

NSW

Lila Mularczyk



ON the morning of 25 November 2007, we awoke to the beginning of the Education Revolution. As this gathers momentum, we must resist the renewal and oft-repeated discourse to re-engineer an unchanged practice and set of policies. A repositioned, centralised and unchanged education interest is something we can ill afford.

Now is a time of opportunity for a genuine revolution. We must strive for substantial and authentic policy development to frame a contemporaneous and courageous model of education to be accessed by all, now and into our nation's future.

As school resumed in late January, the inevitable rigorous, and at times intellectual and substantiated, often ill-informed and emotional media debates flooded the opinion pages of newspapers in our State. This public conversation once again highlighted the great divide between educational sectors.

Issues such as the escalating teacher shortage, the resourcing of schools, fees and their perceived aligned value with quality education, equity of policy, more crudely and significantly the funding policies, accountability and obligations were laundered for public scrutiny, plundering and contribution. The debate was fuelled by well spun and accurate data by politicians, journalists and citizens.

Reference was made to a review by the Rudd Government which had '*identified entrenched inequity in the Commonwealth system*' (*Sydney Morning Herald*, 9/1/08:1). Once public, this report may illuminate truths to drive policy change and development. Is this the beginning of a revolution or an evolution? After all, a return to equity is an entitlement of citizenship; the birthright of every child is to sit '*side by side*' (Public Instruction Act, NSW Parliament 1880, Henry Parkes), and to have equal access to quality education.

Rhetoric aside, public discourse and the debate on educational policy must, above all, put our young people first. They are our future. How we invest in their education articulates our current values and anticipations for the future of our community and society!

So, as policy consultation and dissertation continues, the NSW Secondary Principals' Council, in partnership with the NSW Primary Principals Association, surges forward with voice, research and action-based projects. Our Sustaining Quality Schools (SQS) project has embraced, and continues to work on, a number of substantial investigations and positions, including the

viability of schools, learning communities, corporate infrastructure and staffing (a hot topic this year!).

Emerging from SQS is SPC work currently being undertaken on principal authority, autonomy and accountability. Work to date has included principal surveys, a capacity matrix, workshops, consultation with Professor Brian Caldwell, as well as the mapping of responsibility and roles in reference to mandatory frameworks and policy. This work will enrich the interdependent SQS projects and ensure authentic and informed positions.

Finally (as alluded to previously), the School Staffing Agreement is one significant focus of negotiations in NSW this year.

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New South Wales

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REVOLUTION, evolution and heated interlocution! Computers, procurement and staffing are high profile issues for public school principals and school communities as I write this report.



The digital revolution has arrived and the NSW Department of Education and Training (DET) has embraced and enriched the proposal. *'The Commonwealth Government recently identified 302 NSW public secondary schools as eligible to apply for first round funding . . . a \$1 billion digital education revolution'*, said Education and Training Minister, John Della Bosca. The NSW Secondary Principals' Council, the NSW Primary Principals' Association and DET have been in intense consultation and communication to develop an agreed position on one of the most expansive and creatively resourced educational projects.

The strategy in development by DET relies on a 1:1 ratio of computers for years 9 - 12 students in secondary and central public schools by 2013. In an unprecedented and highly innovative framework, this world-first approach will require high leveraging of buying power, as all schools action and work together.

Further, the NSW Government is prepared to significantly contribute to the program and its successful implementation over the next four years. This exceptionally exciting project has already elicited global interest.

The power of purchasing as a system has been further explored through procurement. Resourcing of public schools is now evolving to meet the requirements of State budget requirements. Procurement processes are an effective way of purchasing quality resources for NSW public schools. An analysis of all DET spending has occurred and significant procurement saving opportunities have been identified. Consolidation of contracts, increased and high leverage purchase opportunities and 'smart buy' access are contributing to meeting systemic budgetary requirements.

Tempers rise as the industrial dialogue on staffing ceases between the union and Department. The staffing agreement (which came into operation on 28 April) escalated to industrial action. At the time of writing, no current interlocution or planned working parties are anticipated in the near future. The NSW Teachers' Federation membership, during a stop-work Sky Channel meeting, voted to participate in a 24-hour strike. Negotiations between DET and the Teachers' Federation have ceased. The union/DET divide has focused, simplistically, on equitable systemic staffing of public schools; a selection of staffing procedures with determination by principals and individual school communities and the subsequent increased accountability, and so on.

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A significant event was recently hosted in Sydney, initiated by Chris Bonnor and Jane Caro (co-authors of *The Stupid Country: The Dismantling of Public Education*; Chris is also past-president of the NSW Secondary Principals Council and Jane is an advertising executive and public education advocate). The event was 'The 2020 School Education Summit: The Public Good and the Education of Children'.

This was a NSW Public Education Alliance (PEA)-supported event (PEA members include the public parents association, teacher union and three principals' groups). Eighty people were invited. Enthusiastic, energetic, committed, passionate, intellectual, practitioner's academics, educators, students, parents and colleagues from around Australia gathered at the NSW State Library for the Summit on 28 June. More information may be accessed at *The Stupid Country* website at: www.thestupidcountry.com).

Six NSW Secondary Principals' Council members were in attendance. Other participants included the University of Wollongong, the NSW Department of Education and Training, the University of Western Sydney, the Humanist Society of Qld, students, Paint the Town Red Project; University of South Australia, University of Sydney, NSW Primary Principals Association, NSW Teachers Federation, NSW P&C, PSFP; NSW DP's, Group 8 Education, Academics and Solid Commentators, SBC Radio National, the *Age / Dissent* magazines; Australian Education Union, Defence of Government Schools, an educational anthropologist, University of Western Australia; consultant on inclusive education, Australian College of Educators, Greens member (NSW Parliament), advisers to Minister for Education and Training; Centre for Policy Development, ACOSS, Charles Stuart

University; University of Sydney, the *Daily Telegraph*, University of New England, Public Education Alliance, Barbara Preston (a research, economic and policy analyst, Monash University, Priority Public, Australian National Sector Association and policy adviser. Can you imagine the conversations that occurred?

It is impossible for me to adequately capture the scope and depth of discussion, and the discourse during the day in this brief report. Suffice to say, some issues rigorously discussed included teacher quality and quantity, a national focus on equity and the public purpose, student entitlements, the reframing of funding, rhetoric, language and debate platforms; parental choice; equity and sector funding; a national focus on accountability; economic analysis and social gains and gaps in opportunities; inclusiveness, social capital and public education – what is, and is not, negotiable.

Accolades to Chris and Jane! We eagerly anticipate the opportunity to further contribute. The evaluations highlight the need and value for such a high level leverage strategy. It was an extraordinary event.

Other issues in NSW also continue to dominate the work of SPC and / or schools. These include the staffing dispute between the NSW Department of Education and Training and the NSW Teachers' Federation. The heated conflict continues through ongoing industrial action. Apart from the issues already reported on, current SPC priorities include our extensive Principal Authority and Accountability Project, the debate on raising the school leaving age; mapping of federal policy and the implications at a national, state, professional association. level At the local level, we are considering the cutting-edge NSW model of the digital revolution and connected classrooms. All are extremely complex considerations, requiring appropriate and sufficient infrastructure to ensure success. The principals of NSW public secondary schools, in partnership with primary principals, continue our research, efforts and energies to ensure equitable implementation.

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THE Federal agenda reigns high on the state landscape.

The digital education revolution has achieved a 360° scope and now requires a resolution. The technological opportunity for every student in years 9 to 12 in NSW remains enveloped at a political crossroad.

Dr Paul Grimes authored a paper (in August) responding to material provided by all States and Territories on the funding required to implement the revolution effectively, innovatively and with a view to sustainability

This report has not been released and Round 2 offers have closed without any extension to the date. The model proposed by the NSW DET created a cutting edge capacity for all secondary and central schools with students in years 9 to 12 to gain quality access



to computers, with quality infrastructure and quality professional learning. Jim McAlpine, President NSW SPC, and I, presented the proposal at the Australian Secondary Principals' Association (ASPA) conference in September, in Perth. The national and international participants were most impressed and engaged in the resolutions to issues profiled across the nation and, in particular, the NSW model.

Congratulations to the organisers of the national conference organising committee – an outstanding program.

At the time of going to print, the NSW Premier, Nathan Rees, confirmed that confidence in the 'Government's *Computers in Schools*' program is in freefall across Australia', as quoted by Shadow Minister for Education, Christopher Pyne. The NSW Government has now withdrawn schools from Phase 2 of the program. We await the outcome.

Other frameworks are developing as MCEETYA works on producing a new declaration on goals to replace the 1999 *Adelaide Declaration*.

The NSW Secondary Principals' Council (SPC) has been rigorously responding to the drafts of the *National Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians*. Our responses to the three versions have been strong, fast and furious, as the turn-around period has been almost immediate.

Further, the NSW SPC continues to comment on the national curriculum through our state association and national principals' peak body. Our NSW Minister for Education firmly articulates the strength and quality of our curriculum standards; supporting our advocacy of curriculum developed by educators and teachers.

Principals in NSW are also firmly focused on the agenda of equitable funding and accountability for all government-funded schools. The Federal Government's bills, locking in funding until 2012, are not redressing the significantly growing imbalance of funding across educational sectors. We will continue the debate on equity, social inclusion and social capital.

At the state level, industrial action continues as the NSW Department of Education and Training and our teachers' union table staffing and salaries issues. Negotiations are currently at an *impasse*.

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