



Introduction: Conference Theme – Closing the Gap

Pleasure to be here this morning

- Welcome to Brisbane and Qld – interstate, international
- Theme of the 12th National Curriculum Corporation Conference is *Curriculum and Assessment: Closing the Gap*
- To close any gap need some understanding why gap exists
- Appreciate how the answers to that question might inform the task of closing it.
- Don't have all the answers – believe gap has emerged through a range of reasons – cultural, structural and political.
- Conference opportunities to discuss and consider details of initiatives across jurisdictions, inc. Qld
- Useful for me – some political context.
- Acknowledge differences – Commonwealth and the States – different countries – way through this, all asking the same questions.
- All grappling with the same issues – pressures from parents, industry and the community.
- All motivated by similar desires – to provide the best for our children.

Political Consensus

- I don't have much disagreement with Fed Minister on essential questions faced by jurisdictions around the world, including Australia.
- I do argue about details – flagpoles, quartile reporting
- On big agendas – robust, vigorous and comparable assessment – little disagreement.

- Much what Federal Minister says put on the Federal agenda by State Ministers at the Ministerial Council for Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA).
- Well before you heard Nelson say the words – national consistency - it was on agenda at MCEETYA by State Ministers – project to examine level of consistency
- Not petty to claim credit. Said it to demonstrate some political consensus on the bigger issues around consistency – about supporting parents, about the need for better assessment – better reporting.
- Consensus not emerged by coincidence – shaped by social economic and political forces.
- World in which you work will be shaped by the same trends – political consensus in Australian – enduring.

Education big ticket item

- Education – significant political interest, particularly from State’s perspective – 25% of the budget – big investment.
- Education one of single biggest levers for Governments in terms of creating individual opportunity and economic prosperity.
- Governments of all political persuasions have keen interest in manipulating those levers.
- Education – transmission of culture is essentially political. The natural move, to a knowledge economy – stakes have got higher.
- Theme – “Closing the Gap between Curriculum & Assessment” acknowledges that there is a gap
- The proposition that there should be a seamless, interrelationship between
 - What is taught
 - How it is taught
 - How that is measured or assessed; and
 - How the results are reportedSeems a simple and self-evident proposition.
- Indeed, it would appear to be at the very heart of the educational mission.
- But you would not be here discussing the Gap, if this simple proposition was always in practice.
- The Commonwealth Minister would not be getting beamed in from Canberra enthusing the new conditions of the Quadrennium Agreement which include numerous requirements about curriculum and assessment.

- And States like Queensland and others would not have spent much of the past three years conducting public consultations and implementing numerous initiatives to reform the curriculum, teaching, assessment and reporting relationships.

- **GAP** – some observations on possible causes

Last decade

1. National focus on development of KLA's and outcomes based education:
 - Manifested differently in different states
 - But in all – a real focus on content of curriculum – often highly charged debates e.g. SOSE

Result

- Curriculum documents – input focussed
 - Assessment poor cousin – after thought
 - Message to schools/teachers – not significant at least not until later years
2. Ongoing disjunction between publicly stated policy and local activity
 - Despite Hobart declaration – 1989 and Adelaide declaration – 1999; and
 - Nationally consistent

Neither the priorities of states nor the activities of curriculum authorities reflected much significant move in that direction.

- Referred earlier to MCEETYA 2001 decision to audit curriculum consistency
- Results audit – curriculum is more divergent 20 years after a Commonwealth/State declaration committing to consistency than it was before – some serious – up to 21 years – % don't blame curriculum authorities alone – but what advice?
- Not surprisingly – national consistency now back on agenda – inevitable political concerns – where in cycle-
- Statements of Learning being developed to uniform curriculum authorities
- Curriculum authorities – sources of some and developed experts resistance
- Blind Freddy can see choices
 - Either draw together the enormous talent and expertise – develop co-operative arrangements – lead the national curriculum consistency agenda and make something wonderful happen.

OR

- Throw up as many barriers and sandbags as possible to protect the special and unique characteristics of your own jurisdictions – advise your Ministers agenda is the work of

SATAN and sit quietly waiting for the Sherman tanks to come over the top – and come they will.

- Political consensus – driven not by Brendan Nelson, not by Anna Bligh

But – parents, teachers and industry.

A Good question – why is this being driven through MCEETYA working parties not curriculum authorities?

3. 3rd influence relates to assessment as professional judgement on sacred ground.

- Assessing students' knowledge and abilities – core of the profession of teaching. Professional judgement underpins every assessment task in its design, application, deliberation and reporting.
- However, remarkably little expectation that professional judgements will be subject to scrutiny, tested for consistency or reviewed by peers.
- Qld – stark contrast between system in P-10 and the senior years.
- Latter rests on continuous, school-based assessment, moderated by peers. Over 30 years – powerful, professional development tool - enhanced not only the standards of teachers' professional judgement but rigour and reliability of whole senior system.
- Stark contrast – P-10 years consistent curriculum, no consistent assessment method, no comparable assessment between schools or across systems, therefore, no moderation of individual teacher judgement, no development of professional expertise in this area. – QCAR
- Qld – but many similarities in other jurisdictions
- Situation existed happily for many years without question – outcomes based education landed into the middle – with little or no guidance about assessment of outcomes or reporting against outcomes – teachers/schools made best efforts – results often unintelligible to those outside profession – parents, employers and students – the clients of the system.
- Net results: Quadrennium Agreement now requires “plain English reports”, reporting against a five point scale, reporting against peer performance, reporting in quartiles.
- Said earlier – consensus – plenty of argument about specificity of requirements – ‘quartile reporting’ not only useless and meaningless and potentially very damaging, but no disagreement that assessment must relate directly to curriculum, that it must have a direct relationship with reporting and that it must make sense to clients. Federal Minister – gets same letters – views shaped by same forces – parents understand importance and want to know.
- Brings me to....

4. Some Social Influences

- Knowledge economy – parents know this Green paper – teachers/education, – parents.
- Reporting Discussion Paper – teachers; – parents
- Parents
 - Increasingly empowered as consumers
 - Have range of choices
 - Expectations increasing, more demanding
- Families – increasingly mobile
 - Don't want their children disadvantages
 - Significant lobby group – ADF
- Therefore consistency – schools, sectors, states
 - Age
 - Curriculum
 - Assessment – what testing; – how A, B, etc mean the same
 - Reporting
- 2 parents working – influencing relationship between parents, home and school
 - Report cards
 - Parent/teacher interface
 - Homework – hot button
- Technology – changing relationship shape schools; – also making more possible

5. Government Expectations

- 25% budget
- driver of economic development/prosperity
- not just interested in \$ inputs but growing interest in outcomes and comparable outcomes – is investment delivering?
- Year 3,5,7 tests – only current basis for interstate comparability – year 9.
- PISA – international benchmarking
- Urge to improve and ability to test it won't diminish
 - Governments
 - Sense of urgency
 - This must be shared by curriculum authorities
- Draw some threads together for you to consider during conference
- Believe curriculum authorities faced with unique and exciting opportunities

While

1. Closing the Gaps between curriculum/assessment – would add teaching and reporting – lest your back here 2 years time to close more gaps.
2. Recognise/understand social/political forces shaping agenda – Australia and elsewhere – jurisdictions everywhere striving for rapid

improvements in outcomes, measurement and assessment critical to testing outcomes and to driving them –

3. expertise to ensure that is done in meaningful and useful ways resides in this room – use your power for good!
 - National tests in 3, 5, 7, 9 inevitable and desirable
 - Should be driven by nationally consistent standards of learning
 - otherwise cart before horse

These should be imbedded in every school –*Engage with statements of learning.

4. Talk loudly about assessment – give status it deserves in professional dialogue – support schools and teachers to develop as professionals in the exercise of this core function.
5. Talk to parents – bring into professional dialogue, make sure it includes them – they are driving the agenda, politically because it is the only avenue open to them – write to Ministers when teachers, schools and systems fail them and their children – and curriculum authorities have a role to play in giving teachers, schools and systems right tools and materials to meet legitimate expectations of parents
 - good quality curriculum
 - effective ways to assess the teaching and learning of that curriculum
 - and meaning ways of reporting that assessment

London Tube – Mind The Gap

- Sounds easy enough – good luck in closing a gap that should never have opened.