Independent Schools Queensland

choice & diversity

Schools Speaking for Themselves

TELLING THE REAL STORY

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His contribution to Australia's education community has been recognised through Fellowships of the Australian College of Educators and the Australian Council for Educational Leaders. Norm has been awarded the 2006 Australian College of Educators' Biennial Queensland Medal, the Medal of the Order of Australia in 2007, the ACEL Queensland Award of Excellence in Educational Leadership, and the ACEL national Nganakarrawa Award for his contribution to educational leadership.

Norm is a former principal of an independent school, with a Bachelor of Arts from the University of Queensland, and a Master of Education (Leadership and Management) from the University of Southern Queensland.

Norm has been widely involved in education committees and other bodies at the state and national levels, including the ISQ Education and Executive committees and two State Government Ministerial Advisory Committees. He has served as Queensland President of the Australian College of Educators and has chaired the Griffith University Centre for Leadership and Management in Education.

OUR SCHOOLS – OUR FUTURE

Our Schools – Our Future is an Independent Schools Queensland (ISQ) research-based initiative designed to promote informed public policy debate about schooling. Through commissioned and internal research, Our Schools – Our Future explores trends and issues in key areas which determine the nature and performance of our school education systems. While the initiative has a particular focus on the contribution of independent schools to our education provision and outcomes, it examines a range of issues and trends relevant to the development and implementation of effective public policy for schooling. All research reports are available to members on the ISQ website.
www.isq.qld.edu.au

Foreword

As students around the country prepare to sit National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN), debate continues in relation to the benefits of the national literacy and numeracy tests.

NAPLAN is a tool which enables schools and teachers to identify where students require additional support. It also importantly provides for a high level of school and school system accountability for literacy and numeracy outcomes.

However, opposition to the tests, and more specifically, how the results are published, have become more strident in recent times.

NAPLAN has been variously described as a rating and marketing tool which hasn't fulfilled its main aim as a measurement of student progress. The alternative view is that NAPLAN and other published data, such as Year 12 outcomes, have challenged schools to do better.

With NAPLAN now in its 11th year, the nation's Education Ministers recently agreed it was timely to consider terms of reference for a review of both the assessment program, and more specifically, how school results are published.

In Queensland, there is debate over the publication of Year 12 results, particularly Overall Positions (OPs). As the state moves to a new senior schooling and tertiary entrance system by 2020 that uses Australian Tertiary Admission Ranks (ATARs) instead of OPs, it is also opportune to consider how our state can share the most comprehensive and meaningful story of the outcomes and pathways of graduating students.

There are opposing views within the education sector about the publication of school data and whether it's an accurate reflection, or indeed useful indicator, of a school's education impact. In this current environment of change and debate, it is therefore timely to revisit the 2010 work of respected educator Norm Hunter OAM, who encouraged schools to "speak for themselves".

In a paper commissioned by Independent Schools Queensland (ISQ), Mr Hunter examined how schools can build and construct a rich and meaningful school narrative that extends beyond test scores. The research, arguments and examples that Mr Hunter puts forward are just as relevant, if not more so today, in this information-rich social media age, than they were in 2010.

Mr Hunter has extended his analysis in this 2018 paper to include new insights into the increasing role schools are playing in supporting student development and wellbeing. The work schools do to develop the potential, resilience and personal capabilities of their students is not easily quantified but is a critically important element in the stories schools share about themselves.

Mr Hunter's work adds another perspective to this important political, policy and community debate about school performance and what matters the most.

DAVID ROBERTSON
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS QUEENSLAND

Introduction

The context

This publication is the second iteration of *Schools Speaking for Themselves*, published in 2010. At that time schools were reporting that media league tables constructed from NAPLAN data were causing anxiety among parents and students. As their schools were not being shown as 'winners' on the league tables, some parents were questioning their choice of school for their children. Independent Schools Queensland engaged me to write a paper to assist schools in communicating balance between the media league tables and what schools really do to achieve for their students.

Eight years on, the issues continue and much of what was written in 2010 is as relevant today as it was then. I have updated the relevant sections, drawing from recent sources to show how these issues have persisted for almost a decade.

Student wellbeing is a topic schools are finding increasingly challenging following the growing trend of standardised testing and hard data. This newly added section is an attempt to trace the ways student wellbeing has developed over the years, and what the latest research has to offer schools. There are some promising indications in research and practice that I hope will be helpful to schools and their communities.

In May each year students across Queensland in Years 3, 5, 7 and 9 undertake NAPLAN testing. NAPLAN was devised as a point-in-time data set designed to assist schools to identify group and individual students' progress to address learning gaps and build on strengths. Later in the year the data is released to schools and published on the My School website in March the following year.

In December data for Queensland Year 12 students, including the Overall Positions (OPs), soon to be ATAR positions, is released to schools. OPs place students in a rank order to be used for tertiary entrance. Many students pursue vocational education or non-OP pathways: in some schools these students outnumber those opting for an OP.

The NAPLAN journey

Introduced in 2008, NAPLAN is in its 11th year of operation. Over the years the test has been further developed and refined. It is still essentially a pen and paper test, though the plan is to move to online testing over the next few years, with a number of Australian schools making the transition online in 2018, including 83 in Queensland. Some teacher professional associations have conveyed concern that online testing may narrow the scope for students to show what they have learned. Further, while the My School website has been refined since 2015 in an attempt to provide more meaningful information, some educators and parents continue to see its main use as the constructing of media league tables rather than helpful information for parents. Education Ministers have agreed to consider terms of reference for a review of NAPLAN including reporting of results at this year's Education Council meeting in June.

In recent years I have taken part in school reviews in the state and Catholic school sectors. My consistent observation is that school leaders and teachers are becoming more skilled at using NAPLAN data to inform teaching practice as they track students' progress in literacy and numeracy. At the same time, many express dismay at the way the NAPLAN data continue to be used by many media outlets to construct league tables that purport to make judgements about the quality of the schools themselves.

In this publication I offer the view that while the NAPLAN tests may have some flaws, the tests generally provide reliable information for schools to make important judgements about teaching and learning in literacy and numeracy in their own contexts. I urge schools to communicate how they use the data to parents and students, and to place this in the context of the wider learning that takes place and the benefits that brings to students.

SPEAKING FOR THEMSELVES

There are eight chapters put forward in this paper, designed to highlight the partisan outlook on the quality of teaching and learning and quantifying of student outcomes in Australian schools. Each chapter presents contextual quotes and evidence-based arguments. At the end of each chapter is a *Schools Speaking for Themselves* section, which provides advice on how schools can apply a balance of expectations, develop strategies and embed research-based best practice to deliver the real story, beyond league tables and towards human beings.

I also urge school leaders to resist the temptation to use the media league tables as a marketing tool when their school is 'scored' favourably. Educators know that this is not valid use of data, and it contributes to making NAPLAN high stakes when it should be helpful to all schools. It is well summarised in this extract:

"Our school does quite well, but I am on the board of two other little schools in the West. I see the devastation that goes on for those schools and it's heart-wrenching and destroying… as a result of the (My School) website. People read it simplistically," a principal of an independent school said.

(The Sydney Morning Herald, 5 March 2015)

Recent developments

The other main development since 2010 is the recently released *Gonski 2.0 Report: Through Growth to Achievement*. Recommendation 11 in the report calls for the development of "a new online and on demand student learning assessment tool based on the Australian Curriculum learning progressions." It is possible that this could become a replacement for NAPLAN, though it would raise the question of 'transparency' if that were to occur, with politicians and the media surely seeking ways to make these diagnostic assessments public, as occurs with NAPLAN.

Further, Recommendation 7 of the report places greater focus on the general capabilities of the Australian Curriculum, calling for them to be integrated more closely with the learning areas. Five of the seven general capabilities reflect the kinds of learning for the 21st century that are presented in this publication.

The issue

There have been changes since 2010, but the issues have not changed. NAPLAN and tertiary entrance rankings have a specific purpose at a point in time for schools and students. NAPLAN data are used by individual schools; OPs and ATAR are used by universities. Neither tell anything about the quality of learning and student achievement within schools. Neither tell anything about the human and social development that schools have achieved with their students.

Despite this, each year the raw data, whose purpose is narrow and specific, is converted by many media outlets into league tables, purporting to inform the general public about which schools are the best in the state, and by default, which are the worst. Because this is the main story that is told, politicians often act on it, at times unjustly, to the detriment of schools, their communities, and often to the morale of their teachers. The media who construct the league tables, and the politicians who react to them, do so under the banner of 'transparency'.

This is not transparency. It is a misleading use of data, yet is the only story told to the public about the quality of teaching and learning in our schools.

It is not helpful to bemoan the ways NAPLAN and Year 12 data are used by the media or politicians and leave it at that. The media and politicians work with different agendas from educators, and their approaches to 'transparency' and 'accountability' reflect these. It is up to schools to take the lead with their communities and communicate the educational agenda as a positive message, not as a complaint about media and political agendas.

They will always be here and won't go away. Schools need to speak for themselves, telling the real story, and it's my hope that this publication will help them to do so.

Finally, this paper deals with a controversial issue, and while I have tried to address it in a coherent way with evidence to support the contentions and advice, it's inevitable that my own views will reveal themselves quite clearly. It's important to note that they are my views, not necessarily the official views of Independent Schools Queensland.

NORM HUNTER OAM
MAY 2018

Preamble:
A tale of two stories

All too often the quest for results serves to undermine the foundations of self-confidence rather than to strengthen them. Young people – some of them skilful exam-passers – become less curious as a result of their education, not more. They lose their capacity for wonder and critical questioning. Rather than becoming bolder and braver, they become more docile and fragile in the face of difficulty. They learn to think narrowly rather than broadly, to compete rather than cooperate, to be frightened of uncertainty and the risk of error that accompanies it. Education is in dereliction of its duty to the next generation if schools are not fostering these strengths in their students.

(Guy Claxton 2008)

A child is not a test score.

(Monty Neill 2009)

The story

Below is the story according to media reports, about the 2017 data for Queensland students in NAPLAN in Years 3, 5, 7, and 9, and the end-of-year results for Queensland's Year 12 students.

On NAPLAN:

Private colleges have dominated Queensland high school NAPLAN results taking out nine of the top 10 positions this year … In comparison five state primary schools were in the top 10 performers with (school name) finishing second for Year 3 results … (school name) topped the Year 3 results and (school name) led the Year 5s, with (school name) rocketing up into 12th in the state.

The article then presents a table showing the 'High Performers': the 'Top 10' in each of the four year groups tested in NAPLAN in Queensland.

On Year 12:

An (town name) school has delivered the best OP results in Queensland with an extraordinary rise from 135th place in the state to first in a single year…

Almost 60 per cent of the OP students at (school name) and more than 55 per cent of (school name)'s OP students scored in the coveted one to five range, placing both schools in the top three in the state…

A number of other Queensland schools showed significant improvements in the Queensland Core Skills Test results, including (school name), which ranked fifth in the state, with 50 per cent of students receiving OPs from one to five last year, up from 228th with only 14 per cent in 2016. (School name) ranked 24th in 2017 with 40 per cent of OP one to five scores, compared to 265th with 12 per cent in 2016.

The article goes on to list Queensland's 'Top 50 2017 OP Achievers'.

The real story

- There is no 'Top 10' in NAPLAN, or 'Top 50' schools in Overall Positions (OPs).
- There is no 'first place'.
- A school has not 'rocketed up' into '12th in the state'.
- There is no 'fifth in the state'
- There is no 'top three' in the state.
- There is no '24th', '135th' or '228th place'.
- Schools do not 'score' places.
- There is no 'coveted one to five range'.
- There is no competition for 'ranking' of schools against others.

The articles are examples of the now all-too-familiar media league tables. The 'scores', the 'rankings', the 'Top 50', the 'first place', are all figments of a media story constructed to catch the attention of readers.

There are many high performing schools across all three education sectors in Queensland, but they are judged on what really matters in schools, not by ranking schools on raw data gathered from diagnostic literacy and numeracy tests for individual schools, or from positions on a tertiary entrance rank.

The real story, of course, is that NAPLAN is intended to assist individual schools and teachers in directing learning strategies to where they are most needed for their students; and an Overall Position or ATAR is not a 'score', it is a position for students hoping to gain a place in tertiary or further education.

It tells nothing about what a student has learned or achieved, or what a school has contributed to the human development of its students.

To look at how a school might have helped shape a young person's future is apparently judged to be too ordinary and uncontroversial to generate reader interest; so an alternate story is created about a high stakes competition in which schools strive to score points against one another for a place in the 'Top 10'. In keeping with this, the story is told in the language and imagery of the sporting pages or the stock market. And it is presented as 'transparency', and therefore in the public interest.

There is no point in spending time lamenting or demonising media or political agendas. The media work to a different agenda from educators, and the two do not always fit together. It has to be accepted that the media agenda is real, it is valid within its own jurisdictions, and it will continue. Along with this, politicians respond or react to what they judge to be public opinion. At present, the media story is the main story that reaches the public, and it is not helpful to schools and their communities.

The danger in accepting that the media story represents 'transparency' is that this misleading information purports to reflect the purpose of schools and to demonstrate to the general public the quality of teaching and learning that occurs in them. In doing so it presents a challenge to every school, particularly those schools that are deemed successful in the media league tables. It is tempting to bask in the prestige they generate, but that prestige is illusory and probably temporary. It is time for schools to set the rules and redefine 'transparency' by speaking for themselves about what really matters in their schools, and what their teachers and students are really achieving.

A key for schools:
Telling the real story

A school's most valuable and irreplaceable asset is their story. Storytelling conveys a school's purpose, values, quality of experiences, and most crucially, what other people say about them. Schools are encouraged to speak for themselves about what is important; to tell a cohesive narrative that encompasses the truth, the facts and importantly, the effects on their community.

Education is not a destination or a 'score' in a mythical race to the top, it is a continuing journey. This report outlines the purposes and limitations of data, what schools really do and why this is important; all drawn from national and international research. It confronts the distorted facts with legitimate and credible data.

To strengthen the argument around the importance of transparency, this report will give reference to that of a glass prism. A transparent prism displays all colours (facets) of the life of a school. The story of standardised testing and tertiary entrance rankings is representative of a narrow beam of light; just one facet of the life of a school.

It's time to tell the real story.

School leaders can either agree to accept the rules set by the media metaphor and play this game, or they can refuse to run onto the field, opting instead for another game, with another set of rules.

Independent Schools Queensland (ISQ) Executive Director David Robertson has offered the ground rules for the real story:

For independent schools operating in a market where choice is a key factor, transparency and accountability measures such as NAPLAN can be important drivers of school improvement. They can provide school Boards with the platform to ask important questions about whether the school is achieving the best possible outcomes for students, and whether the teaching and learning practices are of the highest possible quality and meeting the needs of individual students. However, NAPLAN is just one tool of measurement and should be used as a positive contribution to excellent teaching and learning.

(David Robertson 2018)

Queensland Catholic Education Commission Executive Director Leanne Perry offers a similar view:

Catholic schools aim to develop the whole child, and while important, the annual NAPLAN results are only one indicator among many.

(Leanne Perry 2015)

As the pace of life, especially for children, has quickened – as we have striven to improve schools, increase productivity, accumulate wealth, and provide a more technological education – the consequences of our intentions are not always what we intend.

(Richard Louv 2009)

These two education leaders represent sectors who represent schools that generally do well on the media league tables. In rejecting the rules of the media game and refusing to run onto the field and play, they set an ethical standard and a political agenda: develop your own story about what really matters in the education of our young people in your school, and tell it honestly and constantly.

If the media story is the only voice that is heard, then the real story will not even be available to the community, let alone heard by them. The words of the Independent and Catholic Education leaders above are well chosen and accurate, but they are a voice in the wilderness.

It is time for the voice of schools to be heard, telling the real story of what they do, and why what they do is of so much more substance, and is so much more important than the contrived mythology that is currently being presented to the public as 'transparency' by much of the media.

1.0
Transparency or translucency

> We live in the age of measured accountability, of reward for measured performance, and belief in the virtues of publicising those metrics through 'transparency'… But by a sort of linguistic sleight of hand, accountability has come to mean demonstrating success through standardised measurement, as if only that which can be counted really counts. Another assumption that is often taken for granted is that 'accountability' demands that measurement of performance be made public, that is, 'transparent'.

(Jerry Muller 2018)

> Ultimately, just like Easter Island ended up a barren island filled with big statues, countries may succeed in raising test scores, but they will likely end up as nations of great test takers in an intellectually barren land; test scores do not count nearly as much as reformers believe for the success of individuals or nations. Moreover, great test scores can come at a huge cost.

(Yong Zhao 2016)

1.1 Which game to play?

The decision of the Queensland Government in 2006 to support the publication of Year 12 school data and later, NAPLAN results in the media, and of the Commonwealth Government in 2009 to create the My School website in a format that includes schools' comparative NAPLAN results, have created significant issues for schools. In themselves, these are not necessarily negative developments, but in the context of the media agenda, and to a lesser extent the political agenda, they are problematic.

In essence, schools are faced with two options: either accept the media narratives that emanate from these decisions and 'play the game', or confront the narratives by refusing to play that game, and instead play another game by articulating the real story, speaking for themselves about what is really important in our schools.

The league tables that inevitably followed the decisions on NAPLAN and Year 12 data are justified by government and the media under the banner of 'transparency'.

transparent: transmitting light without appreciable scattering so that bodies lying beyond are entirely visible;

translucent: transmitting and diffusing light so that objects beyond cannot be seen clearly.

distort: to alter the true meaning of, or misrepresent.

(The Penguin English Dictionary 2002)

1.0 TRANSPARENCY OR TRANSLUCENCY? (CONT)

Transparency in terms of school outcomes is now firmly embedded into the education system.

(David Robertson 2018)

Mr Robertson's comment above is a reality that all schools now have to face, and they face it with the knowledge that the way in which the Year 12 school data and NAPLAN data are presented in the media and on My School does not provide transparency. It is at best translucency: it lets some light in, but blurs it so that what lies within cannot be seen clearly. At worst it is an exercise in distortion: it misrepresents the real purpose of standardised testing and tertiary entrance rankings, and at the same time undervalues the richness and quality of what schools really achieve with their students. In essence, it distorts the purpose of schooling.

This is especially so when placed in the context of the early 21st century and when the purpose of schools is given thoughtful consideration. Indeed, when viewed in this context, league tables only display a narrow shaft of light, and more is hidden than is revealed; yet what is revealed is used to encourage the public not only to judge the effectiveness of schools, but also to rate them against one another. This is particularly disconcerting, and at times demoralising for educators and others who understand the purpose of tertiary entrance rankings, the strengths and limitations of standardised testing, and what really matters in schools.

Schools must speak for themselves. In a political and economic climate in which school performance is made public, performance tables and inspectors' reports can only tell a partial story. Sometimes they get it wrong.

(John MacBeath 1999)

Schools speaking for themselves

CONFRONTING THE TRUTH

Schools need to speak for themselves with confidence about their achievements; not ignoring or dismissing quantitative data such as Year 12 and NAPLAN results, but insisting that they be used as they were meant to be, and balancing them with the depth and power of human, qualitative data. Many experiences that cannot easily be measured in the life of the school, both in and beyond the classroom, generate deep learning: learning that occurs through experiences that enrich the lives of the students and empower them for the challenging world they already live in, and will soon inherit. Only the schools themselves can tell these stories.

The challenge for our schools is to speak in ways that firstly identify these experiences, and secondly elevate them to the status that is currently accorded to the 'hard data' of league tables and My School. A further challenge is to do this without denigrating the role of standardised testing in education, or appear to be 'covering up' for any genuine failings that might exist on the part of the school.

Confront the concept of transparency by redefining it in the spirit of light pouring through a transparent glass prism, displaying the true, rich colours that make up the life of the school. Those colours, painted in words expressed in the language of potential not product, can offer real transparency, presenting to the community a living portrait of the school. This should replace the misguided use of data that currently masquerades as transparency.

2.0
Why do we have schools?

> You have to do the research, especially when facts have to compete with opinion for intellectual oxygen.

(John Medina 2018)

> For nearly a century, Western society in general has been dominated by a form of thinking and an approach to life that is narrowly reductive and deeply analytical. Ours has been the age of the "knowledge worker", the well-educated manipulator of information and deployer of expertise. But that is changing. Thanks to an array of forces – material abundance that is deepening our non-material yearnings, globalisation that is shipping (blue and) white-collar work overseas, and powerful technologies that are eliminating certain kinds of work altogether – we are entering a new age.

(Daniel Pink 2005)

2.1 Starting with questions

As all good educators know, the place to start when seeking knowledge and wisdom is not with answers, but with questions. Perhaps the most fundamental educational question of all: *What is the purpose of schools?*

We can likely agree that there are six elements, all integrating with one another, that combine to answer that question:

1. To enable students to discover and nurture their individual talents, empowering them to lead balanced and fulfilling lives;
2. To enable students to develop for themselves a framework of values and beliefs that they will take with them beyond school, to build on and modify throughout their lives;
3. To develop students' interpersonal skills so they can have positive and enriching relationships with others;
4. To prepare students for fulfilling and productive working lives;
5. To prepare students to be thoughtful and contributing participants in a democratic society; and
6. To prepare students to be confident, capable and contributing participants in the global community and economy.

2.2 What is the context?

Setting out aspirations in this way is important, but it is equally important to place them in context: in this case, the world of the early 21st century. Few would dispute that we now live in a global community with an accompanying global economy, characterised by themes of change, uncertainty and complexity.

Daniel Pink puts it this way:

We are moving from an economy and a society built on the logical, linear, computer-like capabilities of the Information Age to an economy and a society built on the inventive, empathic, big-picture capabilities of what's rising in its place, the Conceptual Age… It is an age animated by a different form of thinking and a new approach to life – one that prizes aptitudes that I call "high concept" and "high touch".

High concept involves the capacity to detect patterns and opportunities, to create artistic and emotional beauty, to craft a satisfying narrative, and to combine seemingly unrelated ideas into something new. High touch involves the ability to empathise with others, to understand the subtleties of human interaction, to find joy in one's self and to elicit it in others, and to stretch beyond the quotidian in pursuit of purpose and meaning.

(Daniel Pink 2005)

The aptitudes Pink describes here are almost all characteristics of the brain's right hemisphere: the source of human creativity and imagination. The linear, logical characteristics of the left hemisphere are still important, but they are now not enough. As Pink explains:

The left hemisphere analyses the details; the right hemisphere synthesises the big picture.

(Daniel Pink 2005)

We are now preparing our students for an age that will require the human brain to be used as it was meant to work: holistically, with both hemispheres working as part of an integrated whole.

Given the importance of this in education, it is timely to ask at the outset: How much of the right hemisphere of the brain can be engaged through standardised tests such as NAPLAN? Or for that matter, OECD testing such as PISA and TIMMS? If the answer is not very much, this places a serious challenge to the high stakes status NAPLAN data are given in league tables and the My School website, as well as comparisons of nations in PISA and TIMMS. Indeed, that high-stakes status not only strongly influences what and how we teach, it also influences government policy and encourages parents to use it to judge how effective our schools are.

Are schools prepared to accept this translucency and distortion, or are they going to speak for themselves and generate real transparency that tells the full story?

The linear, logical characteristics of the left hemisphere are still important, but they are now not enough.

2.3 The deeper purpose of education

How is the purpose of schools viewed in the context of the Conceptual Age, as articulated by Daniel Pink? Schools will ultimately have to answer this themselves, but it is helpful to draw on two respected educational researchers and thinkers from the UK and USA respectively.

In *What's the Point of School?*, Guy Claxton of the University of Winchester suggests:

In thrall to content and qualifications, we have forgotten the deeper purpose of education. In the rush to make young people into successful exam-passers, we have overlooked their deeper need to become successful people, eager to learn and grow in the real life world of work, leisure and relationships.

If we are serious about education being a preparation for the future, it is the quality of learning skills and attitudes that matters in the long-run… (This) derives from a number of personal qualities… These are: curiosity, courage, investigation, experimentation, imagination, reasoning, sociability and reflection. (Author's emphasis)

(Guy Claxton 2008)

In similar vein, Diane Ravitch of New York University writes eloquently, perhaps speaking for most parents in western societies:

Everyone involved in educating children should ask themselves why we educate… What do we hope for when we send our children to school?

Certainly we want them to be able to read and write and be numerate. Those are the basic skills on which all other learning builds. But that is not enough.

We want to prepare them for a useful life. We want them to be able to think for themselves when they are out in the world on their own. We want them to have good character and to make sound decisions about their life, their work, and their health. We want them to face life's joys and travails with courage and

> We are now preparing our students for an age that will require the human brain to be used as it was meant to work: holistically, with both hemispheres working as part of an integrated whole.

humour. We hope that they will be kind and compassionate in their dealings with others. We want them to have a sense of justice and fairness. We want them to understand our nation and our world and the challenges we face. We want them to be active, responsible citizens, prepared to think issues through carefully, to listen to differing views, and to reach decisions rationally. We want them to learn science and mathematics so they understand the problems of modern life and participate in finding solutions. We want them to enjoy the rich artistic and cultural heritage of our society and other societies…

If these are our goals, the current narrow, utilitarian focus of our national testing regime is not sufficient to reach any of them. Indeed, to the extent that we make the testing regime our master, we may see our true goals recede farther and farther into the distance. By our current methods, we may be training (not educating) a generation of children who are repelled by learning, thinking that it means only drudgery, worksheets, test preparation, and test-taking.

(Diane Ravitch 2010)

There are two powerful themes here: firstly, the deeply human values and skills that both authors identify as necessary for schools to develo in students to prepare them for the world; and secondly, their despair at the way high-stakes testing regimes are dominating the curriculum – indeed in some cases becoming the curriculum – and actually impeding schools from developing the abovementioned values and skills in their students.

It is timely here to ask: Are there sufficient messages from the UK and the USA for Australia to take note? If we agree that there are, we need to ask a second question: What can we, in our schools, do to redress this imbalance? How can we engage in, and publicise, what is really important in our schools rather than reacting to the narrow and limiting agendas of politicians and much of the media?

Schools speaking for themselves

THE MANAGEMENT OF MEANING

It has been claimed that in today's complex and ambivalent world, the major role of leadership is *the management of meaning* (Limerick, Cunnington & Crowther 1998). This doesn't mean spin: it means presenting the school in the light of the bigger picture, and defining what is special and different about it.

When speaking to parents and to wider audiences about what the school does, and its aspirations for its students, we need a transparent prism, not translucent glass, to portray the many facets of what the school offers its students.

- Place the school's achievements and activities in the context of the purpose of schools;

- Place the school's achievements and activities in the context of the world of the early 21st century – the 'Conceptual Age' – giving appropriate emphasis to right hemisphere activities as well as left;

- School leaders, including teachers, can provide genuine transparency by moving the focus to what the school is doing to empower its students for the present and the future, placing it in a context parents and the wider community can understand and relate to, because many parents are experiencing it daily themselves in both their personal and working lives;

- Show how the school is addressing the human values and capabilities, as identified by Diane Ravitch. These are likely to resonate with parents, because surely they are the kinds of things most parents hope for from their children's education; and

- Use that context to confront and rise above the narrow focus of standardised test results and media league tables, and show how the school is doing a great deal to prepare young people for life in the Conceptual Age. And have no doubts about the legitimacy of this kind of qualitative evidence in portraying the effectiveness of the school. For the purpose of genuine transparency, it is more valid than My School comparisons and media league tables. Tell the real story.

3.0
Why do we have assessment?

3.1 What is the purpose of assessment?

Let's address a fundamental question. Just over thirty years ago, Derek Rowntree wrote what has become a seminal work on assessment. He titled the book *Assessing Students: How shall we know them?* The wording of the subtitle helps explain why Rowntree's book continues to be relevant today: not How shall we measure them?… but, How shall we know them? And there in that one word – know – Rowntree hits the mark. Schools are not factories, they are places of human development: places of potential, not product.

The most important reason for testing of students is to assist them and their teachers to identify weaknesses and strengths in their learning in order to work towards enabling them to match their achievement with their potential: as human beings, not just as students.

It is well explained in the Ontario Ministry of Education document, Growing Success (2010):

Assessment is the process of gathering information that accurately reflects how well a student is achieving the curriculum expectations in a subject or course. The primary purpose of assessment is to improve student learning.

The Ontario document is grounded in the definition of curriculum as "all the intended experiences offered by the school", and by the terms "assessment for learning" and "assessment as learning". It is an enlightened way to conceptualise assessment and thinking, which educators would want to endorse. It suggests that the testing of the students should itself be a learning experience for them.

This brief discussion can be said to encompass formative and diagnostic testing. At the same time summative assessment – assessment of learning – which is described as assisting teachers to use evidence of student learning to assess student achievement against goals and standards, is also important. It is what appears on students' certification at the completion of Year 12 and provides keys to further study.

> When test results become the arbiter of future choices, a subtle shift occurs in which fallible and partial indicators of academic achievement are transformed into major goals of schooling… Those personal qualities that we hold dear – resilience and courage in the face of stress, a sense of craft in our work, a commitment to justice and caring in our social relationships, a dedication to advancing the public good in our communal life – are exceedingly difficult to assess. And so, unfortunately, we are apt to measure what we can, and eventually come to value what is measured over what is left unmeasured.

(Robert Glaser 2010)

> An emphasis on measured performance through standardised tests (can) create a perverse outcome. It destroys the predictive validity of the tests themselves. Tests of performance are designed to evaluate the knowledge and ability that students have acquired in their general education. When that education becomes focused instead on developing the students' performance on the tests, the test no longer measures what it was created to evaluate.
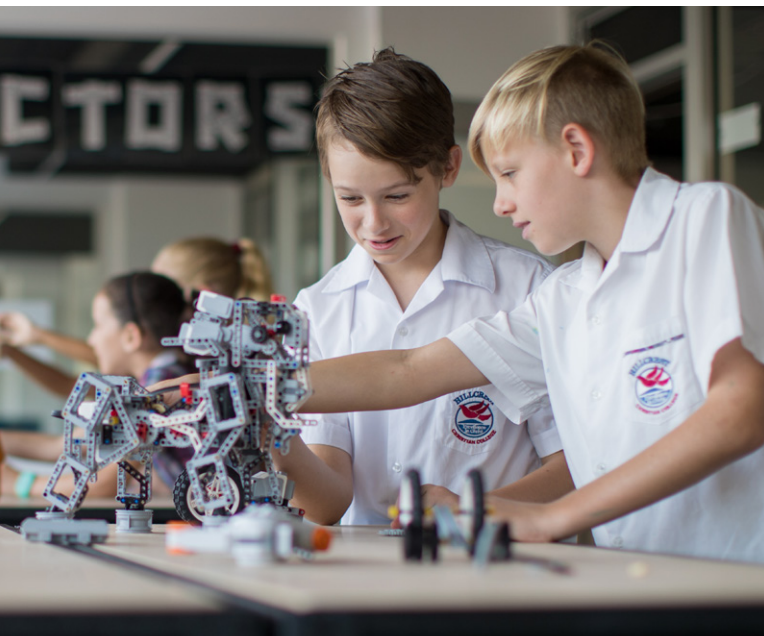
(Jerry Muller 2018)

The most important reason for testing of students is to assist them and their teachers to identify weaknesses and strengths in their learning in order to work towards enabling them to match their achievement with their potential: as people, not just as students.

Yet like NAPLAN and the OECD testing, it is a snapshot of a student's academic achievement in a number of specific subjects at a particular period in time. It is a comparatively narrow measure of what a student has learned at school, and is also a weak predictor of a student's future success in study and at work.

In sum, whether the assessment is diagnostic, formative or summative, its purpose is to inform about how well a student is achieving, sometimes against the student's perceived potential, and at times, against externally devised criteria or standards.

3.2 What is not the purpose of assessment?

Another fundamental question and the answer is unambiguous. It is not intended to be used to judge the effectiveness of schools, nor to compare the effectiveness of schools, states or countries against one another. There are good reasons for this:

Testing does not equal accountability. Test scores are information for an accountability system; they are not the system itself… The ability to continue to develop and preserve… useful assessment depends on helping policy makers understand that tests are only indicators that offer information for accountability systems. Otherwise, tests are asked to take on burdens of decision-making and instructional improvement, which they are not designed to carry and are not capable of accomplishing.

(Linda Darling-Hammond 2006)

And, closer to home:

The intentions of assessment and reporting regimes are to ensure improved learning outcomes for students and provide valid and reliable data for policy-makers.

There is compelling evidence from other countries… that when accountability for educational outcomes is measured solely

by results in national full-cohort tests, the negative effects on teaching and student learning outweigh the positive intentions, and furthermore, that the data from such tests cannot be used by policy-makers in meaningful ways.

(Queensland Studies Authority 2009)

3.3 What is the power of assessment?

It is well known and understood by educators that assessment, if it is high stakes and used mainly for accountability purposes, will dominate the curriculum. Indeed, it can become the curriculum.

This was powerfully put at the Learning and Technology World Forum in London in January 2009:

Whatever the formal curriculum says, whatever teachers are taught to do in their training, whatever it is that students want to learn, the paramount determiner of what is taught, how it is taught, and what is learned is what is assessed, particularly on high-stakes exams. These summative, high-stakes assessments determine students' futures, establish rewards and punishments for schools and teachers, and shape classroom and instructional practices…

(CISCO, INTEL, Microsoft 2009)

The sad reality for our schools is that in Australia today none of the lessons to be drawn from any of this appear to be learned, or even taken notice of by governments or media. Under the mantra of transparency, parents and the rest of the community are asked to believe that the league tables published in the media actually tell us which are the 'best' schools and by default which are the 'worst'. We are also asked to believe that the most important information on the Commonwealth Government's My School website is the comparative NAPLAN results of the schools; and the clear implication is that this tells us which are the 'best' (and by default, the 'worst') schools.

And it gets worse. Based on this message, there is a clear assumption that the use of data in this way by government and media can be used to hold teachers and schools accountable to parents and to the community. Those who work in schools know that it can't. That is not the purpose of assessment, and it is not transparency. When data is misused in this manner we are dealing at best with translucency, and at times with distortion. It is damaging for our students and teachers, and it is important that schools not play this game, even if, as is the case with the media article quoted earlier, it appears to paint our own school(s) in a favourable light.

More often than not, accountability efforts have measured what is easiest to measure, rather than what is most important. Existing models of assessment typically fail to measure the skills, knowledge, attributes and characteristics of self-directed and collaborative learning that are increasingly important for our global economy and fast changing world…

To measure these skills and provide the needed information, assessments should engage students in the use of technological tools and digital resources and the application of a deep understanding of subject knowledge to solve complex, real world tasks and create new ideas, content and knowledge.

(CISCO, INTEL, Microsoft 2009)

3.4 A judgement, not a calculation

At the same time, it is important not to appear to oppose the use of reliable, fair and valid testing. When the tests are constructed to meet these three criteria, and when the data are used by schools to initiate action to improve student learning, standardised testing can be a valuable aid for teachers in working with their students.

The important thing is firstly to be aware of the limitations of such testing, as flagged above by Linda Darling-Hammond and the Queensland Studies Authority, and secondly to ensure that it is used for the intended purpose – and not for invalid purposes such as judging school effectiveness or ranking schools against one another. It would be a sad thing if schools allowed themselves to be 'data driven', by data that are not capable of being used to make these judgements.

It is worth noting, right from the start, that assessment is a human process, conducted by and with human beings, and subject inevitably to the frailties of human judgement. However crisp and objective we might try to make it, and however neatly quantifiable may be our 'results', assessment is closer to an art than a science. It is, after all, an exercise in human communication.

(Ontario Ministry of Education 2010)

> A standardised test result is not a precise measurement, a chemical equation, or a mathematical calculation: it is a judgement – with all the human frailties that go into that.

Enlightened educators know this, and they know that the best schools are not data-driven: they are values- and beliefs-driven and data informed. This simply bears out the limitations of such tests as highlighted in the quoted Ontario statement, and the caution needed in drawing broad-based conclusions from them.

Schools need to find ways to convey this to parents and students, yet at the same time avoid falling into the trap of appearing defensive or trying to avoid accountability. And the language is important, even critical. A standardised test result is not a precise measurement, a chemical equation, or a mathematical calculation: it is a judgement – with all the human frailties that go into that. Furthermore, it is a judgement that is a snapshot in time: its validity and reliability can be outdated soon after the snapshot is taken. The more schools allow it to be presented as having mathematical or scientific accuracy, the less the deep learning that occurs through the students' achievements in the wider life of the school will be given credibility by the school community.

3.5 Creativity and the imagination: just warm fuzzy stuff?

According to Brian Caldwell, one of Australia's most highly respected educational researchers:

As far as the future of the nation is concerned, my over-arching concern is that innovation, creativity and passion are the key requirements for a vibrant society and a successful economy in the years ahead. These are in jeopardy if we continue on our present path.

(Brian Caldwell 2010)

And from overseas, Tony Wagner of the Harvard Graduate School of Education offers a set of 'New Survival Skills' which he urges educators to build into their students' experiences at school. Two of these are *curiosity* and *imagination*.

The words curiosity and inquisitiveness are almost always mentioned when I asked (industry) leaders to tell me what skills matter most today. Creativity and innovation are key factors not only in solving problems but also in developing new or improved products and services. And so today's employees need to master both 'left-brain' skills – such as critical thinking and problem solving, accessing and evaluation information, and so on – and 'right-brain' skills such as curiosity, imagination, and creativity… Employees must know how to use analytical skills in ways that are often more 'out-of-the-box' than in the past, come up with creative solutions to problems and be able to design products and services that stand out from the competition.

(Tony Wagner 2008)

Wagner's views are echoed in a survey of 247 industry executives across seven countries – western and non-western – conducted by the Centre for Creative Leadership, North Carolina. The study identified ten international trends in the survey, one of which they name 'The Innovation Revolution'.

The report states:

Though our organisations grow in different ways, there is no topic that is providing more fuel to that fire than innovation.

(Centre for Creative Leadership 2007)

The report goes on to reveal that only 50 percent of the 247 executives who contributed to the study felt that their organisations were creative and innovatory enough. They expressed a major need for employees to bring high levels of these skills to their organisations.

This is serious information for schools. It is hard data, direct from the mouths of industry leaders in an international survey conducted by a highly respected research organisation. The statistics above are now ten years old, but their relevance is affirmed in comparable contemporary studies such as those discussed in Section 6.4.

3.6 The Place of the Arts

While these competencies (reading, mathematics and writing) are important pre-requisites for living in our modern world, and fundamental to general and continuing education, they represent only a portion of the goals of elementary and secondary schooling. They represent neither the humanities nor the aesthetic and moral aims of education that cannot be measured.

(Robert Glaser 2010)

Given the acknowledged importance of creativity and innovation in the education of young people today, as evidenced in Section 3.5, it is disappointing that subjects such as Music, Art, Drama and Dance, which come under the banner of the arts, are still often short-changed as 'soft', while the 'hard' subjects such as mathematics and the sciences – now promoted as STEM – are elevated and seen as more relevant to the 'real' world. Without devaluing mathematics and the sciences, it is important to point out the role that involvement in the arts can play in the development of young people.

Champions of Change, a major United States report by the President's Committee on the Arts and the Humanities in 2004, presented a compelling case which holds true today. The report drew on thousands of students across American schools in a variety of geographical, cultural, racial and socio-economic environments.

Its conclusions will resonate with teachers and leaders in our schools today:

Why the Arts Change the Learning Experiences

- The arts reach students who are not otherwise being reached;
- The arts reach students in ways that they are not otherwise being reached;
- The arts connect students to themselves and each other;
- The arts transform the environment for learning;
- The arts provide opportunities for the adults in the lives of young people;
- The arts provide new challenges for those students already considered successful;
- The arts connect learning experiences to the changing world of real work;
- The arts encourage self-directed learning;
- The arts promote complexity in the learning experience;
- The arts allow management of risk by the learners; and
- The arts engage community leaders and resources in the life of the school.

(Fiske [ed.] 2004)

How important is this? And how much of it can be shown through comparative standardised tests and league tables?

It behoves our schools, particularly school leaders, to speak for themselves and focus the spotlight on the ways they address this for their students, and the resultant benefits to the students: these are not 'soft' subjects or extra-curricular activities, they are learnings, and they are as important in the human development of students as mathematics and the sciences. If the list above is applied to the purposes of schooling in Section 2.1, and to the characteristics of the Conceptual Age – in particular engaging the right hemisphere of the brain in concert with the left hemisphere – it offers powerful evidence of the important role of the arts in preparing students for the 21st century: as individuals, as members of communities, and for the world of work.

> Without devaluing mathematics and the sciences, it is important to point out the role that involvement in the arts can play in the development of young people.

3.7 Another voice in the wilderness?

School leaders and teachers are sometimes tempted to underestimate the ability of parents to know what is important, given the attention given to the media league tables. The following comment from a parent is a reminder that some, perhaps many parents probably do know, and need reassuring from their schools about what is important:

The system feels broken. Newspapers should stop publishing the annual high school rankings and NAPLAN should abolish league tables. Parents are making choices about schools based, perhaps, on the wrong parameters for their child. League table pressure, and anxiety over a high school's end-of-year ranking, are trickling down to teachers and parents, but most of all to the people who matter most – the kids.

(Nikki Gemmell 2018)

That reads as a statement of opinion. It should really be read as a plea for reassurance by a parent, in the face of the media translucency and distortion, that schools really do know what matters in that school for her children. The reality is that hers is another voice in the wilderness. Newspapers will not stop publishing the annual high school rankings, and ACARA cannot abolish league tables. This parent is counting on the school not to run onto the field and play the media game, but to tell the real story of the richness the school offers to her children, placing NAPLAN and Year 12 tertiary entrance rankings in their proper context. Every school leader owes that to every parent. Schools must speak for themselves, or the media will do it for them. And it will not be the real story.

Schools speaking for themselves

REASONS AND LIMITATIONS

It is important to emphasise to the school community:

- The main reasons for testing students;
- That using standardised test results to judge the effectiveness of schools is both unscientific and invalid, because it only tells a fraction of the school's story;
- The ways in which one-off high-stakes testing can narrow the curriculum to the detriment of the students; and
- The limited ability of current forms of assessment to inform a young person's future.

INTERPRETING TEST RESULTS

- It is important to convey to school communities the limitations of even the best constructed tests. They are composed by humans, so they are fallible. And they are judgements, not measurements or calculations. This means that test results must be interpreted intelligently and validly, not in the simplistic and translucent manner that is currently the case in much of the media and on My School;
- At the same time, schools should show how they are using the test results as they were intended to be used: by teachers working with students to address gaps and maximise students' potential; and
- In the pursuit of genuine transparency, throw light onto your school through a prism, showing how the depth and richness of what the school does for its students goes way beyond measurable test results.

CREATIVITY AND INNOVATION

- Make a point of emphasising the need in the workplace today for creativity and innovation in the age of globalisation, and if necessary cite the research; many parents will already be well aware that it's true because they're experiencing it in their own workplaces;
- Highlight all the creativity the students are engaged in at school, both in the subject curriculum and in the wider life of the school. If the school is putting on a musical, a play or a concert, highlight the learning experiences. Staff, students and parents often work together over many months leading up to the performance. In the process, students will have experienced such things as high levels of teamwork, long-term commitment and stickability, sacrifice, time management, high concentration, reliability, shared leadership, adaptability, creativity, self-discipline, managing relationships, facing down fears, the power of synergy when contributing to something bigger than the sum of the parts, stepping out of comfort zones, the exhilaration of achieving something they are proud of… and schools could continue this list.
- This is not only deep learning that contributes to the personal and social development of the students; it is also highly relevant to the world of work in the 21st century, as described by employers; and
- Parents need to hear not just how, but why experiences such as these are offered by the school. The quality of the performance on the night is important, but of more lasting importance are the learning experiences that the students are involved in over a sustained period of time in preparing for the performance. Schools are places of human development, and this is the stuff of life. It reaches into the heart of what education is about.

THE ARTS

Give the arts – in the classroom and in the wider life of the school – credibility by showing how they contribute to students' learning and development, especially how this relates to the world beyond the school.

Give this credibility and status by citing research about the value of the arts as preparation for life, and the workplace. This is more real than a standardised test result or a media league table, and more relevant in the lives of students. Schools should not be afraid to say so.

4.0
Schools are different: they are places of potential, not product

In our bureaucratic rush to test everything with a pulse, we have lost sight of the face at the other end of the stethoscope – our students. Not seeing them, we run the risk of missing the real mark, which is drawing out each and every student's fullest potential.

(Russell Quaglia & Michael Corso 2014)

Education is the great engine of personal development… It is what we make out of what we have, not what we are given, that separates one person from another.

(Nelson Mandela 1994)

Most students never get to explore the full range of their abilities and interests. Those students whose minds work differently – and we're talking about many students here; perhaps even the majority of them – can feel alienated from the whole culture of education. This is exactly why some of the most successful people you'll ever meet didn't do well at school. Education is the system that's supposed to develop our natural abilities and enable us to make our way in the world.

(Ken Robinson 2009)

4.1 How can we describe what schools really do?

Educators have never been good at articulating what it is that we do. We have often left it to unions, whose main (legitimate) agenda is industrial relations, or to journalists and commentators whose agenda is not educational; or we have resorted to jargon that is technically clear to educators, but not to the public. We have further contributed to the lack of public understanding of what we do by adopting the language of industry, implying that we have a quantitative product (e.g. an 'outcome') that can be measured in precise terms: in Queensland, for example, an OP 'score', or a curriculum that can be 'delivered' as though teaching is a simple transaction of passing a commodity from one person to someone else.

In our attempts to appear to have hard data, or be data-driven, educators have mislead parents and the wider community to our own detriment: we are using the term 'transparent', but through language we are contributing to the narrow translucency and distortion of league tables and the comparative NAPLAN results on My School. We need to have the confidence to use the language of potential to describe the full-colour transparency of a multi-faceted school.

Here is an example of the 'hard' language of industry used by the media when editorialising education:

Parents… must be at the forefront of decision-making. The introduction of the My School program is an example of that thinking. It is also an example of the transparency which must be a vital part of service delivery. Voters must be able to assess the success of delivery by using available information.

How happy are we that a major newspaper writes about education using this language? How accurately does it capture what schools really do? And is the 'available information' providing transparency or translucency?

Schools need to speak for themselves because the available information currently being used to judge them is narrow, and the language used is not that of human development. Schools know well enough the importance of what they do; they have the relevant information, and they must find more powerful ways to explain it. So, let's move from translucency to transparency, to a transparent prism – and use the language that enables us to do this.

4.2 What's in a name?

For a start, education is not an industry, nor is it a service. It is not even a service industry. It is a profession, and while schools do serve, equally they initiate, and at times they lead. And teachers' work is not service delivery. (See the Appendix for A Statement of Commitment to the Profession of Teaching). Schools are not factories, they are communities, and at the deep level of what schools do they do not deliver an outcome that is measurable by hard data. Above all, schools are places that nurture the development of young people. They make decisions based on their context, mission and culture, and this may result in schools focusing on different and distinctive approaches to the education of their students. These varied approaches offer differentiation and choice, and the parents and students themselves will make judgements about their value. Diane Ravitch points to the danger of using the language of industry when conceptualising assessment:

'Value-added' assessment is the product of… a managerial mindset that believes that every variable in a child's education can be identified, captured, measured, and evaluated with precision.

(Diane Ravitch 2010)

Language such as that in the quoted newspaper editorial does not provide transparency: it mistakes translucency for transparency, and it misleads the public about what schools really do. It may be unintentional, but it is reality.

If we continue to use the wrong language we will create further confusion, and the media will continue to write about education in these terms.

Schools are complex organisations. It is not just that they do not produce a 'product' that can be readily defined. Nor is there any clarity about who the 'client' or the 'customer' is, or to whom the school is accountable. Is it the student? The parents? The wider community? Commonwealth and State Governments that provide funding? All of these? If so, is one more important than the others?

Furthermore, it is important to note that good schools are values-driven, not data-driven. As far as data go, the best schools are data informed: they interpret and act on the data in keeping with the values, beliefs and norms of their school culture. Schools need to be managers of meaning, speaking to our communities in language that captures the unique work that our schools do.

For industry, for much of the media, and for many politicians, the answers to these questions are far more clear-cut than they are for educators, and schools should not sit back and accept simplistic answers: they should speak for themselves by communicating with confidence, using the appropriate language. If we continue to use the language of the factory, we must expect to be judged on the criteria of the factory, and the translucency and distortion that currently masquerade as transparency will continue to devalue and undermine our efforts.

4.3 Learning: It's complicated

Here is a true story about one of history's greatest thinkers. Indeed, he is often cited as the benchmark for mathematical and scientific genius.

As a young student, he never did well with rote learning. And later, as a theorist, his success came not from the brute strength of his mental processing power but from his imagination and creativity. He could construct complex equations, but more important, he knew that math is the language nature uses to describe her wonders…

He would often play the violin in his kitchen late at night, improvising melodies while he pondered complicated problems. Then, suddenly, in the middle of playing he would announce excitedly, 'I've got it!'. As if by inspiration, the answer to the problem would have come to him in the midst of the music.

(Walter Isaacson 2007)

The young student was Albert Einstein. This anecdote is revealing because it touches on the complexity of intelligence and illustrates how difficult it is to make judgements about a student's potential based on narrow test instruments. Would a student be permitted to play a violin during a standardised test of numeracy or literacy in order to clarify his/her thinking?

Yet this is the way our brains work: with the left and right hemispheres working as a holistic entity, supporting and complementing each other. And it is especially the way our brains need to work in the complex world of the 21st century.

How much of Einstein's imagination and creativity would show up if he were able to take a NAPLAN test today? It is an excellent example of why schools must not allow their students' achievements to be narrowed, commodified and devalued by the misuse of externally imposed hard data.

4.4 Schools: They're complex

Of all of society's organisations, schools are the most complex So how do we accurately describe what schools really do in simple, but not simplistic, language?

Anyone who works in a school understands this complexity. It cannot be captured in an organisational chart. Nor can it be captured by standardised test results.

Education is an undeniably complex mixture, and we must not allow it to be portrayed in simplistic terms as a service or an industry, delivering an outcome, or as a national competition among schools to 'score' top place in the rankings. We must invoke different concepts and language and use them to describe what we do. Only then will we have genuine transparency.

Schools speaking for themselves

THE LANGUAGE OF POTENTIAL

When discussing students' achievements, and when speaking about what the school does, and what it is aspiring to do, have the courage to speak in the language of potential, in words that capture something of the richness of how the school empowers its students. Speak about learnings, or achievements, not 'outcomes', conveying that learning is a continuous, never-ending journey. Speak about offering, not 'delivering' curriculum, conveying that curriculum is a dynamic process that students need to engage in, not a commodity that teachers can simply transfer or 'value-add' to them. Refer to NAPLAN results, not 'scores'. And relate the learnings to the real purpose of schools, and to their relevance to the wider world.

Engage teachers in composing the language of human development and potential that reflects what your school really does, and aspires to do for your students, so that the staff can speak with a consistent and authentic voice about what they do. This is not 'spin'. It is an attempt at genuine transparency -`This is what we do' – and to drive the agenda rather than reacting to it. The very great majority of teachers enter the profession because they want to make a positive difference in the lives of young people, so talk and write about how the school does that, and speak proudly of it. It's why we are here, and it's what we do.

COMPLEXITY AND INTELLIGENCE

Schools must speak for themselves by rejecting the simplistic and misleading use of data to construct league tables and comparative standardised test 'scores', and instead convey the deep learning that takes place in the complex life of the school.

It is important to explain something of this complexity in simple, but not simplistic language, and harness the complexity by using it to capture the richness of experiences the school offers. Remember: an important role of leadership today is the management of meaning.

Speak and write about modern understandings about intelligence, such as habits of mind, multiple intelligences, emotional and spiritual intelligence, all of which are well researched and documented.

Suggest that in preparing our students for the future, the question to ask now about our students is not 'How intelligent are you?', but 'How are you intelligent?' Intelligence in the 21st century must not be constricted by the narrow boundaries of what can be assessed in standardised tests, or the traditional understanding of IQ.

Schools can do that by continuing to refer to the deeper purpose of schools and to the nature of the Conceptual Age, asking 'Why are we here?', and answering that question by speaking for themselves: not through the language of industry or the agendas of the media or politics.

Highlight the colours thrown up by the prism, and capture them in language that paints a dynamic, living portrait of the life of the school.

5.0
A living portrait, not a clinical statistic

💬

The portrait… creates a narrative that is at once complex, provocative, and inviting, that attempts to be holistic, revealing the dynamic interaction of values, personality, structure, and history. And the narrative documents human behaviour and experience in context.

The only way to interpret people's actions, perspectives, and talk is to see them in context. Of course, this approach contrasts greatly with the traditional perspectives in social science which mimic the… paradigms of mathematics and physics.

But the portraitist is interested not only in producing complex subtle description in context but also in searching for the central story, developing a convincing and authentic narrative

(Sara Lawrence-Lightfoot 1997)

5.1 The value of qualitative data

Schools should be in no doubt that it is absolutely valid to present qualitative, 'human' data with at least the same status that is given to quantitative 'hard' data such as standardised test results or tertiary entrance data. Qualitative research is a valid, credible and living exercise that goes deeper than simplistic interpretations of statistics. It is difficult to measure, but it is steeped in evaluation, and attempts to capture the holistic life of the school, to make valid judgements about how well the school is achieving its aims. It attempts to show how effective the school is in answering the question, 'Why are we here?'

In 1983, *The Good High School* by Sara Lawrence-Lightfoot was published, and it was a revolutionary work because Lawrence-Lightfoot delved into the lives of six American high schools, examining their school cultures and observing how their stated aims were acted out – or not acted out – in the lives of the schools. She called the finished work a 'portrait', because it captured the art, as well as the science, of the profession of education as it was practised in these six schools.

'Portraiture' is now a widely recognised form of ethnographic, qualitative research, especially in education, as it is able to capture the depth and breadth of what schools really do, and shed light on the learning that takes place in the human side of the school. In the interest of genuine transparency, schools need to go there, and to go there they will need to speak for themselves.

I seek to combine systematic, empirical description with aesthetic expression, blending art and science, humanistic sensibilities and scientific rigour. The portraits are designed to capture the richness, complexity, and dimensionality of human experience in social and cultural context (in schools).

(Sara Lawrence-Lightfoot 1997)

This is not 'warm fuzzy stuff'. This is what schools do. Lawrence-Lightfoot has developed and refined 'portraiture' continually since the publication of *The Good High School*. A school may wish to engage in the formal exercise as developed by Lawrence-Lightfoot, but that isn't necessary. It's the concept that is important.

What is necessary is that schools set about validating the art as well as the science of what they do, and speak for themselves by presenting it with confidence to their own school communities and to the wider community. And they should do so under the banner of transparency, confronting the translucent political (My School) and media (league tables) agendas and language that are currently presented to the public as transparency.

5.2 Watch your language

Professor of History at the Catholic University of America (Washington D.C.), Jerry Muller, has coined the term 'metric fixation'.

The key components of metric fixation are:

– The belief that it is possible and desirable to replace judgement, acquired by personal experience and talent, with numerical indicators of comparative performance based upon standardized data (metrics);

– The belief that making such metrics public (transparent) assures that institutions are actually carrying out their purposes (accountability);

– The belief that the best way to motivate people within these organisations is by attaching rewards and penalties to their measured performance, rewards that are either monetary (pay-for-performance) or reputational (rankings).

(Jerry Muller 2018)

> What is necessary is that schools set about validating the art as well as the science of what they do, and speak for themselves by presenting it with confidence to their own school communities and to the wider community.

It is time for schools to confront that enduring but mythical adage, 'If you can't measure it, you can't manage it'. As Barack Obama would say, 'Yes we can'. In the spirit of portraiture there is some measurement, but the portrait of the school goes well beyond measurement and into the qualitative domain of evaluation, where so much of what students learn can't be measured, but can be captured in words.

And so we come again to language. Numbers and statistics have their place, but they need to be presented with integrity, and in the context of evaluating the deep learning that takes place in the holistic life of the school, showing how important that learning is in preparing young people for the future. In this way schools will not only be managing, they will be leading, and it's time schools had the courage to do that, by speaking for themselves about what is important, in the language that best describes it.

Schools speaking for themselves

A PORTRAIT OF YOUR SCHOOL

Portraiture is a continuing, dynamic process. There is never a completed portrait; it is always being developed, refined and added to by all members of the school community.

- Publicise creativity in all its forms across subject disciplines, and again, link it with the world our young people now live in, and will ultimately inherit. Creativity is highly important, whether it relates to Physics or Art, and schools should be sure to highlight it in the lives of their students.

- Where possible combine science ('hard' data) and art ('human' data) as part of an holistic portrayal of the life of the school.

- Present the school as a place of human development, and explain the special ways the school goes about this, using the appropriate language: the living language of potential, not the clinical language of product.

- Publicise the work your teachers do on the higher-order thinking skills such as analysis, synthesis, evaluation, hypothesis and making value judgements… most of which are barely testable through NAPLAN-type tests, yet are highly relevant for the Conceptual Age. Speak at parent meetings and write in the school newsletter about how this is preparing your students for the future.

- Present the school's activities and achievements in the context of the real purposes of schooling, and of the world beyond the school.

- Find words to capture the culture of the school: what we believe, what we value, and how we try to act this out in the every-day life of the school.

- Use an inclusive, research-based framework like Costa's Habits of Mind or Bloom's cognitive and affective taxonomies, Gardner's multiple intelligences or Crowther et al's IDEAS process to show how up-to-date understandings of intelligence and learning enrich the way the school goes about the human development of its students.

- Use your own in-school research to highlight the school's activities. 'Small data' based on teacher professional judgement is as valid as 'hard data' from external sources.

- Take a holistic view. Resist the temptation to brag about successful standardised test results as shown on league tables in ways that suggest they demonstrate the school's overall effectiveness. Refuse to play that game!

- Provide anecdotes from students, teachers, past students and parents that capture the full spectrum of the learning that takes place in the life of the school, especially the things that are special and different about it. Link these to their relevance to the world beyond school.

- Focus on qualitative achievements and show how they empower young people with qualities like optimism, teamwork, citizenship, resilience, compassion, empathy, enterprise and entrepreneurship: all important characteristics for success and fulfilment in the 21st century.

- When speaking about the school's physical resources, don't focus on the buildings and the technology: focus on what the students are learning when they use the resources, and relate that learning to the world beyond the school.

- Make particular reference to the school's human resources – the human capital (Caldwell and Harris 2008; Hargreaves & Fullan 2012) – and be lavish in praising the commitment and talents of the staff, linking this to the quality of what the students learn each day.

- Continually show the ways that the school is different and special, and use words like difference, choice, uniqueness, and diversity to describe them, resisting the temptation to use the language of industry, such as delivery, outcomes, and value-added.

- Explain priorities that are currently being addressed by the school and explain how they relate to the learning and human development of the students.

- Don't be afraid of complexity: go there, make sense of it, and find simple – not simplistic – ways to explain it. You are managers of meaning, interpreting data and information and turning them into knowledge and wisdom to explain what your school really does, and how it empowers your students.

6.0
What do people want from our schools?

> The world is changing faster than ever in our history. Our best hope for the future is to develop a new paradigm of human capacity to meet a new era of human existence. We need to evolve a new appreciation of the importance of nurturing human talent along with an understanding of how talent expresses itself differently in every individual. We need to create environments – in our schools, in our workplaces, and in our public offices – where every person is inspired to grow creatively. We need to make sure that all people have the chance to do what they should be doing.
>
> To make the best of ourselves and of each other, we urgently need to embrace a richer conception of human capacity. It's about how we can all engage more fully in the present and how we can prepare in the only possible way for a completely unknowable future.

(Ken Robinson 2009)

> My eldest is almost out the other side of the high school experience, and soon he'll have to leave the nest. And as I look back on the galloping secondary years I regret a system that bore down on him so much. We weren't allowed to just … enjoy him; revel in the parenting like we had when he was young. The system demanded we nag and push with homework and exams; I wish it hadn't been so.

(Nikki Gemmel 2018: NSW parent)

6.1 What do parents want?

Independent Schools Queensland regularly conducts surveys of parents whose children attend independent schools. Throughout those surveys parents have consistently rated one factor as more than twice as important as any other in their choice of a school for their children: *The ability of the school to prepare students to fulfil their potential in later life* (Independent Schools Queensland, 2015).

And there is that word again. Far more than anything else, parents want schools to identify and nurture the potential of their children. Interestingly, also rated highly by parents is: *The school seemed right for student's individual needs*. It's not much of a stretch to link that as a subset of the first factor: both are about the human development of young people in a broad rather than narrow sense. They include academic achievement, but go beyond it. Indeed, strong academic performance did rate as important, but was given less importance than developing students' potential and meeting individual needs.

It would be foolish to underestimate the importance parents place on academic achievement – which may or may not equate to comparative standardised test results at a point in time – in their choice of a school. At the same time, we should be in no doubt that they see it as part of the holistic aspirations they have for their children, and the focus of that is their children's potential in all its forms.

The Commonwealth Government's National Survey of parents in 2008 revealed that 63 percent of parents wanted information comparing their school's performance with others, 92 percent wanted information about their school's approach to literacy and numeracy, and 97 percent agreed that information about individual schools should be available to them (Independent Schools Queensland 2010). This led to the establishment of the My School website in 2010.

The key word here is information. The My School website purports to provide the information parents want, based on

the 2008 national survey data, and similarly league tables are justified with the claim that parents want this information. Yet as we know, information is not knowledge, and knowledge is not wisdom. That resides in the heads of people, in this case parents, and parents in independent schools have made clear what is important to them in their hopes for their children at school. It is reasonable to assume that the main findings of the 2015 Independent Schools Queensland What Parents Want Survey would be largely replicated in the other two school sectors.

In the 2015 survey, only 5 percent of parents who responded listed the My School website as a source of information they accessed when choosing a school for their child. Parents identified four sources which together made up close to 75 percent in importance to their choice: firstly, family, friends and colleagues; secondly, other parents with children at the school; thirdly, the school website (consulted more than three times as frequently as My School); and fourthly, the school open day. As well, 83 percent of parents surveyed said that they visited the school at some time, most visiting more than one school.

The My School website provides information. It is, in fact, data-driven information because it is derived from statistics. But it is not knowledge, and it is certainly not regarded by parents as wisdom. That is where their values and beliefs come in, and that is where judgements about the qualitative, human dimension of the school top the hard data such as that on the My School website or league tables. They want a portrait, not a statistic. Tell the real story of your school; it's what parents want to hear.

6.2 What do students want?

In August 2010, the final *Tell Us* national campaign was conducted. It surveyed 10,000 Australian high school students across every state and territory about the meaning of success at school.

While the majority of students indicated that they felt that their school was preparing them well for the future, the most significant finding was that 60 percent of students believed that what they know cannot be measured by tests or marks, and that success for them is drawn from a variety of sources beyond academic achievement.

Students in the survey said that in addition to academic achievement, success comes from participation, friendships, sport, the arts, recognition from peers and teachers, and from leadership opportunities.

Some student comments:

Success is not measured by marks or an ATAR score, but instead how you make a difference and bring people together.

I felt successful at school when I was president of the Make Poverty History club.

I think the most successful thing I am at school is being in the SRC, which means I can put my say to my school.

I felt successful at school when I was appointed House Vice Captain in Year 11. It was more important than just doing well in a test, as it showed me that I was valued as more than just a student, but as a worthy contributor to the community.

(Foundation for Young Australians 2010)

In a major study in the United States entitled *Having Our Say*, published in the Journal of Research and Technology in Education, 7 000 students from Years 6, 7 and 8 were surveyed on what engages them to achieve in school. Out of the study came four key themes from the students:

- Do you know us?
- Engage us.
- Prepare us for jobs of the future.
- Let's not get left behind.

The authors note that their findings reflect "the global changes and the new demands that this trend places on education".

(Hiller et al 2007)

Russell Quaglia and Michael Corso have conducted more recent surveys in the United States, publishing the results in *Student Voice*. Based on their findings, Quaglia and Corso have devised the Aspirations Framework, which synthesises what students say they would like from their schools, and how they learn best. The framework they devised from this data picks up many of the themes in what students said in the studies referenced above. The framework offers three guiding principles which are acted out in schools through eight conditions that make a difference:

GUIDING PRINCIPLE	CONDITIONS THAT MAKE A DIFFERENCE
Self-Worth	Belonging – as a valued member of community;
	Heroes – the everyday people in students' lives who inspire them to excel and make positive changes in attitudes and lifestyles;
	Sense of accomplishment – recognition of effort, perseverance, and citizenship, along with academic success, as signs of student success.
Engagement	Fun and excitement – students being actively engaged and emotionally involved in their schoolwork;
	Curiosity and creativity – inquisitiveness, eagerness, and a longing to satisfy the mind with new discoveries;
	Spirit of adventure – ability to take on positive, healthy challenges at school and at home, with family and friends.
Purpose	Leadership and Responsibility – students being able to express their ideas, make decisions, and show a willingness to be accountable for their actions;
	Confidence to take action – the extent to which students believe in themselves and act on behalf of their goals when others have high expectations of them and provide support when needed.

(Quaglia and Corso 2014)

As with parents, it would be foolish to downplay the importance students place on their academic achievements at school, but just as with parents, students clearly hope for much more from their school experience, and their conceptualising of 'success' goes well beyond academics and exam results.

6.3 What do teachers want?

It has been recognised for some time that their school is young people's main community. Indeed, the term *learning community* is often used by schools to describe who they are, and this goes beyond the students to include the teachers, and in many cases, the parents.

When students speak up, we find that their perspectives on schools and learning, rather than being at odds with those of teachers, are remarkably similar. Teachers want to be respected and want to work with students who care, who exhibit humour, openness, and consideration; and who are actively involved in subject content. Furthermore, teachers want to be in safe and tension-free environments. Students say they want the same things.

(Phelan et al 1992)

The world has changed since 1992, but those who work in schools would affirm that most of what is said above applies today.

Surveys conducted of teachers consistently come up with a common theme. When asked why they became teachers, they answer that they want to make a positive difference in the lives of young people. They often go on to explain that their greatest satisfaction is when they believe they can see this happening.

John Hattie concludes his book *Visible Learning* with words from a fellow educator who was also a parent, so we have the benefit of one person offering the perspectives of a father and a teacher:

Not just as a professional educator, but as a Dad, I want all future teachers of my Sophie and Millie to abide by three fundamental principles that I believe should underpin teaching and learning.

First, to nurture and challenge my daughters' intellectual and imaginative capacities way out to horizons unsullied by self-fulfilling minimalist expectations. Don't patronise them with lowest-common-denominator blancmange masquerading as knowledge and learning; nor crush their love for learning through boring pedagogy…

Second, to care for Sophie and Millie with humanity and sensitivity, as developing human beings worthy of being taught with genuine respect, enlightened discipline and imaginative flair.

And third, please strive to maximise their potential for later schooling, post-school education, training and employment and for the quality of life itself so that they can contribute to and enjoy the fruits of living within an Australian society that is fair, just, tolerant, honourable, knowledgeable, prosperous and happy.

When all is said and done, surely this is what every parent and every student should be able to expect of school education… within every school not only in Australia but throughout the entire world.

(Brock in Hattie 2009)

Few would argue with that, and it captures much of what has already been said here: education is a human enterprise; it is above all about potential, and this means striving for the well-rounded human development that is surely the birth-right of all young people.

6.4 What do employers want?

It is not surprising to find close similarities in the aspirations of parents, teachers and students for their schools. It is perhaps surprising to find such symmetry extending to the aspirations of employers in industry. The Australian Chambers of Commerce and Industry conducted what they describe as "a major exercise to discover what employers across Australia really look for in workers to meet their current and future skills needs". The results of the study showed that there was significant agreement, whether it be a small business or a major corporation:

The outcomes of the project were overwhelming. Employers today want more than technical skills. They select staff that can demonstrate a variety of social and personal attributes as well as the ability to learn technical skills.

(Commerce Queensland 2005)

From this research project the Australian Chambers of Commerce and Industry produced an Employability Skills Framework based on the findings. It is presented in two parts:

1. Personal Attributes that contribute to overall employability. These are listed as:

- Loyalty
- Commitment
- Honesty and integrity
- Enthusiasm
- Reliability
- Ability to deal with pressure
- Common sense
- Positive self-esteem
- Sense of humour
- Motivation
- Adaptability
- Personal presentation
- Balanced attitude to work and home life

2. Skills. These are listed as:

- Communication… that contributes to productive and harmonious relations across employees and customers
- Team work… that contributes to productive working relationships and outcomes
- Problem Solving… that contributes to productive outcomes
- Self-Management… that contributes to employee satisfaction and growth

- Planning and organising… that contributes to long and short-term strategic planning
- Technology… that contributes to effective execution of tasks
- Learning… that contributes to ongoing improvement and expansion in employee and company operations and outcomes
- Initiative and enterprise… that contribute to innovative outcomes.

In 2017 the Foundation for Young Australians conducted a similar nation-wide survey of industry to that of the 2005 ACCI survey. The language is slightly different and there are some changes reflecting the time between the two reviews, but the messages are very similar. The Foundation identified what they call 'enterprise skills' as heading up what employing authorities across Australia are looking for in their employees. They are referred to as transferable skills, and the most mentioned are:

- Problem solving
- Creativity
- Communication skills
- Teamwork
- Financial literacy
- Digital literacy
- Critical thinking
- Presentation skills

In both reviews employers and employing authorities made clear that they want young job applicants to be literate and numerate at a competent level, but they also made clear that in today's world, and for the future, that is not enough. Indeed, much of what employers said in 2005 and again in 2017 shows an understanding and affirmation of the Conceptual Age, and both reports indicate an understanding that for industry, creativity, and innovation are as important as literacy and numeracy. It is also strongly in keeping with the CISCO et al concerns as expressed in Section 3.3. From an educational perspective, employers are calling on schools to develop both the left and right hemispheres of the brain in the learning experiences they offer their students.

The other clear message from these projects is the consistent human themes of personal and interpersonal qualities that flow through them, calling for skills and capabilities that draw from various forms of intelligence, rather than just the traditional IQ model. Essentially, employers across Australia want the same things from our schools as parents, students and teachers, and these are strongly congruent with the purposes of school education as set out Section 2.1, and to the characteristics of the Conceptual Age of the early 21st century as described earlier by Daniel Pink in the same section.

Schools speaking for themselves

MANAGEMENT OF MEANING

'Schools are awash with data' (Hattie, 2005). That is probably even more so today than it was in 2005, and the question is: What do schools do with the data?

Leadership involves 'the management of meaning'. School leaders can offer far more meaningful information about their schools than can data on the My School website, or from media league tables. Indeed, schools can go much further and offer knowledge and wisdom.

The percentages quoted earlier in the Government's 2008 National Survey of Parents are really a request by parents for knowledge and wisdom: 'data informed' in the context of the school's mission and their own aspirations for their children, rather than 'data driven' information offering statistical comparisons without a credible human context.

At the same time, parents are not likely to be impressed by schools overly criticising My School or the media league tables. They are more likely to be impressed with credible, meaningful messages from their school, presented with openness and integrity in the appropriate language.

Perhaps the most underestimated element in a school's culture is 'relational trust'. Studies show that in schools where high levels of trust and respect are shared, students are likely to achieve well and improve academically. (Bryk & Schneider 2002; Kochanek 2005; Hill 2017). Again, the qualitative, human life of the school is shown to be important.

School leaders, including teachers, will do well to consciously nurture trust and respect among themselves, their students and parents. It is not only likely to impact positively on student achievement, it also paves the way for parents to take notice when schools speak for themselves.

Perhaps the most obvious whole school action to build trust is to 'walk the talk': to match what is said with what is done. The terms 'espoused values' and 'operational values' have been used to describe this (Argyris & Schön 1996). They suggest that the organisation is 'healthy' when the two are not only consistent, but perceived to be consistent.

It sounds simple, but amid the complexity and tensions of school life, it can be difficult.

As with most things in the life of a school, there are no short cuts or silver bullets, but Thomas Sergiovanni has suggested that the principle of 'purposing' offers the best way to 'walk the talk'. He describes 'purposing' as:

… that continuous stream of actions by an organisation's formal leadership which has the effect of inducing clarity, consensus and commitment regarding the organisation's basic purposes.

(Sergiovanni 1992)

Sergiovanni suggests that if this can be achieved, the school's mission becomes clearer and stronger, and the shared values that are acted out daily can transform the school from an organisation into a community: a subtle shift in language, but an important shift in perception.

WHAT'S REALLY IMPORTANT

The assertion that schools should fundamentally be places of human development, in their full spectrum of colours and facets, is broadly affirmed by parents, students, teachers and by industry. That means there is uniform support for schools being places where the talents and passions of young people in all their diversity are the focus, and that focusing on the potential of students is likely to bring us the best human beings, the best citizens and the best employees.

This widespread agreement across Australia about what is important in the education of our young people is not reflected by government policy nor by most of the media. Despite this agreement, and despite research and experience in particular from the UK and the USA, Commonwealth and State Governments in Australia continue to pursue the idea that frequent, high-stakes standardised testing of full cohorts of students is the way to improve schools, and the media continue to construct league tables accompanied by misleading and at times harmful reporting. And they do this under the mantra of transparency.

We have compelling research from Australia and overseas, and we have strong agreement from parents, students, teachers and industry about the kind of education schools should be offering our young people in the early 21st century. It is up to school leaders, including teachers, to stand up with confidence and tell it to our communities. Schools, not politicians or the media, can provide the genuine transparency that is currently so lacking. We owe this to young Australians, and schools can only achieve this by speaking for themselves.

7.0
Student wellbeing: A big, complex issue, growing bigger and more complex

Every moment of one's existence one is growing into more or retreating into less. One is either living a little more, or dying a little bit.

(Norman Mailer 1959)

If you teach nothing else, teach hope.

(Hedley Beare 1987)

We are in community each time we find a place where we belong. To belong is to be related to and a part of something. It is membership, the experience of being at home in the broadest sense of the phrase. It is the opposite of thinking that wherever I am, I would be better off somewhere else. Or that I am still forever wandering, looking for that place where I belong. The opposite of belonging is to feel isolated and always on the margin, an outsider. To belong is to know, even in the middle of the night, that I am among friends.

(Peter Block 2008)

7.1 Potential, not product

We return to the theme of schools as places of potential, not product.

Among the most recurring themes in research and thinking about education in the 21st century is that while technical abilities, including literacy and numeracy, are important for today's young people, personal and interpersonal skills are vital: for their own human development, for the workplace, and for their ability to find a place and belong in communities and wider society.

While acknowledging this, those who work in schools today are observing a deeper phenomenon that is of particular concern: students will not grow and learn to their potential if their own wellbeing – their ability to know and be at ease with who they are and where they fit in their wider environment – is not travelling well. And over recent years, in Australia and internationally, we are seeing a significant increase in the number of young people who are not travelling well.

The recent Mission Australia Youth Survey offers the following statistics:

- From 2012 to 2016 *Probable Serious Mental Illness (PSMI)* rose from 19% to 23%.
- Among girls the figures were 23% to 29%;
- Among boys the figure was 13% to 14%.
- Three in ten indigenous young people met the criteria for PSMI.
- In order, the top 3 concerns in order of frequency stated by young students in the PSMI criteria were:
  – coping with stress;
  – school or study problems;
  – depression.

(Mission Australia 2017)

Note that while schools cannot directly influence the third concern above (depression), they can influence the first two, and in doing so they may indirectly influence depression. And they can do so while pursuing improved academic learning and achievement.

7.2 What's new?

The issue of student wellbeing itself is not new. Over the years the language has changed – child-centred education, the whole child, the well-rounded individual, holistic education, wellness, and more recently, executive function and social and emotional learning (SEL). The language has changed, but for more than a century the fundamental aspiration hasn't: educators have long seen the social and emotional learning of students as important. What is new is that we are now facing statistics that indicate that the issue is moving from important to urgent. What is also new is that we now know a lot more about it.

7.3 The School Restructuring Report: 'Organic' cultures vs 'bureaucratic' cultures

From as far back as the early 20th century, educators such as John Dewey were linking students' intellectual learning with the need for social support at home and at school. Acceptance of this balance between care and academic learning waxed and waned throughout the last century, but in the last decade of the 20th century a seminal study from the University of Wisconsin (Madison), The School Restructuring Report, made clear that Dewey and his colleagues were right. The research covered over 1100 schools, primary and secondary, in varying locations in the United States, across urban, rural, cultural, racial and socio-economic backgrounds. A synthesis of the data showed consistently that students in schools that combine high levels of academic expectations with high levels of care for students, improve academically more than students in impersonal schools that offer only high academic expectations, or schools that have high levels of care but a minor focus on academic learning and achievement. (Newmann & Wehlage 1995)

A follow-up study of primary and secondary schools a few years later further supported the findings. Lee and colleagues summed it up as:

Good schools engage students in learning and teaching through rigorous, consistent academic expectations and caring, personalised experiences and environments.

(Lee et al 1999)

The researchers suggest that the key to 'good' schools is that they all have 'organic' cultures as opposed to 'bureaucratic' cultures. They are alive with energy, trust and respect, and a sense of purpose about the curriculum, which is defined as all the planned experiences offered by the school: academic, personal and social.

Further, the researchers found that one of the major contributors to an organic culture is 'collective responsibility': teachers and support staff take responsibility for all students in the school, not just those they teach in their year groups or subjects, and this responsibility takes in care, behaviour, and academic teaching and learning. And for students, responsibilities are given equal status with rights. In summary, it is a portrait of a school functioning as a genuine community rather than as an impersonal bureaucracy.

7.4 Social and Emotional Learning (SEL)

While the School Restructuring Project shows the clear link between student care and academic learning, their focus is on academic improvement rather than directly on student wellbeing, though that is seen as a by-product. The specific focus on student wellbeing is another step on this long journey seeking wisdom for schools and parents, and the research on this long and winding road now leads us to the door of social and emotional learning (SEL). It is time to go in.

Daniel Goleman from the Harvard Graduate School of Education and Peter Senge from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology are two of the world's most highly respected researchers and writers on organisational behaviour. Recently Senge and Goleman have collaborated in an exploration of SEL in the particular context of including academic achievement as an integral element of student wellbeing. They conclude that the message from the research by Newmann, Wehlage, Lee and colleagues in the middle and late 1990s holds up today: that a young person's academic learning and social and emotional development are mutually reinforcing, and that in the interest of student wellbeing, schools need to consciously and holistically work on both. (Goleman & Senge 2014).

Goleman and Senge urge schools to take up the fundamental principles of SEL and weave them into the culture of the school. They refer to past 'wars' on drugs, poverty, violence, bullying, and high school drop-out rates in the United States, pointing out that some helped, some didn't, and some actually made things worse.

Analysing practices in the 'wars' that did have some success, Goleman and Senge identify certain common elements:

The programs were taught over many years rather than just once; they repeated basic lessons through the grades as students' abilities to comprehend grew; they emphasised the school as a community; and they reached out to families.

The active ingredients boiled down to a handful of emotional and social abilities. These included self-awareness, or knowing what you feel and why; self-management, what to do about those feelings; empathy, knowing what other people think and feel and understanding their point of view; and then social skills, putting all of that together for harmonious relationships, and drawing on all these emotional intelligence skill sets to make good decisions in life.

> The jury is in, and the verdict is: student wellbeing and academic learning and achievement go together. Not only are they mutually complementary, together they impact positively on students' wellbeing.

Those five points – self-awareness, self-management, empathy, social skill and good decision-making – are now the core abilities taught in SEL.

(Goleman and Senge 2014)

Goleman and Senge claim that if schools introduce these 'active ingredients' of SEL and the methodology of applying them, the students are not only likely to be emotionally and socially better adjusted, they are also likely to improve their academic learning and achievement.

Among the five SEL 'ingredients' listed above by Goleman and Senge are *self-awareness* and *self-management*. John Medina has written about 'executive function' which is essentially about those two ingredients. Consider the following statement in a research paper by Roy Baumeister and John Tierney:

When researchers compared students' grades with nearly three dozen personality traits, self-control turned out to be the only trait that predicted a college student's grade-point average better than chance. Self-control also turned out to be a better predictor of college grades than a student's IQ or SAT score.

(Baumeister and Tierney in Medina 2018)

These findings continue to be affirmed. The Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning (CASEL), has published compelling research to suggest that Senge and Goleman are right. In 2011 the peer-reviewed journal *Child Development* published a meta-analysis of 213 social and emotional learning programs in schools. The findings showed that students receiving quality SEL learning scored 11 percent higher on academic tasks than before the SEL program, and demonstrated increased motivation to learn, including completing homework. Furthermore, they found that time taken from academic classes for social and emotional learning did not detract from academic achievement but actually saw it improve.

CASEL and collaborators followed up this research with a 2017 meta-analysis of 82 different SEL programs in schools ranging from kindergarten to high school, 38 of which were in countries outside the USA. Again, the research was published in *Child Development*.

Among the findings:

- 3.5 years after the last intervention, the academic performance of students exposed to SEL programs was an average 13% higher than their non-SEL peers.
- Behaviour problems, emotional distress and drug use were all significantly lower for students exposed to SEL programs.
- Development of social and emotional skills and positive attitudes toward self, others and school was higher.
- SEL participants later demonstrated a 6% increase in high school graduation rates, and an 11% increase in college graduation rates.
- SEL participants were less likely to have a clinical mental health disorder, ever be involved in crime, and had lower rates of sexually transmitted infections and unwanted pregnancies.

(Taylor et al 2017)

The effects of these programs were assessed six months to eighteen years after the students left the programs. The longitudinal nature of the SEL research findings and their consistency with previous and other contemporary research offer a compelling message for educators. The jury is in, and the verdict is: student wellbeing and academic learning and achievement go together. Not only are they mutually complementary, together they impact positively on students' wellbeing. Students in schools that focus on academic results without also focusing on student wellbeing are unlikely to thrive. Nor are students in schools that focus on student wellbeing at the expense of academic achievement.

7.5 Balance

While the research doesn't offer a silver bullet for the wellbeing of young people (and it never will), in one way or another there is a consistent theme of *balance* in all this. If schools can build and nurture their own genuine and unique balance between the two, they are likely to foster students with the resilience and confidence to succeed at school and beyond school: personally, socially, in higher studies and in the workplace.

In support of this, Harvard educational psychologist Robert Kegan offers the following advice to schools:

If I were asked to summarise my reading of centuries of wise reflection on what is required of an environment for it to facilitate the growth of its members, I would say this: people grow best when they continuously experience an ingenious blend of support and challenge. Environments that are weighted too heavily in the direction of challenge without adequate support are toxic: they promote defensiveness and constriction. Those weighted too heavily toward support without adequate challenge are ultimately boring; they promote devitalisation. Both kinds of imbalance lead to withdrawal or dissociation from the context. In contrast, the balance of support and challenge leads to vital engagement.

(Robert Kegan 1994)

Kegan's concept of balance between challenge and support is not just about young people: it refers equally to adults, extending the concept of collective responsibility to the school leadership and staff as well as to the students. This is important not just in itself: when students see the school leadership caring for staff and staff caring for one another, they are being shown how a successful community operates. This is likely to be reflected in their own treatment of one another. Collective responsibility for the staff as well as the students is a strong example of an organic culture in action.

7.6 Schools with 'soul'

A special perspective on balance and organic school culture is offered by Rachael Kessler, who explores the concept of 'soul' in schools:

Geometry and History, English and Science – places and times for these subjects in the contemporary classroom are secure. But the soul? Doesn't that belong in church? Aren't questions of the soul private, spiritual matters that are best left at home?

If so, someone had better tell the children. While we adults continue to debate these questions, most students continue to bring their souls to school … Students of all ages come to school with their souls alive and seeking connection.

(Rachael Kessler 2000)

In a work consisting mainly of anecdotes about real events and situations, Kessler identifies and draws together a balance of eight characteristics in schools she sees as having 'soul':

- Honouring young voices
- Deep connection
- Silence and stillness
- Meaning and purpose
- Joy
- Creativity
- Transcendence
- Initiation and rites of passage

This deeply human conceptualisation offers another way for schools to think about how they might approach social and emotional learning. It is very much in the balanced and integrated spirit of the SEL research.

7.7 Complexity, but with a clear message

The work of Kegan, Newmann, Wehlage, Smith and colleagues emerged at the end of the 20th century. Since then our understanding about student wellbeing and social and emotional learning has deepened, including greater understanding of the neuroplasticity of the human brain (Doidge 2008, 2015), greater understanding of how neuroplasticity affects young people's brains (Medina 2018), the effects of an indoor, sedentary society without links to nature (Kessler 2000; Louv 2005, 2012), the impact on the human brain of sustained interaction with the internet over time (Carr 2011), and the related impact of sustained electronic device use on the mental health of young people (Carr 2011; Louv 2012; Heid 2017; Reilly 2018; Medina 2018).

Consider the following statistics from the United States Department of Health and Human Services, gathered over seven years:

- Average age at which a child receives his or her smart phone – 10
- Prevalence of suicide-related thoughts or actions among kids who use electronic devices five or more hours a day – 48%
- Percentage rise in teenage depression in the US between 2010 and 2016 – 60%

Of course, the question of correlation or causation arises with any set of statistics. At the same time:

There are doubtless many factors contributing to teen depression … But even researchers who aren't ready to slam smartphones say it's important to restrict an adolescent's device habit.

(Markham Heid 2017)

On the one hand, the combined research and thinking above indicates the enormity and complexity associated with our understanding of student wellbeing; on the other hand, every one of them strengthens the key messages that have flowed through from Dewey in the early 20th century, Newmann, Wehlage and Lee at the end of the century, and on to the SEL research of Goleman, Senge and others in the first decades of this century. This is about school leaders acknowledging the inseparable relationship between student wellbeing and academic teaching and learning, and getting the balance right in the context of their own schools.

7.8 Teachers and potential

Hidden behind the formalities of strategic planning, curriculum development, policy making and behaviour management programs lies an often unrecognised power: the informal role that a teacher can have in shaping a student's future, often unbeknown to the teacher or anyone else, except the student. Anh Do, the celebrated Australian comedian and artist puts finding his direction in life down to one sentence offered to him by a teacher:

One day Mrs Dorny said to me, 'Anh, you're a very talented story teller'. She had no idea how far that one line of encouragement would take me … Fast forward to 2008 … I told her that it was her who convinced me I could write, that it was her who told me I was a good storyteller. I also told her I was but one of thousands of kids whom she'd impacted with her kindness and that she was my Robin Williams character from Dead Poets' Society.

Tears welled up in her eyes. She held me tight around my waist and said to me, 'Anh, Anh, I'm so proud of you! So proud of you!'

(Anh Do in Macklin 2011)

Li Cunxin, Director of the Queensland Ballet, describes an even briefer moment in his childhood, living in poverty in rural China. In the space of a few seconds a teacher changed his life forever:

I was nearly eleven years old when, one day at school, while we were busy memorising some of Chairman Mao's sayings, the headmaster came into our freezing classroom with four dignified-looking people, all wearing Mao's jackets and coats with synthetic fur collars … They were here to select talented students to study ballet and to serve in Chairman Mao's revolution …

The four representatives came down the aisles and selected a girl with big eyes, straight teeth and a pretty face. They passed me without taking any notice, but just as they were walking out of the classroom, Teacher Song hesitated. She tapped the last gentleman from Beijing on the shoulder and pointed at me. 'What about that one?' she said.

The gentleman from Beijing glanced in my direction. 'Okay, he can come too,' he said in an off-hand manner.

(Li Cunxin 2003)

Sunshine Coast Grammar School

How could those teachers have known where those few seconds from each of them would lead? They couldn't, but they knew something else. They had recognized something in their students that has no relationship with standardised test results or Year 12 positions in a rank order. It goes deeper than that. They knew their students at a human level, and somewhere in there they recognized potential in two young men, in a few seconds changing their lives in ways no-one could have imagined. Good teachers and enlightened school leaders know of this power, though it is rarely seen beyond the school. It is well summed up by Theodore Sizer:

I cannot teach well a student whom I do not know.

(Theodore Sizer 1996)

And so we come again to an organic culture: alive and vibrant, recognising that schools are about human potential, and that means knowing the students. As Sizer goes on to say:

The traditional assembly line metaphor for schooling does not work. Kids are not on conveyor belts with teachers hanging knowledge on them as they pass by. Schools do not 'deliver instructional services', pumping up intellectual tyres and delivering pedagogical pizza. Children blessedly – are more complicated and thus more interesting than that.

(Theodore Sizer 1996)

There are countless stories comparable to those of Anh Do and Li Cunxin, if less spectacular, that occur regularly in the day to day lives of schools. They are testament to the deeply human dimension of what really matters in schools. These stories need to be told by the schools themselves: they are about what really matters in our schools.

Schools speaking for themselves

THE WAY FORWARD

There is no blueprint or road map for enhancing student wellbeing, but the research provides us with a compass to point the way. For schools, it is essentially about balance. Every school now faces the challenge of acknowledging the key messages of the research – both quantitative and qualitative – and instituting practice based on what we now know about student wellbeing, blending that with the values, beliefs and norms of the school's culture. And if the research findings clash with the current culture of the school, the Board, the school leadership, the staff, students and parents have some thinking to do.

This places the way forward firmly in the hands of the school leadership. Finnish educator Pasi Sahlberg offers the following advice:

Smarten school curricula by addressing curiosity, risk-taking, multiple intelligences, play and whole-child pedagogies across the school in coherent ways. Successful educational change process is a function of shaping and fine-tuning good ideas as they gradually build leadership capacity, teacher agency, and ownership.

(Pasi Sahlberg 2018)

WHAT SCHOOLS CAN DO

- Consciously decide not to play the media league table game. Communicate meaningful, not misleading statistics and stories about student quantitative and qualitative achievements under the school's stewardship. This applies especially when a school has had a 'good' year in the media league tables. You do not have to play the league table game; you do need to be legitimately and honestly transparent. You set the agenda, not the media.
- Collaboratively develop, then nurture, an holistic curriculum framework drawing from an evidence base such as Multiple Intelligences (Gardner 2006), The Art and Science of Teaching (Marzano 2007) or Mindsets (Dweck 2006). Be mindful that an off-the-shelf program is not a framework for your school: it is developed by the school leadership in context of the school.
- Build an 'organic' culture that combines student wellbeing with academic expectations and a sense of purpose. Make sure that the school culture fosters a sense of community, with staff taking collective responsibility for all students and for one another.

- Engage staff and parents in addressing the research about SEL, with a view to building it into the school culture, not as an 'extra', but as an integral element in the life of the school. Do not patronise parents by presuming to 'educate' them: collaborate with them by sharing research and engaging them in conversation with a view to action.
- Develop a school policy collaboratively with parents and students on the balanced use of the internet and electronic devices by students, emphasising the positives and addressing the negatives. Ensure that the policy is based on research about the positive and negative influences of device use by young people.
- Establish and nurture parental partnerships, sharing research, and communicating intelligent and ethical understanding about external testing such as NAPLAN and Year 12 results. Do not shield students from pressure, but ensure that the pressure is not unreasonable or harmful. In particular, ensure that the real stories about the purpose of NAPLAN and the relevance and validity of Year 12 statistics are conveyed to students and parents.
- Find ways to evaluate and communicate – not just measure – the qualitative impact of the school on students' holistic development. Present this under the umbrella of 'data', and give it comparable status with quantitative data, ensuring that the two are seen as integral in the portrait of the school. Engage in genuine transparency rather than narrow translucency.
- Establish and consistently apply a balance of high expectations in learning experiences, care and behaviour. Model these through the school leadership and staff.
- Ensure that rights are balanced with responsibilities and are consistent for the adults and students in the school. Ground these in a framework of trust and respect.
- Treat staff wellbeing as importantly as student wellbeing, a key element of community.
- Provide ways for student voice to generate a sense of purpose and community. Ensure that student leadership is inclusive and goes beyond ceremonial roles, contributing to the quality of learning and sense of community at the school.
- Facilitate staff professional learning about research on brain neuroplasticity and mindsets, with particular relevance to young people's social and emotional development.
- Engage students with the outdoors: individual and team sports, an outdoor education program, or a lesson held outside the classroom now and then.

8.0
Highlighting deep learning in our schools

> **It is difficult to foresee what the schools of the new millennium will look like. Many of our schools seem en route to becoming a hybrid of a 19th century factory, a 20th century minimum security penal colony, and a 21st century educational testing service.**
>
> **I prefer a very different future. If you want to predict the future, create it! This is precisely what school people now have the opportunity – and the imperative – to do. We must transform contemporary versions of school into learning environments worthy of the new millennium – and of the youngsters and adults who dwell in them. There is no more important work.**

(Roland Barth 2001)

> **As human beings, we all live in two worlds. There is the world that exists whether or not you exist. It was there before you came into it, and it will be there when you have gone. This is the world of objects, events, and other people; it is the world around you. There is a world that exists only because you exist: the private world of your own feelings, thoughts and perceptions, the world within you. This world came into being when you did, and it will cease when you do. We only know the world around us through the world within us, through the senses by which we perceive it and the ideas by which we make sense of it.**

(Ken Robinson 2015)

There are many excellent examples in our schools of particular approaches to curriculum that facilitate deep learning: learning that draws on both hemispheres of the brain, and which students absorb and take with them on their life journey. Very little of it will be shown through standardised testing or league tables, so it is up to schools to communicate it by speaking for themselves. Below are three examples of independent schools in Queensland that have made decisions about the ways they frame their students' learning experiences, and who speak for themselves.

8.1 Examples from independent schools

Many schools involve their students in community service, and the two-way benefits of this are significant. This particular school has gone further and developed service-learning as an integral theme in the school's curriculum.

Service-learning involves building learning experiences that are geared at service to others into the formal curriculum. Such experiences can include tutoring younger children, adopting a river or other environmental feature and taking responsibility for its welfare, creating a museum exhibit, collecting oral history from senior citizens, or even, as this school has done, organising for a group of students to travel to Tanzania and engaging with a village community there. Many of the sixteen students raised the money for the trip through their part-time jobs, then worked in the classroom with younger children in a number of schools, and helped in the building of an orphanage. The trip was part of an holistic Prep to Year 12 program built into the school's curriculum, beginning in Years 1 and 2 with a writing project which makes links with students in remote Australian communities and in developing countries.

The school invited feedback from parents about the impact of the Tanzania project on the students. Some excerpts:

Where do I begin? A lot gentler in nature, shows an older maturity when doing things at home, not non-compliant or dismissive as teenage girls can be. We, at the moment, have a wonderful girl blossoming.

and,

A much more mature (Name) has emerged, and a realisation of all of his opportunities. I feel he will for sure make more of them now.

The Chair of the United States National Commission on Service-Learning writes:

Service-learning adds a critical fourth 'R' to the three Rs of education: 'R' for responsibility.

(National Commission on Service-Learning 2006)

This school presents service-learning to its community as a way of teaching and learning, skillfully using the language of education to promote it. And there is no doubting the deep learning that it fosters in its students.

Another school has developed a curriculum framework that highlights a particular approach to academic learning. The school underpins its subject curriculum with two models of teaching and learning: Dimensions of Learning (Marzano 1992) and Habits of Mind (Costa & Kallich 2009).

The school describes Dimensions of Learning as placing "a strong emphasis upon the deliberate development and use of complex reasoning processes for higher order thinking"; and Habits of Mind as "the characteristics that intelligent people employ when they are confronted with a problem to which the answer is not readily apparent".

Both models combine attitudes and skills of learning, and the school has developed a special mix of the two into its own unique curriculum framework.

To its credit, the school has not shied away from the complexity of this approach and offers simple, but not simplistic, explanations of it to its community. There is also clear evidence that parents understand and value the framework. A parent, having attended an information evening at which the framework was explained and discussed, said:

I'm impressed with this, and it's just what (son's name) and (second son's name) need to challenge them and stretch their potential.

Once again, a school has taken a unique approach to curriculum based on research and its own context. The school emphasises that it is preparing students for the kind of deep learning they will need to engage in for the 21st century world.

As a third example, a secondary school has developed an approach to curriculum that links the concept of multiple intelligences (Gardner 2006) with a developmental outdoor wilderness course, from Year 7 to Year 12.

This school emphasises the importance of the learning that occurs beyond the classroom as well as in it, and seeks to frame its curriculum in a way that presents learning as inclusive and multi-faceted. In integrating the nine intelligences into its teaching and learning framework, the school states: "Curriculum isn't just the subjects studied: it's all the intended learning experiences that students undertake at the school, in and beyond the classroom".

The school has developed a theme for each year in an attempt to capture a sense of the journey of learning that the students travel in their five years at the school. The themes were originally devised by the Outdoor Education teachers, but were viewed by the teaching staff as relevant to the whole curriculum, so were adopted across the school. They are: Year 7 *Connections*; Year 8 *Explorations*; Year 9 *Journeys*; Year 10 *Transitions*; Year 11 *Decisions*; Year 12 *Destinations*.

Outdoor education has become so embedded in the life of the school that there is now a Parent Outdoor Program (POP) that offers parents the opportunity to undertake some of the same experiences as the students, and parents write regularly about it in the weekly newsletter. One excerpt from a parent letter published in the newsletter:

Schools are about more than teaching young people to read and write – although I think (School) does that very well. (School) is about teaching young people to become young adults. (School) offers students and parents a chance to realise life is not really about chasing after money, status and the latest technology. It gives them the chance to see they can take time out in some incredibly beautiful places and refresh themselves.

The outdoor education program teaches young people invaluable lessons in self-reliance, self-confidence, taking risks, acquiring new skills, getting along in groups, connecting with each other without technology and just plain 'having fun'. What a terrific opportunity POP is.

7.2 What do these schools have in common?

The three schools cited in this section have much in common, and many, probably all, independent schools will have comparable initiatives that help define why their schools are special and different. These three particular examples are offered because firstly they suggest certain common principles that encourage deep learning, which goes well beyond standardised test results and Year 12 tertiary ranks. Secondly they have gained the strong support of their school communities for what they do.

So what do they have in common?

- They balance the academic curriculum and the quality of student learning with the students' social and emotional learning, and they offer a genuinely transparent story: *This is what's important; this is why it's important; this is how we address it at this school; this is how it impacts on the lives of our students; we have high expectations; we have high levels of support; and this is how it prepares them for the future.*

- They all take inclusive, broad-based approaches to human development. They aim for a balanced, well-rounded education for their students, in keeping with the aims of school education as expressed in Section 2.1.

- They are striving to prepare students for the Conceptual Age of the early 21st century, deliberately drawing on and activating the left and right hemispheres of the brain.

- The special initiatives that distinguish and enrich the students' learning experiences are 'built in', not 'bolted on' to the school curriculum, and they are appropriately resourced by the school leadership.

- The school culture is grounded in strong, credible research, and has grown out of the school's agreed mission, culture and context. At the same time they do not simply implant 'off the shelf' programs 'delivering' a silver bullet for student 'outcomes'. They draw from research that supports their mission and focus on learning, not league tables.

- They all focus on the potential of their students, bringing challenges and optimistic expectations that they will succeed, balanced with the necessary support when the going gets tough: a creative mix of challenge and support.

- They communicate in the language of human development, not the language of industry or dense educational jargon. They eschew words like delivery, product, outcomes, value-added, or scores, and use simple, but not simplistic, language to articulate what they do, and why it is so important in the education of their students. Their school leaders are managers of meaning.

- Their approaches take the form of a framework that guides the curriculum. They know there is no off the shelf program delivering the 'holy grail' or 'magic formula' for successful teaching and learning. They do know that a coherent, whole-school research-based framework for teaching and learning based on human development is most likely to bring rich rewards for its students and teachers.

- They are schools that come up strongly in media league tables, and the My School website comparisons, but they do not link that to the achievements of the school. Indeed, they make a clear separation between the deep learning of their students and the students' NAPLAN results and Year 12 tertiary rankings. An example is this extract from the letter one of the schools sends to parents at the time the students' NAPLAN results are released to the public:

The school culture is grounded in strong, credible research, and has grown out of the school's agreed mission, culture and context. At the same time they do not simply implant 'off the shelf' programs 'delivering' a silver bullet for student 'outcomes'. They draw from research that supports their mission and focus on learning, not league tables.

It needs to be stated that (school) remains unconvinced of the value of this testing. The connection between testing of this type and improved student learning is unproven. Anecdotally, there is a concern that some schools are becoming overly focused on 'NAPLAN Data'. The uncritical analysis and 'mini league tables' produced in some media outlets contribute to the potential for the tests to actually have a detrimental impact.

- Each of these schools has gained strong parental support – and in some cases actual involvement – in the initiatives that make the schools special and different. The schools have worked hard to communicate and involve parents from the start, treating them as partners in developing their children's potential, rather than as 'customers' or 'clients' purchasing the school's 'product' which the school 'delivers'. Where necessary they justify to parents the cost, time and emphasis these initiatives entail.

These schools are not offered as outstanding exemplars that other schools should copy or aspire to, and they would not want to be seen that way. Indeed, there are many similar initiatives in schools throughout all three education sectors in Queensland. Rather, they are offered as suggesting ways schools can maximise what they believe is important and special in what they do, and minimise the role played by media league tables in judging their effectiveness. They generate transparency in its full spectrum, and they provide a living, contextual portrait, not a clinical set of statistics that ignores the school's context and bears little relationship to the purpose of schooling, what really matters in that school, what we now know about social and emotional learning, or the nature of the Conceptual Age of the early 21st century.

Afterword:
The Real Story

The purpose of schools is the broad, well-rounded development of their students. The students' academic learning and achievement go hand in hand with their social and emotional learning. The two are inseparable for successful learning.

We have now entered the Conceptual Age, where both left and right hemispheres of the brain are of equal importance. This has major implications for education, in particular the ways student learning and achievement are evaluated.

League tables do not provide transparency. At best they offer translucency, at worst distortion.

Standardised testing and tertiary admission rankings have a particular and valid use and purpose. They also have significant limitations, and it is invalid and mischievous to use them to judge the effectiveness of schools or to rank them against one another. Good schools will not play to the rules of the media league table game.

The media and politicians have agendas that are valid within their own jurisdictions, and they will continue, but they are not necessarily the agendas of parents, students, teachers or industry.

Parents, students, teachers and industry have many more similarities than differences in their expectations of, and aspirations for schools. The potential for them to work together is high.

Qualitative, 'human' data have equal status with quantitative 'hard data', and are often more relevant because they are contextual rather than clinical. Human data can have as much impact on student learning as standardised external testing such as NAPLAN and be complementary to it in classrooms across the school.

Metaphors can shape the way people think, and there are three that schools can invoke to tell the full story about what they really do: the prism, the portrait, and the journey. The factory with its accompanying language, is anathema to creating and presenting a portrait of the school through the rich colours of a prism.

The language good schools use to flesh out these ideals is of human development and potential; not the language of industry and product, nor of a competition with scores denoting winners and losers.

The world of the 21st century is a complex place, and schools are complex organisations. School leaders need to be managers of meaning, working with their teachers and school communities to make sense of the complexity through their own school mission and context.

Schools should engage their communities in agreeing about what is important for their students, and do so with confidence, backed by research and examples of practice based on that research.

Schools must speak for themselves about what they do if genuine transparency is to be achieved.

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Appendix

A STATEMENT OF COMMITMENT
TO THE PROFESSION OF TEACHING

I acknowledge that I am a member of a profession that extends to me the opportunity and the privilege to make a positive difference in the lives of young people.

I bring to the profession my unique talents to teach and to lead, which I commit to nurturing and developing throughout my career.

I understand that teaching is a deeply human endeavour. While I teach subjects, ideas and skills, above all I teach young people, who are our future.

I recognise and respect the body of distinct theory and knowledge which is gifted to me by those who have come before. I draw from it and strive to contribute further to it.

I recognise that young people learn in different ways and at different rates. I believe that given appropriate support and resourcing, all young people can learn, and I strive to nurture a love of learning that will help every young person to succeed.

I make judgements to evaluate student achievement through assessment that is valid, reliable and fair, and I give value to those learnings that cannot be measured.

I recognise that teaching is a collaborative profession and I am not the only teacher in a young person's life. My work is enriched through working with my colleagues, learning from them and contributing to their practice.

I acknowledge the contribution of the many parents, caregivers, and teachers past, present and future who contribute to a young person's education. I work with them wherever possible to enrich the learning of young people.

I offer a spirit of optimism, resilience and hope as I support young people to develop and act on the values, beliefs and capabilities that guide them throughout their lives.

I recognise the changing nature of knowledge, and I commit to continuous learning throughout my professional career.

In committing to this statement I accept the responsibilities of being a teacher, and acknowledge the deep trust placed in me by young people, parents, caregivers and society.

7 April 2017

The consultation, development and production of the statement were facilitated by the Australian Council for Educational Leaders (Queensland).

The statement is a voluntary declaration of commitment to a set of values and beliefs for the teaching profession of Australia. To find out more visit
http://www.acel.org.au/acel/ACEL_docs/Branches/QLD%20Events/2017/Statement_of_Commitment_WEB.pdf

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SUPPORTING
CHOICE &
DIVERSITY

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Independent Schools
Queensland