

 **Briefly**

- The AEU has unveiled a new vision for teaching and leadership.
- Teachers, principals, academics and the AEU collaborated on its development.
- It offers a positive view of education for the common good.



Way to go

A new vision for the future, developed by teachers and educators, gives hope for the twenty-first century, reports **DANIELLE TOWNSEND**.

Two years in the making, a new vision of teaching and leadership has now been unveiled. This innovative project from the AEU invited teachers to put forward their own ideas about the future. It's yielded some inspiring results.

Called *Educational Leadership and Teaching for the Twenty First Century: A Desirable Scenario (ELAT21)*, the document brings together the opinions and aims of Australian teachers, principals, academics and union representatives.

A committee of AEU officers and 'critical friends'—mainly

academics—created a first draft of the document over an 18-month period. It was then time to seek input from members working in schools. "They came up with the most amazing stuff," says Wendy

 **It's a future which looks at society rather than simply the economy.** 

Currie, research officer at the NSW Teachers' Federation. "What they did was clarify a range of things and they added to it."

The result is a 54-page document that challenges assumptions about where

education is heading and what it needs in the near future. It looks at curriculum for a globalised world, how to organise public systems, how to ensure quality teaching and how to rebuild a common purpose. It also explores the essence of good leadership and how to redesign conventional models to better motivate others and create a sense of purpose.

Its messages are optimistic and thought-provoking.

People first

The idea for the paper, which came out of the 2004 Federal Conference, was to respond to

the prevailing conservative view of the future as an 'economy'. "This view is focused almost entirely on the needs of industry," says Roy Martin, AEU federal research officer, "...and people seemed to have little say in the way it would go."

"The future, as portrayed by some, appears to be anti-worker, anti-union, inequitable and individualistic," says the paper's introduction. "It is not surprising that the AEU sees things differently."

"We needed to look at this 'predetermined' future from our perspective to see how desirable this was," says Martin, "and whether we actually had a choice about the way the future might be."

"It is also part of the process of teachers shaping the future of their profession," he says. "We wanted to construct a framework of desirable directions to enable the AEU and its members to participate constructively in this debate."

Education for transformation

So what view of the future does the document describe? "It's a future which looks at society rather than simply the economy," says Martin. "The fundamental principle of the AEU has always been that education is transformational. That's to say that each part of education is about creating greater equity in society; meeting the needs and the wellbeing of individuals, rather than just the wellbeing of industry."

Jill Blackmore, professor in the faculty of education at Deakin University, was invited into the discussion as a 'critical friend' of the process. Her role, along with other academics, was to share relevant research and a perspective from outside the AEU of what issues will be important in the future.

"I think current education policies have started to treat

education not as a public good but as a positional good for individuals," she says. "If people think of education merely in these terms, all they do is look for economic benefits."

Related to that, Blackmore is also critical of the mantra of both sides of politics that education policy should be organised around providing 'choice'.

"There has been very little thought about the long-term implications around social and economic effects of letting 'choice' be the primary way of organising a society's education system."

Feet on the ground

The authors of the paper stress in its introduction that they do not aim to criticise specific documents, but to "chart a scenario which is desirable, feasible and achievable and which involves the pursuit of a fair and just society."

The NSWTF invited members to comment on the draft document online but also brought together a consultative group which looked at and re-drafted sections of the document. Currie

This was an attempt to do something really different.

says that the extensive consultation has ensured that the document isn't "just a wish list". "It certainly is a vision, but the members didn't think it was unattainable. It's actually got its feet on the ground and that's what they were impressed with," she says.

Working out ways that people can use and think about the document is the next challenge. "This was an attempt to do something really different," says Currie. "Now we've got to use it."

Blackmore uses her own career as an example of how the big-picture thinking of unions can be a catalyst for change. "Unions are really critical in terms of informing us of new ideas," she

Your say

Andrew Skourdombis,
maths/science teacher,
Williamstown High School, VIC.

"I think the nature of teaching is changing and I think it's important that the union has a document that can look at that in detail...it gives us an ideal to work with."



Michelle McCormack, teacher
West Pymble Public School

"The issues and ideas that were raised in the working groups were not only attainable but absolutely necessary to work towards cohesive, progressive and equitable education systems."



says. "By arguing the very strong case about the need for good public education systems it is important to try and recapture the debate."

The document itself lays out a modest aim. "It is not the definitive scenario and it is not the only possible desirable scenario...If it is to be more than a dream, it will, like other worthwhile things that have been achieved in education, require considerable work and struggle."

This is the first in a series of stories on Educational Leadership and Teaching for the Twenty First Century: A Desirable Scenario (ELAT21) to be featured in Australian Educator this year. ●

DANIELLE TOWNSEND is commissioning editor for Australian Educator.

Resources

● **Educational Leadership and Teaching for the Twenty First Century: A Desirable Scenario: Download the paper from www.aeufederal.org.au or call the AEU on (03) 9693 1800 to purchase a copy.**