncover, it helps us become more effective in our teaching. As a system here in Parramatta Catholic schools, the work of John Bransford and John Hattie has helped shaped our understanding of learning, teaching and most importantly, teacher learning.

The role of neuroscience in learning and teaching was the theme of this year's ACER research conference in Melbourne. By all accounts it was outstanding particularly John Hattie's keynote. There is no denying the significance of contemporary theory and research on the work we do. For too long we have accepted personal preference and experience instead of intellectual rigour. The science of learning needs to influence the practice of teaching.

For a psychometrician, Hattie's work is easily digestible and after listening to a vodcast of his ACER keynote, I was inspired to re-read Chapters 7 and 9 in *Visible Learning for Teachers*. I felt compelled to re-calibrate my educational compass.

Hattie's makes the compelling point that we don't go to school to learn what we know but what we don't know. So why then are we teaching kids 60% of the things they already know? It comes back to knowing where each student is and being able as teachers to identify where they need to be. We're not good at this because as Hattie says we make erroneous assumptions about students and their learning.

In fact, he believes we are novices when it comes to continually monitoring learning in progress. This the power of feedback and it needs to be seen as a necessary disruption. Why? Because it forces students to slow down, to process and think. Slow thinking is stressful for students especially those who are struggling. The message we have to impart is it is OK to stop, to think and to take risks. Our schools are risk averse environments – we don't often know when to hit the pause button and ask students to stop and think about what they are doing.

This is why Singapore's approach to learning has merit. The goal when Singapore adopted a minimalist curriculum was as the then Minister of Education Tharman Shanmugaratnam said in *The Flat World and Education* to "give students themselves the room to exercise initiative and to shape their own learning." The goal for Singaporean teachers is to get students to accept that it is OK working with unanswered questions. It calls for a slow thinking movement in schooling.

What Hattie found in his *Visible Learning* work was that we are stunningly good at predicting outcomes therefore students set low benchmarks. Our job according to Hattie is to 'create schools that help kids exceed their own potential'. We will never imbue confidence unless we make every child believe they can do better than they are already doing. This is why feedback is so critical because it "aims to reduce the gap between where the student 'is' and where he or she is 'meant to be' – that is, between prior or current achievement and the success criteria." (VLFT Chapter 7).

One of the most powerful statements in Hattie's *Visible Learning for Teachers* is the notion that feedback thrives on error but

error should not be considered the privilege of lower-achieving students. All students (as all teachers) do not always succeed first time, nor do they always know what to do next. This is not a deficit, or deficit thinking, or concentrating on the negative; rather, it is the opposite in that acknowledging errors allows for opportunities. Error is the difference between what we know and can do, and what we aim to know and do – and this applies to all (struggling and talented: students and teachers). Know this error is fundamental to moving towards success. This is the purpose of feedback.

I should write this on my office window along with we go to school to learn what we don't know. We have underestimated the power of feedback in helping every student to identify where they go next; in moving them up the ladder of learning and success. Our job as Hattie explains is to be able to give good feedback and to teach kids how to receive it and articulate back to teachers what and how they are learning. This is why instructional walks are centred on the students and not the teacher. We gauge the effectiveness of teaching through the eyes of students. Hattie's mantra is know thy learner...know thy impact.

As we begin to consider our system focus in 2014 and beyond, I am drawn to the point Hattie makes in Chapter 9 about losing interest in discussions about teaching. He says it's not because teaching isn't important but it

often ‘prevents important discussions about learning.’

I’m convinced that learning has to be the profession’s new narrative.

Advice to our new PM 2013-09-11

Two weeks ago, Professorial fellow and former Dean of Education, University of Melbourne Professor Brian J. Caldwell delivered our annual Ann D Clark lecture. It was timely for two reasons – Professor Caldwell and Jim Spinks' book 'The Self-Transforming School' is recently published and the book contains advice to our incoming federal government – stay out of education.

While the incoming coalition government has committed to supporting the autonomy of school systems and playing a limited role in school education, we are yet to see what this looks like in reality. In a piece last month on the role Canberra should play in our schools, the Grattan Institute's Ben Jensen wrote, "because the commonwealth spends about one-third of all public funds in school education, it will always want something for its investment".

There is consensus across school sectors, academia and tiers of government that in terms of student achievement on international tests, we haven't made any significant improvement. What is more worrying though is the ever widening gap between low and high performing students.

One of the reasons why Caldwell and Spinks are suggesting that the federal government stay out of education is that the 'control and command strategies' used in the past haven't resulted in the desired outcome – ie. sustainable and long term school improvement. Caldwell writes, "tying everything to implementation of a 'national plan for better schools' was bizarre, given that school improvement is something that schools must be responsible and accountable for."

Caldwell argues that there is a strong case for change in Australia. He proposes that we follow Canada's lead (which outperforms Australia on international tests of student achievement) where there is no federal government 'apparatus' in education. A Council of Ministers that would determine national policies and priorities would replace a Minister of Education. Wherever possible funding would be directly funneled to schools or at the very least to state and territory governments as well as independent and Catholic school sectors. This model is built on the premise that you locate expertise and resources as close as possible to the learning space. It takes into account the equity and diversity of school needs as well as being open, transparent and accountable to public scrutiny.

Caldwell says that self-transforming schools don't need two levels of governments competing against one another in order to tell schools what to do. In Canada there is competition among provinces and almost all innovation comes from individual schools and systems. Leadership is critical in this model because school leaders are empowered to respond to change. Who better to address the diverse learning needs of a school community than the school itself? I agree but the challenge is how to go about increasing school autonomy while ensuring we get the learning and teaching strategies right for every child. This requires effective instructional leaders leading in every school. That's perhaps the biggest challenge of all.

My view is that those who can and must improve schools are schools themselves (supported by forward-thinking systems and governments). However, there will always be a place for intelligent debate and intelligent educational policy that acknowledges the demands of a contemporary and connected world.

Let's hope that in the next few years, Australia will become a truly 'learning nation'.

A united voice 2013-09-23

As the new Federal Minister for Education Christopher Pyne settles into his portfolio, I have been thinking about what changes have been made to the educational landscape over the past six years. I don't want to rekindle old debates because many of the Gillard-Rudd policies and initiatives have already been criticised and condemned. It may be that in time, these will be viewed as genuine attempts to improve the education system.

One of the most important commitments made over the past six years has been toward school funding particularly those with diverse needs. This signals a shift in policy thinking and a recognition that every school is diverse, learning needs are different and funding should be based on the level of need at each school.

We are told that our new Minister will be focused on practical policies but I wonder whether it's now time for a collective voice that can inform policy development. In the past broad policy discussion has often been bogged down by sectional interests but I think we need a coherent voice for the teaching profession as a whole.

This is not to diminish the work of organisations such as the Australian College of Educators (ACE) and the Australian Council for Educational Leaders (ACEL) or representative groups such as primary and secondary principals associations, unions and parent councils but each comes to the table with their own agenda reflecting the concerns of its particular constituency. In today's world, shouldn't there be just one agenda – improving the learning outcomes of every student by ensuring we have effective and skilled teachers in every classroom?

I would like to think that by combining these groups into one alliance or affiliation, we could finally end old debates around public vs private, left vs right, state vs commonwealth in favour of robust discussion and ideas that work towards building a highly professional education system where teacher work is respected, teacher learning is supported and student learning is at the centre of every policy. The alliance would serve in effect as a thought leader and think tank at the service of developing coherent education policy.

Let's hope by the time the next federal election comes around, we may have a united voice for the profession and importantly, an advocate for all students.

The new prophets 2013-10-01

I had the great honour of being invited to deliver the Occasional Address last Thursday at the graduation ceremony for the University of Western Sydney School of Education.

As someone who grew up in western Sydney and now leads a system of schools here, I have seen its transformation from an outpost to a dynamic, diverse and prosperous region. As former Labor leader Mark Latham wrote recently, Sydney's west reflects the "Australian spirit of frontierism". Higher school retention rates and mass university access have given the sons and daughters of the region a crack at professional jobs and entrepreneurship."

Growing populations, prosperity and the aspirations of families has resulted in growing demand for quality education in the school and higher education sectors. Our commitment to innovation and excellence is echoed by UWS and there are some exceptional examples of cross-sector partnerships such as the Nirimba educational precinct. This is a consortium of the Western Sydney Institute of TAFE, University of Western Sydney, NSW Department of Education and Communities and Catholic Education Diocese of Parramatta. The campus provides diverse learning pathways for students whether academic or vocational.

It's not only the landscape of western Sydney that has changed over the last three decades – the educational landscape has also changed.

When I was at university in the seventies, I trained as a history teacher but my first job was as an English teacher in a western Sydney high school. Being fresh out of university I was concerned that I wasn't a trained English teacher but the English master basically told me everything I needed to teach was in the English syllabus. If I didn't deviate from it, I'd get through the syllabus and so would my students. We accepted the idea of teaching as delivering the curriculum and the notion that knowledge was absolute. Students were marked on their ability to remember and recall facts without ever questioning the what and why.

My message to the graduates was that as someone who has spent more than three decades in education, I can honestly say this is an extraordinary time to be a teacher. And never before have we needed great teachers than we do today. We have learned a lot about teaching – we have moved from an understanding that intelligence is fixed (ie some students just can't learn), teachers' work is isolated and a one size model fits all to an understanding that all students can learn, reflective practice is critical and personalised learning is the norm. These aren't as Kevin Donnelly recently argued progressive fads or edutainment but the result of contemporary theory and research. We know a lot more about how people learn from the learning sciences. We also know that the more we learn about learning and the more teachers learn about student learning, the more important and influential teaching becomes.

These graduates walk into learning spaces with the benefit of research, theory and technology; a focus on explicit and deliberate teaching; a commitment to ongoing professional learning and a recognition that as critical thinkers and curriculum designers they have a critical role in school improvement. Teachers become better critical thinkers and collaborators, when they are engaged in the practice of critical thinking, inquiry and collaboration on a daily basis. Without doubt, there have always been good teachers in classrooms but the difference in a connected world is an expectation of effective teachers in every classroom.

I asked fellow educators on Twitter last week what advice they would give beginning teachers. When you distil the wisdom of experienced teachers, you end up with four key characteristics of good teachers: being passionate about your work, being life-long learners, building quality relationships and listening to students.

It's often debated whether today's teachers are mediators, designers or co-constructors. The truth is teachers are all of these and more. They respond to individual learners and learning needs in ways that continue to challenge the mind, stretch imaginations and improve learning outcomes.

What I wanted to impart to the graduands is that teachers are our 21st century prophets. Just as biblical prophets were advocates or agents of social change, our teachers are transforming lives and ultimately shaping the future of nations.

Educating parents 2013-10-14

A few months back, I received an email from Jack, an ed tech company director who had finished reading *Educating Gen Wifi*. He felt compelled to write a post on his blog about the book and sent me a link to it.

Jack confessed that it wasn't until he was half way through the book that he realised it wasn't about technology per se but about making schooling relevant in today's world. Admittedly, the book's cover and graphic may have contributed to his initial assessment but Jack's comments were interesting because the premise of writing this was to open up discussion around the nature of schooling in today's world. Technology has certainly forced us to think about schooling differently but it is the question of 'why' that I want readers particularly parents to reflect on.

Parents have a valuable role to play in the learning process but I think they have been under-utilised or overlooked. We talk about school as a community of learners but do we view parents as learners and importantly, do they understand the language of learning?

John Hattie in *Visible Learning* states that 'parents should be educated in the language of schooling, so that he home and school can share in the expectations, and the child does not have to live in two worlds.' (p70)

Hedley Beare wrote in 2001, that "part of the school's formal task is to provide systematic 'teaching' of parents so that they know how to ensure that learning-in-family, incidental learnings at home and out of school, and parent nurturing are in harmony with and reinforce the student's formal learning programme." (*Creating the Future School* p190).

When we educate parents, we move them from learner to learning partner. Silverton Primary School in Victoria is a good example of how parents have become partners in their learning journey. In wanting to create a 21st century learning experience, the leadership team recognised the vital role that parents could and should play. They encouraged parents to observe and discuss what happens in the learning spaces. The school sent research literature home so that strategies were not seen as experimental but grounded in good theory and research. Parent and student voice has become a common feature of their newsletters.

Silverton is just one example – there are other examples in the book but ideally this should be happening in all schools. How do we work together to build a language of learning that extends across home and school? How do we utilise technology beyond communicating with parents to changing how we collaborate with them?

According to Michael Fullan the research is clear. "Nothing motivates a child more than when learning is valued by schools and families/community working together in partnership. These forms of involvement do not happen by accident or even by invitation. They happen by explicit strategic intervention.

Blue Mountains Fires *2013-10-18*

We've seen some devastating fires in NSW over the past 24 hours especially around Springwood, which is home to two of our schools. I've spoken to the principals of St Thomas Aquinas Primary and St Columba's College and there only seems to be damage to the perimeter of the schools. A full assessment is now underway to ascertain the extent.

Sadly, some of our staff and families across our schools have lost their homes. Catholic Education Diocese of Parramatta has made provision for emergency relief for affected staff and requests should be made through your school leaders.

The Diocese is planning to launch a crisis appeal next week which you might like to make a donation to support families in need. Details will be available next week.

I'd like to take this opportunity to recognise the outstanding work of our schools and office staff yesterday in managing this crisis, particularly our leaders, Sergio Rosato and Phil Stewart, for the care and well-being of their communities.

I'm extremely grateful to the Rural Fire Service and the NSW Police and all the volunteers for their courageous work in protecting our students and staff.

Please keep our staff and families, the wider Mountains community and those affected by the NSW fires in your thoughts and prayers.

Mindsets 2013-10-30

I've finished reading Carol Dweck's seminal book, *Mindsets*. Dweck dedicates half of Chapter 7 to exploring what makes a great teacher. It's powerful reading because it illustrates how pervasive the messages students receive in classrooms are in reinforcing 'fixed' mindsets about intelligence. Dweck writes "great teachers believe in the growth of intellect and talent, and they are fascinated with the process of learning."

John Hattie makes reference to Dweck in his work and expands on the notion of mindsets, which should underpin all decision making at schools. In *Visible Learning for Teachers*, Hattie presents eight for teachers/leaders.

Dweck admits that teachers who have fixed mindsets create 'an atmosphere of judging' – they decide very early on who is worth the effort and who isn't. Growth-minded teachers enable students to reach high standards by identifying strategies and giving feedback. It is a continuous challenge-feedback-learning loop in action.

Dweck astutely captures what great teachers do – they see teaching as a way to learn about themselves, their students, the world. She concedes that fixed minded teachers see themselves as 'finished products' whose role is simply to impart knowledge. One is focused on learning, the other on teaching.

Hattie expands on this in *Mind Frame #3*. He says in relation to professional development, the focus "should be about the impact of our teaching. And while you could argue that this mind frame is a bit strong because of the emphasis I place on learning rather than on teaching – this might suggest we should have learning colleges, not teachers colleges. I want to get away from debates we have about teaching. Not because teaching isn't important – it's too strong to say it's not, of course – but it's wrong for it to be *the one and only* focus."

After reading Dweck and Hattie, I am even more convinced that the industrial model of schooling (and teaching) is based on a fixed mindset. Everything is planned, packaged and pre-judged. There is no space for just in time learning and or improvised teaching. Hattie says we adopt this teacher-centred stance because of what we've been taught – create a lesson, plan an activity. This model unfortunately perpetuates the fixed mindset about student intelligence and learning. In theory, a contemporary student-centred model of schooling should be rooted in the growth mindset. And that requires growth-minded teachers and leaders.

Hattie admits that we don't ask teachers to come into the profession because they are expert problem solvers or apt at improvising, we ask them to teach because they are 'willing to adopt a traditional mode of teaching. It requires them to have a particular way of thinking about what their job is, and this perspective can actually diminish improvisation and ingenuity."

The big question is how do we change teachers' mindsets? How do we move from fixed to growth, from sages to activators?

What Dweck's research shows is that it is possible to think differently and when we think differently about our students, we are in a stronger position to teach differently. To quote Hattie, "teachers' beliefs and commitments are the greatest influence on student achievement over which we can have some control."

Alive in the Swamp 2013-11-13

For the past five years we have been working with our ‘learning partner’ Michael Fullan. Michael has acted as a system coach/mentor, helping us to sharpen our focus and stay the course. The benefit of having Michael as our learning partner is that he has a deep understanding of system change but is at arm’s length from the day to day work. He brings a balanced perspective that challenges and motivates. It’s a long road but we are starting to see change where it counts most.

When Michael was here with us a few weeks ago, he shared his latest work ‘Alive in the Swamp: assessing digital innovations in education’, co-written by Katelyn Donnelly on behalf of Nesta and New Schools. I think it’s one of the first times that I’ve seen technology in the context of system change and not as an acquisition.

As Michael and Katelyn write:

Up to this point, technology has not impact on schools. Billions have been invested with little thought to altering the learning system. There are also potentially destructive uses of technology on learning; we must be aware of distractions, easy entertainment and personalisation to the point of limiting our exposure to new ideas. We focus not simply on technology itself but on its use.

And so the question is how do we assess the impact technology is having on the learning and on system change? The authors have developed an Index that allows system leaders to ask relevant questions in the areas of pedagogy, technology and system change. It challenges system leaders and policy makers to focus on HOW technology is making a difference; how it is supporting ‘collaboration and effective interaction.’

This doesn’t mean that schools investment in technology has somehow been a waste. On the contrary, we need to ensure the technology works to support good teaching. What we do know is that technology as a tool in the hands of great teachers has the capacity to be transforming.

If you’re wondering why the ‘swamp’ metaphor, it’s based on the understanding that technology is part of today’s learning ecosystem today; interconnected to pedagogy and system change (with students at the centre) but the waters are still murky. The framework will hopefully help schools and systems navigate their way through the challenges.

World Class Leader 2013-11-18

Last week I had the great pleasure of sitting down for a Q&A with Larry Rosenstock. Larry is the founder and CEO of High Tech High in San Diego and one of the keynote speakers at last week's PBL World Australia 2013 hosted by one of our high schools, Parramatta Marist in partnership with the Buck Institute of Education.

I had heard of Larry Rosenstock and High Tech High before but it wasn't until I read Yong Zhao's *World Class Learners* that I realised Larry is truly an educational entrepreneur. He has taken John Dewey's 'learning by doing' as a model of education and made it work successfully in a 21st century environment.

Larry's an engaging speaker but more importantly, an engaged school leader and I share some of his pearls of wisdom below from our Q&A.

- The purpose of education is to serve society and create it * Education allows people to rise above social disadvantage but schools are the least changed institute * Education should be a combination of academic and vocational – the theory and the practice * High Tech High's most important data point is a four year college degree * High Tech High is a misnomer – it's not about technology – it's about personalised learning through integrated disciplines * Every teacher needs to ask themselves how are they bringing the content alive for their students * High Tech High teachers work together in teams – there's a deep respect for the craft of teaching * Craft always follows intellectual purpose and the purpose is profound * Any change management at school level must be driven by a growth mindset – every child can learn * Content standards don't make sense – process standards do... 'how do I think like a mathematician?' * Role of a school leader is to make as few decisions as possible – lead from behind because you inspire teachers to want to do better every day * Schools are messy organisms; you can't replicate a school model but you can inspire other teachers/school communities to learn from each other * The focus shouldn't be on competition between students and schools but collaboration – this is a national narrative for 21st century schooling * High Tech High is focused on student production not simply student consumption of technology. When you focus on both you see kids' creativity explode.

I ended our session with the question that if Larry had to start all over again what would he do differently. He replied that it's not what you put into a school that counts, it's what you leave out. And there is much in many of today's classrooms that need to be removed. Things like fixed white boards, rows of desk, and teaching times set by timetable requirements, don't add much value to creating a dynamic learning environment. most importantly he wouldn't allow teachers to find themselves working in isolated classrooms.

His last point was the one Carol Dweck makes about teacher mindsets. Larry said we are still inclined to see students as either 'smart or dumb'. His advice – 'don't continue to mis-predict kids' ability and intellect'. Larry's a world class leader overseeing the education of world class learners.

There is little doubt that what Larry and his colleagues shared with us resonated with the conference attendees. What we need to understand from the High Tech High experience is that what they do is not a solution but rather a response to the context and understandings that their learning communities currently have. You cannot just superimpose their solution on your own school. This is a mistake made too often and always leads to failure.

High Tech High's story is one of continuous growth and development and continually learning about how schooling can be better. The live the motto of "learning the work by doing the work." For me this is the most powerful message, however you have to begin the journey, and the best time is now!

Keep it Real 2013-11-21

Last week, the PBL World Australia pre-conference forum opened with an entertaining presentation by four Parramatta Marist students.

Cedric, Brad, Wilson and Gavin shared their experience of learning and how it had changed as a result of their school's approach to learning through PBL. Moving from traditional subject-driven classes to integrated subjects with a specific project focus had taught them a few key skills, such as:

- how to work in teams * how to present their thoughts, ideas and work creatively and for a purpose * how to adapt * how to lead * and how to learn

Of course, the students have gained knowledge through their projects and met the relevant curriculum outcomes, but these key skills also allowed them take ownership of their learning and led to a deeper level of understanding and engagement.

It's no accident that the PBL approach focuses on these skills. Like many contemporary approaches to schooling, PBL aims to meet the student where they are at (personalised learning) and ensure a relevant education for the world in which they live.

It's what one of our PBL World Australia speakers, Sam Seidel, called 'keeping it real'. And the results? They (the students) speak for themselves.

Funding Overhaul Distraction 2013-11-29

The recent announcement by Federal Education Minister Christopher Pyne flagging the overhaul of the school funding model is a major distraction for schools who just want to get on with the work of learning and teaching.

While we have a guarantee on the level of funding for next year, beyond that there is no certainty about how the funding ‘envelope’ will be determined or distributed.

The Gonski review wasn’t just about funding. It recommended a set of reforms, which are enshrined in the Australian Education Act. We need to know whether these reforms will be impacted by the Federal Government’s proposed changes.

While there is certainly some scope to reduce the administrative burden and the costs of implementing and reporting on the reforms, this should not require a major upheaval to existing arrangements. The Coalition promised policy certainty prior to the election and they need to act quickly to ensure minimal disruption to the work of schools and the systems that support them.

Funding is only one part of the equation. The focus has to be on the learning and teaching.

Best evidence is the best policy 2013-12-02

My colleague in Melbourne, Stephen Elder wrote an excellent piece in Saturday's Australian newspaper on the ongoing Gonski saga and the need for both sides of politics to engage in the real issue of public policy. I hate to harp on about this but I can't believe that politicians continue to get bogged down in debates over whether phonics should replace whole-language. These are issues to be addressed within school communities not in Parliament.

As I've said many times before, the challenges facing education in Australia (ie. improving the learning outcomes for each student) need to be addressed with coherent policy not ideology or nostalgia. Improving the quality of education by lifting the performance of teachers does not require a bi-partisan approach here. The approach simply needs to be rigorous.

Political parties will always agree to disagree but the best public policy is based on best evidence. I'd like to see our Education Minister Christopher Pyne remain focused on what really matters:-

1. Quality of the teacher
2. Quality of teacher learning to improve capabilities
3. Precision around the implementation of learning strategies
4. Core focus on improving literacy and numeracy
5. Improving the quality of relationships
6. Evidence of continuous improvement

What appears to be missed in discussions around education policy is an overall commitment to best evidence. The things that divide us should not be the things that actually improve the learning for every student. Best evidence is the best policy here and as Sir Ken Robinson points out education doesn't go on in legislative buildings, it happens in schools and if you remove the discretion of teachers, then the system stops working.

What we can learn from PISA? 2013-12-10

It was interesting to read the range of commentary last week around the latest PISA results. If Australian students are slipping towards a mathematical wilderness, spare a thought for Finland who was out-ranked by Estonia. Yong Zhao's attempt at translating the Finnish newspapers was first-rate.

The most balanced views on PISA came from Dr Ken Boston, former director-general of NSW education and Sir Michael Barber, former advisor to UK Prime Minister Tony Blair on where we should be focusing our attention and efforts.

While Australian students may have slipped behind East Asia in maths, science and reading, Dr Boston says we should forget comparing ourselves with Finland or Shanghai because they are so culturally dissimilar. Instead, we should be comparing ourselves with 'like' OECD countries such as Canada, which performed significantly better than us in maths and reading.

Canadian provinces such as Ontario turned around its school system in less than a decade. It did this by recognising that to improve learning required improving the capabilities of its teachers. The system identified three key areas and focused on research and data to inform their decision making. The improvement in student learning reflect this commitment to teacher quality, student equity and learning excellence.

My concern is that we are still distracted by the noise and educational policy chaos. I've written previously that ideology seems to carry more weight than evidence and by the time the next PISA results are released we will still be debating funding models, a national curriculum and phonics. So what can we learn from the successful practices of Ontario and those highly ranked nations in PISA?

Sir Michael Barber states the first is that talent is a myth – "Those countries that believe some are born smart or bright while others aren't, and reinforce that through the education system, will never be among the top performers. Pacific Asia's focus on hard work over talent is one reason they lead the way." The second is a focus on learning and teaching (what is actually happening in classrooms). The third is an investment in building teacher capacity and the one that often gets overlooked – persist with the strategies that work.

These messages transcend cultures and countries – it is what distinguishes high performing systems and if we are going to address the equity gap that exists in our schools then we must be willing to listen and learn.

Those who know me well know that I am impatient at the pace of change. Too often we underrate what can be achieved in transforming school cultures but it doesn't happen over the course of a school year just look at Ontario. I am not raising the surrender flag here and retreating but I am realistic about what is required. One of the biggest challenges we face is ensuring our politicians, unions, associations and teachers support the right drivers for change.

Let's finally move from an excuse, blame and rationalisation paradigm to one defined by collaboration, coherence, evidence and trust. It seems to me that the former saps energy, the latter energises.

Pondering the questions *2013-12-23*

We're edging towards the end of the year; a time of when bold predictions are often made about 2014. I'm not good at reading the tea leaves but I have been pondering some of the big questions over my morning cup of tea regarding where to next for schooling.

At a local level our focus is on building teacher capacity. All the research we have shows that successful schools have instructional leaders working with effective teachers to improve learning for each student. We continue the work by doing the work, learning from the work and remaining focused on the work. Always easier said than done but our data shows that change is happening in across schools and that is encouraging. We don't often thank our teachers enough but they are education's bread and butter.

Professionally, social media continues to inspire and challenge my thinking and it proves just how diverse and impressive the online networks are. William Ferriter and Nicholas Provenzano wrote about social media in terms of their own professional learning in Kappan recently saying "the relationship that develops between blog writers and their regular readers is symbiotic. Writers publish thinking designed to challenge their peers, and peers push back in the comment sections of posts...Over time, this intellectual give-and-take strengthens the understandings and professional relationships between authors and their audiences."

Thanks to those who posted comments this year on bluyonder for the intellectual give and take – it has sharpened my focus. And so next year brings new challenges and new opportunities but until then these are the questions that I have been pondering...

1. How can we better connect parents into the learning and teaching experience of their children (greater collaboration)?
2. What are the key elements of a contemporary assessment framework for student learning and teacher evaluation (student performance)?
3. Are there different ways of thinking about school day (ie. not face to face)?
4. Is it possible to benchmark learning and teaching internationally (going beyond PISA)?
5. Can quality schooling be delivering in a time when education funding is shrinking in real terms?(doing more for less)?
6. How do we change teachers' beliefs and attitudes?(can the paradigm change)?

I look forward to engagement around these and many similar questions and the challenge of seeking answers as a profession. I remain very positive about where we are in terms of schooling and I think it is a great time to be an educator. The opportunities we have to enhance student learning and to learn about our own practice is enough to keep us motivated and focused. I continually see students achieving great things and teachers doing extraordinary work. Let's aim to make this the norm not the exception.

Merry Christmas and roll on 2014!

2014 Writings

What really matters 2014-01-29

The Australian school year has barely begun and already attention has been diverted into debates over the national curriculum and teaching degrees. What is interesting is that these both seem to be debates over general vs specific.

Should a national curriculum be teaching specific knowledge and should teaching degrees be generalist? Certainly the ability to communicate clearly, express ideas imaginatively and problem solve are critical skills in today's world but that's like saying that a surgeon only requires these skills to operate. We know that isn't true.

I don't believe the issues raised by Minister Pyne and Vice Chancellor Spence are the issues that we should be debating. Whether it's the curriculum or a teaching degree, it has to be a both/and proposition. Education is after all, the interplay between theory and practice, reflection and action, specific and general, academic and vocational.

I believe teachers need to be generalists and specialists just as they need to have both deep pedagogical knowledge and deep content knowledge. Learning is the ability to bring the parts together to form a coherent whole.

For me this year the real action should be around two key areas. Firstly what is a relevant curriculum for today's learners? The very word curriculum conjures up images of content and mastery. Perhaps we need to think more about learning frameworks which sees content as an addition to the learning process, an aid rather than an end point.

Secondly, what is the role of a teacher in today's world? I spent sometime with teachers in one of our primary schools on their first "official" day back. It was interesting to note that they had been back at work for some time. We discussed many things but dwelt a little on the role of the teacher.

We talked about the need to let go of this model of teachers as transmitters of knowledge who have their work day and professional working life highly regimented. Can we give over more control of teachers' professional lives to teachers. They organise their time not by bells but by collaboration so the responsibility for learning shifts from the teacher to the student and so on. Will this happen? It will only when the shortsighted interventions and futile debates cease. The task of reshaping education is the responsibility we share.

This year, our system leaders are using John Hattie's *Visible Learning for Teachers* as their professional reading. Hattie writes: "Expert teachers and experienced teachers do not differ in the amount of knowledge that they have about curriculum matters or knowledge about teaching strategies – but expert teachers do differ in how they organise and use this content knowledge."

As Hattie says, what really matters is that teachers know their impact on student learning.

Framing the right questions 2014-02-10

In the past few weeks I've read at least three articles on 'big data'. We are moving rapidly from knowledge capture to data generated insight and innovation. I think that the questions being posed for business in the age of data can be equally applied to education.

How can we 'create value for our students/teachers using data and analytics? And if data is helping companies like Google and Amazon to develop new models of delivery, providing the customers with personalised and targeted information on likes and dislikes and information and opportunities which they may previously not known about, can this sort of data help education develop new models of personalised delivery? The answer for me has to be yes, or we risk irrelevancy in the schooling space.

Schooling will benefit from looking at the innovative businesses who are capitalising on the opportunities being powered by the Internet. Companies who are learning from and transforming what they do and how they do it through the data and tools available. Imagine if schools had access to student data from pre-kindergarten or if primary schools shared student data with high schools? We wouldn't have to re-invent the wheel time or start from square one because a student changed schools. Critical information would be available for teachers who could then pick up the ball so to speak and identify new learning challenges. Imaging capturing data on career progression 10 years plus from exiting school and using that data to inform planning and learning opportunities for current students.

There is a great article in this month's Harvard Business Review about using data to drive growth. It's well worth a read. The authors pose five key questions for businesses. These are questions that deserve our immediate attention.

1. What data do we have? 2. What data can we access that we are not capturing? 3. What data could we create from our operations? 4. What helpful data could we get from others? 5. What data do others have that we could use in a joint initiative?

Good data helps us frame good questions and good questions will help us find new ways of individualising content and personalising learning. We need to be working smarter not harder in a connected online world.

A different level of insight *2014-02-17*

Following on from last week's blog post on big data, I had the great pleasure of meeting researcher and educator George Siemens recently. George is the Associate Director, Technology Enhanced Knowledge Research Institute at Athabasca University in Canada. He was also one of the first people ever to facilitate the use of MOOCs.

George has been immersed in learning and online networks for such a long time that he presents a different level of insight. He shared some of his insight when I asked him about the opportunities of big data on education.

Innovating workplaces 2014-02-25

The slow and steady demise of manufacturing in Australia has sparked interesting debate in recent times over competitiveness in a global economy. I was interested in the discussion following on from Toyota's recent announcement and whether workplace arrangements had jeopardised the big car manufacturers presence in Australia.

The need for contemporary practices impacts also on the education sector. It seems these discussions have always been framed around productivity and performance but I think we are still looking at the problem through the wrong lens.

Daniel Pink proposes an interesting theory of 20th century motivation vs 21st century motivation and the changing nature of work in a knowledge age. The knowledge economy requires a new mindset and skillset. Innovation is key and key to innovation is human capital.

I heard Professor Bill Harley from the University of Melbourne talking recently about the need for workplace innovation in Australia. He said research around the world shows that there are three things that make productive workplaces:

1. Employees have appropriate skillset (teachers up-skilling and re-skilling)
2. Approaches that allow people to collaborate and solve problems (de-privatised practice)
3. Motivated workforce at every level (managing and rewarding performance)

Professor Harley reflected on the fact that a strategic approach to implementing these practices has been absent from Australian workplaces.

The practices that have prevailed in education over the past century are obstructions to innovation. We need to change our practices by changing culture. The three points Professor Harley refers to demonstrate the shift from industrial to knowledge, from convention to evidence.

Ironically, Toyota is one of the companies recognised for its innovative culture. There are numerous case studies on what drives Toyota's success but it comes down to investment in its people (skillset) and organisational capabilities (problem-solving and intrinsic motivators).

Listening to Professor Harley made me think about education in terms of our manufacturing industry. Only for us, it will be our students not car manufacturers who will walk away in search of something more relevant and rewarding.

Forest for the trees *2014-03-03*

Have we over-complicated schooling so much that we can't see the forest for the trees? In our attempt to make schooling relevant have we discounted something so fundamental to human nature?

Sometimes it takes someone like research professor, Dr Peter Gray to put it into perspective. His exceptional article on children and play is a salutary lesson for us all.

All that glitters isn't gold 2014-03-11

The release of the PISA results last year confirm Shanghai's status as the world's top ranked education system in Maths, Science and Reading. All credit to Shanghai and its teachers but are the results the key drivers for quality learning and teaching which China seeks to pursue? Probably not.

Ian Johnson in the New Yorker magazine reports on the rise of concerns regarding China's approach to education and possible alternative models of education. Johnson follows the journey of China's first Waldorf school in Chengdu. He writes that while Shanghai is widely praised internationally, many Chinese intellectuals see 'education as among the biggest problems facing the country.' There is even growing discussion on how to reform China's public schools as more and more parents look to the West for alternative models of schooling.

Among those quoted in the article, a university student whose recently published book articulates the growing discontent: "In elementary school, they rob us of our independent values; in middle school, they take away our capacity for independent thought; and in university, they take away our dreams and idealism."

Those who are critical of China's current education system are concerned that the country won't be able to compete with an innovative West. Chinese-born academic Yong Zhao admits in his book *World Class Learners*, "the focus on academic achievement is the continuation of a long Chinese tradition that puts book knowledge above all others." Education in the age of globalisation needs to deliver much more than 'book knowledge'.

After reading the article, I've concluded that China is no different to any other nation which views education as an investment in its future. As in the West, the traditional model of schooling is being challenged albeit for different reasons and although Shanghai students may be ahead of their Western counterparts in international measures, the moral is that sometimes all that glitters isn't gold.

The perception of public schools 2014-03-19

I was interested to read the piece written by Verity Firth and Rebecca Huntley in the Guardian last week suggesting that if middle and high income parents sent their children to public schools then it would improve outcomes for all. It stems from Firth and Huntley's report commissioned by think tank Per Capita titled *Who's afraid of a public school*.

While there has been an increase in non-government school enrolments, I don't think we are seeing the demise of public education. Some of the most innovative practices I have seen, have been in public schools. Yet Firth and Huntley write "if anxious parents take their kids out of the local school, it starts to do worse, forcing more worried families to depart." Is the argument being made here that declining enrolments automatically equates to a decline in the quality of learning and teaching?

To suggest that Australia's equity issue will be addressed by middle class and wealthy parents sending their children to public schools is simplistic. Somehow it always comes back to funding. It is so disappointing that media campaigns often have greater influence on public perception than the research.

I always come back to Professor Stephen Dinham's statement that equity in Australian schools is determined by "each student having quality teachers and quality teaching in schools supported by effective leadership and professional learning." Equity depends on quality not choice.

Making time for great teaching 2014-03-26

The latest Grattan Institute Report, *Making Time for Great Teaching*, by Dr Ben Jensen is a must read for educators. In an age of teacher over-load and increasing external accountabilities, Jensen presents the case for removing the distractors so that teachers can spend more time on the things that really matter. He argues that if schools reduce the number of staff meetings, school assemblies, extra-curricular activities etc then critical time can be devoted to proven school improvement practices. Jensen and his colleagues worked with six schools across the country to enable more time for intensive mentoring, observation of practice, collaboration and school-based research.

Schools must make difficult but crucial trade-offs in how teachers and school leaders spend their time. We must be explicit that every time we ask teachers to perform extra activities we are decreasing the quality of teaching and learning in schools.

Last week at the National Catholic Education Commission annual meeting in Canberra, my colleagues and I met with a number of Members of Parliament. It was an opportunity to further impress the need for politicians to focus on what is really important in the work of schools. Many priorities and procedures are often assumed to be mandatory when they are mere accretions. Jensen makes the point that

Government regulations restrict schools. Enterprise bargaining agreements restrict changes to work schedules, and duty of care requirements restrain schools that want to free their teachers from child minding to focus on improving teaching.

Ultimately, the responsibility for making time for great teaching lies with individual school communities but the Grattan report shows what is achievable when we focus on what matters most.

Are raspberry pi(es) good for you? 2014-03-31

I am often asked about what technologies and devices will be like in the near future. Given the innovation, the rate of change, and the exponential power of new technologies, not to mention the cost, this question is understandable. Up unto the last two to three years it was all about “picking the winner” in an ever increasing market of devices and operating systems. Remember the VHS versus Beta race and the cost of getting it wrong. More recently the PC versus Mac was fought out almost like a religious war each side with its own zealots eager to purchase the next big thing and thus strive for market dominance. All this at exponential cost to the market in the relentless search for the most sophisticated device.

The rise of open source and the invention of the App has certainly reshaped the technologies world. The focus has shifted from the device to the software. The devices are quickly becoming agnostic as programming has become what I call “democratised” as users develop their own Apps to make the devices do what they want them to do, not what the original programmers necessarily intended them to do. We have thus seen a shift from the device controlling the learning to the learner controlling the device,. The device is now just an idea, they invite the user to be creative, inventive, and innovative. They become a powerful personalised tool at service not in control of the user.

What we do know about the future for technology is that quantum computing will be more powerful, faster cheaper and provide more storage. Wireless will become more ubiquitous and pervasive. Devices will be smaller more embedded in and on our person and into the built environment. Skills once considered essential to living in a modern society like driving a car, organising your personal life or for employment will be replaced by new skill requirements.

I don't know what the next must have device will be but I wish I did because the profits in getting it right are enormous. The way I like to think about this is that the future will see the emergence of a post device era. This is the age of the algorithm where the high priests will not be the privileged few who understand the sacred mysteries and mathematical intricacies but the kids who understand that programming is a core skill.

This has huge implications for schools. What value is being placed on teaching programming? If computer literacy was about knowing how they worked, computer programming is about doing the work. We're already seeing a shift especially in the UK and US to train more teachers to code software and in doing so encourage young people to develop these critical skills. This movement has been boosted by access to cost-effective computers like Raspberry Pi, designed to encourage kids to program.

Bill Liao co-founder of CoderDojo explained coding as a language skill -“You need to be a native speaker and for that you have to start young. We start kids at seven.” He believes coding should be a “creative experience – the best coders are like poets, able to express their thoughts thoughts powerfully.”

Is this the new literacy for schools?

Silverton's silver lining 2014-04-07

Tony Bryant with Silverton PS students.

I had a chance to catch up recently with Tony Bryant, principal of Silverton Primary School in Victoria. If you've been reading bluyonder for a while you'll know that I've visited Silverton PS over several years. I believe Tony is one of this country's most innovative school leaders and as he would tell you, their overnight success story has only taken twenty years of relentless focus.

The first thing you notice when you walk through the doors is that change is happening constantly. This isn't change for change sake but change as a result of continuous improvement, feedback and reflection. There is an obvious passion for learning both at student and teacher level. The teachers I spoke to tell you that it is an absolute pleasure to come to work each day; to be a part of a collaborative and committed team of professional educators. This cannot be sustained without strong leadership. Silverton is a partnership between Tony, his staff and their students.

John Hattie talks about visible learning and teaching and that is exactly what is happening at Silverton. Students take ownership of their learning, they set their own goals and articulate their learning so by the end of the term they can plot where they need to go next. This does not happen without a high level of trust and respect.

Stephen Heppell always makes the point that when students are engaged in their learning we see how ambitious they can be. What we sometimes forget is the central role, indeed the responsibility of teachers and of course leaders, to make sure that students are engaged because engagement is an imperative for academic achievement.

Despite the entrenched educational practices and mindsets of a century and more, Tony and his team have turned learning and teaching on its head. It hasn't been achieved with bucket loads of money but with a belief in students' ability, a passion for learning and regular evaluation. Silverton PS isn't the only school where this is happening and happening well but to see the theory in practice and to see students becoming their own teachers is after all this time still pretty awesome.

A quality education for all 2014-04-17

Professor Stephen Dinham has been a strong and vocal advocate for greater equality in Australian education. He wrote an excellent piece in the Melbourne Age recently on how the ineffective quick fixes to improve teaching would actually lead to greater inequity and decline in educational performance.

These simplistic approaches ignore decades of research on what makes teachers and teaching effective. According to Professor Dinham:

Australia is becoming a less equitable society both generally and in respect of education and as has been demonstrated, inequality in society is actually worse for everyone.

Our collective failure to address the inequality that exists within our education system is a national shame and as Dinham warns if the profession remains ‘silent and passive’, we will only have ourselves to blame for what ‘might eventuate’.

It’s a national shame that we cannot address the inequality within our own education system. But then I began thinking about the inequality that exists for our marginalised. There are more than a thousand children living in offshore immigration detention centres.

Former UN secretary general Kofi Annan said education is the foundation on which freedom, democracy and sustainable human development rests. Australia offers all of this yet we fail to close the gap for our most vulnerable – the indigenous, the poor and the marginalised.

Picking up the paper to read headlines such as ‘Selective schools ‘the most socially exclusive’ in NSW‘ distract from the critical work of closing the gap. We become polarised by the private v public debates and discussions on whether selective schools are the most socially exclusive.

A commitment to a quality education is a commitment to all students regardless of race, circumstance or background. Closing the gap requires us to address the issues with open eyes and hearts.

Crowdsourcing teaching 2014-04-28

I've just finished re-reading Jeff Howe's 2008 book *Crowdsourcing*. It struck me as I reached the end of the book that many of today's digital natives will become tomorrow's teachers. The question then becomes what impact or influence will digital natives have on shaping the role of teachers and the nature of teaching.

I've been reflecting on the role of teachers in today's world for some time but after reading Howe I wondered if the role of teachers and their work will inevitably change in a decade because the nature of the learner has changed?

Howe asserts that today's kids who Prensky coined as digital natives will create 'wholesale changes to the workforce when they enter the labor force.' Why? Because as Howe writes by the time they reach adulthood they will bring "behaviours and attitudes honed through thousands of hours in front of a computer, constructing their own experience and working collaboratively in various online communities."

It begs the next question, will the next generation of teachers be all things to all students or will crowdsourcing become the norm? It may be blue-sky thinking for the education community now but the concept of crowdsourcing is becoming increasingly prevalent.

Two years ago, I read an article in the *Harvard Business Review* on the competition to design the Beijing Olympics' spectacular Water Cube. It was in fact a structural engineer from Sydney that won the competition through what could be considered as crowdsourcing. The author of the article refers to it as 'teaming' – assembling experts from various disciplines to solve a challenge encountered for the first time. It's a worth a read.

We cannot ignore the growing use and legitimacy of teaming and crowdsourcing. The challenge I see is how we can incorporate these capabilities into the practice of teaching now. Could we respond to student learning needs in a more effective way by bringing diverse experts in to work with teachers temporarily? Would teaming be a better way of utilising casual teachers who could convene quickly to solve challenges not only within one school but across several schools? Would this give teachers greater flexibility to deliver individualised learning?

The future of teaching demands that we do something different and innovative now. The way forward will require us to give greater weight to developments in brain theory, learning theory and evidence-based research. This understanding coupled with the tools to support the work of teachers will hopefully lead to new understanding of teaching and a more flexible, dynamic response to schooling.

Should all roads lead to PISA? 2014-05-14

It was interesting to read the global response against PISA in the Guardian last week. It follows on from Yong Zhao's recent blog posts outlining the negative impacts of PISA rankings on education systems and education policy.

The open letter from academics called for the 2015 PISA tests to be scrapped. The group expressed their concern at the 'distorting effect' PISA is having on educational practice. They claim in short that PISA leads to a focus on narrow outcomes, short-term policy fixes, the commercialisation of educational services and endangers the overall wellbeing of students and teachers.

The letter concludes with constructive ideas that may help to address the challenge of improving schooling for all students. It highlights the need for greater transparency, collaboration and accountability in delivering quality learning and teaching across OECD countries.

The authors assert: "OECD's narrow focus on standardised testing risks turning learning into drudgery and killing the joy of learning. We are deeply concerned that measuring a great diversity of educational traditions and cultures using a single, narrow, biased yardstick could, in the end, do irreparable harm to our schools and our students."

It's difficult to disagree with the concerns raised in the open letter but I think we should be careful not to throw the baby out with the bathwater here. For me, the benefit of instruments like PISA should be used by effective educators along with broad data sets to help inform improvements in learning and teaching. Standardised tests become problematic when they are hijacked or used for utilitarian purposes, which have little to do with learning and teaching and more to do with political point scoring or sectional interests.

Schools become easy targets when these tests are used as the basis of league tables or quick fix policies and the honest efforts of schools to improve are disrupted or derailed. I agree that PISA in its current form doesn't do justice to the complexity of schooling in today's world or the cultural traditions of OECD nations.

I hope the global consternation will lead to deeper and more transparent discussions over how data is used to improve the quality and relevancy of schooling for all.

PS: Yong Zhao will be with us in Parramatta next month to deliver the annual Ann D Clark lecture. His keynote on the need for new paradigms and ways of assessing 'learning' is relevant and timely not only for us but for education systems everywhere.

Federal budget: certainty and consistency the key *2014-05-14*

Last night the federal budget delivered across-the-board cuts and the education sector was certainly not immune.

Schools need certainty in both funding and direction.

Funding has been essentially cut in real terms by linking increases to CPI, while educational expenditure grows at almost double the rate.

The Better Schools Plan (Gonski), which was agreed to by the majority of states, had given schools a clear pathway for improvement within a national framework. This has now been abandoned and the government has adopted a ‘back to the future’ approach of devolving responsibility to the states.

Regardless of your politics, if we want Australia to be competitive internationally we need a coherent, funded national policy framework for schools focused on the areas that make the greatest difference. We know this focus needs to be on improving the quality of teaching by building professional expertise and practice.

Cuts to AITSL and ACARA will significantly impact on Australia’s ability to deliver a national framework encompassing a national standard for teachers and leaders, and a national curriculum.

Furthermore, the constantly shifting educational landscape with each successive government or budget serves as a distraction to the core work of improving schooling.

Any plan for improvement relies on three things – clarity, precision and relentless consistency. Can we be surprised, then, that Australia is not gaining momentum in school performance?

Are pigs more intelligent than humans? 2014-06-03

I have to thank my esteemed colleague Professor Yong Zhao for the title of this post. My original title was going to be “when will they ever learn’ but as Yong suggested humans often repeat the same mistakes, pigs, like all animals don’t.

I am referring to the business of large scale school improvement. There are great examples of whole system improvement but then there are examples such as Newark in the US that make you want to hang your head and cry.

Dale Russakoff writes in depth in the New Yorker about the plan to transform schools in Newark and how it divided an already disempowered community. Add to the mix a \$100 million donation by Facebook head, Mark Zuckerberg, an ambitious mayor, overpaid consultants and you can see where it may have gone wrong, and in a big way.

Had it succeeded, it would have turned a district of high-crime and low-performing schools into a national model but in education nothing happens quickly.

What saddened me aside from the bleak future for these students was that we continue to make the same mistakes based on the same set of assumptions – money can fix the system, change can be imposed top down, consultants know best and the community shouldn’t be involved in the decision-making process.

One person quoted in the article admits the strategy was doomed because it didn’t address the issue of poverty. Another said that “education reform... comes across as colonial to people who’ve been here for decades. It’s very missionary, imposed, done to people rather than cooperation with people.”

The point for me is that you can’t look to the past for answers. Yong Zhao says the same thing – there are many opportunities out there to do something different in education, not to copy but to invent from the ground-up.

This was the recurring theme at last week’s World Business Forum in Sydney. Michael Porter, Gary Hamel and Randi Zuckerberg were all talking about the need for creative leadership in the 21st century, doing things differently and taking risks. While there was no representative from education, everyone agreed that it was critical to the success of individuals and economies.

I’ve been lobbying our federal politicians for sometime for a similar forum, bringing together the world’s best educational thinkers and practitioners to Australia. It would be the beginning of a dialogue, an invitation to create alternatives to the current model of schooling and learn from past mistakes.

Is experience overrated in a knowledge age? 2014-06-18

In my experience, the education sector can only benefit from the innovations and ideas from other sectors and industries. I think we should be examining the underlying philosophies, principles and practices that make an organisation successful in a knowledge age and how schools can learn from or even adopt similar practices. Yet there is still a reticence to do anything that has been cultivated from without the education sector.

Everything is evolving in a connected world and it seems the game-changers are companies like Amazon and Google including how they employ and retain creative staff. It seems that potential is more valuable than experience in the 21st century according to article in the latest Harvard Business Review.

The article's author, Claudio Fernandez-Araoz believes we are moving into a new era of talent spotting, in which 'potential' is the 'most important predictor of success at all levels.' Fernandez-Araoz says that the 21st century work environment is complex, uncertain and volatile and the question organisations need to ask is not do employees and leaders have the right skills but do they have the 'potential to learn new ones.' Remember Alvin Toffler's famous quote about 21st century illiterates!

Fernandez-Araoz goes on to identify other qualities that he sees as the hallmarks of potential: motivation, curiosity, insight, engagement and determination. Interestingly, these are the qualities that effective teachers bring out in students when learning is challenging, engaging and rewarding.

For me this article raises new challenges for education to consider in the way we attract and retain teachers. I tweeted an article from HBR recently on a company in the US that has taken the bold step of ditching resumes and auditioning potential recruits to see how they work in existing teams. Several people responded to me on twitter to say they were already doing this in their schools!

Education in general needs to dismantle the industrial mindsets and practices that are stifling widespread innovation. Even the Federal Education Minister, Christopher Pyne has said that education is one of the last bastions in the working world where length of service is still rewarded.

The days of logical career mapping and moving up the professional ladder are limited. Schools need the best instructional leaders leading – and it may be that we need to look at potential over experience.

The rhetoric of being a life-long learner needs to become the reality for knowledge workers and teachers are no exception.

World class thinker 2014-06-23

Earlier this month we had the pleasure welcoming Professor Yong Zhao to Parramatta to deliver the 2014 Ann D Clark lecture. I recall last year when Larry Rosenstock, founding principal of High Tech High in the US was here for PBL World, he told us we wouldn't be disappointed hearing Yong speak. And we weren't.

One of the many things that impresses me about Yong is his willingness to look outward and to "read the signs of the times". He is continually questioning his own worldview while coming up with fresh ideas and challenging ways of thinking.

I had the opportunity of sitting down to chat with Yong while he was here. He is definitely a world class thinker.

Connecting leaders 2014-07-03

I'm always amazed at the ways in which technology is being used in education to inform practice. Twitter continues to be a source of great ideas and professional learning particularly for the teaching profession.

For the past two years, I have been using technology (OscarLive) to connect with four school leaders each Monday morning. It is a simple video conference facility. We always have both primary and secondary leaders as the agenda is about leading learning. The hour conversation has no set agenda – it is an opportunity to share, support and engage in reflective dialogue.

The feedback has been positive. Leaders appreciate not having to leave their school and it's been useful for secondaries to gain greater insight and understanding into primary challenges/issues and vice versa. It has become a natural and personal way to work, one which strengthens connections and deepens collaboration.

To spend the first meeting of each week talking about learning and teaching with leaders has been most rewarding for me. I find it sets me up for the week, I often find I can reference comments made during our online time in meetings I am having during the week

It reiterates that leadership within a system is a shared responsibility, requiring ongoing dialogue and respect for ideas and diversity. It also reinforces the theme that leadership is most effective when it is genuinely collaborative.

Every week I see leaders who are passionate about their work, supportive of the system agenda and committed to sharing best practice to improve student learning outcomes across the board.

The challenge is how do we use the tools available to challenge, to empower and to deepen our own professional learning?

An investment in hope 2014-07-14

Last week I happened to catch an interview with Nobel prize winning economist Professor Joseph Stiglitz. Professor Stiglitz was in Australia talking about his latest book on inequality. What resonated was his comment that a country's best investment is in its people not its resources. This is why investment in education and teachers is absolutely critical.

Unfortunately many educators still believe that schooling is somehow an instrument of the government or the economy or both. In doing so we buy into an outdated and mechanistic view of the world that has little relevance to the world in which we live. It would be OK if it were just this but in reality it is no more than social determinism. A view of the world in which learning is pre-ordained and pre-destined. We need to restate the purpose of education which has at its heart, the individual child.

Education in its truest sense is an investment in the individual- it builds on the nature of the learner. It does not impose limits or attempts to squeeze learners into jobs that will no longer exist in a decade. Schools should be an investment in hope – equipping students to be life-long learners and hopeful about the future. They are our agents of change and we must nurture their interests and passions as Yong Zhao says.

If creativity, innovation and entrepreneurship are the hallmarks of this age, then today's learners will be creating the new world not our governments. Education is not designed to improve our economy but to improve our society by enabling all individuals to lead fulfilling lives. We can only challenge inequality in society by ensuring it doesn't exist in our schools.

Enterprising schools 2014-07-23

Harvard Professor, Richard Elmore once asked ‘is it possible that schools can continue to operate in the 19th century while the rest of society moves into the 21st century?’ The simple answer is no – although the adversarial position historically adopted by unions suggests otherwise.

NSW and ACT Catholic employers are currently in the process of discussions with staff and the union on a new enterprise agreement that we believe reflects the need to create contemporary working conditions relevant to a twenty first century model of schooling. This conversation is not limited to teaching profession, it is happening in most professional organisations around the world. Federal education minister Christopher Pyne recently said that education is one of the last bastions in the working world where length of service is still rewarded. Length of service in any profession does not guarantee that you are the best you can be. It simply means you lasted the distance.

We want all teachers no matter what stage of their career to develop high level skills and knowledge in their work. I know the majority of teachers want greater control of their working lives. As John Hattie states ‘schools need to collaborate to build a team working together to solve the dilemmas in learning, to collectively share and critique the nature and quality of evidence that shows our impact on student learning, and to cooperate in planning etc.’

This calls for a new professional maturity that provides teachers with greater autonomy but acknowledges the need for all teachers to adopt a rigorous and intellectual approach to improving teacher practice. In 2018, Australia will have a new national teachers standard administered by AITSL. This is one of the foundations of the new Catholic schools enterprise agreement. The standards are imminent and non-negotiable.

What is negotiable under a new enterprise agreement is how each local school community structures and shapes learning and teaching. For more than a century the working lives of teachers have been controlled by bells, timetables and externally imposed agenda. Do we continue to defend an industrial model of schooling in the face of the irrefutable and overwhelming impact of a knowledge age or do we embrace the opportunities for teachers to chart new waters?

Enterprise is defined in the dictionary as a ‘readiness to embark on adventures with boldness and energy.’ Educational expert Yong Zhao believes the time has come for schools to be enterprising, for students to be entrepreneurial and for teachers to be bold in re-shaping the educational agenda. This is what the new enterprise agreement is about. It challenges teachers to think about new ways of working together to improve the quality of learning and teaching in schools.

We don’t just want teachers to last the distance, we want them to shape their profession and to continually raise the bar of excellence for themselves, the school communities and most of all, the students they teach.

If twenty first century schools are enterprising schools, then we need a contemporary enterprise agreement which reflects a 21st century teaching profession.

The proposal for an enterprise agreement stems from a recognition that a new century requires new ways of working in schools. It aims to increase collaboration at a local level by supporting leaders but most of all, it aims to bring alignment in the standards

Enterprising schools need enterprise agreements. It’s time for educators to be bold and to lead the way with imagination and initiative on how we want to work.

‘We learning’ in the digital age *2014-08-11*

According to sociologist Dirk Helbing, the 21st century will ‘be governed by fundamentally different principles than the 20th century’. Helbing says it requires a new way of thinking about the world. He predicts that in this age of ‘collective intelligence’ enabled by social media, we will see the emergence of an ‘innovation ecosystem’ made up of millions of projects. Is this PBL on a global scale?

Helbing believes digital literates will become better informed than experts. His recent paper ‘What the Digital Revolution means for us’ is fascinating reading and raises some important challenges. Helbing concludes:

‘Digital literacy and good education will be more important than ever. But with the emerging Internet of Things and participatory information platforms, we can unleash the power of information and turn the digital society into an opportunity for everyone. It just takes our will to establish the institutions required to make the digital age a great success. Are we ready for this?’

It’s a relevant question for educators – what shifts are we making in our thinking and our work to turn students into exceptional digital literates? In June this year I spoke at the EduTech conference in Brisbane and discussed where I think education has been and where we need to go next in the context of the digital revolution.

Starting point 2014-08-16

As I wrote last month, we are currently in the midst of creating a new Enterprise Agreement with teachers in NSW and ACT. It's been interesting for me to step back and reflect on the big picture. Too often discussions begin from the wrong starting point. It's like the Irish joke about the tourist who asks 'how do I get to Dublin?' The locals reply 'well I wouldn't start from here!'

The starting point should not be focussed on the structure but on how we support teachers within the changing nature of schooling in a contemporary world. The need to personalise learning and de-privatise teacher practice is critical in a knowledge age.

It calls for new ways of thinking and new ways of working and it's understandable that teachers feel angst. I believe the way forward is open dialogue with teachers on what it is to learn and teach in today's world. Teaching is undoubtedly more challenging in today's world but when I speak with teachers I know they are well placed to come up with the best solution for their learning communities.

Dan Pink once said that teachers aren't motivated by extrinsic rewards but the satisfaction that comes from seeing every child learn, and learn well. The more we engage in quality dialogue that is grounded in trust, an openness to reflect and a willingness to collaborate, the better the outcome for all.

Catholic schooling in Australia *2014-08-24*

Earlier this month I was asked to be a part of a three speaker panel to discuss the topic of Catholic schooling in Australia. The panel was part of the University of Notre Dame's silver anniversary celebrations in Australia. This was my contribution on the history and future of Catholic schooling.

Playing our A game 2014-08-26

Photo courtesy of ARU

For those who don't know, I am a rugby union tragic and die hard Wallaby supporter. It's been a disappointing few years for the team (and supporters) but recently we had reason to hope with a new coach. All this came to a screaming halt on the weekend when we were outplayed by the New Zealand All Blacks.

As I tweeted during the match, this was a masterclass on how to play the game and no matter who you supported, it was a pleasure to watch these professionals in action.

It was impressive to see how well the All Blacks recovered from the previous week where they drew with the Wallabies. They came back on the weekend with a relentless focus and new strategy to succeed.

The All Blacks coach was quoted after the draw saying that the team needed to improve 'just about everything' and that their 'skills and game structure' was virtually non-existent. What I saw were individuals taking responsibility for their own improvement. Sure they had input from the coach and others but they did the work themselves. In a week they were able to reflect on their performance, take on the feedback and implement a new strategy. Isn't this what good learning and teaching is about?

Listening to Hansen reminded me of Michael Fullan's message about the right drivers - "The glue that binds the effective drivers together is the underlying attitude, philosophy and theory of action."

Saturday's match was a great example of a learning community in action. We owe it to our students to be playing our A game.

Delany Connective 2014-09-09

I had the great pleasure of launching the Delany Connective at Delany College, Granville last Wednesday. The Delany Connective is a contemporary approach to schooling aimed at fostering the deeper knowledge and skills (cognitive and non-cognitive) necessary in today's world. Students have access to contemporary tools within a contemporary and collaborative learning environment.

Delany staff identified an urgent need to provide a relevant and quality learning experience for students entering high school. What makes this different is the partnership with Telstra and Cisco to deliver a connected learning environment. The partnership with industry extends beyond an investment in technology – it is an investment in learners and teachers.

Speaking at the launch, Brendan Riley, Group Executive of Global Enterprise and Services from Telstra said the 4cs that underpin the Delany Connective: communication, critical thinking, creativity and collaboration were the skills that Telstra also values. So much so that Telstra re-crafted its vision statement to a 'brilliantly connected future for everyone.'

At the heart of the Connective is a curriculum framework called the Learning Wheel developed by our teaching educator, Dr Miranda Jefferson. The wheel describes the qualities learners need in today's world to maximise their learning. It is expressed on the wheel as cognitive (communication, critical thinking, creativity), intra-personal (grit, curiosity, focus) and inter-personal (empathy, influence and collaboration). Students are encouraged to assess how they are progressing and then take greater ownership of their learning.

The launch was a great success but for me the real stars were the parents. Each spoke about their child becoming more confident as individuals and more engaged as learners. As one mother said, her son was now driving his own learning. When I asked these parents how they would know the initiative was working, they said their children were going to school excited and coming home happy.

Parents can be our harshest critics but these parents weren't talking from a script, they were speaking from the heart. One of the most encouraging stories was a Year 7 student with significant learning disabilities who spent much of their primary schooling feeling isolated and disengaged. His mother told me that not only does he see himself as a valued member of the learning community but for the first time in his life, he's proud of his achievements.

It's important to remember this is the start of a very long journey for the Delany school community but I know with their passion and commitment we can look forward to sharing more of these stories.

Mindful learning 2014-09-18

The challenge of re-imagining schooling is not about changing structures but mindsets. This was the theme of my keynote address at the ACE National Conference in Adelaide recently. It is time for a new professional maturity. Let me be clear that professional maturity is the courage to think differently, respond creatively and to act boldly against a dominant and outdated educational narrative.

There have been two books this year that have influenced my thinking on how we think more mindfully about learning and teaching. The first is Carol Dweck's *Mindset*. The other is Ellen Langer's 'The Power of Mindful Learning'. Langer is Professor of Psychology at Harvard University and has devoted much of her career to the theory of mindfulness.

Like Dweck, Langer stresses that myths and mindsets about education undermine the process of learning. The desire by educators to personalise learning isn't a new concept but Langer suggests a new approach – teaching students how to make meaning of content themselves.

Langer talks about enabling students to draw their own distinctions and to frame learning in such a way as to see more than one answer or angle. When students are able to contextualise material it allows them to 'create working definitions that are continually revised.' In her experiments over the years, Langer has found that when information is presented as 'could be' rather than 'is', it immediately opens up the possibility of seeing things from different perspectives or more mindfully.

Reflecting on her own teaching practice, Langer says we should see that every inadequate answer a student gives is often an adequate answer when viewed in another context. Langer writes:

If we respect students' abilities to define their own experiences, to generate their own hypotheses, and to discover new ways of categorizing the world, we might not be so quick to evaluate the adequacy of their answers. We might, instead, begin listening to their questions. Out of the questions of students come some of the most creative ideas and discoveries. All answers come out of the question. If we pay attention to our questions, we increase the power of mindful learning.

Often when I hear educators talk about the challenges of learning and teaching, they begin with 'The reality is. . . .'. As Langer shows, the reality is one perspective or one way of looking at the issue. This notion is wonderfully illustrated by Salvador Dali in his painting *The Persistence of Memory* which challenges our concept of time. There are as Dali depicts, multiple realities and many ways of seeing what 'could be' if we begin to view things differently – more mindfully.

The imperative we have to deliver a more relevant and personalised learning experience for all students demands that we think and respond differently. John Hattie encourages teachers and leaders to adopt new mind frames. He says these must 'pervade our thinking about teaching and learning, because it is these ways of viewing our world that then lead to the optimal decisions for the particular contexts in which we work.'

Mindful learning must begin with mindful teaching. And the challenge of re-imagining schooling begins not with what is but what could be.

The power of now 2014-10-07

I've recently discovered the work and energy of Tim Longhurst. Tim is an Australian futurist who is helping us to make sense of what is happening in a hyper-connected world and how we, as educators, can harness the power of now.

Tim suggests that today's learners are part person and part mobile phone. The ubiquitous nature of these devices means that students are informed and supported 24/7 and because of this, students see themselves as multifaceted global contributors – leaders, advocates, entrepreneurs, marketers and activists. It fundamentally changes the way in which we share our stories and how we share our knowledge and assets on a global scale.

According to Tim, the three key trends are:

1. The power of small (ability to change the world with fewer resources e.g Pebble Smart Watch)
2. Barriers are collapsing (Khan academy has taught 100 million students for free)
3. Wisdom of the group (Open Ideo)

These trends reinforce what is possible today using the power of technology. We can't predict the future but we can imagine what is possible by being curious and asking two critical questions: what is happening in the world and what are the possibilities for learning from each other using today's tools.

As Tim says in a non-linear world, it's OK not to know because we have a billion advisers at our fingertips willing to help and share an idea. Today's learners have already worked this out: ask (on-line) and you will receive. That's the power of the device and we can learn from people like Tim who have their fingers on the pulse. As Tim writes on his blog, if children are going to be in formal education for 12 years, then we owe it to each of them that schooling...

allows them to develop their understanding of themselves and the world. The qualities we ought to instill in learners include: curiosity, collaboration and creativity. Curiosity, because it's the spark that turns us into lifelong learners—essential in a fast changing world; collaboration because knowing how to bring out the best in others and work in team environments is such a big part of realising our own potential; and creativity because that it is an act that puts these amazing supercomputers between our ears to work in ways that inspire ourselves and others.

Beyond curriculum 2014-10-15

I have lost count of the number of curriculum reviews I have lived through as an educator and I'm yet to be convinced that past or even current curriculum reviews actually address the real issue of how teachers' work. It is one thing to strip back a curriculum to allow teachers greater flexibility and freedom to go deeper into the learning but there needs to be focus on how we develop teachers' capabilities to teach a contemporary curriculum.

My concern with the latest curriculum review is that it distracts attention from the critical issue of how teachers' work and how we make decisions about the quality of that work to improve student learning. I agree that we must focus on literacy and numeracy as the foundation to good learning but it is contingent on teachers who not only know how to teach the basics but also continue to build on and deepen student knowledge through challenging tasks and activities.

One of the main problems with a prescribed curriculum is it focuses on delivering content. While content is important, what matters is how students understand it, construct it and apply it. Effective learning relies on effective teaching and in Singapore for example, there is heavy investment throughout teachers' careers on developing their pedagogical and content knowledge.

Now we've had the government's review of the what (curriculum), I believe we need a teacher led symposium on the 'how'. How do we engage all teachers in the type of inquiry and critical reflection that we expect students to engage in to become independent learners and critical thinkers?

Curriculum will always be subject to heated debate and ideological divides so the opportunity for real change lies in exploring new ways of working, new modes of teacher practice that reflects the changing nature of the world, the tools and today's learners. As my colleague, Br Pat Howlett, Principal of Parramatta Marist High says how can you teach in a traditional way and expect students to think critically and work collaboratively.

As Richard Elmore et al Instructional Rounds in Education notes:

...if your improvement strategy begins with a curriculum solution ... then you have to invest in the new knowledge and skill required of teachers to teach that curriculum if you expect it to contribute to new student learning. A failure to address teachers' knowledge and skill as part of a curriculum-based improvement strategy typically produces low-level teaching of high-level content. There are only three ways to improve student learning at scale. The first is to increase the level of knowledge and skill that the teacher brings to the instructional process. The second is to increase the level and complexity of the content that students are asked to learn. And the third is to change the role of the student in the instructional process. That's it. If you are not doing one of these three things, you are not improving instruction and learning.

Schools are still important 2014-10-23

Jack Jeffries is a Year 10 student at Parramatta Marist High. I invited him to write a guest blog as we don't hear student voice enough when it comes to mapping the future of education. His thoughts follow...

Six months ago I spoke at the International Conference for Teaching and Learning with Technology in Singapore (ICTLT). It was a great honour to attend as a Year 10 student of Parramatta Marist High.

I've been lucky over the past four years to experience innovative schooling through project-based learning. Aside from the emphasis on teamwork, I've been able to use technology to make connections via the web. PBL has been incredible for me – I can communicate with anyone, research anything and learn more effectively.

Learning this way has helped me form strong views on technology in education and it was this that led to the opportunity to participate in a student panel discussion in Singapore.

Despite speaking in front of more than 1000 people (which I find pretty daunting for most people), the discussion was exciting and the responses were varied, thoughtful and interesting. Singapore, being number one in education, meant that the use of technology and other aspects that make up the future of education were already well in play, and the students that joined my peers and I at the panel knew their stuff. The questions varied, from the pros of technological learning, in its usefulness and its role in communication, to the negatives, such as cyber bullying. Overall, even in considering the differences of everyone's responses, a general consensus was reached – technology is opening up exciting opportunities for learning.

Where do I see education with all the tools available to us as learners? Over the past few years, I have seen the great potential in these tools and they have to be harnessed to give students an incredibly versatile, effective and worthwhile education. It's not that we will be prepared for the future but it invites students to continue to learn and experience at an incredible rate inside school, outside school and continuing after school.

The potential of learning is open to anyone, anywhere. Khan Academy allows thousands upon thousands of kids to learn in an interesting, simple and engaging way – for free. How can schools compete? In all honesty, you can take the internet in general; it allows for instant access to any content in the world, with everything from video tutorials to diagrams to forums on every topic under the sun. Students literally have the world at their fingertips – our keyboards can take us anywhere. When did schools turn from a key to the world to a barricade from it?

I believe schools are still important and for good reason. They are the connection between our tools, the bridge looking out upon the expanse of our education. Schools are needed – they just have to change. Maybe it's time for open learning, where students could harness the power of technology to communicate, discover and develop their understanding and their awe of the world at equal rates and harness the power of *school* to discuss and consult with peers and teachers.

As I said at the conference in Singapore, this is the time to harness technology so we can utilise the time spent at school for the most efficient and effective as well as exciting education possible.

From compliance to creativity 2014-11-04

Earlier this week, together with our schools leaders, I spent time in a workshop led by Michael Fullan. The focus of his work was on improving student learning outcomes for all students and this involves a commitment to continuous improvement. Fullan states that improvement and innovation is not an either/or proposition. Schools need to be on the road to improvement while constantly anticipating the 'where to next'. This is what Fullan defines as innovation.

How do schools become centres of innovation and excellence in the 21st century? I invited one of our teaching educators, Dr Miranda Jefferson to reflect on this question in a guest blog.

It takes courage to play a whole rugby league grand final with a broken cheekbone. But it takes more courage to transform schools into centres of innovation. It takes courage because it is an act that disrupts the well-established comfort zone into which much of education has nestled.

The comfort zone in education is neatly contained by compliance, standards and Naplan tests and it has unwittingly influenced teachers to think 'within the square'. In *Teacher Professional Learning in an Age of Compliance* (2009) Groundwater-Smith and Mockler argue that the rise of the audit culture in education has given equal rise to a fear of risk, uncertainty and complexity to develop authentic and progressive schooling. Compliance is in tension with the capacity to be creative and innovative in our schools.

Education must foster creativity and critical thinking in order to meet the demands of increasing globalized markets and competitiveness, the rapid pace of change through technologies, automation and connectivity and the shift to a knowledge based economy generated by creativity and innovation.

At a psychological level, creativity is essential to human development and forms a lifelong zone of proximal development contributing to the sustained development of a creative personality (Moran and John-Steiner on L.S. Vygotsky, 2003). In other words, for learning to be truly transformational, development depends on creativity and creativity depends on development.

Is education at the school, systemic and policy level really focused on creativity and innovation? Is the learning deep and transformational? If schools were centres of innovation they would be constantly transforming, critiquing and generating new ideas through collaboration with others and communicating those ideas for maximum impact. They would be acting on and creating research based on a body of evidence rather than responding to a body of opinion.

Parker J. Palmer wrote about the inner landscape of a teacher in *The Courage to Teach* (1998), and said, "We teach who we are". As I work as a teaching educator in schools, I am struck by the amount of courage it takes for systemic and school leaders and teachers to take risks and re-imagine the creative possibilities of schooling.

The irony is that learning, like creativity, is to go from the 'known to the unknown'. Yet education seems fixed by compliance to the 'known'. Protecting comfort zones and vested interests and meeting compliance by 'being seen to be good' rather than 'doing good' is in the long run a very unsafe place to be. By not moving to the unknown there is no progress.

If schools are centres of learning, creativity and innovation there has to be courageous school leaders and empowered teachers promoting and nurturing the Four C's – Creativity, Critical Thinking, Communication and Collaboration – in their own work lives and work places. If we are what we teach, then future generations depend on educators who generate and communicate ideas that defy the crowd, work in creative collaborative teams in and across schools, and challenge and critique each other to think and act locally and globally.

Innovation in education can be achieved through active involvement in research. It takes vision, respect, relationships, mentoring and pedagogies that challenge, take risks and go into the unknown to make new and deeper connections. Schools as centres of learning and creativity have to be dynamic and shifting at their very core.

If schools teach for learning, creativity and innovation, they will more than meet compliance. They will exceed it. If you choose to think outside the square, you'll know what's in the square, who made it and why it is the way it is.

Innovation in schools is a decision. It is a courageous decision to reach beyond the status quo and come up with something new, that when combined with research and relational wisdom, will better serve our young peoples' social and economic futures.

Better learners, better citizens 2014-11-13

Schooling will be out of business if we don't 'revamp' schools. This was Michael Fullan's reply to my question last week of whether he thought there was a growing gap between schooling and learning. Interestingly, Fullan doesn't believe we need to start from scratch. Rather, he suggests looking at ways of extending the boundaries of schooling; making them more permeable in today's world. Technology can be a great tool to help bridge this gap.

While Fullan admits that while technology is a 'pull' factor for students and one of the game changers for schooling, the vast majority of digital use in schools is superficial. What is needed is an engaging pedagogy to pull students in and equip them with 21st century skills. This contemporary framework is built on the 6Cs: creativity, critical thinking, communication, collaboration, citizenship and character. As Fullan says better learners, lead to better global citizens and the better the learning for students, the more focused the work of teachers. Schooling becomes an open-ended and collaborative experience for students as well as teachers.

The next wave in education will be combining digital and student agency to deliver improved learning outcomes. Gaining greater understanding of student learning by assessing how students like to learn, whether they feel they belong to their school community and what are their expectations. The good news is these factors are not fixed – they are able to be leveraged because student engagement and learning success is inextricably linked.

How students participate in their learning, experience it and succeed is the next chapter for many education systems. Powerful mobile connected devices will not do anything to improve student learning on their own. Schools need to design realistic learning experiences which engage and stretch students and use the devices as enablers. This involves both the teacher and the student in a complex process of learning together. This moves our understanding of learning and teaching today from a mechanistic and didactic process to an organic and transformational one. Of course, passionate and proficient teachers working together in this way show us what teaching needs to be in a knowledge age.

The great art of companionship 2014-11-18

For the past year, we have been fortunate to have two Spanish sisters working in the agile learning space at St Monica's Primary, North Parramatta. It's been a great cross-cultural experience for all involved. They say the children are helping to correct their English!

In Spain, Sr Maria and Sr Teresa were the principals of two progressive K-12 Catholic schools in Barcelona. Their congregation is dedicated to the education of children in Spain and abroad. Youth unemployment in Spain is among the highest in Europe – a staggering 54.9%. The Sisters recognise that they have to educate their students to be global citizens. Many of their students will need to move to other European countries or further abroad to obtain meaningful work. Such is the reality of life in Spain today.

What impressed me was that every single teacher is proficient in using technology. As a congregation of 9 schools and a university, they developed a model eight years ago whereby every school has a small technology team that coordinates learning for teachers either online or face to face. As teachers become 'expert', they share their expertise within and across schools. The Sisters accept that students will always know more about technology but to ask a student for help shows a "humbleness that teachers are also in a continual process of learning."

As school leaders, they see their role as primarily helping others to flourish. They believe that knowing your staff well leads to building greater levels of trust and transparency. Sr Teresa says that teachers need to feel at home just as much as students when they come to school. Teachers not only model collaboration but they model what is to be a learner. The question they ask themselves continually is 'how can we do this better?' They are not afraid to look outside their communities or country for inspiration or ideas. They've had educators from Finland and Reggio Emilia visit their schools to share ideas and practice.

Their mission (like Sir Ken Robinson) is to make schools places where creativity flourishes. They admitted that not every child can change everything but some children can change somethings for the better. Their staff see this as a great achievement and testament to the value of education in modern society.

In Spain they work across K-12 because it enables them to have a deep understanding of their students and the learning environment. In a week, each school leader in their system spends approximately 20 hours teaching across primary and secondary. After school, teachers and leaders meet to plan and learn together. It is a continuous cycle of learning and improvement.

They have been very impressed with the standard of education here and the support of our state and federal government. The Spanish government has cut education funding, which is never the solution. Despite this, teaching is a popular vocation for young people. They see good teachers as Spain's great hope.

I asked each what they were most proud of as school leaders. Both agreed that it was the quality of the relationships with students, with teachers and with parents. They told me that students in their final year of high school don't want to leave and when they do, they come back regularly to visit.

This reminds me of Maria Montessori's wonderful quote that teaching is 'the great art of companionship'.

Above all, try something 2014-12-02

There is a wonderful quote by Franklin D. Roosevelt in David Price's new book 'Open'. Speaking at a commencement address in 1932, Roosevelt said: "The country needs and, unless I mistake its temper, the country demands bold, persistent experimentation. It is common sense to take a method and try it: If it fails, admit it frankly and try another. But above all, try something."

David Price was in Australia last week talking about his new book and the changing world of work, life and learning. We live in a world that is increasingly transparent and open: open source, open learning, open communities. Price makes the point that we cannot control or contain knowledge so it is no longer powerful. What has become powerful are the social connections arising from the co-creation of knowledge locally and globally.

This is not explicitly about technology but how it is enabling new ways of thinking, working and learning. The focus is very much on people and how we are using the tools to connect and reshape communities in a more collaborative way.

'Open' fleshes out this new landscape by providing a lens from the outside in rather than the inside out as so often happens. The book presents a sharp synthesis of what is happening in today's world and importantly, how the education sector can learn from those who are successfully weaving the threads of social, open and informal learning into classrooms such as High Tech High in California and School of Communication Arts 2.0 in the UK. These diverse examples illustrate how being open to new ideas, tools and importantly new ways of learning and teaching are changing the nature of schooling.

Price makes the point that 'because education has such a deep-seated resistance to change, that what to them (e.g principals of and) seems logical appears radical to others.' Price goes on to say that governments don't do radical and so the responsibility to be different and "innovative needs to come from schools themselves, and unless innovative new approaches become more disruptive, the reality is that they will fall further behind the pace of change of 'open'."

We are living in uncertain times but to echo Roosevelt – schooling today demands bold, persistent experimentation so that schooling becomes truly open, relevant and meaningful well into the future.

The radical centre *2014-12-12*

On Monday night I had the pleasure of hearing Noel Pearson deliver the annual Bishop Manning lecture. Pearson is founder of the Cape York Institute for Policy and Leadership. In discussing the complexities and challenges facing indigenous communities, Pearson explained that he saw himself as a radical centralist – someone committed to left wing objectives through right wing policies.

As Pearson explained, the free market approach assumes that everyone is educated and can therefore make an informed choice. The paradox is that if you have no education, the market isn't free. The problem with the left wing approach is that you get caught in a cycle of more programs, more money, more administration. One side wants to keep handing out fish, the other the rods. Pearson's view is use both to achieve an effective and equitable outcome.

At the centre of schooling is the child but for decades we've focussed on either the fish or the fishing rod. It resonates with Michael Fullan's theme that educational change will only ever come from the middle. The top (government) cannot be relied on because governments and policies frequently change. On the other hand, when you give the bottom (schools) too much autonomy, you cannot build systemness.

The middle provides coherence so both school and system grow in tandem. No-one is left behind. I believe the teaching profession needs a coalition of central radicals to keep us focussed on the middle.

And that's what Noel Pearson is attempting to do – build systemness so that no-one is left behind.

The adventures of Mr Whippy 2014-12-19

Last week, I was delighted to visit the Kindergarten learning space at St Bernadette's Primary, Lalor Park. It is one of the joys of my work as Executive Director to see talented teachers engaged with vivacious young learners. St Bernadette's have an excellent practice of asking all students to write to the Principal Liz Devlin regularly, and she writes back! Reading and writing are, as you would expect, highly valued and the teachers use every opportunity for the students to learn in a purposeful way. Little did I know the amount of effort and preparation that went into my visit.

Kindergarten teachers, Mabel-Lynn Buenaventura and Brooke Peterson, used my visit as a literacy activity for their students. I was 'bowled over' by the depth of understanding and ability for these children to imagine and write their stories. I asked the Mabel-Lynn and Brooke to reflect on their practice (*the bolding is mine*):

The children had been waiting all year long for 'Mr Whippy' aka Mr Whitby to come to visit our budding Kindergarten authors (Yes that was a lesson in itself hearing all the correct sounds in his surname and clapping out Whitby into two syllables; then making rhyming nonsense words).

Domenic wrote an imaginative illustrated story book (see video) in Term 2 titled, *Mr Whippy and the Big Spider*. It was a well thought out, sequential story with a good introduction, an interesting plot and a happy ending.

When he had written the story he gave it to our Principal to read and of course that's how Greg came to visit the school, so that the children could see the main character in real life and invite him to be the 'audience and the star'.

Greg totally engaged with the reading of the story and the class-prepared 'Big Book' (yes all about him and his 7,000 pairs of socks) and a 'handwritten by every child' description of the 'big man' (tall of course!).

Writing and reading in our learning space is non-negotiable and starts from day one. Creative thinking and spontaneity is encouraged from the beginning and every attempt to 'scribble on a page' is celebrated as writing. Imaginative play and drawing is often a catalyst to writing in the early months and every attempt is celebrated.

Before the students commence school we have a five week transition to Kindergarten program where we have 'observed to be informed'; 'engaged to build relationship'; and 'played to honour being a child'. We feel we already know the learners when they begin Kindergarten. There are many individual changes and developments in the two months between transition and the start of the school year so our baseline data starts to fill out and become a little richer and juicier.

At the beginning of the school year we 'hit the ground running' with our new learners. **We always start with the end in mind; taking each student beyond their personal best so that they surprise themselves and their families** with a positive growth mindset to propel them into Year 1 as confident, spontaneous and competent readers, writers, mathematicians and thinkers (philosophers even!).

Our Kindergarten love to write to everyone and anyone. The audience and purpose is very important to a five year old and they love the 'spotlight shining on them on their own stage' as they reach new milestones in their own learning. Talking and listening is encouraged by all members of the class community (adults and children) and always as a pre-requisite to clear communication. Greg got a taste of our spontaneous learners with a happy dance performed by Jayden; an 'I love you' from numerous children; and a 'you're a great storyteller' by another.

There is nothing extraordinary that sets our students apart from any other Kindergarten students; just as there is nothing that sets us apart from other Kindergarten teachers. Our secret to facilitating enthusiastic, empowered and confident five year old learners is that we simply love teaching and building positive relationships with our little learners every minute of every day.

Yes, we get very tired and our work never seems to end; and **we are always looking at their most relevant and recent data to create, reinvent, innovate and modify the curriculum for each student** – simply because we want every student to be successful in their learning. Success breeds success.

We are two ordinary Kindergarten teachers working with extraordinary minds; the minds of children!

There was great excitement by Greg's visit to our school. He was the main character in Domenic's book and was both the audience, the main protagonist and the purpose for the story. He was a real life action hero and he was

at our school.

Domenic is already writing a sequel...his words not ours!

Listen to the book below:

Where to from here? 2014-12-19

As another year comes to a close it reminds me of the mechanical process of schooling. Our schools are placed in “mothballs” for six weeks and then the system fires up again in late January. I wonder if the school year could be significantly different from the last?

It’s heartening to hear AITSL Chair, Professor John Hattie say recently that we are already having an incredible impact on student learning; the best is in Australia all around us.

We have never had better trained teachers, funding, buildings and access to technologies. The majority of parents have high degrees of trust in their local school to deliver quality outcomes. However, the challenge for the profession is ‘where to next?’

As I’ve said throughout 2014, it’s a question that can only really be answered by those doing the work. When I talk to beginning and experienced teachers, I see people who have great passion; who are not resistant to change (provided they have the structures and support).

Supporting and engaging our teachers more deeply in evaluating and improving their practice is the path that will lead us to the next stage. It doesn’t happen by accident. It’s a daily commitment to improving the learning outcomes of each child and an ongoing investment in the professional learning of every teacher. While the work isn’t always easy, the results are always worth the effort.

Since the best is here all around us, let’s share it, learn from it and answer the ‘where to next’ by raising the standards and status of the entire profession.

As always, thanks for reading and contributing to the blog – your comments shape my professional thinking. A safe and Merry Christmas.

2015 Writings

Innovation as the norm 2015-01-06

I made the following observation on New Year's Day.

My hope for 2015. Less conservatism in teaching profession more innovative practices. Learning together for our future > > — Greg Whitby AM. KSG. (@gregwhitby) January 1, 2015

I think if we are going to do better we desperately need teachers to be prepared to challenge not only what they teach but how effectively they teach.

It is easy to understand this entrenched conservatism. There is a perception of mistrust about the work of teaching and government policy reinforces this view. Policies which seek to mandate what is taught and how it is taught distract the profession from professional competency and capability.

I believe the wider community see teaching as a “soft” option profession and often resist change in teacher practice as some experimentation which has to be resisted at all costs. Why? Because it is not what school was “like for me”.

This may be a generalisation but there are some real truths here. How do we turn this around? How do we encourage innovative practice and build community trust in the profession and amongst policy makers?

Last week I came across an article in the Washington Post from Pasi Sahlberg author of “Finnish Lessons: What Can the World Learn from Educational Change in Finland?” Although the book was published in 2011, Sahlberg's comments make great sense to me.

Sahlberg argues that an education reform agenda cannot be solved with short term policy quick fixes. He quotes the global fascination with Canada, South Korea, Singapore and Finland as models which will provide the “silver bullet” to improve teacher learning and teaching. What these countries take out of the Finnish and other approaches however is a narrow view. Namely that improving schools means better teachers. Therefore we need to attract the “best of the brightest”. In doing so, Sahlberg insists that this misses the point.

He notes three particular fallacies in this understanding:

1. We continue to assume that teachers work independently from each other but in reality teaching is a team effort in the end results are most often team efforts.
2. The focus on improving the quality of education is the teacher ignores the research that says while there are often characteristics in improving quality, the most important is effective school leadership and it matters as much as teacher quality.
3. You can improve schooling by getting rid of poor performing teachers and employing only great ones. This is problematic for two reasons; firstly clarity around “great teaching” and secondly, it takes 5 – 10 years of systematic practice to “effective” in any reliable way.

This leads Sahlberg to the view that “we must reconsider how we think about teaching as a profession and what is the role of the school in our society.” He offers three insights which I urge you to explore in more detail:

1. Focus more on teacher education, less on teaching and learning in schools
2. The toxic use of accountability is in many ways inaccurate and unfair
3. Teachers should have more autonomy in planning their work, freedom to run their lessons the way that leads to the best results and the authority to influence the assessment of outcome of their work. Schools must be trusted in these by areas of their profession.

In citing Sahlberg's work here I'm not trying to simplify a complex issue. However, his observation about teacher autonomy is critical to easing the conservatism I mentioned at the start. We need teachers as collaborators who share practice, try new things, are open to evaluating their effectiveness and are committed to continually improving their practice.

Just as importantly, we need school leaders who build a culture of trust, respect and participation in the life of the whole school and are learners as much as leaders. As innovation leads to improvement, share it and shout about it – that way society will come to expect educational innovation as the norm.

What we value 2015-01-13

I've been reflecting this week on the terrible events in Paris and of course, at the Lindt Cafe in Sydney before Christmas. It was incredible to see footage of more than three million people of different political and religious persuasions marching in Paris in defense of the cultural values which they treasure.

By Olivier Ortelpa from Paris, France (#jesuischarlie) via Wikimedia Commons

All schools, and systems of schools are ultimately an expression of the values of the society in which they exist. While these values may be expressed differently, at their heart is a deep desire for freedom of thought, tolerance of ideas and respect for human dignity.

Values permeate our educational narrative – they inform learning and teaching. We teach because we want our students to value knowledge, to cultivate independent and critical thought and to favour careful deliberation. We want students to seek self-improvement and be responsible, compassionate global citizens. We want students to be informed about society, committed to the common good.

It is important at this time to reflect upon how we express these values in our learning communities; how these values are imbued in the daily life of schools. I don't believe we can assume the values in our school are understood and learned through some sort of osmosis. We need to be proactive, explicit and deliberate.

I suggest we could start by asking questions about how we approach the process of learning and teaching. Some simple ideas might be: are the pedagogies we are utilising engaging all learners? How do we demonstrate tolerance of ideas in our learning spaces? How is respect shown on playgrounds? Do all students and parents have the opportunity to express their ideas freely? Do we rely on unchallenged assumptions or evidence when making decisions?

There are many questions which may be worth reflecting on as a whole school community and the answers we come up with could be well worth sharing.

When I was in primary school, our motto was compassion, justice and a love of learning. It is still a powerful reminder of the role of education in democratic and civil societies. Education is essentially humanising and may be the best defense we have against the scourge of terrorism.

Crowding the curriculum 2015-01-27

Some interesting articles in the weekend papers calling for the teaching of martial arts and alcohol education in schools to address the issues of bullying and binge-drinking.

It seems that whenever there is a need to change behaviours or address attitudes we look to the curriculum. Is this the role of a curriculum? Is it the responsibility of schools?

If the role of schools is to promote the growth of students and their learning – to teach students them how to be critical thinkers and responsible citizens, then shouldn't this naturally lead to a change in behaviours?

I think the calls to introduce things like for example, alcohol education, while important social issues, only muddy the waters. As John Hattie has said debate seems to be fixated on the test-outcome-based questions rather than an intelligent debate about what is worth 'preserving in our society, and what is worth knowing in order to live the desired 'good life'.

In an era of information and curriculum overload, it is important for the profession to discern which knowledge is significant and timely. Just-in-time learning (learning that is relevant to students' lives) must be given priority over the just-in-case learning which can so easily crowd the learning.

As Michael Fullan says we must be relentless focussed on the things that actually make a difference. This means continually reminding ourselves of what's really important in the work of the school. Martial arts and alcohol education may be helpful but is it essential?

Education Minister Adrian Piccoli made an excellent point in relation to alcohol education, which is parents also have an important role in educating their children. Pauline Lysaght, Associate Director Early Start at the University of Wollongong believes that while teachers are influential in reinforcing behaviours within the school context, the responsibility for establishing a knowledge base and encouraging behaviours rests with parents.

When there are vigorous calls to continually pare down the curriculum (similar to Singapore's approach), why do we waste valuable time proposing ways of over-loading it?

Renew and Adapt 2015-02-02

Our system and school leaders gathered last week to reflect on past achievements and to focus on the work ahead. Over the next two years our system's strategic focus will be to 'renew and adapt'. It is not about changing course or increasing the workload but reflecting on our practice; renewing our skills and passion; and adapting our pedagogies to improve the learning outcomes of each student.

Each year we select a professional learning text. This year's was chosen because innovation requires teachers who are willing to continually *renew* and *adapt* their practice in ways that positively impact on students' lives and learning. As Lyn Sharratt says this is the essence of educational innovation.

Lyn Sharatt and Gale Harild's book *Good to Great to Innovate* builds on Jim Collins' good to great analogy by illustrating that purposeful innovation is dependent on a solid foundation of literacy and numeracy. Schools must become good at the basics before they get great at innovation. As Andy Hargreaves writes in the book's epilogue: "when the innovations we introduce involve children's lives, they must be even more disciplined in their implementation."

The "innovation" discussion is as relevant to schooling as it is to business. An article in the December issue of Harvard Business Review outlines the approach to innovation in business. The authors, Nathan Furr and Jeffrey H. Dyer state that the process of innovation requires "discipline, perseverance and dedicated, effective leadership."

Furr and Dyer maintain go on:

Innovation is at heart a process of discovery, and so the role of the person leading it is to set other people down a path, not to short-circuit it by jumping to a conclusion at the start.

The process of innovation requires new mindsets in which we continually push boundaries and search for more meaningful and relevant ways of meeting the needs of today's learners.

In both *Good to Great to Innovate* and the HBR article, the authors contend that innovation isn't controlled by the leader. The role of a leader is to encourage these mindsets, to encourage risk taking, to ask questions and to ensure there is equitable access to resources and partnerships. The leader's role is to advocate for 'the new and different', to listen and then test assumptions.

I think one of the biggest challenges we face is creating opportunities for innovation to grow. Companies like Google and Atlassian have succeeded at this because leaders and managers see their roles differently – as advocates and "bluyonderers". It's the shift from control to collaboration, from being risk-averse to risk-taking.

There are pockets of innovation happening each day in schools and across systems but as I wrote in a recent blog post – how does it become the norm? One suggestion is giving large groups of people uninterrupted innovation time. Think of what happens in project based learning when students have time to sit with a problem, discuss, observe and experiment.

We need to start applying the same principles to teacher innovation. It's about renewing and adapting.

Politicians are teachers too *2015-02-06*

One thing that has begun to baffle me lately is the great divide between our country's educational goals for the next generation and many of our government's policies. Looking at the 'Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians' (Dec 2008), authored by the government of the time, we are urged to recognise the central role of education in creating a 'democratic, equitable and just society' and ensuring that the next generation are 'active and informed citizens'.

In our Catholic schools we are committed to this vision through the teaching of our Catholic worldview. We seek to create graduates who are responsible global citizens; who welcome all cultures and support the marginalised, poor and dispossessed. Why then does our government contradict this teaching in their policies?

I recently wrote to both the Prime Minister and Leader of the Opposition in regard to the current policy on refugees – a prime example of just how poorly our nation is supporting the social formation of tomorrow's Australians. Indeed Australia has always been known as a country that offers a 'fair-go' for all, a value that all schools, not just faith-based ones, are striving to achieve. For how long can Australia truly claim to be a country of equity and opportunity if government policy continues to undermine these core values? While it is true that education has a crucial role in developing moral and just citizens, this must be paired with complementary government policy. Politicians as well as teachers must accept their responsibility in influencing our future leaders, workers and citizens.

Australia's future and the future of the world, is in the hands of today's youth – what messages are we sending them?

The 'Fitbit' for education 2015-02-13

Source: Talkin'Cloud

The words 'evidence-based' are at the centre of the ongoing push to improve student learning and school improvement. This is a welcome focus and helps put the evaluation of both the learning and teaching in the centre of the work schools and systems do. We need to consider what this evidence base is and the robustness of the evidence.

Over January, I was watching the Australian Open Tennis. Several of the top players have new technology embedded in their racquets. A computer, in the handle of the racquet, captures the entire match in real time, every shot, speed, angle of returns, response times and so on. At the end of each match the player and his or her team sit down and analyse the data in order to improve the player's performance. You can only imagine the size of the data and the power it brings to the process. Using big data is not new. What is new, however, are the ways we can collect and aggregate the data in real time.

My daughter gave me a Fitbit for Christmas. From what I gather I wasn't alone in receiving this gift. Everywhere I go I see people with Fitbit bracelets collecting all sorts of data about the wearer's physical activity during the day and sleep patterns at night. This capability is very quickly revolutionising the medical field, the health and fitness business and our lifestyles.

The collection of personal data is not confined to physical data: the *New Yorker* article 'We Know How You Feel' explores how computers are now able to accurately read our emotions. Many companies are now starting to use this information to target advertising based on our emotional reactions and will likely see the advent of the "emotion economy". Think about the applications of 'emotional data' for marketers, business, health providers, even the educational sector.

We are at a point where data and technologies are stretching our thinking on both the nature and use of evidence. What really surprises me is how much incidental discussion and reflection takes place amongst those who use the technology. The ideas and suggestions from other on how the user might use the data and even improve their stats widens the knowledge pool.

By comparison to the above the evidence base for learning and teaching is very thin. Most of the evidence is test based, after the fact analysis. High stakes testing distorts the improvement picture because much of the data is open to misuse and misunderstanding. Assessment tasks are generally used to make judgements about student performance and ignore the critical role of the teacher. Paper-based tests are still the lifeblood of the student assessment process. They are often removed from the actual teaching-learning process which it seeks to evaluate. Even at formal parent-teacher feedback sessions the data sets are limited, and a one-way process from teacher to student.

We need to identify how we collect data on the teaching process. While we are seeing increasing instances of teacher observation, instructional walks and data walls, much of the data collected is not in real time and not always linked to student achievement. Good teachers are already constantly assessing student understanding during class time. The question is, how can we use technology to assist teachers in collecting this data more accurately and effectively? Imagine if we could collect real time information about students' emotional reactions to the learning and teaching process and use this to inform teachers' work in real time.

I think we have much to learn about evidence of improving teaching and learning from the developments in big data and ways that the data is captured and analysed. The power of the evidence collected lies not in the volume of the data or the power of the device, but in the analysis of the data. Individuals and teams can access the data when, where and how they want and need it. It helps provide real time feedback to the user and encourages collaboration. Ultimately it has the capacity to put evaluation of learning and teaching in the centre of the process, not as outcome at the end of the process.

I'm not sure if there is an education Fitbit, but I'm sure it will be here soon. As the devices get more powerful, more embedded and more connected it won't be too far into the future. Having this sort of capability for all learners but particularly teachers, will think, be a game changer for our understanding of teaching in a contemporary world. We will see a dramatic shift in collaboration and real time intervention.

It is clear that these developments are unstoppable. I hope the education profession will embrace these new capacities and show how they can and should be used. We can't afford to let the emotional economy do it for

us.

The speed of things 2015-02-24

According to Yong Zhao one of the biggest flaws of PISA is that it “directs the world’s attention to the past instead of pointing to the future.” Yet education systems and policy makers rely on international assessments such as PISA to gauge student performance in maths, science and reading.

In *World Class Learners*, Zhao admits that based on data comparisons, countries performing extremely well on international tests such as China and Taiwan tend to score lower in perceived entrepreneurial capabilities. The good news is that Australia scores relatively high when it comes to entrepreneurship.

Harvard Business Review had an interesting article last week on the fastest moving digital economies. The authors developed an index to gauge how countries compare in terms of their readiness for the digital economy. Looking at performance over five years (2008-2013), they assigned 50 countries into four trajectories: Stand Out, Stall Out, Break Out and Watch Out.

Australia currently sits in the ‘Stall Out’ quadrant – having achieved a high level of evolution but losing momentum and at risk of falling behind. Singapore, Hong Kong, Ireland, Israel, Estonia, the US and New Zealand are among the countries in the Stand Out quadrant. These are countries who continue to invest in world-class digital infrastructure, encourage entrepreneurship and have governments which support and encourage growth of the digital ecosystem.

The authors’ advice for countries like ours is to invest in innovation, look globally for new markets and find ways of attracting ‘talented young immigrants’ to revive innovation quickly.

If as Zhao says schools must transform into global enterprises capable of educating globally competent entrepreneurs, then we need new measures that look forward – beyond traditional boundaries.

I wonder whether we need to be looking at schooling in the same way countries assess readiness for the digital economy? Do we need a Digital Education Index based on key drivers? For example, when schools deliver a curriculum (especially electives) are they aligning them with “Stand-Out” or the delivery of traditional subjects aligned with “Stall Out”?

Digital is no longer about hardware or software. It isn’t about the number of computers or iPads in classrooms. When we talk about digital education it encompasses the mindsets, policies, users, trends and infrastructure that support this dynamic and ever-evolving ecosystem. An ecosystem that our learners are a part of and will inevitably shape based on their needs and ever-changing expectations.

The authors of the HBR article predict that the “next billion consumers to come online will be making their digital decisions on a mobile device – very different from the practices of the first billion.”

How will schooling be different from last year or even last week so we don’t end up in “Stall Out”?

Rebooting innovation 2015-03-11

In 1979, Sony produced the first portable cassette device – the Walkman. It was a game changer for consumers and the music industry. Sony ended up selling 200 million devices worldwide. Long before Apple or even Google established themselves as innovators, there was Japan.

The BBC recently had an interesting article on how Japan is trying to ‘reboot innovation’. In an effort to encourage innovation, a hub called a high-tech ‘makerspace’ has been set up in Tokyo open to anyone who wants to turn an idea into a product.

The 20th model of schooling is like the Walkman – a product of the times but it’s been superseded by mobile devices, which can do more than just play music. Innovative is not imitation; we need to realise (like Japan) that we cannot make a better version of the current model. We need something never seen before – the school equivalent of Japan’s high tech makerspaces?

It certainly makes Yong Zhao’s argument for an *entrepreneurial model of schooling* even stronger. A model that cultivates student creativity and collaboration but where the focus of learning is on the ‘product not the project’. Perhaps this is where project based learning is headed in the future.

Until then, we should ponder the comments of a former Panasonic employee and now founder of a start-up company who said any organisation is capable of producing something innovative but it is up to management as to whether they allow the ideas to be developed.

The question for school and system leaders is whether we are champions of imitation or innovation?

The tip of the iceberg 2015-03-18

If you ask the general population about their perception of teaching, I am sure the response would be 9-3pm working day, lots of holidays. Teaching is a profession that is still defined by its (industrial) conditions.

The scope of teachers work remains categorised by a school week, a school term or a school year. The roots of the industrial model of schooling extend well into the 21st century. How many people including teachers themselves believe this is the totality of teachers' work? Think about how we define teachers work today: number of students in a class, number of hours they can expect to be face-to-face, hours on playground duty etc. School days are divided into periods separated by a bell and controlled by timetables. School years are divided into four terms punctuated by breaks.

This has inevitably influenced how teachers' work is perceived and even defined by the profession itself. However we know the work of teachers is complex and deeper than is recognised.

Christopher Bantick wrote recently that teaching has 'become a milch cow for commentators and critics who have either never spent time in a school or whose experience of schools is outdated and ossified. Everyone has a view, but few have actual present classroom experience.' Bantick argues for increasing ATAR scores for teacher training arguing that you "can't make a teacher out of someone who is not academically excellent."

Teaching must attract the best of the best. In Finland for example, teaching attracts higher results than medicine or engineering. For me the issue is not simply one of academic rigour, it's also a question of fit for purpose. You can't become a great teacher unless you have a passion to teach. Teaching is highly relational and as Educational Leadership Professor Richard Elmore states if you can't see the relationship between teacher, student in the presence of content in a classroom (instructional core), then it isn't there.

Two of my colleagues from Parramatta Marist High recently returned from Finland where they participated in the Global Education Community conference. Kurt and Gavin identified three key lessons from their Finnish Education experience:

1. *There is a huge investment in developing high quality teachers.* Bantick is right in that you need to start from a high base but teachers are like raw diamonds, the finer the crafting the better outcome. High quality teachers need continual polishing and re-polishing.
2. *Decision making and assessment is locally driven.* This acknowledges the professionalism of teachers to make critical judgments on the 'length, breadth and depth of the curriculum' to meet the changing needs of students.
3. *Teacher autonomy leads to greater trust.* It is a given that teachers know how to teach, know what is required and are able to focus their efforts and attention on improving student learning. Nothing more and nothing less.

I asked them to reflect on what it means locally. In their view, teacher professionalism in Australia needs to meet "the needs of the 21st century especially in terms of graduates coming from university." Teaching needs to be seen as a profession not a job so that teachers themselves are responsible for making the best decisions for learning and teaching.

As Finland has demonstrated, minimum academic standards for teaching are just the tip of the iceberg. Only when we invert the iceberg will we begin to see not only the depth and breadth of teachers' work in today's world but it's direct impact and influence on student learning.

The facts about educational fads 2015-03-25

I don't believe quality instruction ever left the classroom. Successful teachers have always had a thorough understanding of how students learn and have adopted and adapted pedagogies informed by research, reflection and inquiry.

The essential principles of effective learning provide us with the foundations of appropriate pedagogies but they must be creatively applied in ways which maximise opportunities and respond to demands of today's world.

However, if you read Kevin Donnelly's latest opinion piece, traditional teaching is somehow making a comeback. Donnelly claims that the 'tide has finally turned' against educational fads such as open classrooms and discovery learning.

Donnelly doesn't define traditional teaching so I'm assuming he is referring to the type of didactic teaching associated with a traditional model of schooling.

According to John Hattie, direct instruction (which isn't traditional) is reflected in the way teachers work together 'to plan and critique a series of lessons, sharing understanding of progression, articulating intentions and success criteria, and attending to the impact of student and teacher learning.' (*Visible Learning for Teachers*)

While it's true that the learning space is never a substitute for quality instruction, agile spaces provide opportunities for teachers to engage in the kind of planning and teacher learning that is most effective in improving student learning. Many teachers I have spoken to have said the new spaces support collaboration and therefore the process of direct instruction.

Donnelly however cites results from a survey of noise levels in open classrooms in which 50-70% of children said they couldn't hear their teacher very well. What Donnelly failed to include in his piece, was that the survey was conducted in four schools only.

When you don't understand the world in which today's learners live, it is easy to disparage contemporary approaches to schooling. In fact, most contemporary approaches are still largely influenced by traditional structures, curricula and mindsets. We don't have enough examples yet of great contemporary practice to point to – not because it doesn't work but it doesn't yet exist.

These so called educational fads are not designed to replace quality instruction – they are designed to support it. Agile learning spaces support a range of learning activities. And isn't discovery at the heart of learning anyway?

Replicating an industrial model of schooling has only led to the gap between schooling and learning growing wider in an online world. We can't hark back to the past if we want to change the future. We are challenged to think differently by virtue of the fact we live in age that now values critical thinking, creativity and collaboration.

The OECD recognises the importance of these skills not only for the success of economies but also for individuals participating in a knowledge age. It's worth noting that PISA will test creativity from 2017.

We have always known that the most effective teaching is evidence-based. It's a pity Kevin Donnelly's arguments still seem to be largely ideologically driven.

No teacher is an island *2015-04-02*

Last week I had another opportunity to visit two Victorian primary schools that for me demonstrate good theory in practice. Woorana Park and Silverton Primary schools have established themselves as authentic learning communities. Over many years under good instructional leaders they have evaluated their practice, implemented rigorous feedback mechanisms, listened to student and parent voices and used the learning space and technology to support contemporary pedagogies.

As one of my readers pointed out, ‘open classrooms’ have a very low effect size according to Hattie’s meta-analysis. This is absolutely true. Just as no teacher is an island (see Hattie’s comments on direct instruction), there is no one pedagogy (or classroom design) that delivers everything. As Woorana Park and Silverton Primary have demonstrated, the use of agile learning spaces is just a fraction of the whole to improve student learning outcomes. Learning spaces support good teaching practices but they never act as a substitute for them.

Preparing teachers for the profession 2015-04-21

Stanford University in the US is working with Pearson to operationalise an assessment for beginning teachers as part of a national strategy to introduce a single method for assessment.

Nathan Estel, Director, Educator Relations at the Evaluation Systems group of Pearson says the work has provided a clearer picture of how universities are preparing graduates for work in schools.

Nathan says many US states are already using the Educative Teacher Performance Assessment (edTPA) as a policy lever to bring about greater cooperation and changes to teacher preparation programs.

It aims to encourage universities to think about new ways of providing ongoing professional learning and support for teachers once they enter the profession.

edTPA is designed around four key competencies:

1. Content knowledge (computer based assessment)
2. Differentiation in instruction (portfolio based)
3. Teaching practice and learning environment
4. Effective and Reflective Practitioner

A national assessment tool provides insight into future possibilities for the what and how of graduate teacher accreditation in other jurisdictions. This illustrates how systems and organisations are working collaboratively to provide greater support for teachers especially beginning teachers.

Heading in the right direction *2015-04-23*

Jane Caro wrote this week that “Chile, unlike Australia, is heading in the right direction” with its bill before parliament to ban public funding of for profit private schools along with free primary and secondary schooling.

I can understand why Chile’s President wants to adopt a new educational funding policy. Chile’s existing system was instituted under a dictatorship, hence why for profit schools are publicly funded. Australia on the other hand does not fund for profit schools.

Educational funding has to be based on equity across all school sectors not just one. In other words, needs based and sector-blind. Any argument about funding should focus on students not on sectors. If we venture down the public vs private debate as Caro has done, we divert our attention away from what really matters – improving learning for all students in all schools.

If Australia is to head in the right direction, perhaps it’s time to work collaboratively (all sectors) to use the funding to improve the quality of teaching in all schools. If Caro wants to focus on non-government funding, perhaps she can lobby the Federal Government to honour their end of the deal (last two years of Gonski funding).

Making maths meaningful 2015-05-01

Why is it that so many students struggle with numeracy? Is it coincidence that Asian countries out perform the rest of the world when it comes to maths? Do we as teachers perpetuate the view that maths is intrinsically difficult?

Seven years ago, the National Numeracy Review recommended greater emphasis in the early years be given to ‘providing students with frequent exposure to higher-level mathematical problems.’ It went on to state that it should be in a context that is relevant to the learner. I still hear adults say that learning algebra or long division was a complete waste of time.

Central to deconstructing the myth of Mathematics is about contextualising the learning. How can teachers make mathematics relevant to each learner and therefore more engaging and challenging?

Professor Peter Sullivan from Monash University says we have a fundamental problem with teaching Mathematics and we need to think differently about the way we teach maths in primary and secondary.

As a result of the Review, we introduced three system initiatives which invest in the professional learning and competency of teachers supported by leaders. Our approach has always been that improving teacher understanding and learning improves student understanding and learning.

We are fortunate to have partnered with Professor Sullivan on the EM4 (English Mathematics Stage 4) program. It began last year as ‘first wave’ teaching in English and Mathematics in secondary schools. It is about creating opportunities for students to enhance and extend their skills and knowledge. These strategies all rely on data and professional learning to inform good practice. For me, these should be evident across all key learning areas not only English and Mathematics. However, without a solid foundation in literacy and numeracy, we cannot build upon a student’s learning.

EM4’s premise is to get students to think creatively about problem solving by posing questions that they don’t know how to do. Professor Sullivan makes the point that we have taught maths by telling students what to do and then getting them to practice what they are told. However, in this model, students create the maths not the teachers.

It’s a move away from the one approach fits all in favour of the many paths to the top of the mountain. According to the data being collected by Professor Sullivan, student-driven learning is leading to a deeper understanding of Mathematics.

I have been amazed when visiting these classrooms by the rich mathematical discussions between students. Very different from my experiences of school maths. Many of the teachers I speak to acknowledge that these strategies have led to a shift in practice and a new way of seeing their role in supporting rather than driving learning.

This “open to learning” approach by both the teacher and the student is the powerful engine driving a very different schooling experience. What is not made explicit, but is at the core of this approach is the shift of responsibility for the learning. For the teacher it is recognising that the curriculum requirements but then engaging in designing learning experience for each student. For the student it shifts the focus from one right answer to the process of how they arrived at that answer. Ultimately they both take responsibility for their learning.

Making circles 2015-05-05

Stephen Heppell wrote recently that schools of the future must be “places in which difficult, exciting, challenging, engaging, complex learning happens, rather than being where uniform education is delivered.”

In Tokyo, there is a kindergarten that has been designed as a place for exciting, difficult and engaging play (learning). Its circular design literally places students at the centre.

In Asian cultures, the circle is a powerful symbol. It represents unity and perfection. In contrast, the square/rectangle has sharp corners representing laws and regulations. Is this the reason why we still build schools as rectangles seeing them as places of regulations and uniform learning instead of seeing perfection in complexity, chaos and creativity?

The kindergarten is one of the best I have seen because the principal and architect dared to think outside the square. I wonder what our schools symbolise? Are they spaces for passivity or play; spaces for listening or living?

A coherent pre to post policy *2015-05-08*

You may have seen some media coverage earlier this week about early years learning and how children as young as two could benefit from structured play based learning as part of a pre to post school continuum. I'm not talking about putting two year olds in traditional classroom settings, sitting silently at desks listening to the teacher talk (that's not our idea of quality schooling anyway). I'm talking about authentic play based learning experiences for toddlers that include age-appropriate activities like singing, dancing and even learning to play an instrument or language.

It's about rethinking the entire pre to post school structure, to create a more aligned and coherent schooling framework.

Last week, business leader Catherine Livingstone called for a 'philosophical change' in the way we think about education, noting that the traditional separation between schooling and work is no longer relevant for today's world. Increasing numbers of educators believe the traditional model of schooling is no longer meeting the needs of students today, which echo Livingstone's observation. Business and industry leaders are constantly telling us that students do not have the skills they need, and youth unemployment has hit a 15 year high, with one in five people aged 15-24 unemployed. There is also a talent mismatch with 18 of the world's major economies experiencing talent shortages.

We can no longer ignore the growing gap between formal schooling and success in the 21st century. We need to make a fundamental change in education. Moving away from artificial constructs like preschool, primary, secondary and post-school is a start, as these are artefacts of an age long gone.

These distinctions result in short term and narrow funding decisions directed towards separate parts of the system, instead of the whole. The Federal government decision to only guarantee funding for early childhood for the next two years, and only for four year olds, is an example of this type of constrained thinking.

Federal governing structures for education are disjointed: early childhood is within the Social Services portfolio, whereas schools and post school are within Education and Training. It's the same story in NSW, with early childhood, schooling and TAFE all in different departments. This results in policy and funding decisions that treat early childhood, school and post-school as discrete units. Instead, we need to think about how all aspects of the sector work together to gain greater continuity in learning and teaching frameworks.

We're a few days away from the Federal Budget – we need aligned policy and funding decisions that address the holistic, long term needs when it comes to education.

It doesn't make sense 2015-05-14

The prophetic Steve Jobs said: *It doesn't make sense to hire smart people and then tell them what to do; we hire smart people so they can tell us what to do.*

What happens when we replace 'smart people' with 'teachers' is the recognition that we are still hiring teachers and largely telling them what to do. Unfortunately, this is the reality of the current industrial landscape – one that has prevailed since the early 20th century. As Richard Elmore said, maintaining a low-skill teaching profession was a way of paying teachers less and maintaining compliance. The thing about compliance is that it kills creativity.

Over the decades, employers and unions have vigorously defended this structure even down to how many hours teachers should spend face to face. Building a highly professional workforce is as Jobs said hiring teachers to tell us how they work best. It is about giving teachers permission to create the most optimal learning environments and opportunities for their students. As Ken Robinson reflects in his latest book *Creative Schools*, it is based on the fundamental belief: 'the value of the individual, the right to self-determination.'

We have spent much of the last century working on the assumption that external accountability will drive internal accountability. It's the cart pulling the horse, which has not only been counter-productive to school improvement but detrimental to improving student learning.

Giving teachers greater flexibility by allowing them to use their professional judgment day in and day out, is the first step to building a highly competent workforce. Michael Fullan et al has shown that individual responsibility for one's own learning and that of every student in the school leads to a shared internal accountability. This sense of collective responsibility for improving student learning drives the work and feeds into a bigger loop of external accountability. This way, the horse pulls the cart.

If the best way to improve learning outcomes is to raise student motivation, expectations and engagement, then doesn't it make sense to take the same approach when it comes to teachers' work?

Following the journey 2015-05-20

It is always good to listen to students and staff talk enthusiastically about their individual and collective learning. Last week I visited St Oliver's Primary, Harris Park and saw first hand how their data walls are working and how it has helped sharpen their professional focus and thinking.

While many schools adopt a holistic approach to capturing and measuring data on student achievement, St Oliver's has narrowed the focus to two key areas: reading and vocabulary. Principal Anthony McElhone explained they could have just as easily measured spelling or structure but this gives them a precise focus on what they see as the critical areas for their students' growth.

Data walls capture the process and progress of student learning and the effectiveness of teacher practice. It becomes a shared learning journey for every member of the learning community. This was illustrated when I visited an elementary school in Canada.

Every inch of the parish hall was being used as a living data wall. As you walk around the hall, you can follow the growth of each and every student. The data is transparent – teachers share accountability for student learning while students accept responsibility for their own learning path. What is so impressive is when parents visit the school and effectively cut out the 'middleman' by listening to their own child explain, track and describe their learning. They know where they are at, where they need to go and how they will get there.

It is visible learning in action.

Missing a teachable moment 2015-05-27

As educators know, extraordinary opportunities for learning come from those often unpredictable and unscripted teachable moments. Those moments that are not ‘text-book’ and yet provide students with valuable occasions for critical thinking, reflection and deeper learning.

On Friday, our government missed a teachable moment when the Prime Minister rejected appeals for the resettlement of Rohingya refugees stranded at sea in South East Asia.

The aim of government policy is ultimately designed to improve the lives of citizens whether it be access to universal healthcare or quality education. Our politicians are elected community leaders. They are also teachers – reflecting our values, sense of identity and hopes for the future.

This generation of Australian students will be key to solving future challenges including how we aid and assist those fleeing war and persecution.

I’m not sure what values were imparted or what lessons our students learned from Friday’s response but I am reminded of the second stanza of our National Anthem:

For those who’ve come across the seas We’ve boundless plains to share; With courage let us all combine To Advance Australia Fair.

With refugee week coming up in June, perhaps the word for our politicians here is – courage.

There are government and Catholic schools across western Sydney who have welcomed children from around the world (many from war-torn nations) into its classrooms and communities. These students are all contributing to a more inclusive and diverse society.

These students have stories of courage to share – and something to teach our politicians.

The cult of creativity 2015-06-03

Bill O’Chee wrote recently that the current fixation on creativity in schools is ‘anti-intellectual’. He asserts that “while creativity is important, from sciences to the arts, what is more important is rigorous thinking.” O’Chee states that what today’s learners need from their education is to “learn how to think deeply.”

If critical thinking is the precursor to creativity, then how do we develop and assess this skill in teachers so that reading critically, analysing data and formulating ideas is intuitive?

Fareed Zakaria, author of the recently published *In Defense of a Liberal Education*, states that education must satisfy two important aspects: creativity and causality. First you must be able to engage in ‘out of the box thinking’ and then have the ‘rigor and clarity’ with respect to what you are arguing about.

Zakaria makes the point that in a global age where information is retrievable in seconds, we still insist that students learn superficial facts while forgoing the deeper questions of ‘why’. As my colleague, Dr Miranda Jefferson says, it’s about asking ‘why’ and then ‘why, really?’

In a recent blog post Yong Zhao discusses the two competing educational paradigms. He writes that “employee-oriented education values what children *should* learn, while entrepreneur-oriented education values what children *would* learn.”

By its very nature, an entrepreneur-oriented education is classically liberal. It encourages students to follow their passions in search of deeper understanding and mastery. To think critically is to always be asking ‘why’ and it is in this journey of student discovery that the nature of teacher’s work takes shape.

If we want schools to be places where creative modes of practice flow freely, then it requires teachers and students to be continually engaged in critical modes of thinking.

Remixing schooling 2015-06-10

If you've been watching the series *Redesign My Brain* with Todd Sampson, you'll be familiar with the work of neuroscientist Dr Michael Merzenich. Dr Merzenich is a world authority on brain plasticity – the idea that the brain can continually re-wire itself. Hence, the term 'soft-wired'.

Sam Seidel, author of *Hip Hop Genius: Remixing High School Education* also believes that understanding how minds work and how people learn is critical to the current discussions on innovation and education. Re-wiring or as Sam posits 'remixing' education is the ability to take what already exists and create something new and relevant for learners. He uses the example of hip-hop because it illustrates how young people re-mixed creative elements to create a dominant music culture in the US. Sam argues that innovative education is the remixing of ideas, practices and data points collected by teachers to create a personalised and relevant learning experience for students.

Since his appearance at PBL World Australia in 2013, Sam has been working with Students Design for Education (SD4E) which is leading a group of Rhode Island students through the design process to create a new 'student-centred' school. According to Sam, human-centred design or design thinking is the next wave in education because it aims at empowering students and teachers to drive change from within by becoming 'designers' of the learning space and learning experience.

Sam was in Sydney recently to work with students and teachers at Parramatta Marist High and to talk about the student-designed school project. He said that design thinking demands the same skills as project based learning (PBL): think critically, work collaboratively and communicate creatively. Sam was impressed with how quickly younger students (Years 7 and 8) at Parramatta Marist adapted to new learning experiences as a result of the skills they've acquired through their PBL work.

Reflecting on the critical skills and qualities needed by teachers in today's world, Sam believes resourcefulness is important along with compassionate listening, thorough planning and adaptability. These are the cornerstones of design thinking – an organic process requiring empathy, insight, flexibility and experiment. Teaching is essentially human-centred design work – creating something *for* students and *with* them.

Remixing schooling is about continually re-designing learning and teaching. That's what distinguishes a soft-wired experience of schooling from a hard-wired one.

Lessons from Sesame Street 2015-06-17

For those who grew up watching Sesame Street in the seventies, there is research suggesting the much-loved show led to improved early educational outcomes for children.

A new study has found that US children who had greater access to Sesame Street when it first aired experienced positive learning outcomes throughout primary school. Boys and black, non-Hispanic children experienced the greatest benefits.

The authors noted that “Sesame Street may be the biggest and most affordable early childhood intervention out there, with benefits that can last several years. These findings raise the exciting possibility that TV and electronic media more generally can be leveraged to address income and racial gaps in children’s school readiness.”

Created in the late 1960s, the Children’s Television Workshop (CTW) was considered an experiment. However, if you watch the pitch reel for Sesame Street, you’ll see this wasn’t an experiment at all. The show’s rationale was to take the best theory and practice in early learning and apply it to a contemporary context – TV. Behind Ernie and Bert, Big Bird and Count Dracula was a carefully crafted learning experience designed to engage, enable and empower young learners. It was achieved by:

- operating from the fundamental premise that every child could learn no matter what their background *
- integrating various techniques to engage children through song, animation, conversation and puppetry *
- meeting young learners where they were (at home) by locating the show outside a house on Sesame Street *
- giving children control over their learning and TV viewing (which is why it was aired in the mid-morning when older siblings were at school) *
- creating an awareness of the child as an individual and the world around them *
- making learning fun and recognising diversity as the norm

That Sesame Street is still broadcast forty five years on is testament to its core values and principles. The context may have changed but the principles remain. According to the study’s authors Sesame Street acted as the first Massive Open Online Course of its time, aimed at delivering free educational content to a mass audience.

Sesame Street began with the belief that every child can learn. Its success and longevity globally can be attributed to professionals working and planning together and continually evaluating the impact of their work by seeking regular feedback from children.

UK educational leader and speaker Richard Gerver (quoted in Ken Robinson’s *Creative Schools*) says educators today need to find the best early learning facilities and spend time learning about what they do. Sesame Street has taught millions of children valuable lessons over the past four decades and there are valuable lessons educators can learn from Sesame Street.

Simplicity and reliability 2015-06-25

Essa Academy

Six years ago, Hayward School on the outskirts of Manchester in the UK was considered a failing high school. A new principal arrived with a new vision, new leadership team and an expectation that every child can learn and succeed. It was turned into an Academy, renamed Essa and today it is lauded as a school with a 90 percent pass rate.

Last week, one of its directors, Abdul Chohan was in Parramatta to share Essa's learnings. Reflecting on Essa's learning journey, Chohan said that changing beliefs led to changing behaviours. Starting with a clear vision, they began encouraging and resourcing teachers who were willing to try new approaches. These teachers were asked to find another teacher in the school who could try out the idea and if it worked, they brought it forward to the wider community. This approach to building critical mass had the advantage of teachers leading the change and the professional learning.

Not surprising, the Academy operates within an anywhere, anytime, anything learning environment. However, Chohan is quick to point out that Essa has no technology plan only a learning plan. The talk is always on the pedagogy and the tools are in place to enable and deepen the learning. One of the big lessons for Essa was the move away from learning management systems (LMS) and virtual learning environments (VLE) to an iOS platform. Simplicity and reliability are the criteria because it allows teachers to maintain a relentless focus on the learning not the tools.

All students have an iPad and the Academy uses iTunes U (the largest repository for educational material in the world) for teaching and Showbie (app for assessment and feedback) for learning. Using the Open University model as a framework for delivering engaging content, the Academy's teachers work together to plan, develop and assess coursework. Chohan mentioned that they now have students demonstrating their learning by creating course content for iTunes U!

Sharing learning is deeply embedded in the vision of Essa Academy: *All Will Succeed*. The Academy's vision underpins everything they do and is inclusive of everyone. It is a great example of one school sharing its experiences and learning so that other schools and students can also succeed.

Rethinking the beginning 2015-07-09

Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER) CEO Geoff Masters, recently identified some of the challenges we face in closing the achievement gaps in schools. He writes:

Schools continue to be organised on traditional lines with students being assigned to year groups, and teachers delivering the curriculum specified for each year group. If teachers treat all students in the same year of school as equally ready for the same curriculum, then some lower-achieving students are likely to be left behind and some higher-achieving students are unlikely to be challenged and extended.

While every attempt to personalise learning is made, schools remain hamstrung by traditional structures. As Masters writes we ‘prejudge students’ learning needs based on their age or year group’. We continue to process students through the factory model and it is no more obvious than in Kindergarten when students are assessed and categorised.

What if in deconstructing these traditional lines and structures of schooling, we re-conceptualise Kindergarten based on what we now know about the importance of play, the diversity of learning needs, backgrounds and interests of each child in the context of today’s world.

Teachers will often say children can’t sequence when they start school but if they can toast bread, then they can already sequence. What if the first year of ‘formal’ schooling was focussed not on what students couldn’t do but what they had already achieved? What if we could slow Kindergarten down by extending it across two years?

This would certainly provide more opportunities to explore, play and create and for children to build their confidence as learners. It would also give teachers more time to connect with and understand each learner, to develop trust, encourage curiosity and foster deeper relationships.

Rethinking Kindergarten is the tip of the iceberg in what needs to be a larger debate on the whole pre to post schooling experience. As Geoff Masters says, one way we may close the achievement gap is to move away from the group-think and group-solutions that have influenced schooling for more than a century.

Assessing intelligence(s) 2015-07-16

Sir Ken Robinson in his book *Creative Schools* states that our understanding of intelligence over the past hundred years (measured largely by IQ) presents “a narrow and misleading conception of how rich and diverse human intelligence really is.”

As societies and cultures develop, new theories emerge and one of the most prominent theories of intelligence is Howard Gardner’s multiple intelligences. However in 1985, American psychologist Robert Sternberg proposed the theory of successful intelligence. Sternberg says he became interested in human intelligence because his teachers and his parents thought he was ‘stupid’ (thanks to an IQ test) and so he ended up believing that he was.

According to Sternberg, the theory of successful intelligence is the ability to work out what you want to do with your life and to succeed given the constraints of your environment. While IQ measures a single intelligence (analytical), successful intelligence is defined as creative, practical and analytical.

Sternberg has been particularly interested in how his theory applies to teaching by questioning whether you could improve student outcomes if teachers recognise students learn in different ways. Sternberg suggests teaching in different ways at different times so that every student’s creative, practical or analytical strengths are being developed.

For schools, we need to look to assessments that measure a broad range of skills including, as Dr Yong Zhao says, ‘non-cognitive such as motivation, persistence, confidence and personality traits’. It re-affirms Sternberg’s message that we must teach and assess in ways that reflect how students learn best and not the other way around.

Interestingly, the OECD is recognising the importance of social and emotional skills in addition to analytic skills by beginning to develop international measures. Earlier this year, OECD’s Director for Education and Skills, Andreas Schleicher commented that cognitive abilities still remained critical but ‘people with strong social and emotional foundation skills thrive better in a highly dynamic labour market and rapidly changing world’.

The autonomy argument 2015-07-23

It is well documented that the success of Finland's education system has been in part due to the autonomy granted to schools. The decision to trust teachers and the communities to make their own policy decisions has lead to increases in student achievement not to mention a rewarding working life for teachers.

Autonomy needs to be understood as a dynamic interplay between internal and external accountability. Schools set the expectations, measure the impact and make the necessary changes while systems support/resource school communities as part of collective improvement cycle.

'Autonomy' in terms of a policy directive at least in Australia stirs up debate at either end of the spectrum. Can and should governments let go of education all together? The Reform of the Federation discussion paper on school education is an opportunity for some intelligent debate over where the responsibility for improving student learning must lie.

In the paper by Fullan et al on *Professional Capital as Accountability*, the authors state that the main feature of successful schools was their ability to develop internal accountability by building capacity within the school through collaboration and critical reflection. This was more important than 'beefing up external accountability'.

The shift towards greater autonomy at school level is built on a 'new accountability framework' (Fullan et al) which relies on five elements: vision and focus, collective capacity and responsibility, leadership development, growth-oriented assessment and system coherence.

Systems improve when schools improve so the focus of systems is to cultivate improvement across all schools. Autonomy isn't a free for all when it comes to learning. Autonomy is linked to accountability and achievement. The more accountability teachers accept for student learning and achievement, the greater the commitment to building collaborative cultures of continuous improvement.

As Fullan et al suggest external accountability works in tandem with internal accountability therefore 'policy makers will need to make a major shift from superficial structural solutions to investing in and leveraging internal accountability.'

John Hattie in a recent publication "What works best in Education: the politics of collaborative expertise," is even more precise when he says that we need to focus on the variability of teachers within schools not only between schools. This fine grained approach speaks powerfully for the need of each teacher to be responsible for their professional capability not the school, system or government.

The day to day work of improving learning is the accountability of schools. The day to day work of ensuring all schools are improving is the accountability of systems. The work of governments is to trust the profession by investing in building 'the professional capital of all teachers and leaders'.

The Black Box 2015-08-04

In 2001, Paul Black and Dylan Wiliam published their seminal article titled *Inside the Black Box: raising standards through classroom assessment*. It focuses on formative assessment which according to the authors is at the heart of effective teaching.

The article suggests that the practice of formative assessment has not been front and centre in most classrooms. In fact the link between formative assessment and significant learning gains has been nebulous.

Black and Wiliam note there is a “tendency to emphasise quantity and presentation of work and to neglect its quality in relation to learning” in primary classrooms. There is also a tendency to over-emphasise grading at the expense of giving quality feedback to students about the task and their learning.

Integral to the success of the factory model of schooling has been this prevailing view to compare students and cohorts at the expense of using assessment as evidence of each student's progress. Black and Wiliam suggest one way of overcoming this is by creating cultures of success within classrooms supported by a school/system belief that every child *can* succeed.

Formative assessment becomes a ‘powerful weapon’ as teacher feedback is focussed on the task in the context of the learning target with the aim of continually trying to close the gap. In this way, assessment forms the work of teachers as they adapt their practice to the needs of the learners.

Research shows that task, target and improvement are critical to improving student learning outcomes. They must clearly articulated by the teacher and clearly understood by the learner. Black and Wiliam state that students cannot be expected to ‘believe in the value of changes for their learning before they have experienced the benefits.’

The Grattan Institute's recent report on *Targeted Teaching* makes reference to Black and Wiliam's work and Hattie's meta-analysis as the bedrock of targeted teaching. The report identifies what teachers need to measure and evaluate but recognises a lack of time in classrooms and training needs to be addressed.

It is clear that assessment/evidence must be a priority within all schools and across all systems. To do this, we must consider Grattan's recommendations to develop a consistent approach to using evidence, a clear set of expectations and a common language so that all teachers can “support their judgments about student learning and determine their teaching decisions.”

Yong Zhao recently wrote that the quality of an education should not be evaluated on a mean set of scores or student performance in a few high-stakes tests but should always be geared toward the growth of each student.

Growing students cannot be done without knowing students.

Beyond the limits of our own perspective 2015-08-12

A few weeks back I had the opportunity to present to a group of Singaporean educators via video conferencing.

A decade ago we didn't have the capabilities to do this so easily. As part of the discussion, I mentioned that social media needed to be part of a teachers' toolkit in today's world. Without it, we face irrelevancy because for many of our learners, it is where they live, communicate and learn. Understanding where they are and what they are doing with the tools helps us to deliver more personalised learning experiences; to deepen the learning.

One of the questions I was asked in the conference was 'how can teachers make time to use the tools?' Since we can't add any more hours to the day we need to demonstrate to teachers how and where the tools fit within a contemporary understanding of learning and teaching.

I understand there will always be an element of fear associated with using new tools. People burnt books in protest of the printing press. However, we are in the business of learning and if any profession should embrace social media, I believe it is ours.

We have a growing body of research investigating the impact of social media on teacher education as more and more teachers begin using these channels to deepen their professional learning and practice. The very nature of social media reflects the way we learn, which isn't linear but interactive, iterative and complex.

Respected educators like Will Richardson and George Couros have been writing about the relevancy of social media in classrooms for many years. These are powerful tools for connecting educators to students but importantly for connecting educators to other educators around the globe.

My fear in a rapidly changing world is not that technology is changing so rapidly, it's what will happen to those educators who don't see social media as relevant to learning. As Alvin Toffler famously said the "illiterate of the 21st century will be those who cannot learn, unlearn and relearn." How can we find ways of bringing colleagues not already using social media on the journey – to teach, share, demonstrate and present alternatives?

Educator and poet, Robert John Meehan wrote, "The most valuable resource that all teachers have is each other. Without collaboration our growth is limited to our own perspectives."

Social media provides a powerful argument for moving beyond the limits of our own perspective.

A seismic shift 2015-08-26

Despite the increasing democratisation of information arising from access to the internet, the tightly-controlled mainstream media continues to fuel a narrow view of the world professing the need for education to return to the good old days. Isn't it bad enough that we have climate change deniers in the face of mounting scientific evidence; but to have educational change deniers, the likes of Kevin Donnelly, being given an unopposed platform is a source of frustration for educators trying to make a difference to student learning. We are being fed a negative and polarising view of schooling which does nothing to respond to the growing evidence in support of a radical transformation in education. If the good old days were so good, why, for the last 40 years, have we been spending more and more money on improving a failing system?

Emeritus Professor Patrick Griffin

Thankfully last night reason and rationality won out. We had our faith restored after listening to Emeritus Professor Patrick Griffin deliver the 2015 Ann D Clark lecture. Patrick has spent four decades deeply immersed in the work of good theory, practice and evidence. He is a leading educational thinker and believes we have a prime opportunity to do something disruptive when it comes to student assessment at a national level.

The digital reality of today's world cannot be ignored despite many educational institutions and government resisting disruptive change. Yet as Patrick told us last night, change must be systemic and seismic if students are to learn the skills needed to transition from factory to office to internet. The new literates are the ones who will be able to challenge the traditional producers of information (Murdoch, Turner et al). They will have the 21st century skills (4Cs – creativity, communication, collaboration and critical thinker) that are critical to respond successfully to a changing work, social and technological environment.

The tendency has been to focus exclusively on literacy and numeracy to the detriment of the other skills. The internet has paved the way for new ways of assessing skills like collaborative problem-solving even though more work needs to be done on how we assess creativity.

Patrick has been involved in the assessment of children's cognitive and social skills while playing online video games. He also cited changes to NAPLAN testing in 2017 with the replacement of the single test to short tests that will be able to match the ability of the student to the difficulty of the task.

The theory behind this derives from the work of Danish mathematician Georg Rasch who developed an algorithm to predict the probability of a student's ability and success; American educational psychologist Robert Glaser who looked at the increasing stages of development and the stage in which a student stalls in their performance and Russian psychologist Lev Vygotsky's zone of proximal development.

As Patrick explained there are massive changes in technology available for assessing student learning and if we can link it to every child's zone of proximal development, we have the capability at a classroom level to move every child forward every year. We really are at a watershed moment in how we assess and teach these 21st century skills but the revolution must come from within.

Patrick encourages all educators to become the new Karl Marx of the 21st century; to become the new literates that embrace disruptive activity. Unchaining the inherent curiosity of children through increasingly complex tasks can be done by empowering teachers with the resources and strategies to identify where students are in terms of their progressive/proximal development and working with them to move students forward.

Patrick's work and message is more persuasive than the purveyors of an old paradigm. It is up to the teaching profession to develop a new narrative and a new framework for interpreting growth in today's world. It is up to the profession to educate parents and challenge the deeply regressive narratives around schooling in a knowledge age.

Improvement is no longer the challenge 2015-09-04

I have just returned from two days at the third annual *Leadership for School Improvement Colloquium*. The passion and pride for Catholic education is always evident at these gatherings; it reinforces the importance of taking time to reflect collectively on the how and the why.

I have to say however I left feeling a little flat and disappointed in the scope of thinking and models presented. There was nothing new, no stretch and certainly no innovative thinking or practice. Unfortunately this seems to be consistent with most large education conferences.

If we look at other industry sectors we seem a much different approach. Businesses have shelved improvement because in this rapidly changing world of work, lifestyle and technology, they recognise the urgent need to transform themselves into something different. Business communities across the globe are now responding to the challenge of the ‘Internet of Things’. These businesses are turning their backs on the improvement agenda because it’s no longer the challenge today. I think this shift opens up a whole new perspective especially for education.

There is no better example of this than Apple. Up until 2001, Apple branded itself as a technology company within a manufacturing model (*we see ourselves as contemporary schools operating within an industrial model*). Steve Jobs and his team saw there was no future in the manufacturing space as it moved offshore. Rather than improve an outdated model, Jobs announced that Apple was now in the lifestyle business. This simple decision shifted the goal posts.

A Harvard Business Review article has examined how more businesses are moving away from improving old models to responding to the changing needs of consumers (and employees) within the context of a rapidly changing world. In addition, real time data has helped to create a whole new paradigm for doing things differently, thinking creatively and responding immediately.

On the flip side, education is still wedded to the improvement model; looking for enhanced solutions to old problems. We operate on the assumption that we can control the variables, link performance to accountability measures and tighten up processes. Where are the innovative solutions?

Improvement is no longer the challenge so let’s use educational conferences and colloquiums to focus on how we change the system not how we fix it. As Sir Ken Robinson says the challenge is not to *reform* but to *transform*.

Collaborative competition 2015-09-16

We live in societies where the culture of competition exists everywhere and it is no more evident than in education. Schooling has become big business and learning is competitive. At an international level, we rank education systems and encourage them to 'beat the best'. At a local level, there is a growing demand for coaching and tutoring clinics.

Competition is not a 21st century skill. Collaboration is. So how long do we allow ourselves and others to define schooling as a 'race to the top'; as a means of separating winners from losers; where measurable achievement is the most valid measure of a student's work and their worth?

Black and Wiliam reflected that the practice of assessment had as its primary purpose competition rather than personal improvement. This was highlighted recently by former federal Labor leader Mark Latham when he called the decision to replace exams with tasks at selective high school, Hurlstone Agricultural as 'crazy and a soft-approach'. This view still dominates public opinion and it plays a significant part in undermining confidence in teachers. It also diminishes the value of collaboration in the process of learning.

The competitive nature of schooling only ever guarantees success for some not success for all. Successful change today has to as Michael Fullan says come about through 'collaborative competition'. Notice that collaboration comes before competition.

Michael describes this as the 'moral version' of the Olympics where doing your best isn't about surpassing others but spurring others to do their best. When teachers learn, students learn and when school communities learn, systems learn and so on. It is the flywheel in motion.

Samsung has captured the spirit of collaborative competition with their latest ad campaign – We are greater than I.

A level playing field 2015-09-25

There are calls for fundamental changes to be made to the funding and regulation of Vocational and Educational Training (VET) in Australia. In today's Sydney Morning Herald, the Federal Education Minister said he wants to boost the status of VET so 'students don't feel they have to go to university to have a good career.'

It reflects the need to radically rethink VET in a knowledge age and the importance of sectors working together to ensure a consistent approach and coherent framework for providing students with optimal opportunities.

It's interesting that the new Education Minister calls VET the 'forgotten' education sector. The established view is that VET is somehow less rigorous than an academic pathway to learning. VET is a balance between the demands of work and study as well as integrating theory with practice. Students learn the work by doing the work. VET actually provides for a level of personalised and independent learning not always evident in traditional subjects.

We have seen VET as the alternative to an academic pathway and while there are multiple pathways to learning (made more evident by technology), there is still one external credential (Higher School Certificate (HSC) in NSW). This has been the gateway into university and for many, the path to a more rewarding and successful working life.

The view that university is the only option can't be sustained in a knowledge age. It is something the new Federal Minister wants to challenge. It needs to be challenged at policy level as well as at university and school sector level.

The vocational choices of students should be influenced by passion not process. The challenge for schools is how we can, as Yong Zhao says entirely personalise not nationally or globally standardise education. We need to level the playing field by allowing students the opportunity to draw from diverse areas of knowledge and skills. It means allowing students to map their own curriculum based on individual interests and passions.

South Korea has effectively de-skilled a generation because of a cultural drive for students to be university educated. While graduates compete for limited jobs, there is a growing gap for trades that have to be filled by overseas workers.

The knowledge age has created an even greater need for a level playing field in education.

Edward de Bono describes the current model of schooling like a pyramid where the bottom 80% are taught so that the top 20% can go onto university. His view is that traditional subjects and universities may have very little to do with real life. Interestingly, he asks why there are no exams in schools in 'practical thinking' and 'value creation'?

de Bono argues that every student be taught what he calls 'life skills' such as critical thinking etc. The more academically inclined students take additional subjects that prepare them for university while the more practical and entrepreneurial minded students take additional subjects preparing them for work.

de Bono says this would be *'the equivalent to teaching everyone to walk and then giving special coaching to those who showed an ability to run. This is different from the current system of coaching everyone to run and then neglecting those who are not good at running.'*

Not every student wants to be a runner nor should they be. The biggest hurdle for schools and learners is the way in which assessment is currently mandated and reported. Meaning, we are still preparing all students to run the marathon by sitting the HSC.

As Professor Patrick Griffin from the University of Melbourne said recently, we will never get away from comparative measures (how good is my child compared to their class, state etc) but the focus has to be on where students are going (year after year) not on where they have been.

The most effective forms of assessments are those that support learning and inform teaching not control learning and narrow the curriculum. Until we get on with the task of re-thinking assessment based on personalising the learning, we continue to neglect those who don't want to be runners.

Business failing education? 2015-10-08

A recent survey of small to medium businesses said the education system isn't providing the skills students need to be 'entrepreneurial and innovative'. Is education failing business or is business failing education?

I attended the Western Sydney Business Connection State of the Region Address by the Hon. Mike Baird MP, Premier of NSW this week.

Around 600 local businesses and organisations were there to hear the Premier outline the government's bold new initiatives around infrastructure. It is a massive investment and undertaking which will impact significantly on western Sydney.

The key message is that local business is the driver of innovation and growth. What I didn't hear was the role of education in this work. We are in the business of schooling 42,000 students across western Sydney along with the Department of Education's schools. Collectively, we are the biggest business in western Sydney but don't have a seat at the table when it comes to planning for the future.

I saw the plans for the provision of new government schools in western Sydney. Sadly they look like modern versions of the factory school. Where is the innovation and growth and the support from the business sector to develop new models? We could easily argue that business is failing education.

The best outcome would be for both sectors (school and business) to work collaboratively but this can only happen when education is seen as an important stakeholder in the planning and design process.

Local schools serve local communities and it's time the education sector were seen as a key player. We have a lot to contribute especially if we want the state of this region to be state of the art.

Saving language 2015-10-21

A decade ago Don Watson wrote the definitive book on management speak called ‘Weasel Words’. It illustrates the way in which bureaucrats and politicians’ highly crafted messages obfuscate meaning and hide the truth. As Watson wrote “this dead, depleted, verbless jargon is becoming the language of daily life.”

The marketing guru Seth Godin recently asked the question on his blog ‘does vocabulary matter?’ He highlighted Randall Munroe’s concise and clear explanation of how the Saturn V rocket works using only a thousand commonly used words.

As Godin remarked:

It’s not about knowing needlessly fancy words (but it’s often hard to know if the fancy word is needless until after you learn it). Your vocabulary reflects the way you think (and vice versa). It’s tempting to read and write at the eighth-grade level, but there’s a lot more leverage when you are able to use the right word in the right moment.

Professor John Hattie once commented at a conference that ‘metacognition’ was just a fancy way of referring to thinking about learning. He preferred to use the latter.

Education has fallen into the jargon web, which is ironic because as leaders/teachers we are entrusted to do daily what Randall Munroe has done – simplify the complex not complexify the simple.

The list is in no way exhaustive but here are some ‘weasel words’ proffered by some of my colleagues:

- anything strategic (e.g focus, pillars, alignment, teaching) * building teacher capacity * deprivatising teacher practice * empowered/self-regulated learners * rigorous learning * guided thoughtfulness

Of all professions, we have a special responsibility to ensure we don’t take a reductionist approach and to consider whether some of these terms detract from describing the depth and richness of our work. That work is to bring the world alive by bringing language alive. The goal, as Watson expresses in his book is to save language for future generations.

No teacher left behind 2015-10-30

I've often written that Twitter has been an invaluable professional learning tool for me. We have at our fingertips as Will Richardson says the ability to connect with two billion teachers and that presents unlimited opportunities for collaborative learning.

Educators like George Couros and Gary Stager also reflect that it isn't the tool per se but how teachers use the tool to build, connect, learn, inspire, change etc. For many teachers and leaders, social media is a brave new world and I believe that if teachers and leaders aren't operating in this space, they will be left behind.

The danger is though that we make several assumptions about the professional use of social media: teachers have the skills to use social media and they actually see the benefit of using it.

Andreas Schleicher, OECD Director for Education and Skills says that in order to build a great education system, teachers need not only to have access to the tools to develop 21st century skills but they must also recognise the importance of these skills.

The one thing we cannot do is assume that we don't need to invest resources to up skill all teachers to use the tools effectively.

Certainly there is growing evidence of the positive impact social media use is having on teacher and student learning. In 2011, Julie McCulloch, Ewan McIntosh and Tom Barrett authored a report called *Tweeting for teachers: how can social media support teacher professional development?* The report identified a number of research studies linking the impact of professional social media use on teachers' practice, attitudes and beliefs to improved student learning.

A recent survey of 755 educators in the US revealed how they were connecting online. We asked the same question recently of our staff to find out how and what social media tools they were using professionally. The 650 responses provide us with a good snapshot of which tools and the frequency of use.

Three themes emerged from the feedback that needs to be addressed at a system level. These were training, culture/privacy and network access. Perhaps these are universal challenges for many education systems.

The point to be made is that if we are serious about ensuring no child is left behind, we need to be just as serious about ensuring no teacher is left behind in a hyper-connected world.

The internet of 'educational' things *2015-11-17*

When we talk about classrooms being connected, we really are at the tip of the iceberg. Within the next 3-5 years, the Internet of Things (IoT) will have already transformed sectors like health, transport and retail. These sectors have begun using sensor networks to collect and transmit real-time data to improve quality of care and efficiency.

Last month, our Chief Information Officer attended a summit on the Internet of Things hosted by Intel Asia. Although there are very few 'real world examples' at the moment of its application in education, this will almost certainly 'disrupt' schooling.

One of the biggest impacts of these networks of things embedded into software and sensors etc will be reducing the administrative load on schools – anything from school attendance to school security. However, the biggest potential will be the impact IoT will have on personalised learning and teaching.

Reflecting on the potential of IoT in education, Dr Michelle Selinger believes that we “will be able to connect the right people together to accelerate learning as well as collecting and interpreting data on learners' behaviours and activity. Used well, this will make learning more personalised and targeted to individuals' learning needs, their learning styles and preferences, and their aspirations.”

Video analytics used well in learning spaces could immediately alert teachers (through body movement and facial recognition) of students who are disengaged from their learning. The argument may be that good teachers already do this but as Michelle says we are notoriously bad at capturing and analysing data. IoT is a shift from living in a world where we react to living in one which will help us predict. That has to be good for education.

Today's connected classroom is the process of connecting people to people. The connected classroom of the future will be the process of using intelligent information to create more highly personalised learning experiences for all students.

The third teacher *2015-11-26*

The Reggio Emilia approach highlighted the importance of the physical environment on learning and teaching. The incorporation of the physical environment (in Reggio Emilia) to enhance early childhood experiences is seen as the child's 'third teacher'.

Stephen Heppell has been working for two decades on raising the status of the 'third teacher' within the K-12 sector.

As we move towards greater personalised learning contexts, we also have to think about creating more personalised physical environments.

As Stephen points out, students are integral to the whole design process where users become the designers. Strong student and community voice has been one of the guiding principles underpinning the design of the massive Lindfield 'School of the Future' project in NSW.

The rise of learner-led design is starting to take off.

What's really interesting is that there is growing research (including Stephen's) showing how simple improvements to air temperature and light quality etc can make learning better. Warm classroom temperatures have a negative impact on working memory and short-term maths performance!

Research and best practice illustrates that we can no longer evaluate student learning in isolation of evaluating the impact of the third teacher (physical environment).

How technology will make teachers more human 2015-12-02

When Yong Zhao was last in Australia, I asked if he would consider contributing a guest post to bluyonder. I'm pleased to say his post, which is adapted from his newly published book 'Never Send a Human to Do a Machine's Job: Correcting the Top 5 Ed Tech Mistakes' is below. Yong suggests that we need to consider handing over some of the tasks traditionally done by teachers to technology. Look forward to your comments on this.

With increased ease of access to vast amount of information and learning resources online and big-data-driven adaptive learning systems, will technology ultimately replace human teachers? I don't think so. In fact, I believe technology will help make teachers more human educators. But this requires us to reimagine the role of teachers and the relationship between technology and human educators.

"Never send a human to do a machine's job," a statement from the movie *The Matrix*, is good advice for us to reimagine the relationship between humans and technology in education. Technology is developed to extend or replace human capacities. It is designed to do things that human beings are unable or unwilling to do or do things more efficiently than human beings, either more effectively or at lower costs. By design, technology is meant to replace certain human abilities. In other words, if technology can do certain things better with more efficiency or even things that are impossible for humans to do, we should let technology do it. There is no reason for humans to compete with machines. As a result, technology has replaced human beings entirely in cases where human involvement is straightforward and simple. For example, ATMs have replaced certain banking jobs and robotics has replaced certain manufacturing jobs.

Education is much more complex than depositing a cheque or getting cash from a bank teller. It is fundamentally a human endeavor. Technology will probably never be able to replace human teachers entirely. But many tasks that have traditionally been performed by human teachers can and should be done by technology so as to free human teachers to do things that machines cannot do or do as well. In other words, technology can make education more human if used properly.

To better capitalize on the potential of technology, schools and teachers need to reimagine the relationship between technology and human educators so as to determine what can be delegated to technology and what must be done by human educators, or can be done better by them. The reimagining can happen at multiple levels, and how it looks like depends on student characteristics, present arrangements and resources, grade levels, and educational objectives. But the advice would be the same: Never send a human to do a machine's job. To paraphrase, we should not send human educators to do things that technology can do more effectively or at lower costs, and we should certainly allow technology to do things that human teachers cannot do or are unwilling to do.

A realigned teacher-machine relationship is essential for realizing the reimagined paradigm of schooling. As previously discussed, a personalized curriculum and product-oriented pedagogy requires schools to transform from one-size-fits-all factories into personal learning ecosystems. In a personal learning ecosystem, learners pursue their interests, create meaningful products, and take on the responsibility for their own learning. To realize this transformation, schools have to provide a lot more resources and opportunities and rethink how to organize and develop them. The increase in demand for resources and opportunities cannot possibly be met by human teachers alone. Thus schools will need to rely on technology, but not use it to replace human teachers. Instead, technology is meant to expand human capacities.

An essential element of the learning ecosystem is social and emotional support and personal guidance so that individual learners are properly challenged, supported, and mentored on their personal learning journey. No technology, even so-called big data, can be as socially and emotionally engaging to the human learner as another human being. No technology can understand the psychological conditions of an individual human learner, nor can it interpret human purposes. No technology can have the same level of wisdom, intuition, and caring as a human teacher. Thus emotional and social support, as well as mentoring, can be achieved only by human teachers.

However, no human being can compete with Google in terms of how much information one can hold and give access to. No single human can present information in engaging and multimedia ways that rival the computer, nor can one single human store as much information as banks of data servers. Additionally, no human teacher can be as patient as a machine when dealing with repetitive mechanical tasks. Thus human teachers should withdraw from such tasks as information gathering, storing, and transmission, as well as tasks as mechanical

exercises.

After all, there is no reason for teachers to compete with Google or YouTube!

Deeper learning is shared learning 2015-12-15

It seems quite ironic the most effective way of becoming an independent learner is through the process of interacting with others. This was social psychologist Lev Vygotsky's zone of proximal development argument. Essentially we learn best when we learn from and with others.

Alma Harris and Michelle Jones from the Institute of Educational Leadership, University of Malaya, write that professional collaboration "in the form of professional learning communities, can be a powerful catalyst for building professional capital and by association, improving school performance". They go on to say that what really matters is the difference professional collaboration makes to learners.

Its impact comes from having a clear model for professional learning and the right conditions to make it work. As Harris and Jones explains, it also needs to have a strong evidence base for it to be truly effective.

In 2008, Parramatta Marist High School adopted a new pedagogical approach to their learning and teaching strategies with the introduction of Project-Based Learning (PBL), Problem-Based Learning and the Flipped Classroom. Although each of these strategies have been learner-centred and designed to provide students with the necessary skills for today's world, it has also cultivated a culture of professional collaboration and learning within, and now, beyond the school.

This shift has resulted in a relentless focus on building professional connections and sharing ideas with the aim of deepening teacher learning and practice. Discussion and reflection takes place on a daily basis and it is always as Harris and Jones describes, focused on what difference it is making to learners.

The implementation of PBL meant that Parramatta Marist teachers also had to engage in the inquiry and reflection, collaboration and critical thinking that is expected of students as part of the PBL process.

Collaborating and connecting with other professional learning communities has been key to the success of PBL at Parramatta Marist. Their affiliations with the The New Tech Network for Project-Based Learning and Republic Polytechnic, in Singapore for Problem-Based Learning has been key. Several of the staff at Parramatta Marist are also undertaking doctoral research under Prof. Henk Schmidt (a world leader in PBL research) of Erasmus University to build their evidence-base and contribute to the growing body of research on the impact of PBL on student learning and self-efficacy.

As the learning circle widens, so does the opportunities for innovation. Marist's Centre for Deeper Learning (CDL) was established not only to build the professional capital of its own staff but to share their learning with other teachers.

Kurt Challinor from CDL says the school is now coaching several schools in Australia as they transition to a PBL model. CDL has been facilitating workshops between each school's common faculty areas as teachers connect on a regular basis to workshop ideas and share resources.

In reflecting on the impact PBL has had on his own teaching practice, Kurt says it has enabled him to continually push new boundaries. The challenge he says, is to stay in orbit long enough to embrace new opportunities and possibilities.

CDL is one example of how shared learning can deepen the learning for students and teachers beyond the school walls.

A last word 2015-12-23

Here in the southern hemisphere the 2015 school year has ended and I regret to say that we are still in an educational policy wonderland.

A change of Prime Minister has produced some stirrings around the future and the importance of innovation but it has not even filtered into the education sector. Despite the rhetoric of the Turnbull Government to deliver high-speed internet access via the NBN, the whole thing has become a white elephant! And still we hear from our politicians about how poorly our schools are performing in an age of connectivity. No wonder I feel gloomy!

One of the things that has struck me as the year draws to a close is how fortunate we are to be able to have discussions about re-imagining schooling in today's world when other parts of the world are dealing with war. So many children are facing a future without access to education.

A point I was reminded about when I spoke in Rome last month at the World Congress for Catholic Education. A school administrator from Eritrea came up to me and said it would be wonderful if they could have conversations about creativity and innovation but her priority was to find ways of paying her teachers and putting roofs on schools.

Nevertheless, as educators we share the same aspirations – doing the best for our students with the resources we have. In 2016, we will continue the work of sharing ideas, knowledge and opening up our practice to critique in the spirit of improving student learning outcomes.

In closing, I wanted to share one of the great joys of working in and for education. This book was written by kindergarten students from St Bernadette's Lalor Park.

Thanks to those who continue to read bluyonder and contribute to the discussions – it's always a rich source of learning.

Wishing you a safe and Merry Christmas wherever you are in the world. Here's to a 'connected' 2016!

2016 Writings

The innovator's mindset 2016-01-13

*Our system has always welcomed the opportunity to engage with leading Canadian educator George Couros. For me, George not only understands the theory but he is intensely practical – he knows how to empower teachers and learners. George's book *The Innovator's Mindset* was recently published and I am grateful for his guest blogpost on why an innovator's mindset will help educators and schools move forward.*

In an effort to bring the past alive, a historic tour of a Blockbuster store offers visitors a glimpse into the hardships of people who lived in the era of video stores. In a revealing video, reporters from *The Onion* interview period actors who explain that people once traveled great distances (sometimes six miles each way!) to rent and return movies. These poor souls lived in terror of never knowing if the movie they wanted would even be available!

The Onion's video, of course, is a satirical look at a company that tried to continue operating as if the Internet didn't exist. It was only a few years ago that video-rental stores, like Blockbuster, were the best way for people to watch movies in the comfort of their own home. In some places around the world, these stores still exist. But in the western world, cheaper and more convenient options (no travel required) have put most neighborhood video stores out of business.

The Internet completely changed the movie rental industry. Companies that took advantage of new technology, like Netflix with its DVD-by-mail and online streaming options, are thriving. Meanwhile companies that refuse to let go of outdated business models, like Blockbuster, experience a slow, painful death.

Blockbuster had the opportunity to buy Netflix a few times, but declined.[1] And by the time it attempted to start its own DVD-by-mail program, the company had lost its place as an in an industry leader. The hard lesson that Blockbuster and its fellow neighborhood movie rental businesses failed to heed is this: innovate or die.

Defining Innovation

"Innovation" is a common term in many educational circles today, and has been used a number of times in this book already. But what does it actually mean—especially in the terms of education?

In my book, "The Innovator's Mindset: Empower Learning, Unleash Talent, and Lead a Culture of Creativity", I define innovation as the following: a way of thinking that creates something *new* and *better*. Innovation can come from either "invention" (something totally new), or "iteration" (a change on something that already exists), but if it does not meet the idea of "new *and* better," it is not innovative. That means that change for the sake of change is never good enough. Neither is using *innovation* as a buzzword, as many organizations do, to appear current or relevant.

Note, too, that I said innovation is *a way of thinking*. It is a way of considering concepts, processes, and potential outcomes; it is not a thing, task, or even, technology. As [2] Carl Bass, CEO of Autodesk, explains in his TEDx talk, "The New Rules of Innovation," "Innovation is the process by which we change the world. . . . It's the practical application of ideas and technologies to make new and better things." So, although many organizations approach innovation as if the word is synonymous with *technology*, it isn't. Technology can be crucial in the development of innovative organizations, but innovation is less about tools, like computers, tablets, social media, and the Internet, and more about how we use those things.

Another word that is often used interchangeably with innovation is *transformation*, which is really more about dramatically altering the work educators do. Although I can see why some administrators are calling for transformation, the truth is innovation—in our thinking as individuals and organizations—is within easy reach; no dramatic shifts required. Katie Martin, Director of Professional Learning at the University of San Diego Mobile Technology Learning Centre, eloquently explains the importance of leadership in developing an innovative mindset:[3]

There is no substitute for a teacher who designs authentic, participatory, and relevant learning experiences for her unique population of students. The role of the teacher is to inspire learning and develop skills and mindsets of learners. A teacher, as designer and facilitator, should continually evolve with resources, experiences, and the support of a community. It is becoming increasingly clear that we don't necessarily need to transform the role of teachers, rather create a culture that inspires and empowers teachers to innovate in the pursuit of providing optimal learning experiences for their students.

Establishing an innovative culture, doesn't require transformation. However, it does require leaders who will

develop and sustain systems that support “optimal learning experiences” and who value the process of creating and refining ideas.

A Constant Opportunity for Growth

One of John Maxwell's famous quotes is, “*Change is inevitable. Growth is optional.*” In many respects, that sentiment is true. We choose whether or not we will grow, change, or innovate. But in schools, where we focus on our students as the future, growth can no longer be simply an *option*.

Change is an opportunity to do something amazing. Perhaps, the *great* thing we can do is make growth mandatory—for ourselves as educators, as well as for our students. That is how we can truly serve our children.

Education cannot become the new Blockbuster, where we refused to embrace the new, in hopes that the old ways will suffice. In a world that constantly changes, if our focus is to only maintain what's already been done, we are bound to become worse. The innovator's mindset is necessary for all of us, if schools are to move forward.

[1] “Epic Fail: How Blockbuster Could Have Owned Netflix”, November 12, 2013. <http://variety.com/2013/biz/news/epic-fail-how-blockbuster-could-have-owned-netflix-1200823443/>

[2] Bass, Carl. “The New Rules of Innovation”, February, 2012 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YKV3rhzvaC8>

[3] Martin, Katie. “Creating a Culture of Innovation versus Transformation”, June 10, 2015. <http://katielmartin.com/2015/06/10/creating-a-culture-of-innovation-vs-a-transformation/>

A new lens 2016-01-27

According to a recent Victorian study, many assistant principals aren't prepared to take on the role of principal because of the associated work stress.

Responding to the survey, Dennis Yarrington, president of the Australian Primary Principals Association (APPA) was quoted saying that many states and territories were already looking at "innovative practices around principal development" to provide the skills and knowledge to be able to cope with increasing workloads.

I am a champion of innovation but what is the rationale for finding more efficient ways of fixing an old model of schooling and its increasing workloads?

As Canadian theorist George Siemens said you can't expect theories from a largely industrial era to work in a digital one. The solution is to create new pedagogies, new understandings of knowledge, a new view of learning and I would add new roles for teachers and leaders.

If anything, the study highlights that as a profession we aren't responding to or adapting quickly enough to the changing nature of today's world. If we are still trying to up-skill our teachers and leaders to deal with 20th century challenges and workloads, then we are largely stuck in a time-warp.

I recently read in Time Magazine that the Ford motor company is on a mission to disrupt its own company by transforming itself from a traditional car manufacturer to a 'mobility' provider. Its CEO said they would be looking at new services such as ride-sharing (think Uber); inspired largely by Apple's transformation twenty years ago from a technology company to a lifestyle one.

Some have referred to the industrial model of schooling as a Ford production line but what we can learn is that the future of schooling depends upon innovation and transformation. Like Ford, we need to disrupt ourselves because technology has already started disrupting the way students are communicating and learning in a hyper-connected world. The paradigm must move from learning as remembering to learning as thinking.

Roberto Verganti, Professor of Leadership and Innovation in Milan, wrote a great article on innovation in Harvard Business Review this month. He says in order 'to find and exploit the opportunities made possible by big changes in technology or society, we need to explicitly question existing assumptions about what is good or valuable and what is not – and then, through reflection, come up with a new lens to examine innovation ideas.'

Unfortunately schooling struggles to look through a new lens and as the brilliant Mark Twain said "you can't depend on your eyes when your imagination is out of focus."

Opening the door to learning 2016-02-02

Richard Branson wrote a fantastic piece last month on why there is no such thing as an ‘average’ human being. Reflecting on his own experience he writes, ‘The concept of ‘average’ has failed us in many different aspects of life – most notably in our educational institutions.’

Branson wants to see an education system that isn’t geared to making students fit in but enabling each one to stand out. He says when you base an educational system on the concept of an ‘average learner’, we fail to ‘recognise and nurture talent’.

I am sure there are many for whom schooling was a less than average experience. It illustrates how critical it is for teachers and leaders to see the world from the eyes of the learner, to understand what motivates and challenges and to provide ladders to climb instead of hurdles to jump.

At the start of our school year, I wanted to share the inspirational story of one of our former students. Nas Campanella lost her vision at 6 months of age and despite this, went on to achieve her goals including becoming the world’s first blind radio newsreader.

She spoke recently to our system leaders about her experience of schooling and her work as an advocate for students with disabilities.

Our work as teachers and leaders must be as advocates for *all* learners; opening the doors of learning no matter how challenging.

The fierce urgency of now 2016-02-09

Last week our system welcomed 160 new teachers to the profession. The excitement of these teachers is infectious and after my 40 years in education, I know their work will be transformative in nurturing the heart, mind and spirits of students.

In addressing our new leaders and teachers, I urged them not to be disheartened by the negative commentary in the media, which always typically marks the start of a new school year.

Yes there are many professional challenges but I see the greatest and most urgent as the need to abandon ‘improvement’ and embrace transformation. While teachers can’t ignore the realities and challenges of schooling in today’s world – we must seize the initiative for change without becoming disheartened.

It was Reverend Martin Luther King Jr who said that *‘tomorrow is today’* and in being confronted with a *‘fierce urgency of now’*, there is such a thing in the *‘unfolding conundrum of life and history as being too late’*.

In twenty years from now, I don’t want to look back and see education as having been ‘too late’ when the urgency of now is so fierce. This age presents significant challenges to all who learn and teach in our schools – challenges that primarily centre on the need for change.

Nobel prize winning Chilean poet and educator Gabriela Mistral said that we cannot say *tomorrow* to a child, when now is the time their bones are formed and minds are developed – when today is their name.

Our students should not have to wait for schooling to change.

Game changers 2016-02-17

Marketer and entrepreneur, Seth Godin recently wrote a blog on pattern recognition versus pattern matching. Godin writes that “Some people have erroneously concluded that the way to succeed is to slavishly follow what’s come before. Pattern matching is for amateurs. . . pattern recognition is a priceless skill that comes with practice, with the experience of noticing. The art is to see patterns, [and] to use them to do something new.”

We spend a lot of time pattern matching in education when we could be pattern recognising. A case in point was last month when I co-presented at the International Congress for School Effectiveness and Improvement (ICSEI) in Scotland. ICSEI is a professional learning community of practitioners, policy makers and researchers who meet to share and spread best practice across education systems around the world.

As I listened to presentation after presentation at ICSEI, I realised that no-one was talking about educational transformation. This was a sophisticated exercise in pattern matching. While conferences like ICSEI are great opportunities for building collegiality, we have to move beyond the concept of school improvement.

School improvement limits our collective imaginations because we don’t have to do anything new. The industrial model continues to prevail because it is so easy to replicate what’s come before.

Education now needs game-changers not add-ons. This can’t happen if we are still engaged in discussions that are narrowly focussed on improvement and effectiveness. Let’s use conferences and professional learning networks to create something new rather than slavishly improve the old.

Along the battle lines 2016-03-02

The NSW Department of Education's *Centre for Education Statistics and Evaluation* published its report last year finding that Reading Recovery (used in almost a thousand of its primary schools) should be 'restricted to the lowest performing students'.

The mere mention of Reading Recovery sparks vigorous debate in a war that has been ongoing for decades between the behaviourists (phonics) and constructivists (whole language).

It's a highly charged topic that draws comment and divides educators, parents and the media along the phonics versus whole language battle lines.

Teaching children to read is perhaps the most fundamental task of educators. We learn to speak before we ever read and children do not come to reading naturally nor does it happen overnight.

Teaching reading is a highly developed skill and the best defence we have in the "reading wars" is to improve the practice of all teachers so that every teacher is a teacher of reading.

Intervention programs like Reading Recovery are not designed to be a substitute for good classroom practice – it is the corollary of supporting the most vulnerable readers and creating professional learning opportunities within the school.

Teaching children to read doesn't begin at home and end when students leave primary school. Improving literacy is a community responsibility and it needs a community response (K-12).

The best approach to learning how to read is an integrated approach to teaching. Arguing over which method is superior doesn't move us any closer to winning the war on literacy.

Looking for the next generation leader 2016-03-09

Australia has its Sport Hall of Fame, the US has its Rock and Roll Hall of Fame but where are the Education Halls of Fame? We can name the great teachers that have touched our lives but what about the great school leaders? There are a plethora of books on educational leaders and educational leadership but who do we hold up within the educational community as exemplars of school leadership in today's world?

These are some of the questions we've been reflecting on as we prepare to open a new school in outer Western Sydney next year. The proposed St Luke's at Marsden Park will be 'next generation' – an innovative learning community built from the ground up through partnerships with Stephen Heppell, industry and the wider community.

This school will challenge the industrial constructs by embracing a pre to post schooling model not a K-6, 7-12 one. It's collaboration not isolation, it's integration not segregation and it's personalised not programmatic. We want learning to be adaptable to the changing needs of learners and the changing times in which we live.

We are looking for a next generation school leader who can lead a culture of change and innovation. Someone that demonstrates 21st century skills like creativity, curiosity, adaptability, problem-solving and collaboration. Next generation leadership is entrepreneurial – looking beyond the next five years; seeing the infinite possibilities and making it happen. This is about being able to lead by example, to lead by doing, to lead by knowing and ultimately, to leave a legacy for future generations locally and globally.

Could it be you?

Basic skills 2016-03-16

West Australian Education Minister Peter Collier suggested last month that parents weren't putting in the time with their children at home and this was being reflected on school entry testing.

According to Mr Collier, there are increasing numbers of children starting school who lack basic skills such as being able to count, paint and hold a pencil.

The implication is that increased use of technology at home is impacting not only on the development of fine motor skills but also according to a report by Dr Jennifer Buckingham, the capacity to build language through conversation with adults and other children.

It highlights a need for researchers, politicians, parents and educators to re-visit the what, why and how of schooling in today's world. What does it mean to be school ready in today's world? In ten years from now, will it be necessary for young people to know how to hold a pencil? And what will it mean to be literate in an online world?

If literacy and numeracy are foundational skills (and they are), how are these skills developed in changing home/school environments alongside increasingly adaptive learning technologies? And at what stage in a child's development do we begin nurturing new ways of thinking, working, using tools and social responsibility?

If parents are being urged to do more educating at home, then what is needed are clear frameworks (of 21st century skills) for parents and teachers. This needs to clearly articulate the qualities and skills required in today's world and the ways in which these are developed and assessed in each child.

One of the most common complaints I hear from parents is the lack of communication around *what* their child is learning in class, *how* it's being taught and *why* it's necessary.

In the context of a changing world we all need to be asking important questions about basic skills.

Leading by doing 2016-03-23

Search on Twitter or in a bookstore and you'll find a plethora of material on the leadership phenomenon. According to a study cited in Joshua Rothman's piece in the New Yorker, Americans spend \$14 *billion* per annum on leadership training seminars. This is a growth industry on steroids and unfortunately, like regular use of steroids, most of it is deleterious.

I recently came across a tweet by the well known CEO of 'Lead from Within', Lolly Daskal on the seven elements of leadership. These leadership traits come from a sound base but they aren't new. Trait theory has been around for more than a century and is at the forefront of the great man theory of leadership. It basically says that men (not usually women) are either born with the characteristics to be a leader or not. So if you don't have these inherent personality traits, then you can't be a leader.

On the other side, process theory suggests that leadership is something that can be learned. According to Rothman, the process model acknowledges that 'being a leader' is not someone you are, it's something you do.

Over the past fifty years, new theories have been advanced that have given rise to a kaleidoscope of views on leadership and what makes a good leader. Authors have studied 'charismatic' leaders in an attempt to offer the rest of us a blueprint to effective leadership. Most material is really a variation of the same theme.

I am not so sure that you can easily deconstruct or distill leadership into its component parts, which is my issue with the "seven elements of leadership". Leadership is never straightforward and yet we are often presented with an idealised view of it. In his piece, Rothman refers to Jeffrey Pfeffer's book *Leadership BS* in which Pfeffer argues that the five universal leadership traits commonly espoused are often ignored by real-world leaders.

The argument is that there is a difference between being a leader and doing leadership. Rather than linking leadership to a set of traits, I prefer to think of leadership as the art of leading in terms of seven norms:

1. Being open to learning
2. Willingness to exchange ideas
3. Being reflective
4. Building a shared purpose
5. Enabling shared responsibility
6. Being outcomes-focused
7. Celebrating success

It is my experience it's what people do that attracts followers and perhaps the only way to explain the outliers who have passed as great leaders in history. I recently asked our new school leaders who they admired most. The usual suspects like Mandela, Martin Luther King and Mother Teresa were named. Not one mentioned a colleague principal, teacher or staff member.

It seems to me that we interact with outstanding leaders every day but we often don't recognise them. These people should be our models. As Mark Twain wrote: "Thunder is good, thunder is impressive, but it is lightning that does the work." Let's look for the lightning rods who are doing great work in and for our schools.

What's wrong with Aussie schools? 2016-03-30

I wonder how many times we need to hear the OECD and Grattan Institute tell us that our education system needs to be performing *over and above* and not under and below international benchmarks! The link between our declining performance on PISA and teacher quality has been the subject of commentary from educational experts for more than a decade.

Speaking recently in Dubai, OECD's education chief, Andreas Schleicher warned that without sufficient investment in the teaching profession and a fundamental rethink of the role of teachers in today's world, we risk slipping further down the international ladder.

It's not just the economic imperative that we won't be globally competitive that should compel our profession to change, but the moral imperative of giving every student in every school a world-class education.

One of the problems according to Schleicher is that we continue to see teaching as number of hours spent in front of students as though it's the only half of the whole when in fact the other critical half is professional learning and teacher collaboration.

I agree wholeheartedly with Schleicher that we must move away from seeing teachers as deliverers of a curriculum to teachers as 'owners of professional standards.' This view is evident in Finland where it is widely accepted that educators are 'the ultimate authorities on education, not bureaucrats...'

The profession has been compliant for too long in the face of imposed educational reforms and mandates dictating the nature of teachers' work. Our education system is too valuable to be a political and ideological target for short-sighted policies. I'm not naive enough to suggest that we are close to partisan politics in Australia but the time for a coherent pre to post schooling framework was a decade ago.

It's striking that the OECD's education chief has expressed concern about the future of our education system. It is even more striking though that our politicians have failed to listen and our profession has failed to take the lead.

Technology promises 2016-04-06

Recent declarations in the media by some high school principals that computers are a ‘distraction’ is unhelpful at best and shows personal preference as the default argument in this critical issue.

Attempting to divide technology use into a convenient either/or argument and blaming the machine for poor learning outcomes ignores a simple reality – change and innovation is a fact of life and schools are not immune.

I had the opportunity last week to hear Singapore’s acting education minister speaking at a conference on technology in schooling. Ng Chee Meng believes Singapore’s future success relies on the possibilities technology can bring to learning and teaching. Instead of debating whether to ban computers in schools, Singapore has been asking broader questions about what technology means for education overall and how can teachers respond to the opportunities in classroom settings.

In 2015, the OECD released a report *Students, Computers and Learning*. It stated that the real contributions ICT can make to learning and teaching haven’t been fully ‘realised and exploited’ yet but to deliver on the promise that technology holds requires all countries to design. . . .’ a convincing strategy to build teachers’ capacity’. Improving the knowledge (pedagogical and pedagogical content) base of teachers as well as their understanding of learners all takes place in the context of a technologically rich world. We can’t hermetically provision teacher learning from technology, yet we can explore ways in which technology extends teacher practice by helping to develop in students the habit and power of deeper thinking and inquiry, personal autonomy and creativity.

Intel Corp says that in 2006 there were 2 billion devices globally; 15 billion in 2015 and in 2020. . . .200 billion connected devices! Today’s learners already recognise the promises that technology holds – it’s up to us to deliver on the promise.

Failure is the cancer of good learning and teaching 2016-04-20

According to folklore, Albert Einstein failed his college entrance exam, Walt Disney was told he lacked creativity and Bill Gates dropped out of school. While it didn't stop them achieving in their respective fields, I am left wondering why we eschew failure in education.

My younger brother told me recently that he felt like he had 'failed' at school – a belief he has carried for more than 30 years! The prevailing view in education that failure is a negative experience does so much damage to kids' confidence. Sir Ken Robinson says this is because we have created school systems where mistakes are the worst things you can make and children are afraid of failing.

Failure is the cancer of good learning and teaching. This reductionist approach defines learning as a set of numerical or letter grades that can be manipulated, often misused and generally misunderstood. The high stakes test of the Higher School Certificate – the gold standard of learning – is even more misunderstood in its practical application. It is not a description of the achievement of a student across 13 years. Rather it is a ranking process derived by adding together internal assessments and exam marks, then running them through a 'black box'. The public perception is that anything above 60 is good, between 50-60 and you're OK. Anything below 50 and you've failed school.

Sir Edmund Hillary

We need to be very careful about how assessment is understood and used because of the tendency to equate it with test scores. A better way to talk about student achievement is to concentrate on performance. In sporting competitions, points are awarded for technical skill but they are also balanced against points for non-technical skills. The question is what would we include as the sum total of performance in education?

Sir Edmund Hillary's feat on Mt Everest was shaped by learning from past failures. Reflecting on his momentous achievement, Hillary was quoted saying: "I was just an enthusiastic mountaineer of modest abilities who was willing to work quite hard and had the necessary imagination and determination."

Every student is a potential Edmund Hillary with their own Everest to conquer. Learning must be a celebration of failure, discovery and success.

Stemming the tide 2016-05-03

Recently the Conversation Hour featured some of the world's greatest scientific minds sharing their personal stories. It is worth a listen especially Professor Ian Frazer's reflections of how studying German at high school changed his career path from wanting to become an astrophysicist to studying medicine. Ian Frazer ended up inventing the technology used in the Human Papilloma Virus (HPV) vaccine.

The reason for mentioning Professor Frazer is because in part, his story demonstrates how non-mainstream subjects (e.g German) complement learning and contribute to a holistic education. The current push by governments around the world towards a STEM-driven educational agenda and the creation of STEM-focussed schools seems to be short-sighted. It reflects a popular view that innovation is not only central to future economic growth but that it is largely driven by advances in science and technology. The danger is that we run the risk of reducing education to a training capacity.

With the rapid development of quantum computing and its potential to power artificial intelligence we are entering uncharted territory. Even today's complicated programming and coding will increasingly be done by machines that can learn. It is simplistic to assume that current programming and coding skills will remain the same into the future. Before the agrarian revolution the prime skill set was agricultural expertise. The industrial revolution changed that. As the knowledge age expands the same will happen to current skill sets. The ability to use technology critically and creatively (i.e. soft skills) will be more vital than hard skills.

Universities are having a similar debate over the utility of educating students for the short-term job market when we live in such a rapidly changing world. Kate Carnell, former chief executive of the Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry told the Universities Australia conference in March that we had more to gain by focussing on the skills needed in existing jobs rather than focussing on future jobs. According to Ms Carnell, 'innovation is as much about people and process as STEM invention'.

We have always known that a good education is the balance of soft and hard skills; non-academic and academic paths; science and the humanities. Innovation will be defined by how well we teach all students to apply critical and creative thinking across all disciplines.

Funding a bold vision 2016-05-10

It's often said that the devil is in the detail but this election seems to be long on rhetoric and short on innovation. We won't become an innovative nation by looking in the rear view mirror. Everyone recognises the need for innovation, for doing things differently including education but we lack clear examples and the drivers to deliver something different and better for the future.

How do we build, as a nation, innovation? Why aren't we seeing greater engagement and dialogue across industry, sectors and the unions? Money counts but it is wasted when artificial and short-term accountability measures are rolled out under the banner of educational reform and innovation.

What is lacking is innovative thinking from our politicians and policy-makers; thinking outside the box rather than merely ticking the boxes. Funding-linked reform is doing things we've always done and getting the same results. Where are the visionaries who can see beyond election cycles to creating an innovative learning nation?

I've yet to hear any political party talk about the early years of learning either in terms of social, economic or even health outcomes. Let's build innovation from the bottom up – let's start with the early years of learning. PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC) found that benefits to the GDP for children receiving a quality early education program would be up to \$10.3 billion cumulative to 2050, and the benefits to GDP of increased participation of vulnerable children would be \$13.3 billion cumulative to 2050.

Our Prime Minister said it himself, the big shift around innovation is a cultural one. We need to be creating environments that stimulate not stifle innovation and that means governments working collaboratively with educators, unions and industry.

Inquiry and evidence-based policy underpins innovation not aspiration. It's time to fund a bold vision not banal policy.

Stop labelling; start doing *2016-05-19*

This week I got to learn about rockets and it wasn't via a NASA podcast but sitting down with a group of Year 7 students reflecting on their learning. It was as John Hattie states a demonstration of the teacher becoming the learner and the learners becoming the teacher.

What I found impressive (apart from their inherent curiosity), was the recognition that their learning was enhanced through the the ability to problem-solve in teams, communicate their ideas and use technology. While these students won't graduate until 2021, they know that their success will be largely dependent on these skills. Although they admitted to the content being challenging (I'm told this is taught in Year 12 maths), each of the students admitted to enjoying the challenge enough that they were willing to work on the project during the school holidays!

Most telling was the sentiment expressed by one student who said being in control of their learning was a big shift from primary school where he had been 'spoon-fed'. That statement in itself illustrates the vast gap that exists between pre-school, primary and high school in how we view individual learners, how we teach them and how we successfully monitor progress.

To paraphrase Yong Zhao, to get our students to Mars, we need to put away the spoons and build the equivalent of an educational bottle rocket (that is launched at a trajectory of 45 degrees – yes I did learn something!).

Learning and leading 2016-05-31

There's been discussion recently regarding the increasing demands placed on school leaders and teachers. We live in a world that demands greater accountability, transparency, productivity and performance. Education is not immune.

We also have the research outlining qualities of high achieving/effective schools and the 'high expectations' on student and teacher performance. Parents expect their children will achieve quality educational outcomes. Governments and the community expect teachers and schools to consistently deliver those outcomes.

High but realistic expectations are an essential part of the educational narrative in today's world. As part of a professional learning community, we find that our achievements, including how we deal with the highs and lows of our work, grow out of shared respect and collaborative practices. We expect our colleagues to support, and where appropriate, to challenge us.

This is why it's critical to cultivate a culture where we take the necessary time to stand back, to re-balance our professional agendas and eliminate unhelpful accretions so we can focus on what really matters for our students, ourselves and our communities.

Externally driven narratives or codes on how we manage ourselves or our school communities de-skills those responsible for the work. Principals and teachers are best placed to decide on what is best for themselves and their learners.

The role of governments, professional bodies and even systems is to support the work of schools not mandate it. We will never learn how to deal with the complexities of schooling in today's world unless we take the lead.

As Richard Elmore says, we learn the work by doing the work.

Fuelling the revolution 2016-06-15

Revolution School ABC TV

Revolution School is a four part documentary series that began on ABC TV recently. It captures the turn-around journey of a Victorian high school ranked in the lowest 10% of the state. In a sea of navel gazing and feel-good solutions to improving schooling, it is refreshing to see honesty and shared responsibility on the table.

What has stood out each week is the use of theory and research to inform good practice. Kambrya College didn't look in the rear view mirror for solutions that could be repackaged and rolled out nor did they try and emulate competitors who drive educational change through a mix of externally imposed accountabilities and fear. And they didn't expect to be rescued by superman.

Educational change had to come from within and from applying the research in relation to improving learning outcomes for all students. The approach was based on Hattie's mantra: know thy impact on student learning.

Kambrya's journey is uplifting and should be applauded and admired but there are thousands of schools around Australia in the same boat. We'd like to see all of them take the same approach but as we have seen change is easy to suggest but much harder to implement and sustain.

With a federal election less than a month away, education has been the platform for both parties. Rather than promising big bucks to fix the problem, a better solution would be a commitment from politicians to make the Kambrya experience the norm for all struggling schools.

This requires an end to the shameless finger pointing and blame game but rather encourage schools to become critics of their own practice by being honest and open and sharing and collaborating so that we are all on a proper learning journey.

As Professor John Hattie said the fact 1 in 5 children are failing to complete high school is the "biggest crime in Australia". It's time we focussed on what counts otherwise we will continue to count the cost.

Good practice shapes theory 2016-06-24

Michael Fullan has said that good practice often shapes theory not the converse. A theoretical understanding is necessary but theories don't always translate into effective classroom practice. Theories don't provide teachers with the 'how to' and although most teachers recognise the need to continually reflect on their practice in order to improve, there is an assumption that they know what needs to be changed. Too many teachers don't know what they don't know; this was highlighted recently in Revolution School on ABC TV.

Not all teachers are created equal and this is partly because not all teacher education programs are equal. One of the criticisms especially in the US and UK is that there is a heavy focus on theory and not enough of practice. We would have a cadre of academics preparing beginning teachers for classrooms who have not been in classrooms for years if not decades. As John Hattie aptly points out, none of our institutions have ever had to prove their impact. Ironical considering that these institutions send teachers into classrooms where they are now expected to continually evaluate their impact as teachers.

We are moving now from seeing teachers as practitioners to seeing teachers as clinicians. This is not to suggest that the relationship between teacher and student is clinical. Rather, the relationship between a teacher and their practice needs to be. According to Hattie, clinical teaching is the ability of every teacher to "diagnose, intervene and evaluate." It is similar to how world-class athletes improve technique and performance and why Shanghai teachers are assigned mentors throughout their teaching careers.

The simplistic assumption that a "teacher is a teacher..." with the same skill sets and capabilities flies in the face of reality. Even suggesting this will raise the ire of many and be viewed as trendy teacher bashing. The end result must be ensuring each child in each school has the best teacher. We need to build the capacity of all teachers by focusing more on skills than theory. Expertise has to be learned through practice.

The task of teaching 2016-07-05

The task of teaching is multi-faceted, complex and never neatly contained. It continues long after the bells ring and the lessons finish. Most teachers work long into the night marking assessments, providing feedback and planning lessons. However, as we shift towards more evidence-based approaches, the goal is to become more effective to ensure we deliver value because working harder may not be working smarter.

The task of teaching cannot be reduced to simply producing effective and engaging lessons; it requires teachers to evaluate the impact of those lessons on each learner. To be able to use ask questions and use feedback wisely to move all learners forward wherever they are on the learning continuum. If not, then how else do we track student or teacher progress? We cannot take learning on face value.

It is astounding that many continue to view the use of feedback and data as a burden for teachers or worse, as an unnecessary task of teaching. The use of feedback, questioning and data is not a diversion from the work of teaching – it is integral to it. Second, there will always be those who are afraid of change and this strengthens the argument that we need to continually invest in the capacity and learning of teachers. The goal is to ensure all teachers are able to evaluate where students are, give constructive feedback and provide the necessary support and structures to improve learning outcomes.

There are and will always be a minority of voices that are anti-intellectual as observed recently in a journal decrying the use of data. All other professions seize the idea of obtaining data and feedback as critical to improving the work they do so why is it that some wish to see teaching locked into industrial thinking and processes?

Andy Hargreaves in his book *Teaching in the Knowledge Society* commented that ‘teaching is not a place for shrinking violets, for the overly sensitive. . . it’s a place for grown-ups, requiring grown up norms of how to work together.’

Grown up norms of how we work together as professionals includes grown up discussions of how we improve and extend the practice of teaching in today’s world.

An uber teaching profession 2016-07-18

From 2018, every teacher working in NSW schools will have to understand and apply the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers to their work. The Standards go towards helping to clarify and articulate what good learning and teaching looks like; what is consistently expected of all teachers and what it takes to become an exceptional teacher.

Like other sectors, the Standards are designed to enhance the profession both internally and externally. While we can't ignore the Standards, I wonder if they have been developed on an industrial set of assumptions? When we negotiate with teacher unions, we always start from the same premise of linking salary to years of service. Whenever we talk about professional competency, we assume all teachers are the same at the same year of experience, just as we once assumed all learners were.

If there is evidence suggesting the personal qualities of teachers are extremely important and no two teachers are alike, then where does that take us? What are the new assumptions and what would be at stake?

Schools and teachers are operating not only in a new age but in a new world order in which entrepreneurs and philanthropists are venturing into the business of schooling. Look no further than inventor of SpaceX, PayPal, and Tesla Motors, Elon Musk who has set up an alternative school for his children after describing his own schooling experience as uninspiring and basically obsolete. Then there is Sal Khan, founder of Khan Academy who has no formal teaching qualifications but created free online access to educational content. Khan has just opened a physical lab school to 'pioneer new models of learning'. Note that 'teaching' is missing from its vision statement. The new assumption at least for Khan is that teachers will play a supporting role now not a leading one.

In this new world where disintermediation is disrupting just about everything, are we moving towards an uber teaching profession? The real question is not whether Musk and Khan can deliver more relevant models of schooling and higher levels of student achievement but whether we can still assume a teacher is a teacher.

Modernising educational relics 2016-07-27

Last week, Minister for Education Adrian Piccoli announced major reforms to the Higher School Certificate (HSC) in response to what the Minister says was parental, community and industry feedback on literacy and numeracy standards and the preparedness of students to enter a 21st century workforce.

This will be the first time in almost two decades the HSC will face an overhaul in what is a committed effort to address declining literacy and numeracy standards as well as responding to a demand for digital skills.

Having spent the past 40 years (including 13 at school) in education, these reforms sound like the age old rhetoric of trying to improve education by improving the test. The reality is the HSC is a relic of the last century. It was designed in the late 1950s and rolled out in the 1960s when the world of education work was very different. Since the late eighties, successive governments have used school credentials as a means of somehow improving schooling.

What we desperately need is some divergent thinking because reform is not needed at the end of schooling but the beginning of it. Why are we not investing resources into establishing a solid literacy, numeracy and socio-emotional foundation in the early years? We only need to look at what is happening in Finland and their focus on student happiness or Asia where education systems are looking beyond high stakes testing.

This requires a fundamental shift of focus on education policy and the foundations on which these policies rest. Every initiative recently announced by the minister has been tried before with words like rigour, standards and improvement becoming the norm. Where is the new thinking? Where is the innovative and relevant practice? And where is the creativity that builds and sustains a genuinely realistic understanding that today's world is not yesterday revisited. Nostalgia makes us feel good but it ultimately kills innovation.

If our politicians are serious about ensuring students are well-prepared for the new world of work, we first need to ensure the locus of innovative practice and entrepreneurial outlook is found in each and every school. It might be externally supported but it has to be locally driven. This means trusting the profession to make those judgements for its learning community.

The HSC reforms really are a missed opportunity to bring some coherence to educational policy and radically rethink how we assess the spectrum of students' learning and skills.

Is there anyone bold enough to relinquish such educational relics?

School of getting stuck 2016-08-03

There is a goldmine of educational treasure on the Internet if you have the time to dig for it. One of the great discoveries recently has been Dylan Wiliam's reflections on learning and assessment. Wiliam began his career as a teacher and moved into academic research. He is probably best known for his insightful analysis with Paul Black on classroom assessment titled *Inside the Black Box*. As one colleague said recently, Dylan Wiliam has a gift of making the very complex, very simple – there's absolutely no BS.

According to Wiliam what needs to be clear to all teachers is that students need to be clear about where they are going and how they will get support to move from point A in the learning trajectory to point B. Wiliam admits the purpose of schooling is not to get things right otherwise what's the point of coming every day. The purpose is being able to achieve things you couldn't do before. He says school is about the struggle, not about being right.

Wiliam recounts seeing a poster in a teacher's classroom which basically said if you're stuck, then it was worth coming to school today. The point being that if students aren't getting stuck, they're not learning. The danger zone is that teachers either recognise this too late or are unable to implement strategies that successfully scaffold learning for the 20 or 30 students in a class.

There is consonance between Wiliam's thinking and one of our country's most respected educational leaders, Professor Patrick Griffin. In his keynote delivered last year, Patrick spoke about the need to find the area of learning where every child is between what they can do and what they can't do. This is Vygotsky's *zone of proximal development (ZPD)* and as Patrick explained, we need to better ascertain the precise point at which student learning begins to break down in order to intervene through peer/teacher or mentor support.

Regardless of age or year group, this kind of social learning intervention should move every student in the classroom to the next level and the next. Patrick believes that we have the technology to be able to plot the ZPD across teachers and schools to see the impact of every teacher on student learning.

Every learner has a zone of proximal development and getting stuck is a good thing if we can intervene at the right time and with the right level of support. If we are not reminding ourselves and our students of this every day, then we have misunderstood the purpose of learning.

Life-long learning isn't a short-term endeavour *2016-08-10*

You may have seen recently that the Tasmanian Government has proposed lowering the starting age of schooling (from 2021) to four and a half years as well as opening up the possibility for parents to enrol students as young as 3 and a half (from 2020). Predictably this announcement has divided community opinion with a range of concerns raised from toileting to formal learning.

While we don't have much detail yet on what this will look like, the rationale is certainly an honest attempt at providing access to quality early learning especially for children from disadvantaged backgrounds. In Australia, as in other western countries, the range of options for parents is limited, often costly and ranges from day-care to 'Einstein' academies. The idea is to give all students a solid start rather than playing progressive catch up each school year. I applaud that.

Last year my comments on extending the early learning years sparked debate because we think that sending a 3 and a half year old to 'school' is about inflicting the current (rigid, one size fits all) experience of schooling on them. Unfortunately this limits the discussion around what possibilities exist for those important early years.

Lowering the school age challenges us to look beyond the here and now. Life-long learning is not a short-term endeavour, it has to be viewed as long-term. This means schooling has to operate along a continuum in which play-based learning is at one end and inquiry based learning is at the other. The continuum of schooling requires a rethink at every level from the nature of the curriculum and pedagogy to the built environment.

We also need to rethink the minimum qualifications and salaries of early childhood teachers. At present, you do not have to be a trained teacher to work in an early learning setting. Formal qualifications are needed.

Teacher Tim Walker wrote a great piece in the Atlantic last year on what the rest of us can learn from Finland's approach to the early years of learning. No surprise that 'joy' is emphasised in the country's pre-primary curriculum as well as the declaration that play is actually an efficient way of learning for children.

This leaves us to ask an obvious question – why doesn't play-based learning and joy extend beyond the early years?

Pygmy in the land of giants *2016-08-29*

In 2013, a 7.2 magnitude earthquake devastated the island province of Bohol in the Philippines, killing hundreds and flattening communities. It was the worst earthquake to hit the Philippines in 23 years.

Recently, a group of our teachers and students travelled to Bohol as part of an immersion program aimed at putting the principles of Catholic social justice into action.

Our group had the opportunity to work alongside local school communities on identified projects, some of which included repairing damaged infrastructure and providing professional development for local teachers. This had been 3 years in the planning and a wonderful example of cross-cultural collaboration.

For those who don't know me, I'm rather tall (over 2 metres) so when we arrived in the Philippines, everyone greeted me as the 'giant'. I had my photo taken on many occasions that often felt at times like Gulliver's Travels! During our time in Bohol, we worked with teachers who by any standards have very little by way of resources but give so much of themselves and their time to ensure all students have access to quality schooling. Their commitment to education and belief in its transformative effects is extraordinary. Nothing is taken for granted here. There are no demands for more funding or debates over class sizes. Schooling is an investment in the individual as well as the community.

It isn't an over-statement to say that we learned much more from them than they did from us. It brings into light just how fortunate we are here and how the opportunities we are afforded can never be taken for granted.

We often stress that education's focus should be on the whole person: body, mind, spirit, character and imagination. This was certainly a wholistic learning experience for us and one in which I saw myself as a pygmy in the land of giants.

Can we raise teaching standards by imposing standards? 2016-09-06

In response to the above question, the answer from most politicians is yes. In NSW for example, the politics of standards has led to the Board of Studies, Teaching and Educational Standards (BOSTES) being renamed and given greater powers. The newly announced NSW Education Standards Authority will be charged with 'lifting' school compliance and teacher quality in an effort to improve students' results. NSW Education Minister Piccoli stated that the [new] authority 'ought to make teachers nervous around teaching standards'.

Any potential for this new entity to enact change is immediately called in to question by its very name. A 'Standards Authority' sounds very much like a 19th century, carrot and stick approach to school improvement. As John Hattie points out, we love talking about standards and results (usually associated with PISA and TIMSS rankings) but not about building the collaborative expertise of teachers or student performance.

Michael Fullan suggests the all too common focus on standards is a focus on the wrong drivers and it rarely leads to whole of system success. In his 2011 paper (using Australia's reform efforts as an example), Michael Fullan points out that accountability depends on standards and punishment. And these have been the core drivers for educational 'improvement' despite growing evidence that educational transformation is driven from within.

Like Hattie, Fullan strongly believes capacity building needs to be championed over accountability and standards. When teachers are strongly motivated and are continually improving their knowledge skills, student outcomes continue to improve. And the fastest route to de-motivating teachers is to undermine their professional confidence and capabilities by effectively suggesting they are on notice. The big brother approach to improving schooling only ever leads to short-term gains. A collaborative and internally driven approach to transforming schooling will help to ensure long-term success.

According to Hattie what works best is 'recognising, valuing and enhancing the teachers and school leaders with high levels of expertise.' But he goes on to say we risk this if 'the politics of distraction command the limelight.'

The most effective teachers and systems aren't the ones motivated by carrots, they are the ones motivated by continuously improving their own learning, their students' learning and the profession as a whole.

The rearview mirror 2016-09-22

It was media theorist Marshall McLuhan who famously said we look at the present through a rearview mirror. This is what I am doing at the moment as I reflect on the last 498 posts on bluyonder. There have been some posts that were well-received, others critiqued and many that have been ignored. The blog was never going to be a lone catalyst for educational transformation but it joins the thousands of educational blogs around the world creating a critical mass for change.

In all the bluyonder musings, the biggest challenge seems to be ‘why is it so difficult for teachers to change?’ For the most part we are stuck in the liminal space between the vast experience of the past and the unimaginable possibilities for doing the valuable work of schooling differently. This isn’t the responsibility of the teaching profession alone (although the profession needs to drive the agenda) – it is one that society shares. Teachers need the support of the local school communities. These communities need the support of coherent education policies that reflect an understanding of the challenges in providing a first class contemporary schooling experience.

Unfortunately what I continue to see is a vicious cycle where teachers don’t trust the administration when improvement is advocated, where governments want students to be creative and innovative but continue to support high stakes testing and where parents want more engaging learning experiences without schools daring to be innovative in teacher practice and school design. All these come together in the perfect storm alongside publication of international test rankings and federal and state elections. If we want contemporary practice, innovative solutions, continuous improvement and the like as the norm for all schools, some things have to change. A good start would be for communities to talk up the work of their schools. This requires a stronger and deeper engagement than currently exists.

However the most important change we need is to turn the schooling model on its head. Most schooling is still defined and designed around “the Curriculum” and the delivery of this curriculum through the timetable construct. It is not the curriculum that should shape the learning and teaching but the students themselves. In other words the kids are the curriculum. The question of why it so difficult to start with the child rather than the curriculum isn’t new thinking (John Dewey) but it seems we have become increasingly fearful of failure as compliant servants of an industrial system (Ken Robinson). Yet failure is at the heart of learning, teaching and ultimately improvement (Dylan Wiliam) and it is this that keeps me fixed on the bluyonder while occasionally pausing to see where we’ve come through the rearview mirror.

What's worth giving a Gonski about *2016-10-05*

The tug-o-war over the Gonski education funding model continues despite Federal Education Minister Simon Birmingham wanting to make changes that are designed to cost taxpayers less but still deliver needs-based funding to schools. Gonski has become a bit of a patchwork quilt with something like 27 separate school funding agreements in place with various states, territories and education sectors.

Naturally Labor and those states and territories that originally signed up are against any changes in part, because the money has already been used to fund new programs and positions in schools. Negotiations with various education ministers will continue to play out and while no-one appears to be holding their breath on this, the debate seems to be focused on what is sufficient when it comes to educational equity, rather than what is necessary.

The discussion around equity has largely been pinned on funding and who has/deserves the biggest share of the pie. The argument goes something like, the more money a school receives, the better the outcomes. In fact, Kevin Donnelly in his recent piece on Gonski quoted researchers Woessmann and Hanushek who conceded that how [educational] money is spent is more important than how much is spent.

Pete Goss from the Grattan Institute reiterated that point when he wrote last month that “our education results will not change if we continue to spend money in the same way... it must be spent effectively so that it has the greatest impact on students”. We know that one of the greatest impacts on students is teacher quality. This, in itself, is as Professor Stephen Dinham continues to point out, the biggest (and ever-widening) equity issue we face is ensuring a quality teacher in every classroom. As Stephen says, it's the variation in teaching and practice, school performance and resourcing is ‘driving the whole educational system down’.

What is clear is that too many invested in education are reading from different pages when it comes to the equity issue in Australian schools. The debate must be centred on how to systematically improve teacher capacity and therefore their effectiveness across all schools and sectors. According to Dylan Wiliam there is already a considerable body of evidence demonstrating how to make teachers significantly more effective (this has to do with their development of classroom formative assessment). The problem however is that these approaches are not easily scaleable.

What is needed is a coherent framework that links sensible educational policy to funding – not the other way around. The debate over equity needs to be data and evidence driven not resource driven if we are to see both teacher and student improvement in every single school.

As the Business Council of Australia's chief executive, Jennifer Westacott recently said in an address, teacher quality has to be at the top of the agenda. When it comes to equity, making teachers more effective is the only thing worth giving a Gonski about.

Leaders as readers 2016-10-18

In 2012, John Coleman wrote an article in the Harvard Business Review titled 'For those who want to lead, read'. Coleman observed that business professionals were reading less despite their being wide-ranging benefits to leadership. According to Coleman, deep and broad reading habits have been the 'defining characteristic of our greatest leaders' catalysing 'insight, innovation, empathy, and personal effectiveness'. Coleman goes on to say that evidence suggests that when leaders read broadly and apply insight to their organisations, they are more likely to 'innovate and prosper'. Philosopher AC Grayling also suggests that literature provides us with open windows, which is what education is all about.

I am often surprised when I hear that teachers and leaders don't have time to read despite expectations that students will themselves develop healthy reading habits. One of the questions I often ask during interviews is 'what are you reading and how are you applying it to your work?' The response is telling because the act of reading reflects an appetite for gaining greater understanding and wisdom. It reflects a curiosity that ideally grows and deepens over time. As Coleman suggests, reading cultivates the knowledge, habits and skills needed to improve organisations.

As educational leaders, it serves us to read regularly and broadly. I believe there is a canon of educational books that challenge assumptions, inspire new thinking/practice and promote new research; and, most importantly, stretch our imagination. This canon is not defined by academics alone. It includes anything that enriches our thinking such as Dr Seuss' *Hooray for Diffendoofer Day*, Mark Twain's *Huckleberry Finn* and William Golding's *Lord of the Flies*. There is much to learn from the human experience in these texts and how they shape our approach to learning.

One recently published academic book that will be added to our system's canon is Stephen Dinham's recently published, *Leading Learning and Teaching*. This isn't a how to guide or blueprint for action so much as a considered reflection and research on both past and present approaches to improving schooling. Dinham unpacks the major implications for practitioners and the critical challenge of leading learning and teaching.

This book makes no claim of finding the definitive approaches to improving schools. Neither is it a lecture or beating of the drum. What you get is a thorough walk through of the central issues facing educators and schools in today's world. Most importantly the book shows a deep respect for teachers in its open and accessible prose.

Reading this book reinforced my view that the profession is more than capable of meeting the challenges of transforming schooling if we continue to read widely and as Dinham says become 'critical consumers of research' and evidence-based in our practice.

Ideas worth sharing 2016-10-26

It's often said that good ideas are of no value to anyone if you don't share them. This is the value that social media offers teachers everywhere. I have the good fortune of being a connected educator and through this blog and sites like Twitter, have my own thinking continually stretched by great ideas and practice.

I recently asked fellow educator, Darcy Moore, to reflect on a bluyonder post that resonated strongly with him. Darcy was kind enough to share his thoughts below:

In reference: <https://bluyonder.wordpress.com/2016/07/27/modernising-educational-relics/>

The 'modernisation' of the HSC is not that. It is an opportunity lost and tinkering masquerading as reform. It is clear that pen and paper exams rule education in NSW. Until they are abolished there is no real way forward. No one should have any illusion that 'regurgitating on paper' should be replaced by typing fast on a computer; the entire assessment and reporting system needs to be re-envisioned. This "backward-mapping" of our curriculum is urgent and it will start with one decree from the education minister: "pen and paper exams in NSW are no more".

Australian principals and teachers have a vast number of syllabus and policy documents to implement in the course of the hour, day, week and year. Legislation compels the grading of all students from A-E and the release of archaic semester reports. None of this is helping. It is a hindrance. The managerial and corporatist obsession with frameworks, measurement and documentation are creating dystopian conditions in schools and preventing the real work of creating conditions where learning can flourish that are so desperately needed.

The Hawke-Keating governments addressed globalisation by opening the economy and modernising Australia. Currently, the digitisation of society is providing opportunities and challenges that are not being addressed by our education system or government with any strategy that makes sense. This must change. Genuine educational reform has never been more urgent. Rather than looking back to 20th century notions of how learning should be managed (that reflect the fast-food industry more than education in a contemporary democracy) we need to plan with the future in mind.

As social media continues to mature and more educators begin to speak out, it will become a more powerful tool for change. Many educators still see social media as a fad or are suspicious of engaging for a range of reasons. Security and trust are high on the reasons why this is so. Like any disruptive innovation, social media demands us to think and do differently. It requires us to establish new norms and as Darcy points out above, provides opportunities that no-one seems to be addressing with any common sense strategies.

The more educators speak up, the more we build a critical mass towards transform schooling from the ground up.

Teachers as researchers 2016-11-01

Last week, our system held its inaugural secondary Mathematics conference with the focus on teachers as researchers. Along with school and system leaders, secondary mathematics teachers, we also had our academic partner, Emeritus Professor Peter Sullivan from Monash University along with Sue Wilson from the Australian Catholic University (ACT campus) and Professor Kathryn Holmes from Western Sydney University attend.

Teachers as Researchers is an extension of our English Mathematics Stage 4 (EM4) program focused on increasing the knowledge and skills of secondary teachers with the aim of extending all learners within a positive and rich (mathematical) learning environments. Each of the 12 schools who participated in Cohort 1 presented workshops on pedagogical practices that are making a visible difference.

As I said in my welcome address at the conference, nothing will mark the difference between industrial and contemporary teaching practice more than the concept of teachers continually improving their practice through the process of disciplined inquiry. This applies across pre to post schooling and to every teacher no matter what stage of their career.

If the concept of teachers as researchers is to become embedded within the profession, then it needs the support of systems and governments to create available resources to encourage innovative practices especially around the teaching of STEM subjects.

I had the opportunity of chatting briefly to Professor Sullivan at the conference last week. I am not alone in saying that it has been a privilege to have someone of his calibre working with us on transforming the way maths is understood and taught in schools.

We know that partnerships are critical in leveraging learning. This relationship shows how new ways of thinking about the craft of teaching can lead into exciting and innovative practice.

The 'how' agenda 2016-11-18

This year, I've had the privilege of being able to speak at education conferences both here in Australia and abroad. These experiences give me the opportunity to share with other passionate educators my ideas about schools and learning. There are so many people thinking differently about learning. I come away from these events excited and challenged by what others are doing, and how they are reimagining what schools can be.

My experiences this year have reinforced in my mind that the focus has clearly shifted from 'why' schools need to do things differently to 'how' we go about transforming schools. The 'how' question was the theme of a two-day symposium I attended recently, hosted by the NSW Minister for Education Adrian Piccoli, on the future of schools. The conversations at the symposium were robust and engaging, but for me, the messages are very clear:

1. **The challenge is to transform not reform.** Transformation is all about root-and-branch change. The reform agenda focuses on what has been; transformation is all about what could be. The transformation agenda looks forward to future possibilities and requires deep cultural change that impacts on every aspect of schooling. The profession needs to lead this transformation.
2. **Learning is the work!** No-one said this was going to be either easy or quick. As Richard Elmore observed, teaching isn't rocket science, it's far more complex than that! We cannot rely on quick fixes or standardised solutions. We learn the work by doing the work; we transform the work when we can evaluate the impact of it.
3. **"Begin with the end in mind".** Transforming schooling requires a sustainable and substantive narrative because transformation requires widespread cultural change. School communities need to be regularly engaged in a dialogue on what success for each learner and transformed learning and teaching looks like. Parents and students also have to be part of the conversation.
4. **Everything has to change or nothing will change.** Too often, the improvement agenda is focussed on a single silver bullet. High-stakes testing, barriers to teacher selection, narrow measures of achievement, prescriptive appraisals come and go. We need new mindsets, pedagogies and processes that support change, not hinder it. We need to restate our educational narrative in terms that are relevant to today's world. Measurements of success have to be authentic.
5. **Start with the child, not the curriculum.** Schooling is currently organised the wrong way around. The curriculum becomes the structure for the learning and is delivered via a timetable. Yet we know that every child is different so there cannot be a 'one-size-fits-all' approach to schooling. Learning and teaching should be designed around each child's learning strengths and needs. In this way, the curriculum is the reference point, not the blueprint.
6. **Creating collaborative communities.** As Michael Fullan points out, the goal in schools is not to 'innovate the most' but to innovate with coherence. This means working through a process where everyone finds collective meaning in and a commitment to doing things not just differently but collaboratively, and ultimately better.

Transforming schools is not change for change sake, but a response to needs of contemporary learners. If we are prepared to allow our schools to remain what they have always been, locked into a learning model created for another time and place, then our students miss out on the opportunities and experiences that can prepare them for their world. We have a responsibility to not let them down. This responsibility is a leadership imperative. As Martin Luther King observed in a different, but relevant context that demanded change *"We are now faced with the fact, my friends, that tomorrow is today. We are confronted with the fierce urgency of now"*.

Learning to Unlearn 2016-11-25

It is astounding to think that nearly every week there is an education conference happening somewhere covering all aspects of schooling. Many of these have become big business but regardless of size or popularity, most conferences aim to facilitate learning. We attend conferences to acquire new knowledge or skills with the intent of learning and improving our work.

Learning is at core to the teaching profession – we strive to create (school) cultures and (teaching) practices that encourage rigorous thinking and life-long learning. We're all about the learning but what about the unlearning?

Twenty five years ago Alvin Toffler claimed that the illiterate of the 21st century would not be those who can't read and write but those who cannot 'learn, unlearn and relearn'. The Oxford dictionary states that to unlearn is to 'discard something learned, especially a bad habit or false or outdated information from one's memory. So the pressing question is how do we let go of the things that keep us rooted in ineffective and industrial practices and mindsets? Where are the conferences and courses that facilitate unlearning? Can we call ourselves a literate profession if we are not in the business of learning, unlearning and relearning?

To be fair, the educational system we inherited was designed to promote compliance over critical thinking. There has never really been incentive or time to collectively challenge bad habits and outdated practices because of the efficiency of the current model. The first step is to recognise that as a profession (and society) we need to unlearn what we know about schooling in order to relearn how to do schooling in a very different way. It's no longer about collective efficiency (of learning), it's about collective efficacy (unlearning). We need to remove the hierarchies that exist in schools and create agile networks where knowledge and skills are learned, unlearned and relearned.

I'm not alone in my thinking here. In 2009, the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership Limited (AITSL) published an article in its Teaching Australia newsletter titled 'Unlearning in the 21st Century'. The article quoted Professor Erica Mc William who challenged the teaching profession to move beyond the best practice of the 20th century to envisioning 'next' practice for the 21st century.

While we could be waiting a while for the 'unlearning' courses and conferences, we have the opportunity to become innovative next practitioners today.

What are schools preparing learners for? 2016-12-06

For more than a century the requirements of the workforce/economy have influenced what has been taught in schools. In the industrial age, skills like efficiency and conformity were highly valued. What developed was a model of schooling that endeavoured to impart these skills through the curriculum. Even today, the requirements of a 21st century workforce seem to dominate educational debate and discussion. A recent article in the Guardian on careers education stressed that in order for young people today to succeed in a 'new work order', we have to think in terms of skills. In fact, the word 'skill' was mentioned 22 times in the article. The words 'knowledge and insight' – zero.

How many keynotes have included the 'Did you Know' video? This is the one that states: "We are currently preparing students for jobs and technologies that don't yet exist. . . in order to solve problems that we don't even know are problems yet." Yes, I admit to using the video in keynotes to reinforce the argument that has always existed. Schools are in the business of preparing young people to become successful contributors to societies (i.e. economies). Even 'entrepreneurial' has become part of the vernacular of contemporary schooling.

Has our thinking really shifted when the schooling cart is still being pulled behind the economic horse? The skills that have become highly valued in developed societies are those that have been deemed critical 21st century skills by governments with market economies. And these skills are championed by businesses that contribute to and benefit from participation in these economies.

The question that we need to continually ask ourselves is 'are we designing schooling to extend individuals or economies?' As the English philosopher AC Grayling said work is not the sum of our lives. Schooling must exist for the totality of life not just one part of it. The scope of our work in schools can never be limited to training and skills but on developing higher mental capacities such as reasoning, insight and creative imagination.

A contemporary schooling experience must be one in which young people are able to see their worth not only in terms of their economic value but in who they are as individuals and their role as citizens in a global community.

Should international league tables drive education policy? 2016-12-07

Last week it was TIMSS. This week it's PISA. Report cards on the performance of education systems are everywhere right now.

The PISA results released today (PISA is the Program for International Assessment) tell a similar story to the TIMSS report last week: that Australian students are not performing as well as hoped for in core areas such as mathematics and science. It seems that our students are falling behind.

Education specialists from countries that take part in these international tests pore over the key findings and graphs contained in these reports to see where they sit in what is essentially a collection of international league tables. The countries that do well sing from the rooftops the virtues of their education system; those that don't do as well, gnash their teeth and look for someone to blame. The media have a field day with it: with lots of numbers and graphs and rankings, what's not to like?

Should we be worried?

There's a lot of information in the TIMSS and PISA reports, much of it useful. For example, the PISA data indicates that it is not just subject knowledge that our students are behind in; Australian students are also not showing the capacity to apply the mathematical and scientific knowledge they have in everyday situations. This is essential in a knowledge age.

What isn't useful when examining reports such as these is placing too much emphasis on ranking countries based on a narrow set of assessment instruments. Using a set of league tables to determine the direction of our nation's education policy and how billions of precious dollars should be spent into the future is dangerous. Politicians and advocacy groups will also use the information contained in these reports to push their own agenda, or for political point-scoring. This helps no-one.

Numbers and graphs are not sources of truth – they are instruments to help discover it. Rather than simply pledging blind allegiance to a narrow data set – however capably that data has been compiled – we should instead be using it as a starting point for exploring how we can do things better. We need to resist the temptation to take a simplistic view of the findings from the latest TIMSS and PISA reports. Such a view only leads to proposing simplistic solutions that don't work and waste taxpayers' money.

What schools are getting right *2016-12-13*

We've just survived two weeks of a media and political storm over the release of TIMSS and PISA results. We've heard loud and clear that Australia is falling behind OECD nations like Singapore, Finland and Estonia in reading, maths and science. We also know that we need to lift our game when it comes to educational excellence and equity. However to say that our education system as a whole is failing students because of the TIMSS and PISA data is for me, drawing a long bow.

While the trend data might not be good across the board, I believe Australian schools are committed to doing their best for young people. We know there is always opportunity to do better but sometimes we all need to step back and look at schooling through a wide lens.

I had the opportunity to sit down recently with a former student of Gilroy Catholic College. Chris Lee's story is powerful because the formative experiences and life skills nurtured throughout school are now having a positive impact on others. It is a timely reminder that more often enough schools do get it right.

Today's learners are stellar *2016-12-19*

I've worked in education for more than three decades and the brilliance of children never ceases to amaze. When you have a conversation with a young person you realise how curious and switched on they are about the world around them. Perhaps one of the reasons why young people are so creatively minded is because they are continually asking why, really why or making profound observations about the obvious. The fact that young people have greater access to information and ideas through technologies has the capacity to propel their learning even further.

Case in point is 8 year old Stella. Stella has grown up in a world immersed in technology, so it's no surprise that she has come up with an idea for an app based on a need in her own life.

The question is how is schooling ever going to catch-up let alone compete with the kind of learning happening outside of it? Stella typifies a generation who are learning on the go, learning what they want and with whom. This has profound implications for the way we understand today's learners and teach them.

Stephen Heppell once described today's learners as stellar. The greatest disservice we do is improving an outdated model of schooling that holds children back from reaching the stars.

* On a final note, thank you to those who have read, contributed to and commented on *bluyonder* over the past 12 months. To quote fellow educator Matt Esterman: "I cannot learn without others. No one truly achieves anything on their own. . . .we are each part of a vast, thriving ecosystem of learning." Ditto Matt. A safe and Merry Christmas.

2017 Writings

The evolution of schooling 2017-01-11

I was interested to read a recent report that Singapore schools will ease their focus on exam results in order to foster teacher/student innovation and creativity. Singapore's authorities have recognised that blitzing school exams may reflect a good technical understanding but it doesn't guarantee a creative or innovative mindset – a key ingredient in the knowledge economy.

Although Singapore has been at the top of its game in terms of educational excellence particularly in the international testing arena, there is a growing consensus that an overemphasis on exams takes away from the real purpose of learning – discovery. A director with Singapore's Ministry of Education was quoted as saying "Society's mindset also needs to shift over time, to celebrate a multitude of talent and the successes achieved via varied paths."

That shift is the acknowledgment that schools cannot operate the same way they have done for decades. Schooling has to evolve just as societies evolve. What is ironic is that we live in an age where technology and innovation touches our lives on a daily basis and yet we are still happy for today's young people to receive the same education and in the same manner we did. Schools largely continue to remain in some kind of stasis.

Three short months ago, we had in excess of 60,000 students in NSW sitting pen and paper Higher School Certificate (HSC) exams in rows of desks in school. What's changed in fifty years? Very little and that's something we shouldn't be celebrating. Singapore's rethink illustrates why we need to think differently about how we educate today's learners as well as how we measure success.

Last year I spoke at a conference of several hundred South American teachers and school leaders about the need to transform schooling for today's world and today's learners. While there is general assent to this proposition, all too often the feedback is that changing the nature of schooling is too difficult. Of course it will be difficult, transformation requires everything about schooling to change. Dealing with the naysayers, the skeptics, resisters and frightened is the territory you have buy into on the transformation journey.

As I said at the time, change starts with the individual leader and teacher. Don't wait for others to show the way or you'll be left in Godot's world. If every teacher in every school community introduced just one innovative practice, think of the number of examples of contemporary teaching practice we could explore.

Manual labour was hard work in the agrarian age; innovative schooling is hard work in a knowledge age but that's where we are in history. Progress begins by doing things differently and better.

Countries like Singapore and Finland are recognising there is more than one mountain to climb besides the international testing one. If the innovation mountain won't come to our teachers, then it's time we found ways of moving our teachers to the innovation mountain.

An education wishlist for 2017 2017-01-18

Social media, particularly Twitter, is awash with ‘listicles’ such as the ‘top four trends’ or the ‘five best ways to...’. So in the spirit of BuzzFeed, and to simplify the work for our politicians/policy-makers, here is a list of the top nine things that I would like to see happen in education in 2017:

1. *Educational discourse will be the product of informed viewpoints.* Mature and reasoned dialogue will be the key to fleshing out ideas. (Are you with me David Leyonhjelm?)
2. *High-quality early learning will be accessible to all children.* There will be more funding for childhood education. High-quality, well-resourced preschools staffed by university-educated teachers will become the norm, regardless of postcode or parental income.
3. *Child-centred educational policy will drive strategy.* Educational policy will be centred on the needs of the child. Policymakers will realise that providing access to quality education is not only a fundamental right for all children, it makes good sense socially and economically.
4. *Education will cease to be a playground for political point-scoring and the establishment of ideological supremacy.*
5. **The education**profession will reclaim the educational agenda.** It will seize the initiative for radical change and ignite a passion for innovative practice.
6. *Students will have more control over their own learning.* We will find better ways of including student voice in every aspect of schooling, especially in the learning process.
7. *We will have intelligent rather than just standardised testing.* Batteries of standardised tests can create a destructive culture of comparison and punitive accountability measures. Instead, we will have intelligent, authentic assessment that improves teacher practice and student learning simultaneously.
8. *Innovative practice will become the norm, not the exception.* Schools will be focused on the art of the possible....
9. *Collaboration will replace competition!*

So that’s my list. What’s yours?

Creating citizen scholars 2017-02-03

At the start of each school year, our school leadership teams gather to reflect on the work and remind ourselves of our why. A key focus for our system leaders this year is school attendance. We need *every student* showing up *every day* in order for them to receive a quality and relevant educational experience. We often place the reasons for poor attendance at the feet of students when in reality student engagement and quality learning lie with teachers and the school community. More often than not, it's the educational institutions not the individuals who have lost their way.

That's the point Angelo Kourtis, Vice-President (People and Advancement) from Western Sydney University was making when he spoke last week at our system leadership day. Angelo has been deeply involved in the rebranding of WSU, which he says has been driven by passion and philosophical underpinnings. Those underpinnings are built on the ideas of Socrates and classical philosophy and what it means to be a life-long learner and critical thinker.

According to Angelo, universities have diverted away from a classical understanding of an education, which is to bring out one's gifts and capabilities for the good of society to a narrative of preparing graduates for the world of work. At its heart, education is the process of developing insight, discovery and understanding and of making sense of what one has learned. This applies as much to a preschooler as it does to a university student.

In an age of globalisation and rapid technological change, Angelo says the needs of students are changing, the curriculum in the Australian context is simply not meeting those needs. He lamented that content had become king in universities but stated it is only through context that we can teach the importance of agency, advocacy and critical thinking.

Angelo believes universities must challenge and change the economic rationalist thinking that has diluted the higher education landscape. He says universities need to work in partnership to create alternatives to the current archaic model including the Australian Tertiary Admissions Rank (ATAR), which is a reductive system of measuring human potential.

The challenges Angelo named are equally relevant to K-12 schooling and call for a prodigious exercise of our collective imaginations. We are being challenged in the context of a knowledge age that is characterised by unprecedented and unrelenting change to move from knowing to thinking, from economic rationalism to enlightenment. What will guide us now is the sharing of creative ideas and the exercise of critical discernment based on an educational vision that exists to engage all students, bring forth their gifts and create citizen scholars.

Such an aspiration is often dismissed as being nebulous or interesting but of no relevance in a world dominated by a competitive paradigm which shapes a utilitarian view. In fact, I believe it is quite the opposite – this is the hard edge, the intellectual edge that demands deep thought and rigour. We refer to it as learning.

Cracking the code 2017-02-08

Last week in his address to the National Press Club, the Prime Minister made brief mention that increased funding to schools hasn't delivered improved educational outcomes. In the context of Australia's slipping international rankings in Maths, Science and Reading, the Federal Government wants the biggest bang for the least amount of bucks. One of the specific policies directly tied to funding is the introduction of a Year 1 Literacy Numeracy Assessment that includes a phonics screening check similar to the one introduced in Britain in 2012.

One of the most contentious, divisive and ongoing debates in education is the question around teaching children to read and the role that phonics plays in the process. Learning to read is one of the most complex tasks we engage in as humans. Unlike walking or talking, it is not a naturally acquired skill. For a minority of learners, reading does happen naturally before they start formal schooling without any deliberate, sequenced or planned instruction.

We need to ask ourselves as educators 'what does it mean to read?' Sometimes as adults we don't have the required knowledge to gain meaning from the text we are reading. Think about Sir Isaac Newton's *Principia* – we gain meaning from the text by drawing on many strategies including phonic knowledge.

If reading is seen as a process of making meaning, then there are many factors or elements that contribute to the success of reading instruction. As Marie Clay said (2001), "Knowing sounds of letters and letter clusters is essential but not sufficient for successful reading of texts."

What's interesting is that the evaluation report undertaken by the National Foundation for Educational Research has found that the Phonics Screening Check and the systematic teaching of phonics in Year 1 classes, increased children's ability to identify sounds and combinations of sounds, phonics but there was no discernible "identifiable impact on their attainment in literacy." (*Process of Evaluation of the Year 1 Phonics Screening Check Pilot – February 2015*).

No-one disputes that the sooner educators can intervene, the greater the opportunity for struggling students to achieve. Since 2009, our system has been assessing Year 1 students in Literacy and Numeracy. Using the data and relying on evidence-based research, we chose to implement two intervention programs for Year 1 students: *Reading Recovery* and *Extending Mathematical Understanding*. Since 2015, all of our primary schools have trained intervention teachers and trend data shows that we are making progress.

Except for a lucky few, reading instruction is a complex and arduous process for most learners. The danger is that when governments zero funding in on a specific strategy such as phonics, it's not at the expense of other evidence-based approaches. We need to take a long view here otherwise we run the risk of believing that one method, one strategy, one curriculum framework etc is the silver bullet needed for improving learning outcomes. If this were the case, we would have cracked the code long ago.

Give teaching back to teachers 2017-02-20

Too many teachers leave their profession within the first five years of teaching. Some Australian research puts that number at around 50%, and the numbers are similar in other developed countries.

We know some of the reasons why so many teachers leave the profession. We know that many feel the pressure of increased professional demands, more government regulations and the administrative overload. We also know that high teacher attrition rates have a negative impact on student achievement. We can't afford to lose good teachers.

We no longer expect students just to be just literate and numerate when they leave school. Our world demands that them to be critical and creative thinkers, innovative, collaborative, adaptable life long-learners. Add to this the regulatory burden of having teaching, learning and assessment monitored and there is little wonder why many teachers ask themselves the question: is it all worth it?

Newly graduated teachers are expected to hit the ground running after having spent a minimum of four years in an industrial model of teacher training only to find the real world of teaching is very different. For some, it can be disheartening. Most acknowledge that mentoring programs and ongoing support are essential, provided there is sufficient time and resources available. Ironically, these are the two things schools say they lack.

Richard Elmore once said that a non-professional teaching force is a compliant one. We need a new professionalism that is not borne from industrial mindsets or instruments for mandating teachers' work. The external accountability mechanisms actually disempower the very people we need to do the job well. Professional competence, confidence and capabilities need to be built from the inside out, not the outside in.

We need to give back to teachers control of the learning agenda. They also need to be supported with high-quality professional experiences. I want to make clear that I am not advocating an 'anything goes' approach. Good teachers are prepared to be accountable and responsible for their work and the work of their colleagues. But making them jump through hoop after hoop to justify their existence is draining and disheartening.

Twenty years ago Finland liberated their teachers from the tyranny of standardised testing and school inspections because they trusted their teachers to make the required pedagogical decisions and judgements to improve student outcomes. It worked. I believe it would work here too. Teachers will get the greatest satisfaction, and the trust they are entitled to from the community, when they are afforded the freedom to do what they signed up to do, and that's teach.

Spinning the chocolate wheel 2017-03-08

Chocolate Wheel 1920s (State Library of NSW)

I think I've been in education too long because I'm becoming more frustrated with changes continually being made to the 'curriculum'. Recently we read that the Year 12 Higher School Certificate syllabus will be overhauled following concerns that subjects were being dumbed down and we continue to fall behind globally. It is interesting to see that everything announced has been done before. It didn't work then so why do we think it will today? The only impact seems to silence the critics seeking recognition of their ideological or cultural bias of what young people need to know or should be taught. Let's just spin the [school] chocolate wheel again and end up with the same old prizes.

If the history of curriculum design, development and implementation tells us anything it's that we are in a slow moving cycle of repeating the same curriculum constructs with a different emphasis every decade or so. Where is the new thinking, new constructs, the innovation that is demanded in today's world?

Successive state governments have been tweaking the curriculum largely along ideological lines and we see now that history is repeating itself with the next iteration on depth and rigour, maths and phonics. In the midst of this tweaking cycle, other forces of change emerged. The first and most important in my view was the increase in educational research, which has helped shape a better understanding of what works in schools and classrooms and what doesn't. The work of researchers like Patrick Griffin, Dylan Wiliam, Viviane Robinson and Helen Timperley etc is internationally recognised. Yet is difficult to find similar influencers in curriculum design.

Secondly, the rise of international testing and the development of national league tables has had a profound effect on education ministers who are continually being asked to explain why their education systems are 'failing' compared to high performing nations. These comparisons do nothing more than distract our attention and dilute the work of teachers.

Thirdly, the emergence of the over-crowded curriculum. Schools are being asked to teach across a broad range of social issues. It started with driver education programs to now include de-radicalisation and everything in between. Where are the enlightened discussions on these curriculum intrusions?

Finally, the federal government has introduced a national curriculum to which all states have signed onto in various degrees. However, the hidden curriculum has been ignored or is at least implied. The justification is that any change made will somehow fix the system and improve schooling. The curriculum isn't the issue here – it's only a tool and no improving the tool will ever improve teacher practice. The curriculum doesn't teach. Unless we change the way teachers do their work we are condemning another two generations of past practice with past outcomes.

Can we not imagine a curriculum that is designed around the needs and interests of every single learner? Can't we aim for a vibrant community of collaborative learners who have responsibility and choice when it comes to their learning? The bottom line is that schools have to transform themselves from the one size fits all structures, mindsets and processes that have dominated for a century. It calls for re-imagining not improving.

Choice and the new generation 2017-03-21

You may be old enough to remember when Pepsi launched a campaign in the 1980s claiming that its cola was ‘the choice of a new generation’. In the context of education, it seems obvious that ‘choice’ should be synonymous with a new generation of schooling. Choice marks a shift in the ownership of learning. In the past, the learning agenda has been driven predominantly by the system or by government policy. Students haven’t been expected to ‘own’ their learning. This probably accounts for generations of disengaged learners who felt like they had little involvement in what they learned, how they learned and at what pace. Too often, learning has been a process of doing to rather than doing with. The irony today is that we want all young people to become independent learners but too many of the learning environments are still set up towards dependency and control.

This has been made more obvious with the roll-out of the Australian Curriculum (AC). The AC defines very specific ‘learning entitlements’ or content. In NSW for instance, the ‘stronger’ HSC has reduced student choice within some subjects around topics as well as imposing a minimum benchmark for literacy and numeracy.

When learning is largely content or syllabus-driven rather than student-interest driven, we deny students the right to agency and autonomy. We know from research that this is an integral part of effective learning and teaching. As Will Richardson noted, real learning happens when there is the ‘power to choose, and we facilitate that in schools by creating the conditions and space for that to happen at a student (and a teacher) level.’

I recently spent some time with Lyn Sharratt and two of our secondary schools who were sharing their experiences on encouraging learners to read. One of the simplest strategies on the road towards agency was giving students a choice of text instead of mandating a single text to read. Teachers noticed more students were willing to step up and challenge themselves when the purpose of *why* and *what* was clearly articulated and understood. The outcome was higher levels of student (and teacher) engagement and, unsurprisingly, improved attendance in class. These teachers are now looking at how they can extend student choice to other subject areas.

Disappointingly, schooling has been largely driven by the system instead of by students, supported by their teachers. Schooling today can and should be a ‘win-win’ proposition by giving all students greater ownership over their learning, greater input into the curriculum and greater choice in pursuing passions.

Projects with a purpose 2017-04-04

Seymour Papert was one of the great (educational) thinkers and visionaries of the modern age. A mathematician, computer scientist and educator, he was a founding member of MIT's renowned Media Lab. As MIT's President said following Papert's death last year, 'Seymour..helped revolutionize at least three fields, from the study of how children make sense of the world, to the development of artificial intelligence, to the rich intersection of technology and learning.'

Reflecting recently on Papert's four guiding principles for learning, MIT Professor Mitch Resnick said that Paper believed in the power of projects. Often schools focus on teaching students problem-solving skills but Papert argued that students learn to solve problems through the context of projects. Projects enable people to come together to learn with and from each other. Papert saw how technology could extend collaboration by connecting young people through the creation of online communities.

Project-based learning (PBL) ticks these two boxes. A number of our primary and secondary schools have adopted PBL with impressive results not only in terms of learning outcomes but also increased student/teacher engagement. The core of the PBL model is about working in collaboration with others to extend and deepen learning.

Recently, we started working with Steve Zipkes, founding principal of Cedars International High School and Academy in Austin Texas. The purpose of the engagement is to grow our understanding of learning frameworks that engage both teachers and students in a research approach to learning through integrated real life experiences using a collaborative model of learning. Steve has been working in education for more than two decades and has been recognised nationally and internationally for his design practices. In his last two STEM-focused schools, students were completing an average of 50 projects a year!

As Steve says, PBL is about student engagement to deepen learning. Unlike the standard method of learning and teaching which is geared towards mastering content, PBL is geared towards transferring student knowledge to real world issues. It has a rigorous hands-on approach compared to the traditional hands-off and hand-me-down approach to knowledge creation and ideas. Like Papert, Steve believes that it's the engagement in the project that develops critical skills like problem-solving, collaboration, communication, student agency and self-efficacy.

While the concept of project-based learning can be traced back to John Dewey, the integration of technology means that PBL is geared for today's world. Steve notes that PBL plants the seeds for innovation by allowing students and teachers to bring their creativity and ideas into each project. While PBL has led to a renewed interest in schooling, teacher retention and higher attendance rates, Steve does caution that the standards must drive everything. As he says, teachers need to understand the processes and planning that form the basis of good projects.

PBL, STEM, deep pedagogies, Montessori and the like are blooming in the education field. As such, they can be often seen to be a silver bullet for making schooling more relevant to learners but this is to misunderstand the theory base on which they are built. Our approach is to ensure our learning frameworks in schools are 'experiential' using an inquiry model of learning through reflection on doing. Put simply, learning tasks should be challenging, integrated, interdisciplinary and real-life experiences that start from what the student knows and allows for deep reflection on the process. No one model can lay claim to owning this approach but we can use PBL and other approaches as a lens through which to view an experiential model.

Seymour Papert saw the need for education to be about engagement not explanation. We can only do that if we are building on as Mitch Resnick says students' interests and passions. An experiential model is a powerful way to continue the ideas and legacy of Seymour Papert.

Schooling 4.0 2017-05-02

As educators we've always tried to minimise the impact of disruption to learning and teaching. Yet we live in an age of (digital) disruption and the rapid onset of more powerful and converging technologies compel us to adapt and respond in today's world.

As new technologies connect and personalise how we live, work and learn in powerful ways, most schools and universities continue to operate in a time warp that ignores the trends and reality of a changing world. Digital disruption highlights just how much resistance to change there is across education, the very industry that should be at the forefront of innovative thinking. Unless we become early adopters and evangelists, we will join other industries that have failed to keep up with the rapid pace of change.

The university sector is exploring the concept of University 4.0 characterised by flexible teaching methods, shorter degrees and needs based (micro) qualifications. It also calls for universities to be co-located with industries and start-ups so that students gain meaningful real-world experiences.

LaTrobe University head John Dewar said recently, "University 4.0 recognises that... modern students will take pathways into and out of higher education throughout their careers... the shelf life of the knowledge earned in a degree is getting shorter, that we need to engage increasingly with an array of partners in the outside world."

The challenge for us is to explore the concept of Schools 4.0, where a narrow curriculum framework is replaced by a curriculum that follows the child, where students have multiple and flexible pathways to success, where each school engages with a variety of collaborative partners to complement learning, where there is a balance of virtual/physical, digital/analogue and where we innovative to learn.

Our system's exploration of 'Schools 4.0' has informed the design of St Luke's Catholic College, Marsden Park and the STEM focussed school located within Sydney's Science Park (right) at Luddenham. Both schools represent the next iteration of thinking around schooling in today's world bringing together contemporary theory, practice and evidence. While many schools were fit for purpose in an industrial age, we need schools to be fit for purpose in the knowledge age.

Similar to University 4.0, these schools will work collaboratively with industry and community partners. The Sydney Science Park school will be co-located with science and technology industries. It represents a new ecosystem of schooling that is dynamic, digital, collaborative, and responsive to changing needs and times.

Like it or not, the world will continue to change and open up new opportunities to redesign schooling. Technology platforms will allow new ways of working. Global connections for learning certification and accreditation will create competition among providers in a whole new way. What it means to be a teacher will change, and that's ok.

As Pope Francis said in 2015, we are not 'living in an era of change but a change of era' – an era where disruption has become the norm.

Wisdom from the middle 2017-05-30

There's an adage in sport that says 'play the ball, not the man'. It means that despite opposing views, all sides should be mature enough to debate the issues rather than launch personal attacks. The recent debate over a new funding model and what it will mean for the Catholic education sector has seen a lot of 'playing the man'.

The Catholic education sector has been accused of robbing the poor to pay the rich while the Turnbull Government has been accused of taking money from schools and not consulting with those responsible for the delivery of schooling. As history has shown, this kind of language achieves little. It simply distracts from the work of creating better schools.

In Australia, successive governments have continued to increase funding for education. Recently, the Prime Minister announced an additional \$19 billion would go into education over the next decade. That commitment to funding all systems (government and non-government) is a recognition not only of the contribution all schools make to their communities but the right of parents to make a choice.

What the new funding arrangements will mean for Catholic schools and families is still not entirely clear although there has been progress of late. I am particularly pleased that fears in the past week of large fee increases for some families are starting to dissipate.

There remain a number of issues that still need to be addressed before Catholic school leaders can feel confident with the new model. One is the use of the Socio Economic Score (SES) to determine how much funding each school will receive. This coarse-grain analysis ignores the fact that you can have families with high and low incomes living in the same SES catchment. David Gonski and successive governments have realised that we need a better indicator or a finer-grain analysis for developing equitable funding models. I agree with him.

The other major issue is the importance of enshrining in the legislation the capacity of systems to redistribute resources to where they are most needed. That is the strength of the Catholic education system. We all know that it is at the local level that need is best determined.

In reality, no funding model is ever going to tick all the boxes. Hopefully sensible discussion will follow in the months ahead based on what we all agree on. Firstly, there must be a base level of funding that goes to every child in Australia. Secondly, that we address equity through clear and transparent processes that provide additional funding to children and schools in greatest need.

Polarising the debate does not score educational goals – the wisdom has to come from the middle.

The STEM train 2017-06-08

It seems almost everyone is aboard the STEM train and it has left the station. Governments have been extolling the virtues of STEM across K-12 schooling and the need for it to be taught in engaging and interesting ways. In my four decades of working in education, I've never seen an acronym like this that has fundamentally changed the educational landscape. So with such intense focus on STEM or its variant STEAM, I wonder whether anyone has unpacked it?

The origins of Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) came from the US in the late eighties when there was a considerable decline in the number of students taking up science disciplines. While the STEM label is relative new, schools have always recognised the importance of teaching mathematics and science. Technology and engineering though have largely been the preserve of universities.

While STEM is a worthwhile pursuit, we are misguided if we think that it is the silver bullet for making schooling more relevant in today's world or for solving the big challenges our global community faces. As Bybee (2010) stated, if STEM education is going to move beyond a 'slogan', than educators will need to unpack what STEM means in terms of educational policy, programs and practices.

We are living in a world where knowledge, ideas and people are becoming increasingly interconnected and STEM is part of this broad ecosystem. The way forward as people like David Christian (Big History Project) has shown is an interconnected, interdisciplinary real-world approach because once disciplines are separated, the value of STEM is lost.

In the context of pre-post schooling, the value of STEM is its holistic approach to interdisciplinary and scientific thinking. We know this needs to start early – as early as preschool and it needs to be inclusive of all learners no matter their gender or cultural background. Schools must see STEM through a multidimensional lens – an integrated learning framework that promotes all STEM for all not some STEM for all. This translates in practice to an experiential learning paradigm that is driven by an inquiry cycle where students are working collaboratively on challenging real-world tasks. It has to be whole of school, driven by inquiry and advanced through practical professional learning.

We need a major rethink if we are to move beyond the fashionable STEM label in education to a definition that reflects the interconnectedness of the real-world and the dynamic range of careers and industries evolving in light of advancing technologies and scientific discoveries.

What do mega-trends mean for schooling? 2017-06-22

I had the pleasure of speaking at the 2017 Edutech conference in Sydney recently. The conference is a ‘finger on the pulse’ on what is happening in schooling and the trends that are shaping the educational landscape.

Interesting isn’t it that we live at a time where we have moved on from talking about trends and data to ‘mega-trends’ and ‘big-data’. Connectivity, scalability and mobility have been massive game-changers in that we no longer see business dictating trends. Instead we have technology delivering greater power to clients, customers and learners.

This leads to the development of new business models. The point is, that schooling is not immune from the global trends influencing our work, our lives and our future. Being responsive to these social changes requires us to continually develop new models for delivering learning and teaching just as Amazon is in retail and Netflix is in entertainment.

If you’re interested, Frost and Sullivan released its Global Mega Trend Matrix to 2025. It’s interesting to see how these ‘transformative, global forces’ are predicted to impact on all aspects of society. So what do the Mega-Trends mean for schooling? My thoughts are below:

1. *Connectivity and convergence*: Futurist Thomas Frey recently predicted that by 2030, education will be delivered by ‘bots. . . smart enough to personalise each lesson plan to the child sitting in front of the screen.’ Frey says the old model of twenty kids in a classroom vying for the attention of the teacher will be replaced by a more efficient model allowing learning to happen much faster. New technologies will be discarded on the basis of whether they add value to the user or not.
2. *Smart is the new green*. Best articulated by Linda Darling-Hammond in her 2010 book ‘The Flat World and Education’ – we need to ‘establish a purposeful, equitable education system that will prepare *all* our children for success in a knowledge-based society.’
3. *Health, wellness and well-being*. PISA released its first report on student well-being this year. There is a growing body of evidence on the link between wellness and educational outcomes. As Dylan Wiliam said our thinking on this has been upside down – the emotional is as important as the cognitive in learning.
4. *Future of mobility*. Anywhere, anytime learning that is physical and virtual. The learner dictates when where and how they want to learn.
5. *New business models for many*. As Facebook and Amazon have shown, the new business model takes personalisation to scale. And that is what we in schools are challenged to do – take the personalisation of learning to scale.
6. *Innovation to zero*. When Nokia developed the mobile phone it cost \$2000. We started with the phone and ended up with free apps. Like the Nokia phone, we are moving away from the costly physical buildings to a blend of physical and virtual learning environments.

The overwhelming conclusion we can draw from these Mega-Trends is the hubris of believing schools can and must control learning and teaching in today’s world. It ignores that the fact that society has moved on and learners will shape models of schooling. The cold hard truth is adapt or risk oblivion.

The end of efficiency 2017-06-29

The industrial model of schooling is characterised by its efficiency of processing children through the system en masse. That is why the model has been easy to replicate over the decades and why its processes and structures still dominate today. We have come to rely (almost blindly) on its efficiency at the expense of effectiveness and innovation. The question we need to ask is whether we still want schools to be efficient in today's world?

Simon Sinek has spoken a lot about the concept of innovation and efficiency within organisations and says if you're pursuing one, you cannot pursue the other. They cannot co-exist because efficiency relies on improving what has always been done. Innovation responds to the present.

We can agree that efficiency as a construct for driving improvement has well and truly reached its use by date. Really successful organisations focus on value not efficiency. The value proposition by definition is that organisations have to be responsive in their context and environment. They have to embrace change and innovation and demonstrate value for these processes. Value and effectiveness are equally important for schooling as they are for the business sector. We need to acknowledge that we can't ignore efficiency but the modern term is value.

If we want schooling to be innovative and add value, then we can no longer pursue efficiency. A new model of schooling must be dynamic, critical, explorative and iterative in the way design thinking is. This is about creating new learning environments that encourage students to embrace trial and error with an experimental mindset. It requires teachers to continually craft a curriculum that is personally meaningful and intellectually rigorous to every learner, every day.

This is why innovative schools like High Tech High are so successful. Teaching is not reduced to a prescribed curriculum, daily objective or test. Rather the model is responsive, adaptive and designed around what students want to learn and need to learn to become innovative knowledge workers.

This quote below from Elon Musk was posted a few weeks back. It reinforces the point that efficiency leaves no room for mistakes; no room for innovation in schools. It is high time we made space for both.

The X-factor 2017-07-19

An interesting dichotomy exists in our society between how teachers are represented within traditional forms of media. Film/TV have typically depicted teachers as walking on holy ground having earned the respect and admiration of students particularly those on the margins. Think of *To Sir with Love*, *Dead Poets Society* or *Goodbye Mr Chips*. Then there are the tabloid newspapers that blame teachers for lacklustre NAPLAN results and the decline in educational standards.

I suspect for most students, their experience of teachers lies somewhere in between the two extremes. In a particular year or subject they end up hitting the jackpot, and in other years or subjects, not so lucky. It is often evident which teachers are having a positive impact on student learning. These are the ones who inspire a love of learning; who can challenge students while maintaining their enthusiasm to persevere and succeed.

As one parent asked recently, ‘Why don’t all teachers have that X-factor?’ It’s difficult to answer because no matter how good teachers are at their craft, there is always so much more to learn (about students, themselves, their practice etc). I believe there is an intellectual arrogance that is deeply embedded in the teaching profession. This equates to the belief that once teachers step into classrooms they know everything there is to know.

I believe the X-factor relates to curiosity and a willingness to innovate to achieve the best outcomes for each learner. This means assuming greater professional responsibility and accountability for teachers’ own and their students’ learning. It is reflected in an openness to embrace change and to continuously transform one’s self, one’s practice and in the process, one’s students.

Philosopher Soren Kierkegaard argued that Christians should never think of themselves as ‘being’ but rather ‘becoming’. The same argument applies to teaching. The work is never complete; we must always be in the process of ‘becoming’ a teacher.

The best script teachers write is the one in which students see learning as essentially humanising and teachers are as open to learning as they are to teaching. In an age where artificial intelligence (AI) will have an impact on almost every profession as we know it, the real X-factor may be that great teachers are irreplaceable.

Academically engineered schools 2017-07-31

A parent mentioned recently that their daughter's primary school had a strong focus on gifted and talented students much to the exclusion of other students. As the parent explained, her daughter and the other 'non-gifted' students were miffed they didn't have the same activities as the gifted and talented students. This reminds me of a comment by Edward de Bono who described the current model of schooling as a pyramid in which the bottom 80% of students were being taught so that the top 20% could go onto university.

There are two tiers that currently exist within our education system between selective and comprehensive. Recently, NSW Department of Education secretary, Mark Scott announced a review of the Gifted and Talented policy within government schools to address among other things the inequity that currently exists in securing a place in selective schools. There was even a suggestion that having selective primary schools would ensure gifted and talented students receive the appropriate support and/or intervention.

The danger in all of this is that providing for one group means we risk neglecting others. As I've said before creating more selective schools doesn't address the issue of equity, it simply creates more inequity. We then end up with academically engineered learning environments that are not reflective of contemporary Australian society.

Gifted and talented programs emerge out of a one size fits all model that responds to teaching to the middle. This sort of thinking needs to be challenged; turned on its head. At the risk of sounding radical, every child is gifted and we need to learn how to deal with the diversity that exists in all schools.

#mythbusting Finnish education 2017-08-15

Finnish educator, author and advisor Pasi Sahlberg was in Sydney recently to deliver our annual Ann D Clark lecture. There aren't too many countries that haven't been compared or aspire to the Finnish model of education. I don't want to disappoint the publishers, pundits and policymakers but in his keynote, Pasi revealed some home truths about the Finnish education system that debunks many of the urban legends that surround Finnish schools.

The first was a report published in the reputable Independent Newspaper in 2015 proclaiming that Finland would scrap its Subjects. Not true according to Pasi. In fact Finnish schools continue to teach Subjects but what was missed in the report was that within their new national curriculum framework, schools must include a period of time each year where subjects are replaced by some kind of project-based learning. This might be over two days or over a semester, it depends entirely on what the school thinks is best for its learners. The real highlight in this story is the amount of professional freedom and autonomy for schools to write their own curriculum within an over-arching framework and for students to be engaged in planning and assessing what they learn within the project period.

The second myth is that Finland doesn't give students homework or that it is minimal. Pasi was quick to point out that this was one of the most 'dangerous myths' because other countries want to follow in the footsteps by abolishing homework. The truth is that Finnish schools do give students homework but their approach is mindful and meaningful. In other words, it is not homework for homework's sake or because parents want it or teachers haven't had time to cover a concept in class. Pasi says there is always a clear reason for doing homework and children fully understand the purpose of it in the context of their learning. Pasi made the point that it would be virtually impossible to learn maths simply by attending class without embedding the knowledge at home through practising and problem-solving.

Myth number three is that Finland only attracts the best and brightest to the teaching profession. This resonates with debate here in Australia over raising entry levels into teacher degrees and introducing literacy and numeracy tests for graduate teachers. The truth is that all teachers in Finland are prepared through a research university and must have a Masters degree to teach but this doesn't make them better teachers. Pasi said the competitiveness of entry into a teaching degree isn't based on those students who were academically superior at school. Rather, the university accepts students who may score low in English and Maths but have other skills as musicians, actors, athletes or community workers that make a valuable contribution to the learning community. The take-home message is that you don't have to be academically gifted to be the best teacher.

Pasi's keynote confirmed what we already know. That is, it's futile for schools or systems outside of Finland or anywhere else to imitate. What we can do is to learn from best policy, practice and outcomes and contextualise it to our own learning communities.

** If you would like to hear more of Pasi and other innovative educators in conversation, we're launching a new podcast series soon searchable through iTunes and Soundcloud called Bluyonder Voices. Stay tuned via the blog for updates and links.

Five pillars to transformation 2017-08-23

I was honoured to deliver the Sir Harold Wyndham Oration two weeks ago. In my speech, I argued that it is time to be bold and creative and to take the radical path in imagining what schools need to be. It is time to go beyond an improvement agenda and instead adopt a transformation agenda. In calling for this, I'm not the first to say that things need to transform. In my speech, I outlined five touchstones that underpin the transformation agenda we are driving in Western Sydney.

The first is that *learning is the game*. This means that everyone who is a member of the learning eco-system (students, parents, teachers, school leaders, system) see themselves as learners. To learn is to grow – you can't learn without undergoing some kind of change, which is why we need teachers to be continually transforming the learning and teaching.

The second is *diversity is the norm*. Schools were designed to foster uniformity, which might have worked for preparing children for industrial jobs. We know that today's work has been transformed by technology, so schools have to be places where innovation, creativity and critical thinking are nurtured in all students.

The third is *there is no one size fits all*. We have to design systems that meet each student where they are at developmentally, socially and academically. It's a tough leadership challenge when the system has been efficiently replicated over a century. While technology is an enabler, we need to re-imagine schooling by recognising the endless possibilities.

The fourth is *collaboration trumps competition*. Despite the last 40 years of being told that competition is best, human progress has always flourished when people have worked collaboratively. Schools and systems are now embracing this way of working in order that everyone progresses.

The last is *equity*. We must do more than just talk about the equity gap in education. The current approach whereby each student is entitled to the same level of resourcing does not address the growing divide between the have and have-not schools. Those students with the greatest need have to get the most funding, regardless of where they go to school.

These pillars are not directives but touchstones to inform the work we do on behalf of our learners, learning communities and the broader society.

Bluyonder voices podcast #1 2017-08-30

Over the past decade I've had the opportunity to chat with some innovative and inspiring educators, leaders and academics. So often the focus is on what they are doing now rather than how they came to teaching and what inspired them then and now.

That's the starting point for a new podcast series 'bluyonder voices', where each month I'll sit down and chat to educators to learn more about who inspired them and what they are most passionate about. You'll be able to search for the podcasts via iTunes. As always, I'd love your feedback so please rate the podcasts on iTunes and let us know who you'd like to feature in upcoming episodes.

First guest is Finnish educator, author and innovator, Pasi Sahlberg. Pasi was in Sydney recently. He is a passionate advocate for the teaching profession and for sharing the best of Finnish practice around the world.

Failure Week 2017-09-13

There's been quite a bit of media coverage on the decision by Ivanhoe Girls' Grammar School to introduce 'Failure Week' as a way of normalising failure. The rationale behind this was a growing concern about student well-being and the negative impact 'failure' was having on students' self-confidence and achievement. Former Labor leader Mark Latham referred to it as 'another piece of PC nonsense' and asked what it had to do with the teaching of English, maths and science. Actually, failure has a lot to do with it. Any school that acknowledges and even celebrates failure needs to be applauded but celebrating failure for one week out of a school year is not enough to counter the cultural tide.

What the media coverage has done though is shine a light on one of the biggest flaws in the current model of schooling. Sir Ken Robinson in his TED talk on creativity articulated the problem – we have turned failure into an illicit activity to be avoided at all costs. Our schools have institutionalised failure. We design assessments to sift, sort and judge students' capabilities and intelligences then end up with this ridiculous notion that students pass or fail NAPLAN or the HSC. In short we are actively discouraging the very thing that schools are expected to do. The answer to the problem is not structural. Sanctioning certain times to allow young people to experience failure in their learning hides a much deeper problem. And this is that we see learning in terms of competition and as with competition, there are always winners and losers. We even believe that we can quantify down to a decimal point, the degree of that failure.

Thomas Edison Uploaded by Bemoeial at Dutch Wikipedia via Wikimedia Commons

At what point in history did we think it appropriate or valuable to impose limits on learning? Likely well before Thomas Edison went to school. We should not be surprised that Edison was home-schooled because his mother felt formal schooling was too rigid. Edison typifies the value of failure as fundamental to learning. We should be grateful that he never gave up after his 745th attempt at inventing the electric light!

Schools like the Evangelical School Berlin Centre (ESBC) represent a new wave of schooling in which students are encouraged to experiment. They are supported to make their own decisions about the direction of their learning and to see failure as more valuable than success. Schools like these are the 21st century versions of Edison's research lab where learning is not a pass or fail but a joyful life-long experience.

Bluyonder voices #2 – teaching through generations 2017-09-20

There's been a positive response to the podcast series, so here's the second instalment of bluyonder voices. As always if you like the series, please rate it on iTunes.

Robert Nastasi has taken up his first principal role at Emmaus Catholic College, Kemps Creek. As the son of Italian migrants, Robert discusses why he is imparting the same message to students that his parents imparted to him.

Why conservatism is failing students 2017-10-02

I was interviewed for the Weekend Australia (23 September 2017) on a range of issues including the misuse of NAPLAN, the irrelevancy of the Higher School Certificate and the need for a more purposeful and personalised curriculum. Understandably, these views (which are not inconsistent with others championing educational change) were not given the thumbs up by all readers. In fact, a many felt compelled to respond, questioning my professional competence (and even my sanity!) to suggest that schools need to be responsive to the changing times.

Emotions aside, we need to be able to respond as a profession to the challenges of schooling in today's world. Firstly, *there is and always will be a need for meaningful assessments* that provide constructive feedback. It is formative assessment that teachers not only gauge how effective they are but give students an understanding of where they are and where they need to go. Secondly, we need a curriculum that is *less rigid but no less rigorous* – a curriculum that allows students to learn through inquiry and trial-and-error rather than the installation of facts that are removed from their own interests and reality. Thirdly, there will always be the need for explicit teaching and teacher-guided lessons but not to the exclusion of student-voice in the learning and teaching. Fourthly, the profession needs to take greater responsibility for shaping and delivering the learning agenda, not the public or politicians. As Pasi Sahlberg said at the Anne D Clarke Lecture in August this year, there is far more professional freedom and autonomy in Finland because teachers are trusted by society to do what is best for their students and their local school community.

Andreas Schleicher, director-general of the OECD's Directorate for Education has written a sobering piece in the Australian recently in which he stated:

The difference between education systems that are open to the world and ready to learn from other experiences, and those that feel threatened by being exposed or being left behind or to alternative ways of thinking and working is likely to be a key differentiator in the educational progress that we will see around the world.

The world is indifferent to tradition...unforgiving of frailty and ignorant of custom or practice. Success will go to those individuals and nations that are swift to adapt, slow to complain and open to change. The task of governments is to help citizens rise to the challenges.

Sadly, it is clear that there is that is a deep conservatism running through society based on a fear of change. Everyone with an interest in education owe it to every student in every Australian school to keep dialogue open about what good schools look like now and into the future.

Underrating students' capacity to learn *2017-10-11*

There is sufficient recognition that our current model of schooling underrates students' ability to learn particularly those who sit outside of the bell curve. All too often the bar is too low or unrealistically high. Those who fail to meet the narrow measures are considered non-academic and thus, not bright. Yet outside in the real world, these students are highly creative and confident learners.

My colleague's son was placed in the lowest math's class at his primary school. He knows it and he doesn't want to be there. Yet he was able to construct a sophisticated remote control Lego car without any adult assistance in less than 3 hours. He then wanted to learn how to programme the car, which he knew he wouldn't be allowed to do during school hours. His classroom teacher has been made aware of his interest in Lego but that's where personalised learning ends.

I've said before that we don't do enough to recognise and leverage off student interests to engage and extent learning. We are seeing more and more that it is technology not the teacher, that is responsive to today's learners.

Late last term I was out at one of our secondary schools and met an articulate Year 7 student. Jeremy and his friends created an app aimed at helping them address their homework questions. I was impressed not only with the sophistication of the app but with their understanding of peer-to-peer learning. The question that continues to surface for me in all of these examples is 'what is an appropriate learning pathway for these students in a traditional school environment?'

I am struggling to understand why we are still not able to let go of outdated curriculum constructs and why we are not listening to students. Remaining where we are and where we've always been not only entrenches the status quo but limits the possibilities for all learners.

Bluyonder voices #3 – next generation teachers 2017-10-24

In case you haven't marked it on your calendar, October the 27th is World Teacher's Day. It is often easy to dismiss these UNESCO events, however Friday is an opportunity to recognise the valuable contribution teachers make to the lives of students, their communities and society.

As I've said before, we have never needed good teachers more than we do in this rapidly changing world. In this month's podcast of bluyonder voices, I chat with a teacher who is at the start of their professional journey. Elena Stivactas represents the future of the profession – the next generation of teachers who also happens to be working at a next generation school – St Lukes Catholic College, Marsden Park.

Teachers are the new transformers *2017-11-01*

The fast pace world in which we live challenges us to think differently about the nature of learning and teaching. I've been talking a lot this year about the need to move from an improvement agenda to a transformational one. While the transformational agenda is sector blind, it does lie at the core of our mission in Catholic education. When we transform schooling, we transform individuals and society. It calls us back to the real purpose of an education, which is not simply to prepare students to become mere servants of the economy. Rather it is to strengthen relationships with Christ and with each other and to enrich a view of the world in which life is worth living. Education at best provides a solid foundation for all members of society for living life to the full.

At the start of this year, Bishop of Parramatta, Most Reverend Vincent Long Van Nguyen outlined his vision for Catholic Education. It is a vision grounded in the Gospel message of radical inclusion. A radically inclusive school exists to deliver a contemporary education and quality outcomes for all students especially those on the margins of our communities.

Transformation is a journey into never been before territory. It is a prodigious challenge to our imaginations that calls us to continually ask 'what if and why?' Transformation is a journey into the deep – deeper relationships, deeper learning, deeper teaching and deeper knowledge. It does not mean launching into the great unknown and hoping for the best. It recognises that we must launch from a solid foundation of evidence, theory and best practice. It challenges all working in education to think creatively, to act courageously and to continually seek more engaging ways of drawing out the capacities, talents and gifts within each child. Education must not only be life-long but it must enable us to grow in wisdom and understanding.

The changes we see in technology and the arrival of artificial intelligence create an urgency to move beyond the status quo into uncharted territory by re-visiting the core questions of what (we teach), who (are our learners) and how (do we engage and inspire all learners).

There are many forces seeking to re-shape the future of schooling including governments who seek a return on their massive investment in schools as well as a workforce fit for the knowledge economy. However, those that are critical to the transformational agenda are teachers who can continually re-focus on the core purpose of education and re-imagine schooling for a new era.

The academisation of schools *2017-11-07*

After another big school year, I'm now on professional leave for the next few weeks where the bulk of my time will be attending an advanced leaders course at Cambridge. I'll also be visiting some innovative schools and meeting with educational authorities in England and Scandinavia. The focus will be on how these schools and systems are responding to the transformation agenda.

Last week I spent two days with Stephen Heppell visiting West Thornton Primary Academy and Stanley Park High School in South London. The chance to spend time talking 'schooling and learning' with Stephen is priceless but it takes on an added dimension when you are able to see innovation in action and talk to creative and passionate school leaders.

England is currently undergoing a mass privatisation of schools, which appears to me as to be a way of devolving more control to each school. Local Education Authorities (LEAs) are being phased out and replaced by Academies that receive government funding directly. In this way, the LEA is made redundant. It is a process called 'academisation' where not for profit entities are being encouraged to join together as Multi Academy Trusts (MATs). Forgive the acronyms!

Trusts are formed by willing Academies who can become de facto LEAs. There is no overall oversight by governments outside of setting performance benchmarks, which if not met, can lead to school closures. While this is a very general description there is a high degree of concern in the UK for the direction being taken. Like other education systems, there is an ever-widening gap between great schools and those struggling.

However, from what I've seen there is a real drive for transformation across schools. Pockets of innovative practice are evident but as always, much harder to sustain over the long-term. New spaces are emerging as teachers are moving to more collaborative practices and personalised learning. The good news is that teacher learning is a high priority in schools.

Those who read this blog know that I have been critical of state and federal education policy in Australia for some time. In comparison to what is happening in England I think we can be thankful that our policy platform is relatively stable. The key is to achieve balance between total autonomy and central control. Although we haven't reached Finnish status, we are seeing greater trust as schools realise they can demonstrate excellence in learning and compliance.

Bluyonder voices #4 – a connected school leader 2017-11-15

I hope you have been enjoying bluyonder voices so far; if you like the podcasts then please rate on iTunes.

John Goh is what I would call a connected principal in today's world. He's on social media (@johnqgoh), writes a blog, is on twitter every Thursday evening hosting #ozprimschchat and attended the Harvard Graduate School of Education. For the past twelve years he has been leading the culturally diverse community of Merrylands East Public School in western Sydney.

John is a school leader who is actually walking the talk through the introduction of flexible school hours, agile learning spaces and using technology to deepen engagement in learning. Thankfully, he and his parents came to a compromise when it came to John's career and he ended up in teaching.

Leading for the future 2017-11-28

I have just completed the first part of my professional learning which involved participating in the Advanced Leadership Program (ALP) at the Judge Business School, Cambridge University. The ALP is an intensive three week aimed at exploring the challenges of leading for Organisational Change in to the future. It provides senior executives space to re-calibrate and fine-tune their leadership agenda and the changing nature of Leading. I benefitted greatly from the discussions and exchanges with Faculty members along with outstanding speakers from the Business School and Cambridge University. The program aims to prepare leaders for future challenges by creating space to allow those participating to reflect on what is critical to personal and organisational success. The second part will be visiting some of the schools that are 'learning for the future' here in London and Scandinavia.

The question of why I chose a business school to begin my professional learning is easy to answer. The course took me out of the education comfort zone that we all fall into throughout our careers. It was an opportunity to stretch my thinking and to map ways in which we can lead schools into the challenging and exciting times ahead.

The program is divided into three parts with an overall framework that has three distinct but interrelated parts. Part one dealt with *making sense of turbulent times*. Part two dealt with *building organisational and personal capabilities* and finally, *leading for the future*. There were 25 participants from across the globe. Although I was the only representative from the school sector, my understanding of leadership and global trends was certainly enriched by the interaction with those from other nations and sectors. Seeing the world through the eyes of others is a powerful learning experience in itself and discussions on organisational culture highlighted the differences between Eastern and Western cultures. The input and conversations with my fellow participants allowed me to clarify that we need to work with our leaders on an engagement process to help shape our potential future. What does this mean for schools?

Firstly, the economics of schooling doesn't make sense. Substantial investment in land acquisition, bricks and mortar buildings that are only used for seventy percent of the year can no longer be sustained.

Secondly, the traditional subject-based curriculum is simply not fit for purpose in a knowledge world. We need to be teaching students how to learn, not what to learn. It requires a new and powerful set of capabilities that will enable all young people to be curious and adaptable learners that extends beyond school.

Thirdly, the success of schools into the future is not to be found in reputation but in quality. This is similar to how a local credential certified by a government agency or education standards authority will be challenged by global access to high quality credentials without having to attend an institution. Multiple providers are already growing this space. Fourthly, the way we organise the process of teaching shapes how teachers teach. Timetables define groups of students to be taught the what, when and where. Is this an appropriate model for the knowledge age? And what does it really mean to be a teacher in a knowledge world? Do you have to have had teacher training to be a teacher? Why are teachers' working lives still so regulated and why do we continue to protect old ways of working?

The ALP program has given me further insight into some of the big drivers of change and how other sectors are responding regardless of location. It has solidified the fact that schools have one option now – transform schooling. What and how we do it will be the unfolding challenge.

Defining educational transformation 2017-12-06

Almost a decade ago Ken Robinson was touting the idea of transforming education. Marketer and author, Seth Godin says transformation falls into the most difficult and most precious project category. Transformation in education is mercurial – ask ten different people and you’ll get ten different responses. I don’t necessarily think this is a negative but it illustrates that we’re not close to a universal understanding or definition of transformation in education. The idea generates angst for teachers and leaders because it challenges school practices and mindsets.

In his delivery of the William Walker Oration, Professor David Hopkins of University College London and the University of Nottingham talks about transformation and the importance of students developing a critical knowing that allows each student to direct their own lives. Much of the improvement of schools agenda has maintained control over who learns what, when, how and with whom. Professor Hopkins cites Aoki (2004) who explains transformation in education as authentic student learning, intervention and empowerment. Similarly Ken Robinson talks of transformation as personalised learning in which each child is able to develop their individual strengths within a stimulating and engaging learning environment.

While we all want this for students, the difficulty is that transformation requires total not incremental change. It challenges us to move from a top-down approach where students are ‘ruled by knowledge’ to one in which they are ‘served by it’ (Stenhouse, 1975 as cited in Hopkins’ address). It requires teachers and leaders to develop a whole new set of assumptions on which to drive change. In this sense, we need to move as Scharmer (2007) outlined in Theory U from an open will to an open mind, from suspension (of the old) to embodiment (of the new) and from letting go to letting come. While it moves us out of our comfort zones, it is also truly liberating when it happens.

Learning how to learn is the new currency 2017-12-13

While I have been on professional leave, I have found myself with time to think and reflect. What has become very clear to me is that while we expect teachers to be continuously learning, reflecting and transforming the work, I don't feel we have the same expectations of education systems. And that is a problem. How can it be possible to lead transformation *in* schools if transformation isn't occurring *within* the system? As I've written about before, transformation is a metamorphosis of thinking and assumptions. The Grattan Institute's latest report *Towards an adaptive education system in Australia* talks about this in the context of evolution in which the goal "is never stasis, but better managing change, learning from failure, and capturing success."

There is a lot of rhetoric about schools being modern learning communities, but in the traditional schooling model, this is not the reality. The current model is a one-size-fits-all approach to learning that moves students lock-step towards achieving narrowly defined, easily-measured and strictly predetermined goals. The current processes and structures don't ignite the students' imagination and creative spirit – they strangle it. Why should any of us support a model that impedes the development of responsible, resourceful and self-directed learning at student, teacher and system level?

We have to immediately refocus. The new currency is learning *how* to learn, rather than what to learn. The promotion of learning is the *raison d'être* of schooling. Schools exist for the purpose of ensuring students learn things worth knowing. Is there anything more worthwhile knowing than knowing how to learn? We also have to become more comfortable accepting that *learning how to learn* is not something we can easily measure as it can't be simply reduced to a set of scores that can be ranked and compared.

Learning is about making connections and creating meaning. Peter Senge (1990) hit the nail on the head when he said, "Through learning we re-create ourselves. Through learning we become able to do something we were never able to do." Isn't the process of learning itself, a process of transformation?

Maybe the challenge of transforming schooling is as simple as schools and systems learning how to learn. For the sake of our students, we cannot wait any longer.

Bluyonder voices podcast #5 – The PBL guy 2017-12-21

In this final podcast for 2017, I chat with Steve Zipkes. Steve is former founding principal of Manor New Technology High School and current founding principal of Cedars International Next Generation High School both in Austin, Texas. The schools have received international acclaim for their innovative approach to learning and teaching. When he isn't busy leading schools, he travels the world working with teachers on how to integrate project based learning (PBL) across K-12. Listen to Steve explaining why PBL and relevant teacher professional learning can transform learning in an ever-changing world.

2018 Writings

Transformation is the global agenda 2018-01-22

As you may know, I spent the end of the 2017 school year visiting schools in the UK and Scandinavia. Their challenges are the same as the ones faced here: concern over the quality of schooling, overall relevance of schools in a rapidly changing world and the absence of a coherent educational policy.

Nonetheless when you're on the ground in schools, they are questioning the status quo. For example, one educator in Finland told me that PISA had done more harm than good because policy makers equate it to quality schooling. In the Netherlands, two schools I visited are examples of what can be done when you are not afraid to do things differently. Mondomijn is a school that translates to 'My World' in Dutch and has put learners (0-13 years) at the centre of their work. Teachers see themselves as collaborators first and foremost and the learning framework is loosely structured around Reggio Emilia principles. The space itself is very adaptable and students are given full voice in the organisation of the school via a representative board. The school recognises that it is the exception rather than the norm so finding teachers with the right fit has been a challenge.

LOS Deurne is based on the democratic schools model. Although it is a registered school, it doesn't receive Government funding largely because they are not interested in maintaining the status quo of traditional schooling. The school is parent run, operates out of a former restaurant and teachers negotiate learning based on student interest. Parents and community experts are then invited to support the individual learning programs. The school is niche and they recognise that while scalability may be difficult to achieve, they want to be an example to the rest of the world of what is actually possible. I believe they will continue to grow because of an increasing desire by parents to see new models of schooling.

The take-home message is that transformation is the global agenda, which means the professional inertia that has existed for so long must be overcome by a willingness to take on new challenges, directions and ideas. There is not a business or industry operating in today's world that isn't having to ask some hard questions and undertake radical change. The reasons why companies like IBM have thrived is because they see innovation inextricably linked to big challenges. Big challenges have the potential for big change and new possibilities that not only benefit the consumer and company but also society as a whole as explained by Greg Satell in his HBR article. Satell reflects that, 'No matter what form innovation takes – short, agile sprints or long-term, grand-challenge investments – innovation is fundamentally about solving problems.'

And if anyone has a grand challenge to solve, it's us.

Bluyonder voices podcast #6 – School of life *2018-02-01*

Emma Husar MP left school before she completed Year 12. Describing herself as a non-conformist at school, Emma went on to become the Federal Member for Lindsay in NSW. Emma has strong views on how to improve education for all learners and why society needs to value teaching more.

Technology isn't the problem 2018-02-06

Yes, you heard it right. The Federal Education Minister Simon Birmingham and NSW Premier, Gladys Berejikilian have suggested that schools lock up phones until the end of the school day to prevent students' from being distracted. Naturally the comments generated a lot of debate on radio particularly among frustrated parents and teachers. I understand their frustration. Growing up my children wanted TVs in their bedroom because most of their friends had them. Our response was that we had to renegotiate the boundaries of TV viewing.

The same applies to today's medium – the mobile phone. This is a boundary issue, not a device issue. The simplistic response is to either ban the technology or blame it for inappropriate behaviour. If mobile phones are such a distraction, then why aren't we banning them from workplaces also? Simple reason (aside from employee revolt) is that mobile technologies are now part of modern work environments. We're using them to communicate, collaborate, transact and search so much so that they are no longer devices but tools of our trades.

I believe the bigger question is how we as a society, respond to the seismic shifts happening. Since we can't ignore the digital age, we must find ways of navigating the new frontier including what we deem as acceptable and appropriate use at home, at work and at school. Banning mobile phones is not a solution, it's a reaction to the massive waves of ever-changing technologies. There's an air of anti-intellectualism in all of this – a fear of the new sciences that was just as evident in the time of Galileo.

Let's look at this as a learning moment involving a learning tool. The focus for schools is on how to use technologies more effectively to engage learners and to improve the quality of teaching in a digital world. We don't prevent learner drivers from accessing highways nor should we prevent learners from accessing the information superhighway. What they need are good instructors and an array of engaging experiences that develop confidence, knowledge, skill and safe behaviours.

I'm tired of hearing people blaming the tools. Great teachers like Eddie Woo from Cherrybrook Technology High in Sydney are using technology in simple yet powerful ways to engage learners in maths. Engagement is the missing link here. Technology would never be an issue if teachers are maximising the opportunities to deliver relevant learning experiences. Students are tuning into Netflix and YouTube in class because they are turning off the learning. What makes a successful school in the digital age is the concept of a learning community, where teachers and leaders, parents and students are essentially learners, seeing learning (about technology) as a major task of everyone.

The pressing challenge is not to exclude the digital from an out-dated analogue model of schooling. It is to reconsider the very nature of schooling itself which, in today's world, has two dimensions – the virtual and the physical. Technology has already claimed an important place in society, and while these tools refuse to be constrained by the traditional boundaries, we need to create new ones because they have the power to promote new thinking and vastly different learning experiences for young people.

Why 2018 needs to be the year of curiosity 2018-02-14

Over Christmas I had a grandfather's delight of reading Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* to my grandson. The story follows the adventures of a girl transitioning from childhood into a never-seen-before world. Alice talks about her experiences in this new environment as 'curioser and curioser'.

It got me thinking about the importance of curiosity in education. As I was reading the book, I began to see it in the context of the slow shift from industrial to contemporary schooling. Many schools have made their way down the rabbit hole in search of new experiences for students. This brings with it new challenges. The alternative though is that we continue along the path of the familiar and the ordinary.

American biochemist and Nobel Prize winner Paul Berg (1980) said '...I realise that nurturing curiosity and the instinct to seek solutions are perhaps the most important contributions education can make.'

As we know the demands on teachers and the expectations on schools today leaves little room for curiosity and exploration to flourish. Yet if we don't transform schooling, then our students will not have the capacity to seek solutions in new and creative ways.

That's why we've chosen to focus this year on curiosity and it will give us a springboard for future years. To do that requires open hearts, open minds and a commitment to creating new mindsets and new realities for schooling in today's world. This is the essence of educational transformation. While that may be daunting for teachers and leaders, the good news is that we go down the rabbit hole armed with good theory and evidence about what works.

Wouldn't it be fantastic if all schools could open up new and exciting worlds for every learner, every day!

Forget PISA: what should be making headlines *2018-02-24*

I'm probably not the first to point out that the media loves to celebrate schools as much as they love to criticise them. Newspapers often begin the year with the positive back to school stories followed quickly by headlines that claim suspensions are on the increase or students are failing. It's easy to see why teachers feel under siege when the perception and narrative of schooling is being shaped by forces outside of the profession.

Too often the sensational headlines end up leading to drastic interventions and reforms like linking the Year 9 NAPLAN test to HSC attainment. This week, NSW Education Minister, Rob Stokes announced he would be scrapping that policy in favour of minimum standards being achieved instead through a series of online literacy and numeracy tests. It is a great example of common sense trumping short-sighted policy decisions.

I'd like to see news stories this year that inform and educate the community as to why we need a new approach to schooling. I'd like to see headlines that ignore reporting PISA and top HSC results and focus instead on the rich learning and teaching that happens every day in schools. I'd like to see national conversations on Australian education that are comprehensive and inclusive. I'd like to see public debate that attempts to unify rather than divide schools. Finally, I'd like to see a profession that is no longer blamed for the inadequacies of the system but is esteemed and entrusted by the community to improve the learning outcomes of every child.

There are those within and outside the teaching profession who are still wedded to clichés, sensationalism and band-aid solutions. Such distorters of the educational narrative need to be confronted with solid evidence/practice and the lived experience of highly professional teachers who are not only committed to re-writing an educational narrative relevant for today's world but reclaiming the educational agenda.

Bluyonder voices podcast #7 – solving complex educational problems 2018-02-27

Michael Fullan is a name synonymous with leading whole of state/province educational reform. He started out as an academic and has become a prodigious writer and adviser to educational systems and governments around the world. In this episode of bluyonder voices, Michael explains why he loves solving complex educational problems and why the best learning is from leading practitioners.

What schools can learn from Apple 2018-03-08

I've written before about the improvement delusion that exists in education and why our relentless focus on improving the current model is not taking us anywhere.

That model was designed in an age where information was static, schools were insular and technology companies produced technology. We know that information is no longer static, schools are accessible and technology companies like Apple are producing lifestyle products.

As I often tell teachers and leaders, Apple is a company that transformed its whole business model in 2000. They wanted to do more than just produce products, they wanted to enrich people's lives. Can we as teachers and leaders not learn something here?

Fast Company recently interviewed Apple CEO, Tim Cook and highlighted the parts of the conversation where if you substituted a word or two, Tim Cook could have been talking about leading a transformed school. I encourage you to read the full interview and to think about Tim's responses in the context of schooling. Here's just a few examples where the education frame of reference is in parentheses.

- When responding to the comment that the iPhone wasn't an immediate hit, Cook says they just had to have faith that the strategy would lead to results (*learning gains*) and that requires not taking your eyes off what really matters (*transforming the lives of students*). * As CEO (*school leader*), Cook sees one of his main roles as minimising the distractors from the people (*teachers*) who are doing the work. That means doing very few things and making sure they are focussed on the things that matters (*effective learning and teaching*). * What drives Apple (*this school*) to wow consumers (*students*) is to create products (*learning experiences and strategies*) that give people (*students*) 'the ability to do things they couldn't do before'. * Customers (*students*) are jewels. I care deeply about what users (*students, teachers, parents*) think. Our products (*pedagogies*) are all about the people who use them. * We're a group of people (*educators*) who are trying to change the world (*student lives*) for the better. We take our values seriously and we want to make sure all of our products (*schools*) reflect those values. * We make sure that we treat all the people in our supply chain (*learning community*) well. We have incredible diversity and it's diversity that yields products (*schools*) like these. * We all have the same common purpose (*transforming schooling*)... that's the thing that joins us all together... that goal that drives everybody (*teachers and leaders*) to keep working ungodly hours and trying to do the best work of our lives.

Next time you use your iPhone, iPad or Macbook (if you own one), ask yourself whether these would have been developed if Apple was content with the status quo or overly focussed on results instead of achievements. Apple is the most innovative company in the world because they have put the user at the centre of the design process. What can we learn....

If schools kill creativity then why haven't we transformed? 2018-03-14

I spent time revisiting some old podcasts. One of those was Sir Ken Robinson's TED talks in 2006 and 2010. It was particularly striking that he spoke about traditional schooling 'dislocating people' from their natural talents. The solution? Create the circumstances for natural talents to flourish by transforming schools into something else.

Sir-Ken-Robinson-at-TED-Talks-Education

The message is so simple, it's laughable. Only I wasn't laughing. It's been twelve years and we have made little progress despite Robinson's clarion call to action.

The two questions that I ask are what have we learned and when are we going to get serious? Because in those twelve years, we've funnelled millions of curious and talented learners into the sausage machine we call schools. We've focussed all of our attention and effort on improvement, driven by a linear approach to learning and a conformity to teaching.

Transforming schooling is, as I have said many times over, the greatest challenge for school and system leaders. I understand that many in the profession fear change and fear what parents may think. I often hear that parents don't want schools to experiment on children but how can this be an experiment when we've seen the result of a one size fits all approach!

As Andy Hargreave said, teaching isn't for the faint hearted or for shrinking violets. Transforming education demands that we are all revolutionaries and if we haven't become one in 2018, then we may never be.

Stephen Hawking – one of the great teachers *2018-03-21*

Two days after news came through of the death of esteemed physicist and author Stephen Hawking, I presented the Australian Scholarship Group's National Excellence in Teaching Awards. Hawking's passing last week affected me deeply and I posted a tweet that his death was a tremor in the force. It wasn't about the answers, it was about the questions and he demonstrated that learning is about thinking not just knowing.

I used Hawking's life and legacy in my address to NEiTA recipients. The education community has a lot to learn from Stephen Hawking. He was not only a brilliant mind and teacher but someone who remained deeply curious throughout his life. Hawking distilled the complex into the simple and showed how one could overcome a disability. In doing so, he gained a legion of fans and admirers. What I loved most was that he never gave up asking 'how' and 'why'. That insatiable curiosity inspired him until the end.

My favourite Hawking quote is this:

If we want every child to look up and never give up, then we need teachers who approach their work in the same way as Hawking – with imagination, grit and curiosity.

Great teachers are stars in a child's universe. Like Hawking, their impact on lives shines bright.

Bluyonder voices podcast #8 – mastering the art of teaching *2018-03-29*

Pam Betts is the Executive Director of Catholic Education in Brisbane, Queensland. In the latest bluyonder voices podcast, Pam shares why teaching was always in her DNA and why every student needs the opportunity to be the best they can be.

Education and the cult of efficiency 2018-04-10

I was having a conversation recently about why schools are still largely stuck in an industrial model. It prompted me to look for a book that I haven't visited in a while but has been seminal in my thinking. 'Education in the cult of efficiency' by Raymond E. Callahan may have been published in 1962 but it continues to resonate today and will continue until we accept and recognise that schools are not factories; students are not products, and that the "improvement agenda" condemns us to repeating past failures. And while I have argued that we can learn from innovative companies like Apple, Atlassian and Ideo (all of which are driven by the customer), we have spent the better part of a century failing to challenge the dominant business ideology that pervades our school systems.

Callahan and more recently Richard Elmore have argued that the institutionalisation of schools has led to educators being a 'low-status and low-power' group. Hence, why the learning and teaching agenda has been so strongly influenced by those outside of the profession. While Callahan reflects on the social forces that shaped public schooling in America, he admits early on that in the early 1900s, they had established a framework for a 'noble concept' of education. This was the time when John Dewey was espousing his philosophical position that schooling must be a 'hands-on' experience.

Schools at that time were not immune from the social (industrial) forces shaping America. The rise of the great industrialists and the power they wielded across politics and society may have made America great but as we are seeing in the US and in those countries that followed America's lead, the industrialised efficiency model is now a blight on modern societies.

One aspect of the economisation of schooling, which Callahan brilliantly refers to as the 'Descent into Trivia' meant that school administrators were ignoring the substance of quality education in favour of spending time and energy on the mechanics (e.g. increasing class sizes, maintenance of floors, heating and toilet paper). This was in the 1930s – so to read Callahan again in 2018 is akin to reading a Greek tragedy only Callahan calls it an 'American tragedy in education'.

If you read nothing else of Callahan's book, I implore you to read the final chapter. Anyone working in and for education cannot but feel their ire rise by the great disservice we have done to millions of students. As Callahan writes so powerfully, the consequences of blindly adopting [business] values and practices and applying them with 'little or no consideration of educational values or purposes' is the great tragedy. He says that 'it was a serious mistake in an institution whose primary purpose was the education of children and if the focus had been on producing the finest product (e.g. quality learning and teaching) instead of aspiring to delivering schooling at the lowest cost, the outcome would not have been so adverse.'

In summarising, Callahan provides the following reflections and recommendations to school systems in the free world:

1. Society must realise that school systems have been caught in a vicious cycle since 1911
2. The profession must work together with parents, politicians and the wider community to ensure quality schooling reigns
3. There is no easy path to 'genuine professional competence' – it requires hard intellectual work to turn factories into places of learning
4. Job satisfaction is just as important as salary in attracting teachers to the profession
5. Transformation is a national challenge and it requires 'bold and vigorous' leadership from the profession and those in public life
6. Educational leaders need to have a good grounding in humanities, social and natural sciences in order to understand the challenges of the age and make sound intellectual judgments based on the kind of quality education children will need
7. Educational leaders require professional competence as well as the skills and knowledge to know whether the desired outcomes are being achieved (i.e. evaluating instructional efforts)

Finally, I would love to see Callahan's final paragraph (although written for an American audience in the early sixties) in every staffroom as a constant reminder of why we must transform schooling today.

To do this, (America) will need to break with its traditional practice, strengthened so much in the age of efficiency, of asking how our schools can be operated most economically and begin asking instead what steps need to be taken to provide an excellent education for our children. We must face the fact that there is no cheap, easy way to educate a human being and a free society cannot endure without educated men [and women].

Looking at educational data through a sharper lens 2018-04-23

Society is awash with data and so are schools and school systems. The good news is most of this data is available electronically. The gap in terms of our use of data in schools is we have never had an overarching framework which brings structure, clarity and flow to the analysis. While we may have had a good understanding of the inputs (e.g resourcing, professional learning), we haven't been able to measure the outputs (i.e. is it actually improving the learning and teaching). An educational framework links the inputs and the outputs, the external (beyond school control) and the internal (within school control) factors so that any one of us can see where we need to allocate time, effort and resources. Half the game in improving educational outcomes is knowing whether it is beyond or within our locus of control. The end game of course is being able to allocate resources more strategically when we have a framework that gives us a) more data points to provide context and b) a granular focus.

The Six Lens Approach for School Systems (Varanasi, Fischetti & Smith, 2017), pictured below and outlined in detail in *Data Leadership for K-12 Schools in a Time of Accountability* provides a framework and a context for educational change. This is not a panacea but it is a new lever for schools in a new age, allowing us to take a more proactive approach to understanding the variables that impact on education. In the past, we have borrowed frameworks from the higher education sector but as we know, universities are governed by different drivers and values.

Six-Lens Educational Analytics Framework

What we have in the Six Lens is a way that allows data to be consumed and understood by school staff. The emergence of interactive visualisations and dashboards means that data is on demand and can be used to inform discussions within (school level), between (school and home) and across schools (system level). As Ben Shneiderman noted in 1996, the value of visualisation is it not only opens up data to the masses but allow us to go deeper with it. The simple message is we are all data consumers and thus, data is everyone's business. While technology is making it much easier to access the data, analytics in itself is not about providing the answers. We are living in an age where human judgment still lies at the heart of how we use data to bring about change.

By the time most schools adopt the framework, we will have entered the next iteration of education analytics – predictive models and AI. This will be a game-changer for schooling given we will be able to pro-actively identify and manage risks before they negatively impact on the learning. I hope to see this in less than 18 months!

Bluyonder voices podcast #9 – owning the faces 2018-05-02

You could say teaching has been a life-long passion for Lyn Sharratt that began with an inspirational teacher in Grade 3. In addition to her numerous publications and her role as Associate at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education at University of Toronto, Lyn travels to jurisdictions around the world to support, inspire and train teachers.

In this podcast, Lyn talks about the things need to be mandated in schools and why confident leadership drives the work of improving schooling.

The predispositions of school leadership 2018-05-14

Much of the discussion at the recent uLead conference was on how we lead schools in today's world. As you can imagine, there was a smorgasbord of opinions that yielded interesting discussion and important insights. The benefit of attending such conferences is that it often provokes and stimulates your own thinking as was the case when we were asked to write down our top three attributes of a school leader.

As I've written before, I find these requests to develop a list of leadership traits somewhat problematic. The trait theory of leadership posits that leaders are born with inherent traits and qualities that make them 'fit for purpose' for leadership. These traits are somehow genetic – in your DNA from birth like integrity, intellect, morality, resilience, fairness, compassion etc.

Since trait theory was first articulated there has been nearly 140 years of attempts to capture, define and replicate leadership. Most seem to anchor this in a deconstructed approach to leadership whereby you examine the parts of the whole, privileging some over others and then construct a new whole.

We are more likely to find an answer to this by looking not at leadership but at leading. It is in what people do as a leader that we actually understand leading. Looking through a lens of leading, means that we gain deeper insight into leadership.

I think a more realistic way of understanding the complexity of leadership is to view it as a set of predispositions that overlap with each other. For example, someone may have a natural predisposition for collaboration but it's in the totality that you see leading in action. In other words, all the elements even if not in equal measure end up making the whole.

While my fellow participants were noting down their top three traits, I jotted down my five predispositions that good leaders demonstrate in no particular order.

1. 1. Curiosity – the capacity to continually ask the why questions, to go deeper and not to accept things at face value
2. 2. Empathy – the ability to see and understand the world through your teachers, staff and students lens
3. 3. Collaboration – the recognition that problem-solving and creativity comes from a shared vision and language
4. 4. Adventurous – the courage to take on and shoulder bigger risks with the aim of improving the outcomes for those in your learning community
5. 5. Learning – the desire to continually cultivate environments of learning and transformation requiring honest feedback (from others), critical self-reflection and personal growth

As John Kotter said, leadership is about coping with change. For me, these predispositions are fluid enough to be able to respond to the context and demands of the times.

Personalised learning: not an optional preference 2018-05-25

I heard a story recently about an English teacher using the class's interest in sport to motivate and engage them in their lessons. The parent relaying this was so impressed by the 'personalisation' of learning. Many parents think that differentiating instruction for the class is the same as personalising learning for the child. In fact, very few schools I know of are personalising learning only because the current model prevents them from doing it. We will turn this on its head when we start from the child, not the class.

Personalised learning allows the learner to contribute to their own learning: the design of it, the responsibility for it and the identification of learning goals. Every child at school is entitled to know what they are going to learn, how they are going to learn it, how they will know they have learned it and the teacher knows where the child is at before they start the teaching. All good teachers know and understand this but our current structure dictates the learning.

I understand teachers feel immense pressure to deliver in an age of increased accountability and transparency. It seems also that school systems whose role it is to support schools and leaders are drowning under the weight of compliance. Additionally, governments look to other nations in making the next bold educational policy statement.

I have no doubt teachers are working hard but I believe they are working hard at the wrong things. This is not about replicating a new version of the old system. If we are seriously committed to personalising learning for every child, we need to disentangle ourselves from the current model. This includes the definition of teacher's work, which forms the basis of industrial agreements. No industrial agreement can cover the complexity of teaching in today's world nor the flexibility required to deliver challenging and relevant learning. Each of us has to be open to asking the hard questions.

To quote Sheninger and Murray in *Learning Transformed*(p 55),

Making student learning personal and authentic is no longer an option; it's a necessity. It's the exact type of learning that students experience outside of school when consuming and creating content. If we want to reengage students and reignite their passion for learning, we have no choice but to give them various opportunities to choose what they are learning, how they will learn, and ultimately, how they can show mastery of their learning.

Bluyonder voices podcast # 10 – schools as learning organisations

2018-05-31

In this month's podcast, I speak to Dr Louise Stoll, Professor of Professional Learning at the London Centre for Leadership in Learning. Louise was in Sydney this week to deliver the annual Ann D Clark lecture for 2018.

Louise has spent the last two decades examining the idea of schools as learning organisations. She knows schools inside out including the skills teachers and leaders need for today's learners. Listen to our conversation below.

The educational blogosphere 2018-06-09

This blog is more than a decade old and some 500 posts later it is easy to ask what's the point of blogging? Prolific blogger Seth Godin explains it this way:

Other than writing a daily blog (a practice that's free, and priceless), reading more blogs is one of the best ways to become smarter, more effective and more engaged in what's going on. The last great online bargain. > > Good blogs aren't focused on the vapid race for clicks that other forms of social media encourage. Instead, they patiently inform and challenge, using your time with respect.

For me, blogging has been an important avenue for shaping ideas, clarifying thinking and hearing from those with a vested interest in education. The fact that people take the time to read and comment reinforces two things for me. The first is that we are part of a connected community. The second is that learning is a collaborative process. I couldn't begin to list the number of educational blogs written by teachers, leaders, students and even parents. Each person gives us a different perspective and makes a unique contribution to the broader discussion, which as we know, is global now.

What impresses me most about the blogosphere is just how generous people are with their time and ideas. Their intent is never about personal gain but how small contributions can lead to transformational change. We can all make a difference somewhere through our circle of influence (see Stephen Covey).

I feel privileged to be part of the educational blogging community. Thank you to all of those who continue to push the boundaries for today's learners and importantly, choose to challenge and educate the rest of us.

Dare we disturb the universe? 2018-06-18

If you've been following the musings on bluyonder, you'll know I'm no fan of the traditional model of schooling. The reason is pretty simple – the structure as it stands drives the learning. Those who have worked in schools will know the timetable controls everything – who learns what, when and with whom. Often in schools, the person who wields the most power is the one who is in charge of timetabling. Get that wrong and the system ends up coming to a grinding halt.

I'm often puzzled as to why we continue to prop up a system that constricts teacher autonomy and limits student choice. I recently heard of two examples that illustrate this point. The first was a Year 9 student who had to put in an expression of interest to take photography as an elective. The school would only deliver the subject if there were a minimum number of students. Needless to say, there was no photography this year. Similarly, at another high school, almost 40 students put their hand up to take a software development class. The school wouldn't run two classes so they selected 30 students based on grades alone. So much for cultivating interests and passions!

It reminds me of the line from T.S Eliot's Love Song of J.Alfred Prufrock, do we 'dare disturb the universe?' As educators in today's world, we are obligated to disturb the universe. If not, then our learners will never have the opportunities to discover new ones. It is difficult to fathom, in an age of connected technologies, that we are still afraid to step outside the square in pursuit of learning. All of this at a time when we want students to be risk-takers and creative thinkers.

As I've said so many times, this is a fundamental challenge to the teaching profession itself. A new age requires a new mindset and a new approach that inspires us to think outside the square.

The tragedy of lost potential 2018-06-29

The Conversation Australia had a recent piece on the differences between summative and formative assessments. I think it's important for students and parents to understand the nature of assessment because if we understand what it is then we also understand why it is being used and in what context. Having said that, I believe there is an over-reliance on summative assessments in schools. Summative is a narrow concept of assessing learning that produces a pass/fail or an arbitrary mark out of 100. Teachers use it to rate, grade or judge students but it contributes little else to the learner and their learning. While test scores may highlight gaps in student knowledge, it offers little else in terms of how students might close the gaps. And so it goes that teachers continue to press on, teaching more complex concepts without ensuring the foundations for learning are water-tight.

I believe we need to focus more on measuring and tracking student performance over time. When the Country Women's Association (CWA) judge cakes or dance sport judges assess routines, they are not looking through a one dimensional lens. They award points across established criteria and they provide valuable feedback on what worked and what didn't. The goal is for competitors to be continuously improving.

The advice from the NSW CWA to its judges highlights the nature of teaching, which is to help and encourage.

1. use the occasion as a *teaching/training* opportunity
2. offer *helpful* comments regarding entries. . . it makes more members want to bake and compete
3. please *encourage* the junior [entrants] as they are the cooks of the future

It doesn't matter whether students are learning to bake, dance the Waltz or solve complex maths problems. What matters is that these become the vehicles for achieving mastery and feedback supports the journey from novice to expert. As we know, summative assessments view learning as one dimensional and it is so much more than that.

Sal Khan of Khan Academy refers to this as the tragedy of lost potential. His point for schools is that learning should be about mastery not test scores.

The big educational spend *2018-07-10*

If you've just moved to NSW and you have school aged children, you'd be impressed with the 2018-2019 state budget. In brief, a thousand public schools across the state will get air conditioning, \$160 million will go towards school maintenance over the next twelve months and \$6 billion over four years to build and upgrade 20 schools. Very little talk though about how we improve learning and teaching but at least students/teachers will have great facilities.

We all know that Sydney's population is expanding, which places greater demand on school infrastructure. The challenge is always how we invest wisely. Perhaps I'm the only one who looks at the budget and wonders why we are still investing billions in bricks and mortar!

Both the UK and US have experimented with the full-service community school. This is a collaborative approach between education, health and community services that becomes a one stop shop for families. The full-service community school model is an attempt at doing something differently – a response that aims to be effective and economical. At the moment we aren't seeing either.

Look around and you'll see that the most successful companies like Uber and Airbnb aren't investing in the new, they are re-purposing the old. We need to be thinking differently about schooling before the educational funding well dries up for good. This may mean looking at commercial sites that could be re-purposed and rented to schools. It may also mean designing shopping centres to include space for schools. This would ensure that schools were at the heart of community and social life.

Today's school infrastructure needs to be as agile and connected as today's learners are.

Bluyonder voices podcast #11 – teachers are in the relationship business *2018-07-19*

This month on bluyonder voices, we chat to Jeff Johnson who looks after 42,000 Canadian teachers as Executive Staff Officer, Professional Development, Alberta Teachers' Association. After some interesting careers, Jeff saw teaching as the best way to change the world. After two decades he still believes teachers are in the relationship business. And if you're enjoying the podcasts, please don't forget to rate it on iTunes.

Teachers: don't diss the data *2018-07-27*

A recent report has called for the focus in education to be put “back on teaching, away from paperwork”. As someone who has spent four decades in education, I share the pain of pointless paperwork and meaningless marking. However, it's important to set the record straight for what is often dismissed as “data”. The decisions we make when it comes to teaching must be informed by quality data.

As NSW Teachers Federation Deputy President Joan Lemaire states in the same article, our “most important work is getting to know students”. Of course it is – but the work is enhanced when we can gather information about how students are progressing.

I've written before that data has to be a tool of trade for every teacher. Good teachers know that unless data is central to the work, there is little way of gauging how effective the teaching really is. There's a hokey old expression that goes “a poor worker blames his tools”. Rather than criticising teachers who might feel a little uncomfortable with using data as a tool in the classroom, we need to shift the focus on to how we better support the use of the information that we currently collect about student learning.

Whenever there are discussions about the use of data in schools, it is inevitably tied to NAPLAN. NAPLAN is an Australia-wide snapshot of how students are doing in certain measures of progress at a particular point in time. The critical question for all schools is how is it being used to improve the learning and teaching in this community? I believe we need to get NAPLAN data back to students and schools as quickly as possible so that teachers can understand, analyse and use the information while it is still an accurate reflection of where each child is at.

It's easy to diss data because it's not what people get excited about in education. Data isn't “Dead Poets Society” or “Goodbye Mr Chips” but we know it does matter. So by all means, let's ditch the administrative drivel and red-tape that is often associated with education policy-making. But don't throw the data out with the bathwater!

Take control of your learning 2018-08-06

There are schools and then there are, as Yong Zhao says, schools like Templestowe College (TC) in Melbourne. This is a school that walks the talk in terms of students' agency and voice over their learning. Hence their motto, 'take control of your learning'. The impetus for transformation was a serious decline in enrolments and facing imminent closure (TC now has a student population of 1000+ students). What changed was their narrative about learning and teaching.

From the outside, TC looks like any other Australian high school but what is happening within the four walls is what differentiates the school. For example, there are no year groups. Year 7 is a foundational year where students study mandatory subjects like Maths and English. The curriculum is basically deconstructed between Years 8-10 and reconstructed in Years 11 and 12 (graduation year). Classes are developed on ability and interest giving students a lot of choice within the current structure. Each class is 70 minutes and there are no bells. The first 10 minutes is a masterclass given by a teacher to develop a key skill. The remaining 60 minutes allows students to work on projects with support from the teacher all the while aiming to develop a culture of independent learners.

Technology is utilised everywhere in the school and the progress of each student is tracked over the course of the year. Every student that arrives at the school has an individualised learning plan developed in Year 7 based on strengths and interests. Parents get feedback every four weeks and formal reports once a term. The school doesn't pay lip service to parent voice either. Policy decisions are inclusive of the whole community such as making school uniforms optional. Students are also encouraged to apply their skills in practical ways around the school and are reimbursed for their time.

For me, the three big takeaways from TC are:

1. Every member of the school is valuable – decisions need to benefit everyone.
2. Say *Yes* to ideas unless it is too expensive, time consuming or would hurt others.
3. The model can't be replicated but the mindsets can.

TC is not the solution for how we provide quality learning and teaching. The staff at TC will tell you that it is the best approach for their learning community. Schools like this become an example of what can be done and what's possible. We cannot extract the intellectual rigour, analysis and innovative practice from TC – they've learned the work by doing the work. What the rest of us can extract is that change can and is happening so let's take control of our learning.

What leads my learning 2018-08-18

I am consistently asked about my views on leadership and what makes a good educational leader. It seems the more we know about leadership, the less we actually understand. Personally, I avoid the temptation to list respond by giving just another list, which in my opinion, reduces leadership to a set of qualities that seem to be interchangeable. Despite the rhetoric and hype, I think our understanding of leadership is still no more than a “modernised” version of trait theory and the charismatic leader paradigm.

To really understand leadership and leading we need to go beyond superficial observations. We need to look at the core values and beliefs that motivate and inspire the leaders in the work they do. I have two key convictions that continue to shape how I see leadership and doing leading. The first is the realisation that we are not providing today’s learners with the best education possible. This may be contentious. However, it is because of this conviction I have been outspoken about the need to change the model because we have;

1. a curriculum that dumbs down student and teacher learning and places far too much emphasis on subject disciplines
2. a mass production model of schooling that is based on certainty, control and replication
3. a structure that ignores how students learn and disempowers teachers in creating personalised learning opportunities

All of this takes place in the changing context of today’s world and the fact that every other industry except schooling is undergoing transformation of one kind or another.

The second belief is that we are all learners. As such, I am here to say that I don’t have any quick fix solutions nor do I hold the answers to how we solve the challenges schools face. I am absolutely convinced that as a profession, we must learn how to do things differently. This requires honesty, commitment and a preparedness to challenge the sacred cows of the past.

My leadership and learning is centred around the need to create a schooling experience that honours the agency of every student and the engagement of all parents.

Weaponising test data 2018-08-21

There was a time when international standardised tests like PISA and TIMMS were used to provide meaningful insights into the quality of learning and teaching across educational jurisdictions. Nowadays these tests have been turned into weapons that are often used to rank, judge and compare educational systems creating what British educationist Sir Michael Barber calls ‘PISA-shock’.

The performance of school systems has become everyone’s business from policy-makers to media commentators thanks to the wide-spread availability of data. The danger is not in the use of standardised test data but its misuse. As Dr Simon Breakspear wrote in 2015, “...the OECD should be explicit about the limits of PISA – as a narrow metric devoid of cultural or contextual insights.” In other words, PISA and the like should not be used as tools for policy decisions. Data out of context leads us down a narrow path and into a crisis of confidence.

I believe the way in which we de-weaponise standardised test data is to arm the right people with the skills to use it in ways that improve the quality of learning and teaching. The smart use of data leads to continuous intelligent conversations on how to transform schooling not punchy headlines that criticise schools or knee-jerk policies that cripple teachers.

BRAINADE! the Brain Grenade by Emilio Garcia available at <https://www.flickr.com/photos/lapolab/11853733774/in/photos> under Creative Commons Attribution 2.0.

Bluyonder voices podcast #12 – educating for resilience 2018-08-29

The number of students today reporting mental health issues is alarming. This month on bluyonder voices, I talk to Liz Gale, a secondary teacher who is not only living the mantra ‘healthy mind, healthy body’ but wants to spread the mental health message to her students and teacher colleagues.

The educational elders 2018-09-17

I've had a long career in education and over that time I've been exposed to the ideas, opinions and theories of teachers, academics, colleagues and parents. But when I stop to think about those people who've had the greatest impact on my professional life, it would have to be what I refer to as the education elders. These elders may not be the most popular or cited but they have always provided sound advice, were well-informed and well-read, were willing to challenge the status quo and often times stood at the margins of the educational space. People like. . . .

1. Hedley Beare (*) (An Australian visionary whose thinking about education was so far ahead of the times)
2. Paul Brock (*) (Gifted speaker, writer, thinker who showed what was possible even when faced with significant challenges)
3. Michael Ryan (A former teacher of mine who played a mentoring role in my early career and continues to keep in touch)
4. Br Aengus Kavanagh (Has dedicated his life and work to Catholic education; always willing to have difficult conversations in the pursuit of improving outcomes for all learners)
5. Barry Dwyer (*) (A true gentleman and scholar)
6. Philomena Billington (Embodies servant leadership)

(*) deceased

Although wisdom can be found on the pages of books, the real power of wisdom elders is the opportunity to engage in a dialogue that results in reflection and action. Often it is the accidental interactions over a cup of tea or on the way to a meeting that have yielded the most fruitful insights. I am immensely grateful for the interactions I've had with those mentioned here; their wisdom continues to impact on my professional life. Who are your educational elders?

Who should challenge teachers? 2018-09-25

Not long ago, the principal of a large independent school in Sydney penned a letter imploring his parent community to behave appropriately toward teachers. As more and more parents become educated about their child's schooling, it raises an important question – who has the right or responsibility of challenging teacher practice?

As a society, we are expecting more and more from teachers and schools. And the dynamics of the parent-teacher relationship are inevitably changing. We are moving away from the traditional 'teacher knows best' mindset to a 'parents demand best' mindset. Many parents are investing more of their time and money into ensuring the best possible outcomes for their child.

More and more parents are claiming their role as partners in the education journey, not mere 'clients'. They not only want an acknowledgement of this fact and new ways of participating in school decisions but a greater say in performance criteria determined by the school. The pendulum is swinging away from schools as sole providers of learning to parents as organisers of learning and critical friends in the schooling process.

I know for many educators, parent feedback on practice or decision-making can be challenging. Rather than responding defensively, I believe we need to be more open to discussion and dialogue that compels us to continually reflect on and improve our work. As I have written many times before, Uber drivers rate their passengers as well as being rated themselves. Feedback is gold in a flat, hyper-connected world. We all need to be working shoulder to shoulder with our key partners to achieve the best possible outcomes for each child as well as the entire school community.

While I agree wholeheartedly that parent-teacher discussions need to be conducted in the spirit of cooperation and with mutual respect, without embracing those opportunities to be critiqued and challenged, schools will remain insulated and rooted in the 20th century.

What's missing when it comes to educational policy? 2018-10-14

It may feel as if New South Wales has become the education review state of late. We have a review of the NSW curriculum and the one into the use of smart phones in schools. These reviews, while important, skirt around the core issues. What would happen if the time and energy invested into these reviews is actually re-diverted into creating policies that are focussed on improving the quality of teaching and the quality of professional collaboration in order to deliver improved outcomes?

This week's Q&A program was focussed on the current issues facing Australian schools. What resonated was a sense that many teachers are feeling more hamstrung and less valued than ever before. But as Senior Research Fellow at CIS, Dr Jennifer Buckingham pointed out, there needs to be acknowledgement that there are average teachers in schools and there are really effective ones.

As I've written before, the profession needs to re-craft a new narrative that shapes educational policy. We cannot do this if we are not working towards the same goals and committed to the same levels of professional collaboration and continuous improvement.

On the other hand, unless policy makers engage deeply with the profession, we condemn another generation of young people to a sub-standard schooling experience. Further, the exclusion of the profession from creating sound policy entrenches compliance and cynicism. It also misses a valuable opportunity for a richer collaborative approach that recognises the voice and wisdom of 'learning to do policy' together that finally sees teachers as masters of the systems not mere servants.

What does educational transformation mean? 2018-10-30

Just as the industrial revolution ushered in a mass model of schooling, the digital revolution is forcing us to rethink schooling for today's world. The biggest difference now is the rapid pace of change, which means the gap between school, society and technology is growing ever-wider. The call to radically transform schooling is being met with opposition from all quarters – policy-makers, anti-intellectuals and concerned parents who use their own schooling experience as a reference point.

As I've written before, transformation is no longer optional for schools. We waste valuable time and resources improving the old model of schooling when we know it will not adequately prepare all learners for tomorrow's world. There's no five easy steps to transforming education – schools need to do the work. However, the work we believe is guided by a learning framework that articulates a new language and expresses new mindsets about learning and teaching in today's world.

For example, it doesn't make sense to segment learning into K-6 or 7-12. In today's world, we recognise learning as a continuum that begins in the early years and offers multiple post-school pathways. In this context, a pre-to-post learning framework needs to:

- Emphasise experiential learning through inquiry * Recognise different and new pedagogical approaches for different cognitive ages * Prioritise dispositions and capabilities * Incorporate mandatory as well as personalised curriculums * Implement key enablers (e.g technologies and learning spaces) to support teaching * Recognise teachers as learners and leadership as everyone's responsibility * Include intentional partnerships in the learning

Teachers working collaboratively, informed and directed by a unifying pre-to-post learning framework are in the best position to respond constructively and adaptively to the challenges and opportunities that accompanying the massive technological and social changes of the knowledge age.

Imagination, experimentation and learning 2018-11-13

Schooling must undergo a massive shift from a bureaucracy that continues to promotes improvement and discourages risk-taking to micro-enterprises that are adaptive and in pursuit of ambitious targets for all learners. If you're looking for some food for thought or discussion starters in the staffroom, I recommend Gary Hamel and Michele Zanini's piece in the latest Harvard Business Review titled 'The End of Bureaucracy'.

In it, Hamel and Zanini profile in detail how Chinese appliance maker Haier reinvented itself to become not only a market leader but a company that has transformed the way people work from bureaucracy to an open ecosystem. As the authors point out, we live in a world where most employees are highly skilled, where the pace of change is 'hypersonic' and where advantage comes from being innovative. I would argue these realities exist in the education sector. Haier's reinvention came as the CEO of Haier says 'through an interactive process of imagination, experimentation, and learning.'

Just as Haier has successfully challenged a traditional business management model, we need to be thinking differently about the way in which we organise school structures including how we empower and skill teachers to support and lead diverse learning communities that are underpinned by a coherent learning framework for today's world.

I believe the seven pillars that underpin Haier's new model are almost all relevant to our work in schools. For example, moving away from top-down bureaucracy to small autonomous teams (10-15 people) supported by 'nodes' that provide specialised services. These autonomous teams evolve with little 'central direction' but share common approaches and standards. This leads to the second pillar – moving from incremental goals to growth and transformative targets. Core to this is the ability to use data effectively in order to set the bar high and once there, continue to grow exponentially. The question we must all be asking ourselves is how are we as a (teacher, student, school) exceeding last (week's, month's, year's) performance?

The third pillar is moving from internal silos to a system where teams identify those internal nodes or external partners who can meet the current needs. As Hamel and Zanini write, 'every node is invested in the performance of the team'. This requires that everyone accepts responsibility and accountability for the team's work and works at optimal levels to achieve common targets. This mindset discourages mediocrity and blame.

Fourth is the focus on voluntary collaboration rather than top-down coordination. Haier's approach is to organise its autonomous teams into common platforms and then help teams identify new opportunities for collaboration and for building capacity. This also required a move to open innovation, which acknowledges that those outside the team/organisation can also make a valuable contribution to the work.

Hamel and Zanini are correct in saying the problem with any closed system (be it business or schools) is that 'it doesn't adapt – it atrophies.' Schools have to recognise that those historically fixed boundaries between itself and the outside world (physical and virtual) are not important. What is important, is the recognition that those who can make a positive and significant difference to the work of teachers may not come from those inside the school anymore.

Sixth is all about scaling entrepreneurship and creating opportunities, places and spaces to flesh out new ideas and approaches. For schools, it will be necessary to incubate new ways of learning and teaching that can be tested and where successful, adapted. Lastly, it recognises that staff are no longer employees but owners with a vested stake in the future of the organisation. While teachers don't receive shares or bonuses, they recognise that what they do today has a significant impact on what happens tomorrow. I have been a strong proponent of giving teachers greater autonomy over their work because with that autonomy flows greater accountability and the need for greater transparency. At Haier, performance data for all teams is readily available and leaders are automatically changed if performance targets fail consecutively for three months!

Schools are not in the business of producing appliances but I suspect Haier will tell you they are not either. The work is being able to successfully reinvent ourselves for today's learners in a web-enabled world.

The curriculum is just one piece of the bigger puzzle 2018-11-27

The current review of the NSW curriculum – what schools teach – aims to “ensure it equips students to contribute to Australian society in the 21st century.” It’s a welcome recognition that our education system no longer fulfils this purpose, but curriculum is only one piece of a bigger puzzle.

In 1962, the Wyndham Scheme established most of the educational norms that we have been reviewing ever since! As we reshaped the jigsaw pieces one-by-one (and then over and over again), the result was an education system that didn’t fit together quite so neatly. That’s why a curriculum review is not quite the right approach: we need to look equally at how we teach or indeed why?

It’s time we looked at the missing pieces. We have what could be a one-off opportunity to adapt to what this review recognises is “a world in which rapid technological advances are contributing to unprecedented economic and social change in unpredictable ways.”

The magnitude of delivering systemic change and innovation to schooling too often leads to resistance to change. We can learn from other industry sectors that embracing change is critical to their future. Over one hundred years of delivering schooling as a standardised mass production one-size-fits-all process will take some time to change but it is already under way. It is also a challenge to our imagination to think so differently.

Thinking big in education takes time – more time than the election cycle allows. Yet governments come and go, children enrol and young adults graduate. In the same time that our schools, students and educators have adapted (and adapted again) to the recommendations of generations of reviews, we could have already established a new way forward.

The word ‘curriculum’ comes from the Latin word meaning something like ‘run’ or ‘course’. I believe that a curriculum review, as an approach to educational reform, has run its course. Seriousness about sorting out some of the pieces in education is commendable. However, a continued failure to look at the bigger picture when it comes to reshaping learning and teaching in Australia would be puzzling indeed.

A giant step forward for schools 2018-12-19

We've sent humans to the moon, scaled the highest mountains on the planet and developed 3D printers – all giant steps in human endeavour. Yet I believe the one area where we struggle to make the greatest leap forward is schooling.

As an educator, I am flabbergasted when I re-read the likes of John Dewey and Raymond E. Callahan who recognised the inherent flaws of an industrial model of schooling and were championing for change long before the digital revolution transformed the social and economic landscape.

In 1971, a collection of essays was published called *The Underachieving School*. It was written by a progressive American educator by the name of John Holt. Holt, like Callahan and Dewey before him, envisaged a schooling experience that enriches one's life; moving people towards something worthwhile. The first page of *The Underachieving School* includes a Q&A between Holt and the editors of Education News (NYC). I've included it below as something to ponder over the Christmas break.

Ed News: *If America's schools were to take a giant step forward this year toward a better tomorrow, what should it be?*

JH: *It would be to let every child be the planner, director and assessor of his/her own education, to allow and encourage him/her with inspiration and guidance of more experienced and expert people, and as much as he/she asked for, to decide what he/she is to learn, when he/she should learn it, how he/she are to learn it, and how well he/she is learning;*

It would be to make our schools, instead of what they are, which is jails for children, into resources for free and independent learning, which everyone in the community, of whatever age, could use as much or as little as he/she wanted.

I'll let you determine how far we have come since that interview was conducted in 1971. Perhaps the questions we need to be asking ourselves is firstly, why we are so resistant to change in the face of all we now know about improving student learning today? Secondly, why we lack the imagination to conceive of new models of schooling and lastly, what are we going to do to take a giant step forward next year to change the schooling experience for all learners?

Having got that off my chest I remain extremely positive about the future work of schools, and on that note, I take this opportunity to thank all of you for your continued support of bluyonder. A safe and Merry Christmas – see you back here in 2019.

2019 Writings

Voices of learning *2019-01-14*

I'm trying to avoid cliches as we begin another school year but I do believe there is a greater willingness in schools to listen to the voice of learners. We are by no means where we need to be but I am buoyed when I visit schools to see students as 'teachers' – discussing their learning in articulate and thoughtful ways.

If you're looking for some inspiring listening over the summer break, here are a few podcasts recorded by students of St Monica's Primary, North Parramatta talking about their learning. Here's to hearing more student voices over the year!

St Monica's Primary School Podcasts

Time for adult decisions *2019-02-05*

It's been interesting to catch snippets of the conversation with Sir David Attenborough at the World Economic Forum in Davos recently. Sir David was discussing the 'urgency of now' needed to address the global environmental challenges we face. If you mute the sound and read the captions or insert education instead of environment, you may think Sir David was referring to the dominant industrial mindsets that exist in schools today.

Understandably, the preference for comfort over challenge is as Sir David says, part of the human DNA. However, in a world of rapid change, armed with the knowledge of what needs to be done, there can no longer be any more delays or excuses. The consequences of not shifting mindsets, not making the 'adult-decisions' and not developing sustainable policy has a profoundly negative impact on this generation of young people and the next.

While Sir David's message is sobering, it does give us hope that we (the naturalists, leaders, educators, policy makers) can do something to nurture the delicate systems (eco and educational) of which we are guardians.

As I told almost 500 of our school leaders last month, we know what needs to be done to transform the learning and teaching and while it may be a giant leap into the unknown, we are planting the seeds for future generations to adapt and thrive in the future.

As Sir David told the audience, the time for blame is over, we must all get on with the practical task at hand.

Worth every Winx 2019-02-20

Often times understanding how people learn is like trying to master chess. It requires the ongoing commitment to gaining greater knowledge, skills and insights. Richard Elmore talks about this in the context of the instructional core; John Bransford et al. in developing a metacognitive culture within the learning space.

I'm often asked to reflect on how we improve the quality of learning and teaching; how every student becomes a winner in the learning journey through and beyond school. I have to admit it is often a struggle to condense it into something that is clear and simple. However, recently I've thought about the work of good teachers as being similar to racehorse trainers. This is not a post comparing students with thoroughbred horses. Rather, it has been interesting to listen to Winx's trainer, Chris Waller talking about how they have worked with Winx and in doing so obliterate racing's history book.

Under the supervision of Waller, there is a committed team that regularly observes and monitors Winx on and off the track. As Waller has said in past interviews, they are always guided by how happy and sound Winx is on any given day. It is this holistic understanding that applies to good teaching also. That deep affinity between teacher and student that develops from a place of mutual trust and respect. The ability of teachers to be attuned to a student's individual needs at any given time and to adapt tasks and experiences accordingly.

In all endeavours, it takes a team to produce the best possible outcomes. Our goal is not to train thoroughbreds but to unleash the potential of every child. How far each student can go depends on our ability to nurture their abilities, harness opportunities and sometimes take our hands off the reins.

Campaigning for educational change 2019-03-12

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We are less than two weeks out from a state election and two months from a federal election and while it's heartening to hear the major parties include education and education funding in their campaigning, my fear is that as always, the policy dial is wound back and we end up in culture war territory again. Yet when the worst casualties continue to be students, isn't time we called a truce?

What if, when the ideologues and anti-intellectuals continue calling for copperplate and charter schools or dunce's hats and discipline, we simply smiled? Because whether it's lowering the leaving age or pulverising political correctness, we've seen this schoolyard scrap before and it doesn't end well. The time has come when we need to work together to solve some of the pressing problems in Australian education without resorting to the divide and conquer approach.

At the risk of being branded some kind of a revolutionary, how about we try to focus the public discussion about education on young people and their learning in 2019? It's all very well to point to this or that as the only way forward in education (and progressives can be equally guilty of this bombastic single-mindedness). What works in education is passion, persistence and humanity, and the endless fighting about public vs Catholic vs independent funding or what should make it into the curriculum does little to progress learning for all students.

I will be accused of post-modernism perhaps, but in education, there may not be a single correct answer when it comes to how to make sure that every child experiences success at school. Though every child can and will learn given the support needed, this might look as different as each student and indeed each teacher. Great teaching means responding, with a range of resources and plenty of heart, to the needs of any and every student to drive learning improvement. In fact, perhaps if the culture wars around education were quieted, it would be easier to hear student, teacher and parent voices too.

As we head to the ballot boxes, here's a thought: how can we change the tone of public debate and the short-sightedness of policy so that every Australian child receives a quality education regardless of where they live. Education that makes a real difference in the lives of our young people is something worth voting for.

A learning eco-system 2019-03-18

Last week the Gonski Institute for Education held a forum to discuss school assessment. Clearly there are growing concerns around the world regarding the negative impact of high stakes testing. So much so that Singapore has now taken the step of banning high stakes testing of students below the age of 11. Australia hasn't taken this route yet but as one primary principal suggested, NAPLAN should be relegated to the recycling bin.

Opportunities such as these are valuable but I think we've got hold of the wrong end of the dog. Why you ask? Because assessment and testing is often viewed as an add-on to the learning; something done at the end of a course of work, term or final year of schooling. For me, assessment and testing has to be viewed in the broader context of a learning ecosystem. In the ecosystem, teachers are continually using data and feedback as a way of accelerating growth so that nothing is out of balance. In an Algorithm-driven world, predictive analytics opens a whole new way of looking at student, and teacher performance.

Assessment and testing are an integral part of the wider learning framework, in which each member of the learning community contributes to its sustainability.

Some years ago, I had the pleasure of visiting Monet's garden in Giverny, France. I often use the garden as a metaphor in my keynote presentations to describe the learning framework. Like Monet's garden, it is in a state of 'permanent evolution'.

Just as Monet did, passionate teachers oversee its design and ensure the right conditions for growth. It is complex and hard work but the value as Monet instinctively knew, comes in seeing the masterpiece as a whole, not by elevating individual elements.

What is the impact of teachers? 2019-04-01

We have a tendency in education to search for immediate solutions to challenges, which often end up as partial solutions anyway. At a state and federal level, we're in an election cycle where parties are promising more structural change such as smaller classes, more teachers, better buildings etc. I understand how appealing these are to the community but they miss what sits at the heart of schooling – the teaching. As we know, smaller classes and more teachers don't necessarily equate to better learning outcomes for all students. And that's the myth still being perpetuated inside and outside the education system. I believe that what scares us from examining what is happening at the core are the truths that may emerge about the effectiveness of the teaching practice.

Enter John Hattie with *Visible Learning* and *Visible Learning for Teachers*, which stressed the importance of teachers knowing their impact on learning and learners through the use of data and feedback. Depending on your bias, Hattie nails it in ACEL's Monograph No 58 where he discusses how to scale up and value teaching expertise in schools. As Hattie says, 'great teaching should be by design, not chance'. That, as Hattie suggests, requires us to shift our focus from how to improve teaching to what is the *impact of teaching* is on student learning.

Hattie identifies three key areas necessary for 'scaling up expertise' across the profession. The first is building up the professional culture by identifying where expertise is in the school and to create environments of trust where teachers can learn from and with each other in identifying where teaching is not effective and why. The second is student experience and ensuring that their views about their learning are being heard and that they feel safe and appropriately supported at school and challenged within the learning environment. The third is the role of data to inform strategies and accountability systems to ensure that schools are continually learning and evaluating the strategies and practices that are making a positive impact on learning.

Hattie recognises that a necessary part of implementing new models and approaches is dependent on effective leadership. Leaders who see themselves as curious learners, collaborators, curators, motivators and visionaries. As Michael Fullan writes in his latest book *Nuance: Why Some Leaders Succeed and Others Fail*:

Nuance leaders have a curiosity about what is possible...they don't lead, they teach. They end up developing incredibly accountable organisations because accountability gets built into the culture (2019, p12).

The *raison d'être* of leaders and teachers is to ensure the learning outcomes of each child improves year on year. They deserve nothing less. Scaling up teacher expertise is a sure way of building the capacity of the profession in a world where skills and knowledge carry the highest premium.

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What is pre to post schooling? 2019-04-12

The move to have early learning centres attached to primary schools is a response to the research showing the positive impact quality early learning has on students' academic and life outcomes. Here in Western Sydney, the demand for new schools is increasing as the population grows.

This challenges us to think about how we provision for schooling now and into the future in the context of a rapidly changing world. It's always interesting to observe how other organisations and businesses respond to rapid growth given we are a shift towards services being delivered online. What is evident is that many don't take the same approach as they may have done a decade ago. Today, it is about being agile, connected, efficient and most importantly, learning focused.

All of this becomes grist for the mill as we think about how to design schools and deliver schooling in today's world. Our vision is to re-conceptualise schooling away from the traditional model that fragments learning across four stages (preschool, primary, secondary and senior) to a model that is integrated in terms of the learning and operations. In the context of learning, there is a single learning framework that intentionally integrates early years to beyond Year 12 or *pre to post* schooling (P-P).

These P-P entities are flexible enough to be able to move resources to the point of need wherever that may be on the learning continuum. Currently, school systems are restricted to resourcing either learning learning *or* primary *or* secondary, so it is impossible to move staff or resources across these distinct areas. Under a P-P model, resources aren't duplicated three times over so it means better outcomes for learners. Importantly, spaces are designed around learning not structure so in the upper years, the focus is on students co-designing a curriculum that taps into their preferred pathway whether university, industry or vocational.

Beyond this, it also means that schools become points of engagement for the broader adult community who may wish to engage in post-school study. At its core, a P-P model recognises schooling as more than 9-3pm and K-12. It aims to amplify the transformative effect of education on individuals and communities.

It takes a village, not an academy to teach a child 2019-04-29

As an election pledge, Labor announced in February and then re-announced last week that it would establish a 'National Principals' Academy' in an effort to have 'the best school system in the world'. While there are a whole range of issues here that need to be addressed, we always welcome greater focus on the important work of leading schools in today's world. What is disappointing and predictable is that the marketplace is already littered with those who are providing specialist training for leaders.

That Labor has called this an 'Academy' reinforces a reductionist view where people need to be 'trained' up. Leadership is about learning and continuous learning at that. We know that good leadership is not pinned to who leads but how it is enacted day by day.

Then there's the issue of who will vet courses and how they are to be evaluated (which measures and benchmarks). We already have a plethora of leadership courses run through organisations and institutions such as Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL), Australian Council for Educational Leaders (ACEL), Australian College of Educators (ACE) as well as those offered by the universities, the various principal associations (primary and secondary) along with courses accredited by NSW Educational Standards Authority (NESA). So what happens to the current providers of leadership courses when the National Academy opens its doors for business?

My inner critic says the Academy will be another one for the annals of failed policy designed for short-term political gain in a climate where comparisons of our education systems against other nations is generating fear and mistrust. But what is so disheartening in all of this is the failure of governments to think differently and deeply about educational policy in the context of societal, technological and cultural change. I don't believe I'm alone judging by some of the replies to my recent comment on Twitter. Policies like these are simply reinventions of an industrial school wheel that end up costing millions and have little impact on learning and teaching.

Our first order of business is to clarify for ourselves, and within our communities, the narrative we use to make sense of who we are and what we do. We must articulate our understanding of what it is that gives the work of education its own special character. This provides the basis for prioritising and planning; it inspires and informs expectations. Cultural leadership is needed in meeting this challenge. We need school leaders who are able to develop local educational cultures that are strong on reflection, shared purpose and academic and non-academic achievement.

The schools that are likely to survive in changing times are those that support a reflective culture. Such schools encourage the members of their communities to ask themselves important questions of purpose and intention, to collectively and individually seek new solutions to old and new problems. They are centres of inquiry, engaging in a never-ending quest for better ways to learn and teach. This reflective culture is, at heart, a culture of thoughtful change and improvement with the goal of knowing each and every learner within that community in order to assist them to move from what they currently know and can do, to what they need to know and do. Its leaders are able to name, with confidence, the values and expectations on which school life is conducted. They participate as learners and teachers within the community, sharing in the shaping of the narrative within which the whole community is responsible for the development of each learner.

There's an old African saying, 'It takes a village to raise a child'. Today we speak of a child learning in the context of a connected community in which parents, teachers and numerous community members and agencies work in collaborative partnership. It is not an academy, it is our village and it needs wise cultural leaders.

Why investment in early education for all is fair play 2019-05-07

The OECD says that in Australia, “disparities in student performance related to socio-economic status take root at an early age and widen throughout students’ lives”: even the youngest learners in our school communities are not getting a go.

Decades of research and examining best practice in classrooms have already shown us how to make our prosperity work for everyone through education. Sadly though, the insatiable desire, for quick wins and partial solutions, especially at election time, remains as strong as ever. Coming up with a shiny new idea, a pithy slogan or a bucket of money rarely improves learning outcomes for each child.

While politicians have looked for an easy answer, many educators have been guilty of relying on hope as a strategy for change. And this is despite the fact that we know the real driver for improvement is effective teaching overseen by effective leaders supported by parental engagement. We have many great teachers, the problem is however, that they are not in every classroom. And there’s an equity issue here too: every child deserves a great teacher, but those whose needs are greatest deserve the greatest teachers of all.

To truly turn the tables when it comes to schooling, everything must be on the table: the curriculum, funding, teaching practices, collaboration across different sectors and engage with the teaching unions, universities and workplaces. It is not enough just to think about and talk about new models of schools – we have to have ways of implementing and at scale.

Wholesale change to the way we do schooling in Australia is a hard sell, even for the most consummate retail politician. But the cost of doing nothing, or more of the same, is unpardonable when there are young children who continue to start school on the back foot. Bringing our best to the table means doing everything we can for those children who have a rough start not just a school, but in life.

Our PM believes that “if you’re having a go, you’ll get a go”. Let’s start with universal high quality affordable early education because if not, then the most vulnerable in our communities will never ‘get a fair go’.

Don't be another brick in the wall 2019-05-17

There is a fallacy that still persists in schooling. It is the fallacy of standardisation and homogenisation and those like Professor Yong Zhao, have been vocal about the negative consequences of continuing down this path. He says:

For a long time education has been about imposing on all children the same set of skills and knowledge prescribed by external authorities instead of helping individual students grow in their own unique way. But the traditional mindset that all students should learn the same thing at the same speed continues to dominate educational practices. In the 21st century, technology and globalization have brought unprecedented changes and these changes demand us to transform education. One critical element of the transformation is about the value of individual uniqueness and human diversity.

The standardisation of schooling has led to the de-personalisation of it. In the drive to become world's best, we fail to deliver the best outcomes for each and every child. The fact we have more and more students who fall outside the 'norm' is evidence that the system continues to fail our students, our parents and our teachers.

That the majority of classroom practice and decision making in schools continues to be centred around the delivery of a standardised curriculum dismisses the individual learner and contributes to the continuing inequalities in the education system. As I have said for many years, when the curriculum drives learning, we have minimised opportunities for teachers to connect deeply with students as individual learners and traded impact for efficiency.

We delude ourselves and our learners if schooling is not seen as a life-giving narrative and students as agents of their own development and vital contributors to the learning community.

'Don't be Another Brick in the Wall' by aiva available at <https://www.flickr.com/photos/aiva/40820885050/> under a Creative Commons Attribution 2.0

Speak less, listen more 2019-06-04

I attended a summit in Sydney last week where representatives of some of the biggest companies and brands spoke: Disney, Atlassian, Uber and Qualtrics. What unites each of these organisations is an unrelenting focus on the ‘people experience’. Customer and employee satisfaction drives everything and it is what propels them to reach new heights. The formula is simple – it’s the ability to listen and learn.

It was John Hattie who said a few years ago that teachers need to speak less and listen more. I’m not sure the call has been heard given many schools and systems are still operating from a model of transaction rather than interaction. Interaction is propelled by feedback and data as part of a relentless commitment to continuous improvement. Qualtrics has built its business on real-time listening. What was confirmed for me last week is that schools must become real-time communities of learning and listening.

Systems that have not recognised the value of listening to learners/parents and teachers and using data wisely to plot where to next, are at risk of becoming irrelevant in today’s world. As one presenter said, the UBER experience of having transportation show up on demand has raised the bar for every other industry/sector. It is not the exception for customers anymore, it’s becoming the norm.

Next week, parents in our Diocese will have the opportunity to ask questions about our approach to schooling as part of our system’s Chatterbox Live initiative. This will be the third Chatterbox Live we have hosted – the first two included a number of our primary and secondary schools. Students asked some challenging and tough questions. The point is that feedback (positive/negative) must be embraced as part of our collective learning journey. I know many are fearful that these opportunities give a free kick to the critics, detractors and poorly behaved. In the end though, it is the listening community who end up censoring out those who simply want to shout others down.

The most innovative organisations are the ones who are listening and responding in real-time. They use the feedback and data to ask intelligent and empathetic questions that are guided by the people they serve.

Oh captain, my captain! 2019-06-11

Last week, the Sydney Morning Herald (SMH) reported on the NSW Government's decision to open a new selective school in South West Sydney is what is known in politics as a 'Captain's Call'. Unfortunately, Premier Berejiklian has made the wrong call on this one. More selective schools makes for a good sound bite, but it's not sound policy.

As stated in this article ("'Complete surprise': new selective school Berejiklian captain's call"), the selective system favours advantaged students. Surely the schools we need now, and in the future, won't equate student worth to a test score that can be manipulated through practice and coaching? We're so much smarter than that.

Repeating dated approaches to schooling falls short as a response to the needs of students today. Just because we've done things like this in the past doesn't mean we need to in the future, especially when the evidence just doesn't stack up. The real test is what makes the most difference to outcomes for students.

So what does make the most difference? It's not bricks and mortar but really effective teaching, supported by investment in professional learning. Wouldn't it be great to see the NSW Government intervene to get the best teaching to students who really need it most? Now that really would be a good call, Captain.

Greg Whitby AM KSG Catholic Education Diocese of Parramatta

(Originally sent to SMH as a letter to the editor Friday 7 June 2019)

Why aspirational targets miss the mark 2019-07-04

An interesting story caught my eye last week, in which a principal was talking about their aspirational targets for students. While I am not here to dismiss the work of leaders or their approach to improving literacy and numeracy, I must confess that I am not a fan of aspirational targets. Here's why. Firstly, targets applied in the context of learning, assume a hit and miss approach or an either/or. Secondly, it's a binary way of viewing learning and learners; it narrows the focus rather than broadens it. Thirdly, every target must be aspirational, otherwise why set targets? I would argue that setting targets for learners, removes teachers from key stages of the learning process.

Continuing to apply a standardised approach to meeting students' needs that moves everyone towards achieving narrow, easily measured and largely 'numeric' targets, does enormous damage. Those of you who have been around as long as me may remember the devastation that this approach caused in the late 80s and early 90s in both the USA and the UK when they introduced targets. In the UK they implemented "joint targets" that combined health, education and social service targets arguing that such government agencies shared some responsibility for student achievement. They tied these targets to a requirement to report to Parliament annually. Not surprisingly, targets did not last long beyond year one of reporting. How do we shift thinking and develop new skillsets?

A significant part of the answer lies in the use of sophisticated and predictive technologies. These technologies give teachers a holistic view of learners but also a granular view of learning. As Lyn Sharratt says, data allows teachers to be able to assess progress more broadly as well as individually. It means that teaching strategies can be closely aligned to specific needs and this brings greater accountability for the learning beyond current indicators of success – marks and grades.

When we remove targets from learning, we provide opportunities for teachers to apply greater intellectual rigour to the work. Good teaching is not simply knowing the child. It's a matter of knowing where the lagging skills and unsolved problems are, then finding collaborative solutions that move the child forward. As the saying goes, without knowledge, any action is futile.

Can we apply scientific rigour to teaching? 2019-07-10

A colleague of mine spent a week at Harvard Business School earlier this year learning how to apply scientific methodologies to strategic decision-making. The course drew participants from all sectors and all parts of the world. Yet very few in education. Telling perhaps?

The premise is that if you are going to roll out a program/strategy/initiative, you need to be able to measure its impact. Otherwise, why introduce it in the first place? It starts with being able to articulate in ten words or less what you want to achieve (Question Zero), followed by the why (Theory of Change), the how and then the evaluation (during and post) to ascertain whether the program achieved what was intended. While the gold standard in measuring impact is to carry out randomised control trials, this approach isn't always possible in education.

Another challenge is that teachers have their own deeply held views about their preferred strategies – often where focus is centred not on whether the strategy actually made a difference to the learning. That's where we can benefit from following in the footsteps of the medical profession where the focus is on whether there has been a significant improvement in (patient) outcomes. To paraphrase John Hattie, it doesn't matter which strategy you choose, so long as you have evidence that the child is learning as a result.

There are many examples of schools that already take this approach. Think Steiner and Montessori. In fact, Maria Montessori trained as a doctor, which is why their approach is based on 'scientifically applied observation skills'. A scientific approach in education means shifting teacher focus from *I think* to *We learn* and beginning conversations with the student in mind, not the strategy.

Fisher and Frey (2018) discuss this in their paper 'The Long View of *Visible Learning's* Impact'. The authors highlight the *We learn* culture in their own school community in the context of Hattie's work. They write, 'Rather than thinking, I taught it, but they didn't get it, this teacher is saying, I must ensure that all students learn at high levels and I need guidance from my peers to accomplish my goal'. This leads into the application of scientific rigour in determining the impact on student learning.

In their example, Fisher and Frey note that teachers in their school community begin the process by collecting evidence prior to a unit of study, they then reflect on what needs to happen to ensure every child learns and then evaluate the impact their teaching has had. Through this, they are able to identify the students who did not meet particular competencies and what is required for each child. As Fisher and Frey point out, this approach leaves little to chance.

It's a bitter-pill to swallow that we are still trying to find more efficient ways to treat school's symptoms. The industrial model is well past its use-by-date so it requires leaders and teachers to create new cultures where observation, reflection, dialogue, evaluation and collaborative problem-solving in light of current theory/research are the norm.

Looking at learning through a scientific lens does not remove the human factor. In fact, without it, we cannot call ourselves a profession.

Powering education through AI 2019-07-22

My position on technology, especially mobile phones in schools has not changed in a decade. In fact, as technologies become increasingly sophisticated, the worst school systems can do is flee from the overwhelming impact of the digital/knowledge age. I firmly believe that technology *isn't* the biggest challenge in schools today.

We operate in an environment where the system still dominates; information is still contained and controlled, and the expert (teacher) largely controls what is learnt and when. An industrial culture. Yet, as Seth Godin writes, technology shows up and the culture inevitably changes. As he reflects, 'culture enables new industries and movements, which further change the culture.'

Technology has shown up in schools but there has been little cultural or structural change that aligns with the transition to machine learning, artificial intelligence (AI) and data analytics. To be fair, the cultural shift required by all including schools isn't easy as highlighted in the Harvard Business Review article 'Building the AI-Powered Organisation'. The authors identify three key shifts needed for organisations to embrace the power of AI. The first is a move away from silos to cross-collaboration among teams. The second is data-driven decision making at the front line. The third is towards a more agile, experimental and adaptable culture. All of which requires a lot of ground-work and an understanding by all that AI is an enabler to the work.

The fact we continue having debates and discussions over the role of technology in schools is misdirected. Schools and systems must be focussed on the possibilities and opportunities of technology-driven insights that enable the best possible outcomes for learners. Transforming schooling comes as a result of transforming the culture. And as Seth Godin observed, technology has opened a lot of doors – here's our chance to make things better.

Are schools aiming for a win-win? 2019-07-31

The most effective relationships are built on mutual respect and trust. According to John Hattie in *Visible Learning*, when respect, trust, care and cooperation are present, it creates an environment where errors are ‘not only tolerated, but also welcomed.’ It’s a theme that runs through Stephen Covey’s best-seller, *Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*, in particular the habit, ‘Think win-win’.

I’ve been pondering the notion of win-win in the context of schooling. As Covey says, ‘win-win’ is based on the principle of mutual respect and being able to understand the concerns of others in order to come to a mutually beneficial solution. Covey says win-win is based on the spirit of cooperation not competition; it seeks interdependency rather than dependency or independency. It is formulated on abundance rather than deficit so that success for a learner, teacher or school does not come at the expense of another. It is not about your way or my way but working together on a better way.

While I am not so enamoured with the terminology, Covey has a point, which is, that by and large schools condition for a win-lose mindset based on competition rather than cooperation. As Covey says, we don’t assess students against their effort or capacity but rather their performance on a test, which is always comparative to other learners. If further proof is needed, look at how many students who achieve ‘Cs’ are recognised at school awards nights for their effort or persistence on challenging tasks.

Emeritus Professor Patrick Griffin in his 2015 Ann D Clark lecture admitted that the bell-curve has dominated education since the last century. He said, ‘we take it for granted that the [student] population is uniformly distributed. . . these are drilled into student teachers. In the classroom, a number is next to useless’.

While Covey admits that although win-win is the end goal, it is not always feasible. Nonetheless, the win-win paradigm is useful when thinking about the relationships in learning spaces, which have often been dominated by the teacher and classroom structures which have been focussed on performance rather than mastery. All of this serves to reinforce the win-lose paradigm, which is the bedrock of the industrial model of schooling and continues to be replicated in schools today. How many solutions are reactive and imposed unilaterally by adults? And how many of these end up having a positive effect on the learner?

Schools by and large still operate under a win-lose model whereby learners are excluded from being full and active participants in the learning process. It seems paradoxically that in wanting today’s learners to be problem-solvers and critical thinkers, we see classrooms that are still dominated by teacher-talk and questioning (see *Hattie*) or where students are effectively ‘shut-down’ or ‘shut-out’ of learning by teachers. In those situations, is the teacher seeking a win-lose or a win-win and at what cost to the preservation of the child-teacher relationship?

Many schools name ‘respect’ as one of their core values. Yet, if win-win is not visible in the learning environment, can schools really claim respect is mutual?

Bluyonder voices podcast #14 – Championing learning 2019-08-13

When schools get it right they don't just have a positive impact on students but the entire community. Recently, I learned that two of my colleagues decided to embark on a career working in and for schools because of the opportunity to see great teachers in action. One of those is Cheryl Brown, principal Bethany Catholic Primary Glenmore Park. Cheryl's pathway into the profession may have been circuitous but after more than three decades, educating young people is still her passion.

Curriculum unlimited 2019-08-20

The whole notion of the school curriculum has, in recent times, been subjected to insistent pressures and numerous reviews. In fact, we are awaiting the recommendations of a review into the NSW curriculum to ensure it is 'preparing students to meet the challenges and opportunities of the 21st century.' The realisation that the Industrial Age has given way to the Knowledge Age means we are obligated to continually question the nature and relevance of the school curriculum as we have come to know it.

There are many schools that have begun the process of thinking deeply and creatively to ensure the curriculum is fully aligned with a contemporary understanding of today's learners and what it means to learn in today's world. Schools are challenged to offer alternatives to an outdated and industrial construct that limits the curriculum to lists of discrete subjects, courses of study or key learning areas.

As I have often suggested here and in other public forums, we need a learning framework that is appropriate to this age; intended to promote students' growth and learning.

I recently had the opportunity to visit Ormiston Junior College in New Zealand. For the past two years the school has been led by Luke Sumich, whom I have known for many years. Every time I see Luke in action, I'm blown away by his enthusiasm and his commitment to changing the lives of young people through a great schooling experience. He is one of the most passionate and practical school leaders I know.

By way of some background, Ormiston is located in the southern suburbs of Auckland. It is a community not without challenges but Luke has created a culture of respect, innovative teaching practice, excellence and ongoing professional learning to deliver the best outcomes for each student.

What was most impressive was allowing students to pitch for what *they* would like to learn, how they would like to learn it and what level they aspire to reach in relation to the outcome. The students make their case similar and receive feedback from a panel. While this might appear to be an 'anything goes' approach to learning, it is highly structured, rigorous and collaborative. Throughout the process, students are required to report on their learning, demonstrate progress and present evidence (similar to defending a thesis).

While this approach may not be considered the 'norm', I applaud Ormiston and schools like Templestowe College who are responding to the signs of the times and ensuring students understand the value and purpose of what they are learning and why.

Here is Luke talking about the New Zealand Curriculum in the context of their learning community.

Equality and quality are linked 2019-08-30

Koroboro International School recently hosted its inaugural *Festival of Learning*. I was fortunate enough to have been a part of the celebration alongside 350+ local educators and leaders.

While there are obvious differences between our schools and systems, what is evident in PNG and here is the equity gap. The rich are getting richer, the poor are getting poorer and the view that quality schooling is for those that can and those that have is becoming entrenched.

Different students need different things to succeed. As Geoff Masters writes:

In an 'equitable' school system, students' special needs and unequal socioeconomic backgrounds are recognised and resources (for example, teaching expertise) are distributed unequally in an attempt to redress disadvantage due to personal and social circumstances. Here again, 'equity' is achieved by prioritising fairness over equality.

Equity and quality (of learning outcomes) are inextricably linked. If one slips, so will the other yet media coverage on our declining NAPLAN results rarely mentions the 'E' word. Either way, closing the equity gap means closing the gaps in literacy and numeracy.

An education system is only as strong as its lowest performing schools. Fairness is about ensuring those whose needs are greatest have access to the greatest support. Period.

Schooling: the new frontier in customer experience 2019-09-06

It's difficult to escape 'customer experience' in today's world. At a conference I attended earlier this year, one of the presenters spoke about the 'Uber experience' and how it had become the gold standard in terms of how they rated all interactions with other businesses/organisations.

Most businesses today invest significant time and money understanding their customers/clients with the intent of delivering a better service and experience. I'm not sure about you but I am regularly asked to complete customer satisfaction surveys!

Historically, schools have not been highly attuned to the student journey or the family experience. Yet, we operate in a highly competitive environment where parents *are* willing to walk away when schools fail to meet their expectations or the individual needs of learners. Look no further than the increase of students being home-schooled here and elsewhere. Contented students equal contented parents. Nonetheless, disillusionment among parents and disengagement among students still in 'the system' is on the rise.

This goes beyond the expectation of having competent teachers in classrooms. Competent teachers can deliver the curriculum but what's missing here is the *X* factor: personalisation. A great customer experience is highly personalisation. For families, the experience begins with the first phone call, open day visit, meeting with the principal and it continues throughout the learning journey. I know of parents who have made decisions about whether to enrol at a particular school based on the feeling they get when they walk into a school. Whether we like it or not, schools will be rated, assessed, ranked and compared. Those that will be judged as great according to today's standards will be the ones promoting genuine interactions not standardised transactions.

Meeting student needs and exceeding parent expectations happens when schools are listening to the pulse and developing a deep understanding of their community. If we do not take the whole student/parent experience seriously, we will be left behind when the 'Ubers' of schooling come to disrupt.

Who is my class? 2019-09-27

When ‘Teacher Professional Learning and Development: Best Evidence Synthesis Iteration (BES)’ was published in 2007, we invited one of the lead authors, Professor Helen Timperley to speak about the teacher inquiry cycle and its effect on improved learning outcomes.

More than a decade on, we are still referring to the ‘inquiry cycle’ in our conversations within the office and in schools. One of the themes from Timperley’s keynote was the concept of ‘Who is your class?’.

Within a classroom, it is the ability of the teacher to identify the skills and knowledge students need, which determines the skills and knowledge the teacher needs in order to deepen professional practice, develop expertise and so on.

As Timperley explained, the ‘class’ extends beyond the classroom. It relates to school leaders identifying the skills and knowledge teachers need and system leaders identifying the skills and knowledge school leaders need. This idea of collaborative inquiry leading to collaborative learning and teaching was one of the reasons I began a weekly video conference call with school leaders.

Each Monday morning, I invite four school leaders to speak openly about the learning needs of their school communities. It has become part of our professional practice yet when I floated the idea with school leaders several years back, it was met with reticence.

For me, the why was made clearer after hearing Timperley speak because the process of inquiry is how we learn to do the work better through targeted action and critical reflection. Over time, our leaders have come to appreciate the open dialogue, inquiry, mentoring and accountable to each other.

As another school term ends, I’ve been thinking ahead to next year and how we expand ‘the class’ to include school leadership teams. Luckily technology makes all of this possible but the real power comes through the collective inquiry into new and effective ways of learning and teaching.

Contemporary schooling needs to be seen to be believed 2019-10-03

When schools and systems have the audacity and courage to challenge the status quo, they are often labelled as experimental or worse, irresponsible.

Our system has copped its fair share of criticism over the years for taking an ‘experimental’ approach to learning and teaching. While some in the wider community may view it as experimental, everything we have done and continue to do has been guided by contemporary theory and research combined with best practice. It’s as close to being experimental as Vegemite on toast.

All of this has been driven by a deep commitment to making schooling more engaging and relevant for our learners. But somehow contemporary schooling is misunderstood as students Googling their way through schooling on their own. In fact, we say that teachers working collaboratively are critical in today’s technology rich world.

In these spaces, students are not viewed as empty vessels to be filled up with facts and figures. They are engaged in solving real-world problems, they are sharing their learning with others and they are creating new knowledge. While I continue to advocate for this kind of learning, it is always more powerful when others see the learning in action for themselves. Here’s a snippet from an email recently forwarded to me:

We just returned from our granddaughter’s primary school (St Monica’s Primary, North Parramatta). Her little group has just completed their first-ever project-based learning (PBL). She was excited to see her Nan & Pop and was busy sharing her learning. On her and her partner’s hand-drawn poster are two trees. Nanna says, “Oh I like your trees, this tree has lost its leaves and this tree is yet to lose its leaves”. Our granddaughter then explains “No Nanna this tree is deciduous, and this tree is evergreen”. > > Yes, we could smile and laugh, but what tremendous learning! Here are 5-year-olds happy to share their learning; two wonderful young teachers having the strength and intellect to invite parents and grandparents to celebrate in the rich learning that has occurred; the wonderful leadership of a great Principal who trusts her teachers. We are over the moon with these results. > > I defy any critic of learning and contemporary pedagogy to tell me that PBL needs justification.

Our challenge is to make this the story of every school community!

Ask the insiders *2019-10-14*

I spent the first week of the NSW school holidays at the ACEL national conference in Sydney. I was amazed that many teachers had travelled from as far away as Western Australia to attend. It was great to see such strong commitment to professional learning and networking but the irony is that most return to the industrial processes and structures that constrain innovation, dampens enthusiasm and limits autonomy. I think it was Fullan who said never send a changed individual into an unchanged environment.

While I don't underestimate the value of educational conferences, I am always left wondering at how far we are turning the transformation dial, if at all. I think we often show up in the hope that someone will finally reveal the blueprint for transforming learning. As I said at the conference, the tendency for schools is to look outward but the seeds of change must be sown from within.

If we walk to talk about 'voice and vision', let's look to the insiders – our students. We need to be placing greater trust in our students to help shape the educational agenda. We have nothing to lose at this point and it's where we will find a coalition of the willing. Unless we give greater agency to young people, I believe schools will continue down the path of irrelevancy. Young people need to know we see them as co-contributors in the process that they are an integral part of.

We absolutely have to listen to our students and it will take a lot to convince me that school isn't still designed for adults. However, I'll be more hopeful if the next educational conference I attend has students as our co-presenters and co-participants.

The choice is yours 2019-10-23

The question of why we aren't paying the best teachers bonuses for their 'magnificent contribution' is often thrown into the market place for debate. Differential payment of teachers is attractive in its simplicity especially to those outside education. It's based on the premise that rewarding great teachers will motivate others to step-up. Good in theory but not in its application.

Daniel Pink has written previously that external motivators (e.g. bonuses) can end up hurting tasks that require people to problem-solve, think creatively, understand conceptually and show empathy. When Pink wrote *A Whole New Mind* more than a decade ago, he predicted the future would belong to the 'right-brainers': storytellers, designers, care-givers and inventors. In many respects, he is describing the work of teachers in today's world.

We have to move away from this antiquated idea that teaching is an individual endeavour. Even if we went down the path of rewarding high performing teams, what are we linking the bonus to? Scores on standardised tests?

The magnificent contribution of teachers has to be understood in terms of intellectual property not brow sweat. The intellectual work of teaching today is in the design (of personalised learning), the care shown to *all* students, the creation of a new educational narrative; a commitment to ongoing excellence through professional learning and sharing and the ability to evaluate the impact teachers are having on student learning and progress.

In the Afterword of a *Whole New Mind*, Pink writes:

The peril is that our world moves at a furious pace. That means that the greatest rewards will go to those who move fast. The first group of people who develop a whole new mind, who master high-concept and high-touch abilities, will do extremely well. The rest – those who move slowly or not at all – may miss out or, worse, suffer.

Pink is right when he says the choice is yours, so how will you choose to work?

Lowering the white flag when it comes to suspensions 2019-10-31

I've been looking at some data recently on suspension rates and there's no prize for guessing which year group often has the highest (the answer is at the bottom of this blog post). What is alarming is there are students being suspended across *all* year cohorts. This raises a critical question for policy makers, which is 'how does this help develop the necessary skills these children need to meet adult expectations?'

Suspension and expulsion policies are an artefact of an industrial mode. For me, it's a white flag that signals: not prepared to teach you. It seems contradictory that we invest so much time and energy improving literacy and numeracy skills but lagging skills in behaviour are treated differently. We need to view a student's difficulties through the same lens, which should not be focussed on motivating but up-skilling. Today's learning communities should be about offering pathways that lead students from being stuck to being successful. We end up raising the white flag when schools fail to see the red flags early enough.

Equity in schools is the realization that every child will struggle at some point in their learning journey. The way to address it is not by being reactive but proactive. I believe it starts with every teacher taking responsibility for every child, then finding collaborative approaches that are not punitive. The purpose of all schools in today's world is to promote and enhance skills. When we can do that, we strengthen relationships, improve communication and lower the white flags. I know that teaching is demanding and that many students disengage act out and interrupt other students. however, the suspension is a blunt instrument at times with long term consequences. The way schools are organised around one teacher to a set number of students means that the immediate need is to exclude the misbehaving student.

If we can find new ways of organizing students in groups with a team of teachers, we may find new answers

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When West Meets East 2019-11-11

The Greater Sydney Commission unveiled plans this week to make Parramatta the economic centre of Sydney. Under the proposal, a staggering \$30 billion is needed to transform the region and create new infrastructure, schools, hospitals, green space and housing. Transformation is no longer a fringe concept. It is the norm for many nation states and sectors; it recognises the work now is about creating a better future for all.

Twenty years ago, my role as Executive Director was to focus on the day to day oversight of a school system without gazing too far into the future. Today, the role is far more complex and challenging in terms of not simply maintaining or improving schooling but transforming it. As I sit looking out of my window, you can see the physical transformation taking place in the Parramatta CBD. It's part of a much greater social and cultural transformation happening across greater Western Sydney.

In September, I was invited to take part in a study tour of East London (#WestMeetsEast) hosted by the Western Sydney Leadership Dialogue. Executives from a range of industry, government and community in Western Sydney had the opportunity to see and hear about the significant growth and regeneration of East London over the past 15 years. Canary Wharf was once a derelict site that is now the financial hub of London and home to a growing and diverse residential community.

While the tour was short and intensive, we had an opportunity to hear from the stakeholders who were responsible for the transformation of East London. Having been back in Parramatta for a while, some of the important lessons I learned were:

1. 1. 1. Challenges can only be met through partnerships. It's not a government or a commercial responsibility – we are all responsible for achieving the vision and delivering the best outcomes.
2. We need new ways of thinking about how we finance major projects such as hospitals, schools and roads. Robbing Peter to pay Paul, so to speak, is old thinking.
3. Applying value capture to new projects means everyone benefits from the transaction.
4. We need visionary leadership. People who are prepared to think outside the box and predict future trends in the same way the President of Pacific Telephone and Telegraph Co. did in 1953 when talking about phone use.

The transformation of schooling is integral to the transformation of urban spaces. It requires us to work in partnership to ensure a brighter future for the young people living, learning and working in these dynamic, diverse and ever-evolving communities.

Command is no longer the name of the game 2019-12-06

As Richard Elmore once said, the greatest barrier to change in education is teachers and leaders' inability to relinquish control. I would also add to that, a misguided belief that with control comes greater certainty. The ghost of Frederick Winslow Taylor still looms large on current business practice.

By no means is command and control the exclusive domain of schools. In fact, Ibarra and Scoular in the November issue of Harvard Business Review explain why more and more organisations are moving away from this managerial mindset to one that embraces coaching to create true learning organisations. The authors explain that under this model, leaders are motivated to ask questions, support rather than judge and facilitate the development of individuals.

Schooling has had a long history of 'doing to' rather than 'doing with', evidenced in the popularity today of using punishment and rewards to build individual responsibility. Rewards and punishment are intended to create compliance and obedience rather than self-motivation and responsible thinking. In some ways, Seth Godin's recent blog post 'Transition to Leadership' illustrates the problem:

The flawed theory is that A+ students become good leaders. > > There's no reason to think that this should be true. > > Doing well on tests, paying attention to what's being asked, being diligent in short-term error correction—these are three hallmarks of someone who is good at school. > > None of these are important once you're charged with charting a new path, with figuring out what to do next. In fact, they get in the way. > > We invented the educational regime to produce compliant factory workers. But the most compliant aren't always suited to be the bravest, the most empathic or the most intuitive.

Seth has a point and maybe an explanation as to why inertia still exists. If we are honest, there is still more directing than guiding; telling than modelling; punishing/rewarding than trusting; more competing than collaborating. As I've shared with many school leaders, the central paradox here is that the more control you give away, the more you gain in terms of the teams you lead and the environments you create.

Simon Sinek reflects on this paradox in his latest book 'The Infinite Game' where he argues that today's leaders must be focussed on taking care of those in one's charge not being in charge. It comes back to the point made by Ibarra and Scoular that a true learning organisation is one where leaders share their knowledge but are equally invested in developing knowledge in others.

This move away from command and control should not only be the aspiration of all contemporary workplaces in creating true learning organisations but a priority for school systems also.

Taking the PISA bait *2019-12-17*

It's been difficult to ignore the recent post-PISA media coverage. And if you are to believe the loudest voices in the discussion, a return to 'back-to-basics' education will guarantee Australia's future success in the rankings. Thankfully there are those like Professor Yong Zhao who continue to interrogate PISA's 'magical' powers over policy-makers. Furthermore, PISA continues to measure a very 'narrow aspect of education' (still rooted in an industrial model), which may harm the broader purpose of education. Yong also cites research showing a negative correlation between high PISA scores and student wellbeing.

What is clear from the media commentary is that politicians continue to take the PISA bait as part of the quick fix mentality.

How do we ensure young people are equipped to meet the challenges of the future? By designing a new learning framework that speaks to what it means to be a learner and teacher in today's world. As I have been suggesting, this learning framework must reflect the work of teachers as researchers, collaborators and, co-learners. It must also address the equity and resourcing issues to ensure that every child has pathways to success. It must also leverage strategic partners to help deliver the best learning opportunities and experiences in an ever-changing and digital world.

I believe the challenges facing schooling are more cultural than instrumental. Teachers working collaboratively, informed and directed by a unifying framework, are in the best position to respond constructively to the challenges and opportunities that accompany massive technological and social change. Teachers and students are best served by the type of cultural leadership that promotes and defines a new and relevant educational narrative.

The task of the teacher is not just adding value; it is about knowing the learner and enabling that learner to take the next step on the individual journey. As educators in today's world, we need to live up to the rhetoric of lifelong learning. It means continuing to build a robust profession that can critique and critically reflect as well as develop new ways of working that meets the needs of new generations of students.

Above all, there needs to be excitement as we collectively explore new ideas and issues – refusing to be distracted, mislead or deflated by concerns like PISA rankings that have never been part of the fabric of teaching or central to the professional task of teachers.

Why we continue to get it so wrong *2019-12-23*

I couldn't let the year end without some commentary on the Higher School Certificate (HSC). In addition to post-HSC coverage in the media, it was the talking sign outside of a large high school that strengthened my resolve that we need transformation not improvement. The sign read 'celebrating our HSC results'. While it appears fairly innocuous, the focus is misplaced. The whole reason for schools existing is not results, but the growth of the individual child.

All of this follows on from the point I made recently regarding PISA and why we continue to get it so wrong. There are approximately 75,000 students who sit the NSW HSC. What happens at the end is a reduction of learning to a simple rank that is often misunderstood as a mark. Sadly, the high achieving high schools then become the gold standard. The problem is as one letter writer pointed out in the SMH last week, the list of schools, 'makes people feel inadequate... it's an unfair competition. It is a school [James Ruse High] that if it was a sport, would be disqualified because it's on academic steroids.'

As the year comes to a close, my desire is that good theory, practice and evidence finally silences the detractors. We need to accept that the HSC needs to be abolished and a whole new curriculum framework is needed in today's world. I actually don't believe this is too difficult given we have had a decade of voices like Sir Ken Robinson et al. and numerous practitioners who have illustrated how the current factory model of schooling is doing more harm than good to the creative and curious minds of young people.

And that's where I'll be focussing my energies at the beginning of a new decade. And on that final note for 2019, I wish you a Merry Christmas and thank those who have taken the time to read, comment and subscribe to the blog. Your feedback continues to challenge and shape my ideas and professional learning.

Until the New Year, safe travels.

2020 Writings

What lies beyond (the) bluyonder? 2020-01-31

Happy New Year! We face the future of schooling with more optimism than with pessimism. As I go into schools I see change and innovative practice. Sure, its too often one-off but they are beacons of learning to all of us. In particular, I see more staff passionate about their work and a willingness to commit to ongoing learning as a community of learners. This is the engine room of change and diverse models of schooling.

It was Malcolm Gladwell who said that it takes 10,000 hours of (deliberate) practice to become an expert at something. While I'm not declaring myself to be an expert, bluyonder has been part of my professional practice now for more than a decade.

When the first post was published back in May 2007, blogs were still part of the 'Web 2.0' world. Today, social media is embedded in our daily lives and I believe that the influence of artificial machine learning and predictive analytics will be massive. If used in the way it is intended, AI will provide an extraordinary opportunity to finally emancipate teachers from the mundane processes of the industrial model of schooling.

Thirteen years ago, a cohort of learners began their formal schooling journey. Today, those students are graduates of the system and now embarking on new pathways that will hopefully lead to fulfilling lives and careers. So after 13 years in this space and 600 posts, I've decided to retire bluyonder. It's time to look at new and different platforms for sharing ideas and crafting the new narrative for schooling in today's world. I'll continue to share my keynote presentations here for the time being but feel free to come back and re-read past blogs.

As I've often written, bluyonder has provided me with a forum for expressing thoughts openly, thinking critically and connecting with those who are as passionate about the work as I am. While I've received my fair share of criticism, there's also been commendation. And if bluyonder has contributed in some small way to moving the educational agenda forward, then it's been well worth it.

We stand together at the start of a new decade, cognisant that conversations must be on the new relationships between teachers and learners, between learners and the process through which each one grows in competence and wisdom and between what happens in school and outside of it. There are many forces seeking to control the agenda but the essential contributors and change-makers are our teachers, students and the learning communities of which they are a part.

As a former English/History teacher, it's probably poignant to close with a video clip from a film I have referred to in many keynotes and blog posts. So as this door closes, I say thank you for your contribution to bluyonder and for continuing to stand up and challenge the status quo on behalf of young learners everywhere.

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For more than two decades, Greg Whitby wrote candidly about schooling in a changing world, leadership, learning spaces, technology, teacher professionalism, and the dignity of each learner. First shared on his *bluyonder* blog, these short musings trace a consistent message: relevance, relationships and a relentless focus on student learning. Collected here in one volume, Greg's reflections move from the practical to the philosophical — how to build professional culture, why pedagogy matters more than hardware, and what it means to lead learning rather than simply manage schools. This book is a snapshot of an educator's mind at work: curious, optimistic, and grounded in evidence. It is also a tribute to the teachers and leaders who, day after day, turn big ideas into better learning for young people.