A SUMMARY OF THE INITIATIVE’S RESPONSE

Professor Hyland’s critique is not easy to comment upon. About a third of it seems to be either agreeing (if somewhat grudgingly) with what was said in the Policy Paper, or it is additional material which is of personal interest to Professor Hyland but was not originally seen as the concern of the Policy Paper (the extended discussion on the classical origins of education; the discussion on multiple intelligences, or the lengthy explanation of change processes, all of which are worthy in themselves but not seen, by the authors of the Policy Paper, as necessary for this level of explanation.)

From Professor Hyland’s style it is not always easy to understand if her extended explanations are intended to confirm what the Policy Paper says, or to demonstrate her own additional understanding of what has already been written.

Our difficulty in commenting is compounded by the fact that she was apparently working from a draft version of the Paper, which was likely not to have had the five graphs, the endnotes, nor did she have the bibliography – or at least she made no comment that acknowledged these. The Initiative is also – it must be noted – extremely sensitive to the fact that it appears as if Aine Hyland was provided with no other information about our work, or the context in which the Policy Paper and other documents was written. Yet her style of writing could all too easily be taken by some as a critique of the Initiative’s whole program (particularly her dismissive comments in her last paragraphs). If any reader should do this that would be terribly wrong, and a travesty of many years work by literally hundreds of people.

There is a second, underlying, problem which is not of her making. She writes specifically as a professor of education and as such she is obviously well qualified to make detailed observations and judgements about education practice and theory in general and about Irish education in particular. The Policy Paper is, however, about much more than this – it was especially written to take the emerging understandings about human learning beyond the current confines of “learning as a school based activity” to seeing its new and extended application across all aspects of human activity and age groups. It is about far more than the usual interests of departments of education, and the conventional school reform movements.

The problem emerges sharply in two places. It is at its sharpest when Aine Hyland frequently criticizes the Policy Paper’s proposal for advocating change without at the same time arguing for more money. This is a well rehearsed academic argument, but frankly it no longer gets us anywhere. The world has changed. Preparing young people to live with change also means preparing academics to practice change, and accept its implications for both gains and losses. If there are new and more effective ways of doing things then surely it is appropriate to discontinue doing older things which have now been replaced by newer methods and opportunities.

Aine Hyland also writes, as she admits, with a conviction that there is a “hard line” between the world of school, and the parents and the community. It sounds like “so far and no further.” The Initiative most certainly does not accept this and believes that it is in the perpetuation of such thinking that the origins of so many of our problems lie (note the ubiquitous use of the Internet across and between home and school).
With these general points having been made some 14 issues have been extracted from our full response to Aine Hyland’s critique. They are:

1) **New Knowledge.** The findings outlined in the Policy Paper were largely unavailable ten years ago; much of the research has been published since the mid-1990s.

2) **The Need for Synthesis.** Policy makers are aware of much of this research, but do not have a model around which to bring it all together.

3) **The Purpose of the Policy Paper** was not to deal with the issue of process, but to provide a framework within which countries and communities would develop their own strategies for change.

4) **The Economic Realities** facing the countries within the OECD, and by implication others.

5) **Voices Calling for Change** in the structure of schooling come from a wide variety of experiences and countries.

6) Education can not be seen in isolation and despite “its complex and expensive infrastructure” is part of the fundamental shifts within society. The choice is; will we lead or resist?

7) This is not about “views” of education, as Professor Hyland argues, but is about “Change in Systems of Education.”

8) **Predispositions and an Evolutionary Framework.** If the proper learning environments are not set-up in the first few years of life critical periods of opportunity for “learning with the grain of the brain” are missed.

9) An education system based on the **Weaning** of young people from dependence on formal instruction and school based learning, progressively to self-directed study.

10) **Learning How to Learn** (metacognition). Children who understand how they learn need less formal instruction in adolescence and have the key to successful life-long learning.

11) **The Clash in the Classroom** between the demands of the system and the way children learn how to become life-long learners.

12) **Teachers and Teacher Unions** have responded with warmth to “Upside Down and Inside Out ” argument.

13) The evolutionary roots of **Community Involvement** break down the sharp boundaries between education and the community.

14) **The Strategic Advantages of the Initiative.** Because of its extensive network and freedom from institutional control the Initiative is able to exploit a niche in the world of educational transformation which is making the Initiative sought as an ideal partner for many national and international organizations.
Sometimes these points come up several times, and sometimes several of them are combined.

1) NEW KNOWLEDGE

Unfortunately for those people who have been involved for most of their careers in educational reform the findings outlined in the Policy Paper weren’t available ten years ago. However, much recent research confirms what many good teachers and thoughtful parents have intuitively understood about children and their learning. But, with that said, the technologies of brain science are very new and have given researchers unprecedented access to understandings about how the brain functions and learns. These new findings are different to intuitive understandings in that they are “hard scientific facts.” (Interpreting what such facts mean for education is still contentious, and this is why the authors of the Policy Paper talk about the “circumstantial evidence in toto.”) In many instances this new research confirms many long-held intuitive understandings, and in other instances they show that many “bits of folk wisdom” were wrong or partially wrong.

Professor of Education Robert Sylwester of the University of Oregon observed at an Initiative Conference in late 1995 “In terms of the speed at which our knowledge is emerging, it is simply phenomenal. A colleague of mine said that the conventional wisdom used to have it that 90 percent of what we knew about the brain was learned in the last 10 years. Because of the development of fMRI two years ago, he says 90 percent of what we will know about the brain in three years will have been learned in the last three years. What is happening is simply a phenomenal influx of new information. It is happening on our watch. We don’t have to apologize for the last 50 years, but we are sure as hell are going to have to apologize to our grandchildren if we drop the ball at this point.”

2) THE NEED FOR SYNTHESIS

The Initiative’s experience, and the observations of those who helped construct the Policy Paper, is that to a varying extent policy makers are aware of some of this research, but that the pressures they live under makes it virtually impossible for them to relate the different issues to each other. The Initiative blames no one for this, but accepts this as an unpleasant reality. The Policy Paper argues that the sum of all this research requires a different delivery system – it requires reversing what now looks to be an upside down and inside out use of resources.

Whilst the Initiative sees in this great opportunities it is the first to recognize that such a constellation of change is intimidating and destabilizing. However at the simplest level the point must be made that this research points evermore compellingly to the need to develop early years learning in ways which would empower young people to rise to the challenges incorporated in the cognitive apprenticeship model of learning by taking ever greater responsibility for their own learning strategies as they get older. In this statement a neuro-biological understanding of the brain links with an ever growing appreciation from evolutionary studies of why it is that cognitive science suggests that the most effective learning is a collaborative, problem-solving activity, often characterized as constructivism. The challenge posed by the wide-spread use of information and communication technologies is that they create chances to expand learning opportunities whilst also showing the critical importance of opening up the larger community as a resource for learning (e.g. the linking of the five issues namely neuro-biology, the science of
learning, epistemology, the technologies of learning, and home and community. This is the essential essence of what shapes a new model of learning.)

The Policy Paper was specifically written to provide an explanation as to why now is the time to start addressing systemic issues, and so release the creative energy contained within this research. The Policy Paper was specifically written to be “good enough” for Ministers of Education to take these issues to a higher level – namely their cabinet colleagues – rather than keep it just within education. The authors of the Policy Paper have known from the very start that these issues will remain non-starters if they are only handled by education and by inference if the ultimate commentary on them is seen to be by educationalists. (Just as changes spawned by new understandings about genetics involve more than simply the medical community – ethicists, legal scholars and politicians – the knowledge emerging about the brain and learning involves more than simply educators). These matters concern the whole of national policy because they are about the kind of society that a nation, after due consideration and debate, wishes to become.

In a real sense the Policy Paper was written as a plea by educationalists to recruit the dynamic support of society at large.

The Policy Paper is exciting people in many lands and getting them to start questioning seriously the way they currently provide learning opportunities for all their young people.

3) THE PURPOSE OF THE POLICY PAPER

The Initiative agrees whole-heartedly with the Canadian educationalist Michael Fullan when he recently noted, “The main question about state policy for reform is essentially: do relevant, inspiring, clear policy frameworks exist in the main domains essential for serious reform of the education system?”1 It is in direct response to this question, raised in different languages by policy makers in many lands, that the Initiative used its unique transnational network of research and experiences to produce the Policy Paper (it excites and upsets both the political Right and the Left). The authors of the Policy Paper fully accept the model of change developed by Fullan himself – “The Top-Half: Policy Frameworks and the Bottom-Half: Local Life.” The Policy Paper was written to help inform and clarify the Policy Framework.

4) THE ECONOMIC REALITIES

In terms of economic realities, it seems clear that in most OECD countries there are real economic pressures to curtail the growth of their education systems. The OECD wrote in 1998 “in almost all countries expenditure on education increased faster than national wealth.”2 This is certainly in opposition to much of the political rhetoric in many countries which says “we need to expand the system downwards, to early ages; upwards to older students; and in between to longer school days and school years.” Yet, as an issue of prudence, it must be noted that most OECD countries are very shortly going to face a crisis in discretionary spending because, in part,

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of the realities of an aging population. As a matter of government accounting, both children and retired people are largely seen as dependent on transfers from government agencies. As the OECD Education Policy Analysis 1998 noted in the first paragraph of its introduction, "education and training systems, institutions, schools and programs are being asked to respond to higher expectations, and they must do so under very tight budgetary conditions and keen competition for public and private resources." In almost every OECD country more will be expected of education with very little additional real spending.

It is because of such financial pressures that the Estonian Minister of Education told the president of the Initiative in 1998, "Everywhere I go people ask me for more money for university, for schools, for teacher training, for information communication technology; always they give me carefully worked out arguments which imply that I must find more money which I can't. Always they describe their needs in total isolation from anyone else - they are naïve. We simply have to find more effective ways of doing things. Your paper excited me. If I once start thinking in terms of 'upside down and inside out' I then have a framework into which I fit everything else.

5) VOICES CALLING FOR CHANGE

Peter Drucker, the business management expert, observed in 1993 that "So far no country has the education system which the Knowledge Society needs...learning will have to permeate the entire society, with (organizations of all kinds) becoming learning and teaching organizations...Schooling will no longer be what schools do. Increasingly it will be a joint venture in which there are partners, rather than monopolies...schools will be only one of the available teaching and learning institutions."4

Dr. Steven Quartz, a neurobiologist at the Salk Institute, took these ideas further when he wrote to John Abbott in 1998, "As an outsider to the debate, I often find myself perplexed at the terms of the debate, as though a system that we as children somehow survived thereby deserves to be flung on children today. It also strikes me that too many educators are too pessimistic about the prospect of real change (the 'it's too complex a system to move' argument) while not realizing the historical forces at work over the longer term."

Howard Gardner observed in the Unschooled Mind "we run the risk of investing incalculable resources in institutions that do not operate very well...We have not been cognizant of the ways in which basic inclinations of human learning turn out to be ill-matched to the agenda of the modern secular school."

During a visit to the Initiative's office as an Eisenhower fellow David Tik en Lim, a member of the Singapore Parliament and CEO of the Chamber of Trade, said in 1998 "I have been amazed and surprised by my visits to the UK and the US to study their educational systems. You in the US have the best educational research in the world, but your schools seem to be going

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backwards. Both countries appear to have a political crisis. As a business person I am constantly pushing in our Parliament for a 30 percent reduction in the curriculum to promote opportunities for the development of creativity. That is where the future lies. Why are your researchers largely ignored?"

6) THE COMPLEX AND EXPENSIVE EDUCATIONAL INFRASTRUCTURE

Education is not the only “complex” issue where new ideas are challenging the status quo and where vested interests are nervous. While it is reasonable to assume that countries can still further improve their productivity that does not mean necessarily that the public services can expect additional funding. An aging population will necessitate considerably enhanced health expenditure, while the vastly worrying under-capitalization of national pension schemes is likely to soak up between nine and 16 percent of GDP in advanced western countries.

We in the west, the Initiative argues, have a moral responsibility to develop alternative models of education that call on the very best research currently available to us, and match these to new institutional arrangements. Education has to be highly effective and available to everyone while giving excellent value for money. There is no room for waste. The option of change only when more money is available is not a choice most countries can sustain. In reality, the rate of return on increased educational expenditure on current systems is being questioned in very many different countries. We argue, that in the long-run while increased expenditure is needed for those below the age of nine or ten this should be balanced by reduced expenditure during secondary expenditure. However, that would be a non-starter unless key pedagogic changes parallel the smaller class sizes for the youngest children in ways which ultimately develop their capability to manage their own life-long learning, and that proper attention is given to the provision of information communication technologies and great care is expended on developing the community as a learning resource. It is only when all this is seen as a “package” that we can envisage an improved educational system, but within the present financial realities.

7) CHANGE IN “SYSTEMS” OF EDUCATION

Professor Hyland is mistaken when she said the Policy Paper argued that “western countries share the same approaches or views of education.” Had we made such an assertion it would have indeed been “overly simplistic,” but being a transnational initiative we fully appreciate the importance of culture on a country’s view of education. Additionally, in the case of the United States for example, there are numerous “views” on education within particular countries. However, the case the Initiative is making with regard to “upside down” is summed up in Graph 1: Current Relationship of Expenditure to Class Size which shows there is a common model of education within the west. This model across the OECD varies in exact detail, but as a rule, it fits a pattern of least expenditure per pupil in the earliest years of schooling and most expenditure per pupil at the tertiary level of schooling. The OECD’s Education at a Glance Indicators 1998 observes: “There is a common pattern: expenditure per student rises sharply with the level of education and is dominated by personnel cost.” (The Graphs in the Policy Paper reflect this reality). In no country, except Turkey, within the OECD is there more money spent on primary school students than secondary school students, and in no country (including Turkey) is there more expenditure per secondary school student than there is on tertiary level students. As
the OECD wrote “OECD countries as a whole invest 18 per cent of GDP per capita per primary student, 25 per secondary student and 49 per tertiary student.”

8) PREDISPOSITIONS AND AN EVOLUTIONARY FRAMEWORK

A key area of evidence emerging from the brain sciences, not dealt with in Professor Hyland’s critique, involves the concept of predispositions. These understandings have emerged in detail only as brain researchers have started to put the findings from fMRI and PET scans into an evolutionary framework. The Policy Paper quoted Michael Gazzaniga, one of America’s leading cognitive neuroscientists, who wrote in the mid-1990s that “if the evolutionary perspective is simply set aside, the data collected by psychologists and neuroscientists are likely to be grossly misinterpreted.” This insight was strengthened in the same book, The Cognitive Neurosciences, by the Canadian cognitive scientists John Tooby and Leda Cosmides who noted that “because human and nonhuman brains are evolved systems, they are organized according to an underlying evolutionary logic...A familiarity with the basics of modern evolutionary biology is, therefore, an important working tool for cognitive neuroscientists.”

This evolutionary framework is key to understanding why the Policy Paper calls for a model of learning based on the weaning principle.

Evolution, we now understand, has provided humans with a powerful toolkit of predispositions that go a long way in explaining our ability to learn language, cooperate successfully in groups, think across problems, plan for the future, and empathize with others. Predispositions provide individuals with a whole range of skills that enable them to relate flexibly to their environment. Yet, because for most of human history people tended to live in relatively small groups, these skills have to be developed collaboratively as very few people ever possess all these attributes. The speed at which our predispositions evolve seems to be incredibly slow, and it is thought there have been no major changes in the last 30,000 years.

It is critical to understand that childhood is a particularly crucial time for the brain because of the neural sculpting that goes on; for many of our abilities, tendencies, talents, and reaction, those that get ‘hardwired’ in childhood become the collective mental platform upon which we stand and grow for the rest of our lives. There are critical periods for acquiring language, for learning to play music, even for emotional maturity and socialization, for understanding numbers, and probably many others. The experience of our ancestors speaks to us through evolution in many different ways.

What this means for educators and policy makers is that they need to understand what learning can most easily take place during critical periods (and therefore should be supported), and that which is open to lifelong modification. The earliest years of learning are to a very real extent about nothing less than helping to hardwire children’s brains for successful life-long learning. That is why the Policy Paper makes the radical proposal of turning the system upside down, by providing maximum support in the earliest years and the smallest class sizes in the earliest years. This is a key point for anyone concerned about issues of equity in education.

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The 21st Century Learning Initiative
Equity is more about maximizing the mental capacities of all children, than it is about providing increased access to higher education.

9) WEANING

The Policy Paper’s proposal for intellectual weaning is at the very heart of the Initiative’s proposals, yet the arguments that lead to this are completely overlooked by Professor Hyland’s critique. To show the significance of intellectual weaning, the Policy Paper shared a study from 1998 by researchers at McLean Hospital in Massachusetts which used findings from fMRI of adolescent brains to show definitively “age-related physiological changes in the brains of adolescents which may help explain the emotionally turbulent teen-age years. (From this they concluded that) adolescents are more prone to react with ‘gut instinct’ when they process emotions, but as they mature into early adulthood, they are able to temper their ‘gut reaction’ responses with rational, reasoned reactions.” The Policy Paper went on to show that these findings are significant because it is the first hard biological evidence that the physiological changes within adolescence serve a very important purpose. Namely, the natural tendency of young people to break away from their dependence on adults as they move through puberty.

For those concerned with equal opportunity for all children this is a key point. The importance of getting the earliest years of learning right for all children is critical to what happens in adolescence. Everything that is now understood from research about intellectual development suggests that below the age of seven or eight, particularly below the age of three, we are heavily dependent on external encouragement and stimulation to develop the brain in ways which increase survival skills (the ability to collaborate, adapt rapidly and see across issues) develop. In late 20th century terms the functional skills of reading, writing and numeracy fit into the category of survival skills as well. If such skills are not developed at an early stage then learning them later on is simply far more difficult (and costly).

The Policy Paper observed that at an early stage of life every child needs to make great demands on adults if he or she is to master these basic survival skills. The evidence in the Policy Paper shows that it is natural for adolescents to want to be in control; not because they are bloody minded, but because all the hormonal changes going on within are pressing them to show that they can now use what they learnt earlier to be fully functional, independent people. If they are equipped with the right skills and attitudes (how to use their emotions to their advantage) then adolescents are quite capable of performing adult responsibilities. The flip side of this is if adolescents are not equipped with the basic survival skills they are desperately ill-prepared to deal with the physiological changes of adolescence and end up mentally, emotionally and socially adrift. Adolescence is hardly a problem if every child has had an appropriate experience of developing functional skills below the age of ten.

The Policy Paper went on to describe how organized learning, as opposed to formal schooling, has been going on through apprenticeship across cultures for thousands of years, and that this is a system of learning that goes ‘with the grain of the brain.’ As researchers from the Palo Alto Research Center for Xerox Corporation commented in 1991, “in ancient times, teaching and learning were accomplished through apprenticeship: we taught our children how to speak, grow
crops, craft cabinets, or tailor clothes by showing them how and by helping them do it. Apprenticeship was the vehicle for transmitting the knowledge required for expert practice in fields from painting and sculpting to medicine and law. It was the natural way to learn. In modern times, apprenticeship has largely been replaced by formal schooling..." Here the findings from cognitive science look set to join with those from neuro-biology and show that it is through such processes that neuro-networks are best built up.

10) LEARNING HOW TO LEARN

There are several key differences between life-long learning and what Professor Hyland coins “life-long education.” We now know that learning is a learnable skill that can be developed in all children (except those with severe mental disabilities). This is what Jerome Bruner and many other cognitive scientists mean when they talk about metacognition (learning how to learn). Professor Hyland was correct in quoting Bruner, but what we are saying is that if young people learn how to learn they will need, and in fact want, less formal instruction. They would utilize extensive, richer and more stimulating learning environments which are defined as including books, libraries, museums, information communication technologies, community mentors and significant real-time commitments to community-based projects outside the school.6

If we begin to appreciate the concept of learning how to learn in this way and make this the goal of primary and secondary education, and this is combined with the adolescent’s natural tendency to want to control their own learning then it is clear this has profound implications for Universities. If young people, by the time they complete secondary school, are truly “metacognitively aware” then they won’t need as much direct instruction in University. No country or company can afford to “teach” everything, on an ongoing basis, that employees need to learn to survive in a knowledge based economy.

11) THE CLASH IN THE CLASSROOM

As both Professor Hyland and the Policy Paper noted “higher order skills” must be developed in tandem with basic skills, but in many OECD countries the structure of assessment overvalues the basic skills at the expense of higher order skills. Why? Because it is easier for governments to measure content skills than it is to measure process skills. It is this stress between doing what they know they should do and what they can do that is driving so many good teachers out of teaching. As an English teacher noted in the Independent newspaper in February of 1999, “with the demands of the national curriculum and the forthcoming numeracy hour, something has to give if teachers are to remain sane.” And that “something” are the things (higher order skills) which can’t be assessed through content-based exams.7

Can teachers in such restrictive environments reflect the higher order skills recommended by both the Policy Paper and Professor Hyland? Our experience of talking with teachers around the world is that they cannot. To their frustration many teachers around the world have discovered that more accurate understandings about learning collide head-on with established interests. This is the point the Policy Paper is making, and it is with frustration that

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7 The Independent. “Once upon a time there was an ‘imagination hour.’” February 18, 1999.
we read Professor Hyland’s cynical acceptance of the status quo even though she agrees in principle with the Policy Paper. We are acutely aware of the difficulties of change, but we accept the argument of Dee Hock (the founder of VISA International) shared at one of our Wingspread Conferences that “given the right circumstances, from no more than dream, determination, and the liberty to try, quite ordinary people consistently do extraordinary things.”

12) TEACHERS AND TEACHER UNIONS

The Policy Paper does advocate redistributing teachers from the secondary sector to the primary sector because “resource distribution of this kind would provide all young people with such ample teacher support in their earliest years of schooling (classes of 10 to 12) that, as they grow older they would actually need less direct formal instruction...” The authors of the Policy Paper accept that this is a process that can only happen if teachers support it.

We differ with Professor Hyland in her bleak assessment of teachers and teachers unions towards change. We base our more optimistic view on several factors. First, experience in speaking with teachers and their unions in Canada, England and the United States has shown us that they generally support the changes outlined in the Policy Paper, if they are conducted in partnership with teachers and done over an appropriate period of time.

Teachers, and Teacher Unions, are some of the biggest advocates of smaller class sizes because “the impact of class size is felt most strongly in three areas: teacher morale, motivation and self-esteem; teaching styles; and classroom management.” Historically secondary school teachers have been seen as needing higher qualifications than those in Primary School. When the assumptions about learning were those of an earlier age this was seen as appropriate. Whilst pupils already see primary and secondary School as part of a continuum it is now essential that teachers see themselves as an integral part of that continuum. This will require the development of considerable professional skills as the role of all teachers will change and develop. In the short-term, arrangements must be made for all teachers to have continuous ongoing professional development. However, much of what passes for professional development is fragmented and fleeting. All too often it is not focused sufficiently and is too top-down to give teachers and real sense of ownership.

Additionally, as it is likely that large numbers of teachers will have to be trained in the next ten years to cover an above average retirement of older teachers (in OECD countries on average 30 percent of teachers are over 50 years of age) this opportunity should be seized to train teachers in the necessary new pedagogy, and in the use of the information technologies. This adjustment in hiring would take place over a period of at least ten years and it is highly unlikely that it would lead to any form of compulsory redundancy.

13) COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

The Policy Paper rests its case not simply on “feel-good sentiments” about community and family but in the neurological sciences, cognitive sciences and the evolutionary sciences, appreciation of the principles involved in cognitive apprenticeship, intrinsic motivation and the

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significance of emotion in driving learning. We are surprised that Professor Hyland did not draw upon the statement made by David Perkins that “hardly anything in the conventional education practice promotes, in a direct and straightforward way, thoughtfulness and the use of strategies to guide thinking.” Perkins continues by saying “those students who acquire reflective intelligence build it on their own, by working at personal repertoires of strategies; or they pick it up in the home environment where some parents more than others model good reasoning in dinner table conversations, press their children to think out decisions, emphasize the importance of school work, and so on.”

Not surprisingly a study three years ago from California listed the most significant predictors of success at first degree level as being 1) the quantity and quality of the discussion in the child’s home before entering school; 2) the amount of independent reading regardless of subject matter; 3) the clarity of value systems as understood and practiced in the home; 4) strong peer-group support; 5) the primary school. Regardless of parental choice of lifestyle good parenting is utterly essential for the effective development of young people.

The allocation of 10 percent of funds to release the skills of the community was never intended as money to “pay” members of the community. It is entirely expected that such money would go towards mobilization, training, and occasionally as facilitative costs to cover transport and provide an appropriate data base. Such a 10 percent investment in the community is about revitalizing informal learning, and would, as Graph 5 on page 33 of the Policy Paper showed, result in a substantial return on the investment. This is not about the administrative and political changes that are at the heart of charter schools, nor is it about Local Management of Schools. It is about preparing the community to share more of the responsibilities of young people’s learning more broadly through the community.  

It should be noted, however, that the Initiative believes that the “sharp boundaries” that in earlier years separated the work of professional educators from members of the community are starting to break-down, and should break down further. Genuine partnership requires a far more complementary understanding of the different levels of support that young people need, and some would argue most strongly that it has been the attempt to overstate the professional skills of teachers that has led directly to the decline in family life, and the ambivalence of many members of the community towards the teaching profession.

14) THE STRATEGIC ADVANTAGES OF THE INITIATIVE

The case the Policy Paper makes is in one respect simple; the evidence now available to policy people, educators and the general public raises serious questions. If the goal of education is to develop a society of life-long learners, then the long-term validity of current models of education has to be reassessed. In particular their over-emphasis on the direct instruction of older students, and their under-emphasis on the support needed by the youngest children. We want these issues to be a matter for debate, and that is why we have constructed an alternative model of learning that, in Canada and elsewhere, is starting to move the debate in education well beyond the traditional battle lines of “back to basics” vs. “child-

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9 Refer to John Abbott’s article “Children need Communities; Communities need Children.” Educational Leadership (March 1995).
centered approaches.” The Policy Paper argues that because of the evidence now available it is time to look beyond different “approaches” and “views” of education to the actual discontinuity between the needs and interests of the system to the needs and interests of children’s learning. It is a profound shift in focus.

Many groups and individuals agree with the Initiative on this point. We are proud of our many relationships with colleagues in the International community who we work with; including UNESCO’s “Learning Without Frontiers,” and the International Working Group on Education’s “Learning for All: Policy Dialogue for Achieving Educational Quality.” We have also shared documents with OECD researchers. Individuals in these groups tell us that the work of the Initiative is important because we have a coherent and powerful story to tell and can say it more easily due to our independence from institutions and politics. Such people appreciate the access to politicians and policy makers that the Initiative has in several countries. They understand the Initiative has a strategic advantage in being small and non-bureaucratic because it can keep contacts personal. Additionally, the Initiative has freedom of action because it is not dependent on government agencies or universities for funding.

The Initiative is working to maximize its competitive advantage (synthesizing research and experience from around the world faster than any other organization) while working in partnership with other individuals and organizations to help break-down the inertia that surrounds education. This, because of the politics of education, must be a transnational effort.

The Policy Paper was specifically written to provide an explanation as to why now is the time to start addressing systemic issues, and so release the creative energy contained within this research. It was also intended to be “good enough” for Ministers of Education to take these issues to a higher level – namely their cabinet colleagues - than just education. The authors of the Policy Paper have known from the very start that these issues will remain non-starters if they are only handled by education and by inference if the ultimate commentator on them is seen to be educationalists. These matters concern the whole of national policy because they are about the kind of society that a nation, after due consideration and debate, wishes to become. In a real sense the Policy Paper was written as a plea by educationalists to recruit the dynamic support of society at large.

Contrary to Professor Hyland’s critique what we are seeing is that the Policy Paper excites, stimulates and encourages people in many lands and gets them to start questioning seriously the way they currently provide learning opportunities for all their young people.

Note: for a more detailed point by point response interested readers should see the fuller response to Professor Hyland’s critique dated 3/22/99.