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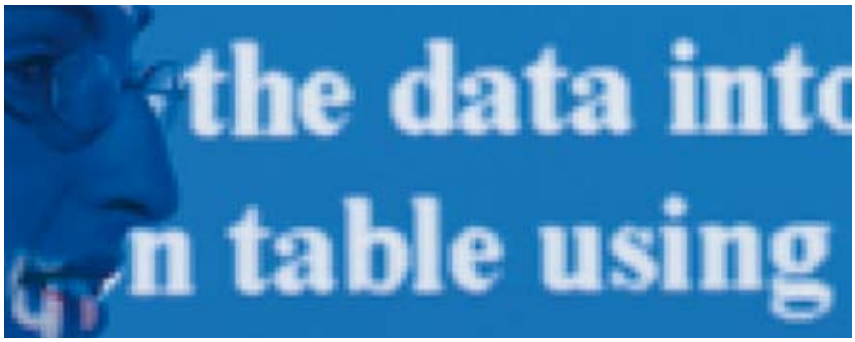

NEXT ISSUE

Look out for articles in the May issue of *Professional Educator* on 'How to love the hard-to-love child' by **Lyn Harrison**, 'A school-based approach to managing bullying with technology' by **Janet Stone**, and 'Learning about teaching and teaching about learning – using video data' by **Hilary Hollingsworth**.

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Cover photo courtesy of Eltham College, Melbourne. See story, page 14.

EDITORIAL

When the Prime Minister, John Howard, completed his Cabinet reshuffle in January, Dr Brendan Nelson went to the Defence portfolio, with Julie Bishop taking his place as the Minister for Education, Science and Training. Nelson's move from Education to Defence was described as a 'promotion' and universally accepted as such in media reporting. Accepting that the defence of the nation is certainly no small matter, it should still concern educators to discover that education appears to be secondary to it. Many readers will have heard the rhetoric that a skilled and knowledgeable population is our most valuable resource, and certainly worth defending, but surely that means education ought to be the primary portfolio and defence the secondary one. What Bishop does with Nelson's inquiries and sometimes inconsistent reforms relating to schools, vocational education and training, and higher education remains to be seen. 'I hope to continue some of the initiatives and policies he has put in place,' she told the Australian. 'A number of them do need bedding down and that will be a challenge.'

Letters to the Editor

HOW ARE YOUNG PEOPLE FARING?

Dr John Spierings, Researcher, Dusseldorp Skills Forum.

Look at the population as a whole and it's clear we're living in a buoyant economy, with strong jobs growth and unprecedented wealth connected to home ownership. So are Australians comfortable with their lot? Well, the evidence is mixed. Widespread optimism about economic prospects is generally tempered by anxiety about levels of household debt and concerns about terrorism. Rising levels of clinical depression, popular longing for a personal sea-change and a profound incidence of family breakdown also tend to counter-balance the sense of economic good times. What about young people?

According to 'How Young People are Faring 2005,' the seventh annual report from the Dusseldorp Skills Forum (DSF), young people share the national optimism, as you might expect. Recent longitudinal research shows that in general young people have high levels of life satisfaction consistent with previous generations of young Australians. But their satisfaction in life is intimately related to what they are doing as students or workers, to whether they have a full-time job or not, or a course or a career plan that provides direction. It's related, in other words, to whether they're members of Australia's economic 'insiders' or 'outsiders.' There are currently more than 560,000 young Australians not in full-time work or study, people who are predominantly on the outside of the Australian economic success story. About 330,000 are women. It's a curious thing that there has been such a passionate focus in recent times on boys participation in schooling – and rightly so – but relative indifference to the labour market opportunities for teenage girls and young adult women.

While full-time jobs for young men are gradually recovering and trade apprenticeships have grown, little attention has been focused on the predominance of casual, part-time and often low-skilled jobs for young women who have left education. It's true that young women have lower levels of absolute unemployment than young men and they participate in education more readily and for longer, but they are also considerably more prone to precarious employment and underemployment. Perhaps it's part of our social condition. The outward signs of distress at school – aggression, bullying, misbehaviour – attract parents, communities and policy-makers. Meanwhile, the piecemeal nature of serial part-time work tends to be endured as an individual experience, with stoicism rather than rebellion being a favoured means of coping.

It was into this pool of hormones, attitudes and structures that the Prime Minister stepped a year ago at the Coalition's election campaign launch in Brisbane when he set an unequivocal benchmark for his Commonwealth government's fourth term. 'We aim,' he said, 'at nothing less than assisting all young Australians from age thirteen to nineteen to make a successful transition from school to an enduring career.' In 2005, however, fifteen per cent of teenagers are either unemployed, working part-time or have withdrawn from the labour force. Thirty per cent of school leavers were in this situation six months after leaving school. When our strong economy is producing skills vacancies that should be filled by young people – and that's not the case right now – it's clear there is considerable work ahead if the PM's benchmark is to be achieved.

His frequent suggestion that students use Year Ten as a watershed point to decide about proceeding further with schooling is well-founded. The latest data shows that forty-five per cent of Year Ten leavers were either unemployed, working part-time but not in education or had withdrawn from the labour force six months after leaving school. It's simply not acceptable to encourage students to consider withdrawing from school without providing strong support and guidance, and decent alternative learning and work opportunities.

There's a growing sense that the nation could be dividing into the overworked and the underemployed, insiders and outsiders. Many in the middle class are aware of overwork and the pain it brings, even if it's often worn as a badge of honour in the tea room. Simultaneously, however, Australia has one of the highest rates of part-time employment for young people in the OECD, and the growth of part-time employment is outstripping full-time employment. More than half of Australia's young part-time workers, excluding full-time students, say they want to work more hours.

One of the high points of the last federal election was the animation that followed John Howard's commitment to improved transitions from school, the new technical colleges, and support for apprentices and apprenticeships. Similarly Labor's 'Learn or Earn' strategy attracted a lot of public comment. For the first time in memory young people and their fates were part of the national political discourse, yet much of that focus has since been lost in the maelstrom of headlines that concentrate on issues like terrorism and industrial relations.

Policies and programs that ensure young people leave school better prepared for life and for employment will have an economic benefit and contribute to sustaining even further our long economic boom. Beyond improving the employability of Australia's young economic outsiders – those growing up in stressed socio-economic circumstances, rural Australia, Indigenous communities and young women not in education – personal support and career guidance, robust learning choices, labour market programs and structural incentives are needed if the PM's pledge is to become a reality.

Numerous Commonwealth and state initiatives to improve participation in education and to provide better support for trade apprenticeships are to be applauded; however, it will take some time for their impact to be reflected in data on youth transitions. The challenge is to match the high expectations attached to these initiatives with adequate resources, pooled funding, coordination and planning, especially between our levels of government. One clear oversight in the array of post-compulsory education and training reforms is a focus on the labour market and the quality of employment that young people experience in the first twelve months after leaving school. It's in this phase that a gender gap is emerging. Along with other holes in youth labour and training markets, this is an area that must be addressed by government and employers.

The DSF report also provides a timely reminder that Australia cannot be complacent about its improving level of educational attainment. OECD rankings of estimated completion rates of upper secondary education show that Australia lies in the middle, significantly behind the Scandinavians, Korea and Japan. Our national long-term prosperity will derive more from the skills and capacity of our people rather than our talent to exploit our natural physical resources. Investing in education and skills, and redoubling our efforts to improve participation, achievement and completion rates is critical.

In the October issue, Ian Keese took Kevin Donnelly to task in a review of *Why Our Schools Are Failing*. **Kevin Donnelly** replies.

Crisis? What crisis? A reply

AS an author, it's always good to know that somebody has taken the time and effort to read what you have written. At the same time, it's important to set the record straight if your work is misrepresented. Ian Keese's review of my book, *Why Our Schools are Failing*, (*Professional Educator*, October 2005) contains a number of claims that need to be addressed.

Keese argues that in using the term 'crisis' I'm guilty of exaggerating the situation, and unfairly stigmatising schools and teachers. As to whether there is a crisis in our education system, consider the evidence – not my opinion – I quote on pages 7 to 13, including: the argument by the one-time head of the Curriculum Corporation, Bruce Wilson, that outcomes based education (OBE) represents an 'unsatisfactory political and intellectual exercise'; the NSW Vinson Report's reference to decreasing staff morale; the impact of political correctness on the curriculum; a related survey that concluded that sixty per cent of parents interviewed expressed 'concern that teachers are either not well-enough trained or professional enough to teach (civics) without bias'; and a 1996 literacy test that showed that twenty-seven per cent of Year Three students and three per cent of Year Five students were illiterate.

All states and territories have recently reviewed their implementation of OBE curriculum and all admit that there have been significant mistakes over the last ten or so years that have adversely affected teachers and schools. Teacher workload and stress have increased, especially at the primary level, as a result of having to implement, evaluate and report on hundreds of often vague and overly generalised outcome statements. As outlined in the Benchmarking Australian Primary School Curricula report funded by the Commonwealth Department of Education, Science and Training and released last year, there's also the problem that the Australian curriculum, in mathematics and English in particular, is not as academically sound and teacher friendly as some overseas examples.

A close reading of *Why Our Schools are Failing* will also show that there is very little, if any, criticism of teachers. After having taught for twelve years and experiencing first hand many of the education fads and bureaucratic grand plans dumped on teachers from on high, my battle is with those outside the classroom who, even with the best of intentions, often make teaching more onerous and frustrating than it needs to be. On page 2, I state: 'the concern is that schools and teachers are often undermined by unresponsive bureaucracies, left-wing education academics and teacher unions more concerned with ideology than supporting what happens in the classroom.'

As evidence that there is no crisis in relation to standards, Keese refers to the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) of the OECD. While it's true that Australian students performed quite well in the 2000 and 2003 tests, especially in literacy, the fact is that students were not corrected in the PISA tests for spelling, punctuation and grammatical mistakes, and as researchers from the Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER) pointed out, 'if they had been, probably all countries' achievement levels would have gone down, but there is no doubt that Australia's would have.' (Lokan, et al., 2001) Keese also ignores the fact that in the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS), Australian students are consistently outperformed by students in Singapore, South

Korea, Hong Kong, Japan, the Netherlands and Belgium. Such were Australia's results in the 2002/03 TIMSS test that ACER CEO, Geoff Masters, said that 'while Australian students acquitted themselves quite well overall, the relative lack of improvement in comparison to other countries was disappointing.' (ACER media release, 15 December 2004) A further concern is that a number of better performing countries, unlike Australia, achieve stronger results with a small gap between the best and worst performing students.

In relation to enrolments in government and non-government schools, Keese criticises my use of the word 'exodus,' quoting figures for 2000 and 2003 to suggest that 'drift' is a better description, ignoring the fact that the figures I refer to in the book note the change between 1980, when twenty-two per cent of students attended non-government schools, and 2002, when that had risen to thirty per cent. Given that the figure rises to forty per cent for Victorian students in Years Eleven and Twelve, one can only conclude that large numbers of parents are voting with their feet. Why? I don't suggest in the book that it's because non-government schools produce better outcomes. What I argue is that surveys of parents indicate that they believe such schools provide 'higher academic standards, a more disciplined learning environment and school values more in tune with those in the home.'

It's true that a substantial part of *Why Our Schools are Failing* addresses political correctness (PC) and I argue that much of Australia's intended curriculum – in syllabuses and course outlines – has a decidedly left-wing, new age focus. I also argue that groups like the Australian Education Union (AEU) and professional associations like the Australian Association for the Teachers of English (AATE), generally speaking, are left of centre in their views about Australian society and the role of education. The fact that Wayne Sawyer, in an editorial in the Spring 2004 issue of the AATE's *English in Australia* could bemoan the election of the Howard government and present it as evidence that teachers have failed to teach critical literacy is only one example mentioned in the book. When you read Bill Hannon, one of the leading educationalists responsible for the national statements and profiles, in 'Curriculum plans a joke: school reformer' in the Australian, July 25 1993, describing drafts of the Study of Society and Environment material as 'a subject for satire' and 'a case of political correctness gone wild' it's clear there's a bias. Anyone familiar with the policies of the AEU will be aware that it has consistently promoted a PC approach on issues ranging from examinations, assessment and curriculum to the role of education in society more generally.

Keese argues that low teacher morale is caused by the types of criticism found in the book and that all we need to improve the system is to ensure that all schools are funded equitably. On what basis the first claim is made I'm uncertain, but it's wrong to argue that funding is the key to ensuring a successful education system. Research related to the effective schools movement suggests that more significant than resources are factors such as: the culture of the school; having a clearly defined and teacher friendly curriculum; sound and supportive leadership; the commitment and professionalism of teachers, and the freedom to get on with the job.

The fact that Wayne Sawyer, in an editorial in the Spring 2004 issue of the AATE's English in Australia *could bemoan the election of the Howard government and present it as evidence that teachers have failed to teach critical literacy is only one example mentioned in the book.*

Dr Kevin Donnelly is Director of Education Strategies and author of Why Our Schools are Failing. *Download at http://www.mrcltd.org.au/content.cfm?PageID=PubsMonographs*

In Ian Keese's article, 'Crisis, what crisis?' in the October 2005 issue of Professional Educator, *the Independent Scholars Association website address was incorrectly given as www.independentschools.asn.au The website should be www.independentscholars.asn.au*

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Reporting to systems and schools

Schools and education systems collect good data, but reporting and using data could be better, especially for teachers and principals, says **Jocelyn Cook**.

WHEN you're explicit about learning goals and you measure your students' progress toward these same goals chances are you'll help to improve student learning. That's why assessment programs are developed that measure in terms of learning goals. Information from the programs then provides an indication of how students, schools and systems are travelling and how successful programs and initiatives have been and provide the information needed to shape programs at the macro level of public policy and the micro level of teaching programs within the classroom. Eva Baker and Robert Linn (2004) refer to this as a theory of action. Baker (2004) elsewhere describes the process in these simple terms: 'Figure out what should be taught, be prepared to teach it, help students learn it, measure their learning, and continue the cycle until desired improvement is met.' Think of it as a series of steps.

Step 1: What students should know and be able to do is agreed and explicated.

Step 2: The extent to which this is being achieved is measured.

Step 3: The broader educational enterprise that includes bureaucrats, administrators and teachers throw their efforts behind ensuring students reach those goals.

Back in 2002, Margaret Forster, in a presentation to the Seventh Roundtable on Assessment in Canberra, conceptualised a framework for judging the quality of system-wide monitoring programs. Forster, the Research Director of Assessment and Reporting at the Australian Council for Educational Research, began by providing a checklist for judging how system assessment programs measure up. These came under three headings:

- planning the program, which is about clarity of purpose, resourcing and sustainability
- collecting the data, which is about validity and reliability, and
- using the data, which includes informing policy and reform.

It's a useful checklist for interrogating the efficacy of testing programs, particularly the reporting processes.

PLANNING THE PROGRAM

Testing programs in which Australian states and territories participate measure up well in terms of their clarity of purpose and their alignment with the designated curriculum and reporting frameworks. All states and territories have been assessing and reporting system performance for at least a decade, and since the late 1970s in Tasmania and the late 1980s in New South Wales. All jurisdictions have in-house capabilities or units dedicated to overseeing work done by contractors on their behalf, and all have contributed resources to support both national and international assessment programs. Technical, logistic and financial resources are made available by all jurisdictions to ensure the sustained operation of international, national, and state and territory programs.

Websites of all testing programs in which Australian states and territories participate make it clear that there's a shared purpose, which is to lever change by informing action that improves student outcomes. For example, the purpose of the OECD's Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) study, according to the Australian report, is 'to help governments not only understand but also enhance the effectiveness of their educational systems.' The Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority's website describes the purpose of the AIM program as 'providing an indication of how well the literacy and numeracy skills of students are developing.... The results provide information used to plan new programs and a useful source of feedback and guidance to students, parents and teachers.' The aim of Tasmania's Assessment Monitoring and Reporting Policy is that 'student learning outcomes will be improved by assessment, monitoring and reporting practices that:

- are integrated into teaching and learning processes
- inform decision-making about teaching and learning
- provide useful and timely feedback to students, parents and teachers, and
- enable accountability requirements to be met at student, school, department and government levels.'

Clearly, the aim of testing programs in which Australian students participate is to stimulate appropriate educational reform by providing information and insight to stakeholders so that the required interventions can be made. Being clear about the purpose of assessment programs does not, however, in itself make them successful.

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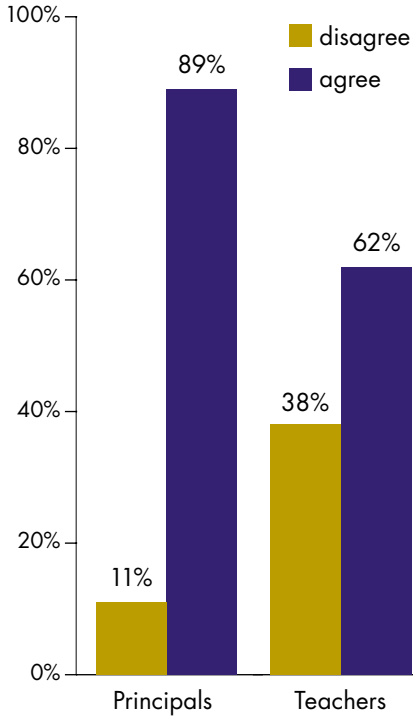
Using the data is the area of greatest weakness in all assessment programs undertaken by Australian students. The talent and creativity that is invested in the development of the assessment and the analyses is not matched when it comes to disseminating and using the information at the local level.

Figure 1: Diagnostic usefulness of Data club



Principals' and teachers' responses to the statement: 'Data club information is useful for diagnostic purposes.'

COLLECTING THE DATA

The testing programs in which Australian students participate measure-up well in terms of the quality of the data collected. Jurisdictions ensure that the processes of measuring performance are robust. International and national assessment programs have national committees that oversee and endorse processes and procedures. These committees require, and are given, significant information to assure them of technical and measurement veracity. Since 1998, when jurisdictions around Australia began to collaborate to ensure reporting of national comparable data, the psychometric and curriculum integrity of jurisdictions' own testing programs have been subject to close scrutiny, by each other and by the Commonwealth. While psychometric rigour is necessary for a successful system-level assessment program it is not in itself sufficient.

USING THE DATA

Using the data is the area of greatest weakness in all assessment programs undertaken by Australian students. The talent and creativity that is invested in the development of the assessment and the analyses is not matched when it comes to disseminating and using the information at the local level. The degree to which programs are integrated into the larger educational context has been relatively limited, as has the use of information to shape programs at the macro level of public policy and the micro level of classroom programs. This is a significant weakness because, if the accountability mechanisms do not positively affect the quality of public policy, school practice and classroom teaching, then the accountability mechanisms themselves are failing, regardless of their other strengths.

While there's a wealth of information from the various assessment programs, it often doesn't get communicated in a particularly timely or accessible way. While I'll draw on the Western Australian experience to illustrate this, discussions with colleagues from other jurisdictions suggest it holds true elsewhere.

Joan Herman (2005) refers to both the symbolic and technical functions of accountability systems. Sample testing programs like WA's Monitoring Standards in Education (MSE) program, the national Primary Science Assessment Program (PSAP) and international programs like PISA currently have negligible symbolic or technical functions at the classroom level because the reports, while comprehensive, don't 'speak' directly to classroom practitioners or even school leaders. Sample programs cannot provide valid individual student-level information and often can provide only limited school-level information. The complexity of the analyses and depth of the reporting result in quite a time lag between testing and reporting, so that the limited information that is given back to schools may refer to a cohort of students that has moved into a different phase of schooling. This in itself doesn't make the information irrelevant, but in the school environment where the operational challenges always have the face of a student, parent or teacher attached to them, it does have a level of abstraction about it that means it ends up in the 'Interesting – I'll attend to that later' pile. When you make time for teachers and school leaders to learn about, say, PISA and the implications of its findings, they are highly responsive to the information and make the connections of its relevance to their own context very quickly.

For example, the National Advisory Committee for PISA in early 2003 was advised of the importance of Australia meeting stringent sampling requirements, and it was reminded of the struggle it had been to get the sample 'over the line' in 2000. The demand on schools' time and resources was greater in

2003 and in WA we could see that for many schools it would be easy to decline a request to take part in a sample of a testing program many had never heard of. A plan to tap into the symbolic power of PISA as an accountability mechanism was developed. All schools selected in the sample were invited to send their principal and one other staff member to a half-day meeting about PISA for an overview of the results and implications of the 2000 study, with a plenary session to analyse the school-level impediments to successful participation in the sample. Key people in the sample schools went away knowing some essential things about PISA.

Recognising the importance of taking time to explicate aspects of the programs for key stakeholders grew out of our experience with the WA Literacy and Numeracy Assessment (WALNA) program, which had been introduced in 1998 under a storm of opposition and anger from educators. In early 1999 an evaluation was conducted to formally gauge parent and teacher reactions to the program. The results indicated relatively high levels of mistrust about and dissatisfaction with WALNA amongst teachers. Fairly incidental work done with schools in interpreting their data suggested that, even in schools where they were trying to use the data for school improvement purposes, the level of knowledge about the assessment was an impediment to efficient and effective use of the data. We also observed more than the occasional instance where teachers and their principals were over-interpreting the data and, as a result, over-preparing for the assessment at the cost of curriculum balance.

From 1999 to 2003 two significant programs were introduced to support better use of the data by key stakeholders of WALNA – principals and teachers. The first to be introduced was the Data Club, which supports school leaders in making performance judgements based on their school's WALNA data. The second, targeting teachers, began life as the Teachers' Data Club, but has since been rebadged as Assessment for Improvement. The aim of the Assessment for Improvement program is to increase teachers' confidence in judgements they make from a range of assessments. Teachers' analysis workshops have been specifically designed to build their ability to blend their classroom monitoring with WALNA results to judge student achievement and plan for future teaching and learning.

While both programs were about understanding data, they were built to meet the needs identified by principals and teachers. Beyond the initial data provided, the displays and graphs included in WALNA reporting are the ones requested by principals and teachers, rather than all the ones that powerful statistical software packages can generate. An evaluation was carried out at the end of 2002, asking a representative sample of teacher and parents their opinions about the key aspects of the WALNA. Ninety-two per cent of parents never doubted that external assessment would support schools to provide better literacy teachings, rising to ninety-five per cent over the next three years. In 1999, forty-two per cent of the teachers surveyed disagreed that system-level test information would assist schools in providing better literacy teaching. By 2002 that percentage had dropped to twenty-seven per cent. There was also a significant shift in how useful teachers perceived the WALNA results to be. In 1999, sixty-three per cent of teachers did not find the additional information provided by WALNA useful. By 2002, sixty-two per cent of teachers agreed that the information was useful – a significant shift on opinion.

Changes in the way principals and teacher regard the diagnostic usefulness of Data Club is suggested in Figure 1. Remember that Data Club began in earnest in 2000, so school principals had earlier access to professional development on sys-

ASK YOURSELF

- *Do you use student performance data for diagnostic purposes?*
- *Does analysis of student performance data affect your curriculum planning?*
- *Do you use data to track student performance, especially from year to year?*

tem-level data than teachers. In the 2002 evaluation, both principals and teachers were asked about the usefulness of the results for diagnostic purposes. Principals responded significantly more positively. Interestingly, principals who had not had access to the Data Club differed significantly in their responses to other principals. These principals were less likely to:

- provide the data to the current or next year's teachers
- think their staff were confident in using the data
- involve the school council in interpretation of the data or share the data with the P&C
- take it into account when reviewing curriculum plans
- find the data on individual students useful for diagnostic purposes or for determining rates of learning, or use it to track student performance.

Beyond that, they were more likely to disagree when asked whether the results confirmed strengths and weaknesses of the school curriculum or that the results gave a good overview of teaching in the WALNA years.

LESSONS ABOUT REPORTING SYSTEM-LEVEL ASSESSMENT TO SCHOOLS

The main lesson is that if you want to engage teachers in discussion about the meaning of system assessment, talk to them about the students that they teach and are crucially interested in helping. Use the data to help them articulate what their students can do and what they are struggling with. Let the data shape teachers' 'stories' about their students. Abstractions about strengths and weaknesses observed in the performance of subgroups and the whole population are less useful as a starting point. It follows, therefore, that it's easier to engage teachers with the meaning of test data when you're working with population testing data: you're talking to them about 'their kids' and their teaching program, and that's irresistible!

Sample programs have richer information, but you have to work harder – although not that much harder – for teachers to 'get it.' Teachers think a lot about how to engage students, how to counter a misconception, how to provide the step that overcomes a block to further development. They dwell on the effect of their teaching programs and think about why students respond the way they do. It's the staple of teaching.

The good news is that all jurisdictions are committed to deep reform that positively alters learning outcomes for students, and demonstrate this by their considerable investment in international, national and local testing programs.

The bad news is that the ease with which principals and teachers take a key step – actually using the data – has been underestimated. Accountability systems will fail if teachers, who have been trained for decades to mistrust test data, are expected to work it out all by themselves.

This is not about producing more complicated graphs. Reporting to schools can be exhaustive and I suspect often exhausting. From the perspective of the test analysts, it can be hard to accept that more is not necessarily better. Getting the amount and pitch of the information that goes out to schools right can be difficult, especially when the statisticians have amazing sets of graphs they could send, but it's really important to listen to school leaders and teachers when planning reporting packages. Once they've 'warmed up' to being 'assessment literate' they'll tell you what is useful, and what they most often tell you is that good reporting is about guiding teachers in the intelligent interpretation of data that is useful to their work – teaching students effectively.

Jocelyn Cook is the Manager of Educational Measurement at the WA Department of Education and Training.

This is a version of a paper presented at the Curriculum Corporation Conference, 'Curriculum and Assessment – closing the gap,' held in Brisbane in 2005. Published with the kind permission of Curriculum Corporation.

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LINKS: www.curriculum.edu.au

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- **Dr Susan Rodrigues**, *University of Dundee, Scotland*
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Australian Council *for* Educational Research

ACER

Improving learning

How turning data into information improves learning

Data, data everywhere, but not enough to think. Data can inform educators, and when it does it's called information. **David Axworthy** explains.

ALL educators want the best possible information so that they can improve learning for students. Easy? There's more to turning student performance data into information that will lead teachers to modify their teaching practices and improve the learning of their students than meets the eye, and many educators have spent quite some time, starting from different places and taking different paths towards that goal. Here, I'm going to show you some examples of the work we are undertaking in Western Australia, but my aim is not to imply that other similar and different work on using data is not going on elsewhere.

According to John Hattie, when you look at those variables over which an education system can have some control, it's the behaviour of teachers that has the greatest impact on student learning. (Hattie, 2003) If that's the case, we need to ensure that student performance data reaches teachers in a way that informs their approach to teaching practices.

Information, quite clearly, informs and, equally clearly, people without information cannot make good decisions (Blanchard et al., 1999), but we all know from experience that the mere presence of performance data doesn't necessarily lead people to make good decisions. Teachers are no exception to this. Despite the fact – or maybe because – they're surrounded by a sea of data on student behaviour and performance, there is no automatic and universal adjustment to their teaching practice in response. Why? Answering that has been at the heart of work we've been doing in WA. And to do that, we've extended the question a bit. More precisely, what needs to happen to performance data to turn it into the kind of information that will cause teachers to modify their teaching practice?

While the class teacher may be the critical target for this work, all teachers engage in their work in a socio-political context regulated by a number of systems, and there are a number of potential enablers and blockers in those system that need to be considered. For this reason, we've taken a systems approach, which has implications for teachers, principals, district directors and central executives of systems in terms of policy, resources, professional learning, capacity building and consultancy support.

To put legs on that, let me explain how we work with teachers, principals, district directors and central executives on performance data produced by the Western Australian Literacy and Numeracy Assessments (WALNA) in Years Three, Five and Seven and the Monitoring Standards in Education Year Nine (MSE Nine).

The WALNA is a curriculum-based assessment that tests students' knowledge and skills in numeracy, reading, spelling and writing. Annual testing commenced in 1998 with the assessment of Year Three students in reading, writing, and spelling. Over the next two years numeracy was added and the assessment extended to Years Five, and Seven. MSE Nine was used to assess Year Nine students in reading, viewing and

mathematics in 2004 and was extended to include writing and science in 2005. Both sets of tests are whole cohort tests for students in public schools in WA. They're also used by Catholic and independent schools in WA and some other states and territories.

In looking at the data and its use to support learning you need to look at the validity of the data; the way in which the data is presented; the knowledge and skills required by teachers to interpret the data; the way that data is managed at the school site and the support provided for teachers to work with the data; and teachers' capacity to transform data into information.

VALIDITY OF THE DATA

Fundamental to any discussion of the use of data is the quality of the data. To what extent does the test result tell us about the nature of learning that has actually occurred? The WALNA is developed in accordance with the standards of best psychometric practice (Wright and Stone 1979) in terms of item response and Rasch analysis. The internal reliability for every test instrument is greater than 0.8 and a rigorous regime of horizontal and vertical equating is used to ensure that tests can be placed against a common scale from year to year across each of the year groups for each of the areas assessed.

The psychometric properties of the test are of critical importance to those of us interested in measurement, but that cuts little ice with teachers. What is meaningful, however, is the involvement of classroom teachers in the panelling of items for consideration, the trialling of sample items and the direct linkage between each test item and a corresponding element of the curriculum. (Outcomes and Standards Framework) Thus we have not only a standardised test with a beautiful set of psychometric numbers, but a test that specifically measures important facets of the curriculum outcomes that teachers want their students to achieve.

PRESENTATION OF THE DATA

If you want data to be informative, you need to present it in different ways to different audiences – teachers, principals, district directors and central executives. The general principle that we've applied is that class teachers get the most specific and detailed information with the focus being to profile the learning of individuals or groups of students. The information for principals, bearing in mind that they also have access to classroom data, provides school-level data with comparisons over time and with other schools. Principals are also given the opportunity to look at cohort growth over time from Year Three to Year Five and Year Seven. The highest level of summarised data is provided on the WA Department of Education and Training intranet website, which provides:

- reports to parents
- reports to schools
- reports to media
- reports for the Annual National Report on Schooling in Australia
- development from paper to electronic to web enabled.

While the first four dot points are reasonably self-evident, the last needs some explanation. It's our contention that data is transformed into information when teachers interpret the performance data in the context of their students, at an individual and group level; teaching program; and other observations and assessments of student performance.

It's only when teachers are able to undertake this work that real changes occur in their teaching practice, which is the necessary precursor for changes in student learning.

ASK YOURSELF

- *Do you receive student performance data that you don't use or that you under-use?*
- *Do you use student performance data in your formative assessment program?*
- *Does your educational institution provide the kinds of professional development you need in order to make good use of student performance data?*

David Axworthy is the acting chief executive of the Curriculum Council, Western Australia. This is a version of his paper presented at the ACER Research Conference, 'Using data to support learning,' held in Melbourne in 2005.

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LINKS: www.acer.edu.au/workshops/conferences.html

Futures education in a rapidly changing world is critical if we are to empower young people to be proactive rather than reactive about the future, say **Debra Bateman**, **Jennifer Gidley** and **Caroline Smith**.

Futures in education

EDUCATION about the future? How can you be educated about something that hasn't happened yet? It sounds ridiculous, yet a relatively new educational field, futures education (FE), is about just that, and it's not crystal ball stuff. If education is to take account of rapidly changing social, economic and environmental world conditions and prepare young people for what will undoubtedly be a turbulent century, futures thinking is an imperative. But that's not the only reason for considering the future. Young people themselves are reacting to rapid change, but we tend to be unaware of their hopes and fears for the future.

Research into young people's images and ideas of the future lead to the disturbing conclusion that, for many, the future is a depressing and fearful place where they feel hopeless and disempowered. On the other hand, as Richard Slaughter (2004a) writes, 'young people are passionately interested in their own futures, and that of the society in which they live. They universally "jump at the chance" to study something with such intrinsic interest that also intersects with their own life interests in so many ways.' (Slaughter, 2004a: 1) FE explicitly attempts to build on this interest and counter these fears by offering a profound and empowering set of learning strategies and ideas that can help people think and act critically and creatively about the future, without necessarily trying to predict it.

Research into young people's images and ideas of the future lead to the disturbing conclusion that, for many, the future is a depressing and fearful place where they feel hopeless and disempowered.

YOUNG PEOPLE'S VISIONS OF THE FUTURE

As early as the 1970s researchers in the United States and Europe identified different ways young people thought about the future. Johan Galtung (1982) found three ways of approaching the future, which he called 'probable futures,' 'possible futures' and desirable or 'preferred' futures. Other research showed that people tend to make a distinction between relatively positive 'personal futures' and more negative general 'global futures.' (Tofler, 1974; Johnson, 1987; Hicks, 1994b) Negative ideas about the future are believed to be the result of the continual bombardment of young people's imaginations by the media (Slaughter, 2004b) with scenarios in which corporations and technology run wild or lead a techno-utopian consumer bliss. These scenarios, with their false despair or false promises respectively, tell us that power is outside us, and that we participate passively in the unfolding of time.

Australian research into views of the future in the 1980s and '90s echoes this earlier research, but also suggests there's a deepening negativity, lack of hope and a sense of powerlessness among many young people. Hutchinson (1994) found that young people fear a future world they believe will be violent, divided, mechanised, environmentally unsustainable, politically corrupt, deceitful and without compassion. He also found a gender divide: boys' images of their preferred futures tended

FE AT WOORANNA PARK PRIMARY SCHOOL

By Jennie Vine

Our futures projects were sparked by the current time machine located in the junior school and Debra Bateman's belief that this machine needed a purpose that directly related to the future. We were all excited about leaving documentation on the machine that reflected our ideas of what we thought the future may be like in the next fifty to 100 years.

After working with Debra, our Years Five and Six students launched their projects. We all knew that the future was going to happen, but were unsure how the future would be shaped by our decisions and contributions. Students constructed Y-diagrams to evaluate the past, present and future, and open up realms of thinking and exploration. Four distinct project areas emerged: 'Fantastic Futures,' examining positive possibilities for our future; 'Social Futures,' focusing on heroes and preferred behaviour; 'Techno Futures,' examining machinery and its impact on the world; and 'Globalisation,' examining equality, justice, law and the environment. A fifth project, 'Technologies in the Future,' explored alternative energy, pollution, global warming and genetic modifications.

Students were empowered by sharing their findings with each other and members of the Faculty of Education at Deakin University. As one student said, 'I feel really inspired now and I want to do something to help people in Third World countries.'

Jennie Vine teaches in the Year Five-Six Unit at Wooranna Park Primary School, Melbourne.

to be highly technological while girls talked more commonly of the greening of science and technology, social justice and making peace with people and the planet. As well as identifying a gender divide in images of futures (Hicks and Holden, 1995), cultural differences have been reported (Inayatullah, 2002), and images also vary with age. One of the more disturbing findings of Hicks and Holden's (1995) major British research project – with almost 400 children aged seven to eighteen from four primary and four secondary schools – is that optimistic fifteen-year olds become disillusioned and rudderless twenty-five-year olds. (Gidley, Bateman and Smith, 2004) Interestingly, the negativity and cynicism of older adolescents was not as apparent in Steiner-educated students, who were very positive about their preferred futures and were confident that their activism could create them. These students' images seemed reflect the strong emphasis in Steiner education on the positive, creative processes of life, including substantial role-modelling of positive human achievement through story telling. Further, gender differences in preferred futures were not apparent for Steiner-educated adolescents (Gidley, 1998), with both males and females questioning technology as a solution to future problems and focusing on social, ecological and spiritual futures.

The research on youth futures and the quite different perspectives of Steiner-educated students show that education can play a significant role in opening up young people's imaginations to alternate futures. Much of the initiative to place FE on the agenda has been driven by Richard Slaughter (1995a; 1995b; 2005) who says it needs to be evident in classroom practice and the curriculum, school leadership and teacher education. David Hicks's work in Britain provides the benchmark for the practical application of FE in schools (see Hicks, 1994a; 1994b) while, in Australia, Jane Page has developed tools for use in early childhood education and found that very young children already possess many of the qualities that futurists try to impart through FE in her ground-breaking work. (Page, 2000)

TOOLS, IDEAS AND RESOURCES

Futures educators have, over the past decades, developed useful tools, ideas and a language for use with students of all ages to enable them to develop foresight literacy. Most of us tend to view the future as somehow beyond the present and rarely consider how decisions and choices made today profoundly affect not just one fixed future but any number of futures. The underlying goal of FE is to move from the idea of a single, pre-determined future to that of many possible futures, so that students begin to see that they can determine the future, that they need not be reactive and that they are not powerless. How does one do that? Here are some ideas.

Timelines and Y-diagrams These are probably the simplest and most effective futures tools for use even with very young children. The bifurcation of the Y indicates the present and the two prongs – there can be more – indicate possible futures. Debra Bateman has used Y-diagrams very successfully with primary students.

Futures wheels and mind maps These can be used to explore a range of cause and effects, both negative and positive, and are stimulating and effective.

Preferable, possible and probable futures – aka the 3Ps Opening up to a range of possible futures, particularly envisioning preferred futures, is one of the most important tools for futurists working with children and adolescents. (See Galtung, 1982 and Hicks and Holden, 1995)

The extended present Seeing that the past, present and future are intimately linked and part of the same continuum helps people understand the influence of the past on the present and the present on the future and challenges ideas about the here and now. (Boulding, 1990)

Interestingly, the negativity and cynicism of older adolescents was not as apparent in Steiner-educated students, who were very positive about their preferred futures and were confident that their activism could create them.

Scenario building Scenario building helps students to explore a range of alternate futures though text, pictures or multimedia.

Incasting or being in a future Incasting helps students to describe life – technology, education, work, family, the environment – in a particular scenario and works well in conjunction with Y-diagrams.

Backcasting or creating a future history A crucial part of envisioning and scenario work is to link possible future scenarios back to the present. Asking 'what needs to happen to get there?' provides a basis for action, and works well with incasting.

T-Cycle The T-Cycle or change cycle introduces the idea that change has its own pace and processes, and examines why some innovations are successful while others are not. (Slaughter, 1995b)

Levels of futures work Slaughter (1993) identifies surface to deep level futures, from 'pop' or 'gee-wizz' futures to problem-centred futures and critical futures.

Other creative learning tools, including brainstorming, concept mapping, role play, creative writing, drawing, jokes, cartoons and symbols, and drawing on science fiction, the media, and social inventions, are all useful tools for FE.

FUTURES IN CURRICULUM DOCUMENTS

Schools will always claim that their aim is to develop and prepare young people for 'the future,' and that's long been a feature of curriculum. Current Australian curricula present education about the future in various implicit or explicit guises. A plethora of statements and curriculum outcomes mention the future, but essentially take 'it' for granted, and are uninformed by FE literature, language, ideas or tools. Science, the humanities and technology tend to be the main areas where such an implicit futures focus can be found. It also appears in documents about vocational education, civics and lifelong learning.

Explicit FE is, as Beare and Slaughter (1993) put it, still the missing dimension in education. Explicit FE attempts to develop futures literacy, and draws widely upon futures studies literature for processes and content. It is expressed in curriculum statements and outcomes that refer to alternate futures rather than a taken-for-granted future. Curriculum documents from Tasmania, South Australia and Queensland all describe an explicit FE approach using 'curriculum organisers' – clusters of connected

FE AT ELTHAM COLLEGE

By Emily Mohan

Eltham College has piloted two Year Nine Futures Education (FE) projects – '2020' and 'Proaction' – at our city campus using a Critical Futures approach. Critical Futures deconstructs assumptions people have about the world, and demystifies the way one thinks about the future. It teaches a person how to be an active thinker and be aware of the big picture. FE shifts the whole perception of the individual as part of society, empowering them to realise the future is not destined. By giving them the tools and skills, students can create situations in the future that are positive and preferably sustainable for future generations.

The first project – 2020 – was conceptual in nature. Some students liked that, but others struggled to cope with the open-endedness of the subject matter. The city campus team then created the second project – Proaction – to offer more of a framework and context around which to work. Students listened to a range of guest speakers and then chose to apply Critical Futures thinking to one issue. They were then required to develop a product or process to address that social issue, and use a PowerPoint presentation to promote their idea to relevant stakeholders.

Fourteen- and fifteen-year olds are certainly ready for futures thinking. Adolescence is a very appropriate time for them to start thinking more critically and they have the maturity to manage those thoughts and work them through.

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ideas linked to skills which enable the development of futures ideas expressed in terms of personal futures, social responsibility and global futures. Tasmania's Essential Learnings is probably the most explicit as far as FE is concerned. It states that 'communities see the curriculum as a means for creating the sort of future they want. Learners' sense of optimism is dependent on a belief in their capacity to shape the future and to pursue worthwhile individual and community goals.' (http://www.education.tas.gov.au/ooe/curriculumconsultation/publications/values.htm)

FUTURES EDUCATION IN SCHOOLS

FE provides such a wide range of ideas and tools that it can be incorporated into education in any number of ways. Programs in two very different schools, one, primary and one secondary, are described here to provide examples of some of these ways. (For further examples, see Gidley, Bateman and Smith, 2004)

Kimberley Park State Primary School in Brisbane operates with multi-age classrooms based on a 'thinking curriculum' developed around four organisers: change, perspectives, interconnectedness and sustainability (www.kimbparkss.qld.edu.au). The sixty students in each class are taught by two teachers who stay with the students for a minimum of two and a maximum of three years, echoing a Steiner approach. With the exception of specialist areas, all teaching and learning is based on integrated or multi-disciplinary strategies, and parental participation is strongly encouraged.

FE was initiated at Kimberley Park by a former principal and developed into a comprehensive and innovative yearlong unit for Year Five, Six and Seven students by two teachers. They started by asking students for their images of the future and what they wanted to know about the future. The result was 'Doom, Gloom or Boom – is ours a fascinating or frightening future?' which was developed into a series of micro-units based on questions generated by the students: the future _ prediction or foresight; superhumans – mechanical humans or human machines; will tiny machines rule the world; the technology revolution impacts on our world, but will it be sustainable?

The teachers used a variety of futures strategies, such as Y-diagrams, to explore possible and preferable futures that formed the basis for independent learning projects. FE also formed the basis of a number of homework tasks aimed at encouraging students to engage in futures discussions at home, particularly with their grandparents. Talking to grandparents had a profound effect on some of the students, and opened up a sense of the extended present. They found that they shared similar views about the future and were amused to think that their grandparents were now living in their own future. Grandparents said they didn't want their grandchildren to make the same mistakes as their generation had.

Technology was a key focus of this unit, and students were able to share enthusiastically their knowledge of nanotechnology and possible implications of its use. At the end they felt that they knew more about the world and the possible impacts of technology on the future, demonstrating a critical understanding of technology. At the end of the year, the class held a summit simulation, attended by parents and the wider community, where they presented and justified their views about the future through their responses to the micro-unit questions. They were enthusiastic about sharing their knowledge and work with the wider community, but felt that the environment was a 'gloom.' Even so, they felt very positive about their experiences in FE, hoped that they would be able to continue with it in secondary education and believed the skills they'd learned had empowered them to make a difference in their own futures, recognising that this would take hard work.

During July and August of this year Professor Brian Caldwell will be travelling the country to present a series of very exciting interactive workshops on 'Re-imagining Educational Leadership', relevant to all education sectors.

The workshops will be held in all capital cities and a number of regional centres in each state and territory, and are based on Brian's recently completed book which focuses on change in education around the world. The book is a compilation of three previously written monographs on self-managing schools, new enterprise logic, and exhilarating leadership. This is East meets West at its best. Some people hope that educational leadership can be transformed. This book goes beyond hope. It shares a genuine optimism that educational leadership is 'mission possible' at a time when many have doubt.

In the past 18 months Brian has conducted many workshops on leadership transformation. Having consulted with a large number of educators across several countries, he is in a superb position to comment on education reform and assess the scale of change and its outcome in different settings. These experiences are captured in the forthcoming book and developed in the workshops.

These workshops will be relevant for **all** educators. Brian will share his insights and engage participants around the country in the generation of new knowledge about change and its impact on educators and their leaders.

This is the one event in 2006 that you cannot afford to miss!!

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KEEP AN EYE OUT FOR FURTHER DETAILS
TO BE RELEASED IN MARCH 2006

Because students are interested in the Big Questions, as one teacher put it, FE provides a perfect opportunity to address them, and to consider values that are fundamental for them and the future of the planet.

St John's Grammar School in Adelaide is an independent school where FE operates as an integrated approach in Year Seven, as a separate one-semester subject in Year Nine and in separate subjects at other levels. In Year Seven – the last year of primary education in South Australia – an integrated approach is used to explore a range of possible futures. Students apply the 3Ps to consider 'chronicles of the future,' a pop-future 'zine' that predicts events for each decade for the next fifty years. Students work in groups to choose an event and categorise it as probable, possible or preferable. They consider the likelihood of each event taking place, and in doing so they enter into discussion about what shapes the future.

The purpose of the Year Nine unit is for students to recognise that a futures perspective represents a continuum, from a future that reproduces the status quo to ones that transform it, and that futures scenarios arise out of specific worldviews. The students are exposed to a range of FE tools and ideas such as the 3Ps, and pop futures, problem-centred futures and critical futures.

A futures-based unit is offered in English from Years Eight to Eleven. This may include reading short stories that are set in the future; using the 3Ps to think about life in the future; writing a dialogue where someone from 200 years in the future talks with present-day students about their lives or writing a prequel to a story set in the future. The school library is actively collecting novels that have a futures dimension, such as *Century, Dream of Stars and Children of the Dust. The Time Machine* has a double advantage, since it was written in 1905 with the film version set in 1960, enabling students to examine different perspectives on the future from different historical periods.

In Year Eleven, a home economics unit called 'Changing lifestyles' asks students to use futures wheels, 3Ps, concept maps and brainstorming to generate ideas and plan a major essay entitled 'From humble beginnings to futures unknown,' which takes a past, present and futures approach to food issues. As part of the process, students interview a senior citizen about historical changes in shopping and eating habits.

Futures ideas and tools are used in Year Ten Religion and Values Education to consider the notion of 'Humans – caretakers of God's creation,' in which students are encouraged to develop a broader view of the environment using biblical references to question the idea of both progress and the human domination of nature. Philosophy students are encouraged to engage in ethical decision-making around futures scenarios, asking 'whose future is being discussed'; 'for whom is a particular scenario preferable and on what grounds'; and 'who are the winners and losers'? In Mathematics, linear and exponential social and environmental trend lines are extrapolated forward, and their possible impacts are discussed in an Australian Studies assignment.

Teachers at Kimberley Park and St John's are very positive about FE. They say it promotes valuable and authentic learning, assists students to realise they have choices that matter and helps them see that the future need not be all doom and gloom. Because students are interested in the Big Questions, as one teacher put it, FE provides a perfect opportunity to address them, and to consider values that are fundamental for them and the future of the planet.

Like any innovation, the long-term success of FE in schools depends on an embedding process so that the innovation does not depend on the enthusiasm and energy of a few individuals, only to disappear when they move on. It requires strong leadership, teacher knowledge, support and enthusiasm, and the support and understanding of the wider school community.

Debra Bateman is a Lecturer in the School of Social and Cultural Studies in Education in the Faculty of Education at Deakin University. Jennifer Gidley is an Educational Psychologist and Futures Researcher at Southern Cross University. Caroline Smith is a Lecturer in Science and Sustainable Futures Education at the Trescowthick School of Education, Australian Catholic University, Melbourne.

Pictured, page 14, past, present and future are intimately linked for students at Eltham College's city campus; page 17, thinking about futures at Wooranna Park Primary School, Melbourne.

For references go to www.acer.edu.au/professionaleducator/references.html

Disciplined thinking

Pathways to intellectual character in mainstream science

Mark Coleman explains how the Ithaka Project and simple action research influenced the development of assessment, curriculum and practice in junior Science.

A CASUAL workplace conversation in 2004 with Julie Landvogt, who leads the Ithaka Project, challenged me to clarify my thoughts about what junior science actually was. Julie was wondering how Ron Ritchhart's (2002) ideas of 'Intellectual Character' (IC) displayed themselves across various disciplines – and I was her target for science. Ritchhart proposed that it was not intellectual ability that was the most important factor for learning, but rather the desire to learn, what he termed 'Intellectual Character.' He isolated six characteristics which he refers to as 'thinking dispositions' (see at right) and it was these dispositions that I was asked to find examples of in my class observations.

I recall not being that keen to become involved, possibly a reaction fostered by earlier experiences in professional development (PD). I'd just completed further studies and I felt it was necessary now for me to do something else, but I accepted the invitation, mentally committing perhaps a term or two to the project. I was sceptical about what the process could do for me apart from fatten my CV. I got it wrong!

STARTING OFF

For me the project started in earnest in the second term of 2004. I was to observe my classes in Years Seven and Eight Science for signs of the existence of these thinking dispositions. Ritchhart's thinking dispositions made intuitive sense, but I wasn't sure I could see examples of them in the classroom.

RON RITCHHART'S THINKING DISPOSITIONS

It is desirable for a student to be:

- *curious*
- *metacognitive*
- *strategic*
- *truth-seeking*
- *sceptical*
- *open-minded*

The program initially involved a term-long study of selected students. I was to make observations during and after lessons, noting events that seemed to indicate the use of the various dispositions. I also had an observer for many of these sessions and I was expected to engage in regular, reflective conversations about the implications of what we had observed. This might be a reflection on me, but I'd never done anything like this since my teaching rounds twenty years previously. Opening up my classroom and myself was perhaps the most difficult aspect of the research process, and it showed me the incredible value of having an honest, open and persistent colleague to share thoughts with.

FROM THE COT TO THE PLAYPEN

I'd never been involved in any formal action research before and so the thinking dispositions initially provided a supportive structure. Just as a cot defines boundaries of play for a baby and restricts the objects for play, the task of trying to identify instances of IC set the boundaries for my observations and focused my attention on particular students. After a short period of time, however, I started to see this as restricting what I could observe. My initial scepticism about the value of the process saw me wanting to do something that I could see was of use to what I did as a teacher. A tension developed between wanting to get the task over and done with, and making sure I came away with something I could make sense of. I resolved to alter the focus of my observations from looking for examples of the thinking disposition, to looking for behaviours or attitudes that I valued in a science student. Essentially, I began driving this PD exercise rather than being led by it. I'd realised the task didn't have to be confined to the mental box into which I'd initially placed it. Metaphorically, the thinking dispositions were to become the boundaries of an ever increasing playpen.

Accepting ownership allowed me to set the agenda for observation. This turned out to be a defining moment for me. Having set the agenda and redirecting the task, I was responsible for making the task work. At this point I finally developed a clear personal understanding of the Ithaka Project. It was a bit like playing around in your own toy box to see what was in there and what you could do with it. I was being challenged to explore. There was no clear path to any right answer. It also started to make me look afresh at my ideas of PD.

SHOWING OTHERS

At the same time, other colleagues were involved in Ithakan research projects of their own and we were frequently called upon to explain to each other what we were doing. Those looking for a consistent description of Ithaka were out of luck and this initially drew some criticism and confusion. The tricky thing to understand was that we all had different toy boxes, and that this was not like the old PD; rather, it was a new activity in the school that was drawing teachers into a process of professional learning.

Opening up my classroom and myself was perhaps the most difficult aspect of the research process, and it showed me the incredible value of having an honest, open and persistent colleague to share thoughts with.

TOY BOX RULES

After changing the focus of my observations, I realised that I'd need a consistent format for the recording of my observations and thoughts. I could now control one aspect of the project that had troubled me. Prior to this I'd used someone else's idea of how observations should be recorded. In developing my own, I began to be able to make more sense of what I did and I became more comfortable in communicating this to others. The point this made clear to me was that, to achieve useful practitioner involvement, it was necessary for them to determine the data collection format.

In the format I used (page 25), which looks a little like an experimental report, I selected four focus students for each class, recording my thoughts about them

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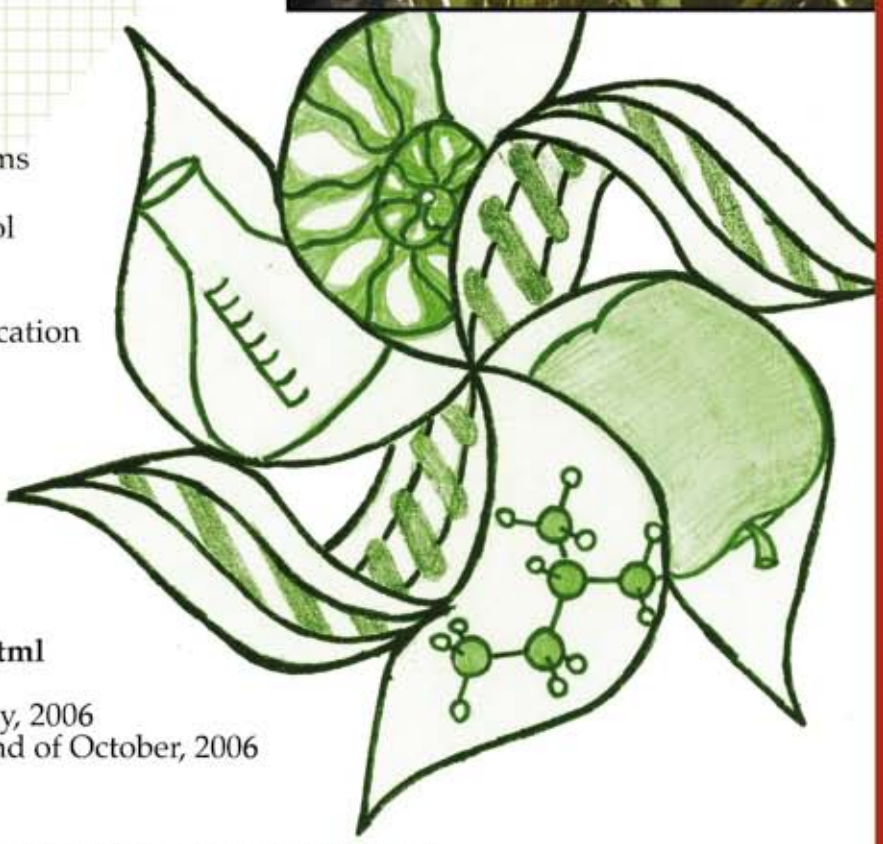

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Ithaka and what I've made of it is drawing me out of the 'cot of teaching' into the bigger 'playpen of education' and I don't want to grow up yet.

after each lesson. After a short while I found myself focusing upon aspects of their performance that I liked or that irritated me. This led me to add the bottom section, in which I began to try to make some sense of what I'd observed. Several weeks in, it became obvious that there were a set of identifiable behaviours which I associated with a 'good' science student.

Look what I found. It's desirable for a student to:

1. be curious about what is around him and actively seek answers to questions he raises – like the baby in the playpen, these students look at a wide range of learning objects just to see what they do, and they're not particularly selective, they have a general desire to know why things work;

2. use all the resources at his disposal and readily contribute to that pool of resources – I like the idea of learning communities and try to promote them in my classroom, and this disposition recognises those willing to contribute to, and be a part of, such a community;

3. work efficiently whether alone or as part of a team, showing a genuine sense of community, which relates to time management skills, but also to the notion of the learning community;

4. use discussions to further his own understanding and that of others in the process – I use the ideas of good and bad sponges in the classroom, where a good sponge will readily absorb what is being discussed and just as readily contribute back, while a bad sponge sucks it all in but gives away nothing;

5. show interest in authentic learning tasks, indicating a genuine curiosity about the subject matter rather than the grades associated with it, which is about having a passion to learn without the need of the big-stick of assessment, leaving me with an interesting challenge to create tasks that allow this disposition to be displayed.

6. place theory in an appropriate socio-historical context that takes science beyond a series of facts that needs to be recalled – I've always wondered about the use of a recall of scientific facts without understanding their context.

WHAT DO I DO WITH THIS?

Up to this point, my research and findings were essentially private. My previous PD experience suggested that this is where I should stop. I'd done what I had committed myself to. The event that moved me forward was a seminar conducted with one of the observed classes. This class was asked to give their thoughts about what Ritchhart's dispositions meant and were then asked to identify the qualities of a good science student – arriving at the same conclusions as mine. My warm, fuzzy glow disappeared when, near the end of this session, my students clearly expressed their view that this had been interesting but that it had been a waste of time. Why? Because it wasn't going to change anything anyway, since I might say I valued particular qualities, but the assessment regime clearly valued others. They knew which message they were going to listen to. Their responses demanded that I do something about the assessment process.

My research and subsequent student discussions had shown me something that I just couldn't ignore, and my acceptance of the need to reframe assessment was the first step in a process driven by an acknowledgement of a need to look further into what I do and why I do it. A relatively simple research task allowed me to clarify my thoughts on what junior science should be and it helped define my values as a science teacher. This has led to changes in report format and language that have begun to give a clearer picture of classroom performance, and allow me to deliver the language of the dispositions directly to parents and students. My students are being involved in the production of rubrics and that

ITHAKA

Class: 8A1
Date: 29/4/04
Period: 2
Context: Practical task on CHEMICAL CHANGE. Taken by a student teacher (Annette – her second ever prac class).
Comments: James: Engaged and involved in all activities. Making appropriate use of discussion to improve his work and his understanding.
Jeff: "Oh, sick!" – a reference to a demonstration by the teacher. Jeff was as involved as James. Made proper use of the discussion too.
Barry: Barry was much more active today in both the initial class discussion session and later in the practical work. An interesting incident at the end of the lesson occurred when he avoided an obstacle on the floor without seeming to pay any attention to it. He then asked me for the same object, apparently not registering its existence at all despite his very recent manoeuverings around it.

Scientific Disposition

James and Jeff are helping focus my thinking here. Unlike Tom (7A2), they seem to be using the time they command in the discussion sessions to further their understanding. Additionally, they are aiding in the advancement of other members of the class. This is especially obvious with Jeff where his less than enthusiastic mates seem to be caught up in his enthusiasm to some extent. Barry's encounter with the safety glasses box is interesting in that it may indicate that he is unwilling to seek answers for himself, preferring to have others find it for him. Am I reading too much into that?

has helped reinforce the expectation that they have to take responsibility for their own learning. How we view, discuss and record curriculum development is now done through a dispositional lens. Content and resources are measured against how they will assist in developing the dispositions. Reshaping the program in these simple ways to allow for the display of the dispositions has enabled student learning that, if we had a different focus, may not have occurred, and which would not have been recognised.

DON'T GROW UP

Success often leads people to ask how they can replicate it, but if you think there's a recipe you can follow you're effectively asking us to stop playing with the blocks and to pack-up the toy box. It links back to many of Ritchhart's dispositions, but curiosity and truth-seeking are driving me to continue examining the blocks in my playpen. What this process has shown me is that I've made a transition from looking at learning opportunities as short-term, discrete elements of PD to seeing them as elements of a longer process of professional learning. Essential components of this process have been:

- to be involved in a critically supportive group of teachers
- to form challenges that have the potential for direct classroom application
- to accept that the path may be neither clear nor smooth
- to customise it to make it your own
- to use a language understandable to students, parents and staff.

Often uncomfortable, but always challenging and rewarding, the process so far has allowed me to begin to think seriously about what I do and what I value. Ithaka and what I've made of it is drawing me out of the 'cot of teaching' into the bigger 'playpen of education' and I don't want to grow up yet.

Mark Coleman is the Head of Science (Wadhurst) at Melbourne Grammar School.

Pictured, page 21, from left, Julie Landvogt, Alan Bliss, Toby Maxwell-Wright, Sharon Mulready, Mark Coleman and Rob Maclaren at Melbourne Grammar School.

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Music

Leaving aside the policies and the programs, the research and the rhetoric, education is really about what happens in your classroom. Trouble is, most educators don't get to see what's happening in the classroom next door. **Joan Earle** opens the door to her classroom to explain what, and how, she's teaching now.

EACH year at Taylors College, where I teach, is different and, generally speaking, in the Music Department we start all over again with an entirely new batch of forty or so music students in Years Eleven and Twelve, and the Monash University Foundation Year (or MUFY), as well as some extra leisure-time instrumental and voice students.

Taylors College, the Melbourne campus of the Study Group International Schools group, offers senior high school – that's Years Ten, Eleven and Twelve – and pre-tertiary education. Students have the option of Music as a subject for VCE Performance, Units 1, 2, 3 and 4, or as a full school subject, within the framework of the MUFY. This MUFY Music subject, connected to the Monash University School of Music, Conservatoria, is offered to our international students, who can use Monash University facilities, which means they can participate in the Orchestra and, if they choose, can bypass the VCE. The MUFY Music subject score may be used for entry to any Faculty at Monash University.

All students at Taylors College may elect to study an instrument or singing, so sometimes we have a very busy 'private lesson' program and quite a variety of visiting specialist teachers. The academic subject timetable runs continuously from 8.00am until 5.30pm and each student has an individual timetable, so there are no breaks and no general timetabled lunch time. Individual timetables for the 'private lesson' students, solo performance VCE and MUFY music subject students all have to be arranged in what we call 'free lines.' Each student is offered thirty individual lessons spread as evenly as possible over the school year, to maximise examination preparation. In line with school policy, extra lessons, as tutorials, may be arranged, at no charge to the student, if more help is needed.

For me, one of the greatest delights is to work with my students to satisfy the Ensemble requirements for both the VCE and MUFY subjects. Since Ensemble is an essential part of both the VCE and MUFY syllabus, there's no question about the necessity of spending precious study time in working with others. That means that opportunities for friendship and fun are written into the syllabus and that, in my opinion, is the real benefit for our students. It's just so good to see and hear the laughter, the development of understanding, skills and confidence too, that this area of the subjects provide. Our students present for the Associated Board of the Royal Schools of Music (ABRSM) Ensemble examination too, and so also gain an internationally recognised certificate as a part of our music subject structure.

The International Graded and Diploma Music syllabus of the ABRSM, for whom Taylors College is a representative, is offered to all students, either within the VCE and MUFY music subjects, or as a leisure-time school activity. In view of the fact that most of our music students are from an international background, the opportunity to upgrade their Certificates is often what prompts them to include a music subject in their academic programs. The ABRSM examinations programs at Taylors College are also offered as a value added part of the VCE performance subject. Much of the prescribed list of works can be matched with current ABRSM Grades and Diploma syllabus for VCE Recital requirements. The set technical work fits conveniently with the VCE Outcome requirements, and the aural Grade syllabus is indeed very similar to the current Aural requirements. It is, in fact, more demanding, when English is a second language, as students have to give a prompt verbal response at the examination. The way I teach, class work, and solo and ensemble performance recital requirements can happily be blended into a very integrated program, resulting in student and parental pleasure in the upgrading of these highly regarded qualifications.

The MUFY program has four areas of study – Solo performance, Materials and Structure of Music, Ensemble, and Perspectives of Performance – with ABRSM examinations a requirement for the final examination, which involves technical work, a recital, a very comprehensive aural examination and sight reading. At the Diploma levels there's an added requirement of Program Notes and a viva voce at the examination. Most of our twenty or so MUFY music students are at a Grade 8 or Diploma level, and as the class teacher, Grade 8 and Diploma piano teacher, I'm in what's probably a unique position to monitor my students' development in their music journeys.

As Director of Music, I have the joy of lots of support from colleagues, but plenty of housekeeping to do as well. I use a teacher folder system so I can keep a documented record of attendance and progress for each class music subject and each student.

Our music students participate in performances for our Cultural Day Celebrations, they perform in the annual Taylors College Concert, they attend Master Classes connected to Monash University School of Music, Conservatoria, and they take part in many recital opportunities such as those held at the Toorak Uniting Arts Centre. Music productions too, offer opportunities for drama and dance within what is a very lively department.

As you'd expect, my door is always open for enquiries from anxious parents and for students who have come bravely into a different culture, a different language, and with different expectations about what constitutes a courteous response to teachers! I'm always very thankful for the common link that music provides: when words fail me, my students and I can still make music together, smile at one another, and nod our heads in understanding.

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Joan Earle is the Director of Music and ABRSM Representative at Taylors College, Melbourne.

Picture courtesy Taylors College, Melbourne.

National perspective

A new Minister; the teaching of reading; the gender balance in education – and hardly a political stunt in sight. We must be between elections. **Steve Holden** reports.

JULIE Bishop is the new Commonwealth Minister for Education, Science and Training, a promotion from her junior ministerial position as the oddly named Minister for Ageing. Dr Brendan Nelson was 'promoted' to the Defence portfolio. Nelson leaves behind a raft of reforms in the schools, vocational education and training, and higher education sectors for Bishop to implement, alongside any number of inquiries for bedtime reading. 'I hope to continue some of the initiatives and policies he has put in place,' she told the *Australian*. 'A number of them do need bedding down and that will be a challenge.'

One of those inquiry reports for bedtime reading, the Committee for the National Inquiry into the Teaching of Literacy (NITL), chaired by Dr Ken Rowe, Research Director of the Learning Processes and Contexts research program at the Australian Council for Educational Research, was presented to Nelson in December. According to the NITL report, called *Teaching Reading*, 'the research evidence indicates that students learn best when teachers adopt an integrated approach to reading that explicitly teaches phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary knowledge and comprehension.' (10) The inquiry's twenty recommendations were buried in the goodies-baddies media spin that turned the report into a phonics v whole language conflict. The *Sydney Morning Herald*'s Miranda Devine ended up in the blue corner – Devine was a member of the NITL committee – slugging it out with children's author Mem Fox in the red corner. If the whole 'let's make a conflict' thing was weird, what was weirder was this comment by Nelson at the December launch: 'If you bump into those friendly, loving people from Finance, Treasury, any of those sort of agencies in the next few months, tell them to be kind to me through the Budget process.' It's worth remembering, however, that reading is also about subtext. By January, the friendly, loving Treasurer, Peter Costello, was signalling his support.

The bad news from the Commonwealth government's Equal Opportunity for Women in the Workplace Agency (EOWA) report, *The EOWA Education Industry Vertical*, is that although more women than men work in the education sector, they're proportionally under-represented in senior roles. The good news is that education institutions were well represented in its 2005 EOWA Business Achievement Awards. Melbourne's Overnewton Anglican Community College won the Leading Organisation for the Advancement of Women award for an organisation with less than 500 employees; the University of NSW was highly recommended in the Leading Organisation for the Advancement of Women award for an organisation with more than 500 employees; Macquarie University won the award for Outstanding EEO Practice for the Advancement of Women; and Deakin University Vice Chancellor, Professor Sally Walker, received the Judges' Award for a Person or Organisation for their Contribution to the Advancement of Women.

A national survey of 1,200 beginning teachers, conducted by the Australian Education Union, has found that the key concerns of beginning teachers are workload, behaviour management, pay and class sizes. Only 1.5 per cent of respondents said they had ongoing support from their university once they began teaching, while only 1.8 per cent said they received support from their employer, but ninety-four per cent said they received most of their professional support from school colleagues. A whopping forty-five per cent expected not to be teaching in ten years.

In brief

NEW INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL

The first Queensland school in the Middle East: that's the nifty description for the Australian International School which was opened by the Queensland Premier Peter Beattie in Sharjah, one of the seven emirates that make up the United Arab Emirates (UAE), in September. The school, which is staffed by Queensland teachers, is the first school in the Middle East to teach the Queensland curriculum, Beattie said. The purpose-built school aims to cater for the multinational community in the UAE, starting with 100 students from Kindergarten to Year Six. Speaking at the opening, Beattie said the plan was eventually to see growth to around 1,800 students from Kindergarten to senior secondary level. 'I'm particularly pleased that Principal Helen Lucas and her staff, an elite group of Queensland teachers, are here because of their enthusiasm for being part of an international school,' he said.

BY THE PROFESSION, FOR THE PROFESSION

Professional standards for teachers and school leaders need to be determined by the profession, for the profession. While it's familiar rhetoric, work to weld together a system of 'by the profession, for the profession' professional standards in Australia still looks a long way off, but that's not the case in Ontario, Canada. There, the Ontario College of Teachers (OCT) is consulting widely within and beyond the profession and has identified five standards of practice – Commitment to Students and Student Learning, Professional Knowledge, Professional Practice, Leadership in Learning Communities and Ongoing Professional Learning – that aim to address what classroom teachers, school principals, superintendents and directors really do. Jennifer Pitt, Chair of the College Council's Standards of Practice and Education Committee, which is guiding the review, told *Professionally Speaking*, published by OCT, she was very proud of what OCT has accomplished. 'I have read standards from other jurisdictions and some go on for pages and pages,' Pitt said. 'Ours do a good job of defining a profession in a concise yet comprehensive way.'

ON THE BUSES

Queensland students can now be suspended or banned from travelling on buses for fighting, inappropriate use of mobile phones and cameras, offensive language, spitting, throwing objects or moving frequently between seats – activities prohibited under a new state government code of conduct. The Tasmanian branch of the Rail Tram and Bus Union, meanwhile, has threatened to file a complaint with the Office of the Anti-Discrimination Commissioner if the state bus service and the Tasmanian Department of Education fail to develop a plan to deal with dangerous student behaviour on buses. The threat looks like a long shot, since the Anti-Discrimination Commissioner is empowered by the 1998 Tasmanian Anti-Discrimination Act, which covers discrimination on the ground of 'race,' although Section 19 of the Act also says that 'a person, by a public act, must not incite hatred towards, serious contempt for, or severe ridicule of, a person or a group of persons on a number of grounds including race, religious belief or affiliation, or religious activity' – and possibly bus driving.

In your state

SOUTH AUSTRALIA

Tertiary applications indicated a growing demand for teaching and nursing places. According to the South Australian Tertiary Admissions Centre, applications are up for junior primary and primary teaching as well as nursing.

VICTORIA

Victorian Tertiary Admissions Centre figures also show a growing demand for teaching and nursing courses, but one in two of the 4,744 Victorians who tried to get into education courses were rejected. Nationally, there was a three per cent fall in applications.

WESTERN AUSTRALIA

English teachers preparing for the new outcomes-based education course in Western Australia were either 'ready' in December or 'scrambling' in January, depending on who was talking. David Kelly, Secretary of the WA State School Teachers Union, told the *Australian*'s Paige Taylor in January, 'They are preparing like mad because they have got to start teaching this stuff in a few weeks and the pressure's on,' but the Curriculum Council's acting Chief Executive, David Axworthy, said after five days of professional development (PD) 'Ninety-one per cent of teachers who completed their PD indicated they felt somewhat to highly confident in implementing the new English course in 2006.'

In Brief *is about you and what's happening in your region, state or territory. To make sure it reflects what's really happening 'on the ground,' email editor.profeducator@acer.edu.au with details.*

Postgraduate student assessment in nursing aims to promote the understanding of theoretical concepts and their application in practice. How do you achieve that? By mapping the influences of the curriculum and then evaluating student progress. **Sue Brown** explains.

From the ground up

Laying the foundation for teaching scholarship

I WANTED to evaluate my students' understanding of a specific learning objective within a postgraduate nursing course, and I wanted to use the results of that evaluation to plan improved teaching strategies and to advance teaching scholarship. I'm using 'evaluate' carefully, since 'evaluation' is to do with reviewing the merit of a particular course of action, without necessarily ranking or making any individual identification, while 'assessment,' in the Australian context, is to do with the use of various methods to grade the work of students for credit in a particular subject.

In evaluating my students' understanding, I needed flexibility so that I could integrate 'real life' situations with theory and so that changes could be re-evaluated at various stages of the given cycle of inquiry. My scope was intentionally narrow to allow for an incremental planning process that could handle interruptions within a larger and ongoing inquiry. (Greenwood, 2000) Student evaluation was defined as the area of enquiry and consecutive cycles of reflection, planning and action commenced.

The topic for evaluation was an assessment which was scheduled midway through a twelve-week semester and required the student to present an oral presentation concerning a specific topic, a type of assessment which is commonly used in schools

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of nursing since it requires the student to synthesise experiential and theoretical information and present it critically to an informed audience within the context of clinical practice. A move to online study and less face-to-face interaction, meant it was difficult to gauge whether adequate preparation, synthesis of current knowledge and identification of areas of learning required for the presentation had been achieved. While an online tutorial included the application of brainstorming methods and use of presentation technique, previous assessments indicated that students found it difficult to identify the significance of their experience within the context of the workplace, encapsulating that knowledge and linking it to their present learning.

PHASE ONE – PLANNING

The class to be evaluated was a small student group specialising in gerontic nursing at a postgraduate diploma level via mixed mode delivery. The first stage of the cycle required reflection about the curriculum and the assessment criteria generated by that. Angelo and Cross (1993) note that often courses are more content driven than goal driven. This is reflected in the Australian nursing context where curricula development is determined by a set of criteria set down by the various state nurses' boards, in their capacity as the professional bodies designated as accrediting authorities. While postgraduate nursing courses are not typically governed by nurses' boards, remnants of 'board' philosophy still underpin the curriculum despite increasing consultation with other stakeholders. The dictates of the curriculum are, however, influenced by the need to align goals with the Australian qualification framework (AQF), the core graduate attributes of a given university and the professional competencies of the Australian Nursing Council (ANC). (AQF, 2002; Victoria University, 2003; ANC, 2004)

Although all students were prepared for the evaluation there was some uncertainty as to its meaning or value. Students were stressed by the activity and viewed the informal assessment as an unwelcome chore. Some failed to understand the intention of the evaluation altogether, seeing it as part of the assessment process.

What about the workplace environment? Today's consumer oriented health model, the increased use of technology and differing community expectations, particularly the expectation of a cure, have led to greater complexity in the delivery of care, and increased responsibility and accountability – and education needs to respond. Just how well it's doing that is open to debate, but a recent longitudinal study of undergraduate nursing students concluded that the art of critical thinking remained the 'missing link' in nursing education today. (Beckie et al., 2001)

We've seen a move from a behaviourist model of education, where students gain proficiency in motor skills, to a far more metacognitive approach to learning and a greater understanding by tutors as to how learning is achieved. (Cheetham and Chivers, 2001) At a postgraduate level this becomes crucial as students learn to synthesise and sort relevant data collated from a variety of experiential, theoretical, emotional and creative sources – all requiring integration with motor skills. Biggs describes this as the integration of declarative or academic knowledge with procedural knowledge – skills, competency – to achieve conditional knowledge – the ability to problem solve in context – which leads to functional or performance knowledge. (Biggs, 1999)

A further dimension in achieving subject goals is the provision for adult learning and variations in individual ways of learning through mixed methods of teaching. (Kolb, 1984; Cheetham and Chivers, 2001) Adult learners, however, often have a clear picture of their learning objectives, influenced by their workplace or lifestyle, which may not align with the aims of the curricula. (Cheetham and Chivers, 2001) It's important, therefore, that experiential knowledge is acknowledged and that newly acquired knowledge is seen to be relevant.

My concern was to identify what was to be measured, and to be clear about that I used a teaching goal inventory (TGI). (Angelo and Cross, 1993b) Online surveys by Angelo and Cross identified the development of higher-order thinking skills – analytic skills, problem solving skills and ability to synthesise and integrate information and ideas – as the primary issue for students.

Oral communication in nursing, as in many professional contexts, is pivotal and therefore the link between language and competence must be exploited. The assignment and learning process evaluated attempted to align with Biggs's (1999) concept of declarative and procedural knowledge, leading to a demonstration of conditional knowledge culminating in pathways to functional knowledge. In identifying as essential the ability to synthesise and integrate information and ideas, the classroom evaluation (assessment) technique (CAT) was used. (Angelo and Cross, 1993a)

One of the CATs, recommended as a result of the TGIs referred to above, was a 'one-sentence' summary to assess students' skills in synthesising and summarising information within the context of evaluating skills and creative thinking. The CAT required the students to answer a series of seven questions concerning who does what to whom, when, where, how and why, concerning a defined issue. The evaluation requires the students to synthesise their answers in a single, informative, grammatical summary sentence. (Angelo and Cross, 1993a) The fundamental idea is to evaluate whether students have 'the ability to interweave the familiar with the new in unexpected and stimulating ways.' (Angelo and Cross, 1993a: 181) The purpose and process of the evaluation was made clear to the students a month before the CAT and repeated at the time of evaluation. Evaluation sheets were peer reviewed by a member of staff familiar with CAT techniques.

Although all students were prepared for the evaluation there was some uncertainty as to its meaning or value. Students were stressed by the activity and viewed the informal assessment as an unwelcome chore. Some failed to understand the

intention of the evaluation altogether, seeing it as part of the assessment process. The completed and returned forms demonstrated overall that the sentences were dense, bulky, poorly constructed and lacked cohesive information. Clearly, a sentence formulated from seven questions requires a high degree of English language competency and many of the students were frustrated with their results. In 'the real world,' which is often synonymous with 'the workplace,' presenters may be asked to achieve exactly what the evaluation attempted to produce, yet in the real world of students at a university the energy expended in the delivery of a presentation, which is judged and graded, can change the exercise.

The second cycle of reflections centred around the value of the CAT and how this could promote changes in teaching and subject organisation. Evaluations of student learning frequently reduce learning to the giving of a numerical value to whatever tasks are accomplished. Measuring success is a problem and, while I had identified the learning deficit, the results did not give clarity or direction as to teaching interventions. Traditionally, nursing education divides the assessment process into a theory and practical component, and subject and teaching evaluations are also measured this way. As a result there is little correlation between the two components in the mind of the student, a problem which is compounded in Australia by the fact that students work in their practice settings but attend an external university for the theory component. Although greater emphasis is being placed on learning contracts that involve the workplace, there remains a divide.

In 'the real world,' which is often synonymous with 'the workplace,' presenters may be asked to achieve exactly what the evaluation attempted to produce, yet in the real world of students at a university the energy expended in the delivery of a presentation, which is judged and graded, can change the exercise.

PHASE TWO – LINKING OF THE CYCLES

The next action is to plan to implement change, which includes the use of the evaluation tool more frequently in the subject content. Future strategies include using the 'one sentence summary' technique on a more regular basis, utilising the students' own repertoire concerning experiential and theoretical learning. It's envisaged that an online application will offer students a less stressful medium in which to prepare the sentence while allowing for practice development of critical thinking through a logical and concise approach. The one sentence summary will become part of every face-to-face tutorial and while a certain amount of tension may be anticipated initially it's envisaged that familiarity with the exercise and support from the facilitators will assuage negative reactions.

To complete the action research spiral, future semesters will involve evaluation based on the findings and I'll continue to observe, reflect and act on the information. Such exercises, however, expose the need to measure the degree of facilitation required to assist the student to achieve the aim, which is something for further investigation. (Burrows, 1997)

There are two tendencies influencing teaching and learning in nursing and other professions. On the one hand, professional codes, core graduate attributes, workplace requirements and the maintenance of academic rigour are all having an impact on teaching approaches. On the other, the nexus between learning, research and practice is becoming more clearly recognised. Both reflect the need for a multi-dimensional educational perspective and for teaching scholarship, which emphasises the link between information, higher order thinking skills and the enhanced communication about complex issues concerning contemporary nursing. As a result of the project the area of concern has been identified and the disclosure of results may encourage more global application of qualitative evaluation. The use of TGIs linked to classroom assessments and investigated within an action research methodology contributed significantly to identifying problems and producing credible, auditable and transferable results.

Sue Brown is a Lecturer in the School of Nursing Sciences at James Cook University, Cairns. *She acknowledges the indispensable contribution to this article by staff of the Continuing Education Department at Victoria University, Melbourne.*

For references go to www.acer.edu.au/professionaleducator/references.html

The Commonwealth's National Review of School Music Education, released in November, proposes better pre-service teacher education for primary school generalist classroom teachers. **Nita Temmerman** says that's a good start, but further action is needed.

Improving school music

We all have a part to play

WHEN the Commonwealth Department of Education, Science and Training released its National Review of School Music Education in November, it suggested a number of measures to improve the quality of music teaching and learning in primary and secondary schools in Australia, singling out pre-service teacher education for primary school generalist classroom teachers. While the quality of music education in Australian schools is inescapably connected to the education of teachers, let me suggest some further proposals for action, all of which rely on support from governments, the school and university education sectors, and arts community and industry groups. The aim? To build activities that bring them all together in meaningful and productive ways to enhance the effectiveness and quality of what goes on in school music education in Australia.

THE CURRENT STATE OF SCHOOL MUSIC EDUCATION

There's been plenty of research on the less-than-ideal state of school music education, especially primary school music education, in Australia and plenty of that research presents examples to show that music education practice across the Australian school sector is of an uneven quality in terms of what is taught, by whom, for how long and with what resources. Why is this the case? Explanations generally identify inadequate support mechanisms for music education and invari-

education

Music education practice across the Australian school sector is of an uneven quality in terms of what is taught, by whom, for how long and with what resources.

ably include issues to do with the insufficient time given to music education in undergraduate teacher education programs, which results in generalist classroom primary teachers who typically lack the confidence to teach music, as well as a low status for music in the school curriculum in comparison with more 'useful' subjects like mathematics and literacy. (See, for example, Gifford, 1993; Russell Bowie, 1993; Jeanneret, 1994; Temmerman, 1997; Stevens, 2003; Hartwig, 2004)

School music experiences have an impact on future adult attitudes to music, but also interest and participation in music, an impact confirmed in the Australia Council's public opinion reports of the 1980s and 1990s. These same reports also claim that most Australians are of the opinion that their inability to fully appreciate and participate in music art forms stems from school experiences, in particular the type of curricula and quality of teaching encountered, which often had a discouraging effect. As an undergraduate primary teacher education student recently put it, 'nobody hates music but an awful lot of people hate school music!' (Dillon 2004) Research shows that school music experiences have a lasting influence on people's lives, and not necessarily for the better. Where dissatisfaction is expressed, it's most often associated with:

- lesson content, such as filling out notation sheets, which is perceived to be useless

As an undergraduate primary teacher education student recently put it, 'nobody hates music but an awful lot of people hate school music!'

- activities that focus on passive, usually listening, experiences rather than active music making involving the playing of instruments
- teachers who appear to demonstrate an intolerance of students who lack knowledge in and an understanding of traditional or classical music forms. (Temmerman, 1993, 1995, 2003; Rosevear, 2003)

The research reveals that students have an inherent interest in practical music activities, especially those that incorporate opportunities for creativity and are conducted in social contexts, but in many classrooms there appears to be limited scope for students to engage in such activities.

QUALITY DEPENDS ON TEACHERS

The quality of music education in Australian schools is inescapably connected to the education of teachers accountable for teaching school music. Enduring transformation in the quality of school music education practice, therefore, is dependent on changes being made to and improved support being made available for university pre-service teacher preparation programs.

Go back ten years and you might remember Malcolm Skilbeck's keynote address to the Australian College of Educators National Conference in Adelaide. 'Important as it is to have a well-structured and resourced curriculum and a well-designed and equipped school,' he said, 'if we lack highly educated and competent teachers, we have nothing.' (Skilbeck, 1995) A wealth of research affirms the inexorable relationship between quality teachers and effective student learning. (Holden, 2004) Australia produces quality teachers highly sought after by both national and international employing agencies. What's evident in recent research into the preparation of early career teachers to teach classroom music, however, is that they lack the essential knowledge and skills to teach an effective program.

The quality of music education in Australian schools is directly correlated to the quality of teacher education preparation. Those responsible for teaching music in primary schools in Australia are, in the main, generalist classroom teachers who report that music education at the primary level is in such an unsatisfactory state or is not taught at all because of their own lack of confidence and competence to teach it, and attribute their lack of competence principally to the type and amount of music education received during undergraduate training.

Making music is a highly complex activity requiring a variety of skills and an in-depth knowledge of subject matter and pedagogy. (Jeanneret, 1995; Leong, 1996) The expectation is that teacher education graduates have mastered this knowledge sufficiently well so they can use it to guide classroom practice. The key question is whether this can be achieved with the resources available and in the minimal contact hours provided in most pre-service teacher education programs. Music education in undergraduate primary teacher education courses has experienced significant reduced face-to-face contact time over the past ten or so years. We've seen four-year degrees drop from 110 to 120 total contact hours of music specific education to a single creative arts – not music specific – subject totalling just six to twelve hours of contact time. The reality is that many graduates, when faced with the prospect of teaching music, feel completely overwhelmed and don't teach it at all. Clearly, six to twelve hours of music education cannot adequately equip them for the required task. For secondary trained teachers the issue is more one of relevance, as demonstrated in a recent study undertaken in Queensland with early career secondary music teachers who rated the relevance of their pre-service program relative to their teaching needs as quite low in a whole range of teaching as well as discipline specific areas. (Ballantyne, 2004)

In many respects, music education at the university level encounters the same pressures of time constraints, lack of resources, and lack of status as at the school level, while university teacher education in general has endured ten or so years of enormous financial deprivation. In light of the current unsatisfactory state of music education at the school level, it's reasonable to question the adequacy of the time currently allocated to music education in pre-service courses, as well as the relevance of curriculum content and delivery methods. To do that, clearly, we need to identify both what is essential and what can be achieved given resource constraints. (Temmerman, 1997, 2003; Rosevear, 2003; Ballantyne and Parker, 2004)

To implement real and positive change at the school music education level it's imperative that: pre-service teacher education programs are adequately resourced to be able to implement innovative programs that produce graduates who have developed a broad discipline and pedagogical knowledge of music education; and each school district in Australia has access to teachers sufficiently expert in school music education to support classroom teachers in the provision of quality music education.

The reality is that many graduates, when faced with the prospect of teaching music, feel completely overwhelmed and don't teach it at all.

MUSIC EDUCATION AND LIFE SKILLS

There is an increasing demand by employers and the community generally for knowledgeable, creative, innovative, responsible citizens. Music and the arts, then, should be given high priority in students' learning at all levels of education because they provide comprehensive learning experiences that contribute to the development of these attributes in ways not available in other subjects.

New Learning: A Charter for Australian Education (Australian Council for Deans of Education, 2001) presented eight propositions to shape the future envi-

The many reviews, inquiries, and reports into teacher education in Australia over twenty or more years confirm what many teacher education students also state, namely, that insufficient time is seen to be given to the costly but absolutely essential practical field-based components within most teacher education courses, and that in many cases these experiences are still essentially artificial and irrelevant.

ronment of learning in Australian school. Two have particular relevance for those involved in the provision of quality school music education, namely: new learning will be life-long and life-wide, and new learning will be general and increasingly interdisciplinary in its focus.

The first proposition recognises that we need to broaden what we mean by a valuable learning environment beyond the classroom to include the home and community environments as sites of learning. It also recognises that we need to reconceptualise the school as the centre of a learning community. In this way, schools contribute to developing in students the capacity for life-long and life-wide learning in multiple settings. The second proposition is about expanding the notion of learning beyond factual content to that which is durable, transferable, autonomous and generic.

Music educators have long recognised the substantial contribution that music education can make to the development of unique aesthetic and intellectual abilities as well as the acquisition of relevant life skills such as time management, decision making, goal setting, personal planning, critical thinking, self-directed learning, interpersonal skills and self confidence. Some of the most recent research, emanating principally from the United States, also comments on the positive relationship between engagement with both school and outside school music programs and the development of life-long learning attributes. (Fiske, 1999; Arts Education Partnership, 2002) The Arts Education Partnership (AEP) Taskforces' compendium on learning in the arts reports that students with high levels of arts participation outperform 'poor arts' students on virtually every measure. Sustained involvement in music and theatre is highly correlated with success in mathematics and reading; there is a positive relationship between drama and problem-solving; disadvantaged youth who engage in after-school arts programs do better in school and their personal lives than their non-arts peers; and links have been identified between listening to music and enhanced spatial reasoning. While debate persists as to how and why music education has such a positive impact on so many facets of the learning process as well as student behaviour, Australian studies into the impact of school-based music education programs along the lines of the federally funded large scale studies in the United States are very much needed.

SCHOOL, COMMUNITY AND UNIVERSITY COLLABORATIVE PARTNERSHIPS

Improvement in the quality of school music education depends on the extension of collaborative partnerships with the wider music-arts community. (Temmerman 2005) The many reviews, inquiries, and reports into teacher education in Australia over twenty or more years confirm what many teacher education students also state, namely, that insufficient time is seen to be given to the costly but absolutely essential practical field-based components within most teacher education courses, and that in many cases these experiences are still essentially artificial and irrelevant. Even so, an increasing number of collaborative partnerships between schools and other arts-music learning sites and universities are emerging in Australia that attempt to strengthen the link between abstract pedagogical theory and the practical context. The Bachelor of Teaching at Melbourne's Deakin University, for example, features subjects that integrate the arts, including music, with language and literacy and studies of society and the environment. The two-year graduate entry degree that equips graduates to teach five- to eighteen-year olds has as its vision the 'educating of teachers to make a difference in twenty-first-century schools and communities.' It takes a collaborative, inquiry-based learning approach and has adopted innovative pedagogical strategies including the provision of opportunities for student teachers to engage critically with multiple sites of learning. Try the

Melbourne museum, the Immigration museum, CERES environmental park and the Warrnambool Fun for Kids Festival. The degree provides student teachers with a valuable, relevant, real context for teaching music, which in many cases would otherwise not be available. It's also an opportunity for student teachers to integrate music across the curriculum, to experiment, be innovative and take risks.

More examples of regular, relevant, professional field experiences that are well integrated with course content are needed. In order for these to succeed, however, we need to allocate resources to collaborative projects involving universities to identify 'best' ways in which education systems, community and industry music-arts sectors can work together to provide effective and transferable music education opportunities. An anticipated outcome would be the establishment of a network of online published exemplars.

Music educators would do well to expand their view of music education in relation to the needs it so ably appears to fulfil for young people out of school. There's still a distinction between the music that students encounter in and outside school. Engagement with out-of-school music includes both music encountered in the home, which may be affected by parental influence, and music that occurs in the learning environments provided by diverse community organisations that complement classroom learning and achieve learning outcomes that schools often don't have the time to foster. While students consider all musical experience as important, they perceive a real distinction between school and out-of-school music. (Temmerman, 2005)

Research findings also point to the importance of presenting young people with opportunities to play in musical groups out of school, as these have a positive impact on their continued involvement in musical activities, especially in the crucial transition years from primary to secondary school. (O'Neill, 2002) In simple terms, where out-of-school music is integrated into the school music program, students' levels of enjoyment of and engagement with music are higher. There's little evidence that relying solely on the present school system will bring about positive change.

A wealth and range of resources exist in most communities that could potentially serve as a resource in the teaching of classroom music. Victoria alone boasts thirty-five performing arts centres and eighty community-based arts groups affiliated with Regional Arts Victoria (RAV). The picture that emerges from the wealth of available data about the arts in Australia is that there's a very productive, diverse and creative population of practising artists, and a substantial number of them already contribute to school music education programs. What's probably less well known, especially at the primary school level and amongst teachers responsible for the classroom music program, is the mass of community-based music making that occurs at the local level that can be tapped into as a resource to complement or enhance what goes on in the classroom.

What appears to be most lacking is an organisational structure or mechanism to bring together in a meaningful way the abundance of expertise, skills and good music practice that exists in the various sectors at the individual artist, arts organisation, and school and university levels. Effective links and interactions between these would enhance the quality of music teaching and learning. Students would benefit because their own musical experience, including performance opportunities, would be enriched and broadened by working with musicians and composers; teachers would benefit in that their skills would be complemented by those of practising musicians; a mutual sharing of expertise would provide valuable professional development opportunities; and musicians would benefit as the occasion to work in schools could provide them with opportunities to trial and receive critical evaluation about their musical ideas and engage with future arts audiences and arts practitioners.

What appears to be most lacking is an organisational structure or mechanism to bring together in a meaningful way the abundance of expertise, skills and good music practice that exists in the various sectors at the individual artist, arts organisation, and school and university levels.

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For references go to www.acer.edu.au/professionaleducator/references.html

Eating disorders

Educators can do plenty to help prevent health problems related to eating disorders, as **Brian Hemmings**, **Sarah Park** and **Simone Masonwells** explain.

READERS familiar with Karen Carpenter's life story will know that anorexia nervosa is a life-threatening emotional disorder characterised by an obsession with food and weight. Its chief symptoms are a constant preoccupation with dieting, excessive weight reduction, amenorrhoea and feelings of inadequacy. (American Psychiatric Association, 1987, as reported in Rice, 1999) Anorexia nervosa can lead to impaired heartbeat, infertility, and death. Bulimia manifests differently. Relatively well-known as a medical condition because of Princess Diana's personal disclosures, it's a 'binge-purge' syndrome characterised by a compulsive and rapid consumption of large quantities of high-calorie food in a short time followed by a purge of that intake. Bulimics either take laxatives or self-induce vomiting to reduce their stress about over-eating. The medical effects of bulimia include dehydration, electrolyte imbalance, epileptic seizure, and death. Interestingly, bulimia and anorexia nervosa can combine, resulting in tooth erosion, hiatal hernia, kidney failure and abrasion of the oesophagus. (Ieit, 1985, as reported in Rice, 1999)

Anorexia nervosa and bulimia affects approximately four per cent of the population in advanced industrial societies, mostly females. (Santrock, 2004; Wolf, 1990) In general, only male models or dancers, or those whose profession demands a strict regime of weight control, are predisposed to eating disorders.

The dramatic increase in eating disorders is partly due to a media emphasis on weight loss. Slimness is depicted on television and in magazines as a social ideal. Such pervasive idealised images have been linked with competence, intelligence, attractiveness and self-control. Unfortunately, for significant numbers of people the messages in such idealised images becomes distorted and they constantly look to identify their own bodily imperfections and seek improvements which can be detrimental to their health. Victims learn to starve, becoming helpless largely due to the overwhelming powerful messages transmitted by our culture. Nagel and Jones (1992), Santrock (2004), and Taub and Blinde (1992) provide explanations of further factors related to eating disorders, including family stress, the emergence of sexuality and poor eating habits.

Whatever the causes of eating disorders, it's critical that we educate people at an early age about the facts associated with eating properly and the consequences of eating inappropriately. This education should begin in the home and move to school settings. Such an education enables youngsters to gain an understanding of why they need to eat nutritious foods and how much of the different food groups should be consumed. Educational programs should stress sensitivity to and acceptance of physical, that is, bodily, differences. Thus, it needs to be emphasised within both environments that teasing and criticism are not acceptable and will not be tolerated.

For instance, both primary and secondary school programs could include time for group discussions about issues such as:

- enjoying the shape of your own body;
- being pleased with yourself and others for characteristics other than physical appearance
- appreciating that male and female bodies change at different times in a person's lifetime, and
- understanding that the media emphasises unrealistic body ideals.

Some educators have argued that programs embracing issues of this type should be more central to the regular curriculum and focus on enhancing student self-esteem. A healthy self-concept is one ally against the negative forces that encourage children and adolescents to eat poorly.

Awareness is one of the best prevention strategies. School programs that incorporate visits from guest speakers such as health professionals and disease sufferers have served a very useful purpose in promoting awareness of anorexia nervosa and bulimia. Another approach is to use real-life stories – like Karen Carpenter and Princess Diana's – as examples of the damage these disorders can cause to one's self and family.

If you suspect one of your students is experiencing eating problems, further investigation of the matter is warranted. This might include appraisal of the student's file, and discussions with friends and family members. The student may even be approached on a one-to-one basis and offered advice and support.

It's imperative that all students have support and counselling readily available to them within schools and know where to gain help, if required, outside the school environment. Pamphlets and information booklets made available to the entire student body may capture the awareness of sufferers afraid of seeking personal attention.

The media conveys powerful messages to our youth on a regular basis. Parents and school personnel have to counterbalance some of these messages by encouraging acceptance and understanding of difference, and express to their charges that they are valued for who they are and what they have to offer, no matter what shape or size they come in.

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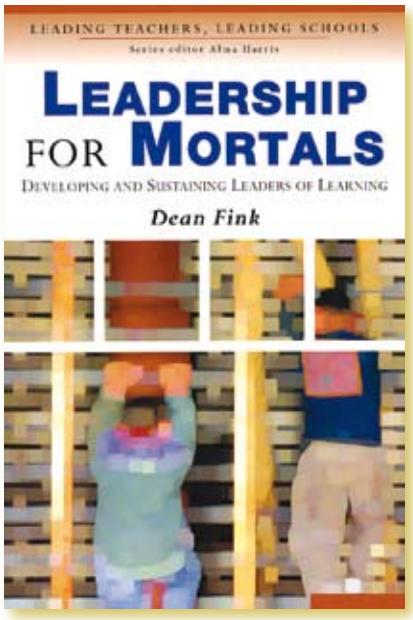

Leadership for Mortals

BY
Dean Fink

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REVIEWED BY
David Loader

I HAVE to come clean and admit I found Dean Fink's *Leadership for Mortals* a hard book to review. I think I came to it a bit negatively, the title suggesting to me that the author might be on a higher plane than those mortals who try and lead. Maybe, I thought, I should skip to the last pages to see whether I was being too harsh, but Fink's concluding chapter didn't help me either, as I found unhelpful statements such as this: 'Leaders of learning are ordinary people who through extraordinary commitment, effort, and determination have become extraordinary, and have made the people around them exceptional.' Oh dear, I thought, yet as I delved into the book I began to like the 'ordinary' perspective from which Fink was coming.

Fink writes of his experience as a principal and superintendent in Canada, and this is valuable – too few books honestly tackle the inner thinking and challenges of leaders. Speaking of his experience he writes: 'I did not have to conform to the "laundry lists" of "best" practices that plague contemporary leaders, or measure up to the latest leadership model "du jour."'

Fink explains that he wrote *Leadership for Mortals* because he is critical of the contemporary state of educational leadership. He believes it limits student learning, stultifies teacher creativity and professionalism and discourages those with passion and ability from leading our schools. As he puts it, in the West, we're 'making the business of leadership so complicated that we seem to need "super heroes" to run a school.' I enjoyed more the stories from Fink's experience and liked less his attempts to generalise. For example in attempting to encourage all principals to take responsibility for their professional growth he provides seven general strategies – reading, 'riting, relating, reflecting, researching, risk taking and rehearsing – which looks a bit like the 'laundry lists' which elsewhere he criticises.

I like Fink's writing on 'invitational leadership.' He identifies core values of trust, since people who are involved in risky work need some security, and optimism, because we need hope, respect and an assurance that we are cared for. Fink's view of leadership is holistic rather than reductionist. He believes that leaders are leaders within a 'learning community' in a knowledge society. He believes that we need to continue to be learners. His learning destination has no fixed coordinates on a compass. He wants his readers to appreciate that the journey will have dead ends and detour, but, he asserts, will be worthwhile, rich and rewarding. There's insight and humour here, too. He tells of his daughter who asked what he was doing 'here.' He replied that he lived 'here.' Her reply? 'Couldn't you find a meeting to go to?'

The book is organised around challenge, commitment, values, qualities, learnings, trajectories and succession, although for mine it's better for dipping into in spare moments, at least, if you're a mortal who cares about leadership and learning.

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15–26 MARCH

EVENT **2006 XVIII Commonwealth Games** is on right now in Melbourne. Visit the official Melbourne 2006 Commonwealth Games website for heaps on aquatics, athletics, badminton, basketball, boxing, cycling, disability, gymnastics, hockey, lawn bowls, netball, rugby, shooting, squash, table tennis, triathlon, and weightlifting.

TheAustralianOlympicCommittee has also launched an online education program for primary students, built around the just-finished 2006 Olympic Winter Games in Torino, Italy.

WEBSITES
http://www.melbourne2006.com.au
http://www.olympics.com.au/youth

29–30 APRIL

EVENT **Beginning and Establishing Teachers' Association Beginning Teachers' Conference** Spirit of Learning 2006 – a residential conference.
PLACE Carlton Crest, Brisbane
CONTACT Tarmie Bryan
EMAIL tbrya4@eq.edu.au
WEBSITE
www.beta.asn.au/deliver/content.asp?pid=989

8–26 MAY

EVENT **Visions of Learning:** ASLA Online II The Australian School Library Association's international online conference will bring together educators across the globe to explore and discuss changing approaches to education in terms of evolving technologies, information services and current educational research.
WEBSITE www.asla.org.au/pd/

24–25 MAY

EVENT **Dusseldorp Skills Forum Learning Choices Expo 2006** If you're a teacher, principal, coordinator or youth worker or you're in educational policy or research you're probably working in diverse ways to engage young people in meaningful learning. This conference particularly suits those working with young people whose needs are not met in traditional classrooms.
PLACE Twin Waters Resort, Maroochydore, Queensland
CONTACT Mikaeli Costello
EMAIL mikaeli@dsf.org.au
WEBSITE www.dsf.org.au/learning-choices/expo_2006.php

25–27 MAY

EVENT **Australian College of Educators National Conference** 'Teachers Shaping Futures; Futures Shaping Teaching' The conference will address issues that impinge on teaching as a profession in the globalised world of the Twenty-first Century, with the aim of charting the future of the profession.
PLACE Holiday Inn, Adelaide
CONTACT APAPDC Events Team
EMAIL events@apapdc.edu.au

9–11 JUNE

EVENT **The Alliance of Girls' Schools – Australasia 10th Annual Conference** 'Girls to Women: Links of a Lifetime' What about the girls?
PLACE Brisbane Girls Grammar School.
CONTACT Jan Butler
EMAIL jan.butler@internode.on.net
WEBSITE www.agsa.edu.au

1 JULY ONWARDS

EVENT **ACE on the road** 'Re-imagining Educational Leadership', Professor

ACE on the road, 'Re-imagining Educational Leadership,' with Brian Caldwell.

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WEBSITE www.austcolled.com.au

8–11 JULY

EVENT **The Australian Association for the Teaching of English National Conference** 'Voices, Visions, Vibes'
PLACE Darwin High School
EMAIL john.sarev@latis.net.au

13–15 AUGUST

EVENT **Australian Council for Educational Research Research Conference** 'Boosting Science Learning: What will it take?' The conference will examine recent research and practice in the area of science education both locally and internationally, asking what it will take to boost science teaching and learning.
PLACE Hyatt Hotel, Canberra
CONTACT Conference Secretariat
PHONE 03 9853 7403
FAX 03 9835 7457
EMAIL taylor@acer.edu.au

Teacher love

Danny Katz explains why he won't be appearing on *60 Minutes* anytime soon.

I SAW a story on *60 Minutes* recently about a female schoolteacher who had a sexual relationship with one of her male students, and I found myself staring at the TV, totally pent up with rage, because this was such a shocking betrayal of the teacher-student trust, because this was such an immoral and sordid little deed and, most of all, because nothing like this ever happened between me and Mrs Valderama.

Oh, Mrs Valderama, sweet Mrs Valderama. She was my biology teacher in Year Nine and I would've happily had a big *60 Minutes*-type sex scandal with her – hey, I would've settled for a lousy little item on *Today Tonight*, following the feature segment on 'fighting flab the lazy person's way.' Yeah, I was crazy about that woman: I loved her long black hair, her small sideways nose, how she'd wear her dresses so short, you could just about see the patellar articular surface of her femur – sometimes, when she sat down at her desk, you could look all the way up to the ligaments on her intercondylar eminence. Oh, Mrs Valderama: daily I dreamed of grabbing her with lusty manliness and throwing her down upon a science benchtop, but always being very careful around the gas taps, because that was the classroom rule. What a masterpiece of genetic assemblage! I used to sit up the back of her class, hopelessly lovesick, writing love poems in the margins of my *The Web of Life* textbook: 'Mrs Valderama, you know what I'm wishin'/you and I could make a bit of binary fission.' Once I even scribbled 'DK LUVS MV 4 EVER' inside a big love-heart – actually it was inside a cross-sectional diagram of a human heart, with each of our initials in its very own ventricle. And I'll never forget the day she gave us that lesson on the reproductive cycle of plants: lordy, she left me quivering like a petri dish full of agar jelly. If that woman ever needed someone to pollinate her pistil, I'd have my stamen ready any day, *any day*.

But I have to be honest here; it wasn't just Mrs Valderama that I was super-lusty for. Oh no, my schoolboy hormones were flowing through my veins like lemon-barley cordial in a squeezy lunchbox drink-popper. I was also totally in love with Mrs Karaniki, the commerce teacher with the squeaky voice like a cartoon bear. And Mrs Benjamin, the history teacher with the teeny little chin like somebody jammed a straw into her neck and sucked out the lower half of her head. And there was the maths teacher, Miss Pearson, and the librarian's assistant, Mrs Ooi, and I even had a crush on old Joan, the canteen lady – it all started the day she gave me a free tomato sauce sachet with my sausage roll.

And that's just the point: highschool kids are always going to fall in love with their teachers because when they go through their teenage years they become saturated with uncontrollable super-strong sexual urges, and just about any adult can start looking good. One time, *one time*, I even spent forty-five sexually-confused minutes gazing longingly at Mr Hoades, the PE teacher, because he was wearing a pair of ultra-tight white gym-shorts that he must've slipped on with a shoehorn.

Teacher-love is a normal, harmless innocent rite of passage for every teenager, but teachers are *never* supposed to reciprocate this love, because sexual relationships between students and teachers are actually illegal. Thankfully, in most cases, teachers are not the least bit attracted to their students; for some peculiar reason Mrs Valderama never seemed interested in a pimply fifteen-year-old boy with greasy hair, and a gummy smile and a pair of glasses that were so heavy, I had to wrap bits of sponge around my spectacle-arms so they didn't slice off my ears.

In retrospect, though, I'm kind of glad I never had an affair with Mrs Valderama, because I would've grown tired of her as soon as the next pretty teacher came along. Yeah, I dropped Mrs Valderama quick smart, the moment I set eyes upon Miss Tuffnel, the English relief teacher. Hoooooooo boy, I'd let that woman split my infinities anytime, *anytime*.

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