

**Supplementary
Submission
No 43a**

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

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Submission in response to the Portfolio Committee's Invitation.

Comment on the two recent Discussion Papers

I submit just one response, which I request be made available both to the Committee and to its Chair. I think the Committee has been fair in evaluating comments previously received. I think that the most important matters that the NSW Minister for Education will have to resolve in moving forward the implementation of the Masters Review are all related to two major challenges: develop and approve a statement that sets out clearly and simply the principles that will underpin and guide the development of a new, holistic curriculum intended to achieve the goals of NSW K-12+ schooling, and develop a long term plan of professional development, applicable to all current and new education professionals, who will be involved in the implementation of the new curriculum, designed to bring their own knowledge and skills to the levels of competence needed to enable that this implementation will prove successful in achieving its learning outcomes.

I emphasise the importance of the second challenge: unless teachers in particular are supportive of the new curriculum and feel professionally equipped to implement it, the chances of any major improvement in student learning outcomes, either short or long term, are virtually zero. Curriculum change, by itself, has been found, over and over again, to result in little change to classroom practice or to student learning outcomes unless teachers support the change and feel professionally equipped to implement it.

I recommend that the Committee avoid using descriptors such as 'Inquiry-based learning' or 'Direct Instruction' when writing on teaching methods, because these may suggest a total adoption of one such method is being advocated. That is never the case if successful learning is to be achieved. (Noel Pearson must have been justifiably disappointed when the use of Direct Instruction as the sole teaching methodology employed by an international company at a primary school in Aurukun resulted in failure.) I strongly recommend that the Committee focus on providing evidence bases for identifying the characteristics of a very good teacher. In particular, a succinct account is provided by Barak Rosenshine in the booklet 'Principles of Instruction', published in 2010 by the International Academy of Education:

http://www.ibe.unesco.org/fileadmin/user_upload/Publications/Educational_Practices/EdPractices_21.pdf).

The Committee Chair has made specific reference to specific work of John Hattie and I think it prudent to note that his methodology has been challenged:

<https://robertslavinsblog.wordpress.com/2018/06/21/john-hattie-is-wrong/>.

With regard to my first-mentioned challenge, I offer the following suggestions:

- a). Any framework for the K-12 curriculum should connect seamlessly with that espoused in the COAG document **BELONGING, BEING & BECOMING - The Early Years Learning Framework for Australia**.

In particular, attention must be paid to the recognition of emotional development in children, especially in the 0-6 age range. Without productive student-student and student-teacher relationships developing and evolving in the classroom, many of the essential characteristics of a master teacher, such as engaging small groups in collaborative work, simply cannot be implemented.

b) Unless good reason can be found to discount the importance of the current set of General Capabilities, I think that a specification of the level of attainment of each capability to be normally achieved by end of Year 12 should be included in any statement of the learning outcomes expected as a result of completing K-12 schooling in NSW.

c) Conceptual understanding, as well as procedural knowledge, are necessary complementary aspects of any satisfactory statement of learning outcomes. The relationship between acquisition of the complementary aspects is context-dependent and will require a framework development of them in a holistic way for K-6 and then transitionally into discipline-dependent ways in 7-12+. This is usually more easily accomplished for procedural knowledge (skills and practical competence) than it is for concept development and will require hard work by those charged with curriculum development. I wrote in a previous submission that conceptual understanding at a lasting level requires the development of an internal representational model that shows how concepts are linked and help us form a coherent understanding of a particular block of knowledge. Without this, working memory can become overloaded with an effort to recall individual items. The acquisition of a new skill may similarly require the review and modification of previous skills if the enhanced set is to be best utilised.

c) At present, there is no agreed methodology whereby the knowledge, skills and levels of general competence considered as a necessary basis for successful transition to post-secondary education are satisfactorily made available to those approaching the end of schooling. Sometimes generalities are used, sometimes 'assumed knowledge' is used without its detailed specification, and sometimes a specific level of knowledge or skill is mandated (eg, a particular level of HSC Mathematics, or demonstrated proficiency as a performer, or skill at specified forms of manual coordination). There is, as far as I know, no mechanism for discussing and negotiating agreement between desired transition requirements and the content of the corresponding school curriculum area in Stage 6 at the time the school curriculum is being developed and yet that must result in a better outcome than exists at present.

d) With regard to consideration of the future role of the ATAR, I think the present variety of methods used to incorporate it and other types of criteria into an admission selection process has resulted in a situation where it is impossible to claim that every applicant for entry into a NSW higher education institution has received the same equitable consideration. Eg, if a principal's recommendation is accepted from a particular school by a particular institution, but not accepted from a different school, how can that be truly equitable, not knowing the specific circumstances of each applicant from both schools? If a Dean of one faculty is willing to offer a bonus for a good performance in a selected HSC subject, but a Dean elsewhere in the same field of study refuses to do so, then the location of an applicant and the associated limited availability of possible institutions because of their locations may well determine the final outcome for that applicant. I draw the Committee's attention to the paper https://www.all-learning.org.au/sites/default/files/resources/beyond_atar_proposal_for_change_all.pdf.

e) I remarked previously that I cannot recognise the NSW HSC credential as being world class if a school-leaver entitled to receive it need not have demonstrated required levels of competence in numeracy and literacy (specified via reference to the Australian Core Skills Framework), **solely via their performance in the Higher School Certificate credentialling process**. It seems ludicrous to me that other tests should be used to verify appropriate levels

of competence in these two general capabilities. Once again, these competencies should be made explicit across the curriculum, in each separate discipline area. Numeracy is NOT the sole prerogative of Mathematics teachers and Literacy is not so for English teachers. All teachers have a responsibility for developing these , as they do for the other general capabilities.

I make a final comment regarding fiction, non-fiction and facts. One of the general capabilities is Critical and Creative Thinking. Now that we have available to us an uncontrolled supply of 'information' that may be completely invented, or intentionally biased, so much so that 'fact-checking' has now become part of a reputable journalist's repertoire, then serious attention must be paid to address this threat to the orderly conduct of one's daily life. Opportunities for this to occur must be included across the curriculum, so that young children begin to be trained in learning how to question the veracity of 'facts'. In addition, they should be given opportunities to understand that interpretations of true facts are very much dependent upon the knowledge and objectivity of the interpreter.

John Mack AM

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