Submission, Review to Inform a Better and Fairer Education System Consultation 2 August 2023

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BACKGROUND

I was initially trained in primary teachers' colleges with staff from primary teaching backgrounds before amalgamation with secondary based universities. The curriculum I was given to follow was traditional, based on 'what worked', written by the experienced (coal faced) infant and primary teachers before the ideologies of 'whole language' and 'constructivism' were adopted from 1980-1990, into ITE and Curriculum. With an effective curriculum to follow, it was unusual not to be an effective primary class teacher.

In the remedial sector, special education teachers did not change our teaching practice because what we knew always worked; direct, systematic, incremental teaching of English and Mathematics skills, which scientific evidence studies now prove is best teaching practice. Our students needed a slower pace of teaching, more practice, and more time to master essential skills and did not leave school illiterate or innumerate.

It was common classroom practice that ALL F-2 children mastered the foundational English skills of Handwriting, Phonemic Awareness then Systematic Synthetic Phonics, Vocabulary, Basic Grammar, and Punctuation) and the foundational Mathematics skills (Counting to 10 in Prep, to 20 in Year 1, to 100 in Year 2 , firstly the Concepts then the Operations of Place Value (HTU) Addition to 10, then 20, then 100, Subtraction to 10, then to 20 then to 100, Multiplication to 10, then to 20, then to 100, Division and fractions to 10, then 20, then 100, taught one at a time, and basic Measurement of Length, Weight, Capacity, Time BEFORE Year 3 so they could build upon those skills.

The curriculum was uncrowded, simple, unhurried, unpressured, and effective. Classes were academically more homogeneous than now. For example, a Year 2 teacher at worst taught classes of children with skills mastered from Year 1 to 3; a two-year span, manageable to provide learning tasks at 3 levels of difficulty to cater for learning differences, whereas now a Year 2 teacher may have to struggle to cater for children with skills from Foundation Level to Year 3, a 4-year span, an almost impossible and very stressful challenge. This example gets worse as year levels progress.

Classroom teachers attended ONE staff meeting per week to be informed about only what we needed to know as School Principals and the Secretary did the administration. Class teachers were responsible for the teaching and welfare of the children in their classes of 35 to 39 children. There were 3 terms with brief end of term reports and 2 parent teacher meetings per year. The teacher in charge of Year F-2, teacher in charge of Years 3-4, and teacher in charge of Years 5-6 met with class teachers to review the Yearly Curriculum from our State Education Dept that we had to write up and submit by April, by which time we got to know our students. The weekly Work Program we had to write up by each Friday, and give to our department head teacher, for the next week's teaching, as our preparation, based on children's current progress.

WHAT IS AND IS NOT EVIDENCE BASED BEST PRACTICE

Published articles by likeminded colleagues are not scientific evidence of efficacy. Scientific evidence-based studies, supported by MRI Imaging over decades continue to find this teaching approach to be best practice and why. This is now finally coming back into ITE and Curriculum.

Reading Recovery, Balanced Literacy, Inquiry Based learning and play based learning with critical thinking and problem solving and their resources are repeatedly proven to lack efficacy in primary education.

Parents are talking about legal address if their States' Education Department's English and Mathematics Curriculum do not follow known scientific evidence based best practices to teach their children to read and write and compute so they can get their education.

If children do not master foundational English and Mathematics Skills before Year 3, they are not able to learn higher level skills from Year 3, so they fall behind and fail as 'Instructional Casualties'. Unless their parents can afford to pay for out of school Remedial Teaching (which they should not have to do, 30% to 40% of children they leave Australian Schools as illiterate and innumerate statistics, with psychological broken self-esteem and often mental illness and broken lives.

CONSEQUENCES OF UNPROVEN IDEOLOGIES IN ITE AND CURRICULUM

Young teachers begin primary teaching with high hopes but un-prepared, due to 'not fit for purpose' ITE, for which they have to pay.

Primary Teachers and Principals have progressively been 'forced' to be in 'damage control' as frustrated parents ask why their children cannot read, spell and compute, and have to 'defend and pretend' all is well when it is not, blaming parents and children along the way.

Parents have the right to expect to send their children to school to be taught to read, write and compute and for them to be looked after safely at school.

In private practice, teachers like me hear all about what has been happening between parents and schools for years. Very common examples, "Your child cannot learn to read. Maybe you should try a special school." "You don't need to learn maths, just use a calculator." "Children don't need to know how to spell, just use spell check or siri." Common advice to intelligent parents of intelligent children.

In staffrooms, excuses are that 'illiterate and innumerate children are dull or lazy, and their parents are hopeless, who don't read to their children at home, give them breakfast or a good night's sleep, so we can't teach them.'

Extreme but true accounts are of a teacher of an illiterate 8-year-old telling parents, "I've given your child a soft toy cat and his job is to teach the cat to read, something I learned at a (whole language-balanced literacy) national conference."

Code Read Dyslexia Network Australia is a parent support group that now has 30,000 members, all with unacceptable accounts of negative school experiences.

Most of the problems in Education today, high illiteracy and innumeracy rates and the problems they create, teacher stress, loss of public respect for teachers, parental angst, employer dissatisfaction, and most importantly permanent psychological damage of too many young children is preventable with the adoption of known Scientific Evidence Based Practices in ITE and English and Mathematics Curriculum.

WHAT IS BEING DONE?

Successive Federal Education Governments from the 2005 National Inquiry into the Teaching of Literacy, which was tabled in the Australian Parliament, have all acted to try and implement the recommendations, which stated that whole language, (now called balanced literacy) is not in the best interests of children and needs to be replaced with evidence based phonemic awareness and systematic explicit teaching of phonics skills to best teach children to read and spell.

But many Education Academics in ITE and some Educators in ACARA and State Education Curriculum Departments scorn, deny, ignore, and discount the NITL and all the professionally conducted surveys, reviews and scientifical evidence base for these best practices to be part of ITE and State Curricula, especially in Victoria.

If personnel in professional education positions of responsibility are unable to study and accept the much undisputable evidence of scientific evidence based best teaching practice in ITE and Curriculum, that can result in

- 95% of primary school children to leave Year 6 with English and Mathematics skills mastered to proficiency so they can cope with secondary education,
- restored professional knowledge for primary teachers and principals and reduction of their stress load,
- restored confidence and respect of parents that their children will be taught to be literate and numerate and be safe at school,
- restored respect by employers and the public for teachers as professionals,

the positions they hold need to be reviewed. Funding needs to be given with accountability for best professional practices by Governments.

WHAT NEEDS TO BE DONE FURTHER?

With the Scott Report 2023 and its recommendations now officially accepted by all State Education Ministers, what is needed is continued, sustained and resolute action by all Education Governments as the only responsible way forward.

THE ENGLISH CURRICULUM

ACARA 9.0. F-2 English Curriculum needs slight adjustment now, so it is ready for all states to implement from 2024.

ACARA's National English Curriculum 9.0 now follows scientific evidence-based practice and has deleted references to balanced literacy practices.

But, the time frame between 'Beginning Readers using decodable books' should be stated for F-2 and 'Developing Readers who can read 'authentic' books' needs to be stated from after Year 2, after children have demonstrated they have mastered ALL foundational Reading Skills.

FOUNDATION YEAR are 'developing readers' in their opinion so reference to using of 'authentic' books can mean 'predictable texts', so ineffective balanced literacy reading practices can be continued.

5% of Year 1 and Year 2 children will learn to master reading quickly but teachers must show they have mastered all foundational reading skills BEFORE they are given 'authentic' texts.

Use of 'authentic' texts to teach novice readers in ineffective practice because they have to guess unknown words from pictures or context and memorise texts after teachers have read the texts.

E.g., Six-year-old child, "I can only 'read' those books when my teacher says the words first."

This is not teaching reading or spelling. Ability to memorise words as wholes, has limited capacity.

If this is allowed to continue into 2024, illiteracy rates will stay the same.

The Literacy Hub now contains Scientific Evidence Based Teachers Resources and the Year 1 Phonics Check but needs further publicity, so all teachers and principals know about it.

STATES' ENGLISH CURRICULUM

State Education Departments are currently debating whether or not to adopt only scientific evidence-based teaching practices and drop all reference to ideological teaching practices.

NSW and SA have shown respect for scientific evidence and will follow the National Curriculum 9.0 and the practices in the Literacy Hub's Year 1 Phonics Check. Their governments have bi-lateral political support.

Q and WA appear undecided yet. Tasmanian Education Department were continuing with a balanced literacy curriculum but the Tasmanian Premier intervened, mandating that all Tasmanian primary schools will follow scientific evidenced based best practices only and the standardized Year 1 Phonics Check.

The most recent Victorian Education English Curriculum, July 2023, is a complete whole language/balanced literacy document which is both disappointing and confusing to teachers. They were allowed to administer their own limited Year 1 phonics check which is non-standardised, and kept secret, which is concerning.

Recently a newspaper article stated that a study of 6 Victorian primary schools that have adopted scientific evidence-based teaching practices was commissioned by the Victorian Education Department using taxpayers' money but has been refused publication.

These 6 schools have reported great improvements in literacy and numeracy standards, improved student engagement in class, reduced bad behaviour and improved children's welfare and co-operation with parents.

Education Departments should be held to account to taxpayers and their governments, and also be aware that there has already been mention of parents considering their legal class action options against Education Departments who do not provide known scientifically proven best teaching practices to teach their children to read.

ACARA MATHEMATICS CURRICULUM 9.0

Academics debated between Inquiry Based Ideology for teaching mathematics which allows children to 'discover mathematics through play and creative problem solving and critical thinking' and direct,

explicit, incremental teaching of foundational mathematics skills to be mastered before asking children to solve mathematical problems.

The Mathematics Curriculum 9.0 is an ideological inquiry-based document.

With PISA 2018 Innumeracy at 46% , this needs revision, for the 9.0 Curriculum to drop Inquiry based Mathematics Curriculum and to adopt only an Direct Explicit Incremental Teaching of Foundational F-2 Mathematics soon.

STATES' MATHEMATICS CURRICULUM

If the ACARA 9.0 F-2 Mathematics Curriculum is revised to be ready for 2024 and the States follow for 2024, the innumeracy problems will resolve within a few years, beginning with 2024 Foundation Year students and seen in 2027 Year 3 NAPLAN, 2028 Year 4 PIRLS and 2029 Year 5 NAPLAN.

SUMMARY

Professional practice is to keep up with scientific evidence based best practices, as in Medicine, Nursing and Law.

High standards for conformity are set out, and respected by the professionals who agree to follow those Guidelines, Principles and Code of Ethics.

If people want to remain in professional practice, they must agree to professional rules and standards if they want to remain in that profession.

It is lack of professional behaviour that has led to the decline in respect for teachers. Teachers have to follow their Education Department Curriculum that they are given.

Principals and teachers are just as many victims of ineffective ideologies in ITE and the English and Mathematics Curriculum as the children who leave school illiterate and innumerate.

They have been bearing the brunt of the public's frustration from illiteracy and innumeracy for too long.

If the Scott Report Recommendations into ITE are implemented and the ACARA 9.0 and all States English and Mathematics Curricula are aligned with only scientific evidence based best teaching practices, especially for F-2, 95%+ children will be taught to read, spell, write and compute at primary schools.

If non-evidence-based ideologies are allowed to continue in ITE and English and Mathematics Curricula, illiteracy and innumeracy rates and their problems will continue.

If this is allowed, the 2029 ALICE SPRINGS EDUCATION DECLARATION goals cannot and will not be met.

The resolution is well known.

The choice is clear.

The choice is simple.