

THE GREAT EDUCATION DEBATE

RUSSELL BOYLE

NO



THE weakness of Australia's political system is laid bare most starkly in education.

Six states, two territories, eight school curriculums. Ridiculous! Forget the economy, it's the curriculum, stupid.

Federal Education Minister Julie Bishop's call for a common national curriculum is timely and sensible.

Transferring responsibility for school curriculum from state and territory education bureaucracies to a national board of studies would remove duplication, save millions of dollars and benefit students who moved interstate.

It would also lead to a renewed emphasis on

Government imitated its predecessor and spent many more millions of dollars on a second version of the CSF, only to conclude it was too complex and too hard to understand.

It is now spending up big on the Victorian Essential Learning Standards, or VELs, which has replaced the CSF. Some aspects of VELs have been sent back for redrafting; others will surely follow.

Victoria's education bureaucracy has, for more than a decade, burdened teachers with "busy" curriculum work. It has wasted their time and distracted them from the more important task of teaching.

Victorian governments of both

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higher standards in the traditional academic disciplines of mathematics, science, history, geography and language.

Deep learning and higher order thinking skills can be developed only through the explicit teaching of these great bodies of wisdom established over millennia.

A national curriculum would prepare the way for a uniform school starting age, a common year 12 certificate and a nationwide system for reporting student achievement and assessing school performance.

Julie Bishop is right to direct criticism at education bureaucrats, rather than at teachers.

In Victoria, the Kennett-led government gave millions of dollars to its bureaucracy to develop and implement the now discredited Curriculum and Standards Framework, or CSF.

The Bracks

political persuasions have failed to make a difference in education.

The state-devised school curriculums of the Kennett and Bracks years have not lessened the educational inequality first portrayed in the school performance data of 1996 and stubbornly reiterated by the data of 2005.

It is time to move to a national curriculum.

The journey will not be easy; our state education bureaucracies are powerful beasts.

They will ferociously defend their territory, to the death. But if Australia is to remain competitive in an increasingly globalised economy, then we must move to a uniform and rigorous national school curriculum.

Julie Bishop is showing admirable leadership. Lead on, minister.

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Do our schools add up?

MARY BLUETT

YES



FEDERAL Education Minister Julie Bishop's attack on teachers and school standards demands critical examination. Her call for a debate on a national curriculum framework was overshadowed by her inflammatory claims that curriculums around the country had been hijacked by Left-wing ideologues.

She further claimed that teaching "fads" had failed our students.

Education is critical to shaping our children's (and ultimately Australia's) future. As such, it is understandable that teaching, more than any other profession, is subjected to public scrutiny.

However, the

performing significantly better.

The facts do not support the minister's alarmist picture of the state of education in this country.

That is not to say that there isn't room for improvement.

While Australian students do perform well by international standards, there are sections of our student community that do not perform as well, including Aborigines and students from low socio-economic backgrounds.

The call for a "back to basics" approach perpetuates a myth that schools don't teach the basics.

Nothing could be further from the truth. However, modern education also demands critical thinking,

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minister's comments add nothing to a genuine debate on education.

They are insulting, ill-informed and designed to undermine public confidence in our education systems.

Teachers are not proponents of "trendy educational fads" or Left-wing ideology; nor are they seeking to undermine whatever version of Australian values Julie Bishop holds.

They are overwhelmingly educated, committed and caring professionals doing their best with the resources provided by governments.

The most recent OECD Program for International Student Assessment Survey of International Education on the Minister's own department website showed that for the 15-year-olds tested, Australian students did very well, with only Korea and Japan

research skills, analysis, contesting ideas and reflecting on them.

Modern education must do it all in our ever-more-complex knowledge society.

Sadly, minister Bishop's statements appear to be more about "headline grabbing" than contributing to a genuine education debate.

It is because of such ill-informed pronouncements that a sensible debate on curriculum content and development would be welcomed by the Education Union.

If nothing else, it may bring to light the difficult work that teachers and other education professionals do in continuing to provide a world class education for our children.

Mary Bluett is president of the Australian Education Union, Victorian Branch.