

NATIONAL PUBLIC EDUCATION FORUM

Friday March 27th and Saturday March 28th, 2009

Session One: The public good and the education of children

KEYNOTE ADDRESS

The public good and the education of children

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[The following text has been transcribed from Geoffrey's Robertson's address to the Forum.]

It is a great privilege to be invited to address you this morning. You are the custodians of the education that shaped my life, the state education that deserves not only to be supported but to be celebrated at a time when upon it depends the fate and the future of 70% of young Australians, including many young Australians who, through learning difficulties or cultural differences, will be the most vulnerable to exploitation and abuse.

It's an exciting time to be here where a government is committed to creating an 'Education Revolution'. A government that recognises, and I quote, "the central role that education plays in the economic and social strength of our nation". And I joined in the applause for the co-author of those words yesterday evening as she promised that her goal would not quail at the economic downturn; that her government would deliver on increased funding for primary and secondary schools at least.

No mention was made of university education, but at least we have the promise of those increased funds, spoken of with the alluring alliteration of equity and excellence, although she didn't stop to ponder the problems of achieving excellence in schools that still teach young earth creationism and intelligent design and condom-phobia, not to mention Sharia attitudes to the evidence of women. As for equity, the current political buzz word, let me tell you as a long standing equity practitioner that it means basic fairness. And I am sure Jim McMorrow will have something to say later about whether the new funding arrangements are truly fair and equitable to the state sector. But what she didn't say, and perhaps it is still difficult for a politician in Australia to say it, is 'put state education first'. First among equals perhaps, but first let others catch up, let others get ahead? Competition in education, as in other professional services, is fine but a real revolution in education will only come when a government ensures that its state schools set the standard of excellence. Then and only then will we have equity.

I want to talk today about how, in the state sector, we may set some of those excellent standards. It is one of Australia's greatest achievements. After all we were among the first of nations to establish free, compulsory and secular education. It goes right back to the 1870s, when the state governments taking a leaf from the Gladstonian text book of improvement - the age of improvement - ah we were then British to our boot straps, from our bowler hats to our brogue shoes but we were unevolved Australians - but one of the great inheritances along with Magna Carta and Habeas Corpus was free compulsory secular state education. And we developed with it a genuine Australian characteristic; the country school teacher who became the backbone of the bush. My great Australian hero was Tom Curnow. Hands up those of you who have heard of Tom Curnow. Well Barry Jones hadn't either when I asked him on a Hypothetical. So you are not alone, but stay tuned and I will tell you a little later about Tom Curnow.

Of course I have an interest to declare. My grandfather was a country school teacher. He had a one teacher school outside Dapto. I was very proud of him. He was the Secretary of the Dapto trots and he even, I think, got the highest accolade: Secretary of the Dapto Dogs. Which was about the highest honour that could be bestowed west of Wollongong. But of course back in the 1870s state education, the institution of state education, did provoke religious reactions. Protestant churches set up their own schools to inculcate the fear of God, at least in the sons, and later the daughters of the wealthy. Catholics, predominantly Irish in those days, were concerned that secular state schools might imperil

their hold over the souls that they wished to save. More importantly, according to Manning Clark, it might suppress the particular version of Irish history that they wished to teach. So they set up their alternative system, these exceptions to the principle, acceptable reactions of course, to the great and enduring principle of free secular education and of course within that principle we've had our debates about how to achieve excellence through various forms of selective schooling.

I was a sort of a shuttlecock when I was a kid in this debate that ebbed and flowed. I went to a primary school in Eastwood, a respectable lower middle class suburb, and found myself elevated at the age of 11 to what was called an opportunity class. I was never quite sure what it was an opportunity for, but we did have better teachers, at least those who made us read the papers everyday full of stories of grand men who all had middle names - John Foster Dulles, Robert Gordon Menzies - and we were made to discuss the news critically. Most of the criticism came from the teacher, to an extent that would probably have him sacked today, but it taught us something that wasn't on the curriculum; namely how to think critically about world events.

It struck me then, it strikes me now, that this opportunity should be an opportunity for all. But my card was marked in those days for a selective school, namely Fort Street, where a relative, John Dettman, had been a former Headmaster. A famous Headmaster. But there was suddenly a change of policy, a levelling in the influence in the education department. Suddenly selective schools were out of fashion and I was streamed for the new school in Epping. My parents were inconsolable and they offered to pay for me to go to Sydney Grammar. Well, I refused, and I would like to think that my refusal was some early indication of my support for state education. But in fact it had nothing to do with that. It was a simple teenage calculus. I worked out I could spend an hour and a half longer in bed if I went to Epping and so I demanded to go there. We had some great teachers including a history master who'd read his A. S. Neill and suggested I should wag school and spend my days instead in the Mitchell Library. I took his advice and came second in the state in History to a boy whose father had set the paper. There are some things you never forget. And 10 years later, in London would you believe, that boy and I both had our first books published by the same publisher. Mine was an attack on the framing of IRA suspects and his was a defence of General Pinochet and his torture tanks. My book didn't sell, except in Ireland. "A book that knocks the stuffing out of British justice," said *The Irish Times*. But my book was shortly remaindered. His sold brilliantly because the Chilean Embassy bought 50,000 copies. So I came second again.

Was I disadvantaged? In many ways I think that I was advantaged by that education. There were times when I had to doubt. I met GPS boys on the train while we were studying for the Leaving certificate. We were studying Shakespeare's *The Tempest* and I noticed after a while that their copies, their Methuen edition of *The Tempest*, was rather thicker than mine. We'd been issued with a rather smaller book, so I went down to Dymocks and I bought the book that all the GPS kids were studying. I found that indeed the book, *The Tempest*, issued to state school kids did have fewer pages, and the reason for that was that our books were censored. All references to sexual intercourse were cut out. We had the bowdlerised edition which removed all reference, for example, to Caliban's attempted rape of Miranda. You simply can't understand the character of Prospero, you can't understand the play, *The Tempest*, until you realise that Caliban had attempted to rape Miranda. So, thanks, not to the underfunding but to the stupidity of the Education Department, we were disadvantaged at least until we got the full book. And just to show the absurdity of the censorship in those times, it cut out Prospero's great invitation to premarital chastity:

... but
*If thou dost break her virgin-knot before
All sanctimonious ceremonies may
With full and holy rite be minister'd,
No sweet aspersion shall the heavens let fall
To make your contract grow: but barren hate,
Sour-eyed disdain and discord shall bestrew
The union of your bed with weeds so loathly
That you shall hate it both: therefore take heed,
As Hymen's lamps shall light you.*

You can see I read and memorised all the dirty bits. But it always struck me as the ultimate absurdity of censorship that we weren't to read those lines in favour of premarital chastity. Well there you go. In

that way we were disadvantaged. But in other ways I think we were advantaged. We weren't bullied. We weren't bugged. We weren't indoctrinated into religion or forced to join the cadets. We actually, however, had no notion that we were any good at all compared with the GPS kids we met on the train until we got the Leaving results and we read our names ahead of theirs in the old honours list in the *Sydney Morning Herald*. But what I think we were lacking, and talking to school friends now we agree, that what we lacked was confidence. It came out at university tutorials as well. The old school tie, for no rational reason, induced a pedigree of self confidence and a degree of self assertiveness in our private school rivals. That shouldn't have been the case then, nor should it be now.

Public education must compete effectively in the parental marketplace. Not only is it free, something of increasing importance as we slide into recession, it has the great advantage of secularity in a world where dogma is becoming the greatest threat to rationality. Secular learning must be regarded as a plus, not to mention diversity, the value of children and teenagers mixing with a wider variety of fellow human beings from different social classes, different ethnic groups, different levels of advantage and performance, and the virtue, of course, of locality; the virtue that I intuited at age 13. But there is another value that I believe state education should endorse and that's what I want to talk about today.

Of course when you talk of value and what values and what values should be taught to give state school kids the confidence that we perhaps lack; the confidence that comes from learning and understanding the rights and responsibilities of citizenship, citizenship of Australia, citizenship of the world. In the United Kingdom we are calling it human rights education and as from 2011 it will be compulsory in all state schools, having been trialled with particular success in Hampshire. You can trace it back, I suppose, to Aristotle and his argument, great argument, for public education in book 8 of his *Politics*. He wrote: *supervision of education must be public and not private. Public training is wanted in all things that are of public interest, besides it is wrong for any citizen to think that he belongs to himself. All must be considered as belonging to the polis, for each man is part of the polis, and the treatment of that part is necessarily determined by the treatment of the whole.*

Well how should public education today teach Aristotle's civic virtues? We've had a lot of talk of values. The teaching values have been argued from Bernard Crick who said that political literacy is essential to teach kids at school – freedom, rights, justice - without those concepts they're unable to comprehend the modern political context in which they live. And of course I don't think there's very much dispute about the principle. We have Agreed National Goals for Schooling in Australia. Goal 6 - the development in students of the capacity of judgement in matters of morality, ethics and social justice. Goal 7 requires dissemination of knowledge that will enable students to participate as active and informed citizens in our democratic society and in the international context. That means teaching democracy, teaching the rule of law, and the rights of citizenship - the first three focus issues that were identified by Tony Vinson in his report a couple of years ago about how Australian society should develop - how to ensure that all children have an equal opportunity to learn and fully develop their capacities.

How do we ensure the principles of social justice are guaranteed and that public education strengthens the influence of these principles across society? I think the debate was somewhat derailed a couple of years ago by someone called Brendan Nelson. You remember him? He was all for teaching Australian values. He prepared a list of Australian values: care and compassion, doing your best, fair go for freedom, honesty, trustworthy, integrity, understanding and tolerance. These aren't Australian values; they're universal values. The values that are enshrined in the Universal Declaration and its progeny - the various good conventions against apartheid and racism and anti-discrimination.

The real question is how we deliver on Article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights which says that education should be directed to the full development of the human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. It should promote understanding and friendship and tolerance between nations. Well, Dr Nelson decided that we should have, in order to teach Australian values, 'Australian heroes'. The first role model he suggested was Simpson and his donkey; the minister apparently ignorant of the fact that Simpson wasn't Australian and was in fact a Yorkshire trade unionist who was an illegal immigrant and a republican. He loathed Australia and he only volunteered in order to get a free passage to England where he planned to desert. Frankly I don't think that makes him any less of a hero. It just makes the point that the values

of humanity are universal. So by all means hero worship Simpson, although that's not in fact his real name.

My particular hero, of whom none of you have heard, is Tom Curnow. Tom Curnow was a country school teacher, in northern Victoria, shortly after secular education was developed. He was taking his family, baby daughter, wife and sister, for a ride in a buggy past the hotel at Glenrowan when he fell into the middle of a terrorist atrocity. Jihad Ned Kelly was in town, the blood of three policemen and a police informer fresh upon him. He'd bailed up the hotel, worse, as Tom Curnow soon discovered, he had ordered at gunpoint, so I guess they had an excuse for not disobeying, the railway workers to dig up the tracks so that a train that was due from Melbourne, a train which would have police aboard but also some 90 passengers, mainly women and children, would be derailed. The outlaws made no bones about the fact, as they drank and danced at the Glenrowan hotel waiting for the train, that they were going to shoot them all. It would be no doubt the worst terrorist atrocity, or at least the first terrorist atrocity, planned in Australia. Tom Curnow decided to stop this event. He became friendly with the Kellys. He even danced with the disgusting Dan Kelly, to ingratiate himself with them. He managed to get them to allow him to leave to go to his home, which was near the railway line, with his wife and sister. They pleaded with him, begged him to stay inside, because the Kellys had threatened that if he didn't stay at home he'd be shot and they'd be shot. And after this tearful pleading he decided nonetheless to do the right thing. He took a lantern, he took his sister's red shawl, and he walked up the railway track and stopped that train. He stopped the train and what, undoubtedly, would have been a most terrible atrocity. That is seems to me is the kind of hero our children should learn about and our children should venerate and our teachers obviously should learn about and teach because Tom Curnow is depicted in films as some elderly ugly pedant; a young man of 29, a man of enormous courage who had the moral virtue to risk his life to stop the slaughter of some 90 people. Well that's Tom Curnow. He and his lantern should be a guide.

What of Tom Curnow's values? How do we teach them? How do we find them? Where do we find them? What I want to encourage you to think about today is using human rights as the basis for an education in values.

I walked across this morning the Magna Carta garden. Just beyond the rose garden there's a big memorial to Magna Carta and that's where we must start teaching our children well. Not that Magna Carta in 1215 - a rather squalid deal between King John and his Barons - but it was revived in 1628 in the Declaration of Right, what those great parliamentarians erected against the arrogance and the absolutism of Charles 1st. His response was to abolish parliament and to torture the puritan preachers who argued the case for parliament. But in 1641, 1642, when parliament came back and broke with the King, we get the abolition of Star Chamber; we get the end of torture. No more are torture warrants ever issued in England, or of course in Australia. This was the law that Arthur Phillip brought to Australia in 1788. Torture, of course, went on in Europe, torture thereafter was something done by the French; but by the English it was not.

In 1642, parliamentary sovereignty became a reality. It was fought for in the Civil War in which more people comparatively lost their lives than in the trenches. We must teach these stories: not only of parliamentary sovereignty, not only of the end of torture, but of the end of the King's right to sack judges, the government's right to sack judges, the independence of the judiciary, which dates from 1642. We could move on to 1689, to the first Bill of Rights that secured the British constitution, that made free speech in parliament, that ensured that cruel and unusual punishments were not imposed, that ensured that bail was not excessive. We should celebrate the fight of John Wilkes, the Lord Mayor of London, who was put in prison for blasphemy, put in prison for sedition, but fought on to become Lord Mayor of London and to become a civil liberties hero and to establish the principle that every man's home is his castle, and in stopping the warrants that were issued by the King. Tom Paine too, and the *Rights of Man* and the courageous booksellers who fought against the sedition laws of the time. This was the law, Habeas Corpus, the rights of the individual, that Arthur Phillip brought to Australia in 1788 and there is something else we should celebrate.

In 1787, as Phillip was waiting in Portsmouth for the provisioning of the First Fleet, he wrote what he said was the first law for a country that only he ever believed would become more than a prison camp and that first law was that in a free society there should be no slaves and therefore no slavery. Of course, Australia hadn't got a name at that stage. It was planned as an open prison but it is striking that 20 years before slavery was outlawed in Britain, a century before slavery was outlawed by the

main countries of the world, that this little prison shipment went off from Portsmouth with the first law that there should be no slavery. 1788 saw the introduction of those particular laws and there are other things that we should celebrate: the fight of the emancipists against the free settlers, and the fight for the right to trial by jury, which has a particular resonance of course for Australia, because in a sense most of our convicts owed their life to the mercy of the jury. If you stole more than 40 shillings, you got executed, you were hung, and the juries were remarkable in their mercy, bringing back valuation of the stolen goods invariably at 39 shillings. And so they crammed in the hulks and the prisons had to be emptied after America won the War of Independence and Britain lost and had to find another place for its convicts. So these are matters that are lodged in our history.

There was a marvellous battle between Governor Darling, who was a martinet who hated criticism, and the newspapers of the time; a great Chief Justice, Francis Forde, who set his seal on freedom of speech in Australia in holding against Darling. We should remember the fight, not only for jury trial but, of course, the fight eventually of Wentworth and Dunmore Lang for a degree of self government. These are parts of Australian history building upon the rights, some of them that had been established in Britain. But there is further to this story. Because, as the Universal Declaration says, we must also teach our children about the progress in human rights that took place: we have the French Revolution, we have the American Revolution, and both led to extraordinary Bills of Rights, Declarations of Rights.

There's the famous story of Jefferson reading to Ben Franklin the first draft of the American Declaration of Independence. "We hold these truths," he said, "to be sacred and inviolable that all men are born equal". "Hm," said Franklin, "sounds a bit preachy. These truths are self evident are they not?" "Well yes," so Jefferson strikes out 'sacred and inviolable' and puts in 'these truths are self evident'. A great document that American children recite with pride, because, of course, their ancestors risked the bayoneting by George the 3rd's troops. But the problem with the American Declaration, the problem with the French Declaration, is that they were based on the idea of natural rights; rights that were inalienable, attaching to people like a shadow, and this just didn't stand up. It didn't stand up for Jeremy Bentham who called them "nonsense on stilts". It didn't stand up for Karl Marx who thought they were echoing bourgeois rights and so the idea of human rights was never mentioned. They were never called human rights.

Throughout the 19th century we get no real improvement in human rights other than slowly - the battle to abolish slavery. And in the 20th century there was still no concept of human rights - there was no right to bring to justice a tyrant who mass murdered his own people. There was some attempt after Versailles to have a court to try Kaiser Wilhelm for the invasion of Belgium - aggression - and for unrestricted submarine warfare -war crimes - but sovereign immunity helped him and there was no justice. He lived. Although Lloyd George came to Versailles with the slogan 'Hang the Kaiser', the Kaiser remained unhung and lived happily ever after until 1941 in Holland.

So, even as Hitler was extinguishing human rights in Europe, we still don't get - in any discourse, in the work of the permanent court, in the work of the League of Nations - the idea of human rights, of universal human rights. Even after the terrible massacre of the Armenians in 1915 there was no retribution for that after the First World War, and, as has been recorded, Hitler on the border of Poland in 1938, urging his generals to show no mercy, said "after all who now remembers the Armenians". And it was interesting because it was not until 1938, when a small group of English writers and scholars led by H.G. Wells - J.B. Priestley was one of their number and A.A. Milne motored up from Pooh Corner to help with the draft - produced a universal declaration of human rights, a document that was based not on notions of natural rights but was based on human dignity. Because a man comes in to the world through no fault of his own, he is entitled in justice to the following rights and they envisaged a world which would be built upon the basic structures of human rights where they would be enforceable; where there would be an element of enforcement against those leaders who denied and massacred their people. Well, it was published in a little Penguin book which sold hundreds of thousands of copies around the world. HG Wells on the rights of man. It was so persuasive, well the Foreign Office thought it was, that they translated it into German and they dropped it on the advancing Nazi tanks as they moved across France.

Of course, they didn't stop to read it but someone who did was Franklin Roosevelt, who was a friend of Wells, and this became the basis of his 'For Freedom' speech - freedom of speech in religion, freedom from want and fear. And then of course, the Atlantic Charter, which Australia was one of the first countries to sign in 1942 - the promise that the war we were waging was a war for human rights in

our country and others. And come the Paris Peace Conference in 1946, the most striking person, the man who in a way bestrode that Conference in many of its sessions, was the Australian foreign minister, Dr. Evatt.

It was he who argued for an international criminal court, a court that would enforce, not a declaration, but a convention on human rights. Australia was elected to the Human Rights Committee. It was a member of Eleanor Roosevelt's drafting committee. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, in a way that ought to be celebrated but isn't known and should be, was profoundly influenced by the Australian delegation. It was the Australian delegation that put in the right to belong to a trade union. It was the Australian delegation that persuaded Eleanor Roosevelt to include social and economic rights. She wasn't keen on this, and, of course, the Americans were reluctant to include social and economic rights, including the right to education and the right to basic medical care and health and wellbeing. But it was the Australian representative, Colonel Hodgson, who said, "Eleanor, listen love, your late husband's great For Freedom speech referred to freedom from want", and she gave in and so we get economic and social rights in the Universal Declaration.

That was, of course, greatly affected by the Nuremberg trial. It was a miracle in a way. In fact the Human Rights Committee, in drafting the universal declaration, were receiving every day transcripts of the evidence from Nuremberg. It was lucky that we got Nuremberg, because Churchill was violently opposed to the idea. He wanted to draw up a list, indeed he did, of 75 top Nazis who would be given six hours to say their prayers after being captured and then would be shot. Truman, by this time, and his Justice Jackson, said this wouldn't sit on the American conscience or be remembered by our grandchildren with pride: "we must give the Nazis the fairest trial that the horrors of the times will allow". The complete deadlock was broken of course by the third ally, Joe Stalin, who loved show trials as long as everyone got shot in the end, and so we got the Nuremberg trial, the beginning of international criminal law, the great promise that those who mass murdered their own people, who tortured and raped and pillaged, would be brought to justice.

It took a long time to deliver because the promise of Nuremberg went into the deep freeze of the Cold War. In 1948 we got the great triptych of human rights. We got the universal declaration presented by Eleanor Roosevelt to Doc Evatt: "this will become the Magna Carta for mankind". Then we got the Genocide Convention which actually requires states to take action against genocide, and then a few months later we got the Geneva Conventions on the treatment of prisoners of war. But that all goes into cold storage, and we get some very good conventions - the conventions against apartheid, against racism, against torture, against maltreatment of children and women - the good conventions. Someone said, surveying the killing fields of Rwanda, "the road to hell is paved with good conventions". None of them had any enforcement mechanisms attached. And so when you get to the Balkans in the 90s I was in Sarajevo where I first heard that grim joke - there aren't many jokes in the business of international criminal justice - but this was one of the first I heard:

What do you do with a man who kills another man? You put him in jail for life.

What do you do with a man who kills 20 other men? You put them in a mental asylum until they're cured.

What do you do with someone who kills 200,000? Well you send them to a luxury hotel in Geneva for peace negotiations.

It was a black joke told about Milošević and it got even blacker. But at the end of the 20th century, and it was a century in which 160 million men, women and children had been killed in wars or genocide, we finally get a world which can conceive of international justice. We got the Pinochet case. General Pinochet came to London to take tea with Mrs Thatcher – I'm reliably informed it was whiskey – and he was arrested. Finally the House of Lords held that the torture convention meant what it says; that he could be held and indeed put on trial in another country for breaching the universal standard of no torture. John Howard said he was most surprised. The law had moved on since he was its student. But it was extraordinary to be in London at this time and to see all the people who appealed for the release of General Pinochet; immediate release. There was of course the Pope, and the Pope in waiting, Henry Kissinger and George Bush, and most remarkable of all, would you believe, was Fidel Castro. He said this was a terrible insult to Latin American leaders like himself who might one day have their collars pelt.

So we have developed the legacy of Nuremberg with the ICTY and ICTI, and now with the International Criminal Court we have a number of heads of state on trial. Milošević died but Karadžić is about to go in the dock. Charles Taylor has been tried at my court, the court in Sierra Leone, although eventually tried in The Hague. Finally, after 30 years, and too late of course, but better late than never, some of Pol Pot's lieutenants are going on trial in Cambodia. So these developments, and of course we have the acid test with Bashir and Darfur, these developments are making a world in which it's exciting for young people to contemplate being part of, to argue and debate human rights.

Now I believe that it is possible to teach human rights and that teaching it has a number of proven examples; great possibilities. There was some ground breaking research done in Canada, the Cape Breton project in 2002, and schools in Hampshire for the last three years have been teaching a course, 'Citizenship through Human Rights'. It's taught to kids between 12 and 14 and it's supplemented by a UNICEF initiative called Rights Respecting Schools. It is quite an intensive course; 12 weeks of teaching where teachers are being trained to bring human rights to life, exploring concrete issues such as poverty and discrimination, and facilitating challenging debates about identities, diversities, and rights and responsibilities. 'School rules' is the first lecture, the first hour of study - 'Are they fair or not?' - and the kids are given a set of new rules. Teachers may hit students at any time. Students must convert to the head teachers' religion. Teachers can go through students' bags at any time and examine their property. Anyone who criticises the new rules will be punished. They will not be entitled to argue or appeal the decision. Teachers can take any trainers or mobiles from students and keep them for their own use. So with those new rules of unfairness, students are required to think about why they are unfair and of course they mirror the kind of rules that are condemned in the Universal Declaration.

The second set of periods discusses the human rights story with particular reference to the Holocaust and the end of slavery. The third session is on human rights in focus using hypotheticals – a mosquito spray that can only be heard and drive wild anyone under 25 and so on. Then the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child is studied, which has particular resonance for children. Then 'balancing rights', 'free speech against religion', and so forth, 'taking responsibility'. By the time you get to lesson 9, you're discussing what is an important issue in classrooms, homophobic bullying; a particular problem in Britain and, as I recall, in Australia, where we simply don't face up to the fact that kids at 15 or 16 could develop a homosexual identity and the terrible misery inflicted upon them by their peers as a result. And so by the time you get to the final session, students are encouraged to actually take action by writing letters to the editor, fundraising, filmmaking, lobbying the local council, organising a peaceful protest (that's something they'll enjoy), going onto radio call-back programs and pestering the likes of Alan Jones. This has some potential for blowback but on the whole I think it's been a very enjoyable and thoroughly well conducted course. That at least is how the British Ministry of Education and Ministry of Justice, two organisations that are not given to exaggeration or excitement, particularly about the organisation of peaceful protests, have assessed the pilot projects.

They found that the benefits were behaviour improvement, increase in attendance, classroom and school atmosphere is healthier, teachers enjoy their job, school environment is respected to a greater degree, students demonstrate a heightened awareness of broader community and social issues. And this is taken together with UNICEF's Rights Respecting School program which can teach children from 6 onwards, and has been again assessed as improving the self esteem of pupils, enhancing their moral development, producing more positive attitudes towards diversity in society and the reduction of prejudice, pupils developing as global citizens, and, importantly, enhanced job satisfaction for teachers.

So there are some examples of how values have been effectively taught. Universal values. And we have in our own history, I mentioned some of them, Phillip's first law against slavery, the fight for the right of jury trial, and for parliaments, for secular free education and we can think of more recent things achieved by the trade union movement – the forty hour week, the basic wage. We were one of the first countries with universal suffrage, the secret ballot, even the smoko is something that, in terms of rights, the trade union movement in this country was first to achieve. So there is a great deal that we can teach and can make children proud of, make them excited to learn and in these ways universal values can be taught as part of the Australian story.

We need to understand, our children need to understand, where these rights come from and the capacity for their use in everyday discourse and in everyday life.

Disciplines of maths, science, geography and history may themselves be value-free, but education itself is not. Richard Pring reminds us about the story of the head teacher he met in Boston, herself a survivor of the concentration camp, who would send her new teachers this letter:

*Dear teacher,
I'm a survivor of a concentration camp. My eyes saw what no man should witness, gas chambers built by learned engineers, children poisoned by educated physicians, infants killed by trained nurses, women and babies shot and burnt by high school college graduates. So I'm suspicious of education. My request is to help your students become human. Your efforts must never produce learned monsters, skilled psychopaths, educated morons. Reading, writing, arithmetic are important only if they serve to make our children more human.*

Surely time to put that insight writ large on the public school curriculum. 'Human Rights' is not history because it isn't past. It's not law because it's still in flux. It's not philosophy although it does provide ethics for our time. Nor is it religion because it's secular and not dogmatic. It's not politics because it's not populist. It is, however, drawn from all these disciplines, and more, in its efforts to define and enforce human values; values which a democratic society can't be neutral about and nor can education. It has the capacity to induce the self confidence that comes from a sense of dignity because these rights sustain and reflect the dignity of the human person. To students in our state schools, and teachers as well, they serve to show that privilege is an anachronism, that dogma is destructive, that freedom is a birthright and discrimination is a wrong that should never be suffered. To the advantages of state education with its secularity, diversity, locality, let us now add humanity, the value of Tom Curnow.

Thank you.