

Political Guts

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The Hon. Julia Gillard
Education Minister
CC Prime Minister Kevin Rudd
PO Box 6022
House of Representatives
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Ms Gillard

Today I heard a teacher describing her day as a series of 35 minute crowd control sessions, whilst trying to impart knowledge to a large group of semi-trained animals. She told me that the morale in her school was low, because her experience was the experience of every teacher there. The management of the school is very out of touch with the teaching staff, demonstrating that by appointing an unqualified person as the HOD.

Whilst this may be just one school, after making a few discreet enquiries, it appears that it's not an isolated situation. Another school is charging parents for school equipment usage and stationery.

Looking at the products of the current education system, it seems that what our school systems turn out is not really what employers are looking for either. Their primary requirements are graduates with English skills, especially the ability to spell, understand grammar and punctuation, to enable them to write quality letters to clients. High on the list is the ability to add and subtract. Simple arithmetic. They also require people with initiative, people who can look at a situation and to be proactive with it, create business profit, to earn the money plus a profit margin that it has cost the employer to hire them. Employers have been telling me for a decade and a half that in many cases, these fundamentals are not being met. They are forced to employ grade 12 graduates who are just not able to handle the menial tasks of writing up orders or calculating change for a sale.

The Australian Education System is heavily bureaucratic and top heavy. The Federal level provides the funding that the states compete for, and then doles out to its various regional centres to filter down to the schools. Each state has a different curriculum; each state has its own management model. None of them appear to be providing the product that our economy needs. Neither are they in synch with each other, or the needs of their clients despite our low unemployment levels. These are artificial, created by a labour shortage, not employer satisfaction.

The system needs an overhaul. I have suggestions on how that can be done, starting immediately, to correct the major systemic flaws that the Australian Education System has evolved into.

Firstly, we have children from kindergarten age to grade 12, right across Australia, all citizens of this great nation. Yet we have a different education curriculum in each state, and what applies in one state is hardly worth a postage stamp in another. We have regional school boards run by people who have 'local autonomy', yet are operating under an intensely bureaucratic system which although empowering them to make certain decisions, refuses or is unable to provide them with the fundamental tools for delivering the services they are employed to provide – in particular, a great education to the willing kids that join them around the age of 5 years in each February, and remain with them for the next decade or more.

My solution for this is to bypass the state management model, by nationalising the system and providing a single, national curriculum. This would eliminate the competition between states for the

education dollar and provide the same, quality education nationally to every child. Our students, the children who are the future of this nation deserve better than a bidding war for their education.

Our teachers also deserve a single employer, so that their skills and qualifications are transferrable throughout Australia. Should they transfer, they would know that their qualifications, skills and abilities would be recognised and valued wherever they went in Australia.

There have been a series of attempts over the last couple of decades to create a single curriculum, but while ever the states are competing in the manner they do, for funding, resources and teachers, they are unlikely to ever achieve that goal. In a competitive environment, it could hardly be expected that the competitors would share resources and opportunities.

Once the mechanisms are in place to have a single national curriculum, the time is ripe to choose that curriculum. The choices are made easy by looking at the deficiencies of the current education product and remedying the faults. What our children and employers are crying out for is a relevant and useful education, with practical outcomes for the students in their everyday lives, going forward into the future, and the instilling of the “yearn to learn” to enable them to continue the education process, to see themselves as a “work in progress”, and to have the confidence to embark on new education as and when they require it throughout their lives.

This suggests a “back to basics” approach, which, even though we are in the computer age, must also include the three “R”s of reading, writing and arithmetic. Allied to that and interwoven will be the computer skills we all need nowadays. However, also absolutely critical in this new age is the ability to think like a business owner/operator, to understand either how to become a valued employee of a business, or eventually the owner or manager of a profitable business.

On my website at <http://www.politicalguts.com/id27.html>, I suggest a list of topics that must be considered essential components of any curriculum. Besides the three “R”s our graduates also need to have the ability to think business strategy, learn to recognise and create opportunity, know how to market their skills, expertise and labour, be able to carve out a career path, and have the personal development skills to handle the curve balls that life throws at them.

If this sounds too much, think about it – this is what is required from every adult as they go through life – where else can they get it, other than at their start in life, their education system?

Technology is creating and destroying career paths so much faster than anyone could have imagined a couple of decades ago. Our children will be working in careers which did not exist when we went to school, and many careers which seem safe now will not exist in another two decades. One critical area of education which currently gets only a passing mention is the area of business planning and career development. Although these are two titles, they essentially describe the same situation – forward planning the next stage of the business of being alive – whether in a standard business model, or in the business of hiring out their labour.

Please, look at my website for all of the ideas that I have had passed on to me. Study them, and consider them as you look for solutions to the problems of a crumbling educational system that is constantly calling to you for help. To this end, I will support you as much as possible, by providing all the community support I can muster for your cause. I will also notify the media of these initiatives so that they can help you in whatever way they can to gain the active support of the public, and bipartisan support from the whole of government. I may also contact relevant members of the State Governments.

I urge you to not only consider these initiatives, but to act urgently to implement them.

Yours sincerely,

Ray Jamieson
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