Win a Trip to the National Conference

SAETA will sponsor two members to attend the conference in Canberra to be held from July 8-11, 2007. We will pay for your airfare, accommodation and conference registration. The winners will be expected to provide a report of the conference for publication in Opinion.

To be eligible to enter the competition you must be an individual member of SAETA. One of these trips will be reserved for a teacher new to the teaching of English, that is someone who has been teaching English for five years or less. Members of SAETA Council cannot enter the competition.

Your Task:
In 500 words or explain what you believe are the critical factors for success in English teaching and learning. Select an appropriate genre for your presentation.

We encourage you to have fun and we welcome creative, entertaining entries which we reserve the right to publish.

Your name and the number of years you have been teaching English should appear on the attached entry form, but to enable the judges to make an objective decision please do not place your name on the entry itself. Our office staff will link your cover sheet to your entry before sending it to the judges.

Entries close: Friday 25 May, 2007

Entry Form:

Win a trip to the AAET/ALA National Conference in 2007

Name: ____________________________

Years as an English teacher: ____________________________

Contact Address: ____________________________

Telephone: ____________________________

Entries close: Friday May 25, 2007

• I am currently an individual member of SAETA.
• If I win the competition I agree to write a report of the Canberra Conference for Opinion in 2007.
• I realise that SAETA reserves the right to have entries reproduced and publicised by press, radio, and television, as well as on the SAETA website.

Signed: ____________________________
ENGLISH (LEARNING) TEACHING

4: Competition Entry
Instead of reproducing the tyranny of a decadent educational discourse, one that numbs teachers into its ranks, Garth Boomer advocates that teachers ‘teach … … …’ to revolutionise the English classroom.

Can you find Boomer’s famous phrase on the front of the card?

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**English through thick and thin…**
Howard, the necromancer of our national psyche, conjures our fears to frighten us, and then offers to banish them again to soothe us... In response, Australians withdrew into a kind of societal trance; they disengaged from the issues that had been preoccupying them; they shut down or, at least, went into retreat. They entered what now looks like the Dreamy Period, and stayed there for the best part of ten years (Mackay, *Advance Australia Where*, 2007, p. 241).

The crisis in education is not literacy. The crisis in education is not postmodern teachers. The crisis in education is not ESL-obsessed students. These are cunning rightwing stunts designed to generate public anxiety. The crisis in education is, in fact, the Federal Government—John Howard and the band of neo-liberal rightwing dreamers (including shock-jocks and shock-columnists). The crisis in education is when the profit motive and ideological crusades are more important than the well-being of students and teachers. The crisis in education is when we give up our human face—our commitment to social justice, inclusivity, accessibility, equality, and multiple and critical literacies—for political self-interest and the cold, hard, monetary fact. This is the crisis.

The ATEE and ALEA National Conference: Critical Capital. Teaching and Learning was in fact a ‘Defence of teaching’ and a ‘Defence of teachers’. Scholastic, it seems, are once again at the forefront of a larger ideological battle. The culture wars over ‘common sense’ and dominant discourse (a war, incidentally, that John Howard claimed victory for not so long ago). Were Garth Boomer alive today he would no doubt have us reading this war against the grain and striking back. It is fitting, then, that ‘The Garth Boomer Address’ was staged (or warped) in ‘The Great Hall of Parliament House (did they know?), thus symbolising the infestation of ‘leftwing lunatics’ into the hallowed chambers on Bowen—where terms like literacy, schooling, student, and teacher are commodified and ‘refurbished’ to suit neo-liberal agendas (perhaps we could call it neo-speak). Ironically, though Michael Apple, we heard some ‘plain-speak’ outlining the regressive ambitions of the neo-liberal campaign to deregulate national teaching, down-size students, and re-segregate a socio-logical world-view worldwide that disempowers rather empowers know-it-people to help—and we heard this in the very halls dominated by neo-liberal rhetoric. Go the lunatics! As a beginning teacher entering an age-old battle, I was inspired by this (fairly) counter-hegemonic platform. Rather than trade in any idealism for an AWR, I was (re)assured that this war was far from over and that there is cause for hope in a powerful leftwing backlash. And here...
Factory Schooling: "Life as the learning of rules and the doing of homework; the world as a school. As Michel Foucault has shown, however, only by its named function, and not by its organization, structure and assumed values, did the school (in its modern form) differ from the factory, jail, military barracks, post office, reform school, workhouse or hospital. All these modern inventions, regardless of their named functions, were also (and perhaps above all) factories of order; industrial plants producing situations in which the rule replaces accident and the norm takes place of spontaneity..." (Bauman, Postmodernity and Its Discontents, 1997, p. 129).

"...it is up to us, then, to show students how dominant groups rally power and privilege through discourse and practice. Otherwise, as Garth Boomer wrote in Metaphor and Allusions in 1991, students will remain 'morecrofted than crofted.'"

In "Teaching and Learning for the 21st Century: Developing Powerful Teaching in Schools Organised for Success," Linda Darling-Hammond reminds us that the "factory model" of education alienates many students by relying on impartorial and divisional methods of transmission teaching. Powerful teaching, conversely, promotes active learning through multiple strategies. It uses continuous assessment, ambivalent marks, task clarification, feedback, expository teachers and students to establish well-functioning learning spaces. Formative assessment is pivotal here. Through ongoing feedback and reflection, students become successful learners with positive academic self-concept. No student fails; some don't complete, but no one fails. Powerful teaching generates authentic learning by engaging a two-way pedagogy where learning is taking and teaching is learning. Assessment drives learning and instruction is never used to discipline, control, or hurt students. Such a classroom is a simultaneously learner-centered, knowledge-centered, and assessment-centered. What's more, it works. Darling-Hammond's success in the U.S. speaks for itself (see: www.school-redesign.net).

In "A Conversation with Linda Darling-Hammond," Linda Darling-Hammond opposes the idea of students competing for marks since it suggests, by implication, that teaching doesn't matter. The bell curve in assessment is nothing more than a hegemonic guaranteeing failure for some and the impossibility of whole-class success for teachers. And success, ultimately, is what teaching is all about. Darling-Hammond also argues that merit- and performance-oriented undermines cooperation and collaboration by pitting teachers against one another. History, she suggests, shows that such initiatives don't work because they demotivate teachers and mislead their jobs unsustainable. She also suggests that having teacher pay on student scores is okay since it ignores the fact that student populations and student backgrounds differ. Such a system is not only unfair but also counterproductive: it penalizes teachers and students at disadvantaged schools. In sum, merit pay may have the opposite effect on outcomes, efficiency, and morale than corporate think tanks care to imagine.

In "The Value of Literature and Language in Contemporary Education: Critical Capital, or Superseded Currency?" Paul Broek argues that most of the educational goals of the 1950s, 70s, and 80s have now vanished. The neo-liberals have transferred teaching and turned English teaching into "teaching literacy." Politicize, he suggests, have failed to learn from literary researchers of the past, something he believes to corporate amnesia. The obsession with phonics characterizes this memory-lapse. English, he suggests, is more than literacy and more than phonics. It involves language, texts, media, literature, reading, decoding, writing, decoding, writing, knowing, and having fun (among other things). Far from being literacy, however, the generation of students actually writes more than any other generation through emails, blogging, YouTube, MySpace, Wikipedia, and so on (literacies that John Howard wouldn't know the first thing about). Consequently, the mainstream media have deliberately misrepresent critical literacy for misused making purposes. Broek reminds us that critical literacy is not how it has been around for centuries. In contrast, too, is the notion of non-practical subjects, reducing a rush of skills based subjects and the demise of critical epistemologies (what the right wing wants). In turn, "high-stakes testing" is generating "collateral damage" while modernist approaches to literature are killing books. Broek suggests that we need less of the abstracts, texts, novels, poetry, and author-centered textual analysis to teach English. We need holistic, systemic, and postmodern approaches to literacy and English that draw upon linguistics, functional language, reader-response, form and function, and whole language approaches simultaneously. We need to mix it up, be inventive, and do more than appeal to plot, theme, character, metaphor, and phrasing to teach effectively. And they call us literary..."
and legitimise his own ideological values. If people say you’re wrong: change the word wrong. It’s a crusade of ego and nostalgia as much as anything.

Mike Gaffney notes that The Australian has wholeheartedly embraced John Howard’s crusade. It systematically (and some might say obsessively) bashes teachers who represent students as human capital and economic tools. According to Mark Hawke, The Australian has a ‘rifle effect’ on other papers: it sets the debate agenda which moves outward to TV, radio, and other media. In this sense, The Australian is a veracious collector of debate (a tool) and a voracious generator of spin (as a propaganda press). It is both an instrument of the government and the right more generally. Warren suggests we turn these attacks back on themselves and use the media to do it. If the government tells us we are failing in literacy, we need to ask them for the resources to improve it. Further, we need to recruit parents and teachers into the fight. After all, as Venter points out, the winner for The Australian believes they are the ones under attack by offering teachers—rather than the other way around. They see themselves as the brave crusaders. Gaffney suggests we use our own professional associations and the voice of parents and caregivers (a powerful lobby group) to meet the focus back. We need aggressive public relations and aggressive engagement with government ministers and policies. Mem Fox made it abundantly clear in her welcoming speech that teachers need to write letters to ministers to get their views heard. It’s no use lamenting the situation in silence. We need to get active. If they want teachers, let’s give them teachers. Let’s give them teachers and parents who are absolutely mad about social justice in schooling, and active and mad angry.

The reality is that centralised managed curricula and political agendas will not supplant the expertise and know-how of those at the chalk-face. As Garth Bloomer suggests:

In order to break these various complacencies of test and median in order to liberate teachers from the tyranny of a dominant discourse, I advocate a syndicate in Englishness, and honestly which will require initial, concerted scrutiny and courage. We need to call education at all levels as it is. We need to make ourselves aware of the presently transparent fakery and abstractions that flow through our system. And perhaps the best technique for doing this is to begin swimming against the flow.

(McIntyre and McIntyre, 1988, pp. 105-109)

I would sincerely like to thank SAETA for paying for me to attend what I consider an eye-opening and hard-hitting National Conference. And to those who think I may now be unemployable in certain sectors, you might be right.