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australasian association for progressive and alternative education

8 Galali Pl
Aranda
ACT 2614
25th March 2005

The Chairperson
Inquiry into Literacy Teaching
GPO Box 3318
Manuka
ACT 2603
Copy emailed to literacyinquiry@secretariat.com.au

Dear Professor Rowe and Committee Members,
Please find enclosed a Submission to the National Literacy Inquiry from the
Australasian Association for Progressive and Alternative Education. (AAPAE)

The following is a summary of the main points of our submission

1. Every learner is an individual, unique and different and responsible for his or her own learning.
2. Effective learning takes place when both learners together and all who are in relationship, have some understanding of the learning ecology of each
3. Learning happens when the learner chooses, and takes responsibility.
4. Whatever we are teaching our children, it needs to be transformative for a transformative Information age.
5. Scientific-based research is no more or less vulnerable to abuses and misinformation than any other form of research.
6. Effective teachers appear to systematically employ a range of teaching methods, materials and classroom tasks matched to the needs of the specific children they are teaching; have coherent beliefs about the teaching of their subject; have a well developed knowledge of the subject and its pedagogical principles which underpins their teaching; place a great deal of emphasis on presenting literacy to their children in ways which foregrounded the creation and recreation of meaning.
7. Improving the literacy levels of all Australians is a much more complex issue than one that might be solved by simply mandating a scientific-based reading programme or a particular pedagogy.
8. Qualitative, relational, individual forms of assessment are far more effective in enabling learners to learn.

AAPAE requests that the Inquiry focus on caring for and transforming learning for each individual learner at all levels, with literacy as part of that, and guarantee inclusive, democratic and socially equitable opportunities for all learners.

Thank you for considering our views. AAPAE awaits your findings with interest.

Yours sincerely,

Cecelia Bradley
(President AAPAE – Website: www.aapae.edu.au)

**A Submission
To
The National Inquiry into Teaching of Literacy
From
The Australasian Association for Progressive and Alternative Education
(AAPAE)
20th March 2005**

ARE CHILDREN BEING TAUGHT TO READ IN THE MOST EFFECTIVE WAY?

“PS I’ve just started the Da Vinci Code – thought I better find out what all the fuss is about! I think of you often as I search for a decent read at the library with all the times you helped me look for a goodie either at Currumbena or Lane Cove Library. My love of reading helped me to escape the HSC every night before bed so thank you for helping to develop my interest in that area”

An unsolicited moment, precious to every teacher, when you receive an insight as to whether your teaching has been effective! Or is it a hint as to whether the quality of your relationship and mutual status as learners has been effective? These words from a former student also highlight for me the key elements AAPAE would like to emphasise in response to this current literacy inquiry. All learning is mutual, reciprocal, collaborative, encased in a caring relationship, discovering, sharing and enjoying passionate interest.

1. Every learner is an individual, unique and different and responsible for their own learning

The current literacy inquiry asks

“Are children being taught to read in the most effective way?”

At the AAPAE conference in Christchurch in New Zealand in 2002 Tony Collins a lecturer at Te Whare Whai Matauraka Ki Otautahi (Christchurch College of Education) gave a paper titled The Metaphors of Education. He wrote

“Metaphor is the language that controls imagery, disposition and ultimately our actions. Sternberg (1979) considered generative metaphor tacitly transmits ideology. Metaphor is not just a rhetorical fancy or a device of poetic imagination: it is central to the gaining an understanding of how an individual perceives our world. Metaphors and analogies are part of our conceptual system. They are the basis for the experiential- based framework controlling our thinking and actions, both conscious and unconscious. Evidence of our conceptual system is concealed within our linguistic articulations

(Schon, 1979, Lakoff&Johnson, 1980)

What is the generative metaphor at play in the main question of the inquiry?

“Children” are viewed en masse, being taught as passive receptors. Teaching is the ‘teacher’s’ responsibility. Only reading is mentioned. What about writing, listening, speaking, communicating, interpreting, analysing, creating, etc ?

By including ‘most ‘and ‘effective’, an emphasis on comparative, competitive, quantifiable assessment against a minimum level and benchmark is indicated.

What answers might be sought, if the question was

Are children learning to read effectively?

Children are still grouped, but taking responsibility, control and management of their learning! The word ‘effectively’ still hangs in the air.

What if the question was

Are children reading effectively?

Or

Are children reading?

Or

Is your child reading?

We ask these questions because we want to ensure that the hidden curriculum of this or any inquiry is duly acknowledged

Members of AAPAE share a belief that every learner is an individual, unique and different and responsible for their own learning. The development, interest, abilities, experiences and circumstances of each individual’s life have to be acknowledged and integrated into all learning. They provide the framework for the child to begin the process of being a literate learner and an empowered member of society.

2. Effective learning takes place when both learners together and all who are in relationship, have some understanding of the learning ecology of each

Professor Stuart Hill (2004) Foundation Chair of Social Ecology at the University of Western Sydney, writes of Learning Ecology as

“understanding the complex relationships between the diverse qualities of learners, supportive environments and effective teachers and the things they do and do not do, the teaching aids they use and the experiential opportunities they provide. Effective learning takes place when both learners together (‘learner’ and ‘teacher’) and all who are in relationship, have some understanding of the learning ecology of each. Without this, teachers are in danger of being inhibitors, rather than facilitators of transformative learning and personal development. This understanding has important implications for the notion of appropriate pedagogies especially in terms of choice, agency, self-directedness and negotiation in learning particularly concerning time place, content preferred styles of learning and its ‘measurement’”

3. Learning happens when the learner chooses, and takes responsibility.

AAPAE would prefer as much as possible for co-learners to work together to create a ‘space’ which enables learners to make decisions about

- a) what effective learning is for them and
- b) when and how they do their learning and
- c) whether their learning is effective.

4. Whatever we are teaching our children, it needs to be transformative for a transformative information age.

For many decades the debate over teaching of reading methods has raged and been fuelled by a series of literacy 'crises' and we question why this current inquiry? This inquiry seems to be driven by a repetition of the old phonics versus whole language debate. This debate polarises, divides, creates 'goodies and baddies' and distracts attention and resources away from the multiplicity of factors which enable or disable a literate person such as access to

Adequate food, shelter, housing, love and care
 Resources and access to stimulating literature
 Lovers of literacy and mentors in learners' lives
 Creative learning spaces and class sizes
 Television
 Technology

Members of AAPAE urge the review committee to look at what works for each individual learner and then encourage more of this rather than concentrating on making up the deficits of what hasn't worked. Many of our children are reading and writing far beyond basic benchmarks. We urge the committee to recommend care, resources, time, and attention be given to those who find becoming literate a difficult task and enable them to build their experiences skills and expertise..

Collins (2002)wrote

"The Outcomes based Education Movement has evolved into the today's Standards Movement (Sergiovanni 2001) operating on the deficit Model rather than the capacity Building Model (Mitchell & Sackney 2000)".

5. Scientific-based research is no more or less vulnerable to abuses and misinformation than any other form of research.

The current push to promote and justify certain methodologies and reading programmes seems to be emulating some of the trends happening under President Bush's administration in the US which as stated by Norman Swan interviewing Dr Reid Lyon on the Health Report January 17, 2005.

"is on a mission to reform literacy education radically in the United States, with vast sums of money available, but only for programs with scientific backing."

AAPAE is concerned about this emphasis linking funding on scientifically based programmes. Whose science is favoured? As Dr Adrienne Huber (2005), currently a Consultant in Literacy in schools in New York, Huber (2005) says

"Scientific-based research is no more or less vulnerable to abuses and misinformation than any other form of research. In the USA the infamous scientific-based research with controlled trials and experimental groups in accordance with the finest algorithm for such research lead us astray. For example, the current Vioxx scandal in which it is claimed tens of thousands of people died from side effects after taking this "miracle" drug despite stringent clinical trials showing its efficacy. Allegedly, unlike the favourable studies, results counter to these findings were not routinely published. The makers of Vioxx are now facing multimillion dollar class

action law suits. So much for the efficacy of scientific-based research. Complacency makes a strange bedfellow. Shame Thomas Kuhn's (1977) message about scientific tradition and change wasn't heeded!"

Some AAPAE members, as in the general community, believe strongly that a concentration on phonics is the basis of effective teaching of reading. Most favour a broad approach, ensuring that the needs of the individual are met by all possible methods. Huber(2005) says, no programme of itself can teach any child to read and teachers are the best vehicles for ensuring children learn to read. Teachers need to be able to make professional judgements about their students and teach them accordingly. Inflexible programmes prevent teachers making and acting on their professional judgements.

Huber (2005) writes

What is the USA planning to do to increase their student outcomes? More standardised testing and mandated specific reading programs (basals by any other name!) which stakeholders cannot agree on how to implement pedagogically and politely dance around the issues leaving children none the wiser. That's no different to their strategies for the past twenty years and still there has been no improvement in reading scores!Australia is already doing much for children's literacy both in Australia and now in the USA!

Whatever we are teaching our children, it needs to be transformative for a transformative information age. No longer can we rest on the transmission model of teaching and learning. Nor can we impose a hypodermic model for teaching literacy akin to the hypodermic theory of communication (see Harms and Kellner, 1998). We cannot inject literacy through direct instruction or one pedagogy or programme any more than we can inject a message to the receiver when we communicate.

Some widely acknowledged drawbacks of the hypodermic theory of communication echo similar limitations for direct instruction models of literacy and off the shelf scientific-based reading programmes.

Programmed direct instruction to a whole class, to small groups or to individuals does not take into account diversity of students in a pluralistic society like Australia. Scientific-based reading programmes do not take into account the many and varied purposes and understandings children bring to classes and to their learning. Likewise, scientific-based reading programmes ignore the resistance students manifest in the form of out of control behaviour and learning difficulties.

Dr John Hughes, Associate Dean and Director of Undergraduate Studies in the Faculty of Education and Social Work at the University of Sydney wrote

Monday, June 14, 2004

"over the past three decades there has been a wealth of research into the reading process. It is now universally accepted that in order to gain meaning from text, three cues need to be operating: semantic cues (meaning cues), syntactic cues (what we understand from the grammar) and grapho-phonetic cues (the letters and the sounds). That is, the comprehension of text requires the reader to have some prior knowledge of the semantic area to be read and some expectation of meaning being possible, and an ability to comprehend the syntactic presentation of the text, (albeit, this may be an unconscious understanding), together with a comprehension of the grapho-phonics, that is the symbolic dynamic of the letters, or codes, with sounds (i.e. phonics and phonemic awareness). I am not claiming this is all that is needed but it

is a start. At bare minimum, children need the three cues to be operational in order to gain meaning from text. This approach to reading stresses the importance of prediction in the reading process. In fact several reading theorists maintain that reading for meaning is impossible without prediction.”.

AAPAE urges the Review Committee to ensure that if decisions are going to be made this way in Australia that a broad spectrum of ‘scientific research’ is examined.

Teacher Training and the extent to which it prepares teachers for Reading Instruction.

Please give due attention to a wide range of research projects such as, the Effective Teachers of Literacy Project, which was commissioned by the Teacher Training Agency (TTA) and conducted by staff of the University of Exeter and the University College of St Mark and St John from December, 1995 to February, 1997 in collaboration with thirteen Local Education Authorities across England and a number of Grant Maintained and independent schools. From the literature review of the characteristics of effective teachers, three key areas emerged.

6. Effective teachers appeared to:

systematically employ a range of teaching methods, materials and classroom tasks matched to the needs of the specific children they are teaching
have coherent beliefs about the teaching of their subject
have a well developed knowledge of the subject and its pedagogical principles which underpins their teaching

Broadly the conclusions show that

“effective teachers of literacy placed a great deal of emphasis on presenting literacy to their children in ways which fore-grounded the creation and recreation of meaning. Because meaning was such a high priority, they tried wherever possible to embed their teaching of the crucial technical features of literacy (how to do it) in a context where the children could see why they were learning about such features.” This context very often involved the use of a shared text, which was either being read or written together. As this text was being either read or written, the fundamental skills and features involved were being systematically taught by the teachers, for example, phonics, spelling, grammar, punctuation, textual structures and conventions. The teachers were, thus, continually making connections explicit for their pupils between text, sentence and word levels language features. These features were thus taught in a way which emphasised their functions in language rather than their focus being simply a set of rules and definitions to learn.

This functional approach also reflects the form that these teachers' knowledge about written language features took and it seemed that, rather than having learned about these features *then* tried to find ways of presenting them to their children, they knew them in the ways they taught them - as features which enable written language to be produced and interpreted.”

(Please see Appendix 1)

7. Improving the literacy levels of all Australians is certainly a much more complex issue than one that might be solved by simply mandating a scientific-based reading programme or a particular pedagogy

AAPAE agrees with Huber (2005) when she writes

A constructive way forward can be gleaned and adapted from some of what the Ministry of Education Finland (2005) has already achieved and what it plans to achieve in the near future. Improving the literacy levels of all Australians is certainly a much more complex issue than one that might be solved by simply mandating a scientific-based reading programme or a particular pedagogy. As with Finland, the approach would,

- guarantee equal opportunities (i.e. inclusive, democratic and socially equitable) for basic education for citizenship in a democratic society to all children and young people, irrespective of their social standing, gender and ethnic background. Education that is free and everyone gets the same extensive benefits, such as a school meal, support for school travel and pupil/student welfare services.
- pay special attention to teachers' training, which guarantees high-standard instruction by having teachers who have a deep understanding of literacy, child development, learning and a wide range of pedagogies from which to reach all children.
- ensure the responsibility for providing education rests with local authorities, that is, close to children, young people and their homes. Strengthen cooperation between students' homes, the school and the community. Moreover, funds for ongoing teacher learning based on classroom-based research and reflective and collaborative practices would ensure education of our children is paramount, timely and relevant at all stages. Additionally, funding for intensive preventative support for students identified at risk would likely negate the need for expensive intervention at later stages.
- focus on attitudes and values, as well as teachers' and students' satisfaction and well-being at school. School facilities and learning environments overall warrant more attention. **(Please see APPENDIX 2)**

THE ASSESSMENT of READING PROFICIENCY including identification of students with reading difficulties.

8. Qualitative, relational, individual forms of assessment are far more effective in enabling learners to learn

"International data indicate that Australian school students compare well with the performance of students in other OECD countries, but some are still not achieving acceptable literacy standards. This Inquiry reaffirms the Australian Government's commitment to ensuring that all Australian children achieve high standards of literacy and the essential reading skills to make satisfactory progress at school."

(Quoted from the Announcement of the Inquiry)

AAPAE believes that the reality of this statement, after 15 years or more of standardised testing and assessment and benchmarking which was purported to be the panacea of all literacy woes, has vindicated our stand that qualitative, relational, individual forms of assessment are far more effective in enabling learners to learn and included in this is the empowering capacity to be multi-literate.

In 2003 AAPAE sent a submission to the Federal Minister for Education Science and Training Dr Brendan Nelson, which outlined our position re assessment and standardised testing. This submission also points to a range of research which shows how detrimental this emphasis on comparative, standardised assessment is on life long learning especially

for those students who struggle to learn. Studies by the National Teachers' Union in UK (2003) by Cambridge and Warwick Universities concluded that tests distort the curriculum and educational experiences available to the children, especially low achievers, they constrict the curriculum and have not led to pupils reaching higher levels of attainment, in fact learning is hampered. The effects of testing processes and emphasis may be counterproductive to its aims and need to be questioned and debated widely.

We include a copy of most of this submission for the committee to consider.

(Please see APPENDIX 3)

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APPENDIX 1

Effective Teachers of Literacy

Jane Medwell

David Wray

Louise Poulson

Richard Fox

May, 1998

The Effective Teachers of Literacy Project, was commissioned by the Teacher Training Agency (TTA) and conducted by staff of the University of Exeter and the University College of St Mark and St John from December, 1995 to February, 1997 in collaboration with thirteen Local Education Authorities across England and a number of Grant Maintained and independent schools.

For our purposes, literacy is seen as a unitary process with two complementary aspects, reading and writing. Seeing reading and writing in this way, simply as opposite faces of the same coin, emphasises a basic principle within the National Curriculum for English, that is, to develop children's skills within an integrated programme and to inter-relate the requirements of the Range, Key Skills, and Standard English and Language Study sections of the Programmes of Study.

In the National Literacy Project literacy is defined through an analysis of what literate children should be able to do. This produces the following list.

Literate children should:

- * read and write with confidence, fluency and understanding;
- * be interested in books, read with enjoyment and evaluate and justify their preferences;
- * know and understand a range of genres in fiction and poetry, and understand and be familiar with some of the ways that narratives are structured through basic literary ideas of setting, character and plot;
- * understand and be able to use a range of non-fiction texts;
- * be able to orchestrate a full range of reading cues (phonic, graphic, syntactic, contextual) to monitor and self-correct their own reading;
- * plan draft revise and edit their own writing;
- * have an interest in words and word meanings, and a growing vocabulary;
- * understand the sound and spelling system and use this to read and spell accurately;
- have fluent and legible handwriting.

There are three strands to the experiences children need to develop these competencies:

1. word level work: i.e. phonics, spelling and vocabulary
2. sentence level work: i.e. grammar and punctuation
3. text level work: i.e. comprehension and composition

Such a study was the aim of the research described in this report.

This research project, the Effective Teachers of Literacy Project, was commissioned by the Teacher Training Agency (TTA) and conducted by staff of the University of Exeter and the University College of St Mark and St John from December, 1995 to February, 1997 in collaboration with thirteen Local Education Authorities across England and a number of Grant Maintained and independent schools.

From our literature review of the characteristics of effective teachers, three key areas emerged. Effective teachers appeared to:

- * systematically employ a range of teaching methods, materials and classroom tasks matched to the needs of the specific children they are teaching
- * have coherent beliefs about the teaching of their subject
- * have a well developed knowledge of the subject and its pedagogical principles which underpins their teaching

A crucial point we need to make here is that, in the majority of areas, research had not yet demonstrated that these features were characteristic of effective teachers of literacy. However, we hypothesised that our research would suggest this to be the case and, therefore, we extrapolated from the general research on effective teachers, and from our own extensive knowledge of the field of literacy, to develop a number of specific hypotheses.

1.5 The main findings of the research: a summary

In the rest of this report we will present findings from the research which give a relatively coherent picture of the subject knowledge, beliefs and teaching practices of effective teachers of literacy. We believe there is a great deal to be learnt from a close study of these features. At this point, however, we give a brief preview of some of our major findings. Broadly speaking, we found that the effective teachers of literacy in this study tended to:

- * Believe that it is important to make it explicit that the purpose of teaching literacy is enabling their pupils to create meaning using text. While almost all teachers would also endorse this aim, the effective teachers of literacy we studied were very specific about how literacy activities at the whole text, word and sentence levels contributed to such meaning creation.

- * Centred much of their teaching of literacy around 'shared' texts, that is, texts which the teacher and children either read or wrote together. Shared texts were used as a means of making the connections between text, sentence and word level knowledge explicit to children, both as a vehicle for teaching specific ideas at text,

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sentence and word levels and for showing how the features of words, sentences and texts work together.

- * Teach aspects of reading and writing such as decoding and spelling in a systematic and highly structured way and also in a way that made clear to pupils why these aspects were necessary and useful.

- * Emphasise to their pupils the functions of what they were learning in literacy. Thus the rules of grammar, for example, were not usually taught as discrete items of knowledge, but as connected features which would help children improve their writing for specific purposes.

- * Have developed strong and coherent personal philosophies about the teaching of literacy which guided their selection of teaching materials and approaches. These philosophies enabled them to pull together their knowledge, skills and beliefs in this area and helped give greater co-ordination to their teaching of literacy.

- * Have well developed systems for monitoring children's progress and needs in literacy and use this information to plan future teaching.

- * Have extensive knowledge about literacy although not necessarily in a form which could be abstracted from the context of teaching it.

* Have had considerable experience of in-service activities in literacy, both as learners and, often, having themselves planned and led such activities for their colleagues.

* Be, or have been, the English subject co-ordinator in their schools.

We will use this pattern of characteristics as a framework for exploring the implications of our findings for the initial training and continuing professional development of teachers of literacy.

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8.2 Teachers' subject knowledge in literacy

* All the teachers we worked with knew the requirements of the National Curriculum well and could describe what they were doing in terms of these.

* They all also recognised the different literacy teaching needs of KS1 and KS2 children.

* There were differences between the teachers from the validation sample of Mathematics co-ordinators and the effective teachers in their specifications of what children needed to know about reading and writing. The effective teachers in general placed a greater emphasis on children's recognition of the purposes and functions of reading and writing and of the structures used to enable these processes. The validation teachers, on the other hand, were more likely to emphasise technical knowledge about these structures. This should not be taken to imply that the effective teachers gave less attention to language structures in their teaching but rather that

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they were more concerned to contextualise their teaching of these and to present them functionally and meaningfully to children.

* All the teachers had limited success at recognising some types of words in a sentence and some sub-word units out of context. The effective teachers were more likely to be able to pick out word types such as adjectives, adverbs etc. but less able to identify such units as phonemes, onsets and rimes and morphemes. Using more everyday terminology for these units still did not ensure total success for the teachers in recognising them. This casts doubt on the effective teachers' abstract knowledge of linguistic concepts such as phoneme and raises the question of whether they would be even more effective if they had such knowledge.

* Despite this apparent lack of explicit, abstract knowledge of linguistic concepts, these teachers were observed to use such knowledge implicitly in their teaching, particularly that connected with phonics. Our interpretation of this contradiction is that the effective teachers knew the material they were teaching in a particular way. It did not seem to be the case that the teachers selected appropriate ways to represent (pedagogy) pre-existing knowledge (content) to children. Rather, they appeared to know and understand the material in the form in which they taught it to the children, which was usually as material which helped these children read and write. The effective teachers' knowledge about content and their knowledge about teaching and learning strategies were integrated. The knowledge base of these teachers thus was their pedagogical content knowledge. This is rather a different idea from that of Shulman (1987) who sees pedagogical content knowledge as a way of transforming subject content in order to represent it for others. At the time we studied the effective teachers, their knowledge in literacy took precisely the form in which they represented it for their children. They may, of course, once have known this

material differently. But, through experience of teaching it, their knowledge seemed to have become totally embedded in and banded by their teaching practices.

* When examining and judging samples of children's reading and writing, all the teachers were able to analyse mistakes. But the way the two groups approached the task was different:

1. the effective teachers were more diagnostic in the ways they approached the task and were more able to generate explanations as to why children read or wrote as they did.
2. in examining the pieces of writing, the two groups eventually mentioned similar features, but the effective teachers were quicker to focus on possible underlying causes of a child's writing behaviour.
3. the validation sample required lots of prompting and time to reach an equivalent point. It is likely that, in a busy classroom context, they would not routinely make the same level of judgements made by the effective teachers.

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This suggests a further aspect of subject knowledge in which the effective teachers of literacy performed better; the knowledge of children and the ways they exhibit skills or skill problems in literacy.

* We also found that teachers used a limited range of linguistic terminology and the way the two groups of teachers used this terminology was different. The validation teachers tended to rely on definitions of the terms they used whereas the effective teachers tended to begin by demonstrating particular language features in use within a clear context before deriving a definition, which might well be arrived at in discussion with the children. Children in the classes of these teachers were thus much more heavily involved in problem-solving and theorising about language for themselves rather than simply being given 'facts' to learn.

8.3 The belief systems of effective teachers of literacy

* The effective teachers of literacy tended to place a high value upon communication and composition in their views about the teaching of reading and writing: that is, they believed that the creation of meaning in literacy was fundamental. They were more coherent in their belief systems about the teaching of literacy and tended to favour teaching activities which explicitly emphasised the deriving and creating meaning. In much of their teaching they were at pains to stress to pupils the purposes and functions of reading and writing tasks.

* Although they emphasised purpose and meaning in their belief statements, this did not mean that the more technical aspects of reading and writing processes were neglected. There was plenty of evidence that such aspects as phonic knowledge, spelling, grammatical knowledge and punctuation were prominent in the teaching of effective teachers of literacy. Technical aspects of literacy tended, however, to be approached in quite different ways by the effective teachers than by most of the teachers in the validation sample.

* The key difference in approach was in the effective teachers' emphasis on embedding attention to word and sentence level aspects of reading and writing within whole text activities which were both meaningful and explained clearly to pupils. Teachers in the validation sample were more likely to teach technical features as discrete skills for their own sakes, and did not necessarily ensure that pupils understood the wider purpose of such skills in reading and writing.

* Our finding concerning the beliefs of this group of effective teachers of literacy, that they prioritised the creation of meaning in their literacy teaching, thus reflects not that they failed to emphasise such skills as phonics, spelling, grammar etc. but rather that they were trying very hard to ensure that such skills were developed in children with a clear eye to the children's awareness of their importance and function.

8.4 The teaching practices of effective teachers of literacy

* There were some differences between the reading activities likely to be employed by the effective teachers and the teachers in the validation group. The effective teachers made more use of big books in their teaching; they were also more likely to use other adults to assist their classroom work. The validation teachers made more use of phonic exercises and flashcards, although both groups were similar in the extent to which they reported and were observed to teach letter sounds. The difference was in the ways they went about this. The effective teachers tended to teach letter sounds within the context of using a text (often a big book) and to use short, regular teaching sessions, often involving them modelling to the children how sounds worked (by, for example, writing examples of letter groups on a flip-chart). The validation teachers were much more likely to approach letter sound teaching through the use of paper exercises.

* The effective teachers were generally much more likely to embed their teaching of reading into a wider context and to show how specific aspects of reading and writing contribute to communication. They tended to use whole texts as the basis from which to teach skills such as vocabulary, word attack and recognition and use of text features. They were also very clear about their purposes for using such texts.

* In lessons involving writing the differences between the two groups of teachers were less clear although it did seem that the effective teachers were more likely to use published teaching materials as a way of consolidating the language points they had already taught their children, whereas for the validation teachers, these materials were often used to introduce a teaching session. This suggests that a similar point to that made about reading work also applies in the case of writing work. The effective teachers generally tried to ensure their teaching of language features was contextualised for their children and that the children understood the purpose of this teaching. Their chief means of achieving such contextualisation was to focus teaching on a shared text. Language features were taught, and explained to the children, as a means of managing this shared text rather than as a set of rules or definitions to be learnt for their own sakes.

* The effective teachers of literacy, because of their concern to contextualise their teaching of language features within shared text experiences, made explicit connections for their pupils between the text, sentence and word levels of language study.

* The lessons of the effective teachers were all conducted at a brisk pace. They regularly refocused children's attention on the task at hand and used clear time frames to keep children on task. They also tended to conclude their lessons by reviewing, with the whole class, what the children had done during the lesson. Lessons which ended with the teacher simply saying, "We'll finish this tomorrow", were much more common among the validation teachers.

* The effective teachers used modelling extensively. They regularly

demonstrated reading and writing to their classes in a variety of ways, often accompanying these demonstrations by verbal explanations of what they were doing.
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In this way they were able to make available to the children their thinking as they engaged in literacy.

* Some effective teachers differentiated the work they asked pupils to do by allotting different tasks on the basis of ability. These teachers also used another approach by varying the support given to particular groups of children when they were engaged on tasks the whole class would do at some point. By this means they were able to keep their classes working more closely together through a programme of work.

* The classrooms of the effective teachers were distinguished by the heavy emphasis on literacy in the environments which had been created. There were many examples of literacy displayed in these classrooms, these examples were regularly brought to the children's attentions and the children were encouraged to use them to support their own literacy.

* The effective teachers had very clear assessment procedures, usually involving a great deal of focused observation and systematic record-keeping. This contributed markedly to their abilities to select appropriate literacy content for their children's needs.

8.5 Novice teachers and the impact of initial teacher training

* Novice teachers did not yet appear to have developed coherent theoretical positions regarding the teaching of literacy. They had a range of views about literacy teaching but had yet to pull these together into a working theory which could inform their actions in teaching literacy. This contrasted with effective teachers of literacy, who had developed a variety of coherent theoretical positions, and were able to synthesise these into a working philosophy which underpinned their teaching.

* Novice teachers had a range of knowledge about children's needs in literacy and how it needed to be differentiated to take account of pupils' age, ability and experience. Their priorities in terms of what children needed to know were much closer to those of the validation sample teachers than those of the effective teachers of literacy.

* They appeared to have a reasonably strong subject knowledge in literacy. Some had highly-developed academic knowledge in language and literature; others indicated that they had gained the requisite knowledge during their PGCE year.

* The novices with highly-developed knowledge in subjects related to literacy, who taught pupils at key stage 2, were able to transform and represent this as pedagogical content knowledge, according to the pattern outlined by Shulman (1987). By contrast, those with a strong academic background in a literacy-related subject, who taught pupils at key stage 1, did not conform to this pattern: they were less likely to make connections between their formal academic knowledge and that needed to teach literacy to younger children. Instead this group tended to cite their PGCE course as the source of the knowledge needed to teach literacy. This was also the case
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with novices who did not have an academic background in language or literature, whether they taught pupils at key stages 1 or 2.

* Most helpful to novices in learning to teach literacy, was a coherent combination of knowledge and practical experience. This tended to consist of:

1. initial introduction to, and practice with, key areas of content, concepts, issues and processes in the teaching of reading and writing; most usually done in the university/college-based parts of the PGCE course;
2. followed by, or parallel with, observation of experienced teachers doing the above; with the opportunity for discussion after observation;
3. followed by the opportunity to practise, in the classroom, the content, techniques and processes learned and observed; and with opportunities for discussion with teachers/university college tutors afterwards, to enable evaluation of performance; to identify strengths and weaknesses; and to set targets for future performance and achievement in literacy teaching.

8.6 Professional development issues

* The effective teachers of literacy were more likely to have a subject background in English language and related subjects.

* Experiences during initial teacher training had now been largely forgotten by the effective experienced teachers and so little can now be inferred about the quality of this training. The more recently qualified effective teachers, however, did value the training they had received in teaching literacy. This suggests that initial training does have an important impact upon teachers' approaches to and success at teaching literacy, but that this is inevitably short term. This point may be particularly significant for teachers' content knowledge. Most of the novice teachers we studied had a reasonably extensive content knowledge but few could genuinely be described yet as fully effective teachers of literacy. It may be that this knowledge would be a major factor underpinning the development of their expertise, and would eventually be merged with their pedagogical understanding and, ostensibly, forgotten.

* Experience of longer in-service courses and participation in long term literacy projects had significantly affected teachers' views about literacy teaching. The most significant feature of these longer term experiences appeared to be that they had provided the opportunity and impetus for the teachers to develop and clarify their own personal philosophies about literacy teaching.

* Shorter courses were also seen as useful in professional development, but largely in terms of meeting a personal need or keeping in touch with recent developments.

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* Effective teachers were more likely, and possibly more able, to discuss their views about literacy teaching as a philosophy and to make explicit links between their beliefs and their teaching practices.

* The role of English co-ordinator was very significant to the effective teachers. It was a focus for in-service provision of a certain type and had also generated substantial commitment to the area of teaching. Simply being the English coordinator meant that these teachers had experiences which involved them:

1. being perceived as experts by their colleagues,
2. being given the status of expert practitioner in teaching literacy in their schools,
3. being offered more extensive in-service course experiences in literacy,
4. having the chance to observe other teachers teach literacy, with a view to offering advice and support,
5. often being involved in delivering in-service to their colleagues, with the

consequent need to think through actively the material they were presenting.

* Teachers not in the fortunate position of being the English co-ordinator in their school were more likely to be relatively deprived in terms of in-service opportunities in literacy. Such deprivation is unlikely to enable these teachers to develop and increase their professional expertise in teaching literacy.

8.7 A interpretation of the conclusions

Our analysis of a wide range of data concerning the teachers we identified as effective teachers of literacy has produced a relatively consistent picture of the characteristics of these teachers and the factors underpinning these characteristics. Broadly speaking, it seems that the effective teachers of literacy placed a great deal of emphasis on presenting literacy to their children in ways which foregrounded the creation and recreation of meaning. Because meaning was such a high priority, they tried wherever possible to embed their teaching of the crucial technical features of literacy (how to do it) in a context where the children could see why they were learning about such features. This context very often involved the use of a shared text, which was either being read or written together. As this text was being either read or written, the fundamental skills and features involved were being systematically taught by the teachers, for example, phonics, spelling, grammar, punctuation, textual structures and conventions. The teachers were, thus, continually making connections explicit for their pupils between text, sentence and word levels language features. These features were thus taught in a way which emphasised their

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functions in language rather than their focus being simply a set of rules and definitions to learn.

This functional approach also reflects the form that these teachers' knowledge about written language features took and it seemed that, rather than having learned about these features *then* tried to find ways of presenting them to their children, they knew them in the ways they taught them - as features which enable written language to be produced and interpreted.

Another characteristic of these teachers' approach to literacy teaching was the explicitness with which they set about it. They demonstrated a great deal of literacy to children, modelling the processes of reading and writing but also explaining at the same time the thinking underlying these activities. In this way the children were being helped to become more explicitly aware of why and how they could read and write successfully.

The teachers themselves were very aware of how they were teaching literacy and had generally made very reasoned decisions about this. Many of them had developed strong personal philosophies about literacy teaching and these had come about through a willingness, and the opportunity, to reflect on their practice and the nature of what they were teaching. These opportunities resulted from prolonged study, involvement in literacy projects and/or curriculum responsibility for English in their schools.

Finally, the effective teachers were thoroughly systematic in the ways they went about their teaching of literacy. They were, of course, very familiar with the requirements of the National Curriculum for English and had worked out, with their schools, systems of teaching that enabled them to guarantee appropriate coverage of these requirements. Although a feature of effective teachers' practice, such systems

were also used by other teachers, although as a determinant of school planning. The effective teachers were also likely to use diagnostic information about children, their development and literacy progressions as a planning tool. They had well developed systems for gathering evidence concerning children's progress and needs in literacy and then using this to inform detailed planning for future teaching. Such a diagnostic approach often led them to tailor the support they offered to particular children, or groups of children, to ensure that, as far as possible, the whole class covered similar ground in literacy.

In the context of recent developments in the teaching of literacy, in particular, the experience of the National Literacy Project (and its recent broadening into the National Literacy Strategy) and the National Curriculum for Initial Teacher Training, it is important to point out how close most of our effective teachers of literacy were

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to the model of literacy teaching implied in these developments. The following points are central to this:

- * The effective teachers of literacy had an extensive knowledge of the content of literacy, even though this was not generally a knowledge which could be abstracted from the context of their teaching action.
- * Because of this knowledge they were able to see, and help their pupils see, connections between the text, sentence and word levels of language.
- * The effective teachers had coherent belief systems about literacy and its teaching and these were generally consistent with the ways they chose to teach.
- * These belief systems, and hence their teaching practices, tended to emphasise the importance of children being clear about the purposes of reading and writing and of using this clarity of purpose as a means of embedding the teaching of grammar, phonics etc. into contexts which made sense to the children.
- * These teachers were teaching literacy in lessons which were clearly focused on this area (literacy hours). Within these lessons they used a mixture of whole class interactive teaching and small group guided work, with occasional individual teaching usually undertaken by a classroom assistant or volunteer helper.
- * A good deal of their teaching involved the use of shared texts such as big books, duplicated passages and multiple copies of books, through which the attention of a whole class or group was drawn to text, sentence and word level features. The ways in which they were making connections between different levels of language knowledge accorded generally with the framework developed within the National Literacy Project (National Literacy Project, 1997), in which it is suggested that '*..text level work provides the essential context for much of the work at the sentence and word levels.*'

8.8 Implications for further development

There are several implications emerging from the research in terms of future policy and practice in continuing professional development. These concern the following:

- * access to in-service courses
- * the nature of professional development experience
- * the content of in-service courses
- * the nature and content of initial training
- * the role of the subject co-ordinator in the school

8.8.1 Access to in-service courses

Over a number of years now there has been a tendency for literacy curriculum specialists (school English co-ordinators) to be targeted for in-service opportunities in literacy. The priorities identified in the annual GEST funding, for example, have been

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 echoed by local education authority provision. This targeting has been implemented for very good reasons. There were clear needs, following the introduction of the National Curriculum, for a heightening of subject expertise and for ensuring that at least one member of staff in a school was sufficiently expert and knowledgeable about the teaching of a subject to be able to offer support and advice to colleagues in this teaching.

There is some evidence from our findings that this policy of targeting in-service opportunities has had a positive effect. The effective teachers of literacy in our sample, over 70% of whom were English co-ordinators for their schools, consistently reported having benefited from the in-service opportunities available to them. They claimed to have been able to pass on some of their expertise through running or organising in-school in-service sessions for their colleagues and through offering general support to these colleagues in such areas as selecting resources for literacy and implementing school policies.

Our evidence does suggest, however, that a rather worrying corollary to this policy has been that teachers who had not been designated as school English co-ordinators were somewhat restricted in the in-service opportunities available to them. For many, these were limited to those arranged within the school, during after-school sessions or on occasional school training days. Given the high value which the effective teachers placed upon their experiences of in-service courses, it seems that non-specialists were missing out on opportunities for their expertise in teaching literacy to be improved. There is a 'Matthew effect' in operation here: the rich (in literacy expertise) tend to get richer, while the poor (perhaps a majority of primary teachers) fall further and further behind the most up to date thinking and practice. This does not seem a satisfactory state of affairs. It is true, after all, that *all* primary teachers are teachers of literacy and, especially in the case of younger children, have an enormous responsibility for ensuring appropriate literacy development in children. Thus it seems to follow that *all* teachers need professional development in this crucial area.

8.8.2 The nature of professional development experience

Two points stand out in this area. Firstly, we have some evidence of the benefits in developing and strengthening teaching expertise in literacy of teachers being brought together in structured discussion groups. These often took the form of regular meetings between teachers from a range of professional situations to discuss particular issues in literacy teaching and a prime example of such meetings were the English co-ordinators' groups which several of our effective teachers belonged to. Working in such groups also sometimes involved watching other teachers teach, and being watched teach in turn. There is evidence from other sources of the positive benefits of such supportive groups. They were at the heart, for example, of the success of the EXEL project (Wray & Lewis, 1994) in developing and spreading

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 expertise in extending children's work with non-fiction texts. They were also vital to the success of national projects such as the National Writing Project and, later, the

National Oracy Project. This approach to professional development might be more widely adopted if part of the funds dedicated to continuing professional development were earmarked to support such structured groups, perhaps by allowing teachers to be released occasionally from their class responsibilities to take part in meetings with other teachers for specific purposes.

Secondly, a number of the effective teachers of literacy had experienced involvement either in long courses about the teaching of literacy, such as CAPS or MEd courses, or in literacy projects, such as the development and trialling of the Primary Language Record. These experiences, as well as having given these teachers access to sources of extensive expertise, both personal and resource-based, had also given them the time and space to reflect in a structured way upon their own approaches to literacy teaching and to develop their personal philosophies. Where teachers had worked out philosophies regarding literacy and its teaching, these did seem to act positively as a co-ordinating force in their day to day practices, and this co-ordination in turn led to increased focus in the literacy teaching adopted. Clearly, involving more teachers in longer courses and study programmes in literacy has very significant resource implications and may not be possible to the degree to which might be thought ideal. In fact, there has been a marked decrease over a twenty year period in the number of teachers released from their schools for longer periods of study. What is more feasible, and has emerged as a professional development policy quite recently, is the deliberate facilitation and encouragement of teachers who want to involve themselves more fully in educational research. Such a move towards teaching as an inquiry-based profession is plainly justified by the findings of our research.

8.8.3 The content of in-service courses

The effective teachers in this study reported that they found in-service courses on such topics as grammar less useful than courses on other topics. This is indicative of a more general implication of the research that the most effective in-service content is not that which focuses on knowledge at the teachers' own level, but rather that which deals with subject knowledge in terms of how this is taught to children. Our suggestion earlier was that subject knowledge in literacy should not be conceived as knowledge of content which the teacher then had to decide how to represent to children. Instead it seems from our research that effective teachers of literacy know the content of literacy as pedagogy; that is, they represent the knowledge to themselves through the ways they teach it.

If this is correct, then it suggests that the most effective in-service courses in literacy will be those which focus on the teaching of literacy content and aim to extend the range of pedagogic strategies at a teacher's disposal. This implies a more practical

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approach and the teachers in this study confirmed that one of the most successful forms of in-service was that which gave them opportunities to try out new ideas in the classroom. This does not mean, however, that in-service courses should be *only* practical - that is, entirely classroom-based. In aiming to develop teachers ability to teach literacy more effectively, they should be mindful of the importance, discussed earlier, of the teacher as a reflective professional. The more teachers are themselves aware of the underpinnings, theoretical and philosophical, of how they act in classrooms, the more likely they are to take a coherent approach to their literacy teaching which seems to pay most dividends. Thus there has to be a place in an

in-service

course, however practical its focus, for teachers to debate and work out the place of practical ideas in their personal, reasoned armoury of teaching strategies.

Another issue arising from our finding about the relative low effectiveness of in-services

courses on grammar concerns the role of linguistic terminology for teachers.

While we found little evidence that the effective teachers of literacy had an extensive command of a range of linguistic terminology, it does seem at least possible that having a greater command might help them further improve their teaching of literacy. Having the linguistic terms available might enable them to be more precise in their explanations to children. Certainly, without knowing appropriate terminology, teachers often have to invent ways of describing linguistic phenomena to their children. To quote the Kingman report (DES, 1988), "there is no positive advantage in such ignorance" (p. 4), and it might be useful to find ways of increasing teacher knowledge in this area. However, in view of the findings of the project, we would strongly recommend that such terminology be introduced (or reintroduced) to teachers not as a set of definitions for them to learn but as the embodiments of linguistic functions with a strong emphasis upon the ways these functions might be taught.

Our suggestion as a first step towards increasing knowledge of linguistic terms and associated functions is to take a route which does seem to have had some demonstrable success already. In talking to the teachers in our samples, both the effective and the validation teachers, it quickly became quite plain that they were almost all very comfortable with the language used in the current requirements for the English National Curriculum. Familiarity with the terms of these requirements has clearly been a necessity for primary teachers as they have legally had to fulfil them. This suggests that embedding a more extensive range of linguistic terminology in other equivalent official documents may well have the effect of ensuring a greater awareness of this terminology, as long as this terminology is described in functional terms.

8.8.4 The nature and content of initial training

The above comments regarding in-service courses in literacy generally apply also to initial training in literacy. A priority here must be equipping novice teachers with an range of pedagogic strategies to enable them to operate successfully in developing children's literacy. But, as with experienced teachers, developing such strategies involves more than simple practical experience. Novice teachers also need to develop an awareness of why and in what circumstances they might employ particular teaching approaches. They need not only procedural knowledge about literacy teaching (knowing how), but also conditional knowledge (knowing when and in what way). The development of this knowledge seems to demand experience in a range of contrasting contexts, together with the opportunity to compare and contrast their experiences with those of others. It would also be useful for them to be taught specific strategies and then given the opportunity to try these out under guidance in classrooms.

Beginning teachers also, if they are to move quickly towards becoming like effective teachers of literacy, need to be given the opportunity and the space to develop their own philosophies of literacy teaching. There is evidence that initial training courses

do allow student teachers to 'make their own minds up' about approaches to the teaching of reading (Wray & Medwell, 1994). In the current research, we found several examples of student teachers who were clearly working out their own positions vis à vis the teaching of literacy, although most had not developed coherent philosophies at the time we studied them. For this to happen would, we suggest, require time and further opportunities to read and discuss a range of ideas in literacy. As discussed above, the effective teachers in our sample were very likely to have experienced some form of involvement with a project on an aspect of literacy teaching. The opportunity to think through issues while working towards a practical outcome appeared to have enabled them to develop more coherent personal philosophies about literacy teaching. It would therefore seem likely to be beneficial if initial training courses could engage students at some point in such project based learning, perhaps a small scale research study, in an aspect of literacy teaching. Many courses already make provision for this on a limited scale but there is evidence (Wray, 1993) that student teachers respond very well to involvement in more elaborate research projects.

8.8.5 The role of the subject co-ordinator in the school

The evidence from this project suggests that, in order to become an effective teacher of literacy, one of the most beneficial steps a teacher could take would be to become the English co-ordinator in his/her school. This puts the teacher into the position of:

* receiving more extensive opportunities for professional development
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* having the opportunity to learn from explaining ideas to other teachers and from watching other teachers teach

* being vested with an expertise to which they have then to live up

* being the gate-keeper in the school for new ideas and resources.

Such a position strongly encourages the development of specialist expertise and one suggestion for a way of broadening the possession of this expertise would be for schools to rotate the role of English co-ordinator every few years. In several of the schools we visited as part of the project, such rotation of responsibilities was already practised and the teachers involved were certainly building up their range of curriculum expertise. In one school, for example, four teachers were identified as effective teachers of literacy. Of these, one was the current English co-ordinator, two had been in the past (they were now responsible for other curriculum areas), and one was in her second year of teaching. Rotation of responsibilities (and of year groups taught) was a deliberate school policy and seemed to be having the desired effect of spreading expertise.

8.9 Conclusion

In this research a fairly coherent picture has emerged of the characteristics of effective teachers. We feel there are also some clear implications for policy and practice and have tried to outline these in this chapter. Many of these centre around what might be referred to as a functionalist approach to the teaching of literacy and we see this as our most significant finding. If adopted more widely, we feel this approach has the potential to enhance significantly teachers' expertise and hence children's learning.

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Hypodermic Literacy: The faster than a speeding bullet would be cure-all

Adrienne Huber

Educational Consultant, New York, USA

and

University of Wollongong NSW Australia

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Abstract

The teaching and learning of literacy frequently invokes emotive debates. Models of literacy teaching and learning vary across the OECD countries. At the level of literacy research, what works and what does not is debatable *ad infinitum*. However, when we look more broadly at our aims for schooling and purposes for citizens in a democracy it becomes clearer that there is a way forward which provides a solid framework to transform teaching and learning of literacy. To consider what we do in terms of diversity, inclusion, democracy, social equity and the wellbeing of our teachers and students helps to constructively refocus our efforts into a win-win situation rather than seeking the magic bullet or hypodermic approach to access, equity and application of literacy for all.

Introduction

Could it be that off the shelf scientific-based reading programmes, like direct instruction are to the teaching and learning of literacy as Harms and Kellner (1998) claim advertising is to communication and consumer behaviour,

...[T]hose who argue that advertising directly and immediately influences consumer behavior are assuming the validity of the old "bullet," or "hypodermic," theory of communication which claims that communication messages directly and immediately shape thought and behavior.

In the USA children are held over (repeated) until they “get it” despite a massive number of hours of direct instruction from teachers using scientific-based reading programmes. A prepubescent ten year old who has been held back for two years in Grade 3 is not a pretty sight. Why Grade 3 and not Grade 4, 5 or 6? Because high stakes testing begins in Grade 4 and *holdovers* (as children who are repeated *ad infinitum* if they aren’t up to passing these tests, are known) risk the school’s performances on the tests. “Social promotion” (i.e., allowing children to continue to the next Grade level because it is socially appropriate) is an anathema. After all each Grade level has clearly demarcated content to be ingested and regurgitated to the State’s satisfaction before progression can be considered. The consequences for failing to meet accountability requirements based on the results of these tests are schools, teachers, and principals being punished. Schools are closed, then reopened, teachers sacked, then rehired usually in the same schools, principals redeployed to roam central administration with no real jobs to perform, unable to gain other substantive positions, tainted forever as failed principals.

A test of knowledge acquired at each grade level from Kindergarten through the next 10 to 12 years is a fact of life in the USA. Despite scientific-based reading research’s impact on the reading (not literacy) curriculum in the past 20 years (see Lyon, 2005, 1999), despite rigorous and unflinchingly consistent standardised testing at each Grade level the best the USA can manage is coming in around the bottom of OECD countries in reading.

Teachers are certified once they can past a test of standard content knowledge. Many teachers, known as Fellows, have no training in teaching, learning or child development. Some teachers demand respect from students whom they neither understand culturally nor care to respect culturally. Parental presence in many schools is eschewed, even feared, in the

name of school safety. Reading is taught with the Teacher's Edition firmly in hand lest the teacher be tempted to diverge from its wisdom. Children are made to endure lessons which they neither can follow nor understand, in the name of scientific-based reading research which demands they be exposed to Grade level materials despite being 24 months or more behind "Grade Level". Others similarly endure lessons despite reading well above the lesson content. Objective assessments do not provide teachers immediate feedback so they can adjust their lesson to meet students' learning or maximize teachable moments. Feedback from objective assessments in some cases do not find their way back to the teacher for several weeks yet are used to "differentiate" the curriculum (i.e. group/teach according to assessment data – seen as ability grouping of "less able" and "more able" students). Regional and school administrators conduct "walkthroughs" (i.e., observations of lessons, classrooms and bulletin boards outside each classroom) to make sure teachers are doing what they are supposed to be doing at 10:35am, 12:10pm and not a minute later or sooner than their schedule indicates. Feedback is usually through a third party and mostly on micromanagement issues such as the Morning Message was not visible, the *Flow of the Day* (i.e., daily schedule) was not current, materials other than those produced by the publisher of the mandated reading programme were being used or on display in the classroom (this is not permitted), imperfect children's work samples are displayed on the bulletin board, and so on. How and what children are learning is rarely raised. Teachers are rarely asked to give a rationale for what they are doing as observers do not *interrupt* the lesson by speaking with the teacher or the children.

Is this what we want for Australia?

Another perspective

Take another scenario, this time, from Finland...

Special attention must be paid to democracy and societal equality in [an] information society... A significant part of culture, art, youth work and sport takes place within voluntary activities. Voluntary activities are a vehicle for participation, inclusion and influence. They provide citizenship education and tools for life management and promote social inclusion. The school is an increasingly important element in social inclusion and participation. Voluntary activities have diversified, long-term commitment to organized activity has declined, association cultures have subsided and activities increasingly take the form of projects. Young people participate, act, influence and take [a] stand, but not through customary institutional and political channels to the same extent as before. The development of [a] democratic society and the renewal of democratic procedures essentially entail efforts to ensure citizens' influence on decision making.

...

Creativity is a source of development – development of optimism and innovativeness as expressions. Productive creativity entails appreciation of diversity as well as the freedom of research, culture and voluntary activities in both content and structure. A dynamic society values initiative, activity and enterprise, tempered with communal responsibility and caring.

...

Opportunities for comprehensive learning and self-development will be expanded. This means that both (sic) versatile educational contents, well functioning school communities and opportunities to learn throughout life, irrespective of people's age and life situation. Linkages with informal learning are expanding. In addition to formal and organized education, people learn at the workplace, at home, in their hobbies and in voluntary activities. Learning promotes life management, intellectual

growth and well-being. The education system will be developed towards greater flexibility in the recognition of informal learning. The way to promote democracy is to increase citizens' opportunities for influence. Intrinsic to renewing and developing democracy in society is the empowerment of citizens to influence administrative decisions (Ministry of Education, Finland, 2005, 1999).

Education in Australia, qualitatively and quantitatively, is vastly different to that in the USA and Finland.

From an Australian Perspective

Education in Australia has prided itself in being pluralistic, inclusive, professional and sensitive to the diversity of students. Educators at all levels aim to promote civil and active citizenship qualities in their graduates. Such ideals are commonly stated in school, TAFE and university brochures. Government funding of non-government schools is based on the premise that parents have a right to equity and diversity in education for their children. As teachers of children we strive to appreciate the cultures and social milieux of our students, to engage students in learning that is intellectually, socially, physically and culturally relevant and timely. We include parents in dialogue and practice as they meet to discuss schooling issues, and as they come into our classrooms to support their and other children's learning. We respect diversity by providing opportunities to learn in dynamic and profound ways across a rich curriculum which not only honours knowledge *per se* but the application, evaluation and synthesis of that knowledge. How do we do this? Through highly professionally trained teachers who engage freely in life-long learning. Teachers who are encouraged to innovate to explore new ways of providing efficacious learning opportunities for a broad range of students unique to each classroom, school and community. We provide additional support and opportunities for ongoing professional learning for teachers who work with challenging students, students who challenge us behaviourally, emotionally, physically and academically. What works in one classroom, one school, one community does not necessarily transfer to another.

Students engage in a range of learning activities using a range of strategies and skills including, inquiry/problem-based learning, projects, excursions, and hands-on manipulatives. Learning is inclusive, collaborative and social. Teachers do not do all the talking. Children are involved in negotiating and designing learning experiences and the curriculum is planned with the specific students in mind. Learning is dynamic and innovative. Assessment is frequently authentic and provides immediate feedback to the teacher who is able to tailor lessons to students and teachable moments.

Being Number One

How does what we do look alongside what the Finns, who rank number 1 across all areas of the PISA assessment do?

According to the Finnish Minister of Education, Tuula Haatainen,
[t]o achieve [their] excellent results... in the international OECD PISA assessment, Finland has used the same level of resources as the other OECD countries on average. Finnish basic education must be able to meet future challenges and maintain the high standard we have achieved. A high level of knowledge is an asset in international contexts and we must make sure we keep it. Basic education resources need to be increased further because it will generate welfare for future generations.

Moreover, according to Minister Haatainen,

- *there are several reasons for Finland's success in the field of education and training.*
- *The Finnish education system guarantees equal opportunities for basic education to all children and young people, irrespective of their social standing, gender and ethnic background. Education is free and everyone gets the same extensive benefits, such as a school meal, support for school travel and pupil/student welfare services.*
- *We have paid special attention to teachers' training, which guarantees highstandard instruction.*
- *In Finland, the responsibility for providing education rests with local authorities, that is, close to children, young people and their homes. Finns have confidence in education and Finland has long traditions in cooperation between pupils' homes, the school and different authorities.*

Taking a Different Approach

Does this mean Finland plans to stand on its laurels? Not at all. Nor does it mean it will take a deficit approach to supporting struggling readers. It is taking a systemic approach based on its values of diversity, inclusiveness, democracy, social equity, and student and teacher wellbeing. There is no attempt to threaten schools and teachers with the “increased accountability bullet”: more standardised testing and more mandated scientific-based reading programs.

- *Minister Haatainen thinks that there are still new challenges for Finland in further developing education and the education sector as a whole.*
- *Problems we see in society inevitably also invade schools, which may add to exclusion. We have to tackle this phenomenon. Similarly, there is a growing need for pupil/student welfare.*
- *We must also influence attitudes and values at school. This year's theme has been pupils' satisfaction and well-being at school. School facilities and learning environments overall warrant more attention.*
- *The structural challenge facing Finland is that the age groups are declining at an uneven rate, and a large number of teachers will retire in the next few years.*
- *This will be a major challenge for teacher education. We must make input into the teaching profession and teachers' working conditions. Only this will ensure that the teaching profession will continue to be an attractive career choice (Ministry of Education Finland, 2005).*

A Hypodermic Approach

What is the USA planning to do to increase their student outcomes? More standardised testing and mandated specific reading programs (basals by any other name!) which stakeholders cannot agree on how to implement pedagogically and politely dance around the issues leaving children none the wiser. That's no different to their strategies for the past twenty years and still there has been no improvement in reading scores! Australia is already doing much for children's literacy both in Australia and now in the USA!

Whatever we are teaching our children, it needs to be transformative for a transformative information age. No longer can we rest on the transmission model of teaching and learning. Nor can we impose an hypodermic model for teaching literacy akin to the hypodermic theory of communication (see Harms and Kellner, 1998). We cannot inject literacy through direct instruction or one pedagogy or programme any more than we can inject a message to

the receiver when we communicate.

Some widely acknowledged drawbacks of the hypodermic theory of communication echo similar limitations for direct instruction models of literacy and off the shelf scientific-based reading programmes. Drawbacks include:

a. it ignores the diversity of the audience, for example, in a society as mixed as modern Scotland

Programmed direct instruction to a whole class, to small groups or to individuals does not take into account diversity of students in a pluralistic society like Australia.

b. it does not take into account the different purposes for which the audience use the media product, for example, information, entertainment etc

Scientific-based reading programmes do not take into account the many and varied purposes and understandings children bring to classes and to their learning (see Huber, 2000 and 1995).

c. it ignores other effects which media products elicit such as our ability to vent our anger at the product, for example, reactions in the letters page

Likewise, scientific-based reading programmes ignore the resistance students manifest in the form of out of control behaviour and learning difficulties.

Despite these concerns this model remains popular with politicians and even with some elements of the media which ignore the fact that the audience can disagree with the media product's message (The Herald, 2005).

Similarly, students do not connect with the teacher's message in direct instruction. A few years ago, on an international flight to the USA, sitting next to a Grade 1 teacher from North Carolina I learned the depth of fear and shallowness of understanding of this teacher. She confided how she pre-tested and post-tested every time she taught something. Now, this may be commendable practice when used to drive the provision of learning opportunities. However, her *raison d'être* was far more sinister. She did this so in twenty years time, in the event a student might sue her because she did not teach them to read, she could show the court what she had taught! What she had taught! The assumption being she had explicitly taught something (i.e. *injected* reading into the student) and that was where her accountability stopped. I do not believe this teacher was alone then, nor is she now! She missed the point that teaching is not learning.

As we all know, scientific-based research is no more or less vulnerable to abuses and misinformation than any other form of research. In the USA the infamous scientific-based research with controlled trials and experimental groups in accordance with the finest algorithm for such research lead us astray. For example, the current Vioxx scandal in which it is claimed tens of thousands of people died from side effects after taking this "miracle" drug despite stringent clinical trials showing its efficacy. Allegedly, unlike the favourable studies, results counter to these findings were not routinely published. The makers of Vioxx are now facing multimillion dollar class action law suits. So much for the efficacy of scientific-based research. Complacency makes a strange bedfellow. Shame Thomas Kuhn's (1977) message about scientific tradition and change wasn't heeded!

Another Way Forward

Not all is doom and gloom. A constructive way forward can be gleaned and adapted from some of what the Ministry of Education Finland (2005) has already achieved and what it plans to achieve in the near future. Improving the literacy levels of all Australians is certainly a much more complex issue than one that might be solved by simply mandating a scientific-based reading programme or a particular pedagogy. As with Finland, the approach would guarantee equal opportunities (i.e. inclusive, democratic and socially equitable) for basic education for citizenship in a democratic society to all children and young people, irrespective of their social standing, gender and ethnic background. Education that is free and everyone gets the same extensive benefits, such as a school meal, support for school travel and pupil/student welfare services.

- pay special attention to teachers' training, which guarantees high-standard instruction by having teachers who have a deep understanding of literacy, child development, learning and a wide range of pedagogies from which to reach all children. Moreover, funds for ongoing teacher learning based on classroom-based research and reflective and collaborative practices would ensure education of our children is paramount, timely and relevant at all stages. Additionally, funding for intensive preventative support for students identified at risk would likely negate the need for expensive intervention at later stages.

- ensure the responsibility for providing education rests with local authorities, that is, close to children, young people and their homes. Strengthen cooperation between students' homes, the school and the community.

- focus on attitudes and values, as well as teachers' and students' satisfaction and well-being at school. School facilities and learning environments overall warrant more attention.

Like Finland, the structural challenge facing Australia is that the age groups are declining at an uneven rate, and a large number of teachers will retire in the next few years. This will be a major challenge for teacher education. We must make input into the teaching profession and teachers' working conditions. Only this will ensure that the teaching profession will continue to be an attractive career choice and a great benefit to all children who go to school. A real shot in the arm for all concerned.

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APPENDIX 3

A SUBMISSION
to
DR BRENDAN NELSON,
FEDERAL MINISTER for EDUCATION, SCIENCE & TRAINING
from
AUSTRALASIAN ASSOCIATION of PROGRESSIVE and ALTERNATIVE EDUCATION
(AAPAE)
 Re: REQUIREMENTS FOR ACCOUNTABILITY BY PARTICIPATION IN
 STANDARDISED ASSESSMENT PROGRAMMES
 in Commonwealth Quadrennial Administrative Guidelines 2001-2004

Presented at a meeting with
 Alan Tudge, Senior Schools' Advisor to Dr Nelson,
 Juli Gassner-Gering, AAPAE Committee Member, Teacher, Kinma School, Sydney
 Derek Sheppard, AAPAE Member, Elected Staff, The Booroobin Sudbury School Qld
 Cecelia Bradley, AAPAE President
 Wednesday 29th October 2003, Parliament House, Canberra.

Dear Dr Nelson,

Our association would like to thank you for the opportunities to meet with your advisors to discuss various educational matters. We have welcomed the chance to introduce AAPAE and articulate our philosophies, practices and processes and showcase the special regard we place on values in education such as freedom and honesty which you have recently been highlighting and encouraging. In this submission we focus on an area our members consider very important.

AAPAE requests:

1. That in the light of consistent choice by the parents and students of many AAPAE Member Schools, to refrain from participating in standardised testing, and ongoing national and international research, the educational place and value of standardised testing and aggregated reporting against literacy, numeracy, and other curricula areas performance measures and targets be reconsidered.
2. That member schools of AAPAE be granted, at the time of their registration and for the period of their registration, upon application, without penalisation to their funding,, whole school exemptions from the requirements for accountability by participation in standardised assessment and reporting aggregated literacy and numeracy performance.
3. That on enrolment at a Member School of AAPAE, parents will sign a form which grants exemption, for their child, from participating in standardised assessment and aggregated performance indicators in all curriculum areas, for the whole period of enrolment at the school, and that these exemptions do not penalise the school's funding or the educational status of the child."

(Please see APPENDIX 1 for a brief summary of AAPAE's position on Basic Skills Testing and National Benchmarking)

From 2002, arrangements whereby a whole school could apply to the Commonwealth for exemption from standardised assessment were changed to one whereby each child's parents in consultation with the school, could seek the exemption. AAPAE appreciates the recognition by the Minister and the government of the parents' right to make the decision whether to test in relation to their specific child. Where schools have the support of their parents, students and community to continue their preference to assess individually and be accountable in more holistic ways, we seek to have the right of exemption re-instated to the school as a whole. These same parents who are making the decision not to test are choosing our schools on the strength of stated values and practices. In the light of government and public belief in the efficacy of testing, long established schools, have appropriately reviewed and reaffirmed their principles of individual, non-comparative/competitive, student/teacher/parent determined assessment. In newly established schools they are a core value which many parents seek by coming to these school. The reality of having to address, communicate and debate this matter every year places a heavy use of energy, resources and time for all in the school communities. It also creates some uncertainty, stress and worry for the children which can effect their love of and process of learning.

We realise that governments want the full cohort of students to be accounted for in the reporting process but we urge you to consider the value of individual difference and diversity in education and take into account that our small numbers make our exemption statistically insignificant. Different forms could provide informative data on alternatives methods of assessment and accountability. This is an opportunity for innovative research and policy development in which we would participate with enthusiasm. During our discussion, your advisor, Alan Tudge, expressed a concern that we may be seeking to avoid administrative processes. We would like to assure the minister that this is not the case and to state again our willingness to be accountable in ways which enhance the learning of the students.

AAPAE schools are accountable to their communities and the governments who fund them and welcome this as an inclusive, informing process. They request choice in how they go about this process so that it is consistent with the needs of the individual students and the constitution or "charter" of the school. Our schools emphasise power being shared with the children as well as among adults, student participation in the decision making processes, negotiated curricula, individual and self- assessment, and co-operative, equal, caring relationships between adults and children and democratic governance.

The process of standardised testing and aggregated reporting has become almost an automatic part of the national and international education scenes. We understand the reasons for the development of this and how the government view it as a transparent, effective, system of accountability and sharing of information. We believe there are other than the quantifiable, comparative ways to provide this. We are concerned about the whole, short and long term impact the processes have on the learning, life and well being of the individual students. Just as AAPAE schools are facing possibly the strongest pressure to conform to these requirements, evidence from around the world is mounting that the effects of this process may be counterproductive to its aims and need to be questioned and debated. Last week on Foreign Correspondent on ABC TV there was a disturbing report of the consequences on many children through to their adult lives of a strongly competitive, comparative, exam oriented, strictly controlled, authoritarian education system and society of Japan. AAPAE was fortunate to have at our recent annual conference in Brisbane, Yoshiyuki Nagata,¹ a Senior Researcher with the National Institute for Educational Policy Research (NIER) in Japan. In an earlier work, published in the NIER book to which a

Founder of an AAPAE Member School was also an invited participant, and discussed at the International Democratic Education Conference in New Zealand in 2002, he spoke of the problems confronting education in Japan and highlighted the fact that the Japanese Ministry of Education is responding to the fast growing school refusal issue with reforms aimed at promoting “diversity, individuality and freedom”. He examined the burgeoning of “free schools and “free spaces” which the alienated children are choosing to attend. We also had students and teacher representatives from these places sharing their real life experience with us.

At the AAPAE Conference in Brisbane, 2003, Yoshiyuki gave a briefing of his most recent research into funding, quality assurance and government attitudes to alternative schools which is soon to be published in English. His conclusions are pointing to the benefit of positive support and caring government administration in countries where the expression of democracy includes listening to minorities, less government regulation, no competition testing, less standardisation and alternatives are cherished. Denmark and Oregon (US) are examples of this. Denmark has 80% govt funding and less control, the govt attitude is supportive and caring, listening, non-competitive, with testing later in high school. Recent studies by the National Teachers’ Union in UK² conducted by Cambridge and Warwick Universities concluded that tests distort the curriculum and educational experience available to children, especially low achievers, and they constrict the curriculum. There is no evidence that the tests have led to individual pupils reaching higher levels of attainment and substantial evidence that it hampers learning. So overwhelming is the evidence and the practical experience, that the teachers in the UK have voted to boycott the tests. A research review drawing from studies across the world, conducted for the Government funded Evidence for Policy and Practice Information Centre (EPPI), July 2003, examine, 187 studies on the impact of repeated testing on pupils’ motivation and learning.

The review’s findings are an indictment of the government’s approach. It found that ‘high stakes’ testing led to pupils asking not how much they had learnt but how well or badly they had

¹ Nagata Y & Kikuchi E (2002) *Sociology of Alternative Education* ‘Publicness’ Generated from Diversity in

YNagata & R Manivannan (Eds) *Prospect & Retrospect of Alternative Education in Asia-Pacific Region*, Japan

National Institute for Educational Policy Research

A copy of this book was forwarded to the former Minister with the compliments of the Booroobin Sudbury School.

² Membership & Communications Dept of National Union of Teachers

–www.teachers.org.uk (2003) *The Case*

Against National Curriculum Tests

done on the tests. The study found that the pupils saw schools as places for passing tests rather than places for learning”

The evidence is that pupils suffer detrimental effects from the pressure of National Curriculum tests...repeated testing has a de-motivational affect...reinforced low self image, led to high levels of test anxiety... pupils became more stressed, not less, as their experience increased.

A study by the Institute of Public Policy Research, found among many other findings, that pupils’ mental health problems were directly linked to pressures connected with testing. The University of Ontario evaluated national Literacy and Numeracy strategies and found that tests had created a situation where primary curriculum had narrowed to meet external targets.

The UK’s OFSTED Annual Report found that majority of head teachers reported a

continuing squeeze on the curriculum.

A recent Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) Study, the PISA REPORT³ found that countries such as Finland, which was among the countries having the highest numbers of 15 year old students achieving well in literacy, have minimal framework for national curriculum and NO national tests. Countries which have the highest numbers of pupils achieving well do not have the burden of high stakes national tests, national targets and performance tables.

Research by King's College team concluded that national tests are "useless as a measure of educational progress and are based on incorrect assumptions" There is an "Ill-judged confidence in the reliability of the short external tests which are a dominant instrument of public policy" The College's research quoted 250 articles by researchers in several countries which concluded that there was firm evidence that formative assessment or assessment for learning produced quantitative evidence of significant learning gains.

Almost 60% of teachers in the Warwick University study disagreed that the National Curriculum tests reflected pupils' achievement 8% agreed. 90% of teachers in the study believed that school performance tables should go

(Please see APPENDIX 2 The Case Against National Curriculum Tests for more comprehensive discussion of these issues.)

A similar story is happening in the United States. The experience with high stakes testing shows how far the power of testing in education may take us and is contrary to our search for a fair, equal and just education. When 500 students were pushed out of the Birmingham Alabama School in order to boost test scores, The World of Opportunity (WOO) was founded to provide a way for these students and others in similar situations to continue their education.

³ Home Knowledge and Skills for Life - First result from PISA 2000

Literacy Skills for the World of Tomorrow - Further results from PISA 2000,

Educational consultant and psychologist Dr David Cohen⁴ with years of experience as teacher, professor in education, senior education bureaucrat in Victoria and NSW and member of the founding team of many alternative schools in Australia, has exposed the 'sacred cow' that parents prize academic success highest over all educational outcomes. He has shown that groups of parents, teachers and students consistently value and rate getting along with others, self esteem, showing and receiving affection, critical thinking and problem solving rather than memorisation and testable cognitive/knowledge related tasks.

(See APPENDIX 3 Cohen, D. *Perils and Pitfalls of Standardised Testing*, the Keynote Address at AAPAE Annual Conference, Adelaide 2002)

Dr Martin Covington,⁵ Professor at University of California, Berkeley, and a main contributor to the California Task Force's academic report on the relationship between self esteem and failure at school and a leader in understanding why kids fail at school, reports that the relationship between shame and blame and school failure is intense and unmistakable. Shame, triggered by belief that they are stupid or not smart enough to do well leads to poor performance, then to feeling demoralised. Achievement is linked to brilliance and ability, not to effort. Students motivated by the threat of intense shame, avoid working hard. Many do not get relief when they do well. They are perfectionists, expecting that the only the very highest quality performance will demonstrate that they do not deserve scorn for not being smart enough. Even some students in the top 2% on standardised tests think they deserve shame for not being as smart as their most intelligent peers. A cruel dilemma occurs, either you work hard and feel ashamed or do not work hard and feel guilty. Covington goes on to state that the one of the broad social influences leading to this shaming

is competition with others which creates the conditions for shame and demoralisation. He recognises the difficulties of changing the traditional morality and dominant paradigm of reward and punishment in all its subtle and obvious forms, so as a positive solution, he advocates a school system which adds an alternative basis for motivating students. He promotes learning for learning's sake, for the joy of learning.

As educators, teachers parents and students and founders of independent alternative, progressive, democratic schools, we know that there is an over emphasis on testing. Many of our concerns and worries about the re-emphasis on testing regimes since the late '80s are being confirmed. We urge you to reconsider this matter and to value the special character of AAPAE schools and work with us to continue to provide joyful learning. We value other forms of assessment and accountability and want to give valuable time to forms which relate to the skills, talents and interests of our learners.

AAPAE's members' views about assessment are as diverse as are our schools and the individuals involved. We believe that the student is the key person in the assessment process
⁴Cohen,D. (1992) *Liberating Curriculum from Sacred Cows*. Sydney, Australian Education Network Inc. p16

⁵Martin V. Covington *Goal Theory, Motivation, and School Achievement: An Integrative Review* Annual Review of Psychology. Volume 51, Page 171-200, Feb 2000

www.google.com/u/berkeley?q=martin+covington&site=search=berkeley.edu&domains=berkeley.edu www.berkeley.edu/calparents/letterhome/2003/spring/facprofile.html

and that all else flows from this. Some accept that the best person to know about progress and assessment is the teacher. This is also confirmed by the UK research. Most of us believe that this is a combined process between the learner, the 'teacher' and the parents. We would like to see more explicit provision for alternative means of assessment, communication and accountability that fit the specific philosophy of the individual school, and its consequent day-to-day practices, in which parents have enrolled their children.

Thank you for listening and considering our submission and please convey our best wishes to the Minister and hopes that he will take in account the unique role of AAPAE Schools in the life of Australian Education .

Believing we can improve schooling by more tests is like believing you can grow taller by measuring your height Robert Schaeffer of Fairtest

Not everything that counts can be counted and not everything that can be counted counts .Albert Einstein

If more testing was the solution to problems in our schools, testing would have solved them long ago Bill Goodling ex Chair House Education Committee

The 4th grade MCAS is longer than the Massachusetts Bar Exam

APPENDIX 1

A Brief Summary of AAPAE's Position on Statewide Testing and National Benchmarking.

AAPAE values the longstanding support in Australia for respecting the rights of parents, and we include students and teachers, to chose the what, where, how, when and why of their education and that this choice is enabled through some access to public funding.

Participating in comparative, competitive, standardised testing is contrary to the long held and publicly stated philosophies, constitutions and educational processes of many AAPAE schools which many informed parents and children have selected

Parents and students choose our schools in the full know ledge that, and often because, we do not base our education on standardised, comparative, competitive assessment and examinations.

We value other forms of assessment and want to give valuable teachers and staff time to work with forms which relate to the individual skills, talents and interests and learning

styles of our learners.

AAPAE schools work to create conditions which promote learning. Considerations such as learner's individual needs, interests and learning styles, conducive, communal learning environments and significant others who join the learning process are paramount to effective learning. AAPAE is concerned about the potential for negative effects on love of learning, self esteem, resilience and student wellbeing inherent in competition and standardised testing which create stress and anxiety and thereby hinder learning in the short term and inhibit lifelong learning.

AAPAE believes, and mounting evidence shows, that tests discriminate in many ways and do not account for diversity and differences in children's learning rates and styles, language, concepts, culture, and resources for coaching and outcomes that are both financial and educational.

Tests measure narrow aspects and they take little or no account of creativity, self-confidence, self-esteem and resilience, self-management, self-direction, community participation skills and the expression and communication of ideas and emotions.

Curriculum becomes narrow and test-focussed.

Teachers and as a result, their students may become test - focussed, stressed, worried and defensive, all counter- productive to effective educational relationships.

Reporting of results by governments and media fosters stereotypes and inaccurate generalisations and comparison and send mixed messages about the availability of follow up resources.

The Case Against Testing – Research Evidence (2003 18th November)

<http://www.teachers.org.uk/story.php?id=2938&PHPSESSID=2432cf7d0cffe019db858e2e4b45dbcd>

This document sets out eight arguments that are used to defend National Curriculum tests and indicates some of the recent research evidence that shows why they are mistaken. Some of the research referred to was commissioned by the NUT, but written independently and some of it is by leading academic researchers, including some done for the Government itself. All of it gives very clear reasons as to why National Curriculum tests should be abolished. More information about all of the research referred to can be found at the end of the document.

Teachers have been concerned consistently about the effects of the National Curriculum tests on their pupils. The strong correlation between the academic research findings and the views of NUT members, as reported by the University of Warwick in its survey in 2002, is a powerful indication of teachers' understanding, knowledge and commitment to the children in their care.

1. Tests improve pupil learning and raise standards

There is no evidence that the assessment arrangements for any of the Key Stages have led to individual pupils reaching higher levels of attainment than they would have done if national tests had not been introduced. There is a substantial amount of evidence, however, that the current way of testing pupils hampers their learning.

A recent research review ¹ from across the world, conducted for the Government-funded body, EPPI (Evidence for Policy and Practice Information Centre). examined 187 studies on the impact of repeated testing on pupils' motivation and learning. The review's findings are an indictment of the Government's approach. It found that high stakes testing led to pupils asking not how much they had learnt but how well or badly they had done against the tests. It reduced pupils' learning potential, and had a detrimental effect on educational

outcomes. It found that pupils came to regard school in terms of passing tests rather than acquiring an understanding of what they had learned one of the most authoritative studies ever carried out, it emphasises that National Curriculum tests undermine learning.

It found that the use of repeated practice tests impresses on pupils the importance of the tests. This encourages them to adapt test-taking strategies designed to avoid effort and responsibility. Repeated practice tests are, therefore, a barrier to higher order thinking.

The evidence shows that teachers adapt their teaching style to train pupils to pass tests even when the pupils do not have the understanding or higher order thinking skills that the tests are intended to measure. Increases in high-stakes test scores were therefore attributed more to teachers and pupils becoming familiar with test requirements than to real improvements in the quality of pupils' learning.

The Demos publication *Beyond Measure 2* concluded that the assessment system “*measures recall of knowledge rather than depth of understanding and tests only a narrow section of the curriculum*” and that “*the notion of measuring a cohort of learners as a whole is absurd. We know children mature at different rates. What we need is assessment by demand*”.

These views are confirmed by a survey of members that the NUT commissioned from the University of Warwick last year³. Fewer than one in five said that the tests helped identify areas of improvement for pupils, with many commenting that the tests duplicated knowledge they already had from their own teacher assessment.

The Primary Assessment, Curriculum and Experience (PACE) project⁴ raised serious questions about whether short-term gains in attainment scores are being achieved at the expense of learning in the long-term.

It found that as pupils moved through Key Stage 2, they became less confident in their view of their own learning. Children tended to use criteria of neatness, correctness and quantity when judging their own and others' work, rather than understanding and effort. The report concluded that the current over-emphasis on the basics had unwittingly led to a reduction in pupil motivation to learn. A significant proportion of pupils were playing the system, with superficial learning and trying to avoid boredom.

The PACE project provides powerful confirmation that the current testing regime is in danger of closing down, rather than opening up learning opportunities for young people now and in the future.

It is interesting to note that in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, children do just as well, if not better, than children in England, particularly in Key Stages 1 and 2 without a national testing system. In Wales, for instance, results at Key Stage 2 have improved faster, and are now higher than in England, from a lower starting point.

2. Tests do not have a negative impact on pupils' well-being

Pupils, particularly at Key Stages one and two, have been proven to suffer detrimental effects in their attitudes to school due to the pressure of testing. As far back as 1996, it was reported by Professor Kathy Sylva “the association between formal teaching, higher anxiety and lower self esteem has been found”⁵. More recently, this view was supported by Dr Sean Neill's research into pupil behaviour, on behalf of the NUT, which found that “increasing curriculum regulation and inflexibility prevented teachers from adapting their teaching to the interests of potentially disruptive children”.⁶

A recent survey carried out by the Liberal Democrats⁷ reported that a significant

proportion of both Years 2 and Year 3 children showed symptoms of stress. However, a higher proportion of Year 2 children showed these symptoms during the summer term when SATs were taken, with 40 per cent of parents saying that

45
their child's symptoms of stress occurred either in the run up to or during the summer term.

A study by the Institute of Public Policy Research⁸ found that pupils' mental health problems were directly linked to pressures connected with testing and recommended that the Government should take a less prescriptive approach if it was to halt the increase in mental health problems in schools. It found that "*there are now well over 1,000 primary aged children being treated for psychoses, severe depression and eating disorders*"

The Government's refusal to accept that the National Curriculum tests are detrimental to pupils' well-being is particularly surprising, given that the Government - funded EPPI study mentioned previously concluded that repeated testing and examination had a de-motivational effect on pupils. Testing was found to reinforce the low self-image of lower-achieving pupils and led to high levels of test anxiety. It also indicated that pupils became more, not less, stressed by testing as their experience increased. This suggests that increasing the incidence of testing at earlier ages has the potential to increase test aversion later in a child's school career.

One of the most shocking findings of the report stated that, after the introduction of the National Curriculum tests, low-achieving pupils had lower self-esteem than higher achieving pupils. Before the tests were introduced, however, there had been no correlation between self-esteem and achievement.

Testing was found to be motivating only for those who believed they would be successful and even then, motivation is directed towards performance targets rather than learning targets. For less successful pupils, repeated tests both lower self-esteem and reduces the effort they put into learning, which has the effect of increasing the gap between high and low achieving pupils.

3. Tests have not affected pupils' access to a broad and balanced curriculum

Michael Fullan's evaluation of the National Literacy and Numeracy Strategy (NLNS)⁹ for the Government found that the much greater attention given to the National Curriculum tests has created a situation where the primary curriculum has been narrowed to meet external targets. The report recommended that schools should be allowed to implement the National Curriculum in such a way as to ensure that significant and lasting improvement is made, for the benefit of pupils, rather than to meet national targets.

Michael Fullan also reported that such a focus was short sighted because of its negative consequences on teachers in terms of overload and stress, which would detract from their daily classroom performance and contributed to the number of primary teachers leaving the profession. The Government chose to bury this analysis in the style of Jo Moore.

In June 2002, the NUT published, 'A Life in Teaching', commissioned by the NUT from Maurice Galton and John MacBeath at the University of Cambridge¹⁰. The report examined the effects of policy changes on primary teachers' practice in the last decade

In examining the amount of time available for teaching each day in primary schools, they found that:

"Art, drama, music and ICT are being squeezed and are only partially covered by lunchtime and after-school clubs The decline in the curriculum time available for these creative subjects is matched by a

decline in teachers' own sense of creativity."

At Key Stage 2, they found that typically, an extra hour per week for English and an half hour for Science had been provided at the expense of music and "other" arts activities. As many hours per week were spent on English as for history, geography, D & T, ICT and art combined.

The key issue that emerged from the research was the over-emphasis on a few subjects and the pressure to get through the curriculum at expense of children's learning. As creative subjects had been squeezed, there were fewer opportunities for children to be good at something, which led to pupil disaffection.

These dangers are echoed by findings reported in OFSTED's Annual Report ¹¹, which said that:

"The majority of headteachers report a continuing squeeze on the curriculum" and that "a relatively low proportion – about one in sixteen – of primary schools having a full inspection can demonstrate the ability to combine high standards in the core subjects with a particularly rich and varied curriculum". Given the pressures on the primary curriculum, it is unsurprising that at Key Stage 1 and 2 "the gulf between what pupils achieve in the core subjects and in the rest of the curriculum remains a concern".

This view is confirmed by the NUT's own survey of members. Fifty-five cent of respondents agreed strongly that the National Curriculum tests had narrowed the curriculum offered to pupils in their schools, frequently mentioning the squeezing out of the arts in particular.

4. The way teachers teach has improved as a result of the tests

The NLNS evaluation report ⁹ referred to previously identifies two key concerns regarding tests and targets. Not only that there has been a redistribution of curriculum time away from non-tested subjects towards tested subjects, but also a concentration on teaching pupils how to take the tests:

"We see some evidence that the high political profile of the 2002 national targets skewed efforts in the direction of activities that would lead to increases in the one highly publicised score. Many teachers acknowledge that they "teach to the test" in Key Stage 2."

The MacBeath and Galton research ¹⁰ for the NUT gave some worrying details on what this can actually mean in the classroom. For example, they found that only 10.4 per cent of Key Stage 2 teachers were able to talk daily to individual pupils about their own idea/interests – an activity teachers valued as being particularly developmental for pupils. Informality and spontaneity were regarded as things of the past. There was felt to be no time to develop pupil self-esteem, which could lead to behaviour problems. There has also been a huge increase in whole class teaching at expense of children having choice of subject or method, compared to before the introduction of the National Curriculum tests. They also found that schools were increasingly squeezing more teaching hours out of school day, for example, earlier start times, shortened break and lunch times no afternoon breaks, which resulted in problems of concentration and motivation for pupils and put intense pressure on teachers.

The survey of NUT members' views on the National Curriculum tests³ found that 50 per cent of respondents felt very strongly that tests took up too much class time, with nearly half of respondents (47 per cent) spending between a sixth and a third of the school year on preparation for the tests. Over three-quarters (77 per cent) said that the tests affected the way they taught.

5. Tests are a reliable way of measuring pupils' achievements

Research by King's College, London, led by Paul Black and Dylan Wiliam¹² has found that national tests at 7, 11 and 14 are *"useless as a measure of educational progress and are based on incorrect assumptions."* They say that rising test scores demonstrate little more than teachers' ability to teach to the test. This adds to growing concerns that tests lead to "skin deep" learning. Black and Wiliam also noted *"there is an ill-judged confidence in the reliability of the short external tests which are the dominant instrument of public policy, whereas in fact there is no well-researched evidence of the limits of error. It is also clear that there is no intention to conduct such research – despite the fact*

49 that it is possible to show, with the slender evidence available, that the chances of a student being awarded a level or grade that is in error might well alarm the public if they were widely known".

Their work also reported that it is impossible to use end of Key Stage tests as a means of gauging pupils' progress over time as the test papers, questions, format and mark schemes are frequently changed. They concluded that, if you cannot trust the information the tests provide, there is little point in using them.

This finding was reflected in the survey of NUT members' attitudes to testing. A significant proportion of respondents were clearly concerned at the accuracy of external marking of the tests. Forty point three per cent said that external marking was not accurate or reliable with a further 43 per cent having mixed views. Forty per cent of respondents also felt that the tests did not accurately reflect pupils' achievements.

6. The general public supports National Curriculum tests

The British Social Attitudes Survey¹³, published by the National Centre for Social Research in December 2002, found that over 97 per cent of the population believe that more exams and tests will do nothing to improve children's education.

7. There is no credible alternative to National Curriculum tests

A review of research literature conducted by Paul Black and Dylan William¹² quoted over 250 articles by researchers in several countries and concluded that there was firm evidence that formative assessment produced quantitative evidence of significant learning gains. There have been few initiatives in education with so strong a body of evidence to support such a claim to raise standards.

Their books, 'Inside the Black Box' and 'Working Inside the Black Box'¹⁴, provides evidence that formative assessment (or assessment for learning) can improve pupils' attainment. Assessment for learning does this by focusing on helping pupils to learn better – without teaching to the test and without increasing test taking or test practice. Pupils will be better motivated to learn, will learn better and achieve more, but only if schools can focus on promoting formative assessment practice and use testing only when it is really necessary.

8. Tests are a cost-effective way of securing accountability

It is impossible to give an exact figure when you think about all the costs associated with the tests at school and LEA level and the amount of time teachers, parents and pupils put in preparing for them are taken into consideration. However, the following figures come from the Qualification and Curriculum Authority's (QCA) total budget of £77,128,920 for 2002/03:

i. to regulate external national qualifications and tests (such as GCSEs, A Levels and GNVQs) in order to maintain and improve standards of awards - £1,669,000.

ii. to develop and report on assessments that measure learners' achievements in relation to national standards (i.e. SATs) - £33,907,993 (or 43.9 per cent of QCA's total budget) ¹⁵. This figure probably includes the optional tests, but these would account for a relatively small proportion of the total amount, as they do not change year on year. To put this into context, only £1,682,705 (or 2 per cent of the budget) is spent on monitoring, developing and supporting the curriculum, including the National Curriculum.

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Inside the Black Box is available from the Publications Secretary, Department of Education & Professional Studies, King's College London, Franklin-Wilkins Building, Waterloo Bridge Wing, London, SE1 9NN. Tel: 020 7848 3189.
Price £3.00/copy or £1.00/copy if 50 or more are ordered.

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