National Goals for Schooling in the 21st Century

The preamble to the Adelaide Declaration, promulgated in Adelaide on 22/23 April 1999, presents two fundamental assumptions and a central purpose of the goals. The first is that:

“Schooling provides a foundation for young Australian’s intellectual, physical, social, moral, spiritual and aesthetic development”.

The second is that:

“By providing a supportive and nurturing environment, schooling contributes to the development of students’ sense of self-worth, enthusiasm for learning and optimism for the future”.

It would seem reasonable therefore to examine the goals in light of these two starting assumptions, to explore the extent to which the goals are being or can be translated realistically and to embed them in the expectations which accompany them.

Building on these two assumptions, the Declaration offers 3 National Goals, the central purpose of which the preamble says, is to “provide a basis for investment in schooling to enable young people to engage effectively with an increasingly complex world….characterised by advances in information and communication technologies, population diversity…and complex environmental and social changes.”

There are, however, two further supporting assumptions – which remain implicit - first, that these goals are achievable for all schools for all students which is at the very least a questionable proposition. They cast in my view great pressure on schools to be responsible for failures to meet such goals and they do not admit of the factor that some 30% of students do not complete the 12 years of schooling.

This leads to the second of the implicit assumptions that the formulation of these goals implies, as they are mandatory, that there should be ways of assessing them. Indeed, since at the same conference Dr Kemp presented a paper on “Outcomes Reporting and Accountable Schooling”, it is not unreasonable to assume that such a paper would explore how such outcomes might be measured and reported.

Indeed Dr Kemp has stated:

“If we are to have a school system for the next millennium which meets the expectations and has the confidence of the Australian community, then we must have mechanisms in place which allow us to measure the key outcomes of all Australian schools and report these outcomes to the Australian community”.

Kemp’s paper goes on to stress the importance of targets and indeed states that if the goals are to work they must embody “agreed” targets.
The only targets which are then discussed for the remainder of the paper are those defined as the “basis — literacy, numeracy, science. It will come as no surprise that literacy is the major focus.

It is obvious that literacy and numeracy are keys to survival in the modern world — although there are some quibbles about the Minister’s definition of the same – but what is striking about the paper is that there is no suggestion that the far more complex issues itemised in the first of the three stated goals are not discussed in terms of assessment or targets. One might be forgiven for thinking that the goal that students “have the capacity to exercise judgement and responsibility in matters of morality, ethics and social justice, and the capacity to make sense of their world” are really of second or third order importance. This must be another questionable assumption.

Indeed when one looks from the goal statements to the curriculum promise, the focus moves to the content of the 8 key learning areas — numeracy and literacy, participation in vocational learning (it is an interesting question as to whether vocational learning is different from learning) and on developing enterprise skills (another notion which suggest an instrumentalist view of education.

Interestingly the expanded set of areas in which targets are to be set are:
- Literacy
- Numeracy
- Science
- Information technology
- Vocational education and training
- Student participation, retention and completion.

So what messages are being delivered?

For me, the goals lack any sense of what learnings in the 21st century might need to confront – the issues surrounding changes. They also beg the question of what the community expects. The community also includes but often ignores in this arena, the learners themselves.

The conference then asks “Will our values survive?”. It is pertinent to ask “Who is our? in this context, how do schools react to change and if benchmarking/target setting and accountability are important, how do we measure such things.

What is clear in my view is that the impact of ICT and the speed of change has created a larger gap between traditional schooling and the world inhabited by learners.

Part of this gap focusses on those areas which, for me at least, are not evident in the implementation of the National Goals of Schooling once one gets beyond literacy and numeracy. They concern the moral, ethical and life choices which the young are making at increasingly earlier ages.
There seem to be two levels of these concerns – one is the increasing emphasis on the “big questions” — such as what happens to the environment and its fragility, the apparent loss of confidence in the political system, now, the human genome project and nuclear waste….and the other is on the day-by-day ethical and moral decisions about life, relationships, drugs, work and school.

Most importantly, too, is that the goals and more particularly the curriculum guarantee appear not to take the future into account. Many of the students in school will be adults in 2020, not in 1960 or even in 2000. Nowhere in this neatly packaged set of statements is there any notion of uncertainty, nor of future oriented thinking about the nature of society.

In a speech given in Melbourne last week at the National ANTA conference, David Ellyard suggested that human development must be seen as one of the biggest businesses of the 21st century and that indeed imagination should be the key to “walking in the future”. Of all groups for whom looking to the future and the ability to cope with it is important, those with the greatest need for such skills are the young. Nowhere, in my view, is there any sense in the National Goals that such concerns underlay the choices of words and phrases or indeed major ideas. If I were to guess, by 2020 the notion of vocational education and training, of enterprise skills, of industry driven curriculum will all have disappeared (some of us might even hope so). Perhaps as Ellyard suggests planetism will have replaced post-modernism as a dominant paradigm, or perhaps there will be a notion that we need to be risk takers in the new world.

What other possible models are there?

Hixson and Tinzman (1990) suggest that the first point of departure is a “new definition of learning” which reflects the increasing consensus that an information-dominated society will require adults who are prepared for a lifetime of inquiry, analysis, collaborative learning, problem solving, and decision making. If one were to start at this point, rather than on the instrumentalist end of the spectrum, what would then follow for curriculum formulation and assessment? I would speculate that the “knowledge-driven” and therefore necessarily historical slant might be diminished and used to inform a future driven curriculum, which might abound in words such as creativity, uncertainty, risky, predictive. We might finally get away from curriculum which, as described by Toffler (1969) “is a large slab of the past, labelled history or background, a small amount of the present labelled current affairs or issues and then time comes to a screeching halt.”

In a 1988 paper, written for OECD Centre for Educational Research and Innovation (CERI), Colin Ball introduced the concept that, if people were to thrive in the 21st century they would need to simultaneously develop capability in three different educational arenas. He named each of these Educational Passports based on the idea that a passport helps to define a person’s right of passage.

He suggested that these three Passports are:
• an academic passport which is the traditional role of education. The visas in this passport consist of the capabilities of literacy and numeracy, and cultural linguistic, scientific, artistic, technological and social knowledge which enables a person to play a meaningful and self fulfilling role in society and culture.

• a vocational passport which focuses on the specific education necessary for the effective performance of work, such as technological, financial, management, and marketing knowledge, in a world of rapid technological and social change.

• an enterprise passport which contains the curriculum to promote the development of enterprising people.

Colin Ball and his colleagues developed the following description of an enterprising person:

An enterprising individual has a positive, flexible and adaptable disposition towards change, seeing it as normal, and as an opportunity rather than a problem. To see change in this way, an enterprising individual has a security born of self-confidence, and is at ease when dealing with insecurity, risks, difficulty and the unknown. An enterprising individual has the capacity to initiate creative ideas ... develop them, and see them through into action in a determined manner. An enterprising individual is able, even anxious, to take responsibility and is an effective communicator, negotiator, influencer, planner, and organiser. An enterprising individual is active, confident, and purposeful, not passive, uncertain and dependent ... (Ball, Plant and Knight, 1989).

It is perhaps pertinent to ask whether if all of our goals are effective the outcome might not be an enterprising person, rather than this being grafted as a goal throughout the curriculum.

Ellyard (2000) indicates that in his view the role of education in preparation for the future is to provide for innovation.

He states: “Every school/learning centre should become a place of innovation. There are many innovations we need to create if the outcomes I have been describing are to be realised. This in turn creates economic opportunities for educators. Earlier I talked about the development of Ways and Ware. What learning ways and ware can be developed to help to customise learning for different thinking and learning preferences, so that all may maximise their learning? What new learning ways and ware can be developed to customise learning for different multiple intelligences, both to assess these intelligences and to optimise learning in each of them? What learning ways and ware can we develop to create virtual reality experiences to put learning in the context which will best assist learning? What learning ways and learning ware are possible to enhance learner driven learning and just in time learning? The list is only limited by imagination and entrepreneurship. I am of the view that just as today the
world is being dominated by economic growth caused by the development of the internet, in the next ten years it will be dominated by the innovations in the field of learning, to promote the growth of human potential, and the environment. This will be achieved through the development of learning ways and learning ware, and of green ways and green ware to create a sustainable future.

For me these are the two next big things. I would like to see the education system promote new product and services development at both the levels of the whole system and the individual school. Many of you will have thought of new and better ways to achieve better results in your schools.

How about taking this to the next step and become an innovator? What we need is a system which promotes this innovation to make education more productive and effective. At the same time this will generate income for both the education system and individuals within it. Perhaps some of you teachers will become the new entrepreneurs of the new learning ways and learning ware, and also of the new innovation ways and innovation ware to promote the development of an innovation culture. In the next 20 years Planetist markets will increasingly demand these.”

I am currently involved in two projects which demonstrate both the need for change and some of the difficulties associated with such change.

The first of these is a research project which looks at adolescent male experiences of education and their reactions. The initial issues which have been explored are:

- The impact of developmental differences on learning
- The intersection of curriculum and assessment with learning and life styles
- The impact of new technologies on learning among males
- Whether those who leave return to study and why
- Discontent or rejection/resistance to education

What emerges, *inter alia*, is that often “the work” is seen as largely boring, irrelevant and repetitive and that there is a huge gap between school and the rest of life. One young man asked us “why, when teachers tell us that we will have at least 7 careers in our lifetime, do they spend twelve years preparing us for one- the first one?”

The concerns of the large number of young men to whom we have spoken is in about quality of life, the freedom to take responsibility (albeit a different path from the teachers on occasions) and to be enterprising. At about 16 or 17 many young men have impressive CVs but they are not measured against either the stated goals nor the outcome statements of the National Goals.

The second project is SACSA, the South Australian Curriculum Standards and Accountability Framework Project, of whose steering committee I am a member. The Steering Committee is overseeing a framework which is attempting to change how curriculum is conceived and to implement the National and Agreed Goals of Schooling.
This is an extraordinarily complex activity because what emerges is a lack of internal consistency in the messages of the document, both conceptually and in terms of a reality test.

It has been very salutary to try to infuse “essential learnings” with inclusivity and with the 8 key learning areas, numeracy, literacy, VET and the development of enterprise skills in a way that might be coherent for all learners from birth to year 12, may be assessable and which should have meaning for students as well as teachers.

What is evident is that here too the notion of the future is difficult to consider as the models and assumptions underlying the exercise can only deal with the past and present. SACSA has now added a requirement that all of the material be examined with at least a small lens on the future. It will be interesting to see what emerges.

The challenge facing schools and teachers is how to move the debate on beyond historical and political rhetoric and to provide an education which meets the needs of the learners as citizens of an uncertain future, which challenges our assumptions while allowing them the freedoms to explore, create, play and learn about themselves and others in a world where the only certainty is uncertainty. Not only do the students need new concepts, new goals, new ways of doing things and taking risks but so too do we - the teachers, leaders and managers. For the first time in our history, perhaps, education can genuinely become a joint venture in which we all can find fulfilment. The National and Agreed Goals may be a step on the way, but I believe they are the first step on a long journey, rather than an accountable end in themselves. For the future it is the journey which is essential. I will enjoy travelling the road with you and stopping to smell the flowers.

Thank you

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