**Committee Secretary**
**Senate Education, Employment and Workplace Relations Committees**

**Below please find my submission to the Senate Committee for Teaching and Learning.**

Submission to Senate Committee for Teaching and Learning.

## Foreword

**How come?** I am perplexed by the establishment of a committee to enquire into matters of great importance at such a time in Australian schooling history; in the full knowledge that it is likely that wide ranging decisions or recommendations effecting the operations of compulsory schooling will be made as a direct consequence, without the opportunity for wide-ranging community discussion....unless the committee is seeking to establish a list of issues for public discussion, of course.

I am not questioning the reasons for the establishment of the committee nor the genuine concern that members have for the future of schooling in Australia. Indeed, I am heartened and delighted by the probable raison d'etre for the establishment of it. I am concerned by the lack of wide discussion about the **establishment** of the committee [Why? How come? Who?] and why the media has not made the most of such a momentous decision. I am also very concerned by certain limitations such as...
[a] very busy committee members will not be able to give full attention to deliberations about schooling matters that they deserve;
[b] seeking for responses at a time when schooling operations are firmly controlled by high-stakes blanket-testing interests linked to top-level political ambitions and to corporate business enterprises;
[c] that the report will be made public at a time when Australia is in an electioneering mode that will distract from the kind of attention that our country, through its school children, deserves;
[d] all schools will be in full preparation mode for the May NAPLAN tests;
[e] the committee might be forced to discuss issues beyond the limits of compulsory schooling such as pre-school issues and the final years of formal schooling.

Essential Readings for anyone seriously deliberating the status of schooling in Australia:-

1. **Say NO to NAPLAN** compiled by Jacinta Cashen, David Hornsby, Gloria Latham, Cheryl Semple, Lorraine Wilson – available for download: www.literacyeducators.co.au/naplan
2. **The Treehorn Express** Tri-weekly email newsletter by geriactivist anti-NAPLAN writer Phil Cullen with 'Readings' by Allan Alach of N.Z. who maintains blog : http://treehornexpress.wordpress.com
3. **Children, their World, their Education** edited by Robin Alexander on behalf of the Cambridge Primary Review which includes the 'final report and recommendation'.[ www.routledge.com ]
   This review is 'bigger than Plowden' and is of particular significance for primary schools in every western country. Its messages are critical.
4. **The Death and Life of the Great American School System** : How Testing and Choice are Undermining Education by Diane Ravitch former USA Assistant Secretary during Geo. Bush presidency. Prof. Ravitch of NYU is the most respected educator in the USA and maintains a blog http://dianeravitch.net for 30,000 readers.
5. **Finnish Lessons:** What Can the World Learn From Education Change in Finland by Pasi Sahlberg, world renowned Finnish educator whose blog is www.pasisahlberg,com/blog/

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It is clear that Australia has established itself, during the past five years, as the greatest GERM-ridden country on the planet. It fulfils all requirements that hard-line measurers and the Gordon Gekkos of this world require. It is rooted in hard-data measurers' 'ground truths' that 'FEAR PROMOTES LEARNING' and "COMPETITION DRIVES IMPROVEMENT'. If there is a genuine concern for the future of Australia in socio-economic terms, then its rulers [you folk] should start again by getting rid of the insidious GERM viruses and seek to design a schooling system with other premises in mind; not unlike Finland did forty years ago and do it better....a lot better. We need a fair-dinkum indigenous schooling system that will ensure that Australia develops a true-blue-Aussie-culture composed of creative, inventive, any-challenge-accepted, productive, healthy, happy, determined individuals. By ignoring the New Yorks, Finlands, Shanghais, Singapores of this world and basing an education system on
[1] love and respect for children of compulsory school age;
[2] helping pupils to develop personal learnacy abilities, linked intimately with self-evaluation;

[3] developing a true sense of equity;
[4] promoting and marketing a firm understanding of a learning-based classroom milieu;
[5] encouraging a respect for teachers and constant recognition of effort;
[6] making sure that extensive classroom-teaching experience is the first requirement for all school-related appointments;
....we can do it. We need to tell the world, loud and clear, that this is what we are doing. Australia can become the greatest and happiest education power on earth. No sweat.

| GERM | LEADING LEARNING |
|---|---|
| Testucation | Education |
| New York origin | Finland model |
| Test core subjects | Teach Learnacy |
| Standardise – same skill level for all | Customise – "Each one is different" |
| Promote pre-test panic | Each at own learning pace |
| Ideas from corporate world | CHILD as the inspiration for change |
| Rank test results | Share evaluation personally |
| Treat child as student | Treat child as pupil : potential student |
| Shame and blame | Celebrate successes |
| Competition based | Open collaboration |
| Large-scale cheating | Shared teaching and learning |
| Cover-up gimmickry | Attention to compulsory schooling ideals |

[ By the way....People who attend school to be taught by a teacher are called **pupils.** Any dictionary will reveal that. They are potential students, but we are unsure of when the desire to pursue studiously a particular line of learning occurs, even though it is likely to occur during the schooling processes. I do hope that the writer of the committee's report uses terms that describe children at school. Few do.]

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**[a] the effectiveness of current classroom practices in assisting children to realise their potential in Australian schools.**

Yes. Australia's classrooms, influenced by the GERM [Global Education Reform Movement – a Pasi Sahlberg term] principles applied to test preparation, are reverting to chalk-talk, didactic instruction practices. Far too many teachers believe that didactic styles of instruction, to the exclusion of more effective modes, are the only safe way to contest NAPLAN tests – practice, practice, practice.

**Implanted childhood memories** of classroom arrangements held by all of us are those of sitting still for most of the day facing east or west towards a chalkboard where a large space [ a demilitarised zone] was the preserve of the teacher who spent most of the school day there and, in some instances, talked a great deal about a special topic. We sat still, kept quiet and wrote a lot. It is a memory of high school teaching in particular, but the use of such didactic/sermonising modes of teaching are also used by some primary school teachers – especially lazy ones. It's a mode that is embedded in our culture, perpetuated by popular movies ['To Sir With Love'; 'Goodbye, Mr Chips' etc.] and TV shows ['Kotter'], while sparkling, learning-enthusiastic classrooms are never-ever seen. Indeed, if one looks-in at a lively learning room, it can look chaotic and that can be off-putting for one raised on chalk-talk modes. Sadly, such memories can inhibit progressive thought, and lead many to conclude that 'that's the way it is' or 'it was good enough for us' kinds of mentality.

Years of classroom experiences and observation have shown child-oriented educators, however, that effective teachers use a wide range of teaching strategies during the course of a school day. Chalk-talk has a place, but teaching-learning varieties are endless and range between teacher-dominated experiences to the completely maieutic, where the teacher mid-wifes the birth of a learning experience that comes from the child, through a variety of confidence-trickery techniques where the child thinks that he or she has decided to pursue a particular learning path but they have been 'stung' by the teacher who has 'set them up'. The teacher knows that results will be better if the child thinks that he or she 'owns' the learning experience.

In the most productive kinds of classrooms, the teacher moves away from the stage quite a lot. The teacher moves around the room, perhaps,to some sort of group-activity, of which there are hundreds of kinds, through to the kinds of child-approved learning activities recognising that the business of learning is an individual matter. The pupil is constantly saying: "Teacher! You had better persuade me that I want to do this stuff. You can't make me learn if I don't want to do so. Make it fun! Make it play! Show me that it is good for me. Make me anxious to get home to tell Mum that this learning business is great."

**Seen one?** God. It such a thrill, isn't it, to observe or share the activities in a classroom where one can 'feel' the learning atmosphere? Ever had that experience, members of the committee? It's so glorious. Learning that comes from effective pupilling – that delicate partnership of "I will teach, You will learn" and "You will teach. I'll love learning, forever."

Isn't it depressing to be in a NAPLAN classroom when test-preparation [February to May] controls the school day? Can you 'feel' how the poor kids feel, having been deprived of the more creative parts of a rich curriculum for a few months and have to tolerate the experience of working through old test papers and the like? Try to tell me that it doesn't happen!

I have tried to describe the arrangement of various classroom techniques on http://primaryschooling.net/?page_id=74 by using a continuum of styles, if you wish to check.

While all this busy-work of using a variety of teaching techniques is going on, there are thousands of interludes that impact on the classroom milieu. Dr.Michael Dunkin, [he's still around] Australia's greatest observer of classroom behaviour, with whom gurus Gage and Biddle worked, provided some examples : "smiling, listening, problem-solving, distracting, answering, asking, demonstrating, commending, cajoling, questioning, supporting, expounding, correcting, disturbing, frowning." As Prof. Dunkin said "Few attempts have been made to document these 'truths'." You know, don't you, that these things go on every single minute of the classroom day....and there's more similar things happen? Many unscheduled. Teachers are constantly trying to catch that learning moment with each pupil. You can remember, can't you, the time when that person, for whom you had some regard, in a casual

exchange, told you that you were good at something...and you are now because he or she told you so. You lived up to their prophecy.

**Naplan virus**. It makes one really sick to think that NAPLAN is deliberately [It is deliberate, isn't it? Test companies demand it, don't they? ] destroying productive classroom practices that teach Learnacy through its many golden moments. Sit-stilleries have to be part of the schooling landscape if the Klein-Murdoch five-point plan - M O N E Y – as Robert Miller describes it – is to work. One would have to be as blind as a welder's dog not to see that NAPLAN testing is about two things only: 1. Political upmanship and skiting; and 2. Lining the pockets of test publishers, high-tech programmers and i-pad manufacturers with billions and billions. It has absolutely no contribution to make towards classroom learning.

NAPLAN, like a Coal Seam Gas miner, invades each Aussie child's intellectual property, fracks their cerebral underpinnings and scars their learning landscape irrevocably. These undemocratic despoilers will not be around to see the damage.

Learners can achieve at the greatest of heights at whatever challenge they face, if they are soaked in a learning-rich, happy environment each day. There are plenty of examples of rich learning environments around...but not enough in our GERM-ridden climate that creates a strong tendency to use strategies that teach to the test.

If members of this committee are really committed to helping Australian pupils realise their potential to a greater degree than Finland, Shanghai or anywhere else.. on any measure ...PISA even, though there are better ways of evaluating progress...then you will have to dump NAPLAN, the billion dollar mistake. You will need a great deal of 'party-room' gumption to tell Julia Gillard, Peter Garret and Christopher Pyne that their GERMy beliefs are crippling Australia's future, but it has to be done. Their beliefs in "second wave reform", "robust curriculum" and their imbalanced threats are educationally untenable. There is no doubt that the present generation of school children are at risk while Australia supports a mentality that boasts "We will be in the top 5 by 2025."...describing schooling by a meaningless number on one PISA test; with the clear intention of doing

more of the same to get there...more test practice, more rigid curriculum, more shaming of teachers and schools, more charter schools and other diverting gimmickry. Disgusting. Sickening.

**Where do we start to fix things?** At the beginning, of course. Practising classroom teachers of some experience need to tell teacher-preparation institutions what their clients need to know to run a rich, effective and efficient classroom. That's where we need to start for the next generation of teachers after NAPLAN is dead and buried. If such institutions can arrange it, each teacher will need to learn to cope with the kinds of teaching strategies that I have outlined above....to learn to be a good didactic teacher for the times when it is necessary, to expand one's repertoire of group-interaction so that pupils can learn from each other, to be able to get down on the floor with the kids and bring out the best in each individual. Such preparation will take some time to 'sink in' to each neophyte classroom teacher's d.n.a.,so a four year preparation period may be inadequate. Helping potential teachers to learn about dynamic and purposeful teaching situations; and helping them to accommodate this knowledge within each one's natural teaching personality will not be easy.

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**[b] the structure and governance of school administration 'local and central' and its impact on teaching and learning.**

***1. The mentality of managerialism has to go.*** We are paying dearly for the 1980-90s scato-meme that invaded corporate businesses and public institutions with its-top-down organisational alterations that have proved to be completely a-about-face for education enterprises, and especially for those enterprises that control school systems. Australia's over-all schooling system is now forcefully controlled by hard-line measurers whose limited knowledge of schooling is too obvious. Market-based schooling has been the ruination of some splendid education authorities.

Somehow or other, public service thinking has to be re-shaped to believe in experience as the major component in situations where authority has to be exerted over others. French and Raven showed us, ages and ages ago, that the No.1 base for social control is expertise, based on hard-nosed experience. The lowest levels of control, now over-used and abused in the management of NAPLAN are reward power ["Pay good teachers more" mentality] and coercive

power [‘Do as I say without question, or you will cop it!” instructions]. These kinds of leadership stink at the best of times; work only on the timid and brain-dead. Most foul.

***2. State structures or federal structure?*** The commonwealth government has recently taken over the control of schooling from the states. It has, clearly, been a mistake. Federal ministers in recent line : Kemp, Nelson, Gillard and Garrett, [ Pyne ?] all possessors of half-baked GERM-type, prehistoric notions of schooling, have demonstrated that commonwealth governments of all persuasions know little to nothing about the concept of schooling. States have clearly demonstrated that, in the past, each has been an innovator of some kind in schooling terms and has, with professional collegiality, been proud to share. Each has led the world at something that has enhanced pupil learning. Each, with proud independence, has been a centre of excellence for some innovation. The learning-designed West Australian classroom modules still dot the building landscapes of many Queensland school-grounds, for instance.

The commonwealth government has gone too far. While its building program has been a god-send, it’s threatened diminution or removal of finances to states if they don’t do as they are told in professional terms is unprincipled. It has persuaded or instructed each state to adopt gestapo-like tactics to control all state and private school teachers and principals who prefer to maintain their professional integrity. [e.g Thomson of Kimberley College and Pope of Willow Heights]. The set of totalitarian rules that prohibit teachers and principals and members of P&C Associations from speaking openly about schooling matters and the cover-up of parental rights to allow or disallow their children from contesting the tests, are grossly un-Australian. We used to play by fair-dinkum, honest, albeit bureaucratic but open rules. We are setting very bad examples for our children, amongst other things.

A national curriculum which, at first seemed a splendid idea, has been an exercise in authoritarianism. There appears to be little or no freedom to adjust or alter and the presentation and timing of learning concepts leave little room for healthy on-the-spot adjustment. I’m told. The question has to be asked if the authority that runs the tests should have any connection with curriculum

content. Which holds sway? Clearly such a combination ensures mediocrity of learning outcomes. Is there a need, perhaps, to revive a Schools Commission or a version of it, peopled by schoolies who know what the game is about, and is well separated from ACARA?

If there is an advocacy for returning the levels of financial and school-control power to the states, please support it. In 2008, states were not given a chance to examine the Klein-proffered 'benefits' from blanket testing. They were hood-winked into trusting a thoughtless, hair-brained scheme that was soft-lifted from New York in a ruddy blush...so aptly described. Did any state even take a look at the school district from which it came? Did they question the authenticity of the so-called reform measures? Did they discuss the impact on teaching and learning? It is now too apparent that the states did not do their homework. They were shamefully tricked as were principals, teachers and academic organisations and unions. All should be asked, now, whether they wish to continue.

***3. Compulsory schooling applies to primary and early secondary schooling ONLY*** It needs fixing. Children are forced to attend school between certain regulated ages for the clear purpose of developing an educated population that will help a country to enjoy the fruits of development. Australian states, for some peculiar reason have held steadfast to varying ages of admission despite appeals to the superordinate committee of Ministers and Director-Generals [now called MCEECDYA] for standardisation since they were asked to standardise them in the 1970s. There is also some variance in the names and ages of a preliminary year that some states favour. This is quite okay unless parents change states. Schools will handle admission differently and the outcome might not be to the advantage of the child. Generally speaking, according to ACARA, children enter formal schooling between the ages of four-and-half and five-and-a-half years of age. Surely there is a need for some sort of consistency. Ask defence force personnel.

Also, why isn't the first year of formal schooling called Year One? It's the first year of school. What's with the fancy names –reception, preparatory, kindergarten, pre-primary? Why? Are some states s-t-r-e-t-c-h-i-n-g the bounds of compulsory schooling? If so, why? Each state offers wonderful non-compulsory pre-school and early-childhood opportunities. Why fiddle with the schooling arrangements for those

who are forced to attend school from Year 1 to Year 10? Compel properly, for goodness sake!

Then again, why not give young children a chance to enjoy their childhood and expand their brain-power before they start formal schooling? Perhaps this Senate Committee can find an explanation why the Finnish children, who, according to Pasi Sahlberg, have about four years less formal schooling than do Australian children and yet, donkey-lick us at the famed, fancied, adorable PISA testing. They don't start school in Finland and many European countries until seven years of age and spend less time on formal schooling each year. It's obvious, isn't it, that children at the top of the testing pole do better because they learn more about learning to learn than we do? We only learn how to pass tests. The systems are different and they pass tests with distinction. Ours could be better than anyone else at anything if we would only grasp the nettle and teach our kids Learnacy through all sections of a broad and flexible curriculum. We have the talent to arrange such schooling...more than most... it's available in our schools. We lack the political will....and our teaching force, generally, lacks the guts to stand up to the political tyrants.

***4. Departments of Compulsory Schooling*** (" 'Wot's in a name?' she sez, an' then she sighs.") It doesn't matter much, but it would be nice to re-assure the general public, through our terminology, that we care about kids and we try to do the best for them; and are unashamed to pronounce that we compel children to attend a school where we have placed a group of classroom experts so that we can develop our children's learning talents. One would like to think that we have Departments of Schooling and that they concentrate on schooling. Some states now have add-ons as if each Minister concerned doesn't have enough to do : employment and workplace relations [Commonwealth]; children's services [NT]; communities [NSW] training and employment [Q], early childhood [Vic]; training [ACT]; child development [SA]. I like the South Australian [shades of Alby Jones?]. We treat Australian children shabbily, by the look of this, don't we? We force them to go to school and then find something else to deter us from the job in hand.

***5. Primary and Secondary Schooling*** It's too obvious that children forced to go to school, go through thorough the one-room,

same teacher all year, wide-curriculum-based learning experience at a primary school before entering subject based no-fixed-abode schooling until they are able to leave school. If we have done our job, they will leave school at the end of this arrangeent, with studious anxiety to learn more because they like learning. If they are pleased to leave school because of the boredom of ritual and test-preparation and such, we have failed. They should get their money back.

A concentration by those who know their primary school business and secondary school business to operate these sections of school systems is essential. What would be wrong with a structure that had a trio at the administrative apex of a departmental structure, one a Director-General who had been-there done-that in either sphere of operations, assisted by two folk who were each primary school and secondary school die-hards. Imagine what children could accomplish if they were supported right to the top by those who knew what they were doing in classroom learning terms! I have described in detail an organisational structure of this kind on http://primaryschooling.net/?page_id=238 I submit it for consideration during your deliberations on this term of reference.

***6.Teacher Talk*** Teachers are good learners. Teachers are good talkers. When they talk to each other about their classroom practices, the classroom benefits. They talk about what they have read, what they have experienced, the seminar that they attended. If they are visited in their classrooms by folk they respect for their experience and knowledge, the classroom pupilling develops more. Call them inspectors, monitors, advisers, coordinators whatever you like. They encourage talk and entwining what has been learned into the kind of teaching strategy that is needed at the time. There is district pride within each wider region. Most states are divided into districts where such dialogue can take place and is taking place. It needs encouragement and support. Are the districts small enough for everybody to know each other? How much clout does the mentor have – it's necessary at times. How do you keep ideas alive, provide the reading material, the blog sites to keep learnacy on the boil? Teachers are not renowned for dedicated attention to professional reading. How does one encourage them? Can they be encouraged to write a lot more about what they do?

If some distant authority wants to know how things are going, for accountability or political or whatever reason, why just ask those who know... the teachers, their mentors on the ground and their mentors' mentors. Trust them. Trust. Trust. Trust. Celebrate successes. No need for billion dollar fear-laden tests and resultant false assumptions. No need for the stupidity of aiming for 'top 5 by 25' that covers-up the real purpose of national blanket testing : to line the pockets of Klein, Murdoch, Gates and their greedy ilk who don't give two hoots about school children.

[I am not advocating an American style school district arrangement. There is a sham about U.S.-type decentralised education and management. If it was as good as it is sometimes described, how come Joel Klein got a job in one? I've attended an AGM of a School District Board. I like our arrangement. It just needs experienced people with backgrounds in classroom experience and the world is our oyster.]

***7. Teacher Respect*** Please don't treat this topic lightly...no matter what you think of the teaching profession. This is the secret behind the success of Finland. The building of respect for those who spend so much time with their children was part of the original plan...many years ago. It worked....splendidly. Ask them. The results are available. There is such a great need to respect teacher expertise and professional ethics. There is a problem,though. They are too nice, too obedient, too humble, too busy to claim the respect they deserve, for themselves. Some have to go on the streets to try. We taxpayers need to do a lot more for them. Please give this aspect the consideration that it deserves, dear senate committee members, and our children's children will benefit....for sure. It's getting a little late for the present generation...unless you can do something about it. Good luck.
Don't forget: Care for Kids.

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**[f] other related matters.**

It is not public knowledge that...

[1] Teachers, principals and members of P & C Associations are not allowed to comment negatively on decisions that effect their operations. The effects of NAPLAN on classroom operations has highlighted this issue. They are encouraged to use the press to

report on nice things, but not anything that might prove embarrassing to superiors or the government of the day. Excuses are made by teachers and principals that they are bound by a Code of Conduct, a recent innovation that seems to be have been designed by higher authorities, without consultation or negotiation. It's purpose is unclear. It has been used, to date, only as a Code of Control.

**I recommend that this senate inquiry sponsor a legal inquiry into the standing of a Code of Conduct within a state department of education, especially in its relationship to the exercise of professional ethics by employees; and that the outcomes be made public.**

[2] Parents are not informed on any official document or public notice that their children need not contest NAPLAN tests. Indeed, they do not give permission for their children to undertake the test on any official document. Generally speaking, there is no mention of this right of parents made on enrolment forms or on a special local school document.

This has the appearance of a cover-up because concerned parents might refuse to have their children submit to the tensions of test-taking and/or prefer their children to experience the full school curriculum during the pre-test period.

If NAPLAN tests have any authenticity in regard to children's schooling progress, shouldn't parents be allowed to exercise prerogatives?

**It is recommended that all education authorities be informed that parents' rights in regard to their children's participation in NAPLAN testing be respected; that their right of refusal is clearly made on enrolment forms and on official announcements.**

[3] Arrangements are not made within schools for the normal [non-test] aspects of the school curriculum to be taught during the preparation period [Feb-May] for NAPLAN testing; nor on the days of testing for those children who do not wish to contest the tests. Such denial of opportunity could become a serious legal issue for state public schools in particular, especially for those schools whose children have been told to stay at home on test days.

**It is recommended that state public schools be allowed to hire teachers to teach those to whom normal curriculum experiences are not available because of NAPLAN testing preparation and operation.**