



## “Where are the zealots?”

(With apologies to the many and various – those whose overheard snippets of conversation and direct statements I have used and modified extensively)

Rattling in (at average age 48 plus), grumbling over who pinched their coffee cup (one of the few dependables in a hostile world), lurching towards the ‘best spots’ at the back of the staff room (where they can ‘hide’) – just who, and how many, can be convinced to invest in change? And which of them (worn down by behaviour management plans that never quite seem to support them enough), having survived and outlasted all pressures to retire them in favour of contracts, or to remove them to the shadowy world of Work Cover claims, dares raise their head to say, “I know something about teaching.”? But all around, in the day to day, making the ends fit the means, or the means fit the ends (“We don’t quite know any more. There is very little to care about in all this – we’ve seen it before and, in any case, we’ll be told something new next year...”), they make the motions of commitment and try to be positive about teaching and learning. (“I think it must only be a few more years to retirement – I’m not quite sure how long I’ll go, but I must be able to hang in there for a few more years”.)

**The hard sell:** An interesting variety of burger with extra cheese and another slice of lettuce – an address by the Principal, convinced of the need for change, and involved in *Learning to Learn*.

“This sounds like a panacea too good to be true – and it probably is!”

“I’ll listen, but it had better be good and – hey – if it don’t fly, don’t waste our time!”

“We should examine the *learning theory* behind all this.”

“Well, I don’t really want to know – just give us the goods!”

“But there aren’t any – we have an opportunity to develop goods along the way.”

“Come back when the market stall is ready! I’ll pick and choose *then*.”

“Are you going to any of the *Learning to Learn* conferences, Roger?”

“Look, it’s interesting, and I suppose I should get into it a bit more. But then I wonder – well, I know that I am a good teacher, I have a methodology that works with most kids, and a lot of parents have told me they are pleased with how I teach their kids. So, why change now? I’ll just go on doing what I’ve been doing. Besides, who has the *time*? I’m teaching six lines!”

“Isn’t it just a matter of calling things by different names? I’ve been around a lot of this stuff on and off for years.”

She’s an engaging speaker, I suppose. I found her stories interesting. But I’d heard all I wanted to hear in the first two hours. And sitting all day long is just not a good way of doing things.”

**Personal space:** The *Learning to Learn* project picks up where the Department seemed to opt out over twenty years ago. It was an era when the economics of building and financing schools gave way to pull-down schools, massive property sell-offs, and a commitment to middle schooling – on the surface of it, for the wrong reasons. *Economic rationalism* and *accountability* – other notions of the time – do not guarantee that teaching and learning will change in any way, other than to make teachers busier, more disgruntled and more suspicious. There is not much doubt, among practitioners, at least, that the lead which South Australian education once seemed to enjoy, was scoured away over the eighties. I don’t feel that there was much to get excited about over that period.

When systems realise that learners are opting out (reduced retention rates, removal to private schooling and, recently, a rapid increase in home schooling), they must face the issues, including harassment and violence. At our school, we had watched these same trends. One factor that emerged particularly was a measurable decline in the academic achievement of boys, on all levels. How could we intervene?