

InToWin Australia - “A Platform for Participation in Improved Political Performance”

CHAPTER 4 : We see the problems – what’s the solution?

Step 4: Re-educate the educators

Alvin Toffler was an American writer, futurist, and businessman, and perhaps most famously, author of “Future Shock”, which hit the bookstores in 1971. He made the following prediction - *“The illiterate of the 21st century will not be those who cannot read and write, but those who cannot learn, unlearn, and relearn”*.

Plutarch, a Greek philosopher and biographer takes us back even further. He may have made the following assertion nearly two thousand years ago, but it does still speak to what education should be – and what an education system should enable - *“The mind is not a vessel to be filled, but a fire to be kindled.”*

Of all the solutions I have proposed, that leading to an improved education system is likely to require the most revolutionary thinking and actions. “Re-educate the educators” may sound like an attack on the teaching profession, or simply another one of my circular arguments! Actually it is neither – it is rather a statement of the bleeding obvious. The system and process of education required today cannot remain rooted in the structures born of the 20th, and perhaps even the 19th century. By the same token, bringing education into the 21st century is not about ignoring the past – in fact I would look to history to remind us of the best way to educate.

I think back to my school days, and I can tell you there are things I remember vividly, and there are others I just don’t remember at all. I don’t remember if there was carpet in the school hall, or ceiling fans in the classroom. I don’t remember if we had coloured chalks or power point presentations (although I’m sure we wouldn’t have had the latter, as there were no PC’s in the 1970’s!). I don’t remember when there were ten kids in a class or when there were twenty, or whether it made a difference. I don’t remember if we had one test a week, one assignment a month, or five exams a term – but I remember if I passed or failed, if I tried or slacked off, if I learned anything or not.

I do remember the schools that had good playgrounds and gave us time to use them, and those that relied on shelter sheds between class for exercise. And I most vividly remember the teachers. Those who had the right blend of empathy and discipline, subject knowledge and teaching skills, patience and drive. Those teachers who took an interest in my efforts and progress and those who didn’t.

I bring up my fading memories to highlight it is teachers not buildings – teachers not equipment - teachers not curricula – teachers not assessments – that are the highest value part of the education system and the educational experience. It is therefore teachers who should be the focus of our funding efforts and the champions for change.

Solution 4: Needs based funding should start by developing the best teaching profession we can – good teachers will create good student outcomes. Funding should also be targeted at the start of the education journey, not the end.

- (a) Create a real teaching profession - demand high quality teaching skills and experience, and change pay structures and career opportunities to reward teaching excellence.
- (b) Allow competition between schools and competition between States to meet community expectations and to improve education standards. Let there be a focus on excellence rather than homogeneity; individuality rather than conformity.
- (c) Establish a curriculum that focuses primary school students on the fundamental basics of English comprehension, reading and writing, mathematics, physical activity and socialising skills.
- (d) Encourage secondary schools to focus on teaching students how to learn for themselves - identifying and encouraging each individual's passions and interests.
- (e) At tertiary level, facilitate access to the almost limitless library of global knowledge that technology brings to every desktop, every ipad, every smart phone - continuing along the pathway to self-development and assisted learning, with centralised assessment of proficiency. As the Chinese proverb says - *"I hear and I forget. I see and I remember. I do and I understand."*