

Rethinking Schools

An approach for a
system of education

An approach, particularly for low SES schools, that has the best chance of producing the innovation necessary to achieve outstanding student levels of achievement and sustaining these outcomes over time.

Interested?

Read on and join with the Australian National Schools Network (ANSN) and Big Picture Education (BPE).

The context

In many suburban and urban settings around Australia the community comprehensive high school is no longer the norm. We have had a drift to the private sector through the creation of low fee schools. We have many more specialized government schools with out of zone enrolments, including international students. This has resulted in a number of residualised government schools usually located in low socio-economic areas.

Many of these schools have persistent problems of low literacy and numeracy, poor student behaviour, low achievement generally, poor attendance, low levels of school graduation, and too many suspensions. Too many students in these schools are not graduating from school. Many of those who do graduate do not go to university.

It has been hard for systems to staff these schools with leadership teams able to stay together long enough to make a difference. Where local and merit selection policies are in place some schools find it hard to attract experienced teachers and leaders.

Whole of system strategies around literacy, numeracy and behaviour management have not cut through. Some systems are finding it hard to staff all schools as well as providing the district and system support for these change initiatives.

Many of these communities have significant social problems such as health issues and unemployment. Typically these school communities have fewer resources and services available to do this complex and difficult work.

None of this is anyone's fault yet it is everyone's responsibility. Doing the same thing in the same way will only produce more of the same. We need some new ways of doing school. We need some new ways of providing support for schools to change. We need some new ways of scaling up success in one school to many schools. We need to stop pretending we know what to do and begin to work together to explore and develop new ways of working.

As Education Minister, I want nothing short of transformational change in Australia's schools. Let's be honest. Current achievement levels are simply not good enough in too many schools...Too many students from disadvantaged backgrounds...are clustered in a small number of schools, with low expectations and low rates of achievement. Our participation and attainment rates at Year 12 have plateaued for the last decade or more at around 75 per cent. And as a result, a child from a working class family is only half as likely as a child from a high income family to go on to tertiary study. This level of failure is not acceptable, it leaves too many of our children entering adulthood ill-equipped for the needs of the contemporary workforce and society. This makes it a huge economic and moral failure on our part. Turning this around won't be easy. But abandoning a situation as hopeless does nothing but reinforce a culture of despair and underperformance.

The Hon Julia Gillard MP¹

1. Gillard, J. 2008 *Leading Transformational Change in Schools* http://www.deewr.gov.au/Ministers/Gillard/Media/Speeches/Pages/Article_081128_133646.aspx

The old solutions

- Offering a few days professional learning for a few enthusiasts.
- The school executive participating in a leadership course.
- Rewriting the curriculum.
- Implementing a new literacy or numeracy program.
- Implementing whole school and whole of system behaviour management approaches and strategies.
- Exploring the use of new technology.
- Developing new planning processes and new improvement plans.
- Increasing compliance measures in curriculum, assessment and performance appraisal.
- Collecting more data and making results public.
- Hoping the staff within the school can solve the problem on their own.
- Restructuring the schools and devolving decision making to the school.
- Providing extra administrative support
- Employing more teacher aides.

Some of these things are important and will still need doing.

But disconnected strategies, on their own, HAVE NOT WORKED to transform a sufficient number of schools. Most of these strategies, on their own, will not turn a school around. They have not helped struggling schools produce outstanding results.

Our historical evidence is that in the longer view, most change victories are fleeting and their celebration is premature .

A. Hargreaves²

What is needed now...

- Acknowledging that things are not working now and that no-one is to blame but everyone is responsible.
- Going beyond standards and compliance.
- Having high expectations of students.
- Changing teacher practice which takes a long time, persistence, exploration, learning from error, reflection etc.
- Learning to be a focus for the system and the union too. This work is not just something for the students and their teachers. New ways of working will be required by everyone.
- The system providing the resources to support a learning journey for each and every school.
- All the teachers and school leaders in learning.
- All the students and their families.
- The system in which the school is located.
- Working with the community, including industry.
- Working with other schools connected to each school.
- Arrangements that enable a critical mass of staff in a school to continue the work begun by others.

Change is a journey, not a blueprint.
Change is non-linear, dynamic
and loaded with uncertainty and
excitement, sometimes travelling through
unexpected places.
M. Fullan³

2. Hargreaves, A. 2007 *The Long and the Short of Educational Change* Education Canada Canadian Education Association. v47 n3 p16-23 Sum 2007

3. Fullan, M. 1993 *Change Forces* London, The Falmer Press

The offer...

Both the ANSN and the BPE have developed a process, for schools to use, that has a chance of success. The ANSN has been working with teachers and school leaders on rethinking school for a changing world since its inception in 1991. It too has employed many of the old solution strategies listed on the previous page. It still does for some purposes. However we have learned that they are not sufficient. While on the surface schools often look and feel the same each and every school context is unique. Each and every school needs to develop their way of working with their community.

From our work with teachers and schools over the last 18 years the ANSN has now developed a set of generic design principles that any school community might be able to use to review, reflect and rethink school. We have also learned that school culture, pedagogy, and structure only works if teacher practice changes too. This takes time. It takes time and expertise to:

- review current practice
- gather information,
- seek out new ideas and reflect on them
- develop new designs of school for your context.
- implement these plans.
- learn from the early efforts of change
- embed these new ways of working to the point where people can say t his is how we do things here an d other people can see it as evident.

Therefore it takes extra resources.

We transform dysfunctional relationships into functional ones, not by continuing to do what we already know how to do more intensively and with greater enthusiasm, but by learning how to do new things and perhaps more importantly, learning how to attach positive value to the learning and the doing of new things.

Richard F. Elmore ⁴

...the schools where everything depends on relationships between individuals. These are the disadvantaged schools. It is in these schools that the fundamental question of a child's relationship to learning in a social environment is posed in its most acute form...We could innovate elsewhere. We could find schools that were exactly average in social and academic terms and fund them for generalisable innovations. But if we want innovations that get to the root of the teaching relationship, we should choose schools where this is the number one priority.

Richard Teese⁵

BPE has developed a specific set of design principles and requires a unique structure. This is more easily set up from scratch. However in particular contexts we are finding it is possible to convert an existing school to a BP school provided time, expertise and resources are available. BPE was started as a not-for-profit in Australia in late 2005. It was established as a sister organization by a group of people who had worked with the ANSN for many years. It was set up as a distinct organisation because it was promoting a specific set of design principles, processes and structures. However there is much in common in the two approaches.

4. Elmore, R.F., 2000 *Building a New Structure for School Leadership* The Albert Shanker Institute

5. Teese, R. 2006 *Condemned to Innovate Griffith Review* Edition 11 p. 158

Our approach for one school⁶

One student at a time in a community of learners

Our approach:

1. A set of design principles for school and an insistence on developing a coherent set that informs what the school does and how it does it.
2. High expectations for learning of each and every student.
3. Deep personal interest and care for each and every student.
4. A process of support to work with staff in a school as they develop their ideas, their structures, their processes etc. This includes time to explore before deciding on an appropriate design. Support for staff as they implement and embed their new ways of working.
5. Both the ANSN and BPE assume that this work will take a minimum of five years.⁷

Instead of living under threat of intervention and inspection in a target-driven culture of fear, principals and teachers find the experience of visiting each other's schools and sharing strategies that make an immediate difference exhilarating and empowering
A. Hargreaves⁸

Our approach includes:

- A series of regular workshops for all staff using action research to aid planning, evaluation, and the analysis of implementation data and achievement data.
- Workshops as required around areas of interest and new information needs.
- Ongoing regular in-school consulting and coaching.
- The provision of significant resources to help teachers and leaders.
- Developing internal consultants and coaches (including district and central staff where they exist)
- The training and development of leaders
- Connection to others (see next page)
- Research and development and the documentation of the work. This happens from the start. Schools and systems that follow will need to learn from this work. It is another way of helping teachers account for their work and making their practice public.
- Liaising and working with district, central and union staff on issues such as staffing, teacher workload, payment of teachers, and creating new use of resources to best meet local needs.
- Having sufficient resources to provide the learning experiences out of school that students need.
- Developing open accountability about student learning and as a consequence teacher and leader practice.

6. Both the ANSN and the BPE have a flyer outlining their specific approaches to this work.

7. We understand that this is longer than most funding cycles. But we need to acknowledge that this work will take longer.

8. Hargreaves, A. 2007 The Long and the Short of Educational Change *Education Canada* Canadian Education Association. v47 n3 p16-23 Sum 2007

Growing the work.....

One school at a time in a local community of practice

In addition to each school being supported by the processes described on the previous page we can do this work with a small group⁹ of interested schools and district and central support staff.

We can

1. Connect them in a network of local schools
2. Support schools as they engage with the community.
3. Create communities of practice for leaders.
4. Create communities of practice for consultants and coaches within the cluster.
5. Offer professional learning opportunities to meet areas of interest and need.
6. Research the local cluster in addition to the individual school research process outlined on the previous page.
7. Disseminate research and story –on line, video, research circles, professional learning and other publications.
8. Coordinate the work across all schools
9. Negotiate agreements with system, union, community and school

The work of educational leaders is to encourage local experiments, to watch for and nourish supportive beliefs and dynamics and to sponsor faculty and staff to connect with all the kindred spirits now working in isolation. This is how we intentionally work with emergence to create the future we desire.

M. Wheatley¹⁰

9. in this flyer we use 5 schools as a notional number for a cluster

10. Wheatley, M. & Frieze, D. (2006) How Large-Scale Change Really Happens –Working With Emergence. *The School Administrator* Spring 2007

Scaling up...

Connecting schools in a national network of support and challenge

1. Schools and cluster of schools will be joined into a national network of rethinking schools and BPE schools.
2. Schools and clusters of schools will be joined into a national and international school visits program
3. Professional learning opportunities created nationally (and locally) to meet areas of interest and need.

This will enable dissemination of the research, the story and evaluation from individual school, to cluster, to groups of clusters and for national network. This will be very helpful for state and territory systems and the Commonwealth as a vehicle for evaluating progress and achievement in a consistent way.

This will make dissemination of the research, the story and the learning –on line, video, research circles, professional learning and other publications.

Included in this work will be an exploration of how to scale up the ideas so that successful work can be supported and adopted or adapted by other schools. Our learning will be driven by the exploration of the following interrelated key strategic issues:

1. Scale and influence
2. Breadth and depth
3. Fidelity and adaptation
4. Practices and tools of scaling up and their relative effectiveness

Joseph P. McDonald et al ¹¹

11. McDonald, J.P., Klein, E. & Riordan, M. 2003 *Scaling Up the Big Picture Essay Number 1* Big Picture Company

Indicative Costs for a group of 5 schools

Costs per school¹²

1. Getting started
2. 4 x 2 day workshops
3. 5 x 2 day school consultation days
4. Research Process
5. Developing local school consultants
6. National Network participation
7. School visits
8. Student travel

Costs for each year per school: \$404 000¹³

Resources provided by the ANSN and BPE to each school...

1. 5 years of school membership of either ANSN or BPE
2. All existing and new ANSN or BPE resources for leaders, consultants and teachers.
3. Professional learning opportunities provided through ANSN and BPE will be provided with significant discounts.

Costs per group of 5 schools

1. Local communities of practice groups (for school leaders, for consultant/coaches, for teachers, etc)
2. Coordination of activity across all five schools.
3. Research process for the cluster and contribution to national research process
4. Working with system, union and school staff to make necessary agreements, monitor progress, and evaluate implementation, process goals and overall achievement outcomes.

Costs for each year per group of 5 schools: \$161 000

Total annual costs for ANSN/BEP to support each group of 5 schools \$2 181 000

The understanding that real learning comes slowly, through the construction of meaning, the recognition of patterns and the creation of relationships.

Stephanie Pace Marshall¹⁴

12. Detailed description of each of these is contained in the flyers for schools.

13. Includes payments to teachers for participation in out of hours workshops

14. Pace Marshall, S (1999) A possible new story for learning and schooling - Enabling a new mind for the new millennium in *The School Administrator* December 1999, AASA.

The Australian National Schools Network (ANSN)



The Australian National Schools Network (ANSN) is a not-for-profit national network of teachers, researchers, schools, systems, sectors, unions, universities, and community and business partners. Our focus is on rethinking schools and schooling for a changing world. As a dynamic learning organisation, the network continually seeks ideas and identifies concerns expressed by teachers, principals, and educational leaders at all levels of the educational system across Australia, in both urban and regional areas. Through the network, we have learned much about the contexts and conditions required to sustain a passion for learning and promote student achievement.

The ANSN has a long, successful history in school reform and improvement. The network is at the forefront of new thinking about learning, pedagogy, curriculum and school organisation. We have six key objectives, which are:

1. to connect teachers nationally, as they explore and research new ideas, and as they reflect on and reform their practices in order to support more effective learning;
2. to support schools and systems that are seeking to review, rethink and redesign their work over time;
3. to establish and maintain partnerships in education as we do our work with other stakeholders;
4. to support critical reflection on emerging trends in teaching and learning in Australia;
5. to learn from our work and publish and disseminate findings from our research and practice; and
6. to provide professional learning opportunities for those interested in learning about the practices that emerge from our work.

The ANSN believes that all students are entitled to an education that is engaging and develops their capacity to access powerful knowledge

Join the ANSN

- **Affiliated school member**
- **Ordinary school member**
- **Individual membership**

Information about ANSN membership can be found on www.ansn.edu.au

Big Picture Education (Australia)



The Big Picture philosophy is grounded in educating one student at a time, personalising education programs for each student while developing young

people in a community of learners. Big Picture Education Australia is a not for profit organisation that works to catalyse change in education by generating and sustaining innovative, personalised schools that work in tandem with the greater community. The Big Picture educational design principles were developed in the United States by Elliot Washor and Dennis Littky. They had previously worked with the US Coalition of Essential Schools which is based on the research and ideas of Ted Sizer. Big Picture Education Australia is working in collaboration with US colleagues.

Big Picture Education develops public schools based on research in new designs for education, trains educators to serve as leaders in their schools and communities, and actively engages the public as participants and decision makers in the education of our youth. This is based in the belief that learning takes place when each student is an active participant in their education, when their course of study is personalised by teachers, parents and mentors who know them well, and when with outside experiences that heighten the student's interest. Big Picture Education Australia wants to make vital changes in education by generating and sustaining innovative, personalized schools that work with their greater community.

Join the BPE

- **BPE Schools**
- **BPE Inspired Schools**
- **School member of BPE**
- **Individual member of BPE**

Information about BPE membership can be found on www.bigpicture.org.au

Expression of interest

Rethinking Schools

An approach for systems

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