Shaping Tomorrow's Schools:

A reaction

Tuesday, August 3rd 1992

West Australian Primary Deputy Principals' Conference

The role of a reactor is twofold: to listen for you and repeat the major issues of each speaker; and to go beyond the speakers and challenge you to consider these issues for tomorrow's schools - either tomorrow, Wednesday, when you are asked to justify two days away from school or the next decade as you plan your school's futures.

We must recall when discussing shaping tomorrow's schools that the future of Australia in the year 2001, is the present for educationalists. The students who are in our primary schools today will be leaving school in 2001, and those who are leaving our schools today will be those who will be claiming to lead the country. They will also be the parents of the next generation and given the present policy they therefore will be choosing schools, running schools, and being more blamed for today's ills. It may be one of your pupils (probably one you upset tomorrow) who will be standing up at a future WAPDA conference as a parent and tell you they are going to take over the governance of your school. Maybe we better get it right while we still have the chance.

It is always the task of the educator to prepare for the future, although this often gets translated into preserving the past. That the Deputy Principals have decided to make the future a theme augers well for students in your schools - provided you participate and do not merely absorb.

I would like to commence by noting the many metaphors that have been used throughout this Conference relating to the theme.

1. The Chief Executive officer of the Ministry of Education used the metaphor of how you sign your letters - are you an obedient servant, faithful or sincere. Let us hope that you only sign letters to your students with those terms. One of the greatest educational travesties was the change in the 1988 Education Act changing the role of the Education Department, which advised the Minister, to the Ministry of Education, which carried out the orders of the Minister. This encouraged gray-flannelled non-critical public servants as opposed to independent, critically concerned educators. I wonder how
2. We heard from more than one speaker about the butterfly model, wherein we are asked to believe that the flapping of a butterfly wing in the Amazon causes a tornado in Texas. This is akin to asking us to assuming that what the Ministry does causes improvement in your school. The answer to this theory is simply: remove the wings from the butterflies.

3. We have had metaphors relating to restructuring schools for tomorrow’s schools via the National Project for the Quality of Teaching and Learning. The metaphor I would have liked to hear is that the NPQTL which promises so much can be summed as the Peggy Lee innovation - Remember Peggy Lee: Is that all there is? I have heard something from the secret society that is conducting the Peggy Lee. I admire the energy it generates in the chosen few schools, but nothing is new, nothing is there which will change the other 9000 schools not involved, and the reward structure to success has not changed. As Sue has commented, the project requirements are highly prescriptive, are developing technical solutions, and I would add, are premised on a top-down model of change.

4. The Professor of Educational Administration, Bill Mumford, used the metaphor of the Nomads postponing their trek because of the TV soapie Dallas. This translate to: we are waiting in our schools behind our moats waiting to see what Finn, Mayer, Carmichael and other are going to do for us, before we react to this (or move on). Like the Nomads of the Sahara we will thus become an endangered species, relegated to museums, with the new breed noting that this is what happened to those who wait and watch the reruns.

5. Another metaphor was bio-change, with seedless watermelons, and freshness chips. So are we to bio-generate Ministries with core, principals with spine, and deputy principals with fire in their bellies?

6. We had Bill Mumford's analogy of the incestuousness of GM, Mazda and Toyota, and Sue Roberston with an update termed post-ford. I t seems we need merely to add post- as the prefix to be current gurus. Post-feminist, post-structuralist, post-person. Now post-Ford. This worries me as Henry Ford's notions of assembly line disappeared in the Ford factory decades ago. Carmichael has even recognised this, the apprenticeship system has gone, and the old tripartite partnership in schools of principals, teachers and students has been replaced by the new tripartite - employers, unions and government. Maybe we need to
become post-post-Fordists.

As with the Finn and Carmichael reports, sometimes, we mask our major and important points with the invention of new and unnecessary jargon.

7. Sue Robertson also introduced the Kentucky Fried Chicken, Benetton and McDonald analogy implying that we will have national standards with a little local diversity. You can choose to offer a second cup but don't change the product to much to get away from the national product - the national average is all. This McDonald's model of schooling is part of the National scene.

8. Bill Mumford also introduced us to WOOPies- well off older people. Perhaps he should have said: Well articulated, promising and desired assets - or WAPDA for short. Or, it is hoped not: West Australian prime dead animals.

I would like to introduce another metaphor relating to Deputy Principals:

Learned helplessness

I intend to relate learned helplessness to the moves in education in Australia.

Let me cite the typical experiment in learned helplessness studies. Dogs receive painful electric shocks in two different situations. In the first part of the experiment some dogs are put in a box with electric grids in the flooring and subjected to numerous painful electric shocks from which they cannot escape. In the second part these animals, as well as dogs who did not have this prior experience with inescapable shock, are placed in a similar apparatus. Now painful shock can be avoided if the dogs learn to leap over a partition to another compartment as soon as they hear a warning buzzer. The behaviour of the dogs is markedly affected by whether they were earlier exposed to inescapable shock. Animals who have not had the earlier experience become quite upset when they receive the first few electric shocks but fairly soon thereafter learn to leap over the partition when they hear the buzzer. The animals who have had the earlier experience with inescapable shocks behave quite differently. Soon after receiving the first shocks, they stop running around in a distressed manner; instead they seem to give up and passively accept the painful stimulation. They do not acquire the avoidance response and typically lie on the grids and whine. They learn a sense of helplessness, which later tends seriously and deleteriously to affect their performance in stressful situations that can be controlled. They appear to lose the ability and motivation
to learn to respond in an effective way to painful stimulation, they appear passive in the face of stress, and fail to initiate action that might allow them to cope.

My point is not that you are dogs, but that maybe much of the moves to shape tomorrow's schools that we have heard at this Conference leads to asking you to have more learned helplessness.

1. Note that what is happening around us. Finn, Mayer and Carmichael are the shapers and front runners in education. We can absorb what they are doing, insulate ourselves, and keep going despite them. These are the classic hallmarks of learned helplessness (and in this case it may be very good adaptive behaviour). We should ask what these reports will do to our schools - and then ask whether we are happy for this to happen to us.

There are two major responses:

a. The first response could be: So what? National curriculum has been around for over ten years, and on the boil for the past three years. Note, the National Mathematics Curriculum has been out for almost two years. With no effect. We have outcome statements which merely define the obvious. We have three levels in Carmichael which the SEA inform us would mean that all students in Year 12 would be at the top level. Maybe we can sit on the electric grids of change and whine and wait.

b. These reports define the rhetoric but not reality of schooling. If you look at the competencies they have discovered: problem solving, expressing ideas and information, planning and organising activities, working with others and in teams - then you could/should ask what you would different tomorrow. It seems that a) these proponents have never been in a school and b) they certainly are merely rediscovering primary schooling. Perhaps Deputy Principals should be screaming out the advantages of primary education as many industrialists and unionists (those running our system tomorrow) are only rediscovering it.

In any vision for the future we must be careful not to determine what would have been the best education for our students leaving school today and then impose this on the future students. Too often, particularly when times are tough, we discover a cure that appears to fix today's ills and then apply this formula to tomorrow's children. We are going through a period in Australia at present where this is happening. Some have decided that they, and only they, know how they could have given all students the skills for today's jobs and they are inflicting this recipe upon our future generation.

I would recommend that anyone who believed that they could shape the curriculum, teaching methods, and educational goals for the year 2001 is not a Messiah worth following. Such a plan ignores the inevitable change of the next 10 years, and we only need to hark back to 10 years ago and shudder if they had set our present in the concrete of those times.
To then note that Dean Ashenden is reported to claim, as cited by Sue Robertson, that most change takes a secondary school model indicates the lack of understanding of what you do. Who is telling them? Not you.

Pat Klink, Professor of Education Administration from Alberta, had much to teach us from Edmonton. I first wondered what an Albertan could tell us: I contemplated that they had the best dinosaur museum in the world whereas we have living ones, we share the biggest mosquitos and other parasites, we share a failed economy after an enormous resource boom, and we share extremes of weather which challenged the grey cells. Then I heard the rhetoric:

- Competence to excellence - Pat we are still becoming clever.
- Banning books and introducing condoms - I don't understand why you added that the latter issue was too big for some.
- Commercialism. Two minutes per day, like Mary advertising sponsors throughout the day at this Conference.

Like Alberta we are going through a rhetoric of change but little has affected the classroom. Since the 1990 Training Act do you realise how many national reports there have been? I count 139+. But what has happened.

2. There have been important modifications to the learned helplessness model since Seligman introduced it 15 years ago. The first change has been the move to learned hopelessness. Those in your schools who have beliefs of hopelessness have negative expectations about the occurrence of highly valued outcomes, and feelings of helplessness about changing the likelihood of occurrence of these outcomes. My interpretation is that we have beliefs of helplessness and hopelessness when there is a decline in the predictability of behaviour and outcomes.

This leads to one of the most critical concerns for Deputy Principals. It is perhaps your major function in schools to add predictability to the teachers and students day. Further, by organising the school with attention to predictability you can also help the principal to become less helpless and hopeless.

This predictability can come from a clear enunciation by action as well as words, as to what you consider are desirable outcomes, and desirable processes. Unlike our present education system, you can add predictability by clarifying the conditions of success, the rungs of the reward structure in your
school. These values can be translated to teachers and students, and thus into the community of parents.

Like the dogs, your peers and charges can accommodate change and progress as a function of the increased predictability you can provide.

My own research on self-concept is relevant here as I am arguing that the key concerns are the manner in which individuals interpret information that they receive and send. Some provide themselves with predictability by self-enhancement: they seek information that confirms what they already believe about themselves. These individuals, parents, teachers and students typically have low self-concept as they build belief systems that confirms their beliefs which may be unrelated to the realities of others. Other individuals provide themselves with predictability by self-verification: they seek information that either confirms or refutes what they already believe about themselves. These individuals can tolerate ambiguity, can be most self-complex, and are the survivors in our system. Too often, self-enhancers emerge as a consequence of a lack of predictability in their environment and they thus build moats around themselves. This seems to sum up much of our present schooling system.

As Deputy Principals you can play a significant part in providing extra predictability in your school. How about asking your charges to predict your behaviour: If they can't then work harder.

Such predictability can lead to less helplessness and increased hopefulness. Let not your school have, above the portals, as the school motto that which Dante inscribed above the gates of hell:

"Abandon all hope, all ye who enter here".

Challenges

Besides this challenge, let me return to the speakers and issue some challenges.

1. The Chief Executive cited Tom Peters claim that the relative predictability of the environment has vanished, so take chaos as given. I would suggest that you must never accept chaos - especially that chaos created by others. Otherwise you are acknowledging the others right to institutionalise chaos in your schools and lives, and merely then sort out their mess. Your right as an educator is to provide predictability in an ever changing world. So capture the agenda and resist ill-considered notions from those who do not understand your world of work. As Bill Mumford said: To foster and create stability to accommodate change.
Why have change, things are already bad.

All the changes are sold as increasing efficiency, removing management from education; but these were not in schools until they began to remove them for us. They praise cost-benefit but do not use it on themselves, they praise evaluation but run their reforms as secret societies, and they abhor extra layers of management and then introduce them. Who are they kidding? Not the parents or communities as they love it. And there are few opposing them. Is this niche for Deputy Principal’s. Are you to be the conscience of education?

2. Who defines a teacher.

I have heard a lot about teachers during this Conference, but little about what you as DPs can do about defining teachers. Since the National Guarantee Act, whereby 1% of payroll must be spent on training, there have emerged a new cadre of non-unionised and non-trained teachers. Many of these teachers turned out, with no training, no school structure, and no DPs, to be quite competent. So, they note why should your charges retain teaching and Deputy Principal positions simply because you have had training (of any quality).

Associate this with the move to re-deploy the work force. Approximately 50% of our present recession is a function of productivity and profit loss, and 50% due to restructuring. When we come out of recession this latter 50% of jobs will not be replaced. This has profound effects both on our students and our teachers, and your jobs. A basic premise of all economic theories relates to supply and demand. You, as teachers and DPs are not a scarce resource. Now with the National Guarantee Act teachers, you are not even a unique resource. Thus, you cannot complain: if you do not attain promotion, if promotion positions are reduced, and more can be added to your role because you have a choice to get out so they can employ a cheaper junior worker to replace you.

The only remedy is for senior managers, such as DPs to begin the discussion and provide action as to what you can do uniquely.

- when are you going to define quality related to duties
- when are you going to decide who can become a member of your profession (as does the APA, WABP)
- when are you going to exert your professional voice for professional and industrial issues
- when are you going to react to the NPQTL registration of teachers (on behalf of the union and employers)
• when are you advertise your role relative to the quality of what you do and not the necessity of your position.

• when are you going to resist the absurdities of key teachers and AST. The notions are eminently sensible but the implementation is a mockery of desirable practice. The selection criteria, which I know many have addressed with much length and use of adjectives, do not include the most critical component: there is no provision to argue how teachers enhanced their students' learning. Now these AST and key teachers are going to be among you; and soon some will attain higher pay and increased classroom relief time than you as DPs. Is this a correct future; is this the reward structure you want; is this recognising and rewarding competent teachers and keeping them in the classroom? Is this a demonstration of how the system is going to identify and reward excellence.

3. Promotion. Let me continue on promotion. One of the most pleasing aspects of this Conference this year, and particularly last year, is that the message is that DP is not merely a pause and part of the promotion rung to become Principals, not an apology for those who have yet to become principals, but that it is both a desirable end position to attain and add quality and a legitimate position that can be accomplished and held with quality and pride. The Conference organisers are to be praised on endorsing this.

There has been, and will continue to be (thanks to restructuring) a bottle neck in promotional opportunities. But I note the lack of discussion, debate and disgust that the traditional, most senior appointment in teaching, the position at the top that we all should aspire (even if we don't want it), the CEO has gone to a non-teacher. If you do not oppose this, then take the consequences as this virus spreads down the vine.

4. What have we heard that will change your day tomorrow.

Most speakers have spoken about principals, teachers, parents, government and students. The message for DPs has been more by osmosis than direct grafting. The challenge for next years Conference organisers is to ask, what is unique about DPs? What does research and experience have to say that is worth sharing with DPs? I note in the references of the various papers that there is much reference to newspapers, advocacy and opinion, but very rare were references made to research studies: and none to research on Deputy Principals. How can we learn from the moves towards cooperative learning and teaching that can be enacted in practice in this Conference? and How can we keep emulate the DP's traditional role of keeping all on time.

I noted at this years WAPPA conference, and again now at your Conference, so much power and energy
in the room and wonder why this power is not being harnessed to ensure that your voice is heard, rather than you hear my voice. When are you going to be part of issuing the challenges, reacting to speakers, and pro-acting?

I would hope that you can learn more about coping with change, increasing learned helplessness, and resisting the safe ground of coping with the rot around you rather than be the agents of change and providing predictability.

One of your roles is to preserve the past while looking to the future. I recall a story that R.D. Laing relates in his model of psychotherapy. He had a DP referred to him with a limp which the principal considered was merely psychosomatic. Sure enough, it was, and Laing through effective therapy removed the limp. But the DP instead acquired a terrible stutter. This was less adaptable to the position of DP, so Laing gave the DP back the limp and the stutter went. Sometimes your past vices are better than what you replace them with.

5. Let me throw a challenge relating to Equity.

Discussion of equity has been noted by its absence verbally but noted by its presence implicitly. It is pleasing to see that more than a token key speaker has been female, that many issues raised are premised on equity, and that a major role for you is to promote such issues.

For example, we have heard much about the importance of a democratic and participative managerial style. Women, rather than men are, in general, more prepared for future leadership roles because: they are more competent to overcome cultural biases that females make poor leaders; and they use the more cognitively complex democratic and participatory methods.

6. Role of parents

We heard much about parents. We had advocacy for more parents involvement, on day one, in such an abominable manner that she demonstrated why parents should be kept out of schools. As a parent I go to P&C meetings and think "My goodness, is this who we are putting the future of my child in". Parents have a legitimate role in the educating of their children, and many could profit from going to classes and cooperating with teachers in the educating of their children, and learn the interaction benefits of working with other parents and other parents' children. Was it not refreshing to hear Ann Spencer claim that parents have no role in the management of schools, only in the education of children. I agree, and hope that there is no rah rah at the P&C annual Conference when that absurd motion to have democratic governance in schools is put - and lost.
Shaping Tomorrow's Schools:

When are we going to place parents in the appropriate roles and not allow them to run our schools. While I acknowledge that the Ministry wishes to appeal directly to the voters - the parents - and give them power over education, I implore you to resist this move. I believe that parents have a legitimate role in the education of their children, in a partnership with you in educating; but never in the governance.

Involving parents in governance presumes that children are equally advantaged because their parents are equally informed: the converse is ethically indefensible: why should children suffer because their parents are uniformed. Is it any surprise that school based decision making groups involving a select group of parents cannot be ethically justified.

Conclusion

You need predictable:

a. career structures;

b. work climates in schools for those in your charge;

c. articulated and known aims so that this predictability occurs;

d. critical comments rather than the party line;

e. tolerance of others mistakes;

f. clear, identifiable, and desired reward structures; and

g. ambition to improve your and your student's lot.

Most of all you need to sell the message that you and your teachers are doing a great job. If you can be beaten by Monitoring Standards, national assessment and monitoring standards, then you deserve to lose. The information reported back from these are woeful, global and horrible. So, my message is that you should be reporting back even better information to parents about the education of the child - not addressed to drawing all kids to some national norm, but raising each child to above their very best.

This does not mean school development plans - these are typically political documents that chronicles the successes or otherwise of principals of negotiating a document through a committee. Unless the
goals of such plans are shared and exclude to gain time for better they will merely adorn shelves and keep two-ring binder companies in business.

As Deputy Principals you need to acknowledge and lead the changing nature of work in your schools. The rise of the unemployed will lead to changes in our work force and notions of work. The five-day week will reduce to four (or for teachers with your holidays and time at school, you presently have a three day week and this may reduce to a two day week). Moreover there will be much more part-time work - which fits with the move to more specialisation in the primary schools.

You heard Bill say that school inspectors are contracted, that cleaners need to be, so why not teachers. With the National Training act, teachers do not need prior training and experience and nor do Deputy Principals, so why should they in our schools.

Let me provide you with more positive plots for shaping tomorrow's schools:

a. We need to consider the nature of multi skilling, a world (not the nation) as a living and working place, the importance of flexibility, and the importance of learning as a skill. It worries me when we talk about our flag, our queen, our nationhood, as we are really talking about building more moats around our children's opportunities. We must acknowledge that we live in a single world, not one of its country.

b. We need to consider how we cope with increased leisure (and/or unemployment) and the value of individuals appreciating the reasons for why they decide on certain actions (my colleagues call this ethics).

c. We need to ask who is to be in control of learning. You heard one speaker comment that little has changed in teaching methods, assessment procedures, and even curriculum. I would argue, however, that there has been a monumental change over the past fifty years. The control of learning has become less and less the responsibility of the student. There are plans underway now, that the curriculum, assessment and reporting progress to parents will be set nationally. Teaching methods will be proscribed by those distant from the classroom, auditing of teachers will relate more to procedures than competence, there will be restructuring of management systems rather than teaching systems, and the training of teachers will be more mechanical than reflective. We hear that parents need to have the right to choose schools, that parents need more information about student's progress, and that parents need to be involved in the managing of our schools.

d. Do you not need to ask how Deputy Principal's can work together to reverse this trend and give some control over learning back to the student. Should we not be allowing students some control over learning or, at least, teaching them how to make choice, how to understand their progress, and how to participation in the management of their schooling.
e. We can guarantee that today's threats will not be those of tomorrow; as progress is often measured relative to the ability to change our problems and threats more than creating new answers and comfort stations. Let me take the positive and make some educational predictions that will challenge us over the next decade:

I would predict, and welcome:

1. deputy principals finally realising that only when they are more scarce (i.e., there are less of them) will their value be recognised and their pay, competence and stature increased.

2. more specialized teachers in the primary schools

3. more teachers and DPs will be chosen in schools relative to the needs of the particular cohort of students in the school.

4. more DPs promoted for excellence of enhancing learning than years of service and mateship

5. a cognitive processing revolution where schooling for students and Deputy Principal's will turn from the imparting of information and the aggregation of facts towards helping students and Deputy Principals understand their own world views, appreciate and understand others world views, and how new information can relate and improve their own world view.

6. the realisation of the power of feedback from Deputy Principals' about student and teachers' understanding as the key to education and the consequential use of procedures that maximise feedback. Cooperative learning and participatory decision making is only as good as the opportunities it provides for feedback to occur.

7. more feedback to students from teachers and to teachers from deputy principals rather than the present trend toward more accountability up the system.

8. the importance of challenging goals and commitment.

9. there will be more alternatives to government schools, at least as we know them now, but the distinction will not be related to competing religious values such as many of our private schools promote, but excellence in teaching and learning. Schooling will not be left to government and church groups. As you have heard from Bill Mumford and Patricia Klink, there will be much more business involvement in schooling and they will stress
f. So the plot I am painting is five-fold:

1. we need to set our students and teachers challenging goals which they accept with commitment and never accept a "do your best" mentality

2. we need to not change one overriding and powerful mandate of how schooling should occur for another powerful mandate - we must give education back to students.

3. we need to give control over learning back to students and control over teaching back to teachers as only then will this lead to engendering self-respect, respect for learning, and respect for others.

4. we need to meaningfully consider the distribution of scarce resources and not let our schools be dominated by special interest groups.

5. and most important we need to be wary of anyone who believes they know the future. Rather we should emphasise the values of flexibility, challenge, openness, excellence, complexity, synthesis and integration, and all our virtual realities. We are not helpless dogs, adaptable frogs, dancing bees, grandmothers, or abominable cavities. We can provide predictability, vision, commitment, challenge, rewards, feedback and involvement.

My aim this afternoon is NOT to explain the corruption and problems in our schools. What needs to be explained is that there are those who do not succumb to helplessness when confronted with the insults our fellow humans deal to us - usually in the name of progress and better schools. Perhaps that is why we need less study of helpless behaviours and more of hopeful behaviours. As DP's you can give this back in your schools. If your staff and you come to school with a positive sense of efficacy then you are more likely to get there. Let me leave you with my most profound thought, attributed to Thomas the Tank Engine:

I think I can, I think I can. ... I know I can, I know I can.