

Planning & Reporting

Some Problems. Some Solutions.

Lester Flockton

Planning and reporting are as old as the hills, but unlike the hills, their form is contrived, constructed, calibrated, confused and circumvented by people. They take on new meanings and new magnificence in the belief (of some in certain places) that they will spur new potencies, remedy old deficiencies and have all of our schools and their students scale new heights. There's nothing wrong with planning and reporting as such. A day doesn't pass when every teacher is planning for student learning. Every year thousands upon thousands of school reports on student achievement – the ones that matter most – are made to parents. But what has become crystal clear among the thinking, searching and experienced professional community (not to be confused with the oft-bitten, thrice shy society of cynics) is that the new Planning and Reporting regime may not measure up to the best tests of their analytic scrutiny. So what are the problems, and what are the solutions?

Globalised "Drips"

Problem: The "Drip" Effect

You don't need to trot too far onto the global racetracks to be struck by some unnerving similarities between what is now pronounced and prescribed for New Zealand's school system, and what other systems have already preached and practised.

The rubric and rhetoric are globally thematic: government priorities of literacy and numeracy, closing the gaps, raising the bar, evidence based improvement, targets, measurable outcomes, performance measures, digitalised data, reporting, accountability, etc. etc. Requirements to submit formulated, data drizzled plans and reports to burgeoning bureaucracies for checking, approval, monitoring and computer banking are endemic.

The state is an incredibly blunt instrument; it gets hold of one overarching idea and imposes it without any sensitivity to local context. And there is the desperate craving of politicians for magical solutions.

Micklethwait & Woolridge, 1996

Professional misgivings and disenchantment with the new administrative devices are universally widespread, and for at least two good reasons: the misdirection of precious time from where it really matters (there is a morality issue here), and the absence of a credible and robust body of evidence which clearly substantiates the claimed benefits of newly spun solutions (another morality issue here).

There is something going on here that might well disturb the thinking principal. Common underpinnings which drive new planning and reporting mandates on the global racetrack are clearly about competitiveness and economism. They are built on questionable assumptions which can undermine the purpose and meaning of a good education for life in a world where differences are a reality and diversity a great source of human richness.

Solution

Arguably, decisions that matter most about the purpose, means and ends of schooling should be made as close to the school as possible within a broadly defined and enabling framework of core responsibilities set down by the State following proper collaborative consultation with the sector. "Closeness" is best defined as the community of parents,

teachers and others in their vicinity who share and actively contribute towards the very best interests of students and the life and work of the school. Let's face it, the vast majority of communities are hugely responsible, sensible, caring and capable. These qualities are not the prerogative of politicians and their advisers. Moreover, most communities are responsive to good, well informed local school leadership, and that leadership is more likely to flourish and prosper the school when it is largely unencumbered by the invasive rituals of governmentalism. Every school community is entitled to good leadership, which is not to deny that there will always be a small number of struggling schools and communities needing suitable and effective support, guidance and counselling from those who themselves have succeeded in the same sort of job. To this end, it is perhaps timely to re-state the opening paragraph in that little yellow book, "Tomorrow's Schools" (1988):

I know of no safe depository of the ultimate power of the society but the people themselves and if we think them not enlightened enough to exercise their control with a wholesome discretion, the remedy is not to take it from them, but to inform their discretion.

Thomas Jefferson

One part of the solution to stemming the flow of globally patterned administrative mandates that have the effect of stultifying the scope, richness, diversity and joy of educational practice and experience, is for each school itself to articulate and come to terms with its identifying purpose or mission. This needs to be more than fancy words on the front of a charter. It needs to become the vital challenge that excites and motivates the forward direction, growth, development and vitality of the school.

In one respect it needs to be hoisted as the verbal flag that pronounces what the school is all about in its day to day life, principles and practices. In another, it should be the defining compass that keeps the school true to its charted course and direction. Truly inspired schools seek out, ferment and capture their own inspiration – it can never be mandated from on high. Without such inspiration, schools are vulnerable to routine self-deceptive drudgery as a consequence of numbingly mechanistic system compliance. I have often shared with school leaders inspired examples of what a school might be all about in what it seeks and does for its students. Eisner provides a fine example:

Among the various aims we consider important in education, two are especially so. We would like our children to be well informed - that is, to understand ideas that are important, useful, beautiful, and powerful. And we also want them to have the appetite and ability to think analytically and critically, to be able to speculate and imagine, to see connections among ideas, and to be able to use what they know to enhance their own lives and to contribute to their culture.

Elliot W. Eisner, 1997

At the level of the school, the development, realisation and celebration of this kind of thinking takes time, courage and practice. Solutions don't always come easily. The alternative is to live with the problem!

Sewing Seeds for Policy Plots

Problem: Trust and Trustworthiness

It is being said (by government education officials) that schools need to learn to work together with the Ministry of Education in a relationship of trust and goodwill so that both together can do productive things to raise student achievement (test scores?) and reduce disparity (close the gaps?). On the surface, this "working together" seems to make great sense. But it shouldn't surprise the Ministry to find a wide-spread reluctance, particularly

among school leaders, to enthusiastically embrace this kind of matrimonial ethic. The reasons are deeply seated in a well patterned history of centralist cultures of authority, decree, control, surveillance and confusion. Moreover, we need to be ever mindful that the Ministry's first and foremost duty is to serve its Ministers. Annually, it negotiates and purchases its work and derives its income from the Ministers, so there are all kinds of self-sustaining motives at work here, and there can be no confusion about who the boss is! It is perhaps timely, given this "trust us" overture, to offer some counsel on practices that build and malpractices that bomb trust relationships. The whole Planning and Reporting affair provides an excellent case study in trust destruction.

Consider the chronology and method of the development and promulgation of the new regulatory requirements for Planning and Reporting.

1. *The week before the 1999 General Election*: Changes to the National Administration Guidelines developed and held under wraps by the Ministry of Education were signed out by the then Minister of Education, Nick Smith. These are the same NAGs that we have today. So who owns these particular NAGs?

- (a) *The National Government*
- (b) *The Labour Government*
- (c) *The Governments (National and Labour)*
- (d) *The Ministry of Education*
- (e) *The School*
- (f) *All of the above*

To what extent did the Government and the Ministry of Education discuss these intentions with the school sector, and involve the school sector in the preparation of these NAGs?

- (a) *Heaps*
- (b) *Quite a lot*
- (c) *Some*
- (d) *None*

When the time inevitably comes to re-jig the NEGs and NAGs, how much involvement can the school sector expect to have in their development and finalisation?

- (a) *Heaps*
- (b) *Quite a lot*
- (c) *Some*
- (d) *None*

2. More than a year before Education Amendment Bill No.2 was made public in December 2000 (i.e. probably before the new Minister of Education took office): The Ministry of Education took the initiative of developing new policy for new Planning and Reporting requirements for schools. Where did the ideas that underpinned this policy come from?

- (a) *The Government*
- (b) *The Ministry*
- (c) *The Government and the Ministry*
- (d) *The School Sector working together with the Government and Ministry*

To what extent did the Government and the Ministry of Education discuss these intentions with the school sector, and involve the school sector in the prior development of the new planning and reporting policy that schools would be required to implement?

- (a) *Heaps*
- (b) *Quite a lot*
- (c) *Some*
- (d) *None*

3. December 2000 the Government introduced the Education Amendment Bill No.2 into Parliament, as prepared by the Ministry of Education. This Bill included new requirements for Planning and Reporting. When did you find out about what was in this Bill?

- (a) *Before December 2000*
- (b) *After December 2000*
- (c) *Don't remember!*

4. March 2001 submissions via the Select Committee process closed on Education Amendment Bill No.2 Note the timing and time of the year for democratic debate about this new law (prepared by the Ministry for the Minister). So, how much time did schools and educationists have to scrutinise, debate and get involved in the proposed legislation:

- (a) *Heaps*
- (b) *Quite a lot*
- (c) *Some*
- (d) *None*

(In the meantime, Ministry policy people are working on designing the Planning and

Reporting "Template" and writing new National Administration Guidelines, but these don't come out into the sunlight.)

5. September 11th 2002, the Ministry had its first meeting with a "Reference Group" of principals chosen by the Ministry to help it pave the way for implementing of the new Planning and Reporting legislation which had already been decided. Remember the CD Rom "Thinking Template" and "SmartCharter"? How practically useful did they prove to be for your school?

- (a) *Extremely useful*
- (b) *Somewhat useful*
- (c) *Of little use*
- (d) *Of no use*
- (e) *Don't know – didn't look at them*

6. October 2002, Planning and Reporting legislation is passed by the Government in its "Education Standards Act". And there we have it!

This chronology of events, and the manner in which they were executed, is not unique in the way things are done to schools by governments and their central authorities – and yet schools are being asked to work with such agencies in a relationship of trust! Clearly, trust is either being redefined as a concept (you can trust us because we know best), or those who would seek to invoke it simply don't understand how to build, let alone sustain, trusting relationships. This kind of pathology was eruditely exposed by distinguished Cambridge University professor Onora O'Neill during her acclaimed 2002 B.B.C. Reith Lecture series.

A crisis in trust cannot be overcome by a blind rush to place more trust. Our ambition is not to place trust blindly, as small children do, but with good judgement. In judging whether to place our trust in others' words or undertakings, or to refuse that trust, we need information and we need the means to judge that information. To place trust reasonably we need to not only discover which claims or undertakings we are invited to trust, but what we might reasonably think about them.

Moreover

Reasonably placed trust requires not only information about the proposals or undertakings that others put forward, but also information about those who put them forward.

Trusting isn't about having guarantees. It's about having reasonably good evidence. Questions arise, therefore, about how much information and valid evidence was provided to substantiate the claimed benefits of the new planning and reporting regime, what opportunities were made available for examining and improving them before they were invoked (which is very different from being "told" about them), and how much credibility we might give to those who developed and promoted the new law. Were they, for example, people highly respected for insights and understandings drawn from first hand experience in successful school site educational leadership? The answers to these questions don't require a multiple choice test! But they do say something about the insensibilities of technocratic ideology and methodology.

Solution

Simple – stop the self-spinning control mentality and arrogance of covert centralist policy making. Engage, listen to, value and take notice of the community of professional thought, practice, experience and wisdom from every beginning to every end. New Zealand is a small country of rich talent – and it doesn't all choose to reside in central power houses.

Elixirs to Sooth Sore Heads and Grumbling Tummies

So what's the point of all of this new Planning and Reporting?

Problem: Doubting Thomas!

So what is the purpose of this new Planning and Reporting? What are the claimed benefits of the new regime – and more important, who says so, where's their evidence, and how convincing is it? The search begins then ends with statements from central officials:

· "Accountability at last", says the Minister of Education:
"No doubt ... your readers will be reassured to know that accountability for learning outcomes will be in place in our schools at last."
Dominion Post, 21.4.01

· "Improving educational outcomes and reducing administrative drama", says the Minister of Education:
"The Government's intention is to reduce the administrative burden on schools.
"The new reporting requirements on schools will be changed to make them

more useful in improving educational outcomes. The new system of public planning and reporting for schools will be **simpler, more coherent, provide better information** to parents, communities and the Government, while **reducing much of the administrative drama of the (previous) system.**

Minister of Education Media Statement, 12.12.00

"... the new planning and reporting processes will provide schools with high quality information that they can use as part of their self-review programme. There will be considerable help for school boards from the Ministry of Education to ensure that the new planning requirements can be completed with a minimum of effort. ... I have consulted with the leaders of teachers' professional groups on the proposals in the Bill and can report that they are very positive about them."

Letter to a school principal from the Minister of Education, 5.2.01

· The new requirements will "consolidate and simplify existing planning and reporting requirements", says the Ministry of Education.

"It will provide the data needed **for the Government** to improve educational policies and enable **the Ministry** to provide schools with another source of information for school self-review.

Curriculum Update, August 2001

· The new planning and reporting will "... encourage better use of achievement evidence both in schools and for the ongoing development of policy and practice", says Fancy, Education Secretary.

National Office Circular to Principals, 12.9.02

So there's an agenda mix! Accountability! Easier administrative practices! Raising student achievement! Better information to inform Government and Ministry policy! Data! However, the problem here is an absence of quality evidence to substantiate these and similar claims, locally or abroad (i.e. evidence based substantiation). Last year I visited the United States of America and England in search of evidence that might strongly support similar and well-established practices in those countries. Its thinness and fragility are such that it needs to be carefully shielded from too much exposure and sunlight. As one distinguished academic commented to me, "Mandated reporting won't make the difference where it's needed – and we don't have evidence to suggest otherwise."

SOLUTION

Schools (in particular, principals with the others on their boards) will be part of the problem unless they hold to account such statements as those given above. They will need to deliberately resist adopting "show off" methods that are complex and time consuming, which result in shaky data, and which make little genuine contribution to advancing children's education in matters that the school community have decided are important. To achieve this, schools need to be well informed and highly astute in their understanding of what self-management actually means, and how this relates to the nature and interpretation of statutory requirements for planning and reporting.

Self-Managing or Self-Damaging Schools?

Problem: Knowing what is really required of your school, as opposed to what someone from somewhere might tell you is required.

The underlying principle of self-management is that the school has ample scope within a broadly defined statutory framework to exercise its own good sense, discretion and enterprising initiative. The effective self-managing school generates its own sense of the world and actively minimises dependency on official agencies and their offices when determining this direction. While central agencies can never "own" education, the actualised self-managing school has a strong sense of meaning and ownership over its directions, achievements and challenges. It doesn't blame the misadventures of officialdom as reasons or excuses for its own inaction.

When Tomorrow's Schools was introduced, The Ministry of Education began a deliberate and systematic programme of dismantling the extensive regulatory platform which previously dictated the actions of New Zealand's schools. After all, to continue in this manner would be antithetical to the very essence of self-management. In place of regulations and the regulatory mentality, the Education Act was re-conceptualised and re-written to allow schools ample scope for localised policy making. The National Education

Guidelines (a form of regulatory framework) were also intended to uphold such principles, although it took a second go at writing them to get this right (the 1989 "social engineering" Guidelines were ditched and replaced by the 1993 Guidelines, which remain the core framework to this day). This is non-directiveness was nicely exemplified by previous NAG 4, concerning requirements for assessment and reporting. The total legal stipulation by the State was that schools "assess, record, monitor and report on student achievement". The NAG didn't prescribe how that was to be done, so it became the rightful responsibility of the self-managing school to define, develop, practise and regularly review its own assessment and reporting systems. But herein lies a salutary lesson. What followed was that numerous schools up and down the country embarked on cumbersome, crazy, time-consuming assessment systems that were presented to them (usually in "contract" deliveries) as "packaged solutions" – specially useful for satisfying the Education Review Office and its slant on things. The naïve thought they were obliged to buy in! They became self-damaging schools. The very same risk now applies to the new Planning and Reporting. So what is required and expected of schools, and where does it say that? I argue that there are only two legitimate sources of expectation that every school is obliged to honour:

1. The reasonable expectations of the school's own community.

(The school's immediate community being its parents and teachers, both of whom are the advocates for students and custodians of their educational well-being. In most cases, the Board of Trustees is the active representative of parents.)

2. The law as it is stated in the law, regardless of its reasonableness.

(Beware: the law as it is stated is not necessarily the same thing as the sometimes curious and often spurious interpretations and embellishments that are packaged for school consumption by those who would have others believe them!)

I argue that when schools come to understand this vital underpinning in the state-school relationship, and when schools actually learn to work closer to the seminal sources of expectation (above), the problems diminish exponentially. But this requires schools to be highly sensitive to their vulnerabilities, the key ones being overload which results in dependency, and misinformation, which abounds.

Dependency is created by three interrelated conditions: overload, misinformation, and corresponding vulnerability to packaged solutions. The system fosters dependency on the part of principals and Boards of Trustees. The role of principals in implementing innovations more often than not consists of being on the receiving end of externally initiated changes (many being the latest fad, fashion, panacea or recycled idea from those who presume to know best, despite not ever having to do, or done, the job of a principal and board). The constant bombardment of new tasks and the continual interruptions keep principals and boards off balance. Not only are the demands fragmented and incoherent, but even good ideas have a short shelf life as initiatives are dropped in favour of the latest new policy. Overload in the form of a barrage of disjointed demands fosters dependency.

after Fullan, 1995

SOLUTION

The majority of principals and the others on their Boards seldom go directly to the statutes as a strategy for clarifying expectations before designing and adopting practices necessary for compliance. They tend to resort to secondary sources. Those secondary sources seldom show and justify the worth of their creations by demonstrating how they are referenced to what the law actually says and requires. So instead of looking to the Act to find out whether it is necessary to do this or that, or to find out how many goals are necessary in a strategic plan, or targets in an annual plan, the common practice is to resort to asking people with assumed knowledge and authority, or reading statements that are frequently spun, woven and embellished by their writers. Arguably, all of the answers needed by the school committed to self-management initiative, are to be found in the Act itself. And if there are no answers, then perhaps there is no need for the question. So what does the Act actually require for Planning and Reporting? It's easy enough reading, if somewhat

laborious, ill defined and poorly conceived – but those weaknesses can be used to the school’s interpretative advantage.

**The School Charter
Requirements as stipulated and stated in
Education Standards Act 2001
Section 61**

THREE SECTIONS THE SCHOOL CHARTER MUST CONTAIN

SECTION 1 – CULTURAL DIVERSITY AND MAORI

A section that includes

- (i) the aim of developing, for the school, policies and practices that reflect **New Zealand’s cultural diversity** and the **unique position of Maori culture**; and
- (ii) the aim of ensuring that all reasonable steps are taken to provide instruction in **tikanga Maori (Maori culture)** and **te reo Maori (the Maori language)** for full-time students whose parents ask for it.

Note: this is precisely the same as what was required of the 1989 Act. Nothing new. L.F.

SECTION 2 – LONG TERM STRATEGIC PLAN

A strategic plan that

- (i) establishes the Board’s aims and purposes;
- (ii) establishes for the next 3 to 5 years the Board’s
 - * aims,
 - * objectives,
 - * directions,
 - * and priorities,

for

- * intended student outcomes
- * the school’s performance
- * use of resources;

- (iii) includes any aims and objectives that designate the **school’s special characteristics** or its **special character**.

Note 1: The Ministry has stated that the words “aims, objectives, directions, priorities” can be read to mean the same thing. (So, why didn’t they simply say “objectives”!)

Note 2: While the Ministry constantly emphasises that plans must address student achievement, there are in fact 3 dimensions here: intended student outcomes, school performance, use of resources. Thus, goals need to interrelate and address all 3 facets because the Law is the authority about what is to be done –not Ministry officers and advisers. Example: “student outcomes” might be about literacy; “school performance” might be about literacy professional development; “use of resources” might be about funding for PD and books. It is important to understand, however, that these terms are only very broadly prescriptive and not defined by the law. The self-managing school is therefore entitled to decide for itself how it will interpret and address them – not a Ministry checker. But beware: the school needs to be able to justify and defend its interpretation.
L.F.

SECTION 3 – ANNUAL UPDATED SECTION

- (i) establishes for the relevant year the Board’s
 - * aims,

- * directions,
- * objectives,
- * priorities,
- * and targets

relating to

- * intended student outcomes,
- * the school's performance,
- * use of resources.

Note: the Act does not stipulate a number of targets. So no one should tell you that there is a required minimum or maximum number of targets. Be astute. It might be best to settle for one, possibly two, or perhaps three targets in any given year. L.F.

FURTHERMORE

A school charter must include the Board's

- * aims,
- * objectives
- * directions,
- * priorities,
- * and targets

in the following categories

- a) student achievement
- b) the Board's activities aimed at meeting both general **government policy objectives** for all schools, being policy objectives set out or referred to in **NATIONAL EDUCATION GUIDELINES**, and specific policy objectives applying to that school;
- c) the management of the school's and Board's

- * capability,
- * resources,
- * assets, and liabilities, including -
- * human resources,
- * finances,
- * property,
- * and other ownership matters;

- d) other matters of interest to the public that the **Minister** may determine.

MOREOVER

A school charter must

- a) contain **all annual or long-term plans** the Board is required to have or has prepared for its own purposes;

or

- b) contain a **summary** of each plan or a reference to it.

Section 62

PROCEDURAL REQUIREMENTS OF PREPARING OR UPDATING YOUR SCHOOL CHARTER

The Board must provide the **Secretary of Education** with a copy of its first school charter and every updated school charter.

The school charter must be prepared and updated in accordance with the **NATIONAL ADMINISTRATION GUIDELINES**.

Section 63

WHEN A SCHOOL CHARTER OR UPDATED CHARTER TAKES EFFECT

1) The **Secretary of Education** must consider whether the school's charter has been developed or updated in accordance with the requirements of the Act and the **NATIONAL ADMINISTRATION GUIDELINES**.

2) A new or updated charter takes effect on the 25th working day after the date that the **Secretary of Education** receives it. (See 5 below)

3) If, before the charter takes effect the **Secretary of Education** determines that it was not developed or updated in accordance with the Act, or is inconsistent with the Act or the **NATIONAL ADMINISTRATION GUIDELINES**, the **Secretary** must notify the Board of the matters in the school charter to be resolved.

4) The **Secretary** must then **NEGOTIATE** with the Board to resolve the matters concerned and, if the Board and **Secretary** are unable to reach agreement about the content of the school charter, the **Secretary** may **REQUIRE** the Board to amend the charter.

5) If the **Secretary** issues a notices under subsection (3) (above), the school charter takes effect

(a) On the date **agreed** by the **Secretary** and Board; **or**

(b) On the date the **determined** by the **Secretary** to be the commencement date for his or her amendments.

MAKING COPIES OF THE CHARTER AVAILABLE

Once a school charter takes effect, the Board must make the charter available.

And that's basically it! So go forth and eliminate the "administrative drama". A well designed charter framework which fits the legal requirements need only use a single double-sided sheet of paper. It has been done! And always remember that volume of paper and verbiage are typically inversely related to usefulness.

Target: a circular or rectangular object, often stuffed and marked with concentric circles, fired or aimed at for shooting practice.

The New shorter Oxford English Dictionary

Problem

If there's anything administratively new in this Planning and Reporting regime, it is the requirement to annually set student achievement targets, measure performance against those targets, report publicly on that performance – and send all of this stuff to the government's Ministry for its checking, approval, analysis, feedback, oversight, monitoring, general surveillance, policy making, correspondence and filing. Why? Because, it's the Government's and Ministry's formula for raising achievement and reducing disparities so that our children will be better prepared for a changing and uncertain future in a world where "knowledge doubles every 6 to 7 years, Aotearoa/New Zealand is becoming increasingly diverse, and there will be a demographic changeover by 2040". The Ministry tells us that the way to addressing these inevitabilities is through a "culture of data driven annual self-review", which "demands boards and principals to be more explicit about their expectations". This explicitness is to manifest itself in annual performance targets – a rhetorical recipe borrowed from abroad! The assumption here is that everything that counts can be measured, but can it? Einstein advises us otherwise: "Not everything that can be measured counts, and not everything that counts can be measured." Examples of targets provided by the Ministry of Education are already being seen to pattern some questionable practices and assumptions. Consider the following reasonably representative example:

60 percent of year 9 students are reading below their chronological age. At least 60 percent of year 9 students will read at or above their chronological age.

In effect, this target is saying that 20 percent of the year 9 students are to make dramatic improvements in the space of a single year. If the target were "met", it might tell us a number of disquieting things: (1) The teaching prior to year 9 was so abysmally bad that the damage could be fixed in just one year. (Most unlikely.) (2): The measures used to

determine entry and post-intervention levels were suspect. (Teaching to the test, especially a single, one-off test, is one sure way to raise the scores.) (3): The rapidly achieved gains were at a surface level only. (How can we be confident that they have permanence?).

This single example alerts us to what could easily become a nonsense bordering on corruption of professional ethics and standards. The risks implicit in annual target setting are more deeply profound than the lack of precision and the inexactness which is characteristic of almost all forms of achievement data as they relate to what students actually know and can do. The inherent problem here is about "games of truth". For those unwilling to party such games, the tendency has been to "sub-optimize" the targets so that there can be some confidence in their success, while allowing space for the numerous other important aspects of learning and life in schools.

What is not well understood or properly recognised in the gathering, constructing and reporting of data is that it is poor practice to make assumptions or generalise about achievement from a single assessment event or one-off tests. International measurement agencies strongly advise the importance of "multiple measures" when seeking to obtain and present dependable accounts of meaningful learning, and these measures should always include quality professional judgement. Furthermore, leading analysts tell us that at least three years of continuous data are needed before there can be sufficient confidence in reported results on the achievements of groups of students.

It is now widely acknowledged that there are many potential ill-effects in setting whole school targets, including the narrowing of teaching and learning in order to concentrate on meeting selective demands of performance measures. There is the risk of learning being reduced to a superficial level with neglect of the student's ability to consolidate and apply their learning to new and meaningful contexts. Moreover, privileging areas such as literacy and numeracy (two hats for all) can detrimentally sideline other areas that are critical for learning for life in and beyond the schools, and for the life of the school itself. As Wilby (1998) cautions, we should be clear about cause and effect. We shall attain narrow targets because we have set precise and narrow targets, not because of any richer or wider developments in our schools. Kohn reinforces this important message:

Broadly speaking, it is easier to measure efficiency than effectiveness, easier to rate how well we're doing something than to ask whether what we're doing makes sense. Not everyone realises that the process of coming to understand ideas in a classroom is not always linear and quantifiable – or, in fact, that measurable outcomes may be the least significant results in learning.
Kohn, 2000

SOLUTION

Target setting, monitoring and measuring could be viewed as a kind of managerial action research. While there might be some gains from the intensity both of purpose and learning for selected groups of students in sectionalised aspects of curriculum, much could also be lost in breadth of vision and engagement within the whole school.

There are two among many critical concerns about targets: the content and prescriptive nature of the targets themselves, and the quality and strength of the data used to measure and report performance against those targets. I am immensely impressed by a small rural school which confronted such issues in the formulation of its goals (strategic plan) and targets (annual plan). They are learner centred and recognise the reality of diverse needs and motivations. In my view they have found something of a solution:

<p>Strategic Plan "Goal" To address each child's particular learning priorities through focused individualised goal setting and review in collaboration with children and their parents.</p>	<p>Annual Plan "Target"</p> <p>All children achieve their priority goals to the satisfaction of their teacher, their parents, and themselves. (Student Achievement)·</p> <p>The school provides ongoing guidance and support for teachers and pupils in goal setting and monitoring. (School Performance)·</p> <p>Up to \$1500 is made available</p>
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	for teacher support and guidance. (Resources)
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For some of these children, literacy might be the priority, for others it might be work and study skills, relationships, aspects of numeracy, or any one of a multitude of valid needs. For some children, the targets will be progressive over a number of years – for others a year will be sufficient. One size does not fit all.

It's a bad plan that admits no modification.
Publius Syrus, Maxim 469, circa 42 B.C.

SOLUTIONS FROM PROBLEMS

The Planning and Reporting regime initiated and now managed by the Ministry of Education for the Government is strongly modelled from elsewhere. The true worth of its underpinning assumptions and data centred methods have yet to be proven to the satisfaction of thinking educationists and others (here and abroad), so they are perfectly entitled to withhold their moral support. The proper precursor to this sort of policy formulation and regulation might have more profitably focussed on coming to shared understandings about what constitutes a good educational experience for our children as preparation for a good life in complex times. Then again, this could have prevented targets and reporting from bolting out of the stable. Yet despite this bolt, some of the misfit nuts have been removed altogether, others replaced and some loosened. There is no longer a designer template (one size, shape and pattern for all), no longer an imperative for externally referenced data, no longer a requirement to use quantitative numeric data, no longer a "meta-analysis" – whatever that was going to be. The unnerving proposed new National Administration Guidelines drafted by the Ministry over a year ago but kept under wraps have yet to see the light of day. So what caused these nuts to be loosened, and who will need to maintain the strongest vigilance to avoid screw-back? You have a 50 percent chance of getting this one right!

(a) Government and Ministry self-reflective corrective practice
(b) School sector professional leadership.

Do not be certain of anything.
Bertrand Russell

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