

Many Tasmanian students are not reaching academic milestones. They come to the education system disadvantaged by a complex cluster of circumstances. Many parents remain disengaged and, even, suspicious of a system that has failed **them**. Their formative years within school did not afford them the supports they needed. The 'assembly line model' into which they had been fed at a certain age and transferred from one approximate age grouping to the next had ignored their individual needs, strengths and weaknesses and, often, resulted in a degree of hopelessness and disinterest in school. Understandably, many parents do not prize formal education. Their distrust in the system may be unwittingly transferred to the next generation and so the cycle continues.

Their failure to thrive in an unsympathetic system means that their children, too often, are born into poor health, inferior housing (maybe no stable housing at all), domestic violence and/or addictions such as drugs or gambling and, maybe, long-term unemployment. Like their parents, the subsequent generation is less likely to fit neatly into the formal setting and academic expectations of a traditional school. Understandably, they may even have developed a certain inter-generational contempt for a society which has failed them all. Their education has not provided a pathway to an exciting and financially secure future. Instead their years in the school system have been, largely, futile.

A new model which really captivates and nurtures ALL children and their families is essential. It is society's responsibility to break the poverty cycle by replacing a system that is not working for too many. Rather than compulsory institutions, ALL Tasmanian schools should be inclusive, happy, vibrant, supportive safe spaces – hubs for personal development to which students and their care-givers are attracted.

All Tasmanian children, whether born into poverty or privilege, are equally important. The modern school should be a 'village-like' model with an emphasis on nurture, co-operation and mutual respect. Ideally, the village comprises K-12. Students are in the care of gifted teachers, community mentors and a range of on-site support professionals, including a speech therapist, a psychologist, an exercise coach and a team of teaching assistants.

Rather than proving compulsory but, often, irrelevant institutions, schools should service the actual needs of the children. **Flexibility** is essential. For example, whole classes being exposed to daily phonics is counter-productive for those in the class who are, already fluent readers. Children requiring extension in maths and reading should be able to transfer to the next level. Students needing more grounding should be enabled, without judgement, to transfer to the previous level until success is accomplished. All learning should result in a sense of achievement.

- **IMAGINE...** A SCHOOL DAY THAT BEGINS WITH BREAKFAST. Much learning might ensue in the form of discussions regarding nutrition, food preparation, hygiene, how the menu might be varied/improved, table manners, respectful conversations, duty rosters and the importance of working as a team
- **IMAGINE...** A SCHOOL DAY WITH AN EMPHASIS ON PHYSICAL EXERCISE. Schools with a **qualified coach** responsible for 3 daily **FUN** physical exercise sessions (for the 'exercise inclined', the 'exercise disinclined' and those students with special needs- all sessions featuring motivational music.

- *IMAGINE...* A SCHOOL DAY THAT PROVIDES MANY STYLES OF BACK-GROUND MUSIC at break times (as suggested by students, staff and participatory community members) and REGULAR VISITS BY ALL STYLES OF MUSICIANS
- *IMAGINE...* A SCHOOL IN WHICH STUDENTS HAVE A GARDEN
- *IMAGINE...* A SCHOOL THAT WELCOMES VISITS BY SUPPORT ANIMALS
- *IMAGINE...* A SCHOOL THAT HAS ITS OWN BUS (AND DRIVER)
- *IMAGINE...* A SCHOOL WITH **ON-PREMISIS** ACCESS TO A SPEECH THERAPIST, A PSYCHOLOGIST AND A BANK OF COMMITTED TEACHERS' ASSISTANTS
- *IMAGINE...* A SCHOOL IN WHICH CARING COMMUNITY SENIORS ARE PRESENT AND HAPPY TO GIVE STUDENTS THEIR UNDIVIDED INTEREST AND ENCOURAGEMENT. While their main role might be in *LISTENING* to students, they might introduce skills such as sewing, knitting, macramé, board games, card games, carpentry, motor mechanics , story- telling, etc.
- *IMAGINE...* A SCHOOL WITH ZERO TOLERANCE FOR BULLYING (perhaps, more likely achievable if that has been consistently promoted in caring environments from K-12 where the needs of the whole school cohort are being met).
- *IMAGINE...* A SCHOOL IN WHICH THE STUDENTS ARE **HAPPY** TO LOCK UP THEIR PHONES FOR THE SCHOOL DAY
- *IMAGINE...* A SCHOOL THAT HAS A LARGE BOARD FOR GRAFFITI (regularly renewed)

It is said that 'it takes a village to raise a child'. A village comprising only two types of citizens i.e., teachers and students is a strange village. Schools are constructs very often unsuited to the physical, emotional and intellectual development of many. It is alarming that society has become so damaged that many schools have locked gates and so it is that the 'actual village' is, largely, locked out!

IMAGINE... CURRICULUM (K-12) LINKED TO WEEKLY VISITS BY INTERESTED (AND INTERESTING) COMMUNITY MENTORS, ACTUAL INFLUENCERS FROM THE REAL COMMUNITY

These might include gardeners, ex-smokers, dentists, sports people, immigrants, nutritionists, child-care workers, First Nations citizens, dancers, garbage collectors, ex drug addicts, animal behaviourists, magistrates, scientists, hairdressers, beauticians, vets, etc. The students should be encouraged to make their own suggestions; to be responsible for writing invitations, thank you letters, verbal introductions, speeches of thanks (clear speaking, looking directly at people), formulating questions, engaging in verbal discussions regarding the appropriateness of questions.

ADDITIONALLY, ALL STUDENTS SHOULD BE OFFERED REGULAR EXCURSIONS OUTSIDE THE SCHOOL TO REAL WORK PLACES, eg farms, op shops, hospitals, men's sheds, the police station, the local waste management centre, motor mechanics' workshops. Senior management could share information and tours. Such visits should promote good manners, consideration for others, listening skills and actual insights into real work environments.

SMALL GROUPS OF STUDENTS (with TA) MAY BE INVITED TO A PART- DAY WORK EXPERIENCE AT A PLACE OF PERSONAL INTEREST, eg a florist, a child-care centre, a gym (students to formulate questions and write up reports).

Teachers should plan for all such visits, whether inside or outside the school, to be related, where appropriate, to maths, reading, creative writing or art.

Clearly, such programmes are highly reliant on the goodwill of the wider community, i.e., business and private citizens. A massive campaign is needed to convince such entities that their generous participation is an actual investment in the well-being of Tasmania's best asset, its educated young people. Everyone should help because everyone will benefit but, ultimately, it is school principals who determine the cultures of their schools. Only the most gifted of teachers should be entrusted with this all-important role. Their main focus should be the well-being of all students in their care. It should not be spent worrying about paying the bills! **That should be the responsibility of a forward-planning State Government.** Principals should, also, mentor their teachers who must, at all times, plan interesting, thought provoking and relevant but challenging curricula. To do otherwise invites disconnection, plain indifference and even rebellion.

Students need to know that teachers and mentors genuinely care about their well-being. Young people can be extraordinarily insightful. Very often, they can detect insincerity which further diminishes their sense of self-worth.

K-12 educational outcomes can be assessed by mingling in the school village, sensing the vibe, gauging the degree of respect between principals, teachers, and essential professional support staff and, most importantly, between the students themselves.

The demands of the modern world dictate that teachers **must** have the readily available support of a wide circle of expertise if the best futures for those in their care is to be achieved. Educational success equates with happy, confident, EMPATHETIC young human beings who understand that they are fully capable of making valuable contributions to society.

Transition to a more modern, relevant model will take time so IMMEDIATE ACTION is warranted. A governmental bi-partisan approach unimpeded by election cycles is needed. Changes of government should **NEVER** impact clearly enunciated long-term goals. Education is the key. With an appropriate model, social disharmony can be diminished, health outcomes improve and the local workforce increase.

As I watch grandchildren participating at 'The Launceston Festival of Dance', observe them enjoying private swimming lessons at 'The Devonport Aquatic Centre', playing soccer in Hobart, basketball in Ulverstone or football in Penguin, tears come to my eyes because I realise that the kids who need these activities most are not present. They'll be finding their own way. Some will be presented with enticements of a different kind – vaping, drugs, cheap, fast food, anti-social media. The poverty cycle keeps turning. Every one of those children is just as important as my grandchildren. Urgent intervention by the Tasmanian State Government is needed **NOW!**

MONDAY 7 OCTOBER 2024 7.00 am ABC news item –

\$13.5M TO BE CUT FROM EDUCATION IN TASMANIA IN THE NEXT 12 MONTHS!

I despair . . .

Keryn Parker, mother of 3 and grandmother of 7.