

OneSchool Criticisms Miss the Point

Education Queensland's OneSchool initiative has received critical coverage in the media. The OneSchool program aims to capitalise on the affordances of new technologies to provide a comprehensive, flexible and sustainable information management system that supports learning, teaching and the curriculum by providing functionality for student management, curriculum and learning management, school resource management, financial and asset management, performance, reporting and analysis. When compared with the effective and efficient systems employed throughout business and industry, one might expect the criticism to be related to why this has taken education so long to develop?

However, the criticisms have focused on issues which invoke fear of misuse and abuse of the information. For example, Frances Whiting, after questioning why children's photos are necessary, asks, "Why does any of this information have to be available online at all?" (*The Sunday Mail*, 22/6/2008: 19) and concludes that, "It seems like a costly, ludicrous and largely pointless exercise that should be scrapped" (*The Sunday Mail*, 22/6/2008: 19). Her criticisms echoed those of the Queensland Council for Civil Liberties Vice-President, Terry O'Gorman, who said that parents, "should be concerned, because the OneSchool system could put students' privacy at risk" (*Geelong Advertiser*, 17/6/2008: 16). In addition to privacy issues, the Queensland Opposition and civil libertarians were reported as saying that the OneSchool system "runs the risk of pedaphiles hacking into the information" (*The Border Mail*, 17/6/2008: 1; *The Ballarat Courier*, 17/6/2008: 12). The cost, reported to be approximately \$31 million also came in for criticism, with various letters indicating that the money would have been better spent on other much needed resources in schools, such as - "My daughter is a teacher. Her class of 28 students has only one ceiling fan. Some of the chairs and desks the children use are more than 20 years old and carpets are threadbare. The Government should look after students' needs, not waste money on something as ridiculous as OneSchool" (*The Courier Mail*, 21/6/2008: 76)

With any database, serious questions always need to be asked about security, access, and privacy. Appropriate decisions and controls are needed to protect the interests of students, their parents/caregivers, schools, and teachers. However, the space given to the criticisms has not been balanced by sufficient space being given to the intention, benefits, and implementation of OneSchool as an intranet. As OneSchool progresses through a carefully staged set of releases and provides increased functionality, students will be able to view information about their learning, and parents/caregivers, and teachers will be provided with access to improved data and information to inform their decision making. OneSchool reduces repetitive data entry, and provides an integrated system for enabling tracking of students and their learning over time and as they transfer across schools, districts and regions in Queensland.

The criticisms miss the point. Initiatives such as OneSchool are needed to provide a long overdue use of new technologies to transform information systems from current ad hoc, fragmented, disjointed, largely paper-based systems, to benefit students. With moves towards a national curriculum, much needed levels of collaboration between the States and Territories, and between various Government departments and community organisations, key questions include – does OneSchool enable the information system to operate beyond the confines of State boundaries and beyond the confines of Education Queensland?

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