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Inclusive education

Why educational inequality matters

Transforming Indigenous education through the arts

Islamic schools in Australia

PLUS: Year 12 or equivalent courses, hijacking the quality teaching movement, Q&A with Carol Nicoll on TEQSA and book reviews



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The Song Room

Correction: The article by Shirley Randall, *World Class*, in the September edition incorrectly stated that she was appointed Director of the ACT Schools Authority in 1994. Shirley held this position from 1984-1988.

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Unlucky in the lucky country

the lucky country has a long way to go until we provide fair and equitable education for all students



Professor Robert Lingard
PhD FASSA
President ACE

The idea of a 'fair go' for all is at the core of Australian values. But we know that in education all Australians don't have equal access to a high quality education and the opportunities that education can provide. Time after time studies have shown that Australian children from low socioeconomic backgrounds, Indigenous students and those from regional, rural and remote areas and with language needs do not enjoy the same educational benefits as children from wealthier backgrounds and metropolitan locations. As former WA Premier and member of the Gonski Review panel, Carmen Lawrence notes in this edition 'Many Australians hold the view that ours is an egalitarian society, but this remains more a hope than a reality.'

The societal benefits of a good education for both the individual and wider community cannot be doubted. The latest OECD *Education at a Glance* report, released in September, notes that 'Countries gain long-term economic and social benefits from investing more in education.' In addition, 'Well educated people also live longer, are more likely to vote and have more supportive attitudes to equal rights for minorities, according to new data and analysis in this year's edition.'

The OECD report provides many positives on Australia's education system. For example, the percentage of 25-34 year olds attaining upper secondary education in Australia is 85 per cent, above the OECD average, and considerably higher than educational attainment of older Australians. Australian women have equalled or surpassed their male counterparts in upper secondary and tertiary education attainment and our education system was said to have been particularly effective for immigrant students. I would note, though, that with respect to NAPLAN, the LBOTE category (Language Background other than English) in its aggregation hides many disadvantages in schooling experienced by those migrant and refugee students with little time in schooling, and low literacy levels in any language. Less positive in the OECD report was the assessment that in Australia 'socioeconomic status and parents' educational background, however, remain strongly associated with student performance.' The current Australian government is seeking to address this intransigent policy issue through its National Partnership Low SES School Communities, but in my view this commendable policy is restricted in its possible achievements through its reductive accountability focus on enhancing NAPLAN scores, with the potential to reduce the width of curriculum provided. If this is the case, it will widen the curriculum and

pedagogical gap between rich and poor schools.

Other recent announcements reiterate this intransigent policy problem. Commenting on the preliminary 2012 NAPLAN results, Federal Education Minister Peter Garret noted that, overall, performance has remained steady since 2008, 'But they also show that there is a long way to go in meeting the national goal of reaching the world's top five by 2025 in maths, reading and science and for equity in school performance.'

While overall Australia performs well in education, the lucky country has a long way to go until we provide fair and equitable education for all students.

How money is allocated to schools and education programs is never far from the centre of education debate and is central to the equity debate. Prime Minister Gillard provided her long awaited response to the Gonski Review in a speech to the National Press Club on September 3 in which she announced, 'The Government will adopt the Review's core recommendation that every child's education should be supported with a benchmark amount of funding: a new School Resource Standard based on what it costs to educate a student at the schools we know already get strong results.' Ms Gillard further announced that, 'Extra needs should be met through a system of "needs loadings" - extra funding, per student, to help students from low SES backgrounds, Indigenous students, students with disability and students with limited English skills, as well as to help with extra costs for small and remote schools.'

The plan has a 13-year timeline, which aims to see Australia ranked among the top five education systems globally by 2025. While some have criticised this as unnecessarily long, others have supported a sustainable approach to change. With the Coalition flagging their intention not to proceed with this funding, it is certain to become a key issue in next year's federal election. ACE, indeed all educators, need to encourage debate about this central equity issue.

Our contributors to this issue of *Professional Educator* include politicians, academics, teachers and researchers. They provide thoughtful analysis and comment on a range of equity issues.

Finally, as this is the last edition of *Professional Educator* for 2012, I would like to thank all of our contributors who have helped to provide our members with informative reading through the year. I would also like to thank Louise Reynolds for her wonderful work on the magazine. •

Completion of Year 12 or equivalent courses

■ Robert New

The Coalition of Australian Governments (COAG) met in 2009 to discuss Australia's levels of education and attainment. As a consequence of this meeting and following on from the Melbourne Declaration's statement that there was 'room for improvement in Australia's rate of Year 12 completion or equivalent,' it was determined that a program would be put in place to ensure that by 2020, 90 per cent of students would complete Year 12 or equivalent. This would require the completion rate to be increased by 16 per cent. This statement of Year 12 or equivalent is used in most DEEWR documents and not elaborated upon. The COAG target is to raise the overall education standard in Australia, in order to enable Australia to be more competitive internationally, and to have a more productive workforce. It is important therefore, to know what benchmark they are setting. The result is surprising.

What is the equivalent attainment of Year 12?

An equivalent qualification of a Year 12 (Senior Secondary) Certificate issued by a Senior Secondary Board of Studies is:

- an Australian Qualification Framework (AQF) Certificate II or higher qualification issued by a Registered Training Organisation or a higher education institution; or
- the Certificate of General Education for Adults, the International Baccalaureate or other higher education pre-entry course.¹

This information is available on the DEEWR website, but is difficult to find. Most people would have an issue with a full VET program being considered equal to a single Cert II or CGEA II (a base Year 10 standard of literacy and numeracy), let alone a complete VCE or International Baccalaureate diploma. I have taught many students Certificate II qualifications and for most

1. www.deewr.gov.au/Youth/YouthAttainmentandTransitions/Documents/CompactQAs.pdf

of them it was the first time they had achieved an academic outcome and was also their biggest life achievement. In other words achievement at that level can be life changing. However, none of these students would have thought that they had achieved a Year 12 equivalent education. A Cert II is not sufficient for entry into university, some TAFE courses or even Year 11 at many mainstream schools.

The decision to set the requirement at this level was stated in conversation with DEEWR representatives as a political decision that was the outcome of many lengthy discussions and community consultation. By setting the required education standard at a Cert II, even if this only applies to a minority of students, COAG are undermining the intent of the policy, which is to produce change in the education standards of Australians. The internationally agreed level of equivalency is a Cert III, which is also the value COAG uses for other less publicised targets. So why change the definition to allow such a diverse range of educational standards to be considered equal?

Some might suggest that it is so COAG can achieve the statistic of 90 per cent without having to change or do anything, but this is not supported by the 'earn or learn' policy, entitlement to a federally funded (or subsidised) courses or the funding of student retention and alternative education programs such as Youth Connections. While lowering the equivalency of Year 12 does make the attainment of the target much simpler and easier – and no doubt a key reason why the deadline was brought forward by five years to 2015 – other important reasons may be to allow for changes in funding models and diffusion of responsibility.

The responsibility to retain or engage students so that they complete Year 12 (or equivalent) has now been shifted from secondary schools to TAFEs, RTOs and community based courses. Thus schools do not need increases in funding to assist them in retaining students as students can achieve their COAG

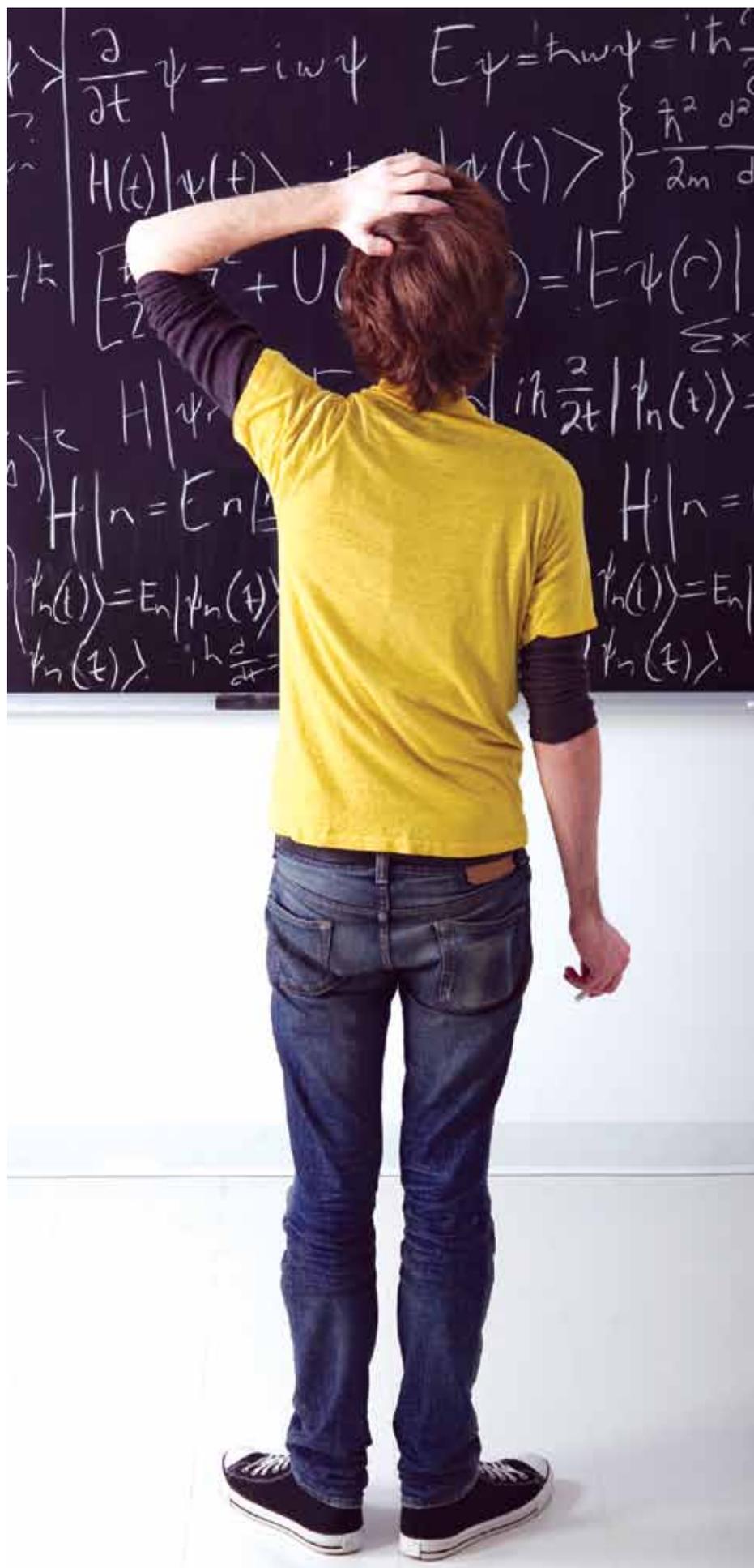
defined education target elsewhere. Similarly, funding for TAFEs can be cut or not increased since community based courses are even cheaper to fund. The more advanced or technical of the TAFE courses are the ones that get cut because they are the most expensive to run. TAFEs then wind up offering more Cert IIs and IIIs that require less specialised equipment and less specialised teachers/trainers in their place. It's as though the 'and further' could be dropped from TAFE's scope and for TAFEs simply to be places of technical education. There are some serious complications of this false equivalency.

When students have achieved this 'technical' Year 12 equivalency they are also then ineligible for many types of welfare support or access to many government subsidised education programs. Thus, by apparently increasing education levels in Australia, the government is in fact saving themselves money and devaluing schools and TAFE institutions. This is despite their commitment that they would provide 'protection from the anticipated tighter labour market' for young people and ensure 'they would have the qualifications needed to take up the jobs as the economy recovered' (DEEWR, 2011).

We need to be careful when measures like this may be used to make claims regarding education status for groups such as ASTI, learning support or refugees. If a high percentage of a particular population or community, achieve their Year 12 (or equivalent) through a Cert II or the CGEA II then that group will be at a disadvantage to those who have achieved the more mainstream Certificates from a board of studies such as the WACE, HSC, VCE or IB Diploma. Yet if these people try to catch up to the others then they will face less welfare support, pay more for their courses and face barriers to enrolment. Once again this negates the intent of the policy. If an employer was faced with two otherwise identical potential employees, one of whom had completed a mainstream Year 12 and one who had completed a CGEA II, would they not hire the mainstream student? The other student could claim equivalency all they liked but in the real world the so called equivalent qualifications cannot be equated to each other.

But at least the 90 per cent completion target will be achieved by 2015 and there will be some statistics to make it seem like our education standard has improved. •

Robert New is a science and psychology teacher from Victoria and a member of ACE.



Education equality is a right of all Australians

■ Senator Fiona Nash



Studies have shown that a large proportion of regional and rural students who defer university do not return and these students largely blame financial barriers...

A world-class education is a right of every Australian and a vital investment in the people, opportunities and prosperity of our nation. The Nationals believe that from pre-school to university the highest standards and equality of access to lifelong learning is fundamental regardless of where people live.

We know, however, that where you live does have a big impact on educational outcomes, with disturbing gaps in achievement and access existing between students in rural and regional Australia and their city counterparts. It is simply not good enough that a child should be disadvantaged because of choice of school or geographical location of that school. Clearly many students from Australia's regional and remote communities are disadvantaged when it comes to education. NAPLAN results, for example, show remote and regional students are being outperformed by their metropolitan counterparts.

Ensuring regional and remote schools have adequate resources and skilled teachers will be essential to raising the educational achievement of regional, rural and remote Australian children. Our state and federal governments must work together to meet the nation's education needs. They must avoid duplication in administering programs to ensure resources are focused on classroom need. Those resources must ensure that teachers have the support and material they need to do their job.

More also needs to be done to improve teacher quality in our schools. This can be achieved to some extent by allowing school principals greater power by delegating to them and school councils funding responsibility and accountability. This would allow principals and leadership teams greater freedom to develop and support their staff and hire the right staff for the right positions, manage underperforming teachers effectively and better reward the best and brightest teachers.

Attracting and retaining skilled teachers in regional and remote communities is an ongoing challenge. Factors affecting this include isolation from other schools, lack of professional support, lack of coaching mentors, insufficient access to quality learning, lack of housing and low levels of life experience and skills. Measures need to be taken to encourage more of our best teachers to accept the challenges of teaching in our regional and remote communities. Providing incentives is one way of encouraging teachers to relocate. Difficulties can, however, emerge due to states offering different rates to entice teachers to switch between states. This could be addressed by implementing a standardised national system of incentive payments that encourage qualified teachers to relocate to, or remain in, rural and regional locations.

Other measures that should be considered include a teacher relocation incentive scheme, a regional teacher network to provide the linkage between teachers and communities in regional areas and bonded scholarships for regional students to study in areas of skills shortage at university on the condition they return to work in these areas.

Disadvantage is also faced by regional and rural students when it comes time to pursue tertiary studies. It is an alarming fact that regional students are not going to university at the same rate as their metropolitan peers. Only 33 per cent of regional students attend tertiary education compared to 55 per cent of metropolitan students and we know the biggest barrier is financial.

Regional communities are certainly impacted by the need for their students to relocate for university or vocational training with an estimated 7000 non-metropolitan students relocating to study annually. Overall, regional and remote students have a greater propensity than metropolitan students to settle in regional areas after studying, which can provide a return benefit for regional communities in encouraging young people to pursue

further education. Students need to be supported to relocate if they are unable to stay at home to continue studying.

Estimated costs for a regional student to relocate to attend university are now said to exceed \$30,000 per year in study costs, accommodation and living expenses. These financial pressures are exacerbated when students are ineligible for Youth Allowance. The Labor Government has backtracked on the worst of its policy changes in this area but there is still gross unfairness in the system as demonstrated by the fact the number of students from Outer Regional, Remote and Very Remote areas accessing Independent Youth Allowance has dropped by almost half in a single year.

The main barriers are the parental income test and the parental assets test. The parental income test deems a student ineligible for Independent Youth Allowance if their parents' combined taxable income is above \$150,000. This anomaly forces students to prove their independence from their parents and then penalises the same students based on their parents' income.

Even worse from a farming perspective is the parental assets test, which fails to acknowledge that farming families are often asset rich but income poor and cannot simply sell off a paddock, or the header used to strip the wheat crop each year, to support their children's education. We are not talking about wealthy people here; we are talking about farmers, police officers or school teachers out in regional areas who potentially receive absolutely nothing from the government for students who travel away to university.

So what do we do about it? The core plank of education policy must be that all Australians can access educational opportunities no matter where they live. Under the Labor Government the gap between regional and city students has been exacerbated, not improved. Funds need to be allocated to address this inequity.

The Nationals support the introduction of a Tertiary Access Allowance to assist regional students who cannot stay at home with their parents while they study. This measure would not be means tested and would negate the need for students to meet the stringent workforce criterion currently in place for independent youth allowance, which is a positive move as those taking a gap year are often tempted by the lure of paid work or travel and do not return to university. Studies have shown that a large proportion of regional and rural students who defer university do not return and these students largely blame financial barriers as the reason for not continuing.

The Nationals are committed to ensuring equity in education between regional and remote students and their city counterparts. We need to ensure regional and remote students and educators have the necessary support and tools available to them to attain high levels of education and have equity in access to education.

Following the last election I was appointed Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Regional Education, the first time the Coalition had made regional education a specific portfolio area. The creation of this shadow portfolio demonstrates the recognition that regional education requires a separate focus and highlights the Liberal/National Coalition's commitment to address current inequities that exist between our metropolitan students and those in regional and remote Australia. •

Senator Fiona Nash was elected as a National Party senator for New South Wales in 2004. She is Deputy Leader of the Nationals in the Senate and Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Regional Education.



The hijacking of the quality teaching movement

■ Stephen Dinham

I have been heavily involved with research into teaching and learning for more than 20 years. Much of my early work involved working in schools observing and interviewing teachers and students and surveying teachers about their work both in Australia and overseas. A former teacher, I was involved in projects investigating aspects such as teacher induction, communication in schools, new approaches to teaching, the impact of teaching on teachers' lives, the social aspects of teaching and learning, teacher health motivation and satisfaction, teacher resignation, educational leadership, professional learning and effective schools.

In the late 1990s my attention moved towards teaching for learning and the impact of teaching on student achievement. Paul Ayres, Wayne Sawyer and I (2004) conducted a study of successful senior secondary teaching in NSW government schools and this led to a larger ARC project involving two universities and the NSW Education Department. In this work we were concerned with the conditions and practices leading to what could be termed exceptional student outcomes across the academic, personal and social domains (see Dinham, 2007).

At the same time I was working with

Catherine Scott on a range of projects exploring the identity, occupational motivation, satisfaction and health of teachers, international patterns of teacher satisfaction and approaches to educational improvement focusing and impacting on teachers. We were also interested in the role that position in schools played in matters such as satisfaction, dissatisfaction and stress. This work continues and now encompasses samples of teachers in over eight countries (see Dinham & Scott, 2000, 2002; Scott & Dinham, 2002, 2008; Scott, Stone & Dinham, 2001).

An important trigger in the development in my thinking was being asked to establish and chair (until mid-2007) the NSW Minister for Education and Training and Australian College of Educators Quality Teaching Awards in 2000. These awards were designed to research and recognise outstanding teaching in early childhood, primary, secondary, TAFE and university settings (Dinham, 2002). Other work I was involved with included evaluations of various attempts to improve the quality of teaching such as the Australian Government Quality Teaching Program (Brady, Aubusson & Dinham, 2009; Dinham, 2009).

Another significant involvement was being asked in 2002 to join the Interim

Committee which established the NSW Institute of Teachers. Both the NSW Quality Teaching Awards and the work of the NSWIT involved working for the first time with professional teaching standards. Joining the Australian Council for Educational Research in 2007 gave me the opportunity to work closely with the late Ken Rowe, a key advocate of evidence-based approaches and a staunch critic of what he termed trendy nonsense (see Dinham & Rowe, 2007). Whilst at ACER I also had the opportunity to work with Lawrence Ingvarson, particularly around the intersection of professional teaching standards, teacher quality and professional learning. Lawrence was and is a great advocate for professional standards. With colleagues we conducted the initial mapping and consolidation of professional teaching and leadership standards for DEEWR which became the basis for the Professional Teaching Standards developed by AITSL and the National Professional Standard for Principals which followed (Dinham, 2011c).

In 2008 we produced a report for the Business Council of Australia which laid out the imperative for a new standards based salary and career architecture for Australian teachers (Dinham, Ingvarson & Kleinhenz, 2008). This model was echoed



in subsequent work by AITSL. I have continued to advocate the need to develop a new career architecture for Australia's teachers and to utilise the AITSL National Professional Teaching Standards to inform, improve and recognise the professional development of our teachers (Dinham, 2011a).

Another significant development in my thinking on quality teaching was exposure to the work of John Hattie in 2003 and later his book *Visible Learning* which appeared in 2009. John's work provided an extensive empirical base to the work I have done to this point and clearly underscored the importance of the classroom teacher as the biggest in-school influence on student achievement. Earlier I published a book *How to Get Your School Moving and Improving: an evidence-based approach* (2008) which brought together much of my work around the areas of learning, teaching, leadership, school change, teacher's work and lives, professional learning and overall school effectiveness. This was well received.

I have also been involved with providing consultancy to a range of bodies including AITSL, various professional associations, departments of education and governments. Since 2009 I have presented over 165 conference papers in Australia and overseas and produced more than 55 publications, most of which centre on improving teacher quality, instructional leadership and student learning. There is clearly a great hunger by educators for

professional development centred on teaching and learning.

Since 2011 I have been involved with the groundbreaking Master of Teaching program at the University of Melbourne, a clinical interventionist approach to teaching and learning championed by Field Rickards, which incorporates close partnerships with stakeholders and a strong evidence-based approach.

The Quality Teaching Movement: Danger Signs

There is no doubt that there is now a significant emphasis on teacher quality within Australia and internationally and that developments such as NAPLAN, My School, ACARA, National Partnerships and AITSL have all played a part in strengthening this focus.

However there are growing and worrying signs that the quality teaching movement is in danger of being hijacked. I was initially pleased to see the growing focus on teachers and teaching rather than other aspects of education such as school organisation and management. By recognising teachers as the biggest in-school influence on student achievement I was hoping that this would lead to significant focus on and investment in teachers' professional learning. However it is apparent that rather than regarding teachers as our most precious asset they are now being seen as our biggest problem when students fail to learn or reach ➔

the standards we have for them individually and collectively.

There has been a growing chorus of ill-informed half-baked solutions to the 'problem' of teacher quality. These top down simplistic measures are based upon misunderstanding and in some cases ideology have included: sacking the 'bottom' 5 per cent of teachers, whoever they are, and somehow replacing them with better teachers; paying teachers by 'results', however these are determined and measured; punishing and rewarding schools on the basis of 'performance'; giving principals more autonomy and power to hire and fire; bonus pay for the 'top' teachers; raising entry standards for teacher candidates; allowing non-teachers to become principals, and so forth. All this ignores the fact that Australia still performs well on international measures of student achievement such as PISA although we certainly can't rest on our laurels as there are signs of slippage and the equity gap remains an issue. We are however well ahead of the USA on PISA, to use one measure, yet we still heed the recipes and exhortations of US economists, educators and politicians to be more like the USA.

Nowhere in any of these solutions or remedies do I see recognition of the need to provide ongoing effective professional learning for teachers to enable them to continue to develop and upgrade their skills and to be recognised and rewarded for this growth. Everyone assumes someone else will fund and provide this. Nowhere do I see the means to provide educational leaders *en masse* with the knowledge and skills they need to be true leaders of learning. What we do see however is a blanket stigmatisation of teachers, principals, teacher educators and education system leaders. There is an assumption, for example that all teachers and teacher education courses are equally ineffective. Reality is quite different.

The work of my colleague John Hattie has been particularly misrepresented and misused as a blunt instrument to attack teachers, teacher education and teaching, something far from his intentions. His recognition of teachers' importance has been twisted to imply that it is the teacher's fault when students fail to learn and that we need greater control over and surveillance of teachers, to the extent that some principals report on a growing practice of snap inspections of classrooms sometimes accompanied by video taking to catch teachers performing badly. Rather than careful, collaborative planning and constructive, improvement oriented feedback, we see arbitrary, unfocused 'assessment', with a broad demand to lift performance.

Hattie's position on direct instruction has been misconstrued as advocating didactic, 'traditional' teacher-centred approaches rather than its intended meaning of teachers having clear intentions of what they are trying to achieve with every student, and planning, orchestrating and assessing learning in their classrooms accordingly.

Similarly the role of professional standards has been twisted to be more about judging and dismissing teachers than developing and recognising them. Rather than being done *with* and *for* teachers, many measures advocated and being hastily and poorly implemented are essentially being done *to* teachers and *without* them, almost guaranteeing resistance and minimal compliance.

I have said elsewhere that the biggest equity issue in Australian education is a quality teacher in every classroom (Dinham, 2011b). However to achieve this we need to address teacher quality at every key point of leverage (Dinham, 2008). Simplistic, quick fix, populist solutions promulgated by economists, those from the business sector and educational advisers and politicians totally out of touch with teaching and the extant body of research on teaching and learning, capture the headlines but provide little guidance.

Recent discussion papers on teaching and learning in Victoria (2012) and NSW (2012) for example, provide little detail but

threaten, stereotype and stigmatise teachers. They paint the picture of a crisis in teaching that requires intervention from on high, a big stick in other words.

A fixation with Finland, Shanghai and South Korea and the like represents the worst form of cultural cringe. We need to recognise and build on the strengths we have rather than attempting to 'cherry pick' what appear to be recipes for success from vastly different contexts. Ten years ago everybody was talking about Japan due to the strength of the Japanese economy. We needed to mimic the educational and business practices in Japan and we needed to teach Japanese in Australian schools. Nobody talks about copying Japan now.

Conclusion

We cannot ignore the effects on learning and development of socioeconomic status, family background, geographic location and the funding and resources available to schools. Every teacher is not going to be able to bring every student to an average or above average level of performance but the vast majority of teachers will try very hard to do this. Teachers and school leaders are primarily the reason why we have such a relatively open and well

performing education system. Life isn't fair, but good teaching and good schools are the best means we have of overcoming disadvantage and opening the doors of opportunity for young people.

Much attention is currently being given to the Gonski review recommendations on school funding. The fact is we have a highly inequitable, inefficient, ramshackle means of allocating funding to schools which has been cobbled together over time. It will be difficult to remedy this from the position where we currently find ourselves. This is recognised. However there is a lack of will to make the necessary hard decisions because of a fear of alienating elements of the electorate. Equity comes a distant second to votes. Whenever there is debate about a more equitable funding system politicians are forced to offer the guarantee that whatever the plan,

no school will be worse off. This almost guarantees nothing will change and that inequities will be perpetuated if not exacerbated.

We are at a crucial point in our development as an educated nation and the national initiatives around enhancing the quality of teaching of the past five years have been substantial and significant. We have the opportunity through these national initiatives and agreements to take the necessary next steps down the path of ensuring quality teaching for all Australian students. We need however strong, informed bipartisan support rather than fragmentation, push back and politicking. We need to be cognisant of decades of empirical work rather than dismissive. We need to stop looking for quick fix solutions which have been found wanting elsewhere. Education as a whole is performing much better than both the corporate sector and governments that criticise it.

Above all, as a nation we need to recognise education as our most important investment in facilitating personal, social and economic prosperity and not a cost or a commodity to be purchased by those with the most assets.

It is time for the profession as a whole to speak up and to question from a basis of evidence the externally proposed remedies to the perceived problems of teachers, teaching and schools in Australia. •

Stephen Dinham OAM is Professor of Teacher Education and Director of Learning and Teaching in the Melbourne Graduate School of Education, University of Melbourne.

The fact is we have a highly inequitable, inefficient, ramshackle means of allocating funding to schools which has been cobbled together over time.

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What goes on in an Islamic school?

■ Peter D. Jones

A third of secondary school students in Australia now attend Catholic and other independent schools, with the number of these schools substantially increasing since educational funding policy changes introduced by the Howard Coalition Government after 1996. One group of faith schools to receive a great deal of publicity in the last decade has been the Islamic schools, although the main area of growth in numerical terms has been with the conservative Christian schools. Much of the publicity for the Islamic schools has focused on community opposition to their establishment, particularly the proposed Islamic school in Camden, near Sydney, in 2007-2008 (the protests were the subject of an ABC Four Corners programme, *Dangerous Ground*, on 10 March 2008). Islamic schools were also targeted in the Australian Values debate after 2003 when the then Minister for Education, Dr Brendan Nelson, said he had received letters from 'concerned citizens' about the schools and what they taught, that he was following up.

Wild allegations have been made about what these schools are teaching their students, yet very little research has been carried out on them. It was for this reason, that my own research since 2004, has focused on visits to many of the schools, interviewing a cross section of Muslim and non-Muslim staff, as well as former students. The research focused on what was taught in the schools, how it was taught, and how staff and students had reacted to the Australian Values debate. In addition, did the schools teach intolerance of other faiths as alleged by some of their critics, and did the schools isolate students from other high school students who were not Muslims?

Australia's Muslim community

According to the 2011 census, there are 476,300 Muslims representing 2.2 per cent of the population of Australia, although some commentators say the figure is probably higher. Almost 50 per cent of Australia's Muslims live in Sydney in addition to 32 per cent in Melbourne, which is why most of the Islamic schools are in these two cities.

The first Islamic schools were established in Melbourne and Sydney in 1983. Today there are just over thirty of them, all in capital cities: three in Perth, one in Adelaide; two in Brisbane; one

in Canberra; and the others in Sydney and Melbourne. While most Australians think of Muslims as a homogenous group, the face of Islam is in reality about as diverse as Christianity, and these differences are reflected in the schools and the organisations or individuals setting them up.

Thirty-eight per cent of Muslims in Australia were born in this country. While the largest communities are of Lebanese and Turkish origin, ethnically over 70 different Muslim communities now live in Australia. In addition, Muslim connections to Australia go back to before European settlement with several centuries of inter-visitation between the trepang fishermen from Sulawesi and the Aboriginal people of Northern Australia. In the nineteenth century, the Afghan cameleers made it possible for Europeans to penetrate the Desert Centre of Australia, and it was this community that established the first mosques in this country.

The growth of the Islamic schools

While there are a number of diverse Muslim organisations in Australia, one of the main ones is the Australian Federation of Islamic Councils (AFIC), which originated in the early 1970s and is based in Sydney. AFIC decided to set up Islamic schools in each capital city in Australia, starting with Melbourne in 1983. Getting land and finance was initially a major problem for the early schools but in Victoria, they had the advantage of taking over previous schools that had been closed for various reasons, especially during the era of the Kennett state government (1992-1999). Some of the schools sought funding from the Gulf States which is why a number of them have names associated with their benefactors. The AFIC school in Melbourne was initially named the King Khalid Islamic College for this reason, while the first campus was set up in what was previously a Catholic school in Coburg that had been fire damaged. In 2006, the school broke away from AFIC to become the Australian International Academy and today it has a sister school in Sydney (formerly Noor al-Houda) and another in Abu Dhabi. AFIC has since opened another school at Tarneit in the western suburbs of Melbourne, starting with a K-4 campus that they plan to expand each year, a model developed by many of the other Islamic schools. Other AFIC schools have been opened in Perth, Adelaide, Canberra and Brisbane.



Sydney was different as the first school there was started by Silma Buckley and her husband after their daughter was turned away from another private school for wearing a hijab. Both Silma and her husband were converts to Islam and the story of their struggle to establish the school has been published as a pamphlet, *Bridges of Light*, and then shown on an ABC Compass program, *Silma's School* (3 September 2006). Finding land in Sydney has always been a struggle, with a great deal of community opposition often masquerading as traffic concerns or related issues. The AFIC school, Malek Fahd Islamic College in Bankstown, tried to set up a second campus in 2010 to meet growing demand and had opened its first classes, when appeals from a local community group meant their initial Council approval was over-ruled. Other schools have been set up by individuals, like Mr Abdullah Magar in Perth, whose Australian Islamic College has over 2,000 students and is the largest Islamic school in Australia. Some schools are connected with a particular ethnic community, while others have been started by organisations specifically set up to develop a school.

Financially the schools were to benefit from policy changes introduced by the Howard Coalition Government (1996-2007). Today, while the schools do charge fees, on average about 80 per cent of their funding comes from government sources because of the low socioeconomic status of the suburbs where they are established. Significantly none of the schools now seek funding from overseas.

In terms of numbers, around 20 per cent of Muslim students currently attend Islamic schools in Australia. While most students attend schools in the public system, there are others whose parents send them to independent single sex schools, especially Catholic schools. Other students get sent to Muslim countries once they reach puberty, where education is again gender segregated, but there are no figures for either of these options, and evidence is only anecdotal. From my research, it seems that more students would attend Islamic schools if they were closer to home or their parents could afford the fees. Many of the schools bus a majority of their students in every day, especially those campuses developed on the outer edges of Sydney and Melbourne.

What do they teach in the schools?

All schools in Australia that receive government funding teach the Australian curriculum. Faith based schools are only different because they include extra classes on religion and their assemblies will take a religious form. Like many other faith-based schools, the annual calendar reflects their sacred times. In the case of Muslims, this means a two to three day holiday for the Eid el-Fitr after the fasting month of Ramadan and the Eid ul-Adha during the time of the Pilgrimage month to Mecca, the Hajj (the twelfth month of the Islamic calendar). On Fridays, the noon prayer forms a special assembly time and one of the school imams* will give a short address. Sometimes older male students will lead the prayers.

Other advantages for Muslim students are having access to a halal (permitted) canteen, which means they do not have to worry

about what they are eating, and the school uniform is in keeping with the Islamic dress code. Girls wear a scarf or hijab, though the age at which they start wearing it varies, and cover their arms and legs, while boys wear long shorts, even when on the sports field. In addition, at school functions, no alcohol is served, and gambling is haram (forbidden) as a school fundraising activity.

Most of the schools devote six lessons a week to faith teaching. A native speaker will teach Arabic while the school imam usually teaches the units on the Qur'an and Islamic Studies. All the imams have qualified overseas, but the standard of teaching varies enormously. Former students interviewed were sharply critical of older imams who did not have a good command of English and were even more critical of their Arabic teachers who were often not even qualified as teachers. Some schools now insist on their staff qualifying as teachers in Australia and students spoke appreciatively of younger imams who understood how to relate to young Australians. There was a marked difference between students who came from an Arabic speaking home and those who did not, and contrary to popular opinion, only about 20 per cent of Muslims are Arabs. Nonetheless, speaking Arabic at home did not mean that students could read and write the classical Arabic of the Qur'an, but some students from a non-Arabic speaking home told me that they never really understood Arabic and their lessons were a waste of time.

With the rest of the curriculum, there are some differences from other schools, reflecting Islamic beliefs, but no different from some of the other faith schools. One big issue for Muslims is whether an Islamic ethos penetrates the whole school curriculum or just the faith units. In some schools, there is an effort to embed these ideas in the curriculum, for example Islam's contribution to mathematics and science, or to provide for a more balanced approach to history than the current somewhat Euro-Centric curriculum. However, as around half the staff at most of the Islamic schools are not Muslims, this awareness is usually missing. Nonetheless, students said that they did appreciate staff who referred to Islam's contribution to knowledge as well as covering the set curriculum.

Many of the schools have a high intake of new arrivals so need to have ESL classes. In English, most of the teachers are non-Muslim, but while teaching the official curriculum, they need to censor passages or films occasionally (especially those with references to inappropriate use of alcohol or pre-marital sex) or not teach inappropriate texts. *Looking for Alibrandi* was a popular text for girls and many of them enjoyed the teen novels of Muslim Australian author, Randa Abdel Fattah (such as *Does my head look big in this* and *Ten Things I Hate About Me*), who had herself attended an Islamic school. Her visit to speak at one school in Sydney had not surprisingly proved very popular.

One contested area is Health Education as like other faith-based schools, Islamic schools reflect a culture where issues like sex and drug education are not discussed in class, although efforts are being made to develop a suitable curriculum. Muslim students are encouraged to keep physically fit, in line with the teachings of the Prophet Muhammad on the subject, but the sports taught do



vary in different schools, often reflecting ethnic backgrounds and access to facilities.

Many of the schools do not teach music because the more orthodox Muslim parents say it is 'unIslamic', and the principals say it is easier just not to teach it. Other schools argue that there is a long tradition of music in Islamic culture although there are certain instruments or kinds of music that are not appropriate. The same controversy surfaces over Art although again Islamic Art has a long and rich history. However many other Australian schools do not teach Music or Art because they do not have the space or trained teachers, just as not all schools can offer Physical Education to their students.

Do the schools teach intolerance of other faiths?

One allegation, often made against Muslims and the Islamic schools, is that they teach hatred of other faiths. In fact, the evidence is quite the contrary, as older students are given the opportunity to take part in inter-faith dialogue through programs like *Building Bridges* in Melbourne. However these occasions are largely with other independent and Catholic schools rather than public schools. The faith units sometimes include a look at the other Abrahamic traditions (Judaism and Christianity), while pre-tertiary religion courses in states like Western Australia include comparative religion units that cover the Indic faiths too.

In Melbourne, Minaret College developed an accredited unit on the Qur'an for the VCE 'Texts and Traditions' syllabus that attracted many of their own students once it was perceived as a pre-tertiary course.

Some students interviewed did complain that only select students were invited to take part in these exchanges but admitted that it did take a certain level of self-confidence to speak on these occasions. The ones who had taken part said that they had enjoyed meeting other students and the best part was the informal exchanges. Given that public schools in Australia do not even include Religion as a subject (apart from recent controversial programs allowing religious visitors into the schools, usually proselytising Christians), the Islamic schools are way ahead in terms of inter-faith dialogue rather than the other way round.

One other related angle within the Islamic schools themselves is the divide in Islam between Sunni and Shi'a. Only one student interviewed said she was taught hostility towards Shi'a Islam by her teachers while others said it was not an issue, though they acknowledged there were a few differences in religious practice like how they prayed. There are two Shi'a primary schools in Sydney, both of which hope to expand their classes to become K-12 schools over the next few years.

Do the schools isolate Muslim students?

Both Muslims and non-Muslims sometimes express the fear that Islamic schools isolate the students from other young Australians and act as a barrier to integration. Some students interviewed said that this was the case for them because they had never been to any other kind of school. However a high proportion of other students

had been to other schools as well as the Islamic schools so they did not feel isolated. These students had often attended Catholic primary schools or public schools while others left high school before Year 12 to attend colleges where they could take subjects not taught at Islamic schools. There is some truth in the allegation that one or two schools manipulate their pre-tertiary results by encouraging students to leave early if they are not prepared to take high profile subjects that will lead to doing Medicine or Law at university. The Australian International Academy is the only Islamic school to offer the International Baccalaureate (IB) and is proud of its high standard of results.

Students also met their contemporaries through extra-curricular activities, ranging from sporting fixtures to debating or participation in Youth Parliaments and Model United Nations Assemblies. Students interviewed often said how much they valued meeting other students and explaining their faith, especially to overcome common misconceptions. The girls reported that questions they were asked included whether they took their clothes off to have a shower, or what they wore to go swimming, rather than raising theological issues about beliefs.

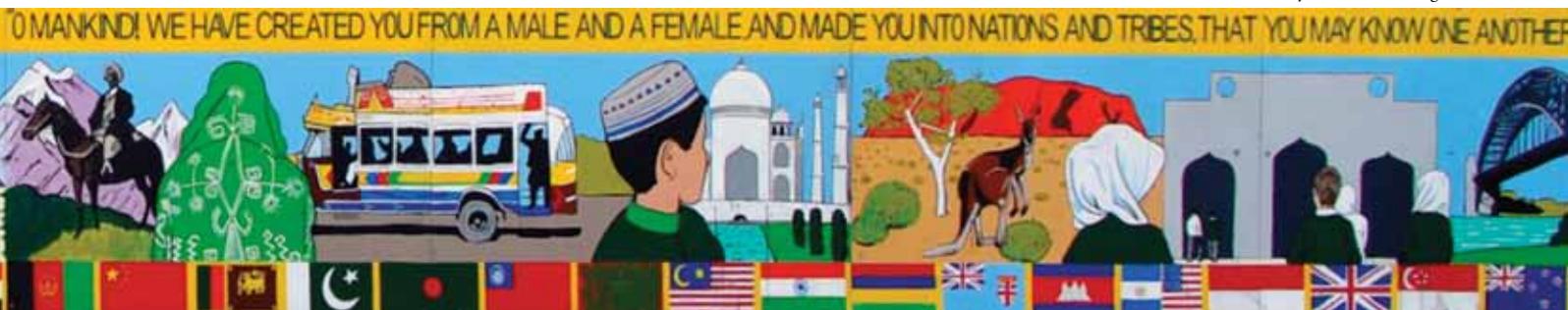
Those students who had attended an Islamic school from K-12 said that while it might have isolated them a bit from wider society and made university a bit of a culture shock, it did offer them a 'shelter from the storm'. This was the case particularly since the events of September 2001 and the Bali bombings. Even as far back as the first Iraq War, Islamic schools and mosques had been the target of attacks. Girls had their hijabs ripped off and some said they took them off out of school to avoid abuse. School buses were also a target. Some also referred to outrageous statements made by so-called leaders of the Muslim community which made them cringe, given the public perception that Islam was monolithic and these men spoke for all Australian Muslims. Muslim staff admitted that it was a problem that in Islam nobody speaks for the whole community. They also reported that it was a problem that the media often focused on some of the more extreme views expressed, in rather the same way that some Christians would get upset if other Australians thought they shared the views of Rev Fred Nile, the Jensen brothers or Archbishop Pell.

As the Muslim population of Australia increases, obviously more schools will be established, and though teething problems remain, students interviewed expressed the view that overall they had improved since the early days. One day, hopefully Islamic schools will be as acceptable as Catholic schools, given the initial opposition both have faced over the years. *

*In Islam, an imam is the person who leads the prayers in a mosque and delivers the Friday address but in the schools, they have an important role as spiritual guides and figures of authority, as they have qualified at overseas seminaries.

Peter D. Jones teaches Comparative Religion at The Friends' School in Hobart. He took the Graduate Diploma in Islamic Studies offered by the University of New England and converted his thesis on Islamic Schools in Australia into a PhD, submitted in July 2012.

Photo courtesy of Minaret College, Victoria



Dr Carol Nicoll

Chief commissioner, Tertiary Education
Quality and Standards Agency

The Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA) was established by the Federal Government in 2011, following a recommendation of the Bradley Review of Higher Education to deregulate higher education places and create a single national regulator to ensure deregulation of the sector does not lead to a diminishing of standards.

TEQSA's regulatory role commenced on January 29 this year, replacing the regulatory roles previously played by AUQA and the state and territory regulatory bodies. It is now responsible for regulating the entire Australian higher education sector, encompassing all 172 higher education providers, including universities. As of July 2012, TEQSA is also responsible for the ESOS (Education Services for Overseas Students) Act.

Deregulation of the higher education market has led to considerable discussion and debate about any possible impact on academic standards, as higher education providers accept greater numbers of students, and concerns about a perceived increase in regulatory burden on Australia's higher education providers. The establishment of TEQSA also heralded significant regulatory change for Australia's universities that were previously self-accrediting.

TEQSA is headed by Chief Commissioner Dr Carol Nicoll who previously headed the Australian Learning and Teaching Council (ALTC). Nearing the end of her first year in the role, Dr Nicoll discussed the progress made by

TEQSA so far and some of the issues she has encountered with *Professional Educator*.

PE: Carol Nicoll, thank you for taking the time to tell ACE members something about the work of TEQSA so far. To start with, why was the establishment of TEQSA deemed necessary?

CN: Australia had a very fragmented approach to the regulation of higher education before TEQSA. Before we existed every state and territory had responsibilities for some part of regulation in higher education because we're a federation. Denise Bradley undertook a major review of higher education and recommended a deregulation of higher education places. Before this took place the Commonwealth controlled the number of places, Commonwealth supported places that any university got. The outcome of Denise Bradley's review was 'no, we should deregulate; we should allow universities to basically take as many students as they want in courses,' with the exception of medicine, which would remain controlled because it's controlled through a different mechanism through the Department of Health and Ageing. The government accepted that recommendation. Professor Bradley also said there should be a single national regulator to achieve a better and more efficient approach to regulation and, if we were going to deregulate the market to allow universities to take as many students as they like, what we don't want is them taking in students at lower and lower ATARs and (resulting in) the possibility that they (the students) then don't get the same outcomes or academic standards. Professor

Bradley wanted a standards-based regulator. TEQSA replaces both the state and territory governments' regulatory functions and AUQA in the roles they all undertook and now we have one national regulator. We've been regulating since the 29th January this year so we're now about eight months into regulation.

PE: You were previously head of the ALTC. How did that organisation differ from TEQSA?

CN: There's a simple way of describing it. The ALTC was a carrot. It only funded the universities; it didn't have the reach that TEQSA has. We cover all the higher education providers whereas the ALTC funded people and projects mainly in the universities. In one sense the ALTC handed out money to enable people and institutions to do quality improvement. TEQSA is a stick. Its approach is to say 'by being a regulator you will move towards improvement in quality higher education by meeting these rules, by meeting these standards that will be tested by the regulator.' The ALTC has been replaced by the Office of Learning and Teaching, which is part of DIISRTE and they still have a role to provide some funding for mainly the universities in quality improvement particularly in teaching and learning. TEQSA's concerned with the whole academic enterprise: teaching and learning, research, academic governance, administration management the whole range.

PE: What are some of the issues at the heart of the so-called academic standards debate?

...there is no other country in the world delivering regulation of higher education in exactly the same way as we've been set up to do.

CN: Academic standards are a very complex area. I think there is an issue though that in the past academics said to the community words to the effect 'We are academics, we are experts in what we do and we know about standards and that should be enough, trust us. Just trust us. We know what we're doing.' Well I think there's been a major move in terms of public accountability in education in the last five years. Whether you are delivering higher education through a private provider or a university there is a sense that higher education is something which the public deserves a say in. I think that academic standards are an important part of the academic enterprise and nobody wants to see those lowered. It involves the need for academics to be very sure about benchmarking, about moderating and understanding how their students perform relative to other students from outside their own university. Standards help that but it does require the academic community to be engaged in moderation both of assessment and standards both internally within a university and externally with other providers.

PE: Coming to the end of your first year in this role, are you happy with the progress of TEQSA so far and what have been some of the challenges and issues you've faced as an organisation in its infancy?

CN: Yes, I am amazed by what we've achieved. As a small organisation we have managed to achieve an extraordinary number of things. And one of our challenges has certainly been that there is no other country in the world delivering regulation



of higher education in exactly the same way as we've been set up to do. We are a standards-based, risk-based regulator. If we could have copied what another country did that would have made it a lot easier for us. But there is no other country that does it exactly as we were set up to do. We are forging new ground in terms of how we approach regulation and quality improvement in higher education. Another challenge has been that we are setting up a completely new organisation. While we are having to do all the external regulation we're also having to build an organisation internally and so doing it all at once has been an incredible challenge but I think we have achieved a huge amount. One other issue in terms of challenges is that the universities are not used to being regulated in the way that they are under TEQSA. They weren't subject to the same sort of regulation that the non-self-accrediting providers were in the past. Under TEQSA they are subject to the same threshold standards. We assess all of our providers, whether a university or a small private provider, against a set of threshold standards and those threshold standards set out what a higher education provider should be about. The universities are as accountable against those standards as are small providers. That has been a considerable change for them because they haven't been used to that sort of approach in the past.

PE: One of the stated objectives for TEQSA is to protect students undertaking or proposing to undertake higher education in Australia. Could you tell me about the protective role of TEQSA and what it is that the students need to be protected from?

CN: We need to protect their right to a quality educational experience. TEQSA is here to ensure that every student, whether they are an international student or a domestic student, has a high quality learning experience. It shouldn't matter where they are, what sort of provider they are in, it shouldn't matter whether they are in a metropolitan city or a regional area. It shouldn't matter if they are with a provider with 80,000 students or 50; they should all be getting a high quality learning experience. That's what we're here to protect. We do have responsibility for the ESOS Act as well as the TEQSA Act. The states and territories and the Commonwealth have all passed their previous role in monitoring international students to us. That's something we take very seriously as well as our responsibilities under the TEQSA act.

PE: I understand a risk assessment of universities is due around March next year following a preliminary risk scan earlier this year. What has that scan involved and what are we hoping to learn from that?

CN: We have been set up to use three regulatory principles. One is that we have to be proportionate in the way we carry out our role. We also have to act only where there is a regulatory necessity to act under the TEQSA Act and, thirdly, we have to adopt a risk-based approach. We made a decision that we would develop a regulatory risk framework. This risk framework is directly connected to the threshold standards. We looked at the threshold standards and we looked for the best indicators that we could find of risks in terms of failure in regards to the threshold standards. The risk framework is based on data that we get from all providers. We are doing a risk assessment on all 172 of the institutions that we regulate, including the universities. It is important for your membership to be aware of that because there are a number of teacher education programs that aren't offered through universities that are offered through other providers. The risk assessment that will be completed by early next year will be based on a much larger set of data than our initial scan. It will be able to give us a picture of each provider. It is possible though that at the end of that process there will be some providers in those 172 that we are sufficiently worried about that we will have to have further conversations with them about their risk profile and that may result in a variety of outcomes but it will mean that TEQSA will have closer contact with that provider. I

suspect every provider has risks that will show up on that. It's what the management does to mitigate and control those risks that is important. We have three areas of risk that we're really concerned about. One is the possibility that there will be the failure of a provider, so that is a collapse where the provider will close because of their financial situation. Another would be if there is a risk to students. Are students in any way at risk because of these indicators that we've identified? And, thirdly, there may be a risk in terms of the reputational damage to Australia in higher education both nationally or internationally.

PE: TEQSA is also responsible for establishing and maintaining a national register of higher education providers. Is there any suggestion that employers of graduates may look at this information to make judgements about the quality of graduates and their qualifications or of students using the information to select a preferred institution for their studies?

CN: What we do is put up (information about) all of those providers that are registered. There is no league table. The information that is there for students is to say 'this is a provider that is formally regulated by TEQSA' and that can give that student some sense of confidence that it has met certain threshold standards but it will not give any information to an employer or to a student about courses within that, there are other sources of information that students can go to for that sort of thing. It is not in any way, it will never be and does not hold itself out to be, something which is a league table of courses or a rating on courses or providers.

PE: We now have well over one million domestic students attending our universities and rapid growth in participation is expected in the coming years. Are you confident that Australian universities and other providers will provide a world-class education for all students?

CN: I think that we have a very strong sector and I think that we have academics and other educational personnel who are all working very hard to get the best outcomes for students. But that doesn't mean that all providers haven't got areas in which they can improve. Quality improvement needs to be on the agenda of every provider in the country and that is part of what we expect to see in higher education in

Australia. We have a very good reputation, I think that reputation will hold up over years to come and a robust regulator will certainly be helpful in maintaining that reputation.

PE: You mentioned at the start of our discussion there's no other country doing what we're doing. Does this mean we can't look to what is done in other countries to see what we can learn?

CN: Yes we can. Definitely. We've always got something to learn. We've already had significant meetings with overseas organisations. We hosted a conference earlier this year of International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (INQAAHE), which is an international organisation of many, many quality assurance bodies around the world. I'm speaking at the OECD about what we do and I'll be looking forward to learning what other countries do. There are other countries that are very keen to learn from what we're doing. The UK, for example, their quality assurance agency has already developed very close links to us and that's partly because they may end up moving towards a risk-based approach as well and we see great benefit in working collaboratively with them where it's appropriate. We'll also look to learn from other organisations. That's an important part of making sure that Australia delivers the best regulation and the best quality assurance approaches for higher education.

PE: Some media reports recently have suggested that some people in the higher education sector are still not quite sure exactly what TEQSA's role is. What have been some of the challenges in

Quality improvement needs to be on the agenda of every provider in the country and that is part of what we expect to see in higher education in Australia.

communicating TEQSA's agenda to the tertiary sector so far?

CN: I don't think we should be surprised that everybody doesn't know how TEQSA will work yet because TEQSA's only existed for just over six months. We are in a very active outreach program engaging with the sector. We've had regular provider briefings, regular correspondence between us and all of the Vice-Chancellors and CEOs of all of our providers. But we do have to have time to develop what we're going to do. Largely the sector has been very cooperative about that. We've had very positive feedback from our provider briefings. We've had very positive feedback about our case management approach, which is that every provider has a case manager to whom they can talk to at TEQSA. Now that's an approach that means if a provider has an issue they have somebody, not just an enquiries number, they can come to the person that they know is their relationship manager. And that is working very well and that will take time as we roll out each part of our responsibilities.

PE: Just a follow up then on that, based on the feedback and the dialogue that you've been engaged in with the sector, what improvements do you think can be made going forward?

CN: We're very aware that there is scope for reducing the regulatory burden. The commissioners are very aware - very aware - that we can look at other ways to reduce the burden. We at the moment have to regulate against two acts: the ESOS Act and the TEQSA Act. So we are embarking on a significant internal review of regulatory processes between the ESOS and the TEQSA acts. We only took over the ESOS responsibilities on 1 July but we're already looking at how we can do that better and

reduce the burden on providers. We are always looking at ways we can better apply our principles of regulatory necessity, proportionality and risk to the frameworks under both Acts in a manner that ensures the best higher education for students, while reducing unnecessary regulatory burden on providers. So that is definitely something that will consume us for months and months to come. In addition to our regulatory role, we also have a quality assurance and quality improvement role and we've announced that we will be doing two quality assessments, one in relation to English language proficiency and one in relation to third party arrangements, where a number of providers actually have an arrangement with another entity to deliver some of their programs or some part of the student learning experience and we are interested in ensuring that those are at the highest quality. We haven't announced all of the details of those or the methodology or how they will roll out but we have said that both of those are going to be important points of exploration for us in the coming months.

PE: Is it fair and reasonable to expect that all universities provide the same standard of education?

CN: I don't think that any provider necessarily has the same standards across the whole provider whether they're a university or other sort of provider. I think there are different strengths and different challenges for all providers. What we do expect is that all providers will meet the threshold standards. The threshold standards are essentially a minimum but they are not a low minimum. They say 'here is what is expected' whether it's in the education faculty, or the medical faculty or the business

faculty, within one provider these standards need to be met. That's the benefit of having a standards-based regulator; they (the standards) are spelled out for us. We don't decide what they are, there is a separate body called the Higher Education Standards Panel and it makes the decisions about the standards. We apply them. It is expected that every provider will meet those standards and that is not unreasonable.

PE: One last question. As we strive to achieve higher participation rates in higher education by students from low SES backgrounds and the attainment targets of 40 per cent of young Australians holding a Bachelor degree, are you confident that our higher education sector can meet the expanding demand for higher education while maintaining the highest possible standards?

CN: I'm very confident that Australian higher education providers take academic standards seriously and I think that providers are increasingly looking at strategies for dealing with the capacity to identify students' needs as they come into higher education, whether they've got a low ATAR or a high one. If they (providers) are taking students without the traditionally higher ATARs they are looking at ways to identify what those students need, what their learning needs are, and then trying to address them. One of the things that we will be looking at, however, is to make sure that all providers take that responsibility very seriously and that is partly why we were established, to make sure that if a student is taken into a provider, whatever their ATAR score, that they are given the support they need for the greatest opportunities to succeed and reach the appropriate academic standards. *

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Transforming Indigenous education through the Arts

A new research study of a pilot Indigenous¹ program involving primary schools, students and parents has indicated the program had a positive impact on students and parents with improvement noted in literacy, attendance and parental engagement.

The study, *Transforming Indigenous education through the Arts*, by Educational Transformations researcher Dr Tanya Vaughan, examines The Song Room's Creative Arts Indigenous Parental Engagement (CAIPE) project. Results of the study, undertaken in 2011, have now been published by The Song Room.

The CAIPE project was a pilot program aimed to better engage Indigenous parents with their children's learning and development. The CAIPE program pioneered a new educational approach as it supported Indigenous families and communities to 'reach in' to connect with schools and education providers to

1. Australia has two broad cultural groups of original inhabitants – Aboriginal peoples who are the original inhabitants of mainland Australia, Tasmania and some of the other adjacent islands, and the Torres Strait Islander peoples who are the original inhabitants of the Torres Strait Islands. Within these two groups are found many diverse languages and cultures. The term 'Indigenous' refers to people who are of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander peoples. We acknowledge the distinctiveness of each culture group.

develop partnerships with the aim of enhancing their children's educational outcomes.

The CAIPE project was conducted as pilot initiatives in urban, regional and remote regions of Queensland. Parents and students from over 20 schools and other organisations in the regions of Brisbane (Inala), Mackay and Cunnamulla were engaged by The Song Room to participate in CAIPE. The project was conducted over 18 months with funding from the Queensland Office of the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, philanthropy and in-kind support from the Queensland Department of Education and Training. The project was overseen by a Steering Committee that included Indigenous community leaders, local community and Government representatives as well as partner organisations.

Project objectives

The main focus of The Song Room is to address the equity gap in education for disadvantaged children by building the capacity of school communities to positively engage children in schooling and learning through creativity. The CAIPE project was based on



Image courtesy of Marcus Thomson and The Song Room

three key principles:

1. Increase community access to educational opportunities

The partnership was developed to provide increased opportunities for Indigenous students, parents and their school communities.

2. Develop and recognise regional youth leadership capacity

The partnership aimed to increase students' engagement with school and thereby improve their personal and social development, including leadership skills.

3. Build social and educational sustainability

In disadvantaged communities, lack of educational resources, negative attitudes towards education and limited connections between parents, students and schools result in higher chances of students disengaging from school. The partnership aimed to develop school and community connections and resources to sustain arts programs beyond the life of the project.

The CAIPE partnership short term objectives were to:

- Enhance engagement, aspiration and achievement for disadvantaged students;
- Improve students' social, emotional and academic outcomes;
- Build student resilience, self-esteem, health and well-being; and
- Strengthen school-community ties.

The long-term objectives of the project were to:

- Create sustainable outcomes by building the capacity of the participating schools and the generalist teachers;
- To provide an ongoing arts program; and
- Develop community networks and leadership for continued development.

The Song Room developed a very effective model for parental

and community engagement in education for Indigenous students to meet these objectives. This program encouraged and supported the Indigenous community to reach into schools through music and creative arts, with a focus on Indigenous culture. The program was run in small groups of closely located schools. Local Indigenous parents/carers and community members had multiple opportunities to engage with the school community. Key program components were:

- **The Song Room School Workshop Program** themed around local Indigenous culture, music and the arts that was run in the schools weekly over an 18-30 week period for all students; the workshop was conducted by a Song Room Teaching Artist, half of whom were Indigenous, who worked with the same students for one day a week so as to engage deeply with the same cohort and go deeper into the art form. The Teaching Artist also encouraged the generalist classroom teacher to participate in the program and was mentored where possible. The Teaching Artist also provided Professional Learning sessions after school to interested generalist teachers. Participating schools were given donations of resources and instruments where appropriate. Schools also were given opportunities to see and participate in live performances.
- **A Creative Community Project** that engaged local Indigenous parents/carers and community members to make a positive contribution to the school and The Song Room School Workshop program. The creative scope of each project was decided by a steering committee and managed by the local Community Liaison Officer with the participation of the Teaching Artists, parents, teachers and the community. ➔

- **Reading Bug Early Literacy Program** sessions that operated at the school premises (and in outreach locations in the community) encouraging Indigenous parents/carers of current and future students to regularly come into the school and participate and learn ways of engaging their pre-schoolers in early learning strategies as well as make and create resources for their community guided by a Song Room Teaching Artist. In each region, CAIPE involved the employment of Indigenous (and in Brisbane non-Indigenous as well) Community Liaison Officers to lead the development and facilitation of the programs. Teaching Artists, individual artists and artistic/cultural organisations were engaged to deliver the school workshop programs and/or creative activities and events. Additionally, a mentor program was developed to support an Indigenous young teaching artist in Cunnamulla who worked with an experienced Song Room Teaching Artist, adding to the arts capacity in this small and remote western Queensland community.

In different regions and schools, various CAIPE events were held, as well as The Song Room supporting and participating in a range of community and school events, committees and activities as part of CAIPE. The program and program outcomes differed across the three regions.

Research findings

Researcher Dr Tanya Vaughan from Educational Transformations was commissioned by The Song Room to conduct an independent study of the impact of the program on students, parents and schools of the CAIPE program over a 12 month period. Eight schools were involved in the research, with a total of over 1000 students, including 155 Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander students.

The study focused on students from Grades three, four and five, as parental involvement was seen to exert the greatest effects on student outcomes in younger rather than older children. The effectiveness of CAIPE in encouraging active Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander parental engagement and improved student outcomes was assessed in the three trial sites through an active Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander parental engagement survey, student outcomes (attendance and literacy - English grades and NAPLAN results - and in-depth ethnographic case studies, which included an investigations of the local nature of the project).

The research findings are striking, particularly for the regional cohort with evidence of improved school attendance, increased parental engagement and improved literacy. Key findings include:

- Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander students in the regional trial site showed significantly increased attendance on The Song Room day in comparison to a 'normal day' in the same week and significantly increased attendance when all three The Song Room days were compared to three 'normal days'.
- Regional Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander students showed the highest increase in percentage of students with zero days absent with 8.1 per cent in semester 1, 2011 in comparison to semester 1, 2010, with all sites and urban Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander students showing an increase of 5.7 per cent.
- All regional students showed significantly increased English grades in 2011 in comparison to 2010.
- Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander students from regional and remote trial sites showed higher grades in English in 2011 in comparison to 2010, which were significantly higher for the remote students.

- The gap between achievement in NAPLAN literacy results for Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander students in comparison to non-Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander students was seen to decrease from significantly different in 2010 in the domains of reading, spelling and grammar and punctuation to no significant difference in 2011.
- Regional Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander students showed a decreased percentage of students below the national minimum in 2011 in comparison to 2010 in all literacy domains, with the largest decrease observed for reading, with 26 per cent less students below the national minimum in 2011.
- Remote Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander students showed a decrease in the percentage of students below the national minimum in 2011 NAPLAN in comparison to 2010 in three of the four literacy domains, with the largest decrease observed for reading with 16 per cent less students below the minimum. Urban students showed a smaller magnitude of change in the percentage of students below the national minimum in comparison to the other trial sites, with the largest change observed for spelling with a 13.6 per cent decrease in students below the national minimum in 2011 in comparison to 2010. The increased gains in literacy results (NAPLAN and English) grades within the regional cohort may have been driven by the changes observed for student attendance (significantly increased attendance observed on The Song Room days and increased percentage of students with zero absenteeism).
- Students from the regional trial site showed the greatest magnitude of impact of the trial CAIPE program in comparison to the urban and remote cohorts with significant differences identified in NAPLAN results (gap between Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander and Non-Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander students), English grades and attendance.

Source: *Transforming Indigenous Education through the Arts, The Song Room, 2011*

Challenges

One challenge in implementing the program resulted from The Song Room's emphasis on employing people from the local community to deliver the programs to best ensure sustainable outcomes, which is challenging in remote communities and can require considerable capacity building and support. A learning from the project on this challenge would be to focus additional time and resources at the outset on the identification and development of local Indigenous community members to engage in delivery.

Building capacity within communities for truly self-sustainable outcomes requires considerable time and a tailored approach, which is difficult to achieve within 18 months. Programs in the communities have continued on a smaller scale to assist with embedding sustainable outcomes where possible. The project model and outcomes have also been documented to replicate and share the model, and support to implement this program in other regions around Australia is currently being sought.

Further information about the Creative Arts Indigenous Parental Engagement (CAIPE) project is available in the report *Transforming Indigenous Education through the Arts*, by Dr Tanya Vaughan published by The Song Room. The report and further information about The Song Room is available from www.songroom.org.au



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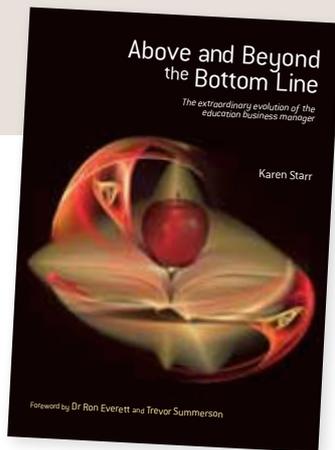
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October

Book Reviews

Above and Beyond the Bottom Line: The extraordinary evolution of the education business manager
 Karen Starr
 9780864318398
 RRP \$44.95
 275 pages
 ACER Press, 2012



Education is now big business and so there should be appropriate business management in each school to take care of the business side of the enterprise. Unfortunately many schools are still run as cottage industries and so not enough is made of business expertise. This stimulating book examines the real world of business managers.

There has been a slow, uneven evolution of business managers. Well over a century ago Harrow School, west London, for example, had an efficient bursar, the legendary Robert Somervell, who also encouraged the young Winston Churchill's love of the English language. If one uses the term 'bursar', then, the idea of a 'business manager' is not so novel. The problem is that the evolution has not followed a clear and consistent pattern.

A value of this book is its examination of what Australian business managers actually do. The role has evolved as the bureaucracy associated with running a school has itself increased. There has been a 'function creep' among long-standing staff, many of whom now think they are doing more than was originally expected of them.

Many business managers also think that they are not accorded the respect that is due to their role. The book argues more should be done to explain to the teaching and other staff just what the business manager's role entails. It is necessary to make the implicit explicit.

Another value of the book comes from its recommendations on leading and managing change. Humans will change but they don't like being changed. The book suggests some ways that change can be achieved.

As we give more explicit attention to business managers in schools, we can also learn from the experiences in the wider

world of management. One concern I have is the risk of the business tail wagging the teaching dog. For example, university business managers (that is, the corporate/ administrative part of a university) gradually end up dominating the institution via the 'new managerialism'. Teaching staff are the 'cash cows' of universities but the administrators control the purse strings and so can often run the show.

A second concern I have is that some companies have become attracted to the notion of 'general management': the idea that business skills are transferable and so staff can move from one industry to another. I believe there is a need for industry-specific knowledge and experience so that managers can talk intelligently about the substance and context of their work and not just the processes of it. School business managers need a deep knowledge of the teaching profession. Not all 'businesses' are the same.

We live (for better or worse) in an era when education is seen as a commodity and its provision is a business. This book very helpfully encourages us to think through the implications of the new era.

This book is therefore well worth reading. First teachers will learn a lot about what their business managers actually do. Second, aspiring business managers will learn about what they could be letting themselves in for. Finally, school principals will learn more about business management and so reflect on their own leadership patterns in this new era.

Dr Keith Suter
 Managing Director
 Global Directions

Above and Beyond the Bottom Line is available from ACER Press visit shop.acer.edu.au

FREE COPIES COMPETITION

Courtesy of New South Books and ACER Press we have one copy of *What Makes a Good School?* and two copies of *Above and Beyond the Bottom Line* to give away to ACE members. To win a copy please email ace@austcolled.com.au by October 31st with 'book giveaway' as the subject of your message. A draw will take place in ACE National Office on November 1st.

What makes a good school?

Jane Caro and Chris Bonnor
9781742233291
RRP \$29.95
256 pages
New South Books, July 2012



As they tell us in the preface to *What makes a good school*, this is the second time Bonnor and Caro have set out to tackle the thorny issue of Australian schools and education systems. Their first foray into the field was, by their own admission 'unashamedly partisan' in its advocacy of state schools and state schooling. In addressing the broader topic of schools in general, it is not clear that their attempts to divest themselves of their attendant bias(es) have been successful. Perhaps they never really set out to do so.

Chris Bonnor is an experienced educator who brings a wealth of personal and professional expertise to the central themes of the book. Jane Caro is an award winning advertiser, writer and public commentator whose profile on radio and television adds a personal presence to the easy writing style that carries the book across its wide ranging field. The declared audience is parents and carers faced by what Bonnor and Caro see as increasingly difficult and pressured decisions about which school to choose for their children.

Bonnor and Caro succeed in providing a lucid account of the wide range of topics and themes that are associated with their thorny topic but they fail to drill down to any meaningful educational depth with most of them. The anecdotes and personal stories employed throughout the book add a warm and at times amusing dimension to what is a complex and often confusing issue. The inherent difficulties of attempting to generalise across the range of state and federal constituencies have been handled in a balanced way. They have rightly honed in on some of the most contentious issues such as the purpose and role of the My School website and the so called Education Revolution with helpful explanation and commentary. They also rightly point to the overflowing curriculum and the heavy onus placed on schools to respond to community and policy demands and the impact that this is having on teaching and school administrations.

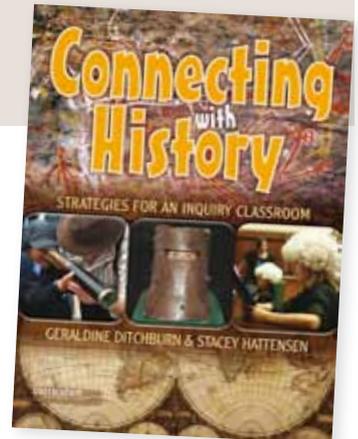
While you might not agree with everything they say, they paint a generally accurate picture of the complexity that schools face in trying to balance the needs of education and learning against the challenges and demands of the wider community, all this amid growing calls for improved student performance.

This is a book that is likely to appeal to its intended audience of parents and the wider community concerned with matters of education. They are right in concluding that the best school is the one that suits your son or daughter. It's what I've been advising friends and family for years. Sadly, I'm not sure that my friends and family found my advice very helpful but Bonnor and Caro have raised and discussed a comprehensive range of issues that will hopefully contribute to a more informed public debate about policy and practice. As they note themselves in the final chapter it remains that parents need to do their homework. With the help of this book, they may have a clearer idea of what to look for.

Suzanne Henden HDT(S), M Ed Stds, MACE
Principal Consultant, proEMA

Connecting with History: Strategies for an inquiry classroom

Geraldine Ditchburn & Stacey Hattensen
978-1-74200-542-3
RRP \$39.95
95 pages
Curriculumpress, 2012



The introduction of the Australian Curriculum in History provides the opportunity for primary schools to re-evaluate how they go about the teaching of history.

Connecting with History, written for primary school teachers who are not history specialists, could play a valuable part in that process. Geraldine Ditchburn is a Lecturer in Education at Murdoch University and Stacey Hattensen is a Program Director at Education Services Australia and has had experience as a primary school teacher and librarian.

The stress in the book is not on the content *per se*, but on developing through that content the skills and understandings that underpin the study of history. In doing so the authors recognise the importance of inquiry based learning and student centred pedagogies.

The book is organised around the key concepts of the Foundation to Year 6 Curriculum: continuity and change, cause and effect, perspectives, empathy and significance. There has been a slight modification of some of these so that one chapter is 'Time, continuity and change' and 'Evidence' has been used instead of sources. There is also an additional section on historical research. These changes are actually an improvement as they introduce the concepts in ways more suited to primary students.

Each of the seven chapters deals with one major concept. Within each chapter there are 3 or 4 case studies and each case study takes around 3 to 4 pages with a focus on a particular strategy. The topic explored with each of these strategies is chosen from those in years 3 to year 6.

For example, Chapter 5 focuses on the concept 'Significance' and chooses three different strategies, with the content of one being based on Mary McKillop (a possible Year 5 topic), one on Family History and one on Cultural artefacts (the latter two being possible Year 3 topics.).

Each strategy has an opening page that provides:

- A brief snapshot of the strategy
- A statement about how the strategy supports development of skills and understanding
- A list of the intended student outcomes
- Assumptions about what students' skills and capacities are at different stages
- Ways to adapt and extend the strategies

If the potential value of the History Curriculum is to be realised teachers will need three things: a strong content knowledge; an appreciation of the contestability of history; an ability to involve students in the historical process. In developing the last two of these, there would be value in each teacher having a copy of this book and it being used as a key element in professional development programs around the new curriculum.

Ian Keese has been a secondary school head of a history faculty, and as an author has contributed to several textbooks for secondary history, including a set for Years 7 to 10 of the Australian Curriculum

Why educational inequality matters

■ Carmen Lawrence

Many of our national institutions were crafted out of a pragmatic realisation that government action was needed to reduce the glaring inequalities that faced Australians at Federation and to share the wealth and the benefits of productivity.

Perhaps as a result of this history, many Australians hold the view that ours is an egalitarian society, but this remains more a hope than a reality.

While deliberate government policies in the post war period produced steady increases in economic equality, the momentum stalled and then reversed.

Today, the wealthiest 20 per cent of Australians own 61 per cent of the nation's wealth; the poorest 20 per cent own just 1 per cent; a fact which is not appreciated by the majority of Australians. Although the income disparities are less marked, they too have been growing.

While we are collectively wealthier than we have ever been, that wealth is spread less evenly than in the 60s and 70s and we are now a good deal less equal than countries like Japan, Sweden and Norway. We are now one of the most unequal developed countries, keeping company with the United States and Britain.

Not everyone regards this as a problem – for some it is simply the way the system works; to suggest otherwise is heretical, marking the critic as a class warrior, at the very least.

However, we once understood – on both sides of politics – that allowing big gaps in income, wealth and opportunity to open up was inherently risky and potentially

socially destructive.

Today's concern with growing inequality, when it is expressed at all, is more likely to draw on the international evidence that economic inequality in developed countries – rather than absolute levels of income - is associated with more than a few social and personal ills.

It's a long list - including reduced life expectancy, higher rates of mental illness, alcohol and drug abuse, increased obesity, higher crime and imprisonment rates, more school drop outs and lower levels of educational performance.

While it's far from clear how inequality increases any of these problems, studies confirm that the context in which we live affects the quality of our lives. Primed by our evolutionary history to be acutely attuned to even the slightest hint of unfairness, we thrive in environments where we are treated as equals; we're all happier and healthier the more equal we are.

International comparisons also show that withdrawal of resources from the public to the private domain goes with rising inequality. As James Galbraith has pointed out, inequality may cause 'the comfortable to disavow the needy', resulting in a two tiered society, where those on higher incomes live lives which are fundamentally different from those less well off, with corresponding levels of mutual incomprehension.

As Sandel argued in his recent book, *What Money Can't Buy*, people of affluence and people of modest means lead increasingly separate lives; depending on our wealth, we live, work, shop and play

in different places and send our children to different schools. In Australia, these divisions are often denied or minimised because they jar with our advertised commitment to the ethic of a 'fair go'.

At the same time as economic inequality has been on the rise, so has educational inequality; each feeds off the other in a cycle of ever decreasing social mobility. It's no accident that the most unequal nations in the developed country league have the poorest educational results, spend less on education and have the most segregated education systems.

Recognition of the marked and increasing under-performance of children from disadvantaged backgrounds prompted the current government to establish the review of school funding (the Gonski review) of which I was a member and has recently reported. As you know, the explicit brief was to devise a fairer funding framework for education which would ensure that differences in children's achievements are not the result of differences in wealth, income, power or possessions.

To some extent, the task was restorative, to find a way to reignite the earlier momentum toward reducing the impact of social position on how well children do at school. One of the foundations of Australia's egalitarian project was, after all, a demand for quality, publicly funded education for all, regardless of means.

Until relatively recently, Australian governments of all stripes had exhibited a strong commitment to a superior public education system, open to all, and good enough to inspire the confidence of parents



and citizens, regardless of their wealth.

The choice to send a child to a non-government school was generally not made because government schooling was judged inferior. In the last twenty years, this commitment has looked increasingly fragile and the system more fragmented.

Governments have had a role in this deterioration - withholding the funds needed to repair flaking paint and down at heel and out-dated government school facilities; orchestrating phony debates about 'values' and fingering government schools as deficient; elevating 'choice' above equality and failing to repudiate even the most extravagant media claims about school failure. Many of us have watched with dismay - and objected - as teachers and government schools have been pilloried by their own governments.

As a result, more parents have withdrawn their children from government schools and the schooling system has become more segregated, especially on the basis of parents' wealth and occupation. By international standards, Australia still has average to high standards of educational performance (although there are recent signs this is falling off), but there are now big differences between the top and bottom performers.

Finding a way to arrest - and reverse - this deterioration was never going to be easy. The Australian education system is awash with special interests and fixed positions, and most of us are fiercely protective of our own children's welfare.

For education watchers, the last year provided a feast of data and policy advice in addition to the Gonski report: Richard

Teese's report, commissioned by state and territory governments, on the state of public education in Australia, the Grattan Institute report comparing Australian schools' performance with our Asian neighbours and a major OECD report on equity, one of a series on the characteristics of high performing school systems in the developed world. Underpinning all of these reports is a deep seated worry that, despite many years of universal, public education, there are still very substantial and, in some cases, increasing degrees of inequality in student achievement which result from entrenched disadvantage.

For the most part, and departing from more conventional lines of argument, these reports take a systemic approach, emphasising differences in funding, selection and segregation within school systems rather than individual school failure, as critical to understanding educational outcomes.

Members of the School Funding Review panel were certainly intensely aware of international data which show that more equitable systems regularly achieve higher levels of performance. As the most recent OECD report emphasises: 'The evidence is conclusive: equity in education pays off. The highest performing education systems across OECD countries are those that combine high quality and equity'.

While all of these reports acknowledge the importance of what happens in schools - teacher quality, innovative teaching practices and the like - they also point directly to the need for changes to school policy and funding.

Richard Teese's report - kept under wraps until it was leaked - underlines the shift that has taken place in thinking about the imperative for equal opportunity in education: from the view that opening the classroom door to all comers was all that was required to the now widely accepted goal of ensuring that the accident of children's birth should not limit their achievement, to see the handicapping weights some of them are carrying.

As Teese puts it, 'it is the shift from success for some to success for all', a shift from accepting the big differences in achievement between different social groups as inevitable, to trying to break down the barriers, ensuring that the same standards are applied to all children, no matter their parents' income or race or location.

The Panel explicitly endorsed the view that 'the underlying talents and abilities of students that enable them to succeed in schooling are not distributed differently among children from different socioeconomic status, ethnic or language backgrounds, or according to where they live or go to school.'

This is not to say that we did not also recognise that children in these situations often enter school already at a marked disadvantage, but rather that school funding arrangements should recognise this fact and seek to minimise it, rather than ignoring and, thereby, amplifying it.

The Panel's deliberations were informed by comprehensive analyses of Australian children's achievement - over time and in comparison with other developed countries. We were, however, keen to stress that

analyses based on existing test results tell only part of the story since they capture only a narrow range of outcomes.

However, it is obvious that the link between student background and educational achievement is more marked in Australia than in other high performing OECD countries. In 2009, the OECD noted that, on average, differences in students' backgrounds accounted for some 55 per cent of the performance differences between schools while the figure for Australia is around 68 per cent. While we do better than the U.S. and the U.K., we are not doing as well as many otherwise comparable countries such as Canada and Finland in minimising the effects of social background.

Some would ask, 'Why we should care?' Apart from the personal loss to the students whose futures are unfairly constrained by poorer educational results than their better off compatriots, the aggregate scores show that five of the six countries that outranked Australia in the 2009 PISA (Programme for International Student Assessment) are those with higher equity in their school systems. In other words, the more equitable systems produce better results overall.

Of note is that fact that the most recent results show that one of the reasons for the recent drop in our international ranking – and poorer results in domestic tests – appears to be the smaller number of students from advantaged backgrounds performing at the highest levels of proficiency; performance at the top end has fallen too.

There were diminishing marginal returns; extra money spent on the already well-off produced less improvement overall than the same money delivered to those with little. An extra dollar to a poor school makes a big difference.

Results like this led the Panel to conclude that there was 'considerable scope' for Australia to reduce the inequities in our system, noting that a disproportionate number of students from the most disadvantaged backgrounds attend government schools, an imbalance that has been growing more marked.

Of all students from the lowest quarter of socioeconomic disadvantage, almost 80 per cent attend government schools. The drift of students and resources from government to non-government schools has accelerated in Australia in the last decade or so and further concentrated wealthier students in the private sector and in schools in more affluent areas. The higher up the social scale, the greater the drift and vice versa.

As a result, there are more schools with very high proportions of students from disadvantaged backgrounds – mainly in the government system – and more with high concentrations of the most advantaged – mainly in private schools.

An education system which siphons off the children of wealthier and better educated parents weakens both the energy and the funding base for the government system. The more parents remove their children from the public system, the more pressure is put on funding; new schools are set up when places are already available.

The unit costs of schooling escalate without any commensurate improvement in quality. Resources which might be used to provide for improved facilities and teacher support in existing schools are diverted into setting up new school places.

Because state governments are largely responsible for government schools and the Commonwealth for Independent and Catholic schools, such decisions are often made without reference to the cumulative impact on all schools.

Without decrying parents' individual decisions about their own children, it seems inevitable that the more those who have the means exit the public system and send their children to private schools, the more likely it is that the public education system will be seen as a residual one for those parents who cannot afford to 'choose' private education for their children, especially since a lot of the recent drift has been in the less well-off suburbs of Australia. The task of educating the most disadvantaged children is increasingly falling to the public sector, which has not been correspondingly resourced.

Because of the pattern of drift to private education, striking gaps have emerged between public schools with high and low socioeconomic profiles; children in the poorest schools are effectively two years behind those in wealthier suburbs.

Despite the fact government schools actually perform as well as private schools, when initial disadvantage is taken into account, knowledge of these gaps gives further impetus to parents' anxieties about government schools.

This exacerbates the problem, since both international and Australian data show that all students, regardless of their parents' wealth and education, benefit from being in schools where the socioeconomic status of the school group is high and conversely, perform worst in schools of lower status.

While we did not systematically explore all the historical reasons for the 'longer tail' of achievement in Australia, the Gonski review did recommend measures to take account of both individual disadvantage and concentrations of disadvantage in allocating school funding – ensuring more resources for schools with the most difficult educational tasks.

The concentration of disadvantage is particularly problematic for those children who start school behind the eight ball. The Australian Early Development Index results show that children living in the most socioeconomically disadvantaged and remote areas, Indigenous children and those who are not proficient in English are the most 'developmentally vulnerable', having poorer physical health and poorer social, language and cognitive skills.

Such children often have fewer educational resources at home and not infrequently encounter lower expectations of their capacity, an experience we know predicts low achievement.

A system which provides more money to schools catering for poorer students can try to compensate for this difference, offering some of the enriching experiences taken for granted by the better off. It makes sense to front-end load the schools who deal with the most disadvantaged; instead, the reverse has happened in Australia.

In the past our inclusive public school system helped reduce inequality; now education appears to be reinforcing privilege and making it even harder for the kids of poorer Australians. The effects of income inequality are being amplified by our education policies.

Schools can either perpetuate or redress disadvantage. They work daily with young people who have a variety of problems and they are crucial in redressing disadvantage.

Schools can work to offset impediments to children's education, but they're not miracle workers and they need the resources and the support to do it. They also need the support of policies which reduce the disadvantage of their charges.

The entire nation's well-being is compromised when young people are not able to participate fully in education or when their schooling is narrow and unsatisfying. For the individual, the costs of a poor education are enormous. For the nation, the social costs of a divided society may be even greater. •

Dr Carmen Lawrence is Winthrop Professor, School of Psychology at the University of Western Australia. Dr Lawrence was Premier of Western Australia before entering Federal politics as the Member for Fremantle. She served as Minister for Health and Human Services and Minister assisting the Prime Minister on the Status of Women. She has held various portfolios in Opposition, including Indigenous Affairs, Environment, Industry and Innovation and was elected national President of the Labor Party in 2004. She retired from politics in 2007.

This article is based on a previous piece entitled *Mind the Gap*, published in *The Monthly*, July 2012. Material presented in *The Monthly* article was the source of Dr Lawrence's address at the annual Walter Neale Oration for ACE's WA branch on August 8 this year.

Member Profile

Margaret Batten



Left to right: Victorian Branch awards committee chair Ian Sloane, Victorian Branch President Annette Rome, Margaret Batten and author John Marsden at the presentation of the Sir James Darling medal.

I want to see ACE continue to award teachers the various medals, awards, certificates because teachers get so little of that public acknowledgment I think it's a really important part of the College's role to keep doing this.

As a young student undertaking her Diploma of Education studies, Margaret Batten went on a visit to Geelong Grammar. There she met Sir James Darling, Principal of Geelong Grammar and first president of ACE. The encounter left a lasting impression on Margaret who was greatly impressed by Sir James and the way he talked about his school, his students and his teachers, as well as his educational philosophy. Margaret had no idea that she would one day be awarded a medal named in his honour.

Margaret Batten, described by her colleagues as a 'living legend' of the College is the 2012 recipient of the Sir James Darling Medal, the highest honour bestowed by the ACE Victorian Branch, in recognition of her outstanding services to education and to ACE during her long career.

After graduating from her education studies, Margaret taught English at a

senior secondary level before joining the Australian Council for Educational Research as a researcher in the policy research field. It was while working with ACER that Margaret was first introduced to the College.

'I joined the College because the directors I served under were all strong supporters of the College and encouraged me to join,' Margaret recalls. 'My director took me along to an event to welcome new members and made sure I met all the right people and this was a very good introduction to the College; it was good to have the support of your boss.'

That first introduction to ACE was the beginning of a long and active association with the College of more than 30 years that continues today.

Margaret has been keenly involved in ACE's awards committees. She first joined the Victorian awards committee, then chaired by revered educator Hedley Beare, in the mid nineties and took over as

chair on Professor Beare's retirement and remained on that committee until 2011 when she became a member of the national awards committee that oversees ACE's Fellowship awards.

'I loved my time on the Victorian awards committee,' Margaret says. 'It's a great committee to be on because you're dealing all the time with these descriptions of great educators. All these submissions come in with the details of a person's career and you realise what a diversity of great educators there is in our state. It was lovely to be looking at evidence of outstanding teaching or involvement in education on that committee.'

Margaret sees the recognition and rewarding of excellence in education as a key role of ACE and hopes this will remain a cornerstone of the College's activities in the future. She encourages all ACE members to consider nominating colleagues for ACE awards and not be daunted by the nomination procedures. ➔

‘My work at the Australian Council for Educational Research took me out in the field to schools all over Australia and I saw such good teachers and principals all the time out there. If only some of their colleagues would think of nominating them it would be so good. We certainly need more of that input for the Fellowship awards.’

When Margaret retired from ACER in 1997 she moved to Gippsland where she lived for 13 years and became a herb farmer. There she served on ACE’s Gippsland regional committee. Although she is now living back in Melbourne, Margaret remains a strong supporter of the Gippsland branch of ACE where the local committee includes several award-winning educators and stalwarts of the College. Margaret travels to Gippsland regional events regularly and enjoys reading award citations at the annual Gippsland regional awards. Each year an educational theme is selected by the local branch committee and schools and tertiary institutions from the region are invited to nominate school personnel who have made an outstanding contribution in this field of education.

‘Again it’s so wonderful to see the acknowledgment of great teaching or contributions to education,’ Margaret says of the Gippsland awards.

Over the years Margaret has observed a number of changes in the teaching profession since she was in the classroom, including the wider range of options open to students and pressures upon them, which she regards as being greater now than during her time as a teacher.

‘There are so many options open to them it’s wonderful in one way and wanting in another and I think good teachers can inspire students to go in different directions and that’s always been so and

always will be so,’ Margaret says. ‘There are also multiple potential problems that were not there when I was teaching in my early years like the whole technological development that’s led to online bullying and the distraction of students by the technological devices that are available to them now and that makes it hard.’

‘On the other hand the students have facilities and a greater range of subjects available to them than they did in my day. I think teachers need all the support and recognition we can give them because, compared to teachers in some other countries, they don’t have the status and they don’t have the salary; they have the rewards, the non financial rewards that come with teaching, but they don’t get the public recognition that they deserve.’

Margaret hopes to see ACE play a leading role in the public acknowledgment of good teachers in the future.

‘I want to see ACE continue to award teachers the various medals, awards, certificates because teachers get so little of that public acknowledgment I think it’s a really important part of the College’s role to keep doing this.’

Margaret’s own contribution to education has seen her made a Fellow of ACE and Member of the Order of Australia (AM) for her services to education. She describes being awarded the James Darling Medal as a great honour.

‘I regard it as a great honour because it was awarded by the Australian College of Educators, which has played a valued part in my life for many years. To have that acknowledgment from the College was a wonderful thing for me. Secondly, it’s an honour because it’s the Sir James Darling Medal. He was an educator that I hold in high regard and, of course, he was one of the founders of the College and its first president. So to be given a medal called the Sir James Darling medal was a particular honour for me.’ •

The 2012 -2013 ACE

Fellowship Nominations



Fellowship of the Australian College of Educators is one of the highest honours that the College can bestow, and should be seen by College Members and Fellows, and by the wider education community, to be recognition of outstanding and distinctive contributions to the advancement of education.

All members are encouraged to participate in the 2013 ACE Fellowships Awards Nomination.

The Fellowships Awards process has been revised for 2012-2013. It is very important for members to read through the new Fellowship Guidelines that are available on the College website at www.austcolled.com.au/fellowship-guidelines before preparing your nominations.

Please note that the due date for the Initial Notification Form (Attachment 1 of the guidelines) is 19 October 2012

Deadlines Stage of Process

19 October	Due date for submission of Initial Notification of intent to nominate to State/Territory Awards Committees who acknowledge receipt of submissions.
2 November	Due date for State/Territory Awards Committees to advise nominators to proceed to complete the full Nomination for Fellowship.
14 December	Due date for submission of fully completed Nomination for Fellowship forms to State/Territory Awards Committees. Committees to provide nominators with acknowledgement of receipt of their submissions and assist and support nominators in completing their submissions to the required standard of documentation for forwarding to the National Awards Committee through the National Office.

For more information please visit www.austcolled.com.au/award/fellowship-face or contact the National Office via ace@austcolled.com.au

ACE calendar

World Teacher Day Dinner and Outstanding Early Career and Experienced Teacher Awards:

Region: The Hills/Parramatta, NSW

Date: 22 October

Close registrations: 18 October

Price: Members \$70 Non-members \$80

Guest speaker Dr Brian Croke, Executive Director, Catholic Education Commission NSW, will speak on 'How Teachers Can Capitalise on the Australian Curriculum'. As the Australian Curriculum is progressively implemented, from 2014 in NSW, it is timely to confront its challenges and opportunities. In exploring the Australian Curriculum within the NSW tradition of curriculum development, it will be proposed that the new curriculum provides an unprecedented capacity for teachers to capitalise on two underlying educational goals whose time has finally come: routine access to the wide world of digital resources and customised/personalised student learning.

Noreen Wilcox Awards

Region: Peninsula (Cairns), Queensland

Date: 24 October, 6.00-7.30pm

Close registrations: 22 October

Price: Members \$18 Non-members \$20

The Noreen Wilcox Awards for Excellence in Education – recognising the work of educators across all sectors in the Peninsula Region. This function will acknowledge those colleagues nominated for the following categories and announce their respective winners:
Category 1: Beginning Phase - one to five years of teaching experience.
Category 2: Accomplished Phase - more than five years teaching experience.
Category 3: Non-classroom based educators - educators whose work is mainly administrative or consultative.

Faith schools in liberal secular states

Region: Sydney, NSW

Date: 25 October, 9.30am-2.30pm

Close registrations: 21 September

Price: Members \$55 Non-members \$75

The event will consist of three parts:

1. An introduction and background to the topic presented by Paul Rooney.
2. The keynote speech by Stephen O'Doherty, inaugural CEO of Christian Schools Australia, a national peak group representing independent faith-based schools.
3. Panel discussion on 21st century challenges for faith schools in liberal secular states.

New England 2012 Awards Dinner

Region: New England, NSW

Date: 25 October, 6.00-10.00pm

Close registrations: 19 October

Price: Members \$55 Non-members \$60

To celebrate World Teachers' Day and recognise the achievements of outstanding educators in New England a Joint Memorial Awards Dinner sponsored by the New England Region of the Australian College of Educators (ACE) and the North West branches of the Australian Council for Educational Leaders (ACEL) will be held on Friday 26 October 2012.

On this occasion ACEL will present the William Walker Award that honours the life and work of the late William Walker, FACE, and ACE New England will bestow the Alan Kerr, JA Sutherland and HTB Harris, Memorial Awards. The Annual Memorial Lecture will also be given.

Education on the Square

Region: Adelaide, SA

Date: 21 November, 5.30-6.30pm

Close registrations: 21 November

Education on the Square aims to promote discussion about relevant and current themes within the education sector of South Australia. Each session provides professional input on a topical educational issue followed by opportunity for open discussion.

For further information on these and other upcoming ACE events visit www.austcolled.com.au or contact the National Office on 1800 208 586

ACE news

ACE Debates

Bringing together key players in education to discuss the future of education, the ACE Great Debate 2012 saw the hot issues being thrashed out in Sydney and Brisbane recently.

Participants opened up some big questions, tackling the purpose of education, how school is perceived and what purpose formal education serves.

The selection and training of pre-service teachers was discussed at length, with speakers advocating for higher entrance provisions and better mentoring and support for graduate teachers.

Funding was on everyone's lips, with the Gonski report discussed, as well as the public/private divide in resources and outcomes.

Two students, one at each event were invited to take part in the debates, providing the 'recipients' view on education. Both students spoke enthusiastically about the future of education.

We would like to thank all participants for their thought provoking and entertaining contributions.

Victorian Branch media award

Caroline Milburn from *The Age* has been awarded the ACE Victorian Branch Media Award for 2011. Caroline received the award for a compelling series of articles on the expectations of Asian parents of the work that their children were required to do to gain the highest possible ATAR (Tertiary ranking score) published in October 2011. The analysis she provided in the three interlinked articles submitted for the 2011 ACE Media award demonstrated a real issue that needed careful examination, and she investigated all angles, speaking to parents, teachers, principals, academics, psychologists and others in her quest to examine the issue in detail.

