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"Why schools: their purpose and directions for the 21st century"

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WHY SCHOOLS:

THEIR PURPOSE AND DIRECTIONS FOR THE 21ST CENTURY

by

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Introduction

The term *school* has various meanings and origins. One etymology traces its origins to a Greek term *skhole* meaning 'leisure, discussion, lecture'[1], or 'leisure spent in the pursuit of knowledge'[2]. It represents a group with a common philosophy or approach, as in a group of artists or thinkers. As a verb, 'to school' is synonymous with 'to educate' or 'to train'.

The term's use to represent a physical structure is more recent. Now, *school* is synonymous with a building or buildings which students attend. As a corollary, the physical structure has become a synonym for the activity of education. Nowhere is this more obvious than in the United States of America (USA) where what we know as a School Principal may be called a Building Supervisor – they are in charge of the building and all that happens within.

Other dimensions of public education are developed to fit within the physical frame of schools – a homeroom teacher, curriculum, timetables, activities. In this lecture I ask to what extent the goal of educating children is achieved through schools as educational structures that we have created, and whether schools as we know them are appropriate for education in the twenty-first century. It is timely to ask **why** schools, in the sense that the purposes of education in the 21st century need to be questioned and challenged, and why **schools**, in the sense that ways we embody and offer education to children need to be similarly questioned and challenged. I wonder how many children today would consider their time at school as 'leisure spent in the pursuit of knowledge'.

2003 marks my thirtieth year as an educational researcher and thirty-third as an educational practitioner. I feel like many a middle-aged actor at an awards ceremony, here to celebrate my overnight success as an academic. Thirty years in one career is a long time. In the context of public education and schooling for all, it is a very long time. In this lecture, I begin by tracing a brief evolution of schools, specifically public schooling for all. Against this, you will see the evolution of my own thoughts about the purpose and direction of schools.

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[1] *Merriam-Webster Dictionary* http://www.m-w.com/cgi-bin/dictionary?book=Dictionary&va=school (accessed 7 August 2003)

[2] *Collins Dictionary of the English Language.* (2001). Sydney: Wm Collins Publishers Pty Ltd.

I am not a historian and do not give a full history of what has been seen as important in education from classic times through church doctrine to economic rationalist fervour. I pick up on the approach to the twentieth century in English-speaking countries, to show what has framed schools, and schooling for the masses, in the present, especially where the combination of national purpose and scientific principles collide with recognition of the significance of education for the individual.

Schools emerge in, of and for the community

Until the invention of the printing press, most of the public did not need to learn written language. Education focused on manual labour, trades and religion (Cubberley, 1920, p.309). Education of children was the responsibility of the family and undertaken in the community, contextualised within the roles children would adopt as adults. Informally this may have been within family work, more formally an indenture or apprenticeship. Public education for children in Europe in the middle ages was also offered by the church, especially for the preparation of further clergy.

Education to perpetuate trades and traditions by necessity focused on maintenance of procedures and standards. While practices evolved, challenge of the accepted knowledge was not expected. Similarly, religious education served to perpetuate the beliefs and rituals of a religion, not to raise questions or promote discourse, but to promote the 'moral fibre' of individuals and adherence to the teachings of the church. Education and the practices of the community were congruent and symbiotic.

It is from church provision of public education that modern schooling developed. Its evolution is most easily traced in the new English-speaking colonies, especially America and Australia, and by jumping a century or two.

Education in early settled America followed the models brought from Europe. As a colony for emigrants escaping religious oppression, religious purposes of education were predominant. The structure of work within the new society was similar to that of Europe, education was the responsibility of families and apprentice masters. Charitable schools, funded through philanthropy, were built in some towns for young children.

However, while education was the responsibility of the community, broader social purposes of education to promote an industrious nation began to emerge. It was considered that educational responsibilities were often not fulfilled (Cubberley, 1920, p.364). For example, in the state of Massachusetts, the Massachusetts Law of 1642 directed 'chosen men' to

'ascertain ... if the parents and masters were attending to their educational duties; if the children were being trained "in learning and labor and other employments ... profitable to the Commonwealth"; and if children were being taught "to read and understand the principles of religion and the capital laws of the country"'. This is regarded as the first English-speaking legislation ordering that all children should be taught to read, and selected good and true men were empowered to impose fines on 'those who refuse to render such accounts to them when required' (Cubberley, 1920, p.364), perhaps the first state instigation of punishment for educational delivery.

While the purpose of education in reading was interwoven with the perceived fabric of the new society, education and its provision were still community-based and contextualised. The 1642 law did not provide physical schools or teachers. A later law, in 1647, required small towns to appoint a 'teacher of reading and writing', and larger towns to provide a 'grammar (or secondary) school' to fit youths 'for the university', to be paid from town funds. A purpose was still the promotion of education to maintain religious unity in the community (Cubberley, 1920, p.365). The 1647 Act is seen as the first assertion, in English-speaking countries of 'the right of the State to require communities to establish and maintain schools, under penalty if they refused to do so' (Cubberley, 1920, p.366). A historian of the Massachusetts law has perceived the principles underlying such legislation to be:

1. Universal education of youth is essential to the well-being of the State.
2. The obligation to furnish this education rests primarily upon the parent.
3. The State has a right to enforce this obligation.
4. The State may fix a standard which shall determine the kind of education, and the minimum amount.
5. Public money, raised by general tax, may be used to provide such education as the State requires. The tax may be general, though the school attendance is not.
6. Education higher than the rudiments may be supplied by the State. Opportunity must be provided, at public expense, for youths who wish to be fitted for the university.

> *...the idea underlying all this legislation is neither paternalistic nor socialistic. The child is to be educated, not to advance his personal interests, but because the State will suffer if he is not educated. ...(legislation is to) better enforce the obligation.*
>
> (Martin, cited in Cubberley, 1920, p.366).

The state as an institution began to play a major role in the provision and monitoring of education.

A century later, in Virginia in 1779, Jefferson proposed legislation for a scheme of universal education to provide elementary schools for all that would be free for the first three years, the beginning of the 'common school' (Graves, 1924, p.86). Finally in 1816, such a system of public education was legislated (Graves, 1924, pp.86-7). As always, funding was a critical issue. Public education was seen as 'poor relief, rather than universal training for citizenship'. Education was to occur in *schools*, buildings separated from the community, to a standard specified by the State, and for the purposes of the State. However, attendance at school buildings was not compulsory and education was not seen as the sole province of schools.

Philanthropic and publicly-funded schools became more prevalent. Even in the eighteenth century, schools were not solely to serve the state's purpose. They were to provide for the moral, religious, and economic reform of the masses (Graves, 1924, p.78). For many of the public, the charitable or optional nature of such schools meant that they chose not to send their children. One reason given has been that they did not seek or want charitable handouts. An alternative proposition is more simple. Working-class and poor families needed their children to work to provide additional family income (Baker, 1999, p.200).

About the same time, in 1824, Moreton Bay was settled, some thirty years before my ancestors first arrived in Australia. Education was obviously seen as important for the new colony, attested to by the ship manifests of the time where ability to 'Read or write' was recorded for each immigrant. My namesake family reported these skills according to the ship Shackamaxon's immigrant list in 1863, although this seems in doubt given the 'personal mark' recorded by one family member on a later marriage certificate. But then, in high-stakes literacy and numeracy assessment, pressures to meet standards will always lead to some inappropriate behaviours.

As in other nations, early education in the Australian colony was a responsibility taken on by the churches. Fees were paid by all 'except orphans and children of paupers' (Wyeth, 195_, p.7). Children could attend schools to be taught the 'rudiments of arithmetic, reading and writing, with simple trades and agriculture for orphans' (Wyeth, 195_, p.7). Despite an 1821 report urging the need for education so '...that as little control as possible be left to the parents over the time, the habits or dispositions of their children' (Wyeth, 195_, p.3), the purpose of education in Australia appears to have been moral and religious

development and the development of basic skills and trades of service to the community. However, education for these purposes could still be achieved within the community. Attendance at a school for education was at parents' discretion.

Towards public schools for the masses

The provision of mass education in Queensland was benefited by the wealth brought by the Gympie gold finds. From 1870, education at a school was free to every child, if their parents chose (Wyeth, 195_, p.109), for a limited number of years of childhood.

Moves towards compulsory attendance began in 1873. Education Acts were drafted but not easily passed. A primary basis of conflict was the role of the church in providing education, and the plan to teach a common Christianity. Compulsory education was also not perceived by all as for the common good. A commentary provided to a Royal Commission into education in 1875 stated that 'compulsory training ... should be confined to reformatories ... (and was) an invasion of the liberty of the subject' (Wyeth, 195_, p.120).

Royal Commissions on a range of issues are common today. It would be interesting to have another Royal Commission into the purpose of education today. Would the final report echo the findings of just 150 years ago:

> *The principle of free education is that it is the interest, as well as the duty, of the State to educate the whole people, and that such education should be of the most practical, useful and elevating character within the resources of the community to command; and that, being provided by State expenditure, it should be shared equally by all citizens who have the capacity and desire to take advantage of the provision made for them and who will accept it on a national basis.*
>
> (Wyeth, 195_, p.123).

The State Education Act of 1875 promoting free, secular and compulsory education finally passed. Children between the ages of six and 12 years of age were to attend school 'for at least sixty days in each half-year, unless there was some valid excuse' (Wyeth, p.125). Instruction was to include 'Reading, Writing, Arithmetic, English Grammar, Geography, History, Elementary Mechanics, Object Lessons, Drill and Gymnastics, and Vocal Music' with Religious Instruction and Drawing omitted (Wyeth, 195_, p.127). The KLAs (Key Learning Areas) are not new in Australian education.

Valid excuses for non-attendance were many, of course, particularly due to the geographic dispersion of the population. The legislation was not really effected until 1900 when sufficient wealth, and population growth, made provision possible.

In summary, free, public and compulsory education for all emerged from developments over considerable time. It emerged more strongly and more quickly perhaps, in new colonies such as Australia and America as new settlers sought to create new environments. Free, public and compulsory education in Queensland has only a hundred year history. It emerged from strong charitable purposes to promote the moral wellbeing of individuals and maintain church unity, to pass through eras of political unrest of separation of education from church power. Varying purposes were ascribed to schools and schooling, but alignment with community and individual needs was strong at the turn of the century. In 1903, the Minister for Public Instruction in Queensland referred to education as an obligation of the State 'which every child in the community has a **right** (my emphasis) to expect and to receive' (cited in Wyeth, 195_, p.157).

Schools for the masses and as systems of the state

Education, by the turn of the last century was legislated as a responsibility of the state, as required by the state, to occur in schools, and with a curriculum developed by the state. At the same time, curriculum in Queensland was directed to be progressive, practical, centred on the child, and 'to bring the work of the pupil into closer touch with his home and social surroundings; and to increase the influence of the school as an agent in the intellectual, moral and social development of the child' (Wyeth, 195_, p.157). Conflicting agendas between the purposes of education as service to the individual, to the economy of the state, or as moral control began to emerge. As education became free, compulsory, for the masses, and directed by the state, serious waves of curriculum reform began. During the 20th century, philosophies of realism, and the influence of the rise of the 'scientific method' were incorporated in various forms into the curriculum (Cubberley, 1920, p.397).

Despite child and community-centred statements of purpose, the shift of curriculum continued towards service of the state, and the development of skilled workers, human capital, for a technically-developing society. The first generic curriculum for all were formed in the early 20th century, drawing on the skills identified to be essential to the work of the time. The purpose of school education was to develop the masses, all students, to have 'flexible, general and widely applicable skills' transferable across industry and location (Goldin, 2001).

The substance of schooling, the curriculum we have in schools today, evolved from that point, adapting to the air of the school environment from the water of social activity.

We have been through many curriculum trends – behaviourist philosophies, componential curricular hierarchies, 'new math'. Traces of these underpin many curriculum structures today. As a researcher I have always been curious about the lack of empirical validation of most curriculum against intended purposes and contexts. These curriculum principles are now so embedded that we have made such curriculum validation almost impossible. For example, we have created hierarchical concepts of knowledge difficulty by the way we teach. As Sue Willis said many years ago, why has the area of a circle been perceived as a more difficult mathematical concept than area of a square, and so introduced at a different, and later, time in education. We have made it more difficult by timing its introduction in schooling. Practice leads to facility. The less familiarity, the less ease. We don't let children practise larger numbers in the first years of schooling or in later years because it is too time-consuming in classrooms. Hence, working with larger numbers becomes more difficult (Ashcraft & Christy, 1995), but not in cultures where such curriculum staging does not occur. Curriculum hierarchies become self-fulfilling.

Over 100 years, education and public schooling have grown, not just as a provision that is a right for the individual or an obligation on the state, but as an industry in itself. Indeed, education is now called a service industry and a major export earner for Australia.

As an industry, schools have a protectionism denied most other industries – compulsory attendance and highly-regulated control. This enables schools to develop their own direction and requires the masses to follow. Curriculum development and implementation are part of that industry. How well do curriculum now link to communities of practice? Are they really the '...blueprint for what ...students should know ... to be ready for the work world ... (to be) a national workforce for international economic competition' (Conley, 2003a, p.23), to provide a 'national' labor pool' (Conley, 2003a, p.34)? Or have curriculum become an idiosyncratically school-based' anachronism?

Curriculum are usually developed by those who have demonstrated success in the previous generation of curriculum. The curriculum establish expectations and pathways for success in school. The question is the degree to which modern evolved curriculum enable, or control, the education of the masses. Is mass education for all or not for all. Or do we, as Howard Gardner has commented,

> *... subject everyone to an education where, if you succeed, you will be best suited to be a college professor. And we evaluate everyone along the way according to whether they meet that narrow standard of success. We should spend ... more time helping them to identify their natural competencies and gifts, and cultivate those.*
>
> (Gardner, 1996)

> *Nowadays, it's mastering a certain amount of mathematics, even though almost nobody will be using that mathematics when they go on. They are hurdles which we set up to discover whether somebody has – the Yiddish word is yechas, the German word is sitzfleisch– to sit down and do something they don't really want to do. ....The notion of coverage, of going through a bunch of disciplines, and learning facts and concepts, is assessed by schools all over the world. It's never been a very good idea, but now it's really irrelevant (because of technology, need for thinking). I would throw away 95 percent of the coverage that we do; figure out really important questions and issues, and give people lots and lots of time to learn about how disciplined minds think about those issues, and then to practice those disciplines themselves.*
>
> (Gardner, in Presseisen, 2000, p.27)

Gardner expresses strong opinions on current school curriculum and processes. However, in my 30 years' observation of schools, and education outside schools, I have come to agree with him. In the school industry of the 20th century, we have created forms of knowledge, of 'doing school', that are a direct impediment to many individuals. We have forgotten how to question these, how to return to basic issues of why this is important, and, most importantly, how relevant it is for the 21st century, for education for all.

Schools for industry and the economy or schools for learning

> *...Society's commitment to school-based education assumes the closely related premises that general-thinking skills can be taught out of the contexts in which they are to be used and that information acquired in school contexts will be translated to applications outside the schools. To the extent that cognition must be situated, learning to think cannot be so dissociated from practice.*
>
> (Hunt, 1999, p.43)

Educational research in the twentieth century has provided considerable insights into understanding how people learn and the nature of knowledge. The research draws on various main disciplines, especially sociology and psychology, merged in fields such as socio-cultural educational psychology. We have come full circle in recognising the

significance of the learning that occurs in a community of practice. Learning theories now recognise that learning is dependent on complex interrelationships of cognitive, affective and socio-cultural factors (Resnick, 1989) and context (Anderson, Reder & Simon, 1996; Wiggins, 1993).

Learning is not passive but requires deliberate engagement. Motivation to engage in learning occurs when students can perceive the relevance of educational activities, the basis for the current focus on 'authenticity' in education (Cumming & Maxwell,1999), for activities that emulate the 'kinds of mastery demonstrated by successful adults' (Newmann & Archbald, 1992) and evidenced by:

- Production of knowledge instead of reproduction or response only to the produced work of others.
- Disciplined enquiry, dependent on:
  - a prior knowledge base (to be used to help to produce knowledge);
  - in-depth understanding (rather than superficial awareness);
  - integration – the production of knowledge requires the ability to 'organize, synthesize, and integrate information in new ways';
- Value beyond assessment – 'aesthetic, utilitarian, or personal value'.

An effective learner constructs knowledge by taking new information selectively and incorporating it with our own prior knowledge. Each person may develop a different construction of knowledge. Such learning also occurs through cognitive apprenticeship (Brown, Collins & Duguid, 1989), with observation and practice supported by scaffolding (Palincsar & Brown, 1986). To learn is an apprenticeship from novice to expert states, building strategies and repertoires. Worthwhile learning has a developmental substance. It is not a collection of ad hoc 'skills' or activities.

We are still exploring the degree to which knowledge and skills are situated in context, rather than generic, and that learning occurs best, or perhaps only, within context (Brown, Collins & Duguid, 1989; Perkins & Salomon, 1989). Some theories posit that learning and performance are so *situated*, that is, developed within a context, that the actual schema of the domain knowledge and processes are different for different contexts. Therefore, a performance demonstrated in one context may not be indicative of capability for performance in another context. Research such as that by Scribner and Lave demonstrates repeatedly that adults do not engage in real-life tasks following the procedures taught in school. People

can demonstrate learning in one context and fail to transfer it to another (Bransford, Brown & Cocking, 1999, p.50). In their everyday lives people display reasoning abilities that go well beyond what one would expect of them, based upon formal examinations of these same abilities, people who 'can't do math' in a school setting or assessment are quite capable of developing methods that work on the job (Hunt, 1999, p.42). Hence, while the drive of much school curriculum is towards generic skills and competencies, research demonstrates that skills are developed in a context of practice and that, despite the earnest attentions of curriculum developers in schools, children and adults do not link the knowledge gained in school to activities outside school and vice versa.

In addition to these theories about the nature of learning, the exponential growth of knowledge in our society has provided argument for changed emphases in curriculum and school education, to focus on problem-solving and flexible thinking. As Newmann and Archbald (1992, p.75) indicated, a major goal for authentically-focused education is 'to cultivate the kind of higher-order thinking and problem-solving capacities useful both to individuals and to the society'. Newmann and Archbald argue that if this is the focus, then 'the mastery gained in school is likely to transfer more readily to life beyond school' (1992, p.75).

The newest area of learning research with the potential to influence curriculum development and instruction is neuropsychology. Studies are beginning to explore, through modern medical technology, brain activity for different types of learners, such as those with dyslexia, or students gifted in specific areas, usually in comparison with 'normal' students. To date, the research shows that patterns of activity are different for some learners. This evidence can be used constructively or destructively. Until longitudinal studies are undertaken, and ethically this may be problematic, the neuroscience studies do not establish causality. We do not know that brain functions are different because of prior brain structure, or as a result of environmental exposure. We can take a deficit approach, where educators might opt out of responsibility for assisting each individual to learn effectively, arguing their brain is 'inadequate', or a difference approach, where educators look to develop a repertoire of instructional approaches that are effective for different learners.

Learning theory, situated cognition theory, higher-order thinking emphases and neuroscience have one message for curriculum directions in the 21st century – diversity of learners, contexts and needs. Schools can choose the direction to follow, increasingly flexible and development of less-controlled curriculum, or conformity of expectations that we know will not be met by many students. The outcomes-based syllabuses Australia's states and territories are moving to are at last facilitative of

flexibility and individual difference in a positive way. If we pursue this direction, and do not reduce such syllabuses to mandatory checklists, effective learning for all should ensue.

We return to the basic question. Is the purpose of schools to serve the state, or the individual? In the 21st century, we know that control and conformity through curriculum will best serve the needs of neither.

21st century tensions in educational directions

My mother was taught that the atom could never be split. When she went to school, computers did not exist. When I went to school, quarks had not been identified. The few computers in existence occupied an entire room each. Now, we have nanotechnology and the future awaits us. It is not just that knowledge has changed, it has expanded and is expanding. Education has to select what to present to students. A shift has been recognition that development of processes that enable flexibility in approaching and using knowledge is a critical outcome for modern education.

Processes, strategies, information use – these are the important focuses of education. Such focuses, however, go against traditions of imparting the accepted wisdom, of church- or state-controlled knowledge. They go beyond a shift of focus to child-centred learning. The ideal curriculum in the 21st century would facilitate children surprising the teacher on a daily basis, extending the teacher's knowledge in different areas. The teacher would be facilitator of student development. However, we are reluctant as teachers to take such risks, and we are reluctant in curriculum to truly let go. As the knowledge of society grows, becomes more complex, we simulate its development and complexity, but within the bounds of school.

All school systems make public statements of frameworks that support lifelong learning and the development of flexible thinkers, people who can cope 'with uncertainty, diversity and the need for collaboration with others' (Broadfoot, 2002, p.5). Lifelong learning has become a focus due to needs for:

> Technological adaptability. In the 21st century, all people need to be willing and able to engage with new information and new technologies as they develop. The rate of technological change in society is rapid, and the flexibility to cope with novelty is seen as a critical factor for the ongoing maintenance, and advancement, of technological societies.
> Self-responsibility. We need to be able to engage with information and develop increasing self-responsibility for areas such as financial decision-making, health maintenance, or, in other words, in areas of

> financial burden to society that will not be well-supported by, and for, the shifting demographic to older populations of the future.
> Cultural pluralism. We need to be flexible in understanding and responding to cultural and individual diversity to maximise societal harmonies. This is not just for social well-being but also to conserve social, personal and fiscal resources.
> Environmental responsibility. Lifelong learning practices are believed consonant with development of understanding of the impact of modern civilisation on the environment and the acquisition of responsible strategies and practices to protect the environment longterm.
> Personal growth. Last but not least, lifelong learning is seen as necessary to create social and personal satisfaction in life. The increasing longevity of many populations and changes in personal environments such as in the traditional nuclear family and family supportive arrangements require new personal strategies for maintaining mental health and wellbeing.
>
> (Cumming, work in progress)

Lifelong learning goals for school for the masses match community needs. Read any newspaper. Employers today advertise for workers who, amongst other attributes, are problem-solvers, strategic thinkers, willing to learn, who have teamwork skills, drive, enthusiasm, an eye for detail, integrity and so on. These outcomes, not traditional curriculum knowledge, decide who gains employment.

In a recent major national research project in the USA, David Conley was perhaps surprised to find that university success is seen to be bound by similar factors.

> *One of the most dominant themes raised by participants is the importance of the habits of mind students develop in high school and bring with them to university studies. These habits are considered by many faculty members to be more important than specific content knowledge. The habits of mind include critical thinking, analytic thinking and problem-solving; an inquisitive nature and interest in taking advantage of what a research university has to offer; the willingness to accept critical feedback and to adjust based on such feedback; openness to possible failures from time to time; and the ability and desire to cope with frustrating and ambiguous learning tasks. Other critical skills include the ability to express one's self in writing and orally in a clear and convincing fashion; to discern the relative importance and credibility of various sources of information; to draw inferences and reach conclusions*

> *independently and to use technology as a tool to assist the learning process rather than as a crutch.*
>
> (Conley, 2003b, p.8)

However, here emerges the major tension for schools in the 21st century as operatives of the state.

> *Sometimes, and in some places, governments have rolled with and even embraced ... uncertainties and complexities, valuing multiple intelligences, diverse learning (and teaching) styles, and a process-based and integrated rather than content-based and specialized curriculum. At other times, governments have countered the spread of uncertainties with an emphatic nostalgia for the kinds of schooling they think they remember (Hargreaves, in press) and taking refuge in "procedural illusions of effectiveness" (Bishop & Mulford, 1996) that standardized tests and other technical certainties reassuringly provide. Contradictory assessment imperatives are, in this respect, at least partly a postmodern phenomenon.*
>
> (Hargreaves, Earl & Schmidt, 2002, p.85)

The 1642 Massachusetts law noted the empowerment of the state to control curriculum, 'standards' and system-level punishment. In an 1874 report on the Victorian education system for the Queensland Royal Commission on education, much of their system was endorsed, with the exception of 'Victoria's system of payment by results. (The author) could find but one advantage of the system, that of making teachers work harder; against that were at least six disadvantages. The system was unwieldy and hopeless confusion resulted. The whole success in education other than examination results went unrewarded; it lowered the moral standards of teachers; the examinations were rarely fair tests; subjects not examined were neglected; and finally, the true ends of inspection were not achieved – the inspector examined but did nothing constructive' (Wyeth, 195_, p.121).

Just as the diversity of what should be valued for education for all, in terms of the individual, is recognised, a political agenda of public accountability creates tensions with such goals. Such an agenda currently permeates most Western nations, apparently based on economic rationalist ideologies and the role of education to improve national economies and competitiveness. The irony is that the agenda is still being played out, despite improvements in global economies long before any student cohort under the accountability regimes has had a chance to enter the workforce.

The tension is created through the formats in which public accountability is being framed. As Madaus and Kellaghan (1993) warned, since the introduction of quantifiable assessments and measurements, the tendency has been to define curriculum by what is seen as assessable:

> *...the more any (quantitative) social indicator is used for social decision making, the more likely it will be to distort and corrupt the social processes it is intended to monitor.* (p.9)

Such standardised external testing programs by necessity narrow the curriculum. Depending on the stakes, the research evidence is growing about their negative impact on education in schools. Shepard (1992, cited in Gipps, 1994, p.55) and others have already noted: 'test-leveraged reform' basic skills test scores have increased in the US at the expense of higher-order thinking and problem-solving skills'. It is generally accepted and supported by research that what is valued through assessment and public reporting, especially if financial or other rewards and punishments flow from results, affects the focus of instruction in schools.

> *In the United States and elsewhere, one disturbing trend is that more standardized assessments and the demands that they place on teachers and students have become by far the more dominant of the two reform patterns... Our evidence is that this is leading teachers either to abandon teaching practices that inclusively address the varying needs of all their students in favour of rote test preparation, or to exhaust themselves preparing students for the tests at the same time as assisting students with assessments that enable them to demonstrate more sophisticated learning through performances and exhibitions...*
>
> (Norwich & Kent, 2002, p.61)

But most importantly, in the system of public, compulsory mass education seen on the one hand as enhancing the education of all, the current accountability agendas do have disparate impact on the students in greatest need, but an impact that is not positive. In addition, the focus of the accountability systems appears to identify cultural, not learning, differences. Lorrie Shepard (1992) has consistently maintained that much of the difference in learning outcomes attributed to different population subgroups, such as black and Hispanic students in the USA, and, it is likely, to the performance of any indigenous or cultural minority students on a nation's external testing programs, is due to cultural difference and 'mismatch between their frame of reference and that of the dominant culture' (p.315), as well as language expectations that are 'determined by the pattern of discourse familiar in middle-class homes, and not fundamental to legitimate academic goals.' (p.316).

A major policy agenda in many states in the USA has been to require students to pass standardised tests in order to be promoted to the next grade level, a policy seen as against 'social promotion'. The agenda is to 'improve standards'. The impact, repeatedly demonstrated by research, is the reverse. It may inadvertently improve test scores, but not due to improved learning, as noted by a US National Research Council report on high stakes testing:

> *... retained students persist in low achievement levels and are more likely to drop out of school. Low performing students who have been retained in kindergarten or primary grades lose ground both academically and socially relative to similar students who have been promoted (Holmes, 1989; Shepard and Smith, 1989). In secondary school, grade retention leads to reduced achievement and much higher rates of school dropout.*
>
> (Heubert & Hauser, 1999, p.285, cited in Haney, 2000, Part 5)

In the USA, Texas is hailed by some as a state that has improved the standards for all by severe programs of testing, including the restriction of issue of a High School Graduation Test to those who complete, at an increasingly-raised passing standard, each of three standardised tests of literacy and numeracy, mostly comprised of multiple-choice questions. Students can first take the tests in Grade 9, but must take them from Grade 10 on. Student success on the tests has implications also for teacher and principal contracts, and school funding. There are highly reputable researchers, however, who are demonstrating through the research evidence, that the impact has been destructive for students most at risk.

> *These results clearly support the hypothesis ... that after 1990 schools in Texas have increasingly been retaining students, disproportionately Black and Hispanic students, in grade nine in order to make their grade 10 TAAS scores look better.*
>
> (Haney, 1998, pp.17-18)

> *The truth about the Texas educational system is that fewer than 60% of Latino youth who begin ninth grade graduate from high school (Haney, 2000) and many Latino youth leave school even earlier, especially those who were required to repeat eighth grade. In that same system, fewer than 60% of African American students who begin ninth grade and only 75% of White students who begin ninth grade stay to graduate from high school. Half of all minority high school students in the state are technically freshman: Some are freshmen for the first time, and thousands more are retained in ninth*

> *grade, some for more than 1 year. Texas retains more ninth graders than any other state.*
>
> (McNeil, 2000, pp.509-510)

These, of course, are American examples. It could not happen here... Yet anecdotal evidence is growing of Year 2 children in Queensland deeming themselves educational failures as they were 'caught' in the Year 2 diagnostic net. A child who is repeatedly told they are below standard in Year 3, Year 5, Year 7, and possibly Years 6 and 9, is not going to improve or persist in schooling. We have no research evidence that supports an hypothesis that individuals and communities can make effective use of such information.

Despite learning, theory, despite community expectations of the learners schools should develop, the institutional role of schools in service to the state dominates. The import is that many individuals must compulsorily attend schools, interact with curriculum provided in those schools, and repeatedly be told they are failures. To create a system that is ostensibly for all in such a way that some students necessarily fail is not education that meets a 21st century purpose. Which direction will we choose? Schools in such a system are not synonymous with education for all.

21st century directions – school as a structure

At the turn of the 21st century, we see schools as the embodiment of education, education that is free and compulsory. What marks the 21st century – technology obviously; communication, from which has flowed globalisation; changing family relationships; divergence of the rich and poor; environmental and resource concerns; recognition of diversity and difference, but challenged by fear based on uncertainty and the unknown. Technology and communication, changing work and social patterns, mean that the fusion between 'school' structures and community and work should become stronger, not weaker. Innovative 'schools' worldwide have been exploring these paths.

A number of directions are discussed in a PhD thesis by Deidre Thian. Directions include integration of schools with the community including developing schools as structures for community use, providing services for the community such as health and human services; and schools as community centres, whether for joint sporting, physical exercise, performing arts, daycare, or library usage. An example is a 16 storey high school, the Kawasaki High School for Science and Technology in Japan, which provides 'community facilities, a community centre and library, open to the public from 10am to 8pm daily' (Thian, 2001, p.244).

Other schools have been integrated within communities such as The Dukeries Complex in England, designed as a community school with 'a

concert hall, theatre and youth club located on site'. As the neighbourhood changed, surplus accommodation resulted. Now it has been transformed into a 'community college, recreation centre, 25 bed residential centre, centre for children under 5 years; purpose built youth centre, joint public-school library and information centre; public/school cafeteria, day centre for the aged, adult training centre, adult unemployed centre and Fire Brigade Training Centre' (Thian, 2001, p.248).

A return to 'schools' that converge with the community, that break down community-school barriers, are 'schools without walls' such as a school established in the late 1960s that enabled high school students to use the whole city, provided by community and business as their classroom. For example, biology was taught at a pharmaceutical company, a class on government took place in the city courtroom, and an art class at the Museum of Art. Most of the students' time was spent in regularly scheduled classes that were taught by teachers, parents, students and other volunteers. Alpha High School in Oregon, a public school so popular it had competitive entry, aimed at 'building bridges between the classroom, the workplace and the community'. Students in the community went to work sites daily, three hours of work a day was 'school'-based, while three hours were work-based, undertaken through partnerships with over 200 businesses. If education is to be synonymous with 'school', these at least are some directions that can be explored to return schooling to the community. However, my own preference is to explore directions for education, and school, in the 21st century as a system that meets individual needs to further their own lives, as their right.

21st century directions – school as a right

The purpose of common public schooling was originally to provide schooling for the masses, education for all. Such education, in the 21st century, can be viewed from two different directions: as a provision by the state that is compulsory on the individual, or as a right that the state is obliged to provide. In the 21st century, as we evaluate the nature and significance of freedom, as we celebrate living in democracies, freedom of individual thought and religious activities, identification of the purpose of schools as serving the economic needs, and endorsing the cultural ideologies, of the state, does not go unquestioned.

> *...a perennial question in education (is) whether the state has a right (or a duty) to insist upon compulsory socialization of children in values that conflict with those of at least some parents, in the name of some higher social good. There is always a battle for children's minds.*
>
> (Glenn, 2002, p.279)

Some court cases in the USA are challenging the notions of common schooling, 'at the most basic level of constitutional principle' (Glenn, 2002, p.279). However, courts in Australia, USA and England currently protect the institution of education and the public policy of schools. The judiciary is reluctant to allow 'resort to courts against statutory authorities (such as education) regarding implementation of their own functions' (Fleming, 1998), arguing that actions would mean court involvement in implementation of public (education) policy[3] (Cumming, 2000, pp.2-3). At present, the purpose of education is not seen as meeting an individual right that exists outside the framework of the state's institutional and legislative control. The state has the right in education, not the individual.

Within an institutionalised purpose for schools and public education, individuals do not have a 'right' in the fundamental sense. They must still fit. As Linda McNeil (2000, p.510) has noted, the 'myth' of the Texas standardised testing system is allowed to stand:

> *...substantive public issues get turned into myths by those who are able to control the language used to describe them in the public realm. ... The myth that the testing system has educational value was accepted by the court because the testing system persists. ...(despite) strong evidence from teachers who served as fact witnesses and by experts who have seen negative consequences of the TAAS system of testing in Latino and African American schools. Yet the myth prevailed in court. It prevailed because the State was able to shift the terms – what Edelman describes as "changing the demands and expectations" – of the educational good being sought.*

In Texas, the testing system was found by a court to have disparate impact upon minority groups, a significant discriminatory finding against the Bill of Rights, but was upheld in the interests of the state, not the individuals.[4]

Over my 30 years of educational research, I have become aware of the significance education plays in individuals' lives, and more importantly, of the significance of education when it is used as a barrier to or filter for individuals' futures. As I have stated previously, no research evidence exists that children who are repeatedly told they are failures, or who do

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[3] Wade J in *London Borough of Southwark v Williams* [1971] Ch at 750 stated that 'general obligations of public authorities in the areas of health, education and welfare are not intended to be enforceable by private action at the suit of individuals', cited in Morris WL & Sappideen C, *Torts Commentary and Materials*, 8th ed, Law Book Company Ltd, Sydney, 1993 at 779

[4] *GI Forum et al. V Texas Education Agency et al.,* 87 F. Supp. 2d 667 (W. D. Tex. 2002)

not fit with schools or curriculum, improve or adjust. The evidence is the opposite. They end up leaving school uneducated and disadvantaged.

I see education not just as a right synonymous with compulsory attendance at a free public school. I see education, and quality education, as a fundamental right of an individual. My personal view is that legislation and the judiciary are most important in education when they are supportive of individual growth and opportunity, just as the recent Family Court decisions in upholding the rights of children in accord with the conventions Australia has ratified. As we remove education from the richness of community and what we know about learning, we commodify education. We turn education into chunks, dominated by location, delivery and timelines. This commodification of education fosters a philosophy that focuses on minimal standards – in attainment, delivery, funding. It enables rationalism of 1.5 to 3 hours a day of 'schooling' as sufficient for children isolated in refugee detention centres on Australian soil. The purpose of schools in meeting individual needs is muddied by bureaucratic requirements.

At present a right to education is not noted in Australian or state constitutions, nor in the well-known USA Bill of Rights. In general, Australian students have no individual right recognised apart from various conventions, international conventions and treaties that Australia has ratified (which it has been noted are breached constantly (Stewart, 1998, p.128)). Specifically, these conventions promote education as a right, a right to an education that meets the *needs of the individual*, the same type of education that the rhetoric of official frameworks of educational systems support. It is a right that acknowledges and responds to diversity, and talks about the individual in the community, not in schools.

> Universal Declaration of Human Rights 1948
> (ratified by Australia 1948)
> *Article 26*
> (1) Everyone has the right to education. ...
> (2) Education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. It shall promote understanding, tolerance and friendship among all nations, racial or religious groups, and shall further the activities of the United Nations for the maintenance of peace.
> (3) Parents have a prior right to choose the kind of education that shall be given to their children.

International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights 1966
(ratified by Australia in 1975)
Article 13 General comment on its implementation
1. The States Parties to the present Covenant recognize the *right* of everyone to education. They agree that education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and the sense of its dignity, and shall strengthen the respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. They further agree that education shall enable all persons to participate effectively in a free society, promote understanding, tolerance and friendship among all nations and all racial, ethnic or religious groups, and further the activities of the United Nations for the maintenance of peace.

UN Convention on the Rights of the Child
(ratified by Australia on December 17, 1990)
Article 28
1. States Parties recognize the right of the child to education, and with a view to achieving this right progressively and on the basis of equal opportunity...
Article 29 General comment on its implementation
1. States Parties agree that the education of the child shall be directed to:

(a) The development of the child's personality, talents and mental and physical abilities to their fullest potential; ...

(d) The preparation of the child for responsible life in a free society, in the spirit of understanding, peace, tolerance, equality of sexes, and friendship among all peoples, ethnic, national and religious groups and persons of indigenous origin.

Queensland's education legislation acknowledges individual diversity, but in subsection (1), part (a), of one clause, within an institutionalised framework. The major focus of the Act is on structures, registration, funding, control, rules and regulations.

EDUCATION (GENERAL PROVISIONS) ACT 1989 - SECT 14
14 Provision of State education
(1) For every student attending a State educational institution established pursuant to section 16, 17 or 18(1)(c), there shall be provided a program of instruction in such subjects and of such duration as the Minister approves that--
(a) has regard to the age, ability, aptitude and development of the student concerned;

(b) is an integral element within the total range of educational services offered with the approval of the Minister first had and obtained;
(c) takes account and promotes continuity of the student's learning experiences;
(d) recognises and takes account of the nature of knowledge;
(e) has regard to whether enrolment is compulsory or non-compulsory.
(2) The duration of the program of instruction must be based on the basic allocation to a student.

While education as a right for the individual in England, the USA and Australia is subordinate to the authority of the state, education lawyers are waiting to see the impact of England's entry to European Union, for under the European Convention on Human Rights, 'noone is 'denied the right to education' (Harris, 1998, p.9) and issues of quality in education that meets individual needs are expected to arise. As noted English barrister, Cherie Blair commented:

> It will be interesting to see how this concept of quality for all interrelates with the rights based approach of the European Convention on Human Rights which will have an important impact on this area of the law.
>
> (Blair, 1998, p.2)

For example, in France, when a conflict occurs between the rights of the individual and the state, the interests of the individual can be paramount to those of the institution:

> *... the emphasis is on the community as a persona with its own interet general; each time an individual citizen is damaged as a result of some activity in the public interest it is unjust, given the constitutional principle of equality, that it should be the individual who bears the cost of the activity. In England, in contrast, a government body is seen simply as an ordinary persona with its own individual interest to protect; those who wish to protect themselves against the risks of activities should thus obtain private insurance cover and seek to shift the burden on to an actor only when the latter has behaved wrongfully. Evidently there is here a difference of ideology.*
>
> (Samuel, 1998, p.824)

What would happen if we were to create a Bill of Rights with education as a fundamental right for the individual? If, because of the increasing significance of education in life opportunities for individuals, education for the masses became education for each individual – a core right for the

21st century, rather than a 'second generation' right (Piotrowicz & Kaye, 2000, p.7).

If education became a core right, along with the other commonly agreed human rights supported by Australia,[5] that is,

- Trial by jury
- Freedom of religion
- Protection of ethnic and racial minorities
- Right to vote
- Freedom from arbitrary arrest
- Right to work
- Protection of people with disabilities

then many of these rights would be facilitated.

What if we saw education as a core right, and hence the purpose of schooling as something that had to serve the needs of each and every person, each potential student in society. 'Schools' and schooling would fit the individual. Consider the change in the way we would construct the match between learner and the institution of 'school'. Another convention[6] ratified by Australia states the rights of 'mentally or physically disabled' individuals to 'a full and decent life, in conditions which ensure dignity, promote self-reliance and facilitate the child's active participation in the community'; who has 'effective access to and receives education ... preparation for employment and recreation opportunities in a manner conducive to the child's achieving the fullest possible social integration and individual development, including his or her cultural and spiritual development'.

The Commonwealth Government has recently drafted the *Disability Standards for Education.*[7] It has now indicated, since many state and territory ministers have refused to endorse these, that the standards will be brought into legislation regardless. In the Scope of the *Standards*, it is stated that 'the Part for each area includes a statement of the *rights*, or entitlements, of students with disabilities in relation to education and training, consistent with the rights of the rest of the community. The Parts then describe the legal *obligations*, or responsibilities, of educational authorities, institutions and other education providers. These

[5] http://www.hreoc.gov.au/human_rights/human_rights_dialogue/index.html (accessed 26 August 2003)
[6] International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights 1966 (ratified by Australia in 1975) *Article 23*
[7] http://www.hreoc.gov.au/disability_rights/education/education.html#standards (accessed 6 September 2003)

are the standards with which education providers must comply.' However,

> *(T)he implementation of the Standards has been discussed for seven years. They have been delayed because some jurisdictions claim to be unsure of and/or afraid to acknowledge, their responsibilities to Australia's almost 200,000 students with disabilities. These students need to be assured of their right to participate in education and training on the same basis as other students.*
> *The States and Territories offer wildly different assessments of the impact on their budgets of implementing the standards. New South Wales claims it will cost $1.8 billion and Victoria $1.4 billion to comply with the Standards, but South Australia claims just $19.4 million, Western Australia $15.8 million and Tasmania $2.2 million. New South Wales claims it will need an additional 43,000 staff, equivalent to 69% of their current funding. However, the ACT does not agree it will cost anything more in that jurisdiction.*[8]

The UK's participation in European HR Convention and its superiority over English law, is governed by a caveat, 'financial viability' clauses. It is clear that our states and territories respond from similar principles. The rights of the individual may still be controlled under the auspices of public interest.

In the goal for creating free, public education for the masses, we have created compulsory public schools and programs of study for the masses – who fit. We have also created various groups in society who don't fit public school and its agendas, but we then seek ways to amend the individuals or justify their exclusion from what we argue should be a right. We create physical structures as the embodiment of education and then argue that due to expense of modification, some students might be excluded. Students 'with disability' are the most visible misfit with schools. There are many others, group and individuals, for different reasons.

We have created '...a perception that the excluded child and the child with Special Educational needs represent not so much real children, but contingent discursive constructs', they are not real individuals in the roles of the state, the community and education, but 'products of social and political discourses' (Monk, 2000, p.356). In other words, as we pursue education for all through schools, we have evolved from education in the community to redefining a new community to be educated in schools – those who fit. Others are to be fitted, if they can. Even the underlying

[8] http://www.dest.gov.au/ministers/nelson/jul_03/minco703.htm (accessed 6 September 2003)

philosophy of the Commonwealth legislation for the Disability Standards for Education shows that the focus is the fit of the individual to institution. *School* and school activities such as curriculum are essentially the viable body to which the individual is fitted. Degrees of modification are expected, up to a point. The principle is *not* that school is something that emerges from the community. 'Inclusivity' and 'mainstreaming' are social constructions that indicate the match of difference to a norm. For me, society and the community are made up of all – there are no exceptions. There is no norm.

We are an affluent nation, the twenty-first century looks strong for Australia. We are enriched in and immersed in the technology that is changing the structure of society and the way we communicate. We can afford to enter the 21st century challenging our current expectations of schools and education. We can afford to shift the focus of education from control by the state to a right that focuses on each individual and the education they need. To focus on school as a physical structure means the cost of amending a building can be a barrier to a child's opportunity to engage with learning. Many current curriculum and accountability agendas provide metaphorical stairs.

We need to break down physical barriers, rethink curriculum to address the 21st century, and help individuals build meaningful knowledge in a meaningful way in meaningful contexts. This is a 21st direction. Education to me is not an industry, a game for academics or politicians, or a drama to be directed by managers or bureaucrats. It matters. We need to break down the barriers, physical and non-physical, that we have put in place between schools and society. It would be wonderful to return to a sense that 'school' meant 'leisure spent in the pursuit of knowledge'.

> *...in Horace Mann's day, the moral objectives of the school were essentially congruent with those of the public, but this is no longer the case. ..The values most strongly stressed in public schools and, even more significantly, those ignored or subtly denigrated are in many cases matters over which Americans divide more clearly than over any theological issue.*
>
> (Glenn, 2002, p.288)

Why schools and mass education? What is their purpose? To serve the state, the economy, the individual? And if all these directions can't be followed, which should be least?

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