Looking Back at Curriculum Change in Tasmania: Will the New Essential Learnings Framework Facilitate Successful Curriculum Reform?

Michael G. Watt

Author

Michael Watt taught in several secondary schools in Tasmania, and has worked as an education officer in the Tasmania Department of Education. He is currently involved in full-time doctoral study at the University of Canberra, ACT, Australia.

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Abstract

The Labor government's policy statement, Learning Together, released in December 2000, proposed reforming the curriculum by consulting the educational community. The purpose of this paper is to trace the historical pattern of change in the curriculum, and assess the challenges posed to curriculum reform proposed in Learning Together by analysing the extent to which Tasmania's educational system provides capacity building and teacher development, accountability, and public leadership needed to mount successful development and implementation of the New Essential Learnings Framework.
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Introduction

In February 1999, Premier Jim Bacon initiated Tasmania Together, a strategy intended to develop a twenty-year social, environmental and economic plan for Australia's island state, the nation's first planning exercise applying a process of community consultation derived from Oregon Shines in the United States. Following the Premier's consultations with community interest groups, a 24-member Community Leaders' Group was formed to consult with the people of Tasmania, and facilitate the development of a vision statement and goals.

In June 1999, the Community Leaders' Group, together with 60 other people representing all sectors of the Tasmanian community, met at a conference in Hobart to determine the major issues confronting Tasmania, and directions that needed to be taken to move forward. The outcome of the conference was the release of a draft vision document in December 1999, which formed the basis for a statewide review. From February to May 2000, the Community Leaders' Group held 60 forums in cities and towns across Tasmania to hear citizens' views about social, environmental and economic issues, over 100 community organisations were consulted, 160 written submissions were received from groups and organisations, 4,000 comment sheets were returned in response to the draft vision document, and 2,500 postcard responses were received. From an analysis of this information, the Community Leaders' Group wrote the draft vision statement and four sets of goals relating to society and the community, the economy, the environment, and the system of government. Released in October 2000, the draft vision statement and 24 goals were refined following a one-month public review. In December 2000, representatives from community groups, state government agencies and the Community Leaders' Group were appointed to benchmarking committees representing six areas: Community Well Being; Employment and Economy; Sustainable Development; Arts, Culture and Heritage; and Open and Inclusive Government. The benchmarking process, which involved the committees identifying issues relating to the goals, standards presenting measurable statements reflecting the issues, indicators showing what is being measured, and targets, was completed during 2001. Budget and strategic planning information provided by state government agencies was used to align their programs to the goals and benchmarks, once planning Tasmania Together was completed. Late in 2001, the state government appointed the nine-member Tasmania Together Progress Board to monitor and report to state parliament on progress made towards achieving the benchmarks, encourage community organisations to adopt the benchmarks, and oversee five-year reviews of Tasmania Together.

In mid 1999, Paula Wriedt, the Minister for Education, held a series of meetings with Department of Education officials, and representatives from principals' associations, teacher and public sector unions, and parent associations at which issues of concern were raised. Draft proposals for education, training and information provision, developed as an outcome of these discussions, were released for a two-month public review in February 2000. The comments from more than 160 submissions, obtained from the public review, were analysed to identify common themes. Five, goal-based working groups then used the themes to
establish concrete actions and strategies to achieve the goals. The work of each group was then consolidated into the policy statement, which was released by the Minister in December 2000.

The policy statement, *Learning Together*, is intended to complement Tasmania Together by presenting a long-term plan to transform Tasmania's educational system by providing lifelong learning across childcare, primary schooling, secondary schooling, college education, vocational education and training, technical and further education, adult education, and library and information services (Tasmania Department of Education, 2000). *Learning Together* presents a vision for a world-class education, training and information system based on valuing people, achievement, flexibility and innovation, organisation and planning, and a ‘fair go’. The vision is supported by five goals.

Five initiatives facilitate Goal 1: responsive and continually improving services that ensure all Tasmanians develop the knowledge, skills, and confidence they need. The Learning Together Council will monitor the implementation of the Learning Together initiatives, and information technology will be used to increase interactions between policy-makers and the community about educational issues. Veteran teachers will mentor beginning teachers, professional development will be provided to teachers to increase their knowledge and skills, and professional learning will be provided to support staff. The Tasmanian Educational Leaders' Institute will provide professional development and a voice for teachers, and the diversity of leaders will be broadened. Partnerships between schools and communities will be fostered, community use of school facilities will be encouraged, and an information base about partnerships will be established. The Department of Education will provide accountability for educational leadership, strategic planning, performance goals, provision of services, and partnerships.

Five initiatives facilitate Goal 2: enriching and fulfilling learning opportunities that enable people to work effectively and participate in society. A review will be conducted to develop a school curriculum for the twenty-first century, which defines the content, teaching methods and means of student assessment across all learning areas in the form of a rationale, essential learning, a curriculum guide, student attainment, and an assessment guide. Student achievement will be reported at particular levels, and provision will be made to link childcare programs to the school curriculum. An Office of Post-Compulsory Education and Training will be formed to coordinate policy, a Tasmanian Qualifications Authority will be established to ensure that standards are maintained, and specific strategies will engage young people in post-compulsory learning. Lifelong learning will be encouraged by providing alternative entry points and current information on learning opportunities. Post-compulsory training will be linked to state and local projects by supporting training that increases employment, assisting students identify career options, and increasing opportunities for local partnerships by forming community learning advancement networks. An Institute of TAFE Tasmania will be established to promote greater participation.
Four initiatives facilitate Goal 3: safe and inclusive learning environments that encourage and support participation in learning throughout all of life. A Behaviour Support Team will be formed to provide safe learning places, and pilot projects will be established in each district. A campaign will be undertaken to increase school attendance and the participation of 'at-risk' students in post-compulsory education. A literacy intervention program will be developed for primary schools, and particular strategies in literacy and numeracy will be targeted at children with specific learning disabilities. The skills and confidence of staff working with disabled children will be raised by providing professional development and forming reference committees, children from disadvantaged groups will be provided with greater access to electronic information services, and gifted children will be provided with opportunities for extension.

Four initiatives facilitate Goal 4: an information-rich community with access to global and local resources so that everyone has the opportunity to participate in, and contribute to, a healthy democracy and a prosperous society. A Centre of Excellence in Online Learning will be established to facilitate online learning in schools, and partnerships with local information technology companies will be formed. Tasmania's culture and history will be promoted to schools and organisations in other states and countries through electronic and digital resources, and preserved and made accessible. A database of information on cultural resources relating to Tasmania's heritage will be provided, and the public library network will become a key centre for accessing information resources. A partnership will be developed between the state's library services and adult education.

Two initiatives facilitate Goal 5: a valued and supported education workforce that reflects the importance of teaching as a profession and is held in high esteem by the community. Exemplary aspects of Tasmanian education will be showcased at an international conference to be held in 2002, an annual education week will be held commencing in 2001 to acknowledge outstanding teachers, outstanding teachers will be given opportunities to share their expertise, the professional status of teachers will be protected through registration, and a recruitment strategy will be implemented to encourage young people to enter the teaching profession. A program will be instituted to involve the education community in consultation about changes in the education system, information technology will be applied to provide an online management system, and the Department of Education's web site will be used extensively to publicise information about activities and provide forums.

In an authoritative history of education in Tasmania, a key theme intimated by Phillips (1985) was the persistent problem of marshalling limited human and physical resources to improve the educational system to meet the needs of a small community on an isolated island. This historical study showed that whilst change occurred in the educational system over alternating periods of inertia and activity, it was largely stimulated by external influences. A question motivating the author to examine the initiatives referring to curriculum reform in Learning Together arose from curiosity about the tardiness of policymakers in attempting to improve academic achievement by defining the content students should know and be able to do. This concern raised a query about whether the limited resources Tasmania's educational system could engage in an effort at curriculum reform would be adequate. The purpose of this article is to assess the challenges posed to
curriculum reform proposed in *Learning Together* by analysing the extent to which Tasmania's educational system provides capacity building and teacher development, accountability, and public leadership needed to mount successful development and implementation of the New Essential Learnings Framework.

**Methodology**

In the United States, the Achieve Resource Center on Standards, Assessment, Accountability and Technology for Governors (Achieve) collaborated in 1998 with the Council for Basic Education and the Learning Research and Development Center at the University of Pittsburgh to develop a process for benchmarking state content standards. The benchmarking process applies four approaches tailored to particular states' requirements. State standards may be benchmarked through brief or in-depth reviews. The brief review provides basic feedback on the content of standards as part of the developmental process. The standards' strengths and weaknesses are identified, and action steps are offered to states for improvement. The in-depth review involves thorough evaluation based on comparisons with exemplary standards from other states and countries, followed by detailed feedback and recommendations for improvements. The alignment between assessments a state administers to students and the state's standards are examined as a package, based on comparisons with other states and countries. Comprehensive reviews of systemic reform policies for states are also provided. A team of prominent experts reviews various aspects of a state's education system, state policies and practices, interviews stakeholders, and makes recommendations to build on the reform strategy.

The findings of benchmarking studies indicated that those states making the greatest progress in standards-based education employed reform strategies that met four challenges. First, all students were exposed to a curriculum aligned to standards with additional support given to low achieving students. Second, teachers were offered professional development to provide the knowledge and skills to teach the curriculum, and schools were supported in becoming high performance organisations focused on improving student learning. Third, an accountability system was designed to provide incentives and rewards, and support for failing schools. Fourth, leadership by either an individual, such as an education-minded politician or a highly respected official, or a coalition of political, business and education leaders provided forceful advocacy for reform, thereby building sufficient public understanding and will to sustain support for the reform during its implementation.

The analysis of *Learning Together* indicated that the document presents a policy statement on systemic reform. Therefore, the approach applied to review systemic reform policies was seen to be appropriate in this case. This approach applies two essential strategies. First, the review team examines documents available from the state education agency, state board, universities and task forces, as well as training materials, curriculum frameworks supporting standards, scoring criteria, external studies of education reform, news articles, and web sites. Second, the review team interviews stakeholders involved in the reform effort. The information in these documents, and that obtained from the interviews, is carefully considered by the review team in the historical context of state education reform.
As it was considered impracticable for an independent researcher to interview stakeholders, the approach applied in this study involved only the review of documents. As the main emphasis of the review lay in determining policy issues relating to curriculum reform, greatest consideration was given to documents concerned with this issue. Citations, obtained from searches of web sites and electronic databases, covered historical documents, books, collected works, reports, and journal articles. Each document was reviewed and a summary prepared. These summaries were then organised chronologically, and incorporated into the commentary.

**Historical Background to Curriculum Change**

The history of curriculum change in Tasmania's educational system has been documented comprehensively in two secondary sources (Hughes, 1969; Phillips, 1985). Hughes identified that its development passed through four stages defined in a classification proposed by Beeby (1966). As no statutory provisions were made during the colonial period following settlement in 1803, the educational system existed in the dame school stage. The first school, established at Hobart in 1807 under the charge of a former convict, was followed by the establishment of 24 schools catering for 785 pupils. The schools operated independently with no program beyond reading, writing and arithmetic delivered by practice and drill methods. The main issue, the provision of a common system of education for all denominations, remained unresolved at the close of this period.

The second period, characterised by transition to the stage of formalism, began with the formation in 1839 of the first Board of Education, which provided a common system based on that of the British and Foreign School Society. The Board's Course of Instruction was limited to reading and writing, supplemented by arithmetic for boys, and needlework and knitting for girls. Teachers could extend the curriculum to include drawing, geography, grammar, history, mathematics, and natural philosophy.

The third period, characterised as the stage of formalism, commenced in 1865 with the issuing of the Standard of Instruction for reading, writing and arithmetic with minimum standards of attainment for six grades. The proclamation of the Public Schools Act of 1868 led to the establishment of local school boards to regulate compulsory education for all 7 to 14 year-olds. The appointment of a select committee in 1882 to report on the system of education led to the Education Act of 1885 changing the role of local school boards to local boards of advice, and replacing the Central Board of Education and the inspectorate with an Education Department accountable to a minister, and headed by a director, but also ushered in a two-decade long period lacking in innovation.

The fourth period, characterised as moving to the stage of transition, was initiated by an invitation in 1904 to William L. Neale of South Australia to report on primary education. Neale's appointment as director in 1905 led to systemic reform of the educational system, but his controversial attempt to introduce the principles of Progressive or New Education by recruiting teachers from South Australia led to his dismissal in 1909. His successor, William T. McCoy, mandated a Course of Instruction in September 1910 based on a version of New Education propounded by Peter Board, the director of the New South Wales Department of
Public Instruction (Selleck et al., 1983). The Course of Instruction covered English, Mathematics, Scripture History and Moral Lessons, History, Geography, Nature Study and Elementary Science, Drawing, Manual Work, Music, and Physical Culture for seven grades. Occurring just before the introduction of selective high schools in 1913, the imposition of the Course of Instruction was followed by revisions, at first by inspectors in 1919, but under the policy of devolving decision-making fostered by George V. Brooks, the long-serving director from 1920 to 1945, committees of teachers undertook revisions in 1921, 1924, 1929, 1934 and 1942.

The fifth period, characterised by completion of the stage of transition and continuation into the stage of meaning, began with the appointment in August 1942 of the Committee on Educational Extension, set up to advise on provisions for older pupils to be catered for outside the existing selective high schools following the enactment of the Education Act of 1942, which raised the leaving age from 14 years to 16 years (Education Department of Tasmania, 1943). Developed in line with recommendations in the Committee's report, a course of study for modern schools, which presented a broadened curriculum aimed at developing individual capabilities instead of attaining academic proficiency, was implemented in 1947. Appointed in 1943, the Committee on Educational Aims in the Primary School initiated a similar shift in the primary curriculum by defining aims in ten areas: physical health; discovery of aptitude; evolving a pattern of abilities; developing abilities; developing social qualities; establishing a regard for truth; developing aesthetic values; appreciating moral values; establishing norms of living; and forming desirable habits (Education Department of Tasmania, 1946). Following revision of the Primary Course in 1948, a new procedure for curriculum review was adopted in 1949 with the formation of the Primary School Curriculum Standing Committee, which appointed subject-based coordinating subcommittees to undertake revisions. The gradual replacement of modern schools from 1956 by comprehensive high schools led to the advent of a general curriculum across the same subject areas for the primary level and the first four years of the secondary level. The application of the research, development and diffusion model to develop, pilot, trial and implement the Social Sciences syllabus between 1968 and 1976 represented the most ambitious effort undertaken during this period to employ sequential development of ideas and the integration of disciplines across both levels (Dufty, 1971).

Setting the Stage for Systemic Change

Two influential reports, one released in 1968 and the other in 1978, aimed at introducing new developments from external sources to the educational system through incremental change. Commencing in July 1967, the 26-member Committee Set up to Investigate the Role of the School in Society held hearings with interest groups and citizens in Hobart, Launceston and Burnie. On the basis of this information, the Committee presented sets of recommendations referring to the organisation of schools, school programs, teaching and teachers, and the provision of facilities and services (Education Department of Tasmania, 1968). With reference to the curriculum, the Committee recommended that general courses should be followed by all students in the primary and first four years of the secondary levels, but that the dual functions of preparing students for higher or vocational education should be followed at the senior secondary level. The program of studies to be followed by all students
should consist of seven subjects: Arts and Crafts; English; Mathematics; Natural Science; Physical Education; Religious Education; and Social Sciences. At the secondary level, however, students should be introduced to additional subject areas, including technical subjects, home arts, personal and human relationships, typing, commercial subjects, and foreign languages. In view of the range of these subjects, provision should be made to offer them as short courses, but also for study in depth during the last two years. In a case study of relationships between the different levels of the hierarchy in the educational system at that time, Pusey (1976) argued that its centralised bureaucratic organisation stifled many recommendations in this report through paralysis wrought by internal forces. However, the report's recommendations led to significant rearrangements of the school curriculum, as well as establishing new services or expanding existing services for schools.

In November 1976, the Minister for Education appointed the six-member Tasmanian Education Next Decade Committee to review the relationship between schools and their local communities, and assess the educational system's capacity to meet particular needs. The Committee held public hearings at Hobart, Launceston, Scottsdale, Burnie, Smithton and Queenstown, conducted two workshops on specific topics, met with educational and community groups, visited 51 schools, secondary and technical colleges, and other institutions of higher education, and collected 213 written submissions from citizens, teachers, and professional, parent and community groups. On the basis of these activities, the Committee presented sets of recommendations referring to general priorities, curriculum, organisation of the education system, school and the local community, teachers and teacher education, rural education, and innovation (Education Department of Tasmania, 1978a). With reference to the curriculum, the Committee concluded that five issues required resolution in order to adjust curriculum planning to recent innovations. First, reduced prescriptiveness resulting from school-based curriculum development required the development of curriculum guidelines by subject-based committees. The development and implementation of curriculum guidelines should be supported by preservice and inservice training for teachers in curriculum development, provision of resource consultants, and the evaluation of school-based curricula. Second, the content for a core curriculum based on the elements of communicating, thinking and valuing needed to be defined. Third, schools should become more involved in teaching moral, religious, and aesthetic values. Fourth, the level of student literacy and numeracy skills should be increased by monitoring through statewide testing, offering professional development, and providing additional remedial teachers. Fifth, high schools should become more involved in issuing their own certificates to replace the School Certificate, and secondary colleges should be responsible for developing their own courses and certificates.

**Defining a Curriculum for Schools**

The adjustments arising from these attempts at systemic change gave way to separate efforts to effect changes in the curriculum for primary and secondary schools during the 1980s. Although both efforts began by taking account of the recommendations of these reports, the influence of school-based curriculum development at the time precluded more than the identification of competencies or capabilities, and areas within a core curriculum.
Beginning in February 1976, the 14-member Committee on Secondary Education, appointed to review the existing provisions and desirable lines for future development in the educational program and operation of secondary schools, surveyed 70 schools to establish an information base, commissioned three external consultants, who worked with a group of principals to produce papers on specific topics, and accepted submissions from educators and citizens. As an outcome of these activities, the Committee presented sets of recommendations referring to relationships and responsibilities within the community, the educational program, the organisation of schools, and the provision of resources to schools (Education Department of Tasmania, 1977). With reference to the curriculum, the Committee identified six broad areas of activity: Language; Mathematics; the investigation of the Physical Environment; the investigation of the Social and Cultural Environment; Arts and Crafts; and the problems of concern to adolescents. Although unrelated to these areas of activity, Physical Education was recognised as an essential part of the educational program. The Committee believed, however, that schools should be given flexibility to organise these areas of activity in different ways, such as through subject disciplines, integrated approaches, or the study of major topics.

In order to implement the report's recommendations, the Education Department formed a seven-member Curriculum Task Force in 1977 to identify issues relating to the school curriculum. Separate forms of a questionnaire were administered in 1977 to 1,824 teachers, 1,289 secondary students, and 3,334 parents to identify their perceptions about school-based curriculum development, core curriculum, school-based curriculum evaluation, resources and support services, and community involvement. Reported by the Education Department of Tasmania (1978b), the findings of the survey identified that a significant number of schools had developed school-based curricula in most subjects. With regard to a core curriculum, 77 percent of respondents believed it should be undertaken by all students, 87 percent believed at least some subjects should form a core curriculum for all schools, and 56 percent believed it should be determined by an external authority. With regard to school-based curriculum evaluation, 43 percent of respondents believed their schools had a statement of aims for the curriculum, and 64 percent reported efforts to evaluate curricula in their schools. With regard to resources and services, the respondents indicated that curriculum guidelines and syllabuses produced in Tasmania and commercially produced materials were the most used resources, and 89 percent believed the main functions of a curriculum centre should be collecting and distributing ideas and materials to schools.

Meeting at intervals between June 1978 and March 1980, an eleven-member Study Group produced a draft paper for a core curriculum, which was reviewed by a number of teachers. Taking into account the teachers' comments, a Writing Party revised the paper in April 1980 to produce a discussion paper, which outlined and elaborated four major requirements (Education Department of Tasmania, 1980a). First, the curriculum should spring from children's needs. Second, it should help each child learn as much as he or she can about himself or herself, the world, and the people in it. Third, it should contain a strong thread of usefulness in the form of essential learnings, basic competencies and enabling capabilities. Fourth, it should highlight the purposes of communicating, valuing and thinking to which all teachers subscribe.
In October 1977, the 24-member Committee on Primary Education was appointed to review the existing provisions and desirable lines for future development in the educational program and operation of primary schools. In its report, the Committee viewed the constituents for the core curriculum to be overriding concern for children, something in the minds of teachers and ways of doing them, and enabling capabilities (Education Department of Tasmania, 1980b). The Committee supported the continuation of curriculum development and review by subject-based policy and planning committees, responsible for developing curriculum guidelines for use in primary schools. The application of the social interaction model to develop curriculum guidelines for English, undertaken by the Primary Language Committee formed in July 1977, leading to the dissemination between 1982 and 1985 of six booklets forming the guidelines, showed an important shift in the process of curriculum development over the previous decade.

To commemorate its foundation, the Education Department of Tasmania convened the Centenary Conference on Secondary Education in September 1985. Held in Hobart, the Centenary Conference brought together 240 delegates, who heard presentations on current developments in education, and participated in group discussions about a range of issues relating to secondary education identified by three regional groups prior to the conference. The suggestions raised by the delegates were then taken into account in drafting a paper on secondary education, which was released in March 1986 for statewide review. Following information conferences, teachers, parents, students and community members submitted comments, which were used in revising the paper to form a policy statement on secondary education. The policy statement presented a set of principles on provisions for secondary education, the curriculum, students, teachers, and parents and the community to guide secondary education in the future (Education Department of Tasmania, 1987). The policy statement indicated that programs should be based on developing competencies in acquiring information, conveying information, applying logical processes, undertaking practical tasks as a member of a group, making judgments and decisions, and working creatively and solving problems within six fields of knowledge: Languages; Sciences and Mathematics; the Arts; the Social Sciences; the Study of Work and Daily Life; and Health, Physical Education, and Recreation.

From the work of 27 working groups drawn from educators, parents and community members across Tasmania, the Department of Education and the Arts released a policy statement consisting of a five-part series of booklets intended as guides for developing educational programs in primary schools. In the third booklet, the Tasmania Department of Education and the Arts (1991) defined essential learnings to be personal, linguistic, rational, creative and kinaesthetic capabilities within seven fields of inquiry: Language; Mathematics; Health and Personal Development; Sciences; Social Education; the Arts; and Technology.

Implementing the National Statements and Profiles

The implementation of the national statements and profiles in Tasmania's educational system has been documented comprehensively in one secondary source (Pullen, 1997). At the time of their dissemination, policy statements presenting four key reference points for curriculum planning in Tasmanian schools and providing direction to teachers to incorporate the national
statements and profiles through continuing reviews, and a professional development material, used to provide inservice training in schools, were released. Guidelines for kindergarten to year 8 in each of the learning areas were prepared and published during 1995 and 1996.

A cycle was determined for the implementation period concluding in 2000, and particular learning areas were identified as priorities: Studies of Society and Environment between 1995 and 1997; English between 1996 and 1998; the Arts between 1997 and 1999; and Health and Physical Education between 1998 and 2000. Languages other than English was a priority learning area throughout the implementation period. Each learning area received specific support from a team of curriculum implementation officers, who were drawn from the six districts. Schools were required to review, develop and implement their educational programs according to this cycle. The cycle also determined the allocation of resources to support each priority learning area, which led to particular curriculum development activities occurring in each learning area. A curriculum guide for kindergarten to year 8 was developed for Studies of Society and Environment. A website incorporating curriculum guidelines and resources was developed for English. An emphasis was placed on the professional development of teachers in the Arts. A curriculum framework for kindergarten to year 10 was developed for Health and Physical Education. A strategic plan was developed for gradual introduction of Languages other than English, especially French, German, Indonesian and Japanese into primary schools between 1996 and 2003, followed by high schools between 2000 and 2007.

Establishing priorities among particular learning areas led to the conduct of several projects. A perception that the national statements and profiles related more to the secondary level, led the Department of Education and the Arts to collaborate with the Curriculum Corporation on the Primary Project, in which 52 units, using commonly presented topics in primary classrooms, were developed as an integrated one-year program, and published in three volumes by the Curriculum Corporation (1996). Two projects on literacy and numeracy led to the development of sets of key intended literacy and numeracy outcomes derived from the national profiles.

**Setting Directions for Education**

In April 1997, Premier Anthony Rundle released the state Liberal government’s Directions Statement, containing sets of directions for education, vocational education and training, information technology and advanced telecommunications, electricity and gas, primary industry, aquaculture, forestry, mining and mineral processing, tourism, the Hydro Electricity Commission, and governance. The six Directions for Education were intended to establish an outcome-based education system by measuring, monitoring and reporting learning outcomes. Schools and local communities would determine the learning outcomes they were to deliver through formal agreements with the state government. These agreements would be supported by devolving decision-making to schools, improving leadership in schools by accrediting principals, offering teachers greater opportunities for professional development, and providing schools with computers to facilitate learning.
A six-member Implementation Taskforce was established with individual members being responsible for providing leadership for each Direction for Education, whilst a two-member Implementation Team was formed to coordinate implementation by convening forums in each district. Responses collected from 1,900 participants involved in the forums were considered in revising the Directions for Education. At the same time, members of the Implementation Taskforce formed working parties to undertake various initiatives relating to learning outcomes, partnership agreements, local decision-making, principal accreditation, professional development, and information technology. Important work accomplished during 1997 and 1998 included developing and administering tests to assess learning outcomes in literacy and numeracy for years 3 and 7, trialing and implementing the Assisted School Self Review process for accrediting partnership agreements, signing the first partnership agreements, designing a process for longitudinal accreditation of principals, developing competency standards for teachers, cabling and equipping one school from each district with computers to act as a lighthouse school to demonstrate how the Directions for Education should work in schools, designing a good practice network in using information technology, producing a video to demonstrate the use of computers in enhancing learning, purchasing computers and connecting all schools to the internet, training over 1,000 teachers to use information technology, appointing a school community officer and parent contacts, and producing various documents to support the Directions for Education.

Consulting on the Curriculum

Following the release of the draft proposals for education, training and information provision in February 2000, a nine-member Consultation Team was appointed to conduct a three-year consultation on the curriculum consisting of three phases: clarifying values and purposes; specifying content; and developing teaching and assessment practices. Beginning in June 2000, district reference groups led more than 6,900 teachers, childcare professionals, business people, community members and students at district and student forums, parent and childcare discussion sessions, and numerous meetings focusing on clarifying the values and purposes of public education. The revision of a draft report on the consultation, released in October 2000, led to the publication of a statement in December 2000 identifying the values of connectedness, resilience, achievement, creativity, integrity, responsibility and equity, and the purposes of learning to relate, participate and care, to live full, healthy lives, to create purposeful futures, to act ethically, to learn, and to think, know and understand, as important.

The statement of values and purposes formed the basis for developing an outline of 'emerging' new essential learnings derived from the suggestions of many groups and individuals. Produced in December 2000, this outline was elaborated in February 2001 to form an initial draft of 'emerging' new essential learnings consisting of working organisers ordered into four categories: Personal Futures; Social Responsibility; Creating and Communicating; and Technologies and Environments. Responses collected from a statewide review were used to revise the initial draft to produce 'working' new essential learnings, consisting of five categories, each containing a description and several key elements, which
were released in June 2001. The key elements for Thinking were being systematic, reasoning and evaluating, thinking laterally, caring thinking, thinking ethically, and thinking reflectively. The key elements for Communicating were being literate and numerate, creatively expressing thoughts and feelings, using information technology for communication, and becoming a critical symbol user. The key elements for Personal Futures were building and maintaining identity and relationships, maintaining health and well-being, being ethical, and creating and pursuing goals. The key elements for Social Responsibility were understanding interdependence, valuing diversity, being a citizen, and understanding the past and creating preferred futures. The key elements for World Futures were observing and investigating, designing and applying technologies, and appropriateness and sustainability.

Twenty partnership schools, selected in November 2000, worked with the Consultation Team as part of the review to refine the new essential learnings, determine indicative outcomes describing knowledge, skills and competencies, and identify teaching and assessment practices consistent with the values and purposes. Teachers in the partnership schools used descriptions contained in the new essential learnings to develop units of work, identify appropriate teaching methods, and determine the means of student assessment. The partnership schools used the new essential learnings in several ways; some schools organised subject matter according to key learning areas, using the new essential learnings to check whether they were teaching fundamental understandings, other schools used the new essential learnings to link to subject matter in the key learning areas identified as prerequisite knowledge, whilst the remaining schools integrated both approaches by presenting topics using the new essential learnings and key learning areas. This work was completed with publication of the New Essential Learnings Framework and indicative outcomes in February 2002.

Another twenty partnership schools, selected in mid 2001, worked with the Consultation Team in 2002 to refine the outcomes and develop standards. The final product of the consultation, the New Essential Learnings Framework will be supported by a Teaching, Learning and Assessment Guide developed by the Consultation Team and the partnership schools.

**Key Issues and Challenges**

**Curriculum and Assessment**

This historical review shows that the lack of a curriculum that meets the needs of students in Tasmanian schools is a major shortcoming of the reform strategy launched in 1997 to transform the education system to world-class standing. Although the decision of state policy-makers made in the early 1990s to adopt the national statements and profiles may have been sound at the time in light of the widely held view that their use would save funds, and reduce time and work for a small state, their implementation across the learning areas proved to be uneven, and lacking sufficient coherence to establish an effective curriculum. The failure of state policy-makers in Tasmania to move sooner in the direction of using the national statements and profiles as a basis for adaptation may be attributed to the policy
adopted following an external review in 1990 of increasing efficiency within the educational system to meet budgetary restraints, whilst at the same time decentralising decision-making responsibilities by creating smaller district offices and increasing resources in schools (Cresap, 1990).

This review also shows that the philosophical perspective presented in the New Essential Learnings Framework may be traced back to the discussion paper for a core curriculum published in 1980. Further elaboration in the policy statements on secondary education published in 1987 and primary education published in 1991, represented the curriculum as a two-tiered structure: essential learnings grounded in knowledge, skills and competencies; and particular fields of study. It is apparent that the decision, presumably made by Department of Education officials to adopt this structure prior to the consultation, affected the process and the product of the consultation in three ways.

First, the process for developing the New Essential Learnings Framework is unconventional. The practice of involving teachers in the actual development of outcomes from the new essential learnings, rather than committees based on expertise in disciplines, may lead to difficulties in reconciling the new essential learnings with the key learning areas. The path of focusing attention on defining outcomes that are based in disciplines, representing bodies of knowledge and ways of thinking that have evolved over centuries, may be compromised by lack of expertise in particular disciplines. The limitations of this process may lead to the development of a complex framework that causes controversy over difficulties posed in its use or to theoretical underpinnings that govern the selection and organisation of the subject matter in unconventional ways that the wider community may not accept.

Second, the attention given in the developmental process to resolving these tensions in framing the theoretical underpinnings in the New Essential Learnings Framework may detract attention from the critical work needed to define outcomes. The definition of outcomes should meet four criteria. They should define content and skills students should learn at designated levels, reflect the breadth and depth of each subject area, be based on the content of the discipline, not just skills students should acquire, and be clear and specific in measurable terms. It is questionable whether the process for developing the outcomes is adequate to meet the demands of these criteria.

Third, the philosophical perspective adopted in the New Essential Learnings Framework may limit the prospect of the outcomes being benchmarked against world-class levels of achievement. The fact that similar models have been drawn on so heavily for ideas may lead to an attitude that curriculum frameworks and standards documents from other countries that do not reflect this philosophical perspective could be ignored. A remarkable opportunity exists to draw on the rich legacy of work in this field that has accumulated over the last decade to benchmark the outcomes in the New Essential Learnings Framework against standards recognised by experts as representing the most demanding expectations set.

The review also indicates that key intended literacy and numeracy outcomes have been developed from the national profiles. Whilst these may form a basis for developmental work, a rigorous statewide assessment system aligned to the outcomes in the New Essential
Learnings Framework is essential for monitoring whether they are being applied consistently across the state. Such work should occur once the New Essential Learnings Framework has been developed. It should form a significant prerequisite for implementation, essential for monitoring and reporting students’ achievements.

**Capacity Building and Teacher Development**

Achieve and its partners identified that issues of capacity building form the single greatest challenge facing states as they move from developing curricula and assessments to implementation. These issues centre on the extent to which teachers are provided with the knowledge and skills to teach the new curriculum, and schools are supported to develop the capacity to become high performance organisations focused on improving student learning.

The infrastructure needed to provide preservice preparation and inservice professional development for teachers in the knowledge and skills to teach the new essential learnings already exists. Teacher preparation is offered through graduate courses provided by the University of Tasmania. The Tasmanian Education Consortium, a partnership between the Department of Education and the University of Tasmania, has provided teachers with professional development for many years, offered principals professional development in leadership since 1995, and registered private providers of professional development since 1998. Although *Learning Together* recommends adjusting the existing provisions for teacher preparation, professional development and leadership under Goal 1, specific strategies have not been devised for ensuring teachers gain the knowledge and skills to teach the new essential learnings.

This review indicates that the Department of Education has increased its capability substantially to assist schools strengthen their capacity to implement outcome-based education since the reform strategy was launched in 1997. However, *Learning Together* does not present specific strategies for providing leadership, advice and assistance to schools to implement the New Essential Learnings Framework.

**Accountability**

As part of the benchmarking process, Achieve and its partners identified six elements essential for a comprehensive accountability system. Achievement and other data about individual schools need to be provided. Schools should be rated on their performances. Assistance should be provided to low-performing schools to improve performance. Rewards should be given to highly successful schools. Chronically failing schools should be provided with school improvement strategies. Incentives should be offered to students in the form of graduation examinations and scholarships tied to performance.

Tasmania’s educational system does not currently provide a coherent accountability system based on these elements. It is apparent that the Assisted School Self Review process has included the collection of achievement and other data about individual schools suitable for rating schools. *Learning Together* calls for an accountability framework to be designed to set and report on benchmarks and targets across the Department of Education. The details of
such a framework should encompass the elements necessary to ensure that schools are accountable for improving student achievement to meet the outcomes set in the New Essential Learnings Framework.

Public Leadership

The evidence suggests that the reform strategy initiated by the state Liberal government in 1997 was driven by a broader political agenda aimed at shifting public investment from physical infrastructure to information and communications technology. Succeeding in 1998, the state Labor government broadened this strategy to include social and environmental issues, and shifted the emphasis from imposing change through centralised bureaucracy to establishing an independent board to oversee a plan formulated through community consultation.

In both cases, leadership by education-minded politicians provided advocacy for educational reform. Whilst the reform strategy led the Department of Education to offer a greater degree of leadership to schools, officials have not contributed forceful advocacy for reform. Although Learning Together calls for schools to establish partnerships with community groups, organisations, businesses and enterprises, these groups are not involved currently in promoting the reform strategy. At present, a broad-based coalition of political, business and education leaders, necessary to build public understanding and will to sustain the reform during implementation, is absent.

Conclusion

This review has identified several issues concerning the nature of the New Essential Learnings Framework, and potential challenges impeding its successful implementation that should be addressed by policy-makers. It is recommended that the following steps could be initiated to overcome these restraints.

Independent evaluations of state standards documents conducted in the United States by the American Federation of Teachers and the Thomas B. Fordham Foundation have found that only a small proportion of these documents contained exemplary standards, when assessed against a range of criteria. Unfortunately, work has not been undertaken to establish criteria to make valid and reliable judgments about the quality of outcomes expressed in curriculum documents developed by the Australian states and territories. Given the qualifications raised in this article about the New Essential Learnings Framework, it is suggested that the Department of Education commissions Achieve and its partners to benchmark the outcomes in the New Essential Learnings Framework.

It is evident that the proposal to develop a curriculum for the twenty-first century, an initiative relating to Goal 2 in Learning Together, fails to take account fully of such issues as
capacity building and accountability in implementing the New Essential Learnings Framework. These issues may have been overlooked, because the development of the proposal for Learning Together preceded the curriculum review. As Learning Together is acknowledged to be an evolving document, it is recommended that the Learning Together Council gives attention to these issues in order to provide effective implementation of the New Essential Learnings Framework.

Notwithstanding these qualifications, the development and implementation of a curriculum framework that meets the needs of students in Tasmanian schools will substantially strengthen the state's system of outcomes-based education. The challenge, however, lies in ensuring that the New Essential Learnings Framework puts in place clear, explicit and measurable outcomes, which are aligned to a set of assessments, and supported by an appropriate degree of capacity building and teacher development, and a stronger accountability system.

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