

Editorial: The SACE debate

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CONCERN FOR RESEARCH AND AN INTERNATIONAL PERSPECTIVE

This special issue of the *International Education Journal* has been prepared for publication by the Flinders University Institute of International Education and the South Australian Institute of Educational Research to draw attention to the radical changes being introduced in South Australia at the terminal secondary school level. These changes follow on from earlier similar changes that were introduced for the first 10 years of public education in the state of South Australia at a time when efforts were being made towards a common curriculum across Australia together with a common system of education. These highly specific changes to schooling in South Australia are being made with little public debate and little soundly based research evidence on the effectiveness of the public schooling provided within the state. Moreover, these changes occur at a time when there is increasing movement between the Australian states, particularly towards Queensland and Western Australia, and increasing attempts are being made to attract students from countries in Asia to complete their schooling and university education within South Australia. The effects of globalisation and movement of people between countries are clearly having a marked impact on education in South Australia, with the establishment of a small campus of at least one university from the United States in Adelaide and the establishment of commercially based secondary schools to cater for overseas students. Furthermore, the International Baccalaureate programs at all levels are flourishing in South Australia with greater per capita involvement within the state than anywhere else in the world.

It is commonly stated that South Australia has an education system that is both innovative and of high quality, but these statements are made with little supporting evidence to back such claims that is soundly based, or that would be accepted outside the state arising from examination of educational outcomes across the states and territories of Australia, or across the developed countries of the world. Indeed, it is our concern that educational research in South Australia is generally both low in quality and quantity and has been throughout the period of approximately 75 years when the South Australia Institute of Educational Research was founded.

Under these circumstances we consider that it is timely for both Institutes involved in the preparation of this issue of the *International Education Journal* to draw attention in a scholarly way, with a belief in open and informed debate on such issues, to the serious lack of an international perspective as well as a research perspective, in the substantial changes being made to public education within the state of South Australia.

CONCERN FOR PRINCIPLES IN DEBATE

In the preparation of the published report “Success for All”, the Review Panel advocated seven principles that they contended were the foundations for the proposed reform to senior secondary education in the state of South Australia and for the development of a new approach for the South Australian Certificate of Education (SACE).

The new SACE needs to be:

- **responsive** to the needs of individual students and groups of students;

- **credible** in terms of the rigour of the learning process, the standards and methods used to assess students' learning achievements, and in terms of the reliability of what the certificate says graduates know and can do;
- **inclusive** of all students, all cultures and all study pathways so that *success for all* is the prevailing dominant culture;
- **worthwhile** in terms of the benefits perceived by students;
- **futures oriented** so that students have the skills and attributes they need to survive in a globally competitive world, and also to help shape it;
- **connected** to learning that precedes the current SACE years (particularly Year 10), to work and study destinations beyond the senior secondary years, to students' lives, and to the wider, global community;
- **supportive** of quality learning and teaching for all students.

(Success for All: SACE Review at a glance, 2006, p. 8)

These principles are admirable and we have no reason to challenge them. However, the open stating of them is in marked contrast to a report that does not consider:

- the different groups of students involved and, in particular, the needs of able students;
- the portability of the certificate across Australia and other developed and developing countries;
- the alternative pathways being followed by students both in South Australia and in other countries who work for the South Australian Certificate of Education;
- the worth of intellectual challenge, independent effort, both cognitive and practical skills, and strong value systems based on universally accepted values;
- the need to think outside the narrow confines of a state of only one and a half million people at the present time;
- the serious shortcomings of a curriculum developed within the public education system in South Australia for the teaching and learning of students during the first ten years of schooling, and the connections that need to be made to clearly identified pathways for entry into adult life; and
- the findings of research into cognitive acceleration and in the field of neuroscience that is changing the learning and teaching of students at all levels of secondary schooling.

Moreover, it can be argued that the report of the Review Panel is ideologically biased with a particular agenda and is written in terms that largely ignore the seven principles listed above.

The image of one certificate for all, in which all achieve success, fails to consider that dual functions of a qualification at the end of 12 years of schooling of both certification and selection. Moreover, the image of one certificate implies that there is only one pathway for all students to follow at the end of secondary education. We would argue that there are several different pathways that need to be identified and considered, namely:

- (a) to university with or without a brief gap,
- (b) to programs involving the development of high level skills in the field of technology and ICT,

- (c) to apprenticeship and training programs for the development of a wide range of skills,
- (d) to work in the labour force involving specific levels of skill.

In addition, it must be expected that no pathway terminates at the end of a single further stage, but leads on to a lifelong program of recurring education and learning to live and work effectively in a changing world. Each of these pathways has both common and unique requirements. One qualification or even the two alternative qualifications that used to operate in South Australia are no longer appropriate for the four or more alternative or shared pathways of the future. What is important is the guidance required to encourage young people to commence moving along an initial pathway, but with considerable freedom to move in and out of different paths as their interests, commitments and abilities require.

CONCERNING THIS ISSUE OF THE INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION JOURNAL

There is no need to summarise or present information about the Ministerial Review of Senior Secondary Education in South Australia or about the Final Report of the Review Panel, *Success for All*, since the full Report and an Overview are readily available on the SACE Review website at <http://www.sacereview.sa.gov.au>. All that need be said is that efforts are being made to implement the findings of the Review Panel, with little if any debate and with no apparent opposition from the universities or other parties who are stakeholders. However, the words of the Prime Minister, the Honourable John Howard, when launching the Australia Research Alliance for Children and Youth in 2002 are of considerable interest.

One of the things you find in government is that no amount of goodwill is enough, no amount of good policy direction is enough, unless you have accurate information at your disposal. And the use of taxpayer resources to achieve particular goals can be very frustrating if in fact the database on which these policies are based and the objectives pursued are inadequate, or worse inaccurate. (Trewin, citing Howard, 2006)

The announcement that the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) is proposing to conduct a testing program to assess the abilities of undergraduate students in a program of reform to enhance the quality of higher education in countries that are members of OECD is a major development in the transition from schooling to higher education. This proposal is likely to be hotly debated at both school and university levels. Moreover, this proposal draws attention to the need for an international and Australia wide perspective on the many aspects of the widespread debate that will inevitably emerge.

It is the purpose of this issue of the Journal to provide a meaningful data base from which the Report of the Review Panel *Success for All* can be viewed and debated before the recommended policies are implemented.

The lead article is a paper prepared by Geoff N. Masters, the Chief Executive Officer of the Australian Council for Educational Research, that is titled: *The Case for an Australian Certificate of Education*. This paper is followed by a commentary by John P. Keeves (Chair of Flinders University Institute of International Education) and David D. Curtis (ACER, School of Education, University of Adelaide), titled: *Research and National Debate on Australian Schooling*.

There are four papers that are critiques of the Report of the Review Panel *Success for All*:

1. *The SACE Review Panel's Final Report: Significant flaws in the statistical analyses of available education data* by Kelvin D. Gregory, School of Education, Flinders University,
2. *Tailoring Educational Research to a Desired Goal: The SACE Review Panel's Report on Community Views* by Kelvin D. Gregory, School of Education, Flinders University,

3. *The Heart of the New SACE* by J. Anthony Gibbons, Flinders University Institute of International Education,
4. *A View from Outside the Confines of South Australia* by John P. Keeves, Chair, Flinders University Institute of International Education

These papers were presented at the FUIIE and SAIER Spring Seminar Series on the *Research Issues on the Future of Post-Compulsory Secondary Education in South Australia* on Tuesday 29 August and Tuesday 5 September 2006 (see Appendix 1 for publicity statement). Since Professor Masters was ill and unable to attend on Tuesday 29 August, his paper was read by Dr Ted Sandercock, Chairperson of SAIER.

The Editor

Trewin, D. (2006). (Citing J. Howard, 2002) Report on Workshop on Population Wellbeing Data Groups (Publication. Retrieved 25 October 2006, from National Statistical Service: <http://www.nss.gov.au/nss/home.NSF/pages/Population+Well+Being+Data+Gaps+Workshop?OpenDocument>)