

Instructional Supervision in Australia

Because of teacher militancy, outside inspectors no longer assess teachers for promotion and advancement, but public concern has stirred interest in new forms of teacher evaluation.

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Australia is big. It encompasses an area almost equivalent to the U.S. but has only 1/17th of the population, and most of that population lives in the urban areas of the eastern and southern coasts. What effect does this have on education in Australia? Responsibility for all significant aspects of education from teacher recruitment, evaluation, and promotion to expenditure of funds, is a centralized bureaucratic function in Australia. There have been token gestures to decentralize but they have amounted to no more than a modicum of discretionary control over building and grounds maintenance, employment of janitorial staff, curriculum and advisory services, and local organization of inservice activities.

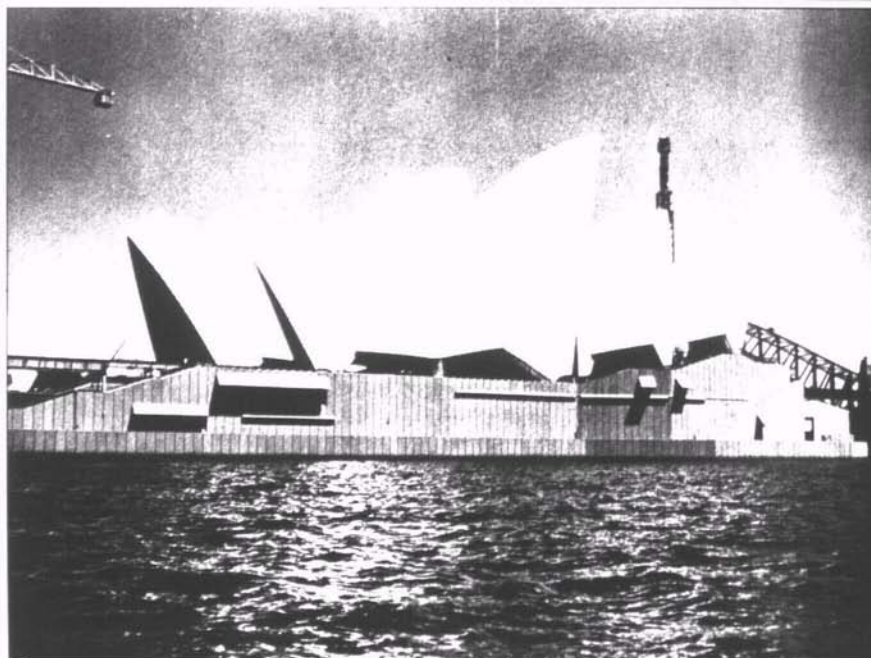
Accountability, Teacher Evaluation, and Professional Development

The theory of educational accountability in Australia is relatively simple. There is a clear layering principle—each level is responsible to the one above it, which also means each level has power over the one below it. Thus, teachers are nominally responsible to the principal who accounts to the inspectors (from the central office) who answer to bureaucratic divisional heads who in turn answer to the director-general of education who then answers to the Minister of Education—a political office where (so the fairy tale goes) “the buck stops.” The practicalities of this system, however, are another thing!

Until recently, inspectors from the head office assessed teachers for promotion and advancement. They observed

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Photos: top left, The University of Sydney; bottom left, Sydney Opera House; right, MLC Centre, Australia's tallest building, Sydney. Credit: Australian Information Service. Thanks to the Australian Embassy, Washington, D.C., for their cooperation.





teachers in action, obtained feedback from the principal, and collected documentary evidence on teaching effectiveness, but teacher militancy led to the abandonment of classroom observation by inspectors. Now some categories of teachers can choose to be observed if they wish, and inspectors are no longer the sole arbiters of a teacher's destiny. In addition assessment panels and committees complement the inspector's activities in most Australian state systems. Due to this diminished role in summa-

tive evaluation, the inspector is expected to exercise a formative role in assisting teachers to improve their classroom practices. This seems to put inspectors in an ambiguous position, performing summative and formative roles, but most inspectors generally opt for one role or the other (Jones, 1975).

School principals also experience role ambiguity. Teachers are never really sure whether the principal is "one of them" or "an agent of the central office." The principal serves on assess-

ment and evaluation panels, giving credence to the latter, while the traditional pathway to the principalship through the teaching ranks suggests the former. Given the bureaucratic and layered structure of Australian schools, principals appear more comfortable in their administrative than their collegial role. Australian research evidence bears this out—principals act as administrators rather than instructional leaders (Willis, 1980; O'Dempsey, 1976; Strachan, 1981).

So formative leadership does not exist in teachers' instructional development. With few exceptions professional development and teacher renewal occur on sporadic inservice days, when teachers are taken away from work-day problems and attempts are made to remedy presumed defects in their knowledge and skills (Skilbeck, Evans, and Harvey, 1977). And, there is mounting concern about the efficacy of withdrawal days as a predominant method of staff development for teachers. As one Australian observer noted:

Their ultimate value in terms of teacher development is suspect and, even more suspect, is their ultimate effectiveness in terms of improving classroom performance (Scriven, 1978, p. 1).

Equally serious is the presumption that teachers are *inadequate* and therefore require the services of self-styled "experts." This approach fails to acknowledge the salience of teachers' views of their own classroom reality—where teachers think they are in terms of their development and whether professional development relates to issues of real and continuing concern to the teachers.

The Current Climate

Although Australia does not have elaborate accountability laws and competency testing of the kind found in the U.S., public comment (informed or otherwise) about the outcomes of schooling is not lacking. A recent federal parliamentary Senate Standing Committee on Education and the Arts (1981) argued that much school-based curriculum development was questionable because teachers had only minimal teaching experience and training and "many of these teachers have been asked to assume a responsibility that they have not sought and in many cases they don't want" (p. 26). Reflecting an alleged need to increase central control, the recent Tasmanian state government white paper on education (1981) carried these sentiments a step further by arguing:

The government will require that a report be written on each member of the teaching service every five years. Each report will include: (1) evidence that the member of the teaching service has taken part in approved inservice activities and (2) an assessment of how successfully the member has done the work (Chapter 3).

Furthermore, the report advocated that teachers be informed as soon as the quality of their work is in danger of receiving an adverse report, and that any teacher so informed who does not improve, be placed on probation pending

further investigation.

Public allegations of teacher incompetence, although largely unsupported by evidence, are on the increase in Australia. The temporary relaxation of external and centralized evaluation of teachers in the 1970s with its replacement by hybrid models based on assessment panels (which rarely, if ever, look at teachers performing), lies at the source of the problem. An Australian academic commented in the press recently:

The very critical human element in government school services is in general far below any acceptable standard. To push up that standard must mean governments' reviewing the security of tenure enjoyed by the present generation of teachers while subjecting their performance to much closer external scrutiny. Trends which have weakened the role of the external examination and diminished the powers of inspectors should be reversed (Chipman, 1981).

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In the state of Victoria there have also been recent calls for the re-introduction of the external inspection of teachers that occurred in Victorian secondary schools up until the mid 1960s. This is based on the alleged need to separate "the good, the bad, and the inefficient" among teachers (Badcock, 1981). While a praiseworthy objective, does the means justify the end? Efforts of this kind, instead of encouraging autonomous and meaningful professional growth of teachers, result in hardened battle-lines with teachers becoming more resistant to initiating dialogue about their pedagogy.

Although rarely surfacing in public discussion, the issue of whether to have teacher observation and if so, by whom and for what purpose, is really central to much of the current controversy. Simply put, most Australian teachers are not observed for either formative or summative purposes. Indeed, one disturbing aspect of teaching is that much of it occurs within the cloistered confines of the classroom with little or no opportunity for feedback from other professionals

that might mean the difference between mediocre and competent performance. The fears of many segments of the community can be allayed if schools demonstrate that procedures exist whereby teachers are regularly provided with constructive feedback for the betterment of teaching.

Beginnings of Enlightenment

Leaving aside for the moment the clamor for increased accountability, it is refreshing to find teachers who open up their classrooms to collegial scrutiny. Whether because of self-preservation, or out of a belated but genuine sense of professionalism, segments of the Australian teaching force are becoming reflective and introspective about their own teaching. More and more teachers accept the desirability of being observed by fellow teachers (McCoombe, 1981; Strachan, 1981; France, 1981). More teachers also acknowledge that they *can* and *should* take a more active part in their own professional growth. Coupled with this is a recognition that the classroom should be the primary focus of teacher renewal efforts.

Australian teachers are awakening to the idea that there is merit in colleague observation and focused non-evaluative feedback on classroom events. Progress in this direction is slow, possibly in part because of the well-entrenched view that people who enter classrooms do so for purposes of summative evaluation. This is an artifact of the attitude that quality control over teaching and learning can *only* be a centralized bureaucratic affair. The idea that teachers can be evaluators of their own and each others' teaching is gaining hold across Australia (Hughes, Russell, and McConachy, 1981; Smyth and Strachan, 1981; Parkinson and Millar, 1981; Gates, 1981; Smyth, 1981a).

In particular there is considerable interest nationwide in the clinical supervision model developed in the U.S. by Goldhamer (1969) and Cogan (1973). Notwithstanding problems of anxiety at being observed (McCoombe, 1981), Australian teachers who have participated so far have found the structured framework of conferencing, data collection, and analysis, to be most productive. Likewise, they prefer collaborative analysis of data to impressionistic value judgments about their teaching. Focused observation on a matter of concern to them during a specific lesson, has had obvious appeal to their sense of relevance and practicality (Smyth, 1981b).

In this era of strident accountability in schools, there may be more than an element of truth for Australian teachers in the maxim:

It is better to do to yourself things that will eventually be done to you anyway. It is better, therefore, to take the initiative or else someone else might take it, and the effects might be worse. ■

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