Directions in Education

Mandatory ICT Skills Testing

AS part of a program to improve national IT skills, a mandatory computer literacy testing program for Year 6 and Year 10 students in Australian schools is due to begin in the 2005 school year (Aust., 27/7/04: 30). This program underlines the growing importance of children developing appropriate ICT skills and knowledge. However, understandings are needed of what is considered worth testing and the limitations of the information gathered. So what does computer literacy mean?

According to Australian Computer Society president, Edward Mandla, *'Any child leaving school by 2010 who does not have adequate computer skills is setting themselves up for a life of poverty'* (Aust., 27/7/04). The inference here is that literacy and numeracy alone is no longer sufficient for the 21st Century, but that computer literacy will keep children safe from a future of living in poverty. Mandla believes that an effectively designed testing program requires the identification of the *'right benchmarks so we understand what the current literacy levels are and what the problems might be'* (Aust., 27/7/04:30). The Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA) Performance Measurement and Reporting Taskforce's *A Measurement Framework for National Key Performance Measures* (available at: **http://www.mceetya.edu.au/pdf/ measurement_framework.pdf**) provides an overview of key performance measures and the agreed data collection cycles. ICT now has a place in that overview, with testing to occur in 2005 and 2008. National targets are defined as *'a measurable level of performance expected to be attained within a specified time'*. MCEETYA *'endorses target setting as a means of expressing aspirations and providing motivation for continuous school and system improvement, and an additional way of guiding, supporting and monitoring school and system improvement'*. MCEETYA recognises the importance of defining useful and meaningful performance measures. While Mandla correctly asserts the need for identifying the *'right benchmarks'*, this should reflect more than computer skills tested within a traditional testing regime. It's naïve to suggest that students demonstrating competency in a set of computer skills, possibly in a predominantly pencil and paper testing environment, will ensure that they aren't destined to live in poverty.

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