

**Submission  
No 33**

**INQUIRY INTO REVIEW OF THE NEW SOUTH WALES  
SCHOOL CURRICULUM**

**Name:** Mrs Kelly Pfeiffer

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## Submission to the inquiry into the New South Wales School Curriculum

My name is Kelly Pfeiffer I am a dedicated educator, author, blogger and presenter; I am the point person for Project-Based Learning (PBL) Global in Australia (<https://www.pblglobal.com/team/>) and an innovator in distance education PBL. I co-created the NSW widely-adopted Dark Sky (<https://www.planning.nsw.gov.au/About-Us/Our-Programs/Dark-Sky/Dark-Sky-education>) PBL unit, which was nominated for the Dark Sky Defender award through the International Dark Sky Association (IDA). In 2019, I was awarded the Australian Association of Distance Education Schools (AADES) for Teaching Excellence, and my Dubbo School of Distance Education (DSODE) Futures Team received the New South Wales Department of Education Technology 4 Learning (T4L) award for Leader in Developing Digital Collaborative Communities. I would like to address the following term of reference.

1. The extent to which the Master's Curriculum Review addresses its terms of reference, including:

(a) Curriculum content, flexibility and pedagogy

The correct pedagogy must allow for the learning experience to be one that is designed to free learning which is key to transforming schools when preparing students for the world of work. Research demands that we rethink what we do at school.

Frey and Osborne (2013,p.44) make this finding: "For workers to win the race, however, they will have to acquire *creative* and *social skills*. Labour market economists in at least two separate research studies find that almost half the jobs that currently exist are likely to be eliminated within a decade or so. By the time the child who is five years old in school today turns 16 half of the jobs, we are preparing them for won't be there according to this growing body of research (Jefferson and Anderson, 2017, p. 13). If one of the purposes of learning is to prepare young people to be economically literate and independent, these studies alone show change is upon us, and we need to act swiftly.

**Issues:** Curriculum content, flexibility and pedagogy while focused on 'Back to Basics' is too prescriptive, there is nowhere near enough autonomy for teachers and students. Education should function to change outcomes for whole communities (McCall, A. 2020).

When there is no hope and possibility for self-determination and transformation in education, it can be described as 'oppressive'.When school leaders say 'we haven't got time for creativity' or 'we haven't got time for crucial reflection and collaboration', or teachers say 'I'm not creative', or system bureaucrats say 'we can't have you choose your own adventure schooling', we sense oppression in schools (Jefferson and Anderson, 2017, p. 21).

Schooling that moves students from places of knowledge transmission and/or acquisition to places in which co-creativity, ingenuity and imagination are central to learning. Critical pedagogy provides a language of hope and possibility. The possibility is for students and teachers being critical and responsible agents of personal and social change. 'Critical pedagogy is about more than a struggle over assigned meanings, official knowledge, and established modes of authority; it is also about encouraging students to take risks, act on their sense of responsibility, and engage the world as an object of both critical analysis and hopeful transformation' (Giroux, 2011, p.14).

**Solution:** To transform schools is to encourage teachers and students to take risks, have high expectations, and responsibly engage with the world as critical agents (Jefferson and Anderson, 2017, p. 21). Students need autonomy within the education system to name conflicts/problems, then give students space, tools, and support to address and resolve them. Our day to day life circumstances and our response to them is curricula that students need. Reading, writing, social studies, mathematics, and science are built into our understanding of and response to everyday events. When we structure students learning around their lived experiences and present needs, they not only develop content knowledge and skills but they grow to care about and for one another. They are equipped to collaboratively face the world they are inheriting (McCall, A. 2020).

**Evidence:**

We have an opportunity to engage students by inviting them to participate in solving the complex challenges faced by our communities during their schooling life. Through project-based learning fueled by robust partnerships between schools and businesses and governments, we can provide students with compelling school experiences that develop critical skills while solving the community challenges. Empowering students to help us navigate our world would also energize a student population that is becoming increasingly disengaged from school (Aguilar, 2020).

This isn't a conceptual educational theory. Schools and organizations have been pioneering project-based learning and service-learning projects for decades. While this type of approach to learning has yet to find its way into mainstream education, some schools have begun to apply this approach (Aguilar, 2020).

I speak to so many industry professionals who want to help students succeed but don't know how to connect their business needs with students' abilities. For some, they simply underestimate how active students can be at solving complex challenges.

They assume students aren't at an appropriate age or experience level to tackle them. But I know that young people across our country, much like the Stage 3 students at a Far North Coast school that changed council legislation, are ready to exceed our expectations.

Students want to help solve real-world challenges, and we have more new problems now than perhaps at any time in the last century. This inquiry is an opportunity for us to work together to empower students to participate in building a better future for all of us (Aguilar, 2020).

**Case Studies / Evidence:**

UTS Future Focused Learning in the Australian curriculum video for change:

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qsZarW4wank&feature=emb\\_logo](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qsZarW4wank&feature=emb_logo)

DSODE winner T4L Award 2019 - Leader in Developing Digital Collaborative Communities:

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Zom6jOXBrAk&feature=emb\\_logo](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Zom6jOXBrAk&feature=emb_logo)

Dr Paula Peeters

<https://www.paperbarkwriter.com/how-a-call-from-dubbo-shook-me-out-of-my-corona-daze/>

NSW interdepartmental collaboration between the Department of Planning, Industry and Environment (DPIE) and the Department of Education (DoE): Dark Sky

<https://www.planning.nsw.gov.au/darkskyeducation>

RODE MICROPHONES & Schools Spectacular: Laura's Story

<https://www.rode.com/laurasstory>

Australian Catholic University: Ngara Wumara Research Study No. 4:

Online Project-Based Learning for Rural/Remote Students

Preliminary Findings Report

<https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1fu3nNz3W4PMf4SCjERPVVULaBispzUNJ?usp=sharing>

2019 Episode 10 – Project Based Learning with Kelly Pfeiffer

Podcasts TeachersPD

<https://teacherspd.net/category/podcasts/page/2/>

2019 We are the stars of our own future: UTS Inspiring Teaching: Future Focused Learning Blog

<https://lx.uts.edu.au/inspiringteaching/blog/>

The pursuit of happiness: Australian Educator

[https://issuu.com/aeufederal/docs/educator\\_summer\\_2018](https://issuu.com/aeufederal/docs/educator_summer_2018)

Project-Based Learning: Can it happen in a distance education environment?

Australasian Association of Distance Education Schools (AADES)

<https://www.aades.edu.au/news/project-based-learning-pbl-can-it-happen-in-a-de-environment>

Project-Based Learning: Where to start?

The Australian Council for Health, Physical Education and Recreation (ACHPER) Blog

<https://www.achper.org.au/blog/blog-project-based-learning-where-to-start>

have a clear structure and use page numbers

include clear recommendations.

### **Recommendations.**

***Give teachers more freedom to be creative, by replacing mandatory testing with formative assessment and have less mandatory outcomes to cover in an over crowded curriculum. This will lead to teachers, students and leaders being able to imagine the possibilities.*** Creativity is a

transformative action; it is to harness what is possible. The act of creativity begins with the imagination to go beyond what we know. We have to imagine how things could be different to develop new authentic understandings in learning. The imagination is a space of freedom where we are unfettered to create an alternative reality. Human beings with the creative power to transform are then fully alive to their potential (Jefferson and Anderson, 2017, p. 29).

***Restructure curriculum to allow time for critical reflection as a basis for problem-based and praxis-based transformative learning and action.*** Critical reflection allows the consciousness of people to emerge so they can critically intervene in their reality. Critical reflection can question ideology and recognise dominant cultural assumptions that may prevent the possibility. Critical reflection is developed first from the awareness that our thinking and actions may be trapped in a

box of orthodoxy or a boxed frame of reference. Through problem-posing and problem-solving, and using theory to inform practice and practice to inform theory, transformative learning in schools can be sustained (Jefferson and Anderson, 2017, p. 29).

***Fund schools to restructure the physical environment (tear down the silos) so they can construct collaborative learning communities and practices with teachers, students and communities in all aspects of school life.*** Creativity with collaboration combines to construct a community based on dialogue and social agency through mutuality in a shared endeavour. Collaboration allows people to form communities that through their mutual zones of proximal development continue their creative capacities (Jefferson and Anderson, 2017, p. 29-30). Share values through collaboration in creative and transformative practice can connect diverse and different people to challenge and share their values, to promote a 'democratic society that takes equality, justice, shared values and freedom seriously' (Giroux, 2011, p.4).

***Structure students learning around their lived experiences and present needs (McCall, A. 2020) to enable the communication of all voices to collaborate, critically reflect and create as a discourse of dialogue and agency.*** Communication as dialogue mediates our understanding and engagement with the world and becomes a tool of enfranchisement. It is in communication that the 'voice' of empowerment resides, for 'to speak a true word is to transform the world' (Freire, 1970/2006, p.87). Communication is not empty slogans devoid of action and reflection. In critical pedagogy, it is through the authentic and collaborative dialogue of struggle and hope that individuals and communities are transformed and humanised (Jefferson and Anderson, 2017, p. 30).

#### **Reference List:**

Aguilar, M., 2020. *COMMENTARY: Students Are An Untapped Resource In Navigating The Pandemic*. [online] EdSource. Available at: <https://edsource.org/2020/students-are-an-untapped-resource-in-navigating-the-pandemic/635048> [Accessed 6 August 2020].

Frey, C. & Osborne, M. (2013) 'Improving technology now means that nearly 50 percent of occupations in the US are under threat of computerisation'. *LSE American Politics and Policy (USAPP) blog*. Retrieved from <https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/usappblog/2013/09/30/computerisation-50-percent-occupations-threatened/> (Date accessed 6th August 2020)

Freire, P. (1970/2006). *Pedagogy of the oppressed (30th anniversary edition)*. New York: Continuum.

Giroux, H. (2011). *On critical pedagogy*. New York: Continuum.

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Jefferson, M. and Anderson, M., (2017). *Transforming Schools*. 1st ed. London: Bloomsbury Academic, pp.13, 21, 29-30,.

McCall, A., 2020. *What If We Radically Reimagined School?*. [online] Diane Ravitch's blog. Available at: <<https://dianeravitch.net/2020/08/05/ashley-mccall-what-if-we-radically-reimagined-school/>> [Accessed 6 August 2020].