

In support of Education within this enquiry in this submission I would like to clarify any contrast between data collection and education evidence and with that how they are used and affect education policy, the classroom, teachers and students.

I could imagine education evidence in its more abstracted sense to be PISA results, data collection the sorting and storage of these.

But if we were to look to the wider body of education evidence, the teachers daily experiences and considerations, their collegial discussions, the stories they co-create of their students, we can see an immeasurable, abundant wealth of education evidence, albeit not distilled, not fully crystalised, not consistently abstractable into number weight and measure for the statisticians, but a living teacher supportive evidence base. We need to give more credence to this living evidence.

Dear Commissioned Reporter Writers,

Thank You for the opportunity to respond to your draft report. This submission lauds your research and discussion with the many fields and developments of data collection. With around thirty five years of working with children, families and teachers, this submission is more a comment from the ground, bottom up as you refer to it, regarding the evidence base. I have highlighted your text.

You, in your draft report seem to, if not missed, to have undervalued the most living evidence base. This most living education evidence base resides with each teacher in their daily presentations, observations and evening considerations. It is nightly fructified as they wake with and bring new impulses, new ideas and new initiatives to help their classes, colleagues and associated families each and every day. This is the broadest and most effective evidence base. It is naturally *mobilised* daily. Discussions between teachers, colleagues and parents is the next most alive, vital and *mobilisable* evidence base. Once it is documented, we are then one stage removed from the reality and one stage more dehydrated and “dead”(reduced quality). With that, it is also one stage harder to reconstitute from the top into usable “improvement initiatives”.

DATA

Number, weight and measure are our tools to work into material world. Once we work in the living world it becomes more complex, the animal world even moreso,.. To use number, weight and measure to find out about humans one may miss the most essential part. One can liken data upon humans to the skin that a snake sheds.

The skin is left behind, dead and shrivelled when the snake moves on to renew itself and continue its life journey. The test results are the desiccated and abstracted remains of that days student results in their “education” process.

Steiner addressed this weakness of thinking. It has continued for one hundred years. His first lecture to his founding teachers raises the polarities of memory and imagination into clear consciousness.

Memory – Imagination

Past – Future

Less than alive (dying - terminal) – More than alive(emergent - growing)

Nerve sense based – Blood Action based

Steiner also clarified the process of abstraction, leading memory based activity towards fossilisation. Just where this leaves us with solutions via databases seems to be almost recognised in your draft report final Key point comment in Ch7.

Drivers- where

It is one thing to reflect upon education data. It is another thing to drive policy down into the classroom running only on data and statistics.

To use an analogy, were one to use measurement and data (in comparison to international standards) to try to drive improvement in ones wife or partner one would swiftly find opposition even ill will. People can and do change, but the process is bigger. Outside of carrots and sticks there are societal and collegial discussions the artistry and culture of which are the soil wherein new developments arise organically. Society can then nurture or prune these new organic developments subject to their fruitfulness.

OVER TIME

There is a lot of talk about evidence based research and practise but mostly all looking at a very short timeframe. Retired teachers should have a wealth of stories about their students, again hard to clarify into trends. Steiner advised that the child/student in life makes a whole, and that the practises and pedagogy used in elementary and secondary education, even the disposition of the teacher would revisit at a later stage of life.

Such research has been outside of the conception or interest of modern people and too difficult. With minimal possibility to exclude variables the noise in the data is largely impenetrable. Life experiences overlay and play into any statistical analysis. ***Information about external influences*** Still there would be stories that might elucidate these overarching strengths and weaknesses that emerge half a lifetime later, were we to talk with teachers with a lifetime of experience that had also been able to follow their students into life and adulthood.

There has long been an intellectual push in early childhood education towards reading and writing. The intention has been said to save first class students from falling behind in their literacy and numeracy (once called 3Rs – Reading ‘Riting & ‘Rithmetic). That push towards earlier continues today. Current studies, adjacent to this issue shed light upon the problem and the consequences. When we look at studies as to kindergarten starting age the results are startling. The earlier starters may have had better take up of literary skills 3Rs, and PISA at 5, but through high school they have increased prevalence of many ills-anxiety,depression,ADHD,etc. The Sebastian Suggate PhD study from University of Otago further researches and clarifies the earlier issue. <http://www.otago.ac.nz/news/news/otago006408.html>

*A Cambridge University expert in the cognitive development of young children, Dr David Whitebread, says "the overwhelming evidence suggests that five is just too young to start formal learning".*

*He says children should be engaged in informal play-based learning until the age of about seven. "The empirical evidence is that children who have a longer period of play-based early childhood education, that goes on to age six or seven, finish up with a whole range of clear advantages in the long term," he said. "Academically they do better and they experience more emotional wellbeing." SMH*

There are a multitude of qualities and human developments (outside of NAPLAN/PISA like studies and data) that teachers are daily working with and attempting to develop in their students. The documentation of these is far outside of cost effective as is the information recovery of them by any subsequent teachers. These qualities and developments are built and developed day by day and in time hopefully include the resilience to not subside into suicide, drug abuse, mental health issues, depression, anxiety or their like.

GAPS

You speak of GAPS. When it comes to student progression through the classes, as it is complex to document each child and equally so for the next teacher to reconstitute documentation into a living mind picture, one economic indication

would be reduce the transition of students from teacher to teacher. There are untold stories not hard to imagine of how students (having lost heart and trust) fall through the cracks, whether for 3Rs or for sociality in their progression from class to class, teacher to teacher.

Where one changes dentist yearly there is a recurring expense for each dentist to read the reports, check the teeth, re-discuss with the patient then newly consider any complications for possible solutions and treatments. Where one has a continued relationship with one dentist much of this new learning expense is saved with memory recall filling that place very efficiently. That is for a simple definable field of thirty odd teeth, gums, bones, lips and a tongue. How much more complex for a teacher to learn each student, their strengths, their weaknesses, their needs and best approaches,.. this is before we come to the Naplan 3Rs related details, their friends, their home life or parental support.

Here Steiner's indication and Waldorf School practise for one teacher through from first class to seventh class makes enormous "economic" sense. The Class Guardian principle now incorporated into the adolescent years across many Education systems seems utterly sound amidst the mayhem of ever changing subject teachers and class levels.

Here the evidence base, not necessarily documented, but lived, is continuous and very economic and efficient thanks to the Human input from all sides. Collegiality, discussions amongst Guardians and Subject teachers brings the next level of varied perspectives but is equally the most time efficient and effective way to work. Steiner wanted his Waldorf School to have collegial meetings and called them the heart and soul of Waldorf Education. Hearts and souls may make mistakes, but they fix them. That is the difference between a computer driven education program and a human based practise, it always falls to the human in us to fix things.

At this level, the research is on the ground, it is living, it is student related and it is individual, inspired by successes, challenged by failures. Governments and Bureacrats should revere such collegial work and encourage it. It is mobile and it is pro-active.

## WELLBEING

A teacher in the class notices wellbeing daily, they in contemplation monitor it continually. It is a massive task to document but easy to relate to colleagues or family.

*Overall, the evidence indicates that a bottom-up approach that looks at what works best within education settings is necessary to drive improvements in education outcomes. In this context, there are two key areas to focus on. The first key area involves the creation of high-quality evidence on what works best to improve education outcomes. The existence of this evidence is necessary but not sufficient to improve outcomes. Therefore, the second key area involves meeting the needs of educators in applying education evidence. This may involve an emphasis on effective translation of the evidence into practical material for teachers, training and development, and research into knowledge mobilization (chapter 7).*

The tale of Anne McNerny, Fulbright scholar is utterly revealing regarding this issue over time. She was winner of the scholarship, chose to visit the UK education department as they were leading edge at the time. They had researched Finland and best practise and were world reknowned. Upon arriving Anne found the whole department was being packed into boxes and shutdown! They had this last day to move out and close up. Anne realised everything was hinging upon her getting her introduction right and asked if she might speak with anyone. They were all extraordinarily busy packing but hearing her story, her trip from the antipodes and her award they offered to answer a few questions, half an hour at most. She had to essentialise her questions and maximise her moment if she was ever to make this visit worthwhile. What she found out was startling but utterly indicative. They had been commissioned to report upon what needed doing to improve education, efficiency, results etc and did report. The essence was that the Bureaucrats and ministers should be led and guided by the teachers, by their requests and by their advice. They spoke together for hours. Its not hard to work out why they were being shut down. An English, world leading education Department newly inspired and enlightened with European and Finnish ideas, ideas twenty years ahead of their time – like Herod the King with the Infants – The top will rule, let the bottom take this as a lesson – Terminated. Just how much Times and Ministers have changed will emerge in the follow up to this report, but it is outstanding, your draft's mention of the need, or rather the mainstay, for bottom up inspired improvement. We can hope the Government will be whitemailed out of their political Ideologies and economic agendas to acquiesce to the consensus that is emerging between educators and educational researchers – listen to and trust your teachers, seek their work wrought pearls, support their sharing them collegially.

3.5 This section has discussed the most efficient and effective means of working with education evidence for the more subtle and human aspects and its eventual worth. Keep it alive. MBAs are now employing storytelling. Stories reach realms the intellect never

bothers about. Realms that are mobile. Realms that long to fix things. Discussions and stories (ideally enlightened) are more effective and efficient than turning this evidence into data, storing it then trying to reconstitute it and impose it on schools.

4

Where this report request has noted cost blowouts the Ministerial media release seems to indicate Government readiness to attribute it to education failures, but as *Box 4.1* relates, there is an unaccounted increase in data collection and compliance in every form imposed upon teachers and schools. The question remains, more data or more effective sharing?

The further question implied in the ministers stating of the problem and calling for this report is, have we been on the wrong track educationally? If results are not improving and we are collecting more data, then ...? More data? Earlier data? More collection? And earlier? More of what is failing? Such is the dreadnought, the ship that cannot turn, the mind that is either blinkered or closed. Sebastian Suggate's University of Otago PhD research could resolve this question utterly, were we to ask it. What is the most age appropriate means of teaching 3Rs?

Studies into historical kindergarten starting age (read age of commencement of intellectual learning - 3Rs) show that earlier starters have many unsocial issues emerge into high school and life; health, mental health, adhd, autism, ritalin, depression, anxiety,... the list is long. They are expensive issues. The cost of such issues societally? Has this ever been accounted for?

The cost of such issues has not till now by the intellectuals been accepted as having any connection with Education pedagogy, Skills then outcomes became the new clothes. This societal cost was observed and written about concisely in the 1890's by Dickens in *Hard Times*, but Gradgrind, facts, and a psychopathic graduate were belittled into a funny little story, as against one of the most significant problems of our times.

Monitoring – This requires creating high-quality evidence on what works to improve education outcomes, while meeting the needs of educators in applying education evidence.

The report draft still wishes the bottom to be assessing, the top to be directing.

There is a further problem. The continuous change in teachers common in student progression through the classes mean that the broader educative work of a teacher hasn't had time to bear fruit even if the naplan results are looked at there is a lot of statistical noise. For example, educators can live in their ideas without having to

face the reality of what they have accomplished with each child and the whole class in general, by passing the class on,...starting a new year with a new cohort of students. This does not make for effective assessment nor evaluation of teacher, of pedagogy or of new trial initiatives.

The argument is used that were a teacher to stay with a class for seven years, if the teacher were a bad teacher that would be terrible for the class. There are two obvious answers;

1. So we would let that teacher hide in the yearly transition process and continue hiding (from the school, parents and Government) the damage they continue to do?
2. That with time, as the pedagogical fruits emerge and become less and less disputable wont any teacher with a heart and soul try to resolve their failings? (Or find another employment, either willingly, or under pressure from their colleagues?)

Essentially, the more years the teacher works with the class, the more the evidence becomes obvious and clear (*high-quality evidence on what works to improve education outcomes*). With that, more opportunity emerges for teacher/collegial evaluation and improvement (*while meeting the needs of educators in applying education evidence*) without needing top down time and effort spent upon it. Then when it comes to *Figure 14 Top-down and bottom-up processes are essential and complementary*, the issues that would require monitoring are increasingly resolved on each level, from the bottom up, saving resources at higher levels needing to be drawn upon. That is efficient use of evidence. That is a productivity improvement on the use of evidence.

#### *INFORMATION REQUEST 5.2*

*The Commission invites participants to comment on the operation of mutual recognition in the health area and any lessons it provides for education research.*

Is it sound to argue ADHD medications are supportive if the study is over a few weeks? Shouldn't the study be over at least a full schooling? Ideally continued into a working life? Before widespread prescription? Or at least be begun now to base future policy and practise upon?

If there were a link, even depersonalised, to connect medical history, medications, vaccination etc with attendance, results, graduation results, social maturity and well

being it may assist greatly in foreseeing risk factors and in support and early intervention for social and mental health issues in each new year and generation.

## 7 Creating and using evidence **Key points**

- Australia needs to invest in high-quality evidence that contributes to greater understanding about what works best to improve education outcomes.
- This investment will require national policy effort, including support for the:
  - development of research priorities
  - commissioning of high-quality research
  - adoption of rigorous research quality control processes
  - dissemination of high-quality education evidence
  - development of researcher capacity.
- But creating evidence will not be sufficient. Knowledge needs to be mobilised — it needs to change decision makers' behaviour in ways that lead to improved outcomes. The most effective ways of achieving this goal in Australia are unknown.
  - Research effort needs to target this issue.

So once again, following Steiner's indication, in this submission I wish to draw your attention to the perceptions of the teachers, the living evidence base and the "emergent future" as Otto Scharmer speaks of. These teacher observations, alive and in the real world are continually touched and fructified by imaginations(the emergent future), including ideas of what educational initiatives might be needed to get there and the will to do it- Bottom up - co-operation with students personal and individual ideal futures.

This submission has tried to offer an extension of clarity regarding the nature of data and evidence towards life wisdom. It has tried to offer a window into a Knowledge base that is mobile and efficiently mobilisable at the teacher, school and system levels. With it comes the hope that these ideas and descriptions can be followed and sounded out for veracity and fruitfulness.

Tracey Wittgenstein Piracini CEO Steiner Education Australia, Director on the Board of AISNSW and member of The Hague Circle is readily available to discuss and present examples of Waldorf education. I also am free to answer any questions or further discuss any of these issues.



Regarding other Countries

Elisabeth Attwell Head of English at Michael Hall Steiner School has advised me that the GCSE markers amazed repeatedly give Band 6 marks to her English students. The criteria is “Bringing new Insights”.

Franz Lutters, a deeply experienced Waldorf teacher in The Netherlands and long time member of The Hague Circle (a Waldorf education umbrella body) has advised me that their education department officials have come to the point of saying, “You tell us what to do!”

Vladimir Putin, was televised in Moscow this year showing the school that won the prize for the best school in Russia, “This is what our Russian schools are going to be like!” was the translation. It was the Moscow Waldorf School.

Silicon Valley professionals, the cleverest geeks in America are sending their children to Waldorf Schools. Steiner’s educative work of early last century is an initiative whose time is soon come to be widely taken up.

Medical connections.

I have tried to relate the value of face to face living knowledge in education. Steiner indicated a similar initiative for medicine. He put Dr Kolisko in his first school as both teacher and school doctor. By wedding medicine and education (both inspired and extended by Steiner’s indications) daily in the classroom and schoolyard and weekly in collegial meetings he wanted to make the teaching more hygienic (full potential-utterly efficient) and medicine(healing) more educational. There has been continued work towards such goals in Waldorf Education ever since. Kolisko conferences are but one face of this initiative.

Has it had effect? This may seem outlandish, but there was a study contrasting Steiner school students with anthroposophical upbringing against state school students in Sweden for Atopy related ailments. The Steiner school students had half to one third of the atopic ailments and the lowest statistical risk was for those who had not received MMR and who largely ate biodynamic or organic vegetables. See *Atopy in Children of Families with an Anthroposophic Lifestyle*, Lancet 353, 1485-1488 (1999) by Alm, Swartz, Lilja, Scheynius and Pershagen. Asthma is but one enormous cost to health budgets and can seriously compromise productivity. Its prevalence has been more than exponential in the last fifty years. Data linkage may find connections and assist in finding better ways to health if looked at wisely.

