

# THE PROFESSIONAL EDUCATOR



THE ACE FORUM FOR POLICY, RESEARCH AND PRACTICE IN EDUCATION

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## Well teachers, well students

Keeping teacher wellbeing  
on the agenda

Health and Physical Education  
in the national curriculum

Eating disorders: What  
teachers need to know

PLUS: Student feedback  
and professional learning,  
opinion, book review,  
ACE news



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# Health and wellbeing on the agenda

■ Debra Goldfinch, CEO

The overlap between student health and wellbeing and educational outcomes is increasingly well recognised. As someone with a background in the health profession, I am a passionate believer in the importance for educators to nurture the physical and emotional wellbeing of students as well as foster their academic development.

In this issue of *Professional Educator*, Geoff Bowser, Executive Headmaster and Director of Wellbeing at Wycliffe Christian School, describes his own learning journey and observations made over four decades, including a welcome shift over time to a more positive focus on student welfare. However, he observes that 'educators, mental health workers and social commentators alike are noting a significant increase in the incidence of mental health problems, including anxiety and depression, in school aged children and adolescents.' Wellbeing has become the centrepiece of his school's community.

In another firsthand account of a specific school based health initiative, Jim Pennington describes how a fitness program and simple visual cues in the dining hall have been developed to educate students about healthy nutrition with considerable improvements in the level of students' health and wellbeing recorded. While Mr Pennington's students may now be full of energy, this isn't the case for all students. Psychologist Sally-Anne McCormack has some interesting suggestions for organising the school timetable to better align with the adolescent body clock.

Educators are often on the front line in the battle many students face against health and wellbeing problems including



depression, anxiety and eating disorders. It is important that they are aware of these issues and their signs. Natalie Wild provides timely advice to teachers on the signs a student may have an eating disorder and how to seek help.

The health and wellbeing of teachers must not be forgotten. Faye McCallum and Deborah Price have researched teacher wellbeing over a number of years and their University of South Australia education students complete a course component on teacher and learner wellbeing. Their article describes the principle of 'well teachers, well students' that the course is based on. A new research paper from the National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER) outlines an examination of the personal and career development needs of lead vocational teachers through the

Educators, mental health workers and social commentators alike are noting a significant increase in the incidence of mental health problems, including anxiety and depression, in school aged children and adolescents.

conceptual framework of Spirituality at Work.

The previous edition of *Professional Educator* considered a range of issues in pre-service teacher education. As a follow up to those discussions, Jean Russell presents a student feedback tool that she has developed to strengthen teachers' self-regulated professional learning and enhance their teaching practice.

I hope you find the information presented in this edition of *Professional Educator* stimulating and thought provoking.

Your feedback is very welcome. ACE hopes to introduce letters to the editor in future issues and we would love to hear from you.

Please send any feedback or suggestions you have to [ace@austcolled.com.au](mailto:ace@austcolled.com.au) ■

# Keeping teacher wellbeing on the agenda

■ Dr Faye McCallum, MACE  
 ■ Dr Deborah Price  
 University of South Australia

The last edition of *Professional Educator* (V11, Issue 1, 2012) identified current challenges for teaching and teacher education. These provided the impetus to write this article to raise awareness about, and highlight the importance of teacher wellbeing, a notion often silenced in many debates. Some of the challenges raised throughout the edition will be briefly mentioned. Firstly, the merits, or not, of the length and type of teacher preparation were suggested to be inadequate for preparing teachers for the challenges posed by teaching today. We would add that the quality of the graduates from teacher programs are not a direct result of the length of the program, but the quality of the entrants in the beginning (which is not solely due to the ATAR), and the quality of the actual program. Like the schooling sector, Higher Education faces many demands in the current de-regulated market, of most note the endorsement by MCEECDYA of the *Teacher Standards and Procedures for the Accreditation of Initial Teacher Education Programs*. Developed by AITSL, they describe the key features expected of high quality teacher education. In this context, the design and planning phase of programs are challenged requiring universities to perform a balancing act to meet standards, fulfil professional experience requirements, and to be creative about managing the crowded curriculum.

Secondly, *The National Certification* scheme promoted professional learning to link pay to performance. It was stressed that new methods will be needed for assessing the standards for teacher

knowledge and practices, and professional engagement. Guidelines will be needed to assist teachers in preparing evidence of their teaching and students' learning; of new technologies used; including student evaluation of teachers; a set of assessments will need development; there will be procedures for training assessors; teachers will need to be part of assessment development teams; teachers will need to be involved in pilots; and, field tests. This, it is mooted could restore teachers' esteem in the community because of the emphasis on quality; and it could lead to attracting better people into teaching (p 10,11).

Thirdly, the importance of early childhood education and care is highlighted because of recent changes by the NQF (*National Quality Framework*). None would question the fact that every child must have the best early learning opportunities possible and that this is directly linked to the quality of early childhood educators and environments that improve children's wellbeing, language and social skills to enable them to be school and 'life' ready. Alison Elliott (p13) makes the point though, that a major hurdle to meeting the new regulatory requirements and ensuring quality, is guaranteeing a sufficient supply of qualified teachers.

*The Staff in Australia's Schools Report* (SiAS) released in 2012, provided interesting data and analysis with one illuminating statistic that warrants our attention. We refer to p27 where it is stated that 7% of primary teachers and 9% of secondary teachers intend to leave teaching within three years. In a 2010 article, McCallum & Price reported on

the global status of teacher retention discussing the many reasons purported to why graduates were leaving within a five year time frame. In that article they refer to research conducted by Graeme Hugo in 2007 who reported that teaching was seen as a short-term career by many beginning teachers, and that teacher stress and heavy workloads explained why many young teachers were leaving. So, we wonder why this is when we experience graduates leaving university, anxious but also full of determination and passion, well equipped to transition to work as a teacher in their own right. It is an interesting observation in Universities at this time of the year where we witness that many pre-service teachers gravitate to the field of education through an innate predisposition to care and connect with students, within which the territory encompasses significant social and emotional investment. Currently we are experiencing a period where financial, environmental, political and societal influences have seen an increase in social and emotional wellbeing issues faced in society. These factors have seemingly influenced rising mental health, anxiety and stress levels being experienced. Teachers are not exempt from these pressures. For us though, the importance of teacher wellbeing, sometimes referred to as 'teacher fitness' by some of our graduates, has an important place in teacher preparation and retention. We approach teacher wellbeing, not as an individual responsibility but as a shared one where the pre-school and schooling sectors must work in partnership with the employing authorities and professional associations to keep wellbeing a key



feature of teacher induction, mentoring and ongoing professional development programs. Thus, it is a collective concern and professional responsibility.

And finally, Bethany the pre-service teacher reminded us of the importance of wellbeing being core in teacher education and that it is a big factor in the attraction, retention and sustainability of the profession. As teacher educators, we are privileged to work on a daily basis with 'bright young things' that enter the profession for all the right reasons but we find that a growing challenge for these pre-service teachers is their state of wellbeing, as summed up by Bethany when she states, '... the excitement and positivity my peers and I feel right now are balanced by some trepidation surrounding the high expectations involved in this career choice' (p22). This is a common story experienced in Schools of Education around the country.

At the University of South Australia, graduates from the Bachelor of Education (primary/middle) degree complete a core course addressing learner and teacher wellbeing in their final semester. Central to this course is the principle of 'well teachers, well students' (McCallum & Price 2010). Explicit teaching centres on examining personal and professional identity, agency, emotional intelligence and teacher resilience. Within professional learning communities established in seminars, students explore enabling and inhibiting factors which influence physical, cognitive, social, emotional and spiritual dimensions of wellbeing, identifying protective factors to sustain teacher wellbeing as they transition to the workforce. Raising awareness of the influence of change, minimising the number of changes at any one time, or if unavoidable, setting structures of support in place to minimise the effect, skills emerging teachers in resilience and development of proactive attitudes that embrace opportunities created by change. Integrating multi-dimensional and holistic wellbeing elements

across the curriculum through teacher programming, not only addresses teacher wellbeing needs, but models the significance of wellbeing for students. Furthermore, the course focuses on relational notions of wellbeing and the significance of supportive networks both personally and professionally including family, friends, mentors, coaches, colleagues and community connections. Student course evaluation comments highlight the importance of focusing explicitly on teacher wellbeing. These include;

- For the course to be run at this point in my education has been greatly beneficial for all aspects of my wellbeing and life outside of the classroom. Strategies and ideas for how this can be implemented within the classroom and passed onto students has been the highlight of this course.
- I think this course has been crucial in highlighting the need for teachers to be aware of their students' wellbeing, as well as keeping their own wellbeing in check. It is so easy to become run down and exhausted as a teacher (you learn that after just a few days on prac!) and without giving us the opportunity to learn coping strategies it may become all too easy for pre-service teachers to feel that it is all too hard.
- This course was a great way to really focus on what wellbeing meant and ways we could ensure our own wellbeing as well as other students while we are out teaching.

The success of this course has had a direct influence on the re-design of the Bachelor of Education which will offer a minor (four courses) in teacher wellbeing in its new Program from 2013. This minor will address teacher wellbeing in various contexts that have traditionally challenged teacher resilience; teaching in regional and rural areas, in leadership, and in diverse communities. Wellbeing, as a notion, is still questioned by some academics and researchers as being 'soft', under-theorised and is a factor that has no direct influence on student learning and achievement. We would

argue that teacher wellbeing has a direct influence on student wellbeing, success, happiness and achievement.

Wellbeing has continued to evolve through varying constructs since the 1960s originating with notions of fulfilling one's potential and progressing through foci including economic, health, children, female, balanced lifestyle, holistic, social/emotional, meaning in life, subjective and relational. Definitions of wellbeing are varied including 'a state of being comfortable, healthy and happy' (Holmes 2005) and the DECS Learner Wellbeing Framework from birth to Year 12 describing, 'wellbeing is a holistic subjective state which is present when a range of feelings, among them energy, confidence, openness, enjoyment, happiness, calm, and caring are combined and balanced' (Roberts 2005 cited in DECS 2007). Wellbeing is not purely about having fixed individual traits, rather it is a fluid notion influenced by relationships, situatedness, individual traits, productivity and engagement in life experiences. Wellbeing is different for each individual and the communities they occupy at varying points in time.

What is undeniable, is the continuing focus on wellbeing within emerging policy, legislation and government initiatives including National Safe Schools Framework, The Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians (2009), COAG National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children 2009-2020 and AITSL Standards (4.4). The central focus on early childhood interventions and learner wellbeing and safety continues to provide overarching frameworks within crowded curriculums and compounding this is the tension between whose responsibility it is for promoting wellbeing. However, if wellbeing is more than individual traits and incorporates relational components, then surely a collective and community approach is needed?

University of South Australia graduates from the Bachelor of Education (primary/middle) degree describe how they have been scaffolded throughout their program to build capacities and ownership for both their professional and personal wellbeing and identity. In addressing teacher wellbeing, pre-service teachers engage in self-awareness and internal reflection in relation to values, strengths, hopes, dreams, obstacles and aspirations, whilst identifying circles of influence and strategies to increase the sphere of influence. Mapping wellbeing trajectories, challenges pre-service teachers to self-identify peaks, troughs and plateaus experienced in life,

whilst critiquing the issues and factors which influence these patterns. This empowers pre-service teachers in decision making, problem solving, resilience and goal setting abilities. Awareness of the 'self' promotes capacities for self-regulation of social and emotional wellbeing, thus enhancing locus of control. Within safe professional learning communities, pre-service teachers are exposed to diversity and commonality of individual experiences, thus enhancing empathy and respect for others. The centrality of relational and community notions of wellbeing are at the core of sustained teacher wellbeing and it is this assertion that equips teachers with emotional intelligence and confidence in self, professionally and personally, as they transition to the workplace.

Graduating teacher feedback consistently identifies the significance of relationships as fundamental to achievement. Whilst the composition of relationships varies significantly from individual to individual, pre-service teachers identify the importance of a single or collective network of support encompassing friends, family, peers, academic staff, school mentors, leadership members, community groups and University liaison personnel. These relationships are fluid, continually evolving, and underpinned by trust and respect. Pre-service teachers are scaffolded throughout their degree from intensive support networks provided through larger cohorts of peers in professional experience, to pair/buddy systems, and ultimately to individual work placements as self-confidence advances. The professional learning community created between the pre-service teacher, mentor and University liaison, promotes skills in initiating and sustaining professional relationships.

Variations in collaborative group work are integrated within pre-service teacher programs to enhance skills in cooperation, conflict resolution, negotiation, team work, communication, and empathy. The notion of belonging is a significant factor in the quality and effectiveness of such group work. Being valued as a member of a community, equates to increased engagement, participation, effort and creativity, thus enhancing the quality of collective outputs and achievements.

Creating opportunities for professional learning communities traversing across university, educational sites and community groups, is core to providing authentic networks of support within the profession. Place based opportunities in special education, physical education, science, mathematics, society and environment or community settings, builds self confidence in personal skills



and abilities through active contribution within professional learning communities, as well as promoting a sense of belonging and identity. These capacities enhance sustained participation and adaptation to future variations of professional learning communities. If emerging teachers are aware of individual, relational and community notions of wellbeing and their influence on learner wellbeing, how can teacher wellbeing be sustained throughout their career? Furthermore, how can existing teachers be supported in their wellbeing?

Relational and community wellbeing initiatives such as mentoring, coaching, working in partnership and belonging to a community, are the key to sustained teacher wellbeing and productivity. An example being initiatives such as the *Schools for Excellence* program, which links university students with 'expert' teachers as mentors in diverse school sites. These not only value existing skills and knowledge of experienced teachers, but build professional learning communities that support graduating teachers as they transition to diverse school settings, such as rural, remote and special education. Reciprocal learning occurs integrating experience, 21st century teaching pedagogies, energy and curriculum knowledge between emerging and



experienced teachers, enhancing lifelong learning qualities of all educators.

Returning to the beginning of this article, we summarised some of the key areas challenging educators today. Although designed with good intentions, we question whether we are neglecting to build social capital, 'the forms of trust and mutuality that hold communities together', that is essential to wellbeing. Bourdieu's (1986) concept of social capital provides a conceptual framework to support the argument that community plays a key role in positively influencing learner wellbeing, engagement and achievement. Irrespective of the approach for achieving school-community connection, increasingly, community is being linked to learning and the role the community can serve in supporting the school's young people is significant. Others go on to add that a Sense of Community requires: membership (relatedness to others and feelings of belonging); influence (making a difference and mattering to a group); fulfilment of needs (the reinforcement of behaviour that binds people in a close community) and, shared emotional connection (encompasses members of the community sharing history, experiences and places with one another). Many researchers have affirmed

the powerful impact school-community connection can have on student wellbeing and engagement in learning. Drawing on the theory of Communities of Practice we suggest there are three benefits that relate to teacher wellbeing and the sustainability of the profession:

- That Well teachers (those in a Community of Practice) are able to take on the stewardship of the profession;
- That Well teachers are able to cross boundaries (that is, manage change; meet work demands; take on new roles or requirements) and this gives them a sense of identity and confidence; and
- When Well teachers build their own community of practice, they can understand their participation in the context of the broader enterprise.

So, for us, wellbeing is central to teacher's work but it is an area that needs to be taken seriously if we are to attract quality people to the profession and if we are determined to improve teacher retention for the sustainability of the profession and to improve learning outcomes for children and young people. The question lies in whether teacher wellbeing has a significant influence on advancing national and local agendas on quality teaching and learning outcomes, expert teaching initiatives and if so, then

where does the responsibility to the building and sustaining capacity of quality teaching lie? ■

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# Health and Physical Education in the Australian Curriculum: Opportunity, responsibility and equity

■ Dawn Penney

Faculty of Education, University of Waikato  
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In a presentation last year to health and physical education (HPE) professionals in New Zealand my emphasis was that irrespective of whether people choose to acknowledge it or not, everyone's responses to policy developments and furthermore, their everyday practice, play a part in determining 'possible futures' for HPE. 'Active' and 'passive' responses (with the latter typically characterised by 'no response') reaffirm or potentially challenge widely held and often narrow perceptions about teaching and learning in physical education. I therefore stressed the importance of engaging with opportunities that policy developments present for us to extend thinking about HPE, and possibilities for future practice. More specifically, I highlighted that policy developments need to be seen as a chance to extend both quality and equity in HPE (Penney, 2011).

Looking from 'across the ditch' I similarly see the ongoing development of HPE in the Australian Curriculum as simultaneously raising issues of professional responsibility and presenting professional opportunities. Both the responsibility and opportunity arguably centre on a simple choice; to retain status quo (whatever that looks like in any HPE program or lesson) or extend the boundaries of current thinking and practice in relation to what can legitimately happen in the name of HPE in schools. Here I take a brief look at some of the issues associated with that choice.

## Scope for slippage...but in what direction/s?

In his recent interview in *Professional Educator*, Bob Lingard (2012) said 'I've learned that one of the problems with looking overseas is that we often borrow policy from elsewhere rather than learn from policy elsewhere'. Perhaps the most important lessons arising from past developments within Australia and internationally relate to the notion of 'scope for slippage' amidst

the interpretation and implementation of new official curriculum texts (Ball, 1990; Bowe & Ball with Gold, 1992; Penney & Evans, 1999). Texts such as the Australian Curriculum will never in and of themselves fully define the learning opportunities that will arise in the name of HPE. Rather, texts and the political, social, economic and institutional contexts that they relate to, combine to shape boundaries to possible (legitimate) responses amidst enactment of new curriculum requirements. As Bob Lingard and others have highlighted, the global and national context in which the Australian Curriculum is being advanced are dominated by discourses (of accountability and performativity) that seem destined to constrain rather than nurture creative policy responses in schools or classrooms. Thinking about the possible ways in which official curriculum texts can be enacted in curriculum, pedagogy and assessment in any school is consequently narrowed, and there is then a danger that the progressive intent of the Melbourne Declaration may be lost.

Yet, the 'flip side' is that amidst constraints, the scope for varied interpretations of official texts and a range of approaches in implementation can never be totally eroded. The prospective 'flexibility within boundaries' that schools, teachers and teacher educators will have to explore amidst the process of developing HPE curriculum, pedagogy and assessment 'as' the Australian Curriculum remains undeniably important. The extent and nature of the flexibility presented; the desire and capability to engage with it; and what specific interests underpin how we engage with new official texts, are three key professional issues for health and physical educators. So, if I return to the notion of 'scope for slippage', one of the clearest lessons to be learnt from many developments is that slippage can be exploited with contrasting agendas. Understandably, one agenda will be to maintain established programs and practice. The response



of accommodating policy change with minimal disruption to familiar programs and pedagogies was poignantly captured in the title of a paper arising from the implementation of the national curriculum for physical education in England and Wales over 20 years ago; 'the more things change the more they stay the same' (Curtner-Smith, 1999). Yet, this response, like any other, is not neutral and an outcome of 'no change' only arises by virtue of professional decisions and actions directed to that outcome. In saying this there is a need to counter the impression of criticism. Amidst any reform it is crucial to acknowledge the strengths of current programs and practice, and there is every justification in pursuing ways in which those strengths can be retained and advanced amidst (or despite) new curriculum frameworks and requirements. Indeed, in 2009 the Australian Council for Health, Physical Education and Recreation (ACHPER) emphasised that 'Enhancing HPE nationally in Australia should draw upon best practice across all the States and Territories'. But the notion of what constitutes 'good' or 'best' practice in HPE, like 'quality', is open to debate and needs to be problematised. Like Bob Lingard I see a need for equity and social justice to be at the fore of any engagement

with policy, and to be informing debates about the merits and shortcomings of current practice. Greater equity in HPE is the agenda that in my view now needs to underpin readings of and responses to new official texts as development of HPE in the Australian Curriculum progresses.

#### **Pursuing slippage and pursuing equity in HPE: Curriculum, pedagogy and assessment.**

Focusing on equity then raises a number of questions, including where, amidst implementation of new official texts, we see the greatest potential to 'do different things' and/or 'do things differently' in HPE, but also, what differences in learning opportunities and/or learning outcomes we are seeking when contemplating any changes to current curriculum, pedagogy and/or assessment in HPE. My interest is in pursuing opportunities to extend the 'knowledge boundaries' to/of HPE, such that more students will feel able and enabled in and by their experiences of HPE. The knowledge boundaries I am referring to centre on two issues that can be summed up as the 'what' and 'how' of curriculum. The first relates to content selection, structuring and sequencing - encompassing what is deemed (and currently accepted as) appropriate

curriculum content to include in HPE at any stage/phase, or in a unit of work associated with a given curriculum strand. The latter relates to the accepted ways in which HPE skills, knowledge and understandings can be developed in and through pedagogy, and demonstrated for assessment purposes. The significance of these issues from an equity perspective is that established and largely unquestioned limits relating to both the 'what' and 'how' of HPE knowledge and learning are inherently tied to differentiated opportunities for students to have their abilities recognised in HPE and to be supported as learners. Curriculum is always selective and as such, represents a judgement call not only about the relative worth of various knowledge in/of HPE, but also about dominant social values and hierarchies. We cannot avoid selections in developing official HPE texts, designing HPE programs or any particular lesson. Decisions about curriculum, pedagogy and assessment are integral to professional responsibility and rightfully so. But a key issue is awareness that all decisions present an opportunity to either pursue greater equity, or let established inequities go unchallenged. A choice to focus on some aspects of content more than others, to choose particular contexts for learning, to



adopt particular pedagogic approaches, group students in certain ways, focus assessment on certain knowledge, skills and/or understandings, or expect these to be demonstrated in particular ways, are all necessary choices – but never neutral. All will variously frame students' differing opportunities to achieve in HPE and beyond it. As curriculum makers, teachers and teacher educators are thus implicated in educational and social processes that either sustain or challenge inequities in HPE and in society.

#### Flexibility and greater equity—realistic or an illusion?

It is all very well to present HPE curriculum, pedagogy and assessment as all offering avenues for change directed towards greater equity, and to point to creative readings of new official texts as the means by which to pursue that. But there is no assurance that this will be a common policy response, or widely regarded as a realistic one. Only in time, with the release of official texts and perhaps more importantly, professional debate about how they might be read, what possibilities for HPE curriculum, pedagogy and assessment can they be interpreted as

prompting or enabling, and furthermore, how any possibilities are seen in relation to individual school contexts, will we have a clearer view of what flexibility new official curriculum texts are seen to present from a professional standpoint. At this point in time I thus encourage people to put equity to the fore when considering draft documents and thinking about what they might translate to in terms of future practice.

If I return to my position 'across the ditch' the recent history is of significant reduction in the content and detail of official texts, with just two pages available to outline the HPE learning area in the 2007 New Zealand Curriculum document. In New Zealand and internationally, 'flexibility' is an increasingly popular discourse amidst the development and introduction of new curriculum requirements. It is one that I expect to be prominent as the Australian Curriculum progresses. Politically, it offers a means of alleviating underlying tensions. In HPE specifically, it may well play a similar function, opening doors to variations in how specifications for the learning area may translate into programs, lessons and learning experiences in any school. In

essence the text can do no more than that – open doors, present opportunities – that I have argued, in the interests of equity, we have a professional responsibility to take up. ■

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# The Big Equity Challenge

## Inclusive Education, Gifted Education, Special Education: meeting complex learning needs

Tuesday 8 & Wednesday 9 May 2012  
MCG, Melbourne

### Keynotes

**Underachievement in gifted and talented students? Paradox or predicament?**

*Prof Miraca Gross AM*

**ICE (Imagination Creativity Education) and the 88.88% hidden factors that bind all achievers – accelerated, normed, delayed**

*Prof Blaine E Hatt*

**The inclusion of Learners with special needs into schools of the 21st century: legal requirements, community perceptions and the reality of effective classroom practice**

*Dr Loretta Giorelli OAM*

**Who Children Are: Evidence Equals Equity – constructive collaboration between health and education**

*Dr Paul Hutchins AM*

**The Big Equity Challenge in the Context of the National Education Reform Agenda**

*Tony Mackay*

This unique conference brings together leading researchers and practitioners in the fields of inclusive, disability, special and gifted education to share their expertise and knowledge on creating quality educational outcomes for all students. The purpose of the conference is to bridge the current research-practice gap and nurture collegial and educational dialogue on the most effective ways of catering for the diversity of students.

The conference will be of interest to a wide range of educators, including school and system/sector leaders, specialist and mainstream teachers, teacher assistants, curriculum coordinators and others interested in catering for diverse student needs. It will showcase contemporary evidence-based research and practice of quality interventions for students with additional learning needs and create opportunities for delegates to meet others who share similar interests, passions and concerns.

Over two days, delegates will have the opportunity to participate in an extensive and diverse range of workshops and will leave with information to assist them to support system, whole school, cohort and classroom processes and strategies.

For further information on sessions available and to register please go to [www.cse.edu.au](http://www.cse.edu.au) or phone us on 1800 001 220.

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# Eating disorders: What teachers need to know

■ Natalie Wild

**E**ating disorders are often surrounded by myths and assumptions, on occasion, resulting in masking the issues or making them worse. So, what are teachers looking for in a student that may be at risk of, or suffering from an Eating Disorder, and what can they do to assist in prevention, support for students, positive role modelling and mindful messages?

While eating disorders can certainly affect males and females of all ages and backgrounds, the average age of onset for Anorexia Nervosa, Bulimia Nervosa and disordered eating takes place during adolescence. It is likely that teachers and other school staff will, at some stage, encounter a student with an eating disorder. It is therefore important that you are familiar with eating disorders and know where to find information to help a student.

## What Is An Eating Disorder?

An Eating Disorder is a serious and complex issue relating to eating behaviours, body image, and weight with strong medical and psychological components. Both women and men at any age can develop an eating disorder. People with an eating disorder can also be on any spectrum of the weight range and may not be underweight. Eating disorders

are characterised by severe disturbances in eating behaviour, and perception of body shape and weight. Someone with an eating disorder will most often assess him/herself in terms of weight and shape, and engage in sometimes extreme behaviours to control this. It is important to realise that even though eating disorders are primarily about food, the eating aspect is merely the outward sign of the issues that are underlying it. Therefore, recovery from an eating disorder is not as simple as 'just eating normally'.

## Eating Disorders and Adolescents

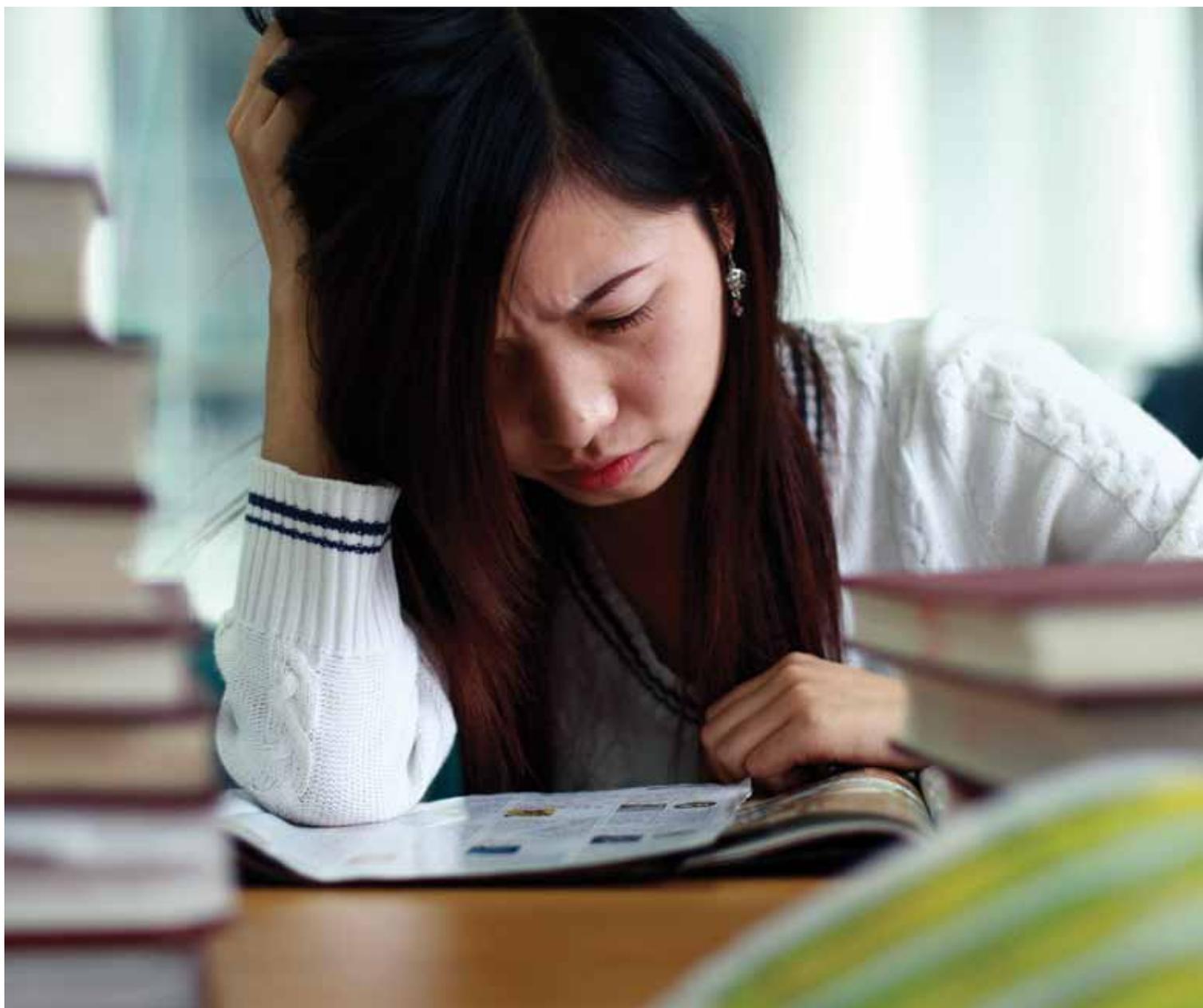
Although eating disorders are usually a result of a number of personal, environmental, psychological, biological and social factors, it seems that adolescents are the most at-risk group of people in developing an eating disorder, and this is due to a number of factors.

The period of adolescence is one of intense change which can bring with it a great deal of stress, confusion and anxiety for many. The physical transformation that takes place during this time is enormous and often intertwined with feelings of self-consciousness, low self esteem and comparison with peers. In addition there are hormonal and brain changes taking place which affect a person physically,

mentally, emotionally and psychologically. There is also the issue of social and environmental change, with the period of early adolescence often being a time when a person will change schools, friendship groups and perhaps develop an interest in the opposite or same sex. All in all, adolescence is a time when many big changes take place in a seemingly short period of time whereby a person may feel tremendous pressure to find their place in the world despite a great deal of confusion, and a sense of feeling ill-equipped or welcome to the plethora of changes around them.

In light of the stress and confusion that accompanies the period of adolescence, it is little surprise that an individual may struggle to deal with the whirlwind of change, uncertainty and often low self esteem. Eating disorders are very often a coping mechanism for people to attempt to gain control of their situation when they feel helpless in the face of other aspects of their life. When this quest for control goes too far, the risk of developing an eating disorder dramatically increases.

In addition, body image concerns and peer pressure are heightened during the period of adolescence, and are potential risk factors in the development of an eating disorder.



### Warning signs

Teachers may be among the first to notice the signs of an eating disorder. Warning signs are both physical and behavioural. Although rapid weight loss is often the first sign to trigger concern for most people, a large majority of people with an eating disorder do not look frail, skeletal or overweight. This is because we all have different body shapes and sizes, and, of the four types of Eating Disorders, restriction of food is often only a component of the issues that can surround the disorder. Noticing a change in thoughts, feelings and behaviours are a more accurate measure of wellness.

The list of warning signs and risk factors are comprehensive, as is the detail on the different types of Eating Disorders, which I strongly encourage you to take the time to read in full at [www.eatingdisorders.org.au](http://www.eatingdisorders.org.au).

Some of the warning signs and risk factors you are more likely to observe within a classroom or during lunch breaks include these behavioural and physical warning signs.

It is important to realise that these warning signs may not be as easy to detect as they sound. The person with the eating disorder often experiences shame or guilt about their behaviour, and will try to hide it. Also, many people with eating disorders do not realise they have a problem, or even if they do they will not want to give up their behaviour at first, because it is their mechanism for coping with an issue. Thus they will go to extraordinary lengths to hide the signs of their behaviour.

It is important to note that any combination of these symptoms can be present in an eating disorder, because no one eating disorder is exactly the same as

another. It is also possible for a person to demonstrate several of these signs and yet not have an eating disorder. If you are unsure whether a student may have an eating disorder, it is always best to seek a professional opinion. We suggest calling the EDV helpline for a list of professionals in the area who have knowledge of Eating Disorders.

### Prevention

The best form of prevention is positive role modelling. When discussing health with students reduce where possible, the focus on weight, BMI's, size, diets, and regiment around food types. These things are simply 'guides' and not something that should be a main focus. Look at the students in your classroom. Are they all the same height, shape, bone structure? Are they all active/inactive? Do you have some



that can consume ‘anything’ and others that need to be mindful of ‘everything’? Do they have the same genetics, skin, eye or hair colour? Of course not. Now task yourself how these very different individuals can possibly sit within the same weight, BMI, food requirement and size ranges?

Focus instead on health and wellbeing, moderation and mindful eating (for more information on what mindful eating is, visit [www.eatingdisorders.org.au](http://www.eatingdisorders.org.au)). Focus on hunger and fullness signals, and wherever possible, keep weighing and measuring, especially if comparing with peers, out of the curriculum entirely. The focus on obesity in schools has, in a lot of ways, created more mental health issues, anxieties within adolescents and rigidity around food, than ever before. Education around food and what ‘normal’ eating is, would be a more effective and non judgemental way to get the message across, nurturing mental health issues and creating awareness of difference at the same time.

If you recognise any of the risk factors in a student, work on challenging their ‘perfectionist’ belief system and self expectations that they may have in regard to their class work and social experiences. Talk about the differences between ‘real’ personal capabilities versus ‘ideal’ expectations of self. How different are they? Another helpful discussion is creating awareness around the things students can control, such as how you react to something, whether or not you study or if an assignment is in on time and the things that you have no control over including other people’s reactions, thoughts and feelings, an exam outcome or the weather. These conversations are a gentle way of challenging black and white thinking, self esteem issues and self belief systems.

### Support

If you recognise some of the warning signs in a student, your ongoing role of prevention, may also become one of support. Students may choose to confide in a teacher they trust, before sharing their concerns with family or friends.

If you feel one of your students may have an Eating Disorder remember that early intervention is a key to promoting recovery from an eating disorder. If you have concerns that somebody close to you may be developing or experiencing difficulties with food,

it is important to try to broach the issue with the person. Do not ignore it; it will not go away.

Where possible, encourage the person to gain knowledge on eating disorders and see if they feel any of the information is relevant to them. If their response is positive, suggest they seek professional help from counsellors, doctors, youth workers, community health centres and organisations such as Eating Disorders Victoria.

Reassure the person you are there to help and support them and they are not alone in their situation. Encourage them to seek support from the people in their life who love them, including their friends and family, and encourage the person to see the benefits of a life without an eating disorder.

If you feel a student is medically compromised and they are under 18, immediate medical support needs to be accessed and families notified, following your school protocol.

### Seek support for yourself

It is important that you keep yourself supported. If you are feeling affected by a student’s behaviors or responses, debrief with your peers, any professionals associated with your school, or feel free to call the helpline at Eating Disorders Victoria on 1300 550 236.

More extensive information about eating disorders, including the types of eating disorders, more about the warning signs of an eating disorder, the risk factors and advice on how to approach someone you feel may have an eating disorder is available from Eating Disorders Victoria.

Our website at [www.eatingdisorders.org.au](http://www.eatingdisorders.org.au) has a range of information available to help you approach a student, colleague or loved one who you are concerned for. This information includes fact sheets, brochures and lists of services. ■

To find out about and request an information sheet from EDV, contact the Eating Disorders Helpline on 1300 550 236 or email [help@eatingdisorders.org.au](mailto:help@eatingdisorders.org.au)

Natalie Wild is Recovery Support Officer with Eating Disorders Victoria

## Warning signs of an eating disorder

Warning signs and risk factors educators are likely to observe within a classroom or during lunch breaks.

### Behavioural Warning Signs

- Constant or repetitive dieting (eg. counting calories/kilojoules, skipping meals, fasting, avoidance of certain food groups or types such as meat or dairy, replacing meals with fluids)
- Evidence of vomiting or laxative abuse (eg. frequent trips to the bathroom during or shortly after meals)
- Excessive or compulsive exercise patterns (eg. exercising even when injured, or in bad weather, refusal to interrupt exercise for any reason; insistence on performing a certain number of repetitions of exercises, exhibiting distress if unable to exercise)
- Making lists of 'good' and 'bad' foods
- Changes in food preferences (eg. refusing to eat certain foods, claiming to dislike foods previously enjoyed, sudden interest in 'healthy eating')
- Development of patterns or obsessive rituals around food preparation and eating (eg. insisting meals must always be at a certain time; only using a certain knife; only drinking out of a certain cup)
- Avoidance of all social situations involving food
- Frequent avoidance of eating meals by giving excuses (eg. claiming they have already eaten or have an intolerance/allergy to particular foods)
- Strong focus on body shape and weight (eg. interest in weight-loss websites, dieting tips in books and magazines, images of thin people)
- Development of repetitive or obsessive body checking behaviours (eg. pinching waist or wrists, repeated weighing of self, excessive time spent looking in mirrors)
- Social withdrawal or isolation from friends, including avoidance of previously enjoyed activities
- Change in clothing style, such as wearing baggy clothes
- Deceptive behaviour around food, such as secretly throwing food out, eating in secret (often only noticed due to many wrappers or food containers found in the bin) or lying about amount or type of food consumed
- Eating very slowly (eg. eating with teaspoons, cutting food into small pieces and eating one at a time, rearranging food on plate)
- Continual denial of hunger

### Physical Warning Signs

- Sudden or rapid weight loss
- Frequent changes in weight
- Sensitivity to the cold (feeling cold most of the time, even in warm environments)
- Signs of frequent vomiting - swollen cheeks/jawline, calluses on knuckles, or damage to teeth
- Fainting, dizziness
- Fatigue - always feeling tired, unable to perform normal activities
- Increased preoccupation with body shape, weight and appearance
- Intense fear of gaining weight
- Constant preoccupation with food or with activities relating to food
- Extreme body dissatisfaction/negative body image
- Distorted body image (eg. complaining of being/feeling/looking fat when actually a healthy weight or underweight)
- Heightened sensitivity to comments or criticism about body shape or weight, eating or exercise habits
- Heightened anxiety around meal times
- Depression or anxiety
- Moodiness or irritability
- Low self-esteem (eg. feeling worthless, feelings of shame, guilt or self-loathing)
- Rigid 'black and white' thinking (viewing everything as either 'good' or 'bad')
- Feelings of life being 'out of control'
- Feelings of being unable to control behaviours around food
- Fear of growing up/taking on adult responsibility

### Risk Factors

Below is a list of potential risk factors for the development of an eating disorder which are standard across all age groups and genders. Individuals who display a number of these risk factors are considered to be at a higher risk of developing an eating disorder.

### Psychological Factors

- Low self-esteem
- Feelings of inadequacy
- Incidence of depression or anxiety
- Fear of the responsibility of adulthood
- A belief that love from family & friends is dependent on high achievement
- Poor communication between family members, or the reluctance of parents to allow appropriate degrees of independence as children mature



- Difficulty expressing emotions and feelings, particularly 'negative' emotions such as anger, sadness, anxiety or fear
- Ineffective coping strategies
- Perfectionism
- Fear or avoidance of conflict
- Competitiveness
- Impulsive or obsessive behaviours
- A need to please others
- Prone to extremes, such as 'black and white' thinking

### Social Factors

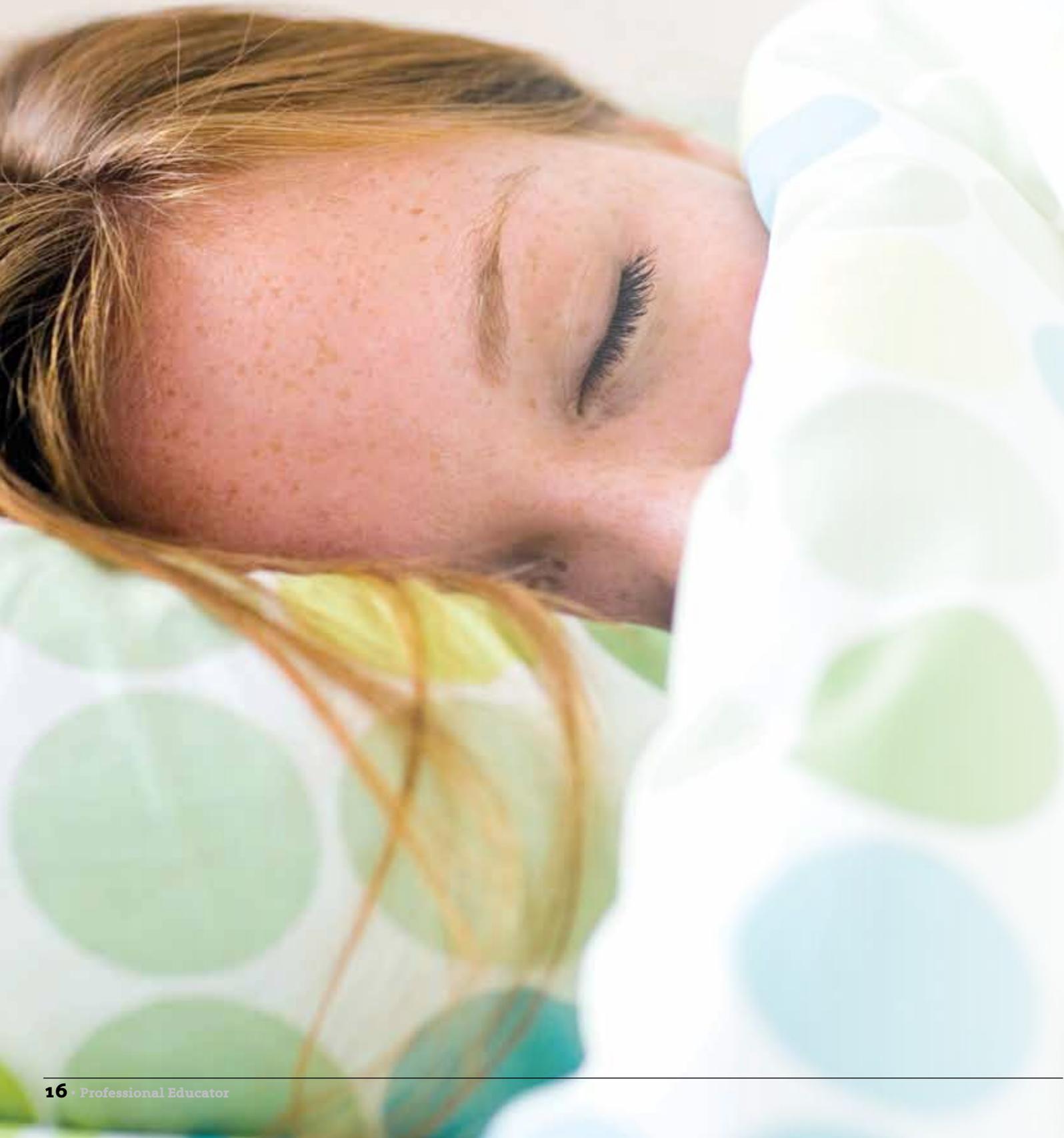
- Cultural value placed on 'thinness' as an inextricable part of beauty
- Current cultural emphasis on the need for a 'perfect body'
- Valuing of people according to outward appearance and not inner qualities
- Media and popular culture's portrayal of men and women's shapes and bodies that are not representative of 'real' men and women
- Pressure to achieve and succeed
- Professions with an emphasis on body shape and size (eg. dancers, models, athletes)

### External Factors

- Life events, particularly those involving major changes (eg. loss of a family member or friend, the divorce or separation of parents, moving schools)
- Dieting
- Peer pressure
- Inability to effectively deal with stress, whereby a person lacks adequate stress-management strategies
- Personal or family history of obesity, depression, substance abuse or eating disorders
- Troubled personal or family relationships
- Sexual or physical abuse
- History of teasing or bullying, particularly when based on weight or shape

# Sleepy teens need altered timetable

■ Sally-Anne McCormack



**A**dolescence is a time of many changes. Socially, during this period between childhood and adulthood, adolescents want to become more independent. Physically they are growing in all different directions - some that they are happy with, others that they are not. The hormones kick in and in some teens this causes pimples, mood swings and may lead to insecurities or confusion. There are countless other changes that occur during this period which do not need to be described here but are well-recognised by parents and teachers alike.

In many respects teenagers are transitioning towards adulthood, but we need to understand that there are distinct differences between adults, children and adolescents which explain why we manage these stages differently. One of the points of difference between adolescence and children or adults is sleep. A plethora of recent research in the area of sleep shows us that the circadian rhythms which are responsible for our sleep cycle change during adolescence. Anyone familiar with teens (and we may remember our own passage through adolescence) will know that many children who were previously early risers seem to 'suddenly' become immovable dead-weights on school mornings. Many people have previously attributed this to teens being 'lazy' but in fact we now know that the same chemical, melatonin, that starts the adult sleep cycle at some stage after 9pm is not produced by the brain's pineal gland in teens until much later in the night.

We adults know that despite our sleep cycle commencing in the evening, many of us are not asleep at that hour. We may have chores to complete, work tasks to address, or simply have a movie that we would like to watch. The sleep cycle lasts for about 90 minutes, so approximately every one and a half to two hours we will feel sleepy again. A teen might still be doing homework (or using some form of technology) and may miss their first cycle. So it is not uncommon for an adolescent to still be awake until well after midnight on any given day. Added to this, while adults generally require only 8 hours of sleep per night, a teenager requires 9.25 hours because of the multitude of changes going on in their bodies.

At a time when an adolescent's biological sleep architecture dictates that they require restorative rest and opportunities for healthy growth, the social and cultural expectations impinge on these sleep hygiene needs. Many secondary schools start before 9am. In order to get to school, teens are often expected to be out of bed between 6am - 8am. Their sleep cycle is cut short, yet there is an expectation on the part of schools and parents that they perform well academically in their classes after they have been sleep deprived. Early school starting times are associated with significant sleep deprivation and daytime sleepiness in adolescents. It does not require an academic to recognise that these students are not capable of performing at their best, nor are they going to be emotionally stable. Reflect on your own life - how well do you perform when you have not had enough sleep?

A 2010 study of 201 high school students in Rhode Island showed clearly that delaying the start of the school day by 30 minutes lead to significant improvements in alertness, mood and health in the students. Other studies in the same year have shown that later weekday wake-times appear to be protective factors against substance use, depression and truancy. A 2008 study, reporting the same findings, further found that the students used 83 per cent of this 'extra time' for sleep, and there were fewer student reports of sleepiness during the school day. We want our children to perform at their optimum level. It is in their best interest, as well as the interest of the staff and parents who have to deal with them. It is recognised that making these changes in schools is likely to be costly and difficult in the short term, but have huge benefits in the long term.

One option for some schools might be to 'flip' the timetables. Begin the day with any required staff meetings and extra-curricular activities. Since studies measuring melatonin levels in adolescents' saliva indicate that their alertness begins in the early afternoon, perhaps beginning the day with sports or less academic subjects would be wiser. This would be very beneficial - if they begin with exercise, the serotonin and endorphin levels are increased, and their brains would be more conducive to learning!

This is not rocket science. Any school that is innovative and forward-thinking enough to make these necessary changes to accommodate the altered circadian rhythms in adolescents will undoubtedly pave the way for other schools to quickly follow suit. Student behaviour, participation and attendance is likely to improve in the short term, and student performance and achievement is likely to improve in the long term. Apart from the fact that the benefits of making the necessary changes have been thoroughly researched and show consistently in the literature to be a successful way of assisting our adolescents to be their best, it seems like a no-brainer to me. ■

Sally-Anne McCormack is a clinical psychologist, former teacher, media consultant and a mother of four. As well as working with adults, she has a special interest in working with children and adolescents, with practices in Blackburn and Burwood East in Melbourne. She has extensive experience dealing with a broad range of mental health disorders especially depression, anxiety, computer addiction and sleep as well as parenting and educational issues. She has a regular spot on Channel 10's 'The Circle', and has websites - [www.ANTSA.com.au](http://www.ANTSA.com.au) and [www.ParentsOnline.com.au](http://www.ParentsOnline.com.au) where you can register for free newsletters, and articles.

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# Student **feedback** as an evidence base for teacher self-regulated professional learning

■ **Jean Russell**  
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The crucial role of the quality of teaching in student learning is now generally accepted. (Barber & Nourshed, 2007). Although many factors influencing students' learning lie beyond the reach of the school, the power to enhance and enrich the quality of teaching is a factor that is clearly within the school's control. Consequently, much current attention is being given to school approaches and system policies designed to improve the quality of teaching (eg., Jensen, 2011). My decision to develop a tool for teacher learning is in keeping with this. In this article I give an account of the instrument that was developed, together with observations and inferences that might be of interest to others involved in educational practice, policy and research.

## What kind of tool would help teachers?

In their best-evidence synthesis of teacher professional learning and development, Timperley and others (2007) assert that teachers need many and continuing opportunities to learn through a range of approaches if they are to realise the complex and difficult goal of achieving change in their practice. The authors conclude that effective approaches which lead to sustainable professional learning

and change in practice are ones that promote professional, self-regulated learning, with individual teachers knowing what their goal is, how they are progressing in relation to that goal and what they will need to do next in order to make further targeted progress (Timperley, Wilson, Barrar & Fung, 2007). Teacher professional learning is thus conceived of as being very much like the self-regulated learning we hope to develop in our students, where learners participate actively (metacognitively, motivationally and behaviourally) in their own learning process.

The *Feedback on Teaching and Learning Questionnaire* (FTLQ)<sup>1</sup> is an instrument that is aimed at strengthening teachers' self-regulated professional learning and thus enhancing their teaching practice.

- It is a feedback tool. We are well acquainted with the power of formative feedback in advancing student learning (Hattie & Timperley, 2007); similarly feedback to teachers, used formatively, can advance adult professional learning.
- Obtaining feedback from students about their experience of a teacher's classroom

gives a teacher unusual access to the thought world of students, enabling teachers to see the classroom through students' eyes – how students perceive their teaching-learning experiences, how they understand or conceptualise what has been going on, how they respond to what they perceive. Perceptions are, after all, the basis of our actions and behaviour.

- In addition, the FTLQ asks teachers to test their own understanding of how students perceive their classroom experiences, allowing teachers to see whether their understanding is in alignment with student perceptions or whether and where there are discrepancies.
- The FTLQ is designed to give teachers feedback that is highly specific, detailed and diagnostic. The questionnaire is to be used by a specific class of students in relation to their own class teacher (primary) or their own teacher in a particular subject (secondary). It is not a questionnaire that gives year-level or school-level data. The feedback is detailed (hence the length of the questionnaire) rather than brief and general, providing the teacher with a rich source of diagnostic information to use as an evidence base.

<sup>1</sup> Further information about the FTLQ and its availability can be found at [www.certainknowledge.com](http://www.certainknowledge.com).



- The content of the questionnaire, that is the set of constructs about which feedback is sought, is centred on the skills, capacities, attributes and depth of understanding that define the type of learning needed by young people in the twenty-first century (MCEETYA, 2008), as well as on what research has shown about how to achieve such learning.

#### How was the FTLQ developed?

The research literature I had been reading over many years provided a fruitful data base for seeking out the main constructs to be targeted in the feedback tool. These research areas included student learning and achievement; student motivation, engagement and self-regulated learning; learning skills and goals of learning for the twenty-first century; classroom teaching and learning; classroom culture; teacher efficacy; teacher professional learning; student attitudes to school and learning across the years of school life; school attendance and drop-out; student voice and decision-making; leadership for learning; leader efficacy; school and teacher effectiveness; and school learning culture. The gradual process of shaping the instrument was followed by a sequence of pilot programs in schools in the Northern Metropolitan Region (NMR)<sup>2</sup> of Victoria in 2009 and 2010. Altogether, 24 schools, 85 classes and 2024 students participated in the pilot programs.

The framework of the FTLQ is presented in Figure 1. The two global dimensions of students' classroom experience, defined by Newmann and colleagues (1992), are thought to be critical to students' investment of energy and involvement in learning: the nature of the work they do (for example, work that is meaningful, worthy of effort, non-trivial, connected to real life, interesting,

valuable and rewarding) and the culture of relationships within which that work takes place (for example, a culture of fairness, respect, support, consistency and caring). This framework was used as a basis for determining the four domains of the *FTL Questionnaire*, the first two domains (Nature of Student Work; Development of Student Skills) focusing on Newmann's dimension of student work and the second two (Classroom Culture; Classroom Organisation) on Newmann's second dimension, the culture of relationships and interactions. These domains are separated out for the purposes of structuring the questionnaire, but they are in fact interactive, together creating the total classroom experience of the student.

Each domain is defined by several scales representing constructs that have been associated with good learning. Each scale measures a construct via ratings on a set of closely and reliably interrelated questionnaire items. Items are rated on a five-point rating scale, from 5 ('Strongly Agree') to 1 ('Strongly Disagree'). The FTLQ (Secondary) consists of 19 scales and 101 items, while the FTLQ (Primary: years 5 and 6) consists of 12 scales and 68 items.

The FTLQ is completed on-line by the students in the class or classes selected by the teacher, as well as by the teacher who completes the questionnaire in terms of his/her perception of what the average class response will be. Once all have completed and submitted the questionnaire responses, an on-line confidential report becomes available immediately to the teacher. The report contains information presented graphically, as in Figure 2. Numerical information is also presented, giving average responses to items, scales and domains by students and teacher, as well as the extent of variation in ratings amongst students within the class via standard deviations. Creation of the on-line format for presentation of the questionnaire, data collection and the means of on-line reporting of results was undertaken by my

<sup>2</sup> The part played by staff of the Northern Metropolitan Region, Victoria, and the principals, teachers and students of schools involved in the pilot programs for the development of the FTLQ is very much appreciated.

colleague, Graeme Jane, who also organised this aspect of the piloting of the FTLQ.

Teacher participation in the use of the FTLQ is intended to be voluntary, with the teacher selecting one or two classes for involvement. Feedback is most likely to lead to learning if there is some aspect of class functioning that is puzzling or concerning the teacher. Selection of one's best class, as would probably happen under high-stakes performance assessment conditions, would give much less useful information.

Individual student responses are confidential and on-line feedback reports of results are confidential to the teacher, with the teacher choosing those colleagues with whom to share results. Teachers are asked to spend time preparing students for the questionnaire completion by discussing with them the purpose, nature, confidentiality and potential helpfulness of the FTLQ to both teacher and students. Teachers are also strongly urged to discuss aspects of the results with students subsequently, especially in areas that are potentially targets for change.

It is suggested that teachers work in small professional learning and mentoring teams (eg., triads), together interpreting and reflecting on the meaning of the evidence, and using the evidence to develop their individual learning plans for achieving desired changes. Implementation of the learning strategies over a period of several months is then followed by a re-administration of the FTLQ (or one of the individual Domain Questionnaires) in order to obtain further feedback and evaluate progress.

**What observations were made about the development and subsequent use of the FTLQ?**

The FTLQ has now been used by a total of 62 schools, 266 classes, and 5,363 students. Most users have been located in Victoria, but ten ACT schools have also recently trialled the instrument. The following observations and comments are based not only on the data obtained from FTLQ responses, but also from numerous workshops, as well as from interviews conducted with principals, co-ordinators and 29 teachers in seven secondary schools at the end of 2010. Some observations are specific to the FTLQ content, but many of the more general observations and impressions will be familiar to those engaged in teaching practice, research and policy development.

There were interesting patterns seen in the accumulated data.

- The Nature of Work domain is viewed least positively by most classes, with the *Work Interest* and *Work Activities* scales usually receiving relatively low ratings. This is

somewhat challenging, given that learning lies at the heart of the school's purpose. Students generally respond positively to items concerning the value of their work and the values underpinning their learning (*Value of Work* scale and *Learning Values* scale), and they have a high regard for their teachers (*Teacher Knowledge and Engagement* scale). They are much less convinced about some of the teaching and learning processes, especially those measured by the *Decision-making Skills* scale, the *Valuing the Individual* scale and the *Personalisation* scale.

- Clear differences are seen in student responses to teachers within the same school, something that has been reported elsewhere (eg., Hill, Rowe & Holmes-Smith, 1996). Within some classes, student perceptions differed widely, a factor that is particularly important for teachers to ponder. Some secondary teachers collected feedback from two classes, perhaps at the same year level or in the same subject area. Sometimes the two classes differed noticeably in their levels and patterns of response, again calling for reflection and interpretation.
- Overall primary school classes responded more positively than secondary classes. The familiar pattern of the middle years emerged, with class responses falling until years 9 and 10, but showing some recovery in years 11 and 12 (Russell, Mackay & Jane, 2003).
- Not surprisingly, strong associations exist across the questionnaire domains and can help illuminate the meaning of students' perceived experience. For example, interest is a major factor in students' engagement in learning, the energy they invest in their work and the persistence with which they pursue it. *The Work Interest* scale in the *Nature of Work* domain correlates strongly with a number of scales in the other three domains, defining an important cluster of related classroom experiences.

Teachers expressed particular appreciation of

- the feedback itself, mentioning the power of the data to surprise, to grab their attention, to confront them and to alert them to aspects of their teaching. Specificity of scales and items in the FTLQ was contrasted with other questionnaires that contain information of a general nature only. The specificity of the feedback provided guidance about where things were not working and what could be done to improve students' classroom experience.
- the on-line report, especially its immediate availability, which meant no loss of momentum between questionnaire completion

**The Four Domains of the Feedback on Teaching and Learning Questionnaire (Secondary)**

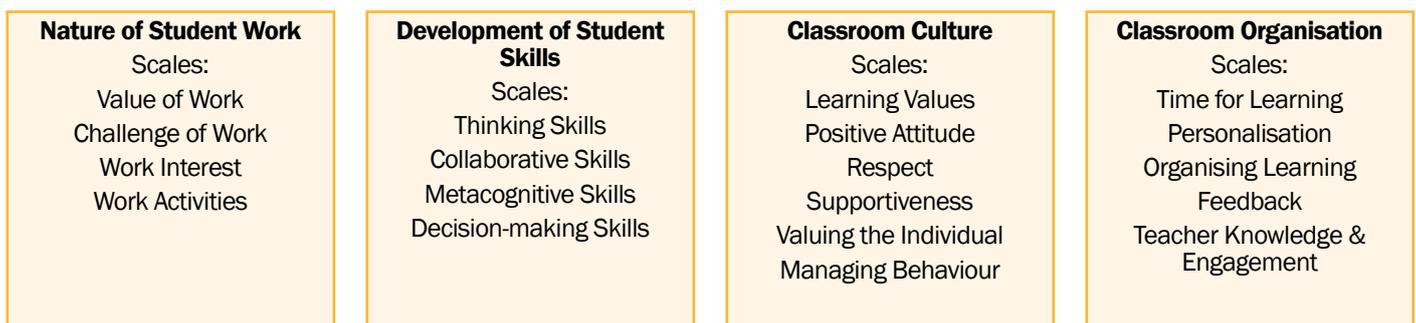


Figure 1: The four domains of the FTLQ (Secondary) and their constituent scales

and use of feedback. Helpful aspects pinpointed were the inclusion of graphs (some used these with students and the broader group of staff) and of standard deviations that alerted teachers to divisions or varied experiences within a class.

- information about the congruence or gaps between student and teacher perceptions. This was seen as valuable for both teachers and students. One teacher commented on students' surprise that teachers understood how they felt.

There was considerable variation in the way teachers carried out FTLQ completion and used the feedback.

- Teachers were encouraged to hold both a preliminary class discussion about the FTLQ and post-completion discussions about aspects of results. These were seen as opportunities to engage and stimulate students, to increase their understanding of their own learning and the way classroom processes affect it, as well as to indicate to them that their feedback is valued. Unfortunately, preparatory class discussion was often about questionnaire administration only and teachers seemed hesitant to talk subsequently with students about results.
- Teachers varied in their openness about sharing their data with one another, in planning and reflecting within a professional learning triad, and in observation of one another's classes. For example, at one extreme were the two experienced teachers who shared their

reports in detail with the whole teaching staff, while at the other were teachers who did not allow anyone else to see their reports.

- Some professional learning triads met regularly and operated well, although not all. Regular meeting times, especially if time-tabled, meant greater likelihood of success. While experienced teachers commented on the usefulness of data-based learning plans, strategy development, peer observations and discussions, first-year teachers were especially enthusiastic about the helpfulness of the student feedback and peer mentoring.

Leadership support, commitment and involvement (as is true generally of professional learning in schools: Robinson, Hohepa & Lloyd 2009) are vital in ensuring productive use of the FTLQ and the evidence it gives to teachers. Mandating use of an instrument or program can have a negative effect, with lack of enthusiasm at a leadership level communicating itself to staff and producing less efficient and more superficial teacher involvement.

Strong school co-ordination of the FTLQ process made a big difference to the quality of use of the feedback by teachers. Efficient administration meant fewer hassles for teachers, while having a person in the co-ordination role who acted as a professional learning leader deepened the feedback-based learning experience for teachers, as well as sharpening their planning and strategies for change. Access

to external expertise, for example to researchers as in the Middle Years Research and Development Project (Russell, Mackay and Jane, 2003) or to a skilled critical friend, is a considerable advantage.

### A final word

In their best-evidence synthesis of research concerning teacher professional learning and development, Timperley and colleagues advocate teacher participation in a 'co- and self-regulatory learning cycle' in which 'teachers collectively and individually identify important issues, become the drivers for acquiring the knowledge they need to solve them, monitor the impact of their actions, and adjust their practice accordingly' (Timperley et al., 2007, p.xl11). The FTLQ provides an important evidence base for this model of professional learning.

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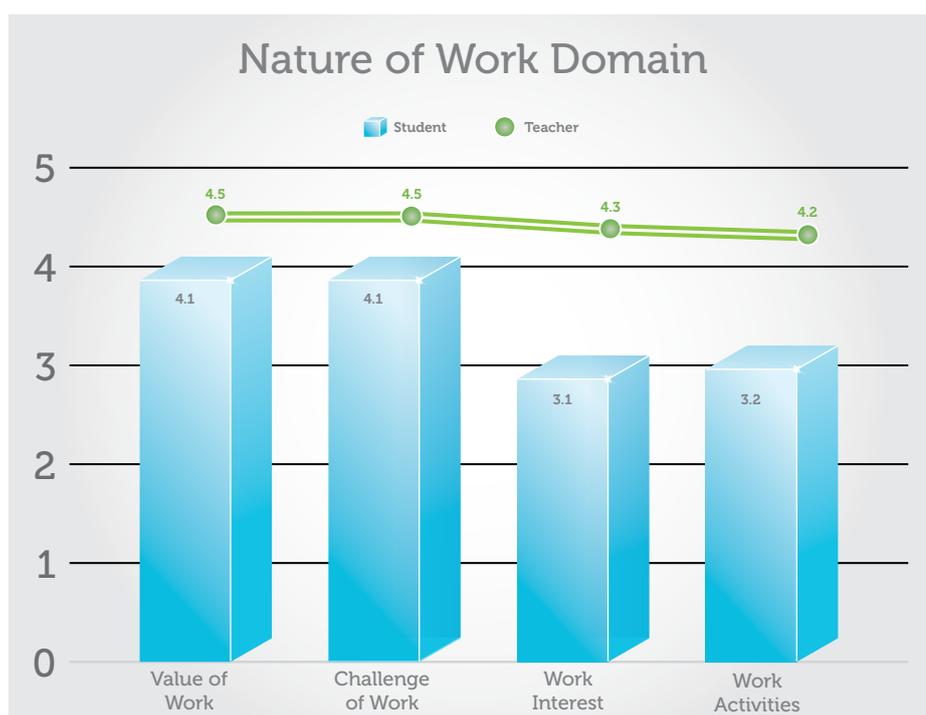


Figure 2 A secondary class example: Student and teacher ratings on scales in the Nature of Work Domain

# Have a heart: Challenges for lead vocational teachers in the changing VET landscape

**A** new occasional paper from the National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER) investigates the personal and career development needs of TAFE Queensland's lead vocational teachers through the conceptual framework of Spirituality at Work – an approach that espouses the treatment of workers as whole human beings who require dignity, respect, fairness, trust, harmony, meaningfulness and higher purpose.

In *Have a heart: challenges for lead vocational teachers in the changing VET landscape*, released by NCVER on 6 February 2012, Jennifer Davids of the Southbank Institute of Technology presents a snapshot of research undertaken for her doctorate studies.

The research presented in the paper was conducted through four focus group meetings held in November 2009 with 24 of TAFE Queensland's lead vocational teachers. Davids argues that the Spirituality at Work framework already exists in the teaching profession as a set of humanist values, which, while acknowledged as fluid, changeable and multiple, informs the basis of much teaching work.

The research, which was sponsored by an NCVER academic scholarship for novice researchers, found that lead vocational teachers view their profession as a 'calling' and see serving their students as a priority. However, with greater emphasis being placed on financial decisions within VET workplaces and the introduction of increased reporting requirements, these teachers feel that they are operating in environments with low levels of trust. Overall, lead vocational teachers considered that their teaching practices were undervalued.

The conclusion to this research paper is reproduced with permission of NCVER.

## Conclusion

The Spirituality at Work approach strives for a workplace where the individual is a part of a community, participating in meaningful work, appreciated for their skills and knowledge, and undergoing appropriate professional and personal development. It depicts a workplace where employees seeking more than just financial reward can work with integrity in an atmosphere of trust and experience a sense of wholeness. The leadership model most commonly associated with this approach is Greenleaf's concept of servant leadership, which combines both a moral and transformational dimension, and places emphasis on serving individuals as a first priority (Biberman & Whitty 1997; Fairholm 1996; Barbuto & Wheeler 2006). The Spirituality at Work paradigm connects on many levels with the role and identity of the lead vocational teachers in this study.

This study found that lead vocational teachers find it fulfilling to lead the learning journey of their students and their peers. Because it represents more than simply monetary reward, the teachers value the process of helping people to become professionally proficient and they derive satisfaction from the achievements and outcomes of their students. They have a commitment to the teaching and learning community, with some describing it as a 'calling', and they discuss the importance of passion in their work. The teachers profess an awareness of the necessity for passing on their knowledge and skills to the ensuing generation of teachers. They would like ongoing opportunities for professional and personal development to invigorate their teaching lives — opportunities to work in various fields, such as management, research and mentoring within education, but combined with a teaching role.

It is clear that lead vocational teachers understand the economic imperatives of the current VET system and want to contribute



to the development of the business and to the betterment of the TAFE learning community; that is, to feel that their specialist skills are being fully utilised and their professional potential recognised and developed. They want their professional judgment to be trusted and drawn upon and their professional integrity to be respected. They are dismayed and disheartened when their teaching practices are undervalued.

However, there is evidence of a growing lack of congruence between the values embedded in the individual institutes and those held by the teachers. This is causing professional anxiety and stress — particularly in regard to the decisions being made on financial grounds, the prominence given to compliance requirements and the misdirection of teacher energy and talent into administration. Teachers expressed frustration that lead vocational teacher energy is not being channelled into what is perceived as more worthwhile professionally based duties and functions, such as formal mentoring and coaching, curriculum and resource development, networking and business development, and targeted use of specialist skills and knowledge. They emphasised the commitment they had to the long-term goals of education, business and the TAFE community, as opposed to the short-term financial outcomes pursued by the management in their institutes, and they experienced an ethical dilemma when one took precedence over the other. In addition, they felt that they largely operated in an atmosphere of low trust, where their views are marginalised and their teaching skills seen as of secondary importance to the growing demand of excessive compliance. These concerns are deeply felt by the teachers, to the extent that a number indicated that they had considered leaving the job and returning as casual teachers, thereby reaping the

rewards of more heart-based teaching practice without the burden of reporting.

The key to retaining experienced and highly skilled lead vocational teachers in Queensland TAFE institutes is to keep staff engaged with their work and to encourage a sense of wellbeing through the targeted use of their skills, knowledge and experience in an atmosphere of trust and to view them as a professional body whose judgment and sense of moral purpose are fully integrated into a new work paradigm. In this we agree with Gorgievski and Bakker (2010, p.265) when they say:

Engaged employees ... have a sense of energetic and effective connection with work activities. They work hard (vigor), are involved with a feeling of significance, enthusiasm, inspiration, pride and challenge (are dedicated), and feel happily engrossed (absorbed) in their work. Engaged employees exercise influence over events that affect their lives — they are self-efficacious.

Engaged employees perform better, are innovative, are better able to take advantage of business opportunities and develop important connections and networks, and are generally healthier and happier at work. We have found that the key to retaining experienced lead vocational teachers is to provide engaging work and good conditions in an atmosphere of trust that acknowledges, understands and focuses primarily on the educational journey and outcomes of the students. ■

*Have a heart: Challenges for lead vocational teachers in the changing VET landscape*, by Jennifer Davids, is available from NCVET at [www.ncver.edu.au/publications/2462.html](http://www.ncver.edu.au/publications/2462.html)

# Empowering teenagers to make healthy food choices

■ **Jim Pennington**  
The Armidale School  
PDHPE teacher

**H**ow do we empower teenagers to start making healthy food choices for themselves? How do we make sure they are choosing the correct foods for their energy needs and in the right proportions? These were some of the questions I faced four years ago when initiating a program aimed at helping students take responsibility for leading a positive lifestyle.

The Armidale School (TAS), in northern New South Wales, comprises a co-educational Junior School and boys-only Middle School (Years 6-8) and Senior School. TAS has an enrolment of 620 students, 200 of whom are boarders and whose nutrition, health and well-being are of particular interest.

The school has developed a program that aims to improve education about nutrition, diet, portion control and exercise within the classroom curriculum; influence behavioural change in food selection at meal times and sports events; and assess students understanding of different food groups and how this matches their own particular nutritional needs.

My own experience as a boarder at school, and later on the residential staff at TAS, made me aware of potential shortcomings in meeting the individual needs of students. The 2005 NSW Schools Physical Activity and Nutrition Study (Dr Louise Hardy, University of Sydney), galvanised me into developing a plan to approach the issue in a holistic way.

It was made clear in that report that as a nation we were headed on a similar path to the United States, where there was a decline in active participation in sport and more passive forms of entertainment. At the same time, busier working lives meant there was less time to prepare healthy meals, with more reliance on cheaper, processed foods or convenience meals of lower nutritional value.

In 2006, the school's Physical Education curriculum was revised to focus more on individual health than sport-based skills. The timetable was revised so that entire cohorts would have PE together, with three teachers. At the commencement of each year, boys would be tested for power, strength, endurance and Body Mass Index, with individual programs developed to work on the area of greatest need. Every child has these results on a chart and they monitor themselves through the year, promoting a sense of

ownership of their individual physical health.

Funding was then sought to develop and deliver the next stage of the program, and the school was fortunate to be awarded an \$82,000 grant from the Department of Health and Ageing 'Active Australia' program. Under the project, this grant money contributed towards a visit to the Australian Institute of Sport in Canberra, professional education in nutrition under Sports Dietician Australia, a new classroom nutrition program, signage in the dining hall and canteen, portion plates, heart rate monitors, pedometers and gymnasium equipment.

A professional nutritionist was engaged to refine food menus, and students now have their own food committee, with the focus being on delivering 'the best foods to help our boys grow up to be big, strong, healthy and confident young men'.

The project attracted the interest of University of New England researchers Professor Lorraine Graham and Dr Judy Miller, who assisted in developing the program and measuring outcomes in a three-year study which became the basis for a paper they co-authored and presented at the British Educational Research Association, London, in September 6th-8th, 2011.

Informed decision-making about health and nutrition is a key outcome for the Health and Physical Education curriculum in Australian schools. At TAS nutritional information is taught in Health Education Programs (HEP) to all infants and primary school-aged children by generalist home room teachers. Under the initiative, content of the HEP was revised to ensure content included basic nutritional needs, healthy food choices, and the essential food groups. In secondary school, knowledge is imparted by Health and Physical Education staff.

While there is a general acceptance that students learn the message, the transfer of this knowledge through behavioural change and habits is harder to measure or control.

With all of the school's boarders and many of its day boys reliant on the school for meals, a Nutritional Symbol System (NSS) was developed, refined and made available in the dining hall of the school, where food is served cafeteria style, and the school canteen, mainly utilised by day boys.

As students queue for their meals at both locations, their eyes



are caught by 12 large posters featuring high achievers from the world of sport, politics and the creative arts alongside plate-sized, colour-coded pie graphs that depict the ideal percentage of fruit and vegetables (40 per cent), carbohydrates (20 per cent) and protein that most students need in every meal.

In the dining hall, this is reinforced on printed melamine plates used by boys, which help give them an indication of an appropriate portion size for their age. There are also charts with suggestions for ideal high carbohydrate/low fat meals for before and after competition.

One of the posters reads 'Carbohydrates are the critical source of energy for exercising the body's muscles. Proteins are derived from amino acids, which provide the building blocks for the growth and repair of the body. Vegetables and Salads are important to a balanced diet. A balance of 5 fruits/salads everyday is the key to a healthy body and the prevention of many diseases. Using the coloured plate as a guide, select your meal using healthy choices'.

Parents were involved in school meetings regarding the NSS, with information also shared through the school newsletter and website. The system was designed with teenage boys in mind. In my view, if it's not visual, then the message won't get across. The system of posters and plates allows students to make an informed decision. As they use the system meal after meal, the messages are reinforced and should result in lasting changes to their diet.

Other strategies include the placement of healthier food choices at the start of the smorgasbord: at lunchtime, for example, students have an ad-lib selection of a range of salad and vegetable dishes, while portion size of hot foods, particularly meat and carbohydrates, is monitored by catering staff.

The healthy eating philosophy has been physically extended into the classroom, with every classroom in the TAS Junior School (pre-Kindergarten to Year 5) fitted with a small fridge so students can bring fresh/cut fruit. Messages were also incorporated into practical activity involving younger students, such as during supervised use of a 20m high climbing wall in the school's gymnasium, funded by the school's Parents and Friends Association, and utilised by students from Year 3 onwards.

In Year 9, the school runs a program whereby boys are given seven dollars for a meal, then have to work out how many calories they have consumed, and then they have to run that off.

Some students were shocked to discover that some of these meals, particularly from the main fast food chains, can take more than 20km to burn off. This type of exercise gives students a practical perspective about how they can measure calories in against calories out, weight control, and 'good' versus 'poor' food choices.

The Armidale School has long held the belief that physical activity is crucial to a boy's physical, mental, social and

emotional wellbeing. With a strong emphasis on participation in sport, the school also has a duty of care to ensure students, particularly those engaged in high level activity and competition, are receiving appropriate nutritional requirements. To this end, both as part of the formal curriculum and in co-curricular programs, elite-level students in particular are now monitored for various health benchmarks including heart rate and body mass.

As part of the program, the university researchers and TAS staff surveyed over three years a number of students to gauge their understanding of nutrition, and how this transformed their behaviour. The students – two from each year group from Years 3-10 – were interviewed using a semi-structured questionnaire which provided insight into their understanding from the classroom nutrition programs (HEP) and the dining hall signage (NSS).

In the interviews, all students were able to recall and discuss the information included on the posters used in relation to the NSS. In addition, the coloured wheel symbol, with carbohydrate (yellow), protein (red) and fruit/vegetable (green) portions, was memorable to the students who were all able to recall what the colours signified and where the posters were displayed in the school.

Students were also largely able to accurately describe what foods were 'everyday' foods (fruit, meat, vegetables and bread) and what were 'sometimes' foods ('fast' foods, sweets, soft drinks, fatty foods).

Overall, the results revealed that students were knowledgeable about food portions and had adopted the nutritional symbol system. Indeed, 18 months after their first interview, six students – more than a third of respondents – reported they thought less about the NSS because they had developed good habits and now consistently chose healthier options.

A minority of those surveyed had misconceptions in identifying whether foods were protein, carbohydrate or fruit/vegetables, and the role of each food category in human nutrition.

There was also some feedback that the graphic on the melamine plate may be misleading to some students about the appropriate portion size and may have resulted in some 'false economy' as to their actual requirements.

The researchers found the success of the program was due to its aligning of messages in the classroom, at food service areas and during activity and sport, and that the NSS was a graphic, memorable way in which to convey key messages.

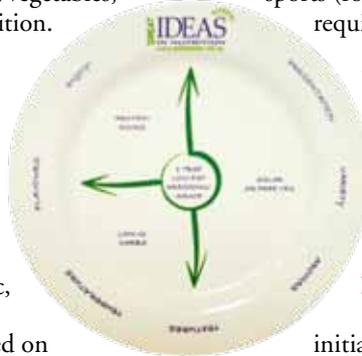
To quote from their paper: 'In conclusion, based on the research findings outlined here, there is evidence that many students attending the project school applied the knowledge gained from the Health Education Programs and Nutritional Symbol System in order to make informed healthy choices. Teachers would benefit from the feedback gained through this research in order to inform their Health Education Programs and increase their effectiveness'.

Three years on, there have been great improvements in the level of health and wellbeing experienced by students, and indeed staff, who are also exposed to the messages and are offered special

fitness programs delivered through staff at the school's sports centre, which incorporates a 25m indoor swimming pool and weights room.

Since 2008, the enhancement of the school's sporting program, in which many students are now participating at a higher level of competition, has seen greater physical demands of students in some sports (particularly rugby) and the introduction of new sports (rowing) – all with their own particular nutritional requirements.

With most older students having the HEP and NSS initiatives as routine for most of their school life - coupled with the demands to develop more tightly individually tailored programs to suit an emerging group of elite athletes – it is time to revisit the program and see what further refinements can be made. ■



### References

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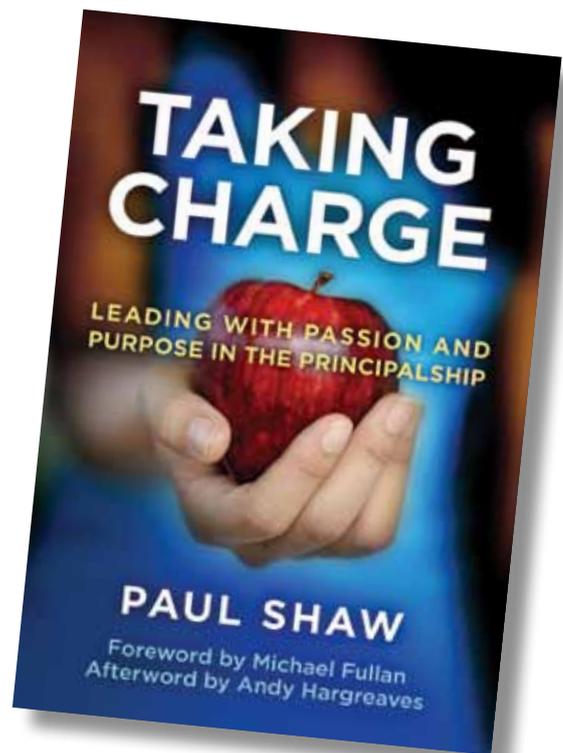
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# Book review: Taking charge



Shaw, Paul L. (2011) *Taking charge. Leading with passion and purpose in the principalship*. New York. Teachers College Press. 228pp

**T**hree things immediately catch the eye in Paul Shaw's book.

First, there is a foreword by Professor Michael Fullan who writes that he 'loves the book' for the way it 'combines passion with hard-nosed action'. Then there is an afterword by Professor Andy Hargreaves who writes that Paul Shaw is 'a leader among leaders who writes from the leader's own perspective without being hidebound by it'; who is sensitive to research but not a slave to it; and who has 'an unswerving moral commitment to all students and to the idea and ideal of teaching as a profession requiring long training and hard reflection'. That is strong endorsement indeed from two world education leaders.

Finally there is Shaw himself who has certainly been around the metaphorical waterfronTS of education as a teacher, principal of four schools, project co-ordinator, international consultant in educational leadership, and as a university professor. What the reader soon comes to appreciate in Dr Shaw's writing is not only his ability to analyse current points of tension in schools but also his capacity to describe practical ways of responding grounded in practice and amplified by research.

While Shaw's writing is clearly centred on current research, there is not the felt need, as Andy Hargreaves notes, to 'play academics at their own game by supporting every statement with endless references'. The research base is admirable and international. There is a strong Australian presence stretching back to Garth Boomer's seminal work on negotiating the curriculum.

The real strength in Shaw's book however is in its practicality. It is based on two key fundamentals of school change: a morally compelling purpose and a participatory workplace culture. Upon these stand four pillars of continuous improvement: knowing students well; developing intellectual capital through continuous inquiry, learning and development; forming strong collegial relations; and developing powerful and cohesive pedagogical responsiveness.

Shaw takes the reader on a thoughtful journey considering the moral purposes and cultural identity that underpins strategic planning processes; the principal's relationship to formal, mandated curriculum, and what might be done to have the curriculum serve as a more effective learning tool rather than as something to 'get through'; and the use of classroom evidence for teacher learning, capacity-building and accountability. A centrepiece to his work are the chapters on teacher professional learning and capacity building; sustainable school cultures; and on thinking and acting strategically.

The attractiveness in Shaw's writing is that it is not simply a series of exhortations as to what principals ought to do, but rather an elaboration through school case studies and practical ideas of what can be done and, indeed, has been done.

*Taking charge. Leading with passion and purpose in the principalship* is ultimately a very practical book well worth a place on the bookshelf of principals, those who aspire to the role, and those engaged in the formal study of educational leadership. Shaw rightly concludes that there is no job as fulfilling as being a principal who helps to lead the transformation of a school. ■

Norman McCulla PhD FACE, Co-ordinator, Educational Leadership Program Macquarie University, Sydney

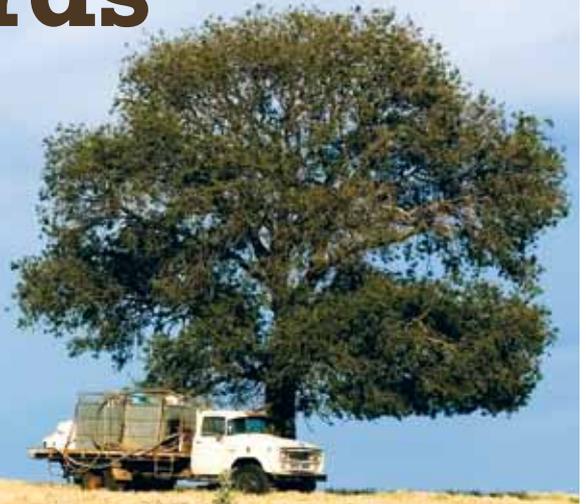
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# A journey towards wellbeing

■ **Geoff Bowser**, B.A. (Hons), B. Soc. Sc. (Psych) (Hons), B.D., B. Ed., AssocMAPS.  
Headmaster & Director of Wellbeing,  
Wycliffe Christian School, NSW



Any 21st century Australian educator would almost certainly have a keen interest in student wellbeing. However it is an entirely different proposition to adopt a wellbeing initiative as a centrepiece for a whole school community. At my school, Wycliffe Christian School, a student wellbeing initiative has been adopted as centerpiece for the whole school community. Wellbeing is not being promoted as an alternative to an academic focus, but rather as a fundamental component of an academic focus. Student wellbeing is also being explored in the context of school community wellbeing.

Ours is not the first school to focus on student wellbeing. There are notable examples of Australian Independent Schools (Geelong Grammar School in Victoria and Knox Grammar School in NSW) focusing on student wellbeing in their distinctive ways. I was motivated to explore a model that could be adopted by schools of modest size and means regardless of the education sector to which they belong. I am keen to acknowledge the leadership role of schools such as Geelong and Knox in pioneering wellbeing research in Australian schools.

In late 2011, after seven years as head of school, my leadership role was reframed to allow me to divest some of my former responsibilities and take on the new role of Director of Wellbeing as part of the Headmaster's role. Mine has been a challenging and rewarding, but yet unfinished, learning journey on the importance of student wellbeing.

Although much of my learning journey has occurred in the last few years, it has its origins both for the school and myself in the 1970s. Wycliffe Christian School,

in the Lower Blue Mountains, NSW, is a small to medium sized faith-based Pre-School to Year 12 campus serving approximately 600 students. Under my predecessor, who led the school with vision, passion and energy for 27 years, the school was known for the rigor of its exploration of faith-based values, its development of a sound academic program and its hallmark commitment to pastoral care of students. Also in the mid-1970s I began my teaching career. Given the recent focus on wellbeing, I am confident that the prospect of hearing staff members in Australian schools boasting about making students' life a misery would be a distant memory. Sadly in the early 1970s, this was not always the case and some teachers regarded their role as to 'put students in their place.'

As a teacher, and in leading three NSW schools since the late 1980s, I have witnessed many changes in education and society across the last four decades. While mastery of classroom management usually remains a learning curve for beginning teachers, the discourse in schools and education systems is now framed around the more positive concept of 'student welfare'. This has become the dominant theme in the discourse, overshadowing the now subsidiary concept of 'student discipline' with its negative connotations of sanctions.

Educators, mental health workers and social commentators alike are noting a significant increase in the incidence of mental health problems, including anxiety and depression, in school age children and adolescents. Schools and educators are generally finding this trend an increasing pressure as they also encounter many other challenges in meeting the needs of children identified with learning difficulties

and a variety of developmental disorders. While it may be tempting to argue that these recent trends are simply a product of more rigorous diagnostic systems, the evidence of real increases is mounting. Nevertheless only very recently have Psychiatry and Psychology recognised that Childhood and Adolescent Anxiety and Depression have some unique features that mark them as something distinct from being simply childhood and adolescent extensions of adult disorders. Gaining a full understanding of these features is still a work in progress in research and therapeutic practice.

The fields of Psychiatry and Psychology, long dominated by the Psychodynamic (or Freudian) perspective, succumbed to a biomedical model in the mid 20th century. In an era when drug therapies became the preferred treatment, there seemed an ever increasing emphasis on what has been termed psychopathologising, defining an ever-increasing number of human behaviours as disordered and requiring treatment. Martin Seligman is well known both in the professions and in popular discourse for his attempts to challenge this trend and instead focus on human potential. He has been one of the leading figures in the Positive Psychology movement, a movement that is now seen as having great relevance to the field of education, and has an emphasis on error correction and acknowledgement of deficits.

I have frequently argued that those in the education profession, and especially school leaders, should attempt to attend professional development activities outside the education sector on a regular basis, at least every couple of years. It is enriching to listen to the discourses in other professions

and fields. I have followed that practice in my own professional development, although ventures into the field of psychology became more frequent. Over a little more than a decade, with a few interruptions I have found my way through Psychology programs at Monash University, Charles Sturt University and now Clinical Psychology at James Cook University. Whilst this has been an obvious contributor to my own journey as a school leader in promoting wellbeing programs, I do not consider this a prerequisite for a school leader or coordinator of wellbeing initiatives in schools. An individual school could easily gain impetus from the services of consultants, or in education systems, from specialist system support staff.

Wycliffe's own journey into wellbeing programs is intimately intertwined with accessing external consultants. However those relationships were to develop as the school emerged from the turbulence of a major management restructure in 2008, designed to realign with a lower enrolment base. Such restructure processes are often painful. This process had its share of pain, even though there was extensive consultation with staff about and during the process. Like many restructures it involved a delicate balance between reducing the number of management positions whilst creating space for new strategic directions and potential visionary appointments. One of the drivers in the discussions about change was a desire amongst key senior management staff to rethink the school's approach to Year 9. A decision was taken to conduct a stand-alone Year 9 program and recruit a staff member to develop it. It was hoped that the Year 9 program would focus on sharpening the personal goals of Year 9 students, helping them integrate ideas about academic study, life direction and faith. There was also a deliberate goal of challenging a common Year 9 disengagement pattern.

After attending a number of conferences and mental health consultations my ideas about school based wellbeing programs began to crystallise, including the potentially important role that a Year 9 program could play as a pilot program. In 2008 a number of members of my newly appointed leadership team then accompanied me on an interstate study visit of schools that had developed innovative Year 9 programs. At that point our newly appointed leaders began discussions with Dr Peter Kaldor of *New River Leadership*. With an extensive background in research and strengths-based capacity-building leadership training with adults, our consultant was interested in piloting a similar program with school students. A partnership, now in its fifth year, was forged. Dr Kaldor, from the outset, was committed to working with the school's leadership in growing capacity among staff and developing a capacity-building culture in the school. The goal was that the program would ultimately be self-sustaining. As a school, we owe a debt to our consultants in bringing to the fore an engagement with Positive Psychology. Another staff member from the consultancy worked with our own staff in developing strengths-based seminars for Year 9 students.

A little over three years later, the Year 9 program is known as *Encounter 2012 – An expedition into life*. The strengths-based seminars lead to groups and individuals considering their strengths and undertaking a practical project. Many projects have a strong emphasis on service and some confront issues of poverty and injustice. As students engage in their personal journey through Year 9, they also take part in break-out days. These break out days take students from their comfort zone in the Blue Mountains, to city experiences, including confronting youth and adult homelessness, as well as farm experiences.

The goals of the Year 9 program have evolved over three years. They are in part encapsulated in the following information guidelines for staff, students and parents:

Our emphasis and deliberate action over the past three years has been to develop a community in which the teacher leads the student to a point of access. From there the student has responsibility, freedom and encouragement to take risks in learning. The need for risk taking is vital and needed in the students' pursuit of self-discovery and exploration of their learning styles. Being wrong is not frowned upon as much as being right is not always applauded, but moreover we look to engage young people in an environment where they can become self directed in their learning and breakaway from the 'teacher-driven vehicle' of the past.

The piloting of the Year 9 program has been the vanguard of the school's embracing of positive psychology perspectives in developing a whole school wellbeing initiative. The risk taking metaphor has also been a useful reference point for other aspects of the wellbeing initiative. One of those other risks has been dealing with the almost inevitable risk of frustration that implementation of other aspects of the initiative has taken so long. Establishing the ground-work for a whole-school approach was a major undertaking.

By early 2009 there was a blueprint for a wellbeing initiative that was to focus on strengths and ultimately focus on the whole school community - students, staff and parents. Following extensive consultations at staff and governance level to flesh out the blueprint and address concerns, a school nurse was appointed, a culture-building school café was opened for Senior College

**The piloting of the Year 9 program has been the vanguard of the school's embracing of positive psychology perspectives in developing a whole school wellbeing initiative.**

students, staff and parents, a range of student and community seminars were conducted on issues such as cyber-safety and the sexualisation of girls. Ultimately a new School Psychologist was appointed with a brief of involvement in both proactive preventative programs as well as counselling, diagnostic and referral interventions.

After more than 20 years of headship it was both exciting and challenging to rethink the role of school leadership. I was not personally aware of any situations where a school principal combined their role with that of a Director of Wellbeing. It appeared uncharted territory. I am moving ahead with the project's lofty goal: 'it is recognised that one of the most challenging features of this project is to move the organisation from seeing mental health programs as being only about crisis intervention or maintenance style counselling to another paradigm focused on wellbeing. That paradigm includes, but is not limited to, the idea that classroom pedagogy, organisational communication structures, human resources policy and practices, co-curricular programs and the like are all components of a Mental Health Friendly school.' We have now placed a high priority on that goal by again restructuring senior management, including the role of the Principal. We have changed the nomenclature of key roles as we believe language conveys many layers of meaning.

The 2012 school year began with all staff invited to undertake the VIA Character Strengths Profile and discuss their findings in subsequent meetings of staff teams. Staff were invited to an ongoing conversation, critically analysing the values embedded in positive psychology and their alignment or otherwise with declared school values. Staff are being challenged to critically assess Martin Seligman's journey from *Authentic Happiness* (Random House, 2002) to *Flourish* (William Heinemann, 2011). They are being asked to wrestle with Seligman's new perspective (The PERMA theory of Wellbeing). The challenge is to consider whether, despite its new emphasis on relationships, the theory remains overly individualistic, focused, like many western theories, on 'my own wellbeing' more than the wellbeing of others or the wellbeing of the group. The journey continues... ■

# Member Profile:

## Barry Grear AO FACE



ACE has helped me keep up with what's happening in education

**A**CE life member, Barry Grear, has had a long interest in education and particularly Vocational Education. He first joined ACE in 1971 while with the South Australian Institute of Technology.

'I was working in the administration area of the institute of technology in South Australia and joining ACE seemed like the right thing to do for me because I wanted to understand more about what was happening in education', Barry explains. 'ACE has helped me keep up with what's happening in education.'

Barry became more involved with ACE while lecturing in engineering and joined the state committee.

After commencing his career as an apprentice in the South Australian Railways, where he was awarded a scholarship to study electrical engineering,

Barry went on to build a long and successful career that has stretched beyond education and into community services.

He has been a lecturer in engineering at both TAFE and university. In addition he has held a number of executive positions within the South Australian government including a stint as President of the Kindergarten Union in South Australia with responsibility for organising all of the State's kindergartens.

In 1983 he was handed responsibility for managing the distribution of the public appeal funds following the Ash Wednesday Bushfires. He is still actively involved in disaster management in South Australia.

Following this he held the position of Deputy Director General of the Department of Technical and Further Education for 8 years. It was during this period that he became a Fellow of the College.

In 1990 Barry was seconded to Canberra to establish the National Training Board which was responsible for developing the Australian Qualifications Framework. From 1997 to 2004 he was Chairman of the Vocational Education Employment and Training Board (VEET).

Barry has served for many years on the executive of the World Federation of Engineering Organisations (WFEO) that involves some 15 million engineers worldwide. He served as President from 2007-09. He has been a leader in developing international mobility of academic qualifications of engineers.

Barry's many contributions to engineering and education have seen him twice recognised in the Australia Day Honours. In 1985 Barry was made a Member of the Order of Australia (AM) and in 2001 was made an Officer of the Order of Australia (AO) for service to the engineering profession, particularly through the Institution of Engineers Australia, and in the area of education, and to the community through sporting, church and emergency services organisations.

More recently Barry received a Distinguished Alumni Award from the University of Adelaide in recognition of his leadership to the Australian and world engineering profession and his significant contribution to emergency services organisations in South Australia and nationally.

Although Barry is now retired he stays in touch with ACE by attending some meetings. He is looking forward to catching up with his colleagues at the upcoming Fellows dinner.

Barry was elected a Fellow of ACE in 1987 and Life Member in 2002. ■

# ACE news

**Australia Day Honours**

ACE congratulates Fellows and past winners of the Sir James Darling Medal on being named in the 2012 Australia Day Honours list.

**Officer (AO) in the General Division of the Order of Australia:**

Emeritus Professor Kwong Chiu Lee Dow AM; *For distinguished service to education in Australia as an administrator, scholar and contributor to major curriculum reforms, through executive roles with education advisory bodies, and to the community.* Professor Lee Dow is a Life member of ACE and winner of the Sir James Darling Medal in 1994.

Mr Stephen Hibbert Newton; *For distinguished service to education in the independent schools sector, through executive roles with professional organisations and advisory bodies, and to the development of educational development opportunities with China.* Mr Newton is a Fellow of ACE and winner of the Sir James Darling Medal in 2011.

**Member (AM) in the General Division of the Order of Australia:**

Dr Michele Denise Bruniges; *For service to public administration through executive roles, and as a contributor to reform in the education sector at state and national levels.* Fellow, Australian College of Educators, 2009.

Mr Kenneth James McAlpine; *For service to education, particularly through executive roles with the New South Wales Secondary Principals' Council, as an educator, and to the community.* Fellow, Australian College of Educators.

Emeritus Professor Alan Duncan Reid; *For service to education as an academic and researcher, particularly through contributions to the development of state and national curriculum policy, and to professional associations.* Fellow, Australian College of Educators.

**Medal (OAM) of the Order of Australia in the General Division:**

Mrs Janice Maree Millikan; *For service to early childhood education.* Fellow, Australian College of Educators, 2007.

Mr Keith James Brownbill; *For service to the community of the Morwell region through a range of organisations.* Secretary/Treasurer, Australian College of Educators, Gippsland Chapter, for 12 years; Member, since 1978.

**Welcome to our new members**

- Mr Nathan Berger, MACE
- Mr Stephen Brophy, MACE
- Mr Dan Chen, MACE
- Mr Nicholas Clark, MACE
- Ms Sandra Colegate, MACE
- Dr Catherine Day, MACE
- Ms Nicole Delmas, MACE
- Mrs Anna Dickinson, MACE
- Mrs Lyn Ferenci, MACE
- Mr Kim Flintoff, MACE
- Professor Annette Gough, MACE
- Mr David Gove, MACE
- Mr David Hegarty, MACE
- Mrs Margaret Howard, MACE
- Mrs Louise Ibbett, MACE
- Ms Gayle Kenet, MACE
- Ms Jo-Anne King, MACE
- Mr Richard Lander-Clarke, MACE
- Ms Veronicah Larkin, MACE
- Ms Kim Lemon, MACE
- Ms Linda Maher, MACE
- Mr Matthew Messer, MACE
- Mr Robert Muscat, MACE
- Mr Phillip Pain, MACE
- Mr Darren Pope, MACE
- Mr Chris Ramsden, MACE
- Miss Sabina Rowe, MACE
- Mr William Stewart, MACE
- Miss Anne Sullivan, MACE
- Miss Melanie Walker, MACE
- Mrs Emily Woodward, MACE

To suggest a news item for inclusion in the March 2012 edition of the Professional Educator please contact the editor via [ace@austcolled.com.au](mailto:ace@austcolled.com.au)

**Upcoming ACE events**

March 9	Adelaide	The Australian Curriculum Challenges and Opportunities by Peter Hill
March 19	The Hills/Parramatta	From NSWIT to AITSL by Patrick Lee
March 19	Melbourne	Food, Mood, Behaviour and Brain Power by Selina Byrne
March 21	Adelaide	Education on the Square
April 24	Melbourne	New and Life Members, Outstanding Service Awards and 25 Years Service Event
May 9	Melbourne	Engaging the imaginations and emotions of students in learning with Professor Kieran Egan
May 16	Adelaide	Education on the Square

For further information about these and any other ACE events please visit [www.austcolled.com.au](http://www.austcolled.com.au)

# ACE directory



## Australian College of Educators

ACE is dedicated to providing an independent voice for educators and advancing the education profession. ACE provides the forum in which educators can inform themselves; discuss and debate issues; and seek to find shared solutions to current educational questions.

## Contact Details

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## Board

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Mr Peter Jacob Bsc(For), FFin, MBA, MAICD  
Mr David Kronenberg MACE  
Emeritus Professor Alan Reid FACE  
Ms Annette Rome FACE  
Mrs Cristina Sandri FACE  
Ms Lyndsay Connors AM FACE

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VIC..... Ms Annette Rome FACE  
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Further details at [www.austcolled.com.au](http://www.austcolled.com.au)

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Publications and Communications..... Louise Reynolds  
Member Services and Events ..... Meaghan Flynn  
Executive Assistant and Branch Support..... Karrine Sleiman  
Administration ..... Rebecca Goldfinch

## Membership

Provides you with an opportunity to connect with a diverse and vibrant community of education practice with a goal to ensure the profession is respected and valued.

Membership is open to teachers, researchers, principals, leaders, administrators and others with appropriate qualifications and experience.

ACE represents educators working in early learning, primary, secondary, tertiary and higher education as well as VET across all sectors of Australian education.

## Value of membership

Have a say in policy and procedures that impact on your profession by joining the only Australian professional association representing educators across all sectors and levels of education.

- Contribute to the sector's primary advocacy body for the profession of teaching.
- Attend our events and conference and converse with cutting edge presenters.
- Have access to the ACE website for news and articles relevant to the profession.
- Receive our professional journal, 'Professional Educator', eight times per year.
- Receive a free copy of 'Education Review' eight times per year.
- Gain the right to use the letters MACE as a recognised, professional post-nominal
- Be eligible to receive regional, state/territory ACE awards as well as the highly valued Fellowship award.

Full details and online application form [www.austcolled.com.au](http://www.austcolled.com.au)

## Empowering Learners 2012 ACE Great Debate

Are we adequately preparing today's learners for life tomorrow?

Join the discussion with Author, Journalist and Speaker Madonna King and a panel of experts representing all levels of Australian education.

Melbourne 4 June  
Sydney 6 June  
Brisbane 7 June  
Perth 12 June  
Adelaide 13 June

Members \$40 | Non-members \$50



Further information on the events and panel members will soon be available from [www.austcolled.com.au](http://www.austcolled.com.au) or from the National Office on 1800 208 586