

ACSSO. President's Message.

The reviewing of the Melbourne Declaration that has been presaged recently by Minister Tehan is certainly another "capital" idea provided that we truly understand and engage its intent. The Hobart and Adelaide Declarations have faded somewhat into history but they certainly set the foundations for the Melbourne Declaration which is now itself, a decade old. It is important that we as a nation have some clear, commonly held understandings of our goals in this most critical aspect of Australian life, the preparation of our coming generations for their role as Australian citizens.

A nationally agreed definition on the educational goals for young Australians (and this is perhaps what it should be called, "the National Declaration"), is always going to be tricky to effect and somewhat broad in the stating. But hopefully it can contain the essence of some real and agreed substance, because anything less is an unfortunate exercise in wordsmithing to little effect.

The statement was made at the recent, February meeting of the Council of Australian Governments' Education Council that a revitalized Declaration would be extant by the end of the calendar year. We are of course in the midst of interesting times electorally, but a revisiting of our vision for Australian education is very timely and is overdue.

The current Declaration articulates two central goals:

1. Promoting equity and excellence in Australian schools
2. That all young Australians become successful learners, confident and creative individuals and active and informed citizens.

Surely these could hardly be expressed more succinctly and they provide a valid departure point for the beginnings of the broad conversation that must be had, for it is through the conversation that we will eventually isolate the key elements that become part of the distillation of new and revised notions of the way forward.

There is certainly a view that that promoting equity and excellence in our schools is hardly arguable, the real issue being that we have adopted the noble shibboleth but, despite initiatives such as the Gonski reviews and a plethora of policy initiatives, that we have not gone far enough to making it a reality over the last decade; that we are still immersed in funding wars that speak to politicians' continuing failure to extricate education from the mire of party infighting and point scoring. More of this in the coming months!

Successful learners becoming well rounded citizens also rolls easily of the tongue and needs to be analyzed for new meanings. "Soft skills" is an unfortunate term for an array of absolutely essential personal attributes which are now being seen as going to the heart of achieving this goal and their significance was expressed eloquently by Verity Firth recently in the *Sydney Morning Herald*

In all cases, the capacity to work with others across differences to solve problems, and competence in ethical reasoning and empathic decision making are key. These skills are at the heart of collaboration.

It is of course a truism that if we are to take the second of the two goals as a departure point then the shape of the Australian curriculum must speak strongly to it. I conclude by congratulating David de Carvalho as he takes up his role as the CEO of ACARA and we look forward to working with him and his team as they progress this significant work.

Kevan Goodworth.

President and Chair.