

COPY

074

**Victoria Brown**

---

**From:** Laurie Loper [l.loper@xtra.co.nz]  
**Sent:** Tuesday, 28 November 2006 3:03 p.m.  
**To:** Shared Mailbox Learning Policy  
**Subject:** Feedback to Draft Curriculum Document

Kia ora ra koe,

I wanted to make an email submission to the new draft curriculum but couldn't find an email address, other than yours that is. I know there is an online means of giving feedback but that format doesn't provide the sort of vehicle I require for addressing the issues I have. These largely concern the inefficient nature of existing learning practices all schools use, the assumption that these will be a sufficient means of delivering the aims and intentions of the new curriculum, and whether their continued use will result in equitable and high level educational outcomes for all students.

I would grateful if you could ensure this feedback gets to the appropriate destination in time for it to be considered. Confirmation of this would be appreciated. Thanking you in anticipation.

na Laurie Loper, Reg Psychologist

14 Hampstead Court

Manor Park

Tauranga 3112

(07) 543 110

**Brief Biography:**

Reg Psychologist, Trained teacher (Primary). Youth worker/social worker. Various roles in Special Education for 30 years (Guidance Counsellor, Ed Psych, RTSN, RTG, RTLB, all of which have had to do with learning and behaviour issues with mainly primary and intermediate students).

Teacher training in use of high rates of specific positive reinforcement (own programme, which has been researched).

Developed a new learning support resource for parents called *Chance is Fine Thing (CIFT)* which will shortly become available nationally, though under a new name yet to be decided, on the new website [www.kiwifamilies.co.nz](http://www.kiwifamilies.co.nz).

Contribute letters and articles to local and national print media on educational issues. Contribute submissions to parliamentary select committees on educational and social issues. Teacher training in

21/12/2006

ECE, primary, intermediate, secondary and tertiary contexts. Papers to international conferences. 50 year long interest in classroom learning issues. Researcher. Consultant.

Major interest is in learning efficacy, hence in 1989, developed a new, more efficient learning model called Self Directed Learning (SDL). This model matches very well some new world-first research (reported in 2001 by G Nuthall) showing that the model all teachers use (known as the teacher-as-classroom-manager learning model) is very inefficient. The model has also been incorporated into a workshop on learning, *Towards Better Learning Outcomes*. that has been used with secondary trainees doing their Dip Teaching at Tauranga Campus, University of Waikato.

-----  
-----

## ● Feedback to Draft Curriculum Document

### Preamble

What would be education's worst nightmare? Try this. What if everything that all students experience daily in the name of learning was causing significant underachievement problems. was causing the waste of perhaps half of the nation's learning potential, and was fueling social injustice in a major way?

With new research suggesting that's pretty close to the everyday, waking-hours reality, by definition it's no nightmare. Besides, few appear to be acting scared around this situation. Seems there's so much acceptance of the underachievement involved, so little concern about the evident waste of human potential, and such desensitisation occurring about the growing social disparity, we don't see anything scary about it at all. Sure, we show periodical concern about why that gap is so hard to close. But we remain just as oblivious to what's so dire and frightening about the whole inequitable circumstance of it, as we are devoid of ideas about what it might take to fix it.

That's why this submission wants the final curriculum document to spell out unequivocally:

- How it will ensure a much more evenhanded and higher level of learning achievement for all students than currently pertains.
- What mechanisms it will insist upon being put in place that'll ensure such learning outcomes will be achieved.

The only solid research this nation possesses on learning, and on the contribution that people think teaching makes to it, shows both of the above mentioned considerations to be very pertinent. In an exercise where the objective is creating a new curriculum, we'd be making a laughing stock of ourselves if it subsequently became known we didn't make use of this new knowledge referred to, there isn't anything more relevant that we could call on. A double indignity would be suffered here if

it also became known it was a New Zealander, the late Professor Graham Nuthall, who has contributed these new understandings, We can't afford to treat him as the proverbial prophet in his own land.

## Rationale

There seems little point to having a curriculum document if its implementation remains reliant on the same inefficient means of delivering it that have proved so problematic in the past, namely the existing learning practices being employed every day in all places of learning. Inherited from the past, they're based on beliefs about learning that have no evidential basis (Nuthall, 2001)

Likewise, there seems little value in having a curriculum at all if it makes no real contribution to improving the across-the-board quality and equity of learning outcomes.

## Explanatory notes

We know from new research by the late Professor Graham Nuthall – done in New Zealand classrooms during a 40 year career researching how teaching contributes to learning – that current learning practice is inefficient to the point that the learning of every student is being compromised. (See attached copy of "*The cultural myths and the realities of teaching and learning*". Nuthall, G. Address to the NZARE Annual Conference, Christchurch, Dec., 2001. See also on the same attachment "*Closing the education gap*". Loper, L. in *Education Review*, 13 Oct., 2006.)

From that same research we also know that those unsatisfactory outcomes are mostly the unintended consequences of using the flawed, belief-based understandings about learning we've inherited from the past. These mistaken understandings and the practices built on them have become so hardwired into our culture, it makes both our understanding of them and the counteracting of their influence two almost impossibly difficult tasks. So much so, as the history of teaching reform has demonstrated, "teachers are more likely to reform reforms than to be reformed by them" (Nuthall 2001)

## Comment

The inefficacy of ordinary everyday teaching practice is certainly "an inconvenient truth" of some magnitude. If the creators of the new curriculum want to see outcomes that are inclusive and equitable, they have to solve this learning efficacy issue, They need to keep in mind the learning outcomes aspects of the exercise and factor into their deliberations the new evidence about learning that's now available. Listing just a few bits of it, there's solid evidence that for instance says:

- That in allocating work to students, "excellent" teachers achieve a less than 50% match of task to the skill and difficulty level of any given student (flipping a coin gives you better odds).

- That the capacity to learn is remarkably even in its distribution, hence there's the potential for every student to learn as well as any other, and for most to learn as well as do the best.
- That teachers think it's their role to be managers of classroom learning and that automatically makes them into such busy people they're prevented from knowing what's happening – teachers simply can't afford to have so much attention tied up in that role.
- That there is not one single evidenced based theory of learning in use in teaching at all.
- That the full information on new ideas/concepts/topics needs to be experienced three times to be learned, each experience needs to be at 2 day intervals (there'd be few if any teachers who would know this).
- That teachers do not have accurate ways of knowing what prior knowledge students have before say starting on a new topic. Since they also have no accurate ways of knowing what students have learned either (see also next item below), they cannot say what "added value" their teaching has supplied in respect of any individual student,
- That individual students form unique understandings from any given lesson, different from almost every other in class. Even for those few teachers who are aware of this, it poses evaluation problems that existing practices are unable to handle. Therefore, the information teachers obtain from evaluations isn't sufficient and/or soundly enough based to expect it could improve/alter teaching behaviour.
- It's what students bring to the task that determines whether they learn or not, it's not what teachers do. For instance, if students were simply to follow teacher instructions, and didn't invest something of themselves by the way they self managed their involvement in the work and/or didn't generate a personal purpose to engage in the task, they'll fail to learn. However, much of that sense of purpose comes from students feeling a sense of ownership about their own learning. But where control of the learning agenda is in teacher hands and/ or is vested in prescriptive programmes/curricula, that sense of ownership readily diminishes, and so does motivation ( "interesting" work by itself then is never going to be the answer many people think it will be to motivation problems and underachievement). Not only that, students who in effect are being told what to do all the time become dependent learners so do not become independent lifelong learners.
- That students already know about half the information teachers give them anyway.

(Note: All but the first are findings from Nuthall's research, the first comes from Wilkinson C. et al, of Lancaster University, in *The Quality of Classroom Learning Experiences* , published by Erlbaum.)

To ignore such evidence and then to design a curriculum that doesn't speak to the issues it raises would be foolhardy beyond all comprehension. Now we have such knowledge, it would be unconscionable not to use it. To adopt the attitude that curriculum implementation is an issue outside

the brief of curriculum design is indefensible.

It isn't a good idea any more either to simply leave to teachers the task of developing the means of implementing the new curriculum aims. It's not that they're lacking in professionalism, it's just that their professionalism is based on flawed traditional understandings about learning. Throughout history, practice based on these understandings have demonstrated a persistently successful ability to subvert the intentions of all new curricula. Unless there's some significant changes made, it'll be inevitable this will continue happening in the future. Not for nothing is it said that reforms in education come and go but teaching carries on much the same as ever.

Further, no nation wishing to be internationally competitive can afford to countenance the enormous loss of intellectual capital involved here. No nation either that prides itself on being inclusive and which espouses social justice ideals can afford to tolerate the low levels of efficacy – consequent upon mistaken understandings about learning – currently to be found in every single one of its places of learning. Places of particular concern in this respect need to include families and, to a lesser extent, work places. For it is not just only in classrooms – from child care right through to post-doctoral levels, and not forgetting in teacher education centres and colleges either – where we need to be making improvements in how learning is understood and is carried out. A new development in the business world that gives me hope is that the concept of learning support is starting to appear in New Zealand literature and articles to do with mentoring and coaching, overseas this has been happening now for some 3 years. We can do with some robust examples of it happening in education.

Crucial to the success of the new curriculum will be improving the efficacy of learning . Failure to do so will not only significantly endanger it's intentions, it will ensure the continuance of inequitable learning outcomes, risking yet again the locking in of a widening achievement gap, and of that being increasingly seen as the defining feature of our nation's education system. We're already second worst ranked for the size of that gap in the OECD countries, we surely don't wish to be ranked worst.

Finally, in case it's not been made clear, what needs to be done about improving learning efficacy isn't a matter of, say, making "best practice" available for use by every teacher everywhere. No, because even though best practice purports to be evidence based, it's still part of the problem. It's underpinning is still the same problematic mistaken beliefs and understandings about learning that are fueling the efficacy issue. No, something different is required, something like what's indicated in the suggestions that follow.

## **Suggestions**

I would like to see the curriculum document become something that sets out what teachers need to learn that will ensure an across-the-board improvement in quality and equity of learning outcomes. I suggest the inclusion of a special content section specifically devoted to creating the possibility of improving learning by:

- (1) Exposing teachers to a model of teaching and learning that better accords with what is now known about how learning works, especially about how it works in classrooms.

**Comment:** Since there is no current model yet constructed that accords with every aspect of this new research, until this happens, use could be made of a model called Self Directed Learning [SDL] that does accord pretty much with it. It's based on scientific method – things don't come more accountable than that – and it's an adaption of the Individual Education Planning Process [aka IEPs] model used in Special Education. Unlike the IEP model though, it's a very student-driven model and is so in a way that would be unmatched by anything in current use. As such it creates in students a real sense of ownership of the learning they do and ensures pleasing levels of engagement. A workshop programme called *Towards Better Learning Outcomes*, developed to train teachers in the rudiments of operating such a system, has been trialed with secondary trainees completing their Diploma of Teaching qualification.

2) Exposing students to the same self-driven model of learning and to the specific skills they'll have to be competent in to operate it independently themselves. Students also need to acquire all the specific learning-to-learn skills all independent learners require.

**Comment:** It no longer makes sense, nor is it even ethical, to leave the acquisition of learning skills to chance and to incidental learning, which patently is the most common practice. We need to know with certainty that all students have such skills in their repertoires. The skills required to operate any self-driven learning model of the kind in question here, along with those other learn-to-learn skills, all need to be specifically taught. As the draft document indicates, learning-to-learn skills are both considerable in number and quite varied in kind. A means needs to be devised to enable students to take responsibility for that learning.

Adapting materials I had developed, an inner city decile 1 Hamilton primary school successfully employed this approach on a school wide basis. A self-teaching way of learning these skills was part of this. It enabled students to self identify the skills they needed to address, and taught them ways of doing this. They were thus independently operating a highly individualised and efficient way of learning. Part of the school day was timetabled for this, it was called Learning-to-learn Time.

(3) Implementing a learning-support concept such that support for learning occurs in every place where such support might be expected to occur, and to the maximum that it might.

**Comment:** If we really wish to reduce the load on teachers and hope to get the utmost from parent participation and parent-teacher cooperation, we need to be doing something different. Also our thinking around support for learning in classroom contexts has to extend far beyond that which, for instance, regards the various forms of tutoring primarily as a special provision that caters for only a few particular students. Clearly something like tutoring ought to be thought of as being an essential, everyday technology to be used class wide and school wide. I once helped a whole school develop such a programme for tutoring Reading, having demonstrated how it could be done at a TOD, using mainly 6 year old Maori students to

demonstrate the skills involved to the teachers. What sold the idea to these teachers was that the 6 year olds were better at tutoring than they were. Teaching students to use high frequency, high quality praise amongst each other and with their teachers is another example of the same idea that I have used.

Support for learning should also to be occurring at all interfaces such as teacher-to-teacher, teacher-to-student, student-to-teacher, student-to-student, student-to-parent, parent-to-student, parent-to-teacher, and teacher-to-parent. Though support does occur in a few of the situations listed, existing practice is barely scratching the surface of the potential. Some successful trials of doing this – mostly through training everyone to use high quality, high frequency praise with each other but by other means too – have been undertaken in the teacher-to-students, students-to- teachers, student-to- student, parent-to-student contexts. A particular approach, trialed over the last 7 years, that aims to have large numbers of parents self-learn the skills needed to better support the learning their children do is about to be posted on the new family website [www.kiwifamilies.co.nz](http://www.kiwifamilies.co.nz) just recently launched by a Tauranga couple, Kerry and Ian Burridge.

Laurie Loper, Reg. Psychologist

14 Hampstead Court

Manor Park

Tauranga 3112

(07) 543 1102