

# professional EDUCATOR

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The ACE forum for policy, research and practice in education

## **PISA's new poster boy**

Three national responses to Shanghai's performance on PISA 2009

## **Education assessment in the 21st Century**

What teachers need to know about assessment

Global Future:  
Is a new world view of the tropics required?

# professional EDUCATOR



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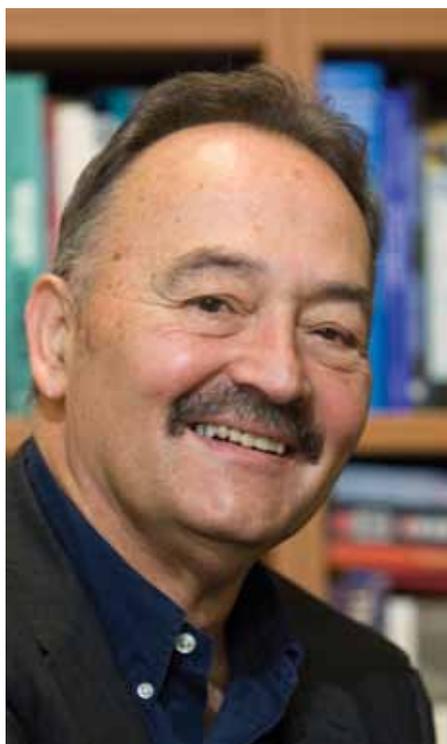
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# Funding school improvement



In our previous edition of *Professional Educator* we looked at Australia's performance in international comparative studies and the implications of these results for the federal government's stated objective for Australia to be ranked as a top five country in reading, science and mathematics achievement. Since then the federal government has made further major education reform announcements including a highly anticipated proposal for school funding reform based on the Gonski Review.

In April, Prime Minister Gillard announced that the proposed National Plan for School Improvement 'Will establish a new, fairer school funding approach, based on the needs of individual students and linked to reforms that will improve school performance.' School improvement is the other side of the enhanced funding agenda.

The government plan would result in an extra '\$14.5 billion in public investment over the next six years along with better indexation'. The Gillard Government proposes to contribute 65 per cent of the additional investment with the states and territories asked to pitch in the remainder. State and territory leaders were not able to come to an agreement with the Prime Minister on school funding when COAG met in late April. At the time of writing only New South Wales had signed up for the National Education Reform Agreement. No doubt education funding reform will continue to be debated in the lead up to the federal election in September.

It would be most remiss of me not to criticise the federal government's decision to reduce funding to universities over the next two years by about \$2.3 billion dollars so as to fund the Gonski reforms in school funding. This seems a short sighted and foolish policy decision to say the least, given the centrality of universities to Australia's future and even

given the government's commitment to enhancing the global status of more Australian universities.

Prior to these Gonski funding announcements, ACE was invited to make a submission to the Education Bill 2012. In this edition of *Professional Educator*, Ian Keese notes that the ACE submission raised a number of concerns, including 'the Bill's setting the goal for Australian Education as being in the 'Top Five' by 2025. Primarily it says nothing about what a high quality and equitable education for Australia in the twenty-first century should look like and does nothing to define the directions in which Australia should move; and as the contrasting results from the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) and the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) indicate, each method of testing has its own inbuilt assumptions.'

Some of the issues arising from international comparative studies were raised in our March edition. In this issue, with University of Queensland colleague, Dr Sam Sellar, I look at Shanghai's performance on PISA 2009 and the policy responses to it in Australia, England and the US. We argue that most often it seems that such international performance data are used as policy ammunition rather than for genuine policy learning. Other contributors in this issue look at some broader issues of student assessment. We also hear from James Cook University Vice-Chancellor Sandra Harding, a new Honorary Fellow of the College, about her call for a new world view of the tropics.

If you would like to share your thoughts on any of the articles in this edition please send an email to [ace@austcolled.com.au](mailto:ace@austcolled.com.au)

**Professor Bob Lingard PhD FASSA  
National President**

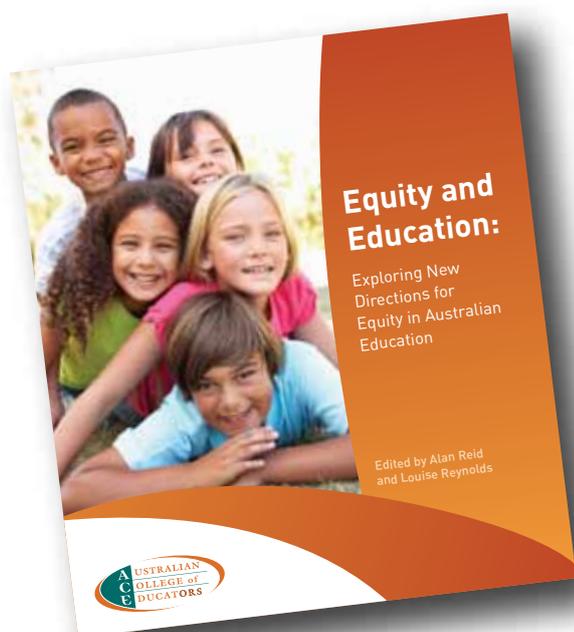
# Equity and Education:

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### **Section A: Deepening the Equity Discourse**

Alan Reid sets out the argument as to why, in the current context, it is urgent that the equity discourse in education is deepened and enriched.

### **Section B: Equity and Education Research, Policy and Practice: A review**

Rob Gilbert, Amanda Keddie, Bob Lingard, Martin Mills and Peter Renshaw explore the ways in which equity has been conceptualised in the research literature and in policy and practice in Australian education from the 1970s to the present.

### **Section C: Understanding Equity in Health**

Elaine Sharplin, Colleen Fisher and Wayne McGowan investigate the ways in which equity has been theorised in the field of health.

### **Section D: Reflections on a New Equity Agenda**

Roger Slee, one of Australia's leading educational researchers in this area, makes some observations, and raises some important questions about possible new directions for equity in education in policy, research and practice.

# your say

“

The face of an intelligent, engaging woman, obviously from an earlier era, leaps at the reader from the pages of the March issue of PE. Jan Lokan has done us a signal service in rescuing from near-oblivion a remarkable person who deserves to be remembered and held in honour, as Ruth Gibson was in her lifetime. She conquered adversity and prejudice in rising to the topmost ranks of educators in a challenging environment. In her role as Inspector of Schools in South Australia, she not only empowered teachers, but also encouraged school students to consider the teaching profession at a time when the low birth-rate during the Depression meant that there was a serious shortage of trainee teachers after World War II. Her sustained work for the National Council of Women and other organisations was just as noteworthy as her achievements in education.

Ruth Gibson was made a Fellow in 1963. Fifty years later, we are the heirs of her achievements. She earned the accolade ‘mighty educator’ from Alby Jones, himself a legend. People like Ruth were trailblazers.

Thank you, PE, for including this arresting and moving article. I hope that there will be more like it.

Stuart Braga FACE

”

“

I received with interest the latest edition of *Professional Educator* of March 2013.

I noted the various topics, ‘In pursuit of a top 5 ranking, ‘Going for gold: Are international comparisons valid?’ and ‘Blame politicians not teachers’ to name a few. While interesting in themselves, I think for classroom teachers those articles would not be at the forefront of teachers’ concerns.

For a normal classroom teacher, of which I am one, the increasing demands on teachers, the increasing technical knowledge required and the technological complexity of the classroom, the increasing class sizes, a changing youth culture, the increasing demands for compliance and the liability that teachers are subject to (to name a few) are what are concerning teachers.

For the institution of education, the ageing of those in the teaching ranks and the deficiency in numbers of young joining the craft are also of concern. Essentially teaching is in crisis and few are being attracted to take up the craft.

Rupert Dalley MACE

”



Stuart and Rupert receive a complimentary copy of ACE’s recent publication *Equity and Education*.

To have ‘Your Say’ on this issue of *Professional Educator*, please send your contribution of up to 200 words to Louise. Reynolds@austcolled.com.au

# What's coming for education in 2013?

ANNETTE ROME EXAMINES SOME OF THE LIKELY ISSUES AND POLICIES OF 2013 THAT TEACHERS NEED TO BECOME ENGAGED WITH



Behind the excitement of the election day announcement, Prime Minister Julia Gillard's first major speech of the year also pointed to education as a cornerstone of her government's policies and the election year to come. She called education a 'moral cause' and a 'crusade' and talked about winning the education race.

Few people realise the immense changes experienced by the education profession in the last few years. The Melbourne Declaration was released in 2008. It set out a 'vision statement' for the profession. This was closely followed in 2009 by the Charter for the Teaching Profession. Soon after the National (Australian) Professional Standards for Teachers were formulated and the Teacher Performance and Development Framework was released and signed off by state education ministers along with the Charter for Professional Learning in 2012.

While many note that few professions have had their vision, standards of performance and career framework set by a government body (in this case AITSL – the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership), the response of the profession to date is that ultimately these changes are beneficial. It is appropriate and useful to have a set of descriptors that ensure a common language and standards across states.

It is also advantageous to be able to articulate what excellent teachers do and, as a corollary, question the widely held (inaccurate) belief that anyone can teach and that appropriate training/education do not matter. Indeed, I have been tempted to take along the Australian Standards to dinner parties so that when guests challenge the complexity of teaching, or the ability required to be an excellent teacher, quizzing those present as to how they might meet the specific challenges expected of teachers in the standards could be most enlightening and, dare I suggest, educational.

For the first time in 2013 all teachers will be expected to take a more active role in their own development as individual and team educators through the application of the Teacher Performance and Development Framework. Similarly schools are expected to provide increasingly meaningful feedback to all teachers on their classroom practice and schools are currently working out how to best do this. Levels of reflection, action research, classroom observations and the recording and interpretation of these are all expected to increase. I suspect that the general public has little idea of the new expectations regarding teacher performance that are coming in. On one level it may provide the profession and public with increased confidence in

their schools, on another, it may leave teachers and administrators wondering how they might find the time to manage.

Linda Darling Hammond (2005) noted that:

*Though the importance of teaching experience has been reinforced by much research it is important to recognise that practice alone does not make perfect, or even good, performance. Learning to connect practice to expert knowledge must be built into learning experiences for teachers.*

The acknowledgement that a) there is a body of knowledge relating to expert practice and b) this knowledge needs to be learnt and c) we need to consciously embed our learning in our practice are the cornerstones of our profession as educators and this is what separates us from those that claim that 'anyone can teach'. The Australian Standards and associated publications go some way towards articulating this body of knowledge.

The writing of such materials for a profession by a government-appointed body does, however, raise a number of questions. If a government designated organisation is not the ideal group to write such standards, who is? The number of organisations that represent education in Australia number well over 400. Independent, Catholic and Government representative groups comprising principal associations, speciality interest groups, subject associations, umbrella organisations - many of which are duplicated at state and federal levels - lead to a multitude of voices that result in a sea of noise. No wonder a clear voice is not heard! Who do people, including the media, go to for informed comment? Often it seems the union is at the top of the list. While unions play an absolutely crucial role, they do not and should not call the shots on educational decisions relating to pedagogy, staff learning or curriculum or assessment. The public remain rightly confused as to whether they (the unions) represent all educators. Of course they do not - they usually represent one sector (Government, Catholic or Independent) and often are operating at a state or

federal level. The other 'go to' people are sometimes individuals, usually principals of independent or Catholic schools, or the odd academic. One has to question where the voice of the 'on the ground' educators is. While organisations such as The Australian College of Educators or the Australian Council for Educational Leaders exist and are really the only associations that represent educators from all three sectors (Government, Catholic and Independent - early childhood through to tertiary), membership of these as a percentage of the profession is very low (conservatively estimated at less than one per cent) and sadly reflects an inherent view that the profession clearly has of itself.

There is a good reason why so many educators are not in a position to devote time to supporting the profession in the way other professions may be supported by their members. The average teacher or principal is simply too busy. With the increasing requirements of the profession in 2013, this situation is likely to get worse. Ironically though, this means that teachers require more than ever easy access to effective, accurate information that relates to their practice. Many teachers I know turn to Twitter or other online communities and while these are brilliant for exchanging topical information, they are not effective at impacting on or communicating with the profession at large.

The teacher this year also has an increased part to play. Onus also rests on us to critically examine our role in the profession more than perhaps ever before. Current discussions and analyses of education all appropriate the deficit model - what does the profession need to do to 'fix' itself? Usually the response involves some sort of intervention strategy as witnessed by the confrontational language used in media and politician's headlines. This is actually deeply insulting

and provides yet another reason to garner the profession to take control itself.

It is time for educators to take over the journey that others have started for the profession. To own and contribute actively to the discussions and policies that flurry around us and actively impact on our professional lives. Getting involved in a professional organisation would be a very good start. Another would be to ensure that we are all skilled sufficiently to discuss effectively that 'body of knowledge' that defines excellent teaching and not see it as an optional extra. This would stop others doing things 'to' the profession rather than with the profession.

**Annette Rome is president of the Australian College of Educators Victorian branch**

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# Policy Learning or Policy Ammunition: Three national responses to Shanghai's performance on PISA 2009

BOB LINGARD AND SAM STELLAR EXAMINE THE GLOBAL 'PISA SHOCK' FOLLOWING THE PERFORMANCE OF SHANGHAI-CHINA IN 2009 AND ITS IMPACT ON POLICY MAKERS ACROSS THE GLOBE

Following the election of the Rudd Government in 2007, the National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) was introduced into all Australian schools from 2008. This form of national census testing linked to a new form of test-framed, top-down educational accountability has been a common reform in many schooling systems over recent years, particularly in Anglo-American countries. Much has been written about the effects of such testing on schools, teacher pedagogies and enacted curriculum. In this paper we are interested in international comparative testing of national school performance. Specifically, we focus on the OECD's Programme for International Student Assessment or PISA.

Such international testing complements NAPLAN, with the former providing a global comparison of performance against which the latter national test constructed account can be set. Here we focus on the impact of the performance of Shanghai-China on PISA in 2009, which has had significant effects on politicians and educational policy makers across the globe. We might see this as a global 'PISA shock'. We focus on policy impacts in Australia, England and the USA<sup>1</sup>. In a sense, Shanghai's performance has seen the rise of a new PISA 'poster boy' to challenge the preeminent position held by Finland's schooling system following its stellar 'high quality/high equity' performances in PISA 2000, 2003 and 2006. Our account demonstrates that the result of the new focus on the performance of Asian schooling systems on PISA, particularly that of China, has not really seen policy learning, but rather the use of this new 'reference society' to justify and intensify national reform agendas in schooling. The use of PISA's performance has been more as policy ammunition, rather than as a tool for reimagining schooling reform strategies at systemic, school and classroom levels.

### The OECD and PISA

Australia has been a member of the OECD since 1971. The OECD was established in 1961 as a bulwark against communism and a showpiece for liberal democracy and capitalist market economies. The place of education work within the Organisation has changed dramatically since its establishment and has become increasingly significant since the mid-1990s, following the end of the Cold War and the emergence of neo-liberal global capitalism. A combination

of developments contributed to the new importance of education at the OECD, including: the ratification of new policy positions on education (e.g. lifelong learning and knowledge-based economies framed by human capital theory); the creation of the Indicators of Education Systems (INES) program and the publication of *Education at a Glance*; the alignment of statistical data categories and data sets held by the OECD, UNESCO and Eurostat; and not least the emergence of PISA, which has become one of the OECD's most successful 'products'. In this context, we would assert that the OECD has now become more of a policy actor in its own right, well beyond the think-tank construction of its work (see Sellar and Lingard, 2013b).

PISA was launched in 1997, first administered in 2000 and then every three years subsequently. PISA assessments test reading, mathematical and scientific literacy, and 15-year-olds in a sample of schools sit the test in each participating system. The focus is on students' capacities to apply their knowledge in problem solving contexts and not their mastery of curriculum content taught in each system. Students also complete background questionnaires that enable analyses of relationships between performance and socioeconomic status, as well as students' attitudes toward learning. The first round of PISA in 2000 included 28 OECD countries and 4 non-member countries, whereas PISA 2012 has covered all 34 OECD countries, plus an additional 31 non-member countries and economies; more than double the number of participants in the 2000 assessment. Shanghai-China participated in 2009 and the reach of PISA now extends into new regions

1 For a fuller version of our argument here see Sellar and Lingard (2013a).

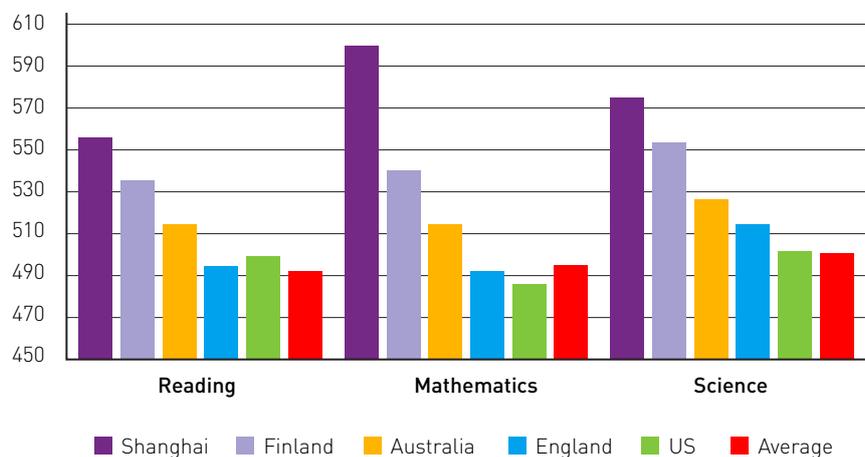
of Asia, South America, North Africa and the Arab Gulf. More countries have participated again in PISA 2012. We would also note that countries pay to participate in PISA. The expanding participation globally can be explained, we would argue, through the effects of a globalised educational policy discourse pushing a discursive convergence in schooling policy around the globe.

### Shanghai and PISA 2009

Shanghai is one of the largest cities in China, with a population of more than 20 million people, and is becoming part of a transnational network of global cities (Sassen 2001), an important entrepot for the import and export of ideas to and from China. Since the early 1990s Shanghai has experienced a renaissance and has become a preeminent location of multinational corporate headquarters in China and a major financial centre in Asia and globally. Shanghai can be seen as the business and entrepreneurial centre of China contrasted with the government and public administration centre which is Beijing. Shanghai's education system is a top performer nationally and a leader in terms of educational reforms. In this way it is a 'reference system' internally for other Chinese provinces. It is the only region of mainland China that participated publicly in PISA 2009 and has provided China with a comparison of its top performing system against other systems internationally, as well as a benchmark for driving education reforms internally.

Shanghai substantially out-performed all other OECD countries, partner countries and economies in reading, mathematics and science (see Table 1) on the 2009 PISA. Shanghai's schools also appear comparatively successful at enabling students to overcome disadvantageous socioeconomic backgrounds, indicating that its schooling system is both top performing and more equitable than many others. On this latter point, though, we would note the exclusion of most of the very poor internal migrant students into Shanghai from public schools and from the PISA sample and the non-public release of PISA results for other participating Chinese provinces.

PISA 2009 performance, selected systems



How do we understand Shanghai's performance beyond issues of sample and the specificities of Shanghai's population? We would argue that its performance is attributable to a conjunction of cultural and policy factors (Tan 2013). China has a long history of examination-driven education that dates back to the civil service exams of the seventh century. Social values of educational commitment, competitiveness and ambition associated with Confucianism are also prevalent and have perhaps even strengthened in the post Cultural Revolution period.

“ Shanghai is trying to move away from transmission pedagogies and toward curriculum that is more focused on 'real-life' problems. ”

The exam at the end of secondary schooling determines university entrance and still drives a deeply embedded emphasis on education for Shanghai parents, one that pressures for intensive study, often supported by extra tuition, in pursuit of high grades. The one child policy and competitive culture of Shanghai for good university places and

jobs reinforce the valuing of academic achievement. As Simola (2005) has shown in relation to Finland, such cultural and historical factors contribute to explaining performance on international comparative tests such as PISA.

However, these historical and cultural factors tend to be played down by the OECD, even neglected to some extent. Such analyses emphasise instead the effects of education reforms in China since the Cultural Revolution and more recently in Shanghai. We note that the value of PISA for shaping global education policy discourses, and as an evidence-base for policy making across national contexts, depends on performance being attributable to policy, in addition to cultural factors, not simply the latter. There are a number of policy settings that have been linked to Shanghai's success (see Tucker, 2011) and these include: clear and ambitious system-wide goal setting for comprehensive reforms, drawing on the reform-oriented culture in Shanghai and embedded in a wider agenda to position the city as a global leader; a focus on learning and instruction, informed by research and professional learning; and a strong accountability and transparency agenda. Shanghai's strategies for improving 'weak' schools through pairing rural and urban schools to create professional learning communities, and by transferring teachers between schools and empowering experienced leaders in

strong performing schools to manage poor performing schools, are other prominent reform strategies.

Our position is that a hybrid mix of cultural, historical and policy factors offers the best explanation of system performance on PISA. Ironically, traditional approaches to education have contributed to the success of Shanghai's students in PISA at a time when contemporary curriculum reforms are looking outward in efforts to move the system away from exam-driven approaches. Recent curriculum reform has responded to concerns that Chinese students are overly pressured and too focused on rote learning and exams, at the expense of creative and innovative capacities. Shanghai is trying to move away from transmission pedagogies and toward curriculum that is more focused on 'real-life' problems. This has also been a concern in other Asian nations such as Singapore, Korea and Japan,

which are looking to Finland, with its high performance without high-stakes testing, and to other systems for reform ideas.

## Shanghai and PISA 2009: Policy effects in Australia, England and the USA

### Australia

Following a long tradition of looking beyond the nation for educational reform ideas, the Australian government has recently looked toward the US and the data and accountability agenda of previous Chancellor of the New York City Department of Education, Joel Klein. This is evident in NAPLAN and the *My School* website and publication of comparative results for schools with sixty statistically similar schools across the nation.

The OECD has been important in policy terms in Australia. Australia has been a participant in PISA since 2000 and,

compared with England and the US, has accorded a more central place to its performance in national policy debates. This is partly due to Australia's close involvement in the OECD's education work, having provided the two previous Directors for Education, while the Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER) has been involved in the testing. PISA is oversampled in Australia to enable results to be provided for each of the state and territory systems and these data have been an important component of analyses undertaken by ACER for education systems around Australia, including comparisons between systems that have spurred reform agendas and influenced the national policy narrative about education.

Australia has performed relatively well in each round of PISA, generally ranking in the top ten across the areas of reading, mathematics and science. However, it is now one of only four



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- Is your strategic planning an isolated event that produces a document that sits on a shelf until it's time to shake off the dust to do another one?
- How do you hear the voice of your whole school community and respond authentically?
- Do your review processes simply measure whether you've 'jumped the bar' or do they help you know how to 'jump a higher bar'?
- Are you using review tools because you have to, or are they truly guiding the why, what and how of continuous development?

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## Meet us at the ACE Conference

To meet with Julia to view the EPS and develop an appreciation of the EPS and its online survey system she will be available at Stand 9 from 7.30am until the conference start as well as at morning tea, lunch and the end of the day. Please feel free to email [julia.atkin@mac.com](mailto:julia.atkin@mac.com) or [janet.luxton@core-ed.org](mailto:janet.luxton@core-ed.org) and register your interest.

nations that are declining in reading and mathematics performance and this has generated real political concern. The media has prominently reported Julia Gillard's assertion that Australia needs to 'win the education race' with other countries in the region (The Australian, January 24, 2012). In this same article, Gillard observed that 'four of the top five performing school systems in the world are in our region and they are getting better and better,' and she does not want Australian students to become 'workers in an economy where we are kind of the runt of the litter in our region and we've slipped behind the standards and the high-skill, high-wage jobs are elsewhere in our region'.

The Nous Group report for the Gonski Review of Funding for Schooling and the recent Grattan Institute report have also directed attention to Asia. Both were framed in terms of Australia's performance in comparison with other systems globally and begin with analysis of PISA performance. The Nous Group report draws attention to Australia's decline in reading and mathematics performance and the risk of 'falling behind' Asian systems such as Shanghai, Korea, Hong Kong and Japan (Nous Group 2011, p. 7). The Grattan Institute report (Jensen et al. 2012, p. 2) emphasises the rise of Asian systems and begins by stating that 'Today's centre of high performance in school education is East Asia'. The influence of culture on this performance is downplayed, while the importance of reform agendas in countries such as Shanghai, Hong Kong and Singapore is emphasised. The Shanghai system is a focus of analysis and comparison throughout the report, and was the focus of associated opinion pieces and other prominent features in Australian newspapers.

These research reports and media reporting have influenced the views of politicians, policy makers and the public more broadly, marking a distinct shift in attention in Australian education policy, from looking 'west' to the US and the UK to 'looking East' (or, in this case, North). However, there is an ongoing tension between those that continue to see Finland as an important reference society and those who instead are turning

to Shanghai. The Australian Education Union's attraction to the critique of Sahlberg (2011) of the neo-liberal reform agenda is a good case in point here.

### England

Historically, England has exported educational policies and practices to its colonies, a diaspora of English ideas. As with the US, it has tended not to look outwards for education policy ideas or has looked across the Atlantic. English policy makers are confident in the quality of national education data and have tended to be sceptical about the value of international comparisons such as PISA. However, attention to PISA in English politics and policy making has increased substantially since the initial rounds in 2000 and 2003, and particularly with the change of government in 2010. New Labour assumed the policy usefulness of internal data, while the Coalition has looked more to international comparisons.

“ *The media has prominently reported Julia Gillard's assertion that Australia needs to 'win the education race' with other countries in the region* ”

This can be seen in changing government responses to England's performance on PISA. Response to its performance in the first two rounds of PISA was ambivalent. The government celebrated a relatively strong performance in 2000, but the 2003 results showed a decline in performance and were suppressed on the basis of a low response rate to the survey, even though this response rate was only marginally lower than in 2000. We note that schools are now given financial incentives in England to participate in the sample. The 2006 results showed further decline in performance and received extensive, negative media coverage. This reflected



SHANGHAI IS ONE OF THE LARGEST CITIES IN CHINA, WITH A POPULATION OF MORE THAN 20 MILLION PEOPLE, AND IS BECOMING PART OF A TRANSNATIONAL NETWORK OF GLOBAL CITIES

the increasing international publicity of PISA and the OECD's active approach to promoting the results as an important evidence base for national policy makers. Declines in England's performance between the 2000 and 2006 rounds of PISA, and its comparative rankings in 2006, have been used by Cameron's Coalition Government to criticise the record and achievements of New Labour in relation to education. PISA data have been used to support a narrative of declining standards and to legitimise the need for more extensive reforms, in contrast to New Labour's claims of ever improving standards on GCSE targets and SATS. Indeed, the present focus on international comparisons differentiates the Coalition government's approach to education from both New Labour and previous Conservative governments. For example, the Coalition's 2010 White Paper began by emphasising the importance of international comparisons. England's performance in PISA 2006 was used to frame the positions set out in the paper, with the 'Far East' and Scandinavia identified as having top performing systems from which England must learn.

In speeches made by the current Secretary for Education, Michael Gove, the new emphasis given to PISA results is very clear. For example, following a 2010 visit to China, Gove authored a controversial opinion piece in *The Telegraph* on 28 December 2010, observing that '[s]chools in the Far East are turning out students who are working at an altogether higher level than our own'. He called for a 'Long March to reform our education system' and, displaying a baffling understanding of Chinese education under Mao, 'a cultural revolution just like the one they've had in China'. In recent speeches, Gove has regularly noted the need for England to learn from such top performing systems such as Shanghai, and in 2012 Foreign Secretary William Hague (2012) declared that '[t]oday Britain is looking East as never before'.

Under New Labour the focus in England was very much on national data, in support of claims about the need to drive up standards and as the basis for school choice discourses and school effectiveness approaches. However,

from 2007 the Opposition began to use international comparisons to critique the policy strategies and achievements of Blair and Brown, and in office the Conservatives have continued their policy gaze on PISA data and toward the high performing systems in the 'East'.

#### USA

The US has looked both outwards and inwards for ideas about reforming schooling across its history. In the early decades of the nineteenth century, for example, Horace Mann looked to Prussia to provide a model and justification for the creation of a mass, secular public schooling system in Massachusetts, which formed the prototype for subsequent comparable state legislation on schooling in other states. In the post World War Two era, the US turned inwards in its attention to education reform ideas, at the same time as it became the major global economic and military power. However, Japan became an important reference society for the US in the 1980s, in the wake of the *A Nation at Risk* report.

President Obama has strengthened the federal presence and national focus in US schooling. Obama supported the move by most of the nation's governors and school superintendents to develop national standards for Mathematics and English, which began in early 2009. Obama has been an activist education president with his *Race to the Top* program replacing Bush's *No Child Left Behind*, and in his linking of federal school funding to performance management of teachers.

There has been substantial school reform across the US in recent decades. Darling-Hammond (2011, p.ix) has noted the central features of these reforms as frequent high-stakes testing; expansion of the numbers of entrepreneurial charter schools; alternative routes into teaching and efforts to improve teaching by getting rid of teacher tenure; and introducing merit pay and firing those teachers whose students are performing poorly on tests. Such reforms are the antithesis of those instigated by the most successful schooling systems as measured by PISA such as Finland and are those critiqued by Sahlberg (2011) in his work.

US performance on PISA has never been particularly good. The response to the release of the 2009 PISA results however was more immediate and volatile. The headline in the *New York Times* (7 December 2010) read, 'Top Test Scores from Shanghai Stun Educators'. Quoted in the report, former Head of President Reagan's Department of Education, Chester E. Finn Jr. observed, 'I've seen how relentless the Chinese are at accomplishing goals, and if they can do this in Shanghai in 2009, they can do it in 10 cities in 2019, and 50 cities by 2029'. Arne Duncan, Secretary of Education, said, 'We have to see this as a wake-up call'. He added, 'The United States came in 23rd or 24th in most subjects. We can quibble, or we can face the brutal truth that we're being out-educated'.

“ *In the post World War Two era, the US turned inwards in its attention to education reform ideas, at the same time as it became the major global economic and military power.* ”

The USSR launch of Sputnik in 1957 symbolised Soviet progress ahead of the US in the so-called 'space race'. In his State of the Union Address on 25 January, 2011, President Obama noted that, 'We know what it takes to compete for the jobs and industries of our time. We need to out-innovate, out-educate, and out-build the rest of the world'. The *New York Times* story continued to quote President Obama: 'Fifty years later, our generation's Sputnik moment is back. With billions of people in India and China suddenly plunged into the world economy, nations with the most educated workers will prevail'.

“ Just as with Finland’s outstanding PISA performance on both quality and equity, so too Shanghai’s 2009 performance has not really been used for policy learning. ”

In response to the US’s PISA 2009 performance, Arne Duncan commissioned an OECD report on what the best performing school systems were doing and what lessons could be learnt from them. The findings of this report are collected in the book, *Surpassing Shanghai: An Agenda for American Education Built on the World’s Leading Systems*, edited by Marc Tucker (2011) from the National Centre on Education and the Economy (NCEE), which together with the OECD, did the research commissioned by Duncan. The US is now looking outwards again in relation to school reform, yet the reality seems to be reinforcement of an already underway reform agenda.

We have already noted the dominant ahistorical and acontextual explanations of the outstanding performance of school systems on PISA. In respect of the US, Condrón (2011) has demonstrated how inequitable funding of schooling and the extent of poverty are very significant factors in the poor comparative performance of US schools on international tests in both equity and quality terms. He shows how deep structural inequality is neglected in discussions of US performance on PISA and demonstrates statistically that if the Gini Coefficient of inequality in the US were the same as that in Finland, US performance would improve 25 points on mathematics. As already noted, OECD readings of PISA outcomes stress the significance of policy and deny cultural explanations for different national performances. We would also suggest they neglect the effects of inequitable school funding and structural inequality.

## Conclusion

Policy learning and policy borrowing are often used to describe how policy makers look elsewhere for ideas about developing their own schooling systems. This outward gaze was central in the development historically of comparative education. With the rise in significance of international comparative performance data on schooling systems, the nations that systems now look to are generally those who perform best on these tests. In comparative education, these nations are described as ‘reference societies’, but with the focus on Shanghai today we might more accurately speak of ‘reference systems’ at sub-national levels. This is part of the rescaling of politics associated with globalisation and new relationships between and amongst cities, provinces, nations and regions, globally. Current reform agendas in Australia, England and the USA differ from those in Shanghai and therefore provide an example of ‘externalisation’ (Schriewer, 1999): the use of Shanghai’s performance by politicians and policy makers to justify the necessity of further reform in their systems without any direct policy learning.

Just as with Finland’s outstanding PISA performance on both quality and equity, so too Shanghai’s 2009 performance has not really been used for policy learning. Rather it has been used as ammunition for strengthening national reform agendas of a neo-liberal kind that neglect structural inequality and inequities in the funding of schools, though Gonski in Australia is an important attempt to address the latter. The policy situation in our view, should not be an ‘either-or’ (policy versus context), but rather ought to be a ‘both-and’ policy approach, stressing the need for addressing the extent of social inequality and reforming schools and pedagogical practices. Unfortunately it seems that policy makers appear to be one-eyed in this respect.

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GEOFF MASTERS

# Education assessment in the 21st century

IT'S TIME FOR SIGNIFICANT REFORM IN EDUCATIONAL ASSESSMENT ARGUES GEOFF MASTERS

*Instead of judging student success only in terms of year-level expectations, assessment needs to recognise the progress that all students can make in their learning, and celebrate excellent progress, regardless of students' starting points.*

The traditional practice in schools is to assess students against the expectations for their year level and to report success in meeting those expectations in terms of A to E grades. The problem with this practice is that it fails to recognise that students of the same age and in the same year of school are at very different points in their learning and development. Typically, the most advanced students in any school year are about six years ahead of the least advanced.

This means that the same year-level curriculum is not equally appropriate for all students. When learning is judged as success on a common year-level curriculum, it is almost inevitable that less advanced students will struggle and achieve low grades and more advanced students will achieve high grades, and this is likely to be repeated year after year. A student who consistently receives a 'D' not only is unable to see the progress they are making, but worse, may infer that there is something stable about their ability to learn – that is, that they are a 'D-student'.

## Change is urgent

If school assessments in the 21st century are to contribute to improved learning and better outcomes for all students, then a change in approach is urgent.

Effective decision making in education depends on good information about where students are in their learning. Teachers can use this information to plan learning at the level of individual students, and education systems can target resources, monitor trends and evaluate progress.

Better methods are required to assess the progress individuals make in their learning. Learning is more appropriately defined and measured as the progress that individuals make, whatever their starting points.

Priorities identified for schools in the 21st century increasingly require long-term perspectives on student learning and include problem solving, communicating ideas, working in teams, evaluating information, and creating and innovating. These kinds of learning are not well monitored using processes designed to judge and grade success on limited bodies of taught content.



The emergence of new technologies and changes in where and when learning takes place also demand new approaches to assessment. New technologies are enabling more flexible, personalised forms of learning, including by providing learning activities tailored to individuals' current levels of progress and learning needs.

## Designing a Learning Assessment System

Reform to meet the demands now being placed on educational assessment requires the adoption and implementation of a coherent assessment 'system'.

Under a 'Learning Assessment System', all steps in the process should be interdependent, and designed to address the fundamental purpose of establishing and understanding where learners are in their long-term progress in an area of learning at the time of assessment. An assessment should not merely judge student success on a taught body of curriculum content.



A Learning Assessment System should be underpinned by a set of five design principles:

- Assessments should be guided by an empirically based understanding of the learning domain.
- Assessment methods should be selected for their ability to provide useful information about where students are in their learning within the domain.
- Performances on assessment tasks should be recorded using one or more task 'rubrics', providing a direct link to the learning domain.
- Assessment evidence should be used to draw a conclusion about where learners are in their progress within the learning domain.
- Feedback and reports of assessments should show where learners are in their learning at the time of assessment and, ideally, what progress they have made over time.

Such assessments provide teachers, parents, school leaders, governments and students themselves with information about where students are in their learning and the progress they make, including their long-term progress in solving problems, communicating ideas, working in teams, evaluating information, and creating and innovating.

The process of establishing where students are in their long-term progress in an area of learning depends on a deep understanding of the learning area itself. This includes a research-based understanding of how learning typically develops, the role of prerequisite skills and knowledge, and common learning difficulties.

The reform of assessment thinking and practice has the potential to lead and drive improvements in teaching and learning, but assessment reform is likely to be difficult in the absence of broader educational reforms.

For example, assessment to establish where individuals are in their learning is largely pointless if teachers intend to deliver exactly the same content to all students in a class regardless of their current levels of achievement. Developing and implementing such changes in assessment thinking and practice constitute a long term agenda – they will only occur over a number of decades.

The time has come for the reform of educational assessment. We need to use it to understand rather than to judge learning, and make it an integral part of effective teaching and learning, rather than something that stands apart from, and follows, teaching and learning.

Geoff Masters is CEO of the Australian Council for Educational Research and author of *Reforming Educational Assessment: Imperatives, principles and challenges*, which is available as a free download at [www.acer.edu.au/research/publications/aer](http://www.acer.edu.au/research/publications/aer)

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# *Your Child's First Year at School: Getting Off to a Good Start*

Jenni Connor and Pam Linke (2012)  
Early Childhood Australia

Have you ever wondered why nursery items, from bunny rugs to pyjamas and beyond, routinely feature numbers and letters of the alphabet? Work by anthropologists who study families and parenting across different cultures provides an answer.

The introduction of mass schooling did more than assure basic education for everyone; it profoundly affected society as a whole and changed the nature of a variety of other institutions. This included the family and parent-child relationships. Comparisons of how parents interact with their children in cultures where most people don't go to school and those where everyone does show marked differences.

In cultures with universal schooling parent interactions with young children are markedly 'teacher-like'. In other words, many interactions with children are organised around mini lessons, designed to teach vocabulary or number concepts or behaviour that will be necessary for the child's learning in school. Indeed these parent-led lessons can be essential, as, for instance, the best predictor of a child's early literacy gains in schools is whether someone – usually the mother – has taught the child sound-letter correspondences before the start of formal schooling.

In truth a great deal of what parents already do is designed – subconsciously – to make sure that their children 'get off to a good start' and parents whose circumstances are supportive and stable

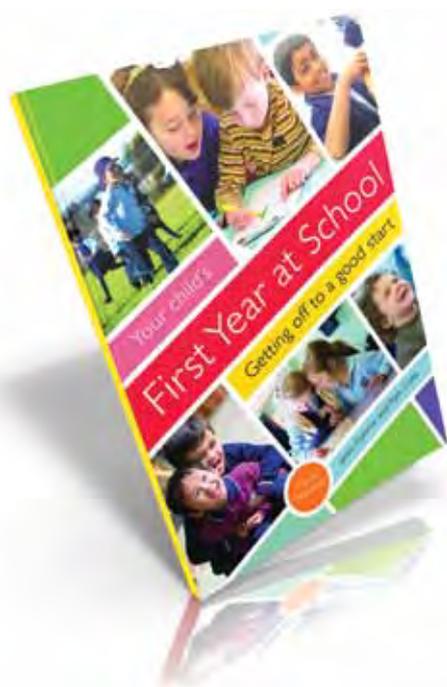
do not need further encouragement in that endeavour. Parents who do need support are those whose circumstances are not optimal. Regrettably when looking for support or assistance parents who are already struggling with difficulties are not likely to purchase a book that offers advice they may not be able to follow.

Connor and Linke's book contains a good deal of common-sense advice on preparing a child for school, support him or her in the first year and establishing and maintaining good relations with the school. This advice is most likely to be useful for parents who are well-educated, proficient in English and not burdened with material and social difficulties.

However, the book could give the impression that the only way to be a satisfactory parent (mother, actually) is to be a qualified early years educator able to furnish a full foundation curriculum before the child begins school.

Mothers – and fathers – already have a great deal to worry about and pressure to increase the 'teacher' aspects of their relationships with their children could take the joy and spontaneity out of parenting. Children learn a great deal from simply participating in a stable and loving family.

**Catherine Scott is a senior lecturer at the University of Melbourne Graduate School of Education.**



***Your Child's First Year at School: Getting Off to a Good Start*** is now in its fifth reprint.

ISBN13 978-1-921162-28-2

The book covers content including Getting Ready for School, Starting School, Learning and Development, Curriculum in the First Years, Emotional Wellbeing and Social Skills, Learning Literacy, Learning Numeracy, You and Your Child, Working with Your Child's School and Keeping in Touch.

Individual copies are available for \$19.95. A bulk order price of \$12.95 applies to orders of 20 copies or more for primary schools and pre-schools wishing to provide copies for parents.

The first chapter of the book is available on the Early Childhood Australia website.

For more information or to order visit [www.earlychildhoodaustralia.org.au](http://www.earlychildhoodaustralia.org.au) or call 1800 356 900

# Global Future: A view from the edge

A NEW WORLD VIEW OF THE TROPICS IS REQUIRED ACCORDING TO JAMES COOK UNIVERSITY VICE-CHANCELLOR PROFESSOR SANDRA HARDING



This is a northern story, but its importance is not confined to the north. It is a story that I hope speaks to all Queenslanders, to Australians and to all those who feel that our world can and should be a better place. In this article I hope to take you on a journey that aims to change the way we think about the world. It is a journey that examines and interprets global futures, and it is a view from the edge, from the tropics. It is my view – but not mine alone.

North/south, east/west, first world/ third world, developed/developing, democratic/non-democratic, poor/ wealthy, these are the world geographic, economic and political dichotomies with which we are most familiar. They are mined for meaning to understand the human condition, the environment, approaches to business and economy, exploitation, health and hunger, justice and oppression. They are also fraught with meaning and judgment, they have political and economic overtones; racial, ethnic and religious tensions are enveloped by them. Each of these ways of seeing and interpreting the world reveals something and will continue to be important.

More than 2000 years ago, Aristotle wrote that there are three zones in the world – the Frigid Zone, the Temperate Zone and the Torrid Zone. So consider the world as comprised of these three zones. There is work going on about the Frigid Zone – taking up that depiction and expanding it into the Idea of North.

My colleague Professor Peter Davidson at the University of Aberdeen has published a wonderful book that seeks to elaborate on that idea of north. Northern universities and economies and scientific assets, including universities, undertake research in their place, on issues that matter to them. Their work provides the kernel of fresh knowledge and innovation, fresh approaches to the common and uncommon issues of the North.

The Temperate Zone is where much of western science is transacted. Western science is defined by the Temperate Zone because of the dominance of our issues and people and economies. The Temperate Zone features common geographies, there is the western world's great power and authority, bruised and battered, but still potent in formal and informal ways. Now we see the rise of the East, specifically the rise of China, itself predominantly a Temperate Zone economy. Most Temperate Zone nation states are developed in an economic sense, but not all by any means.

The power of western or temperate science and ways of knowing appear ubiquitous and the problems addressed there are focused on issues in that world, but extend beyond as well.

Then there is the Torrid Zone - The Tropics. This is my zone. It is this zone and its power and potential that I want to make plain for you. What do I mean by the tropics? We know the lines on the map. The tropics surrounds the

equator, limited in latitude by the Tropic of Cancer in the northern hemisphere (at approximately 23°26' (23.4°) N latitude) and the Tropic of Capricorn in the southern hemisphere (at 23°26' (23.4°) S latitude). But when I refer to the tropics, I mean much more than that, I mean that zone of the world:

- where lives more than 40 percent of the world's population
- that contains around 80 percent of its biodiversity
- that generates around 20 percent of the Gross World Product
- where too many do not have access to the very basics of education
- that features some of the world's greatest environmental and ecological challenges – more so because 100s of millions of people rely on the marine resource and the land environment for their very lives and those of their children
- where there is a great diversity of political systems, ethnicities, religions and other belief systems, and ensuing tensions
- where biosecurity and national security issues are real
- where, for example, one of the 60,000 unmonitored boat journeys each year between Papua New Guinea and the northern tip of Australia could mean the release of a new virus or vector in either place
- where there are great health challenges, amongst them antibiotic resistant Tuberculosis, right there on our northern border
- where live 100s of millions of people who simply want to live their lives in peace and with sufficient to meet their needs
- where economies seek to grow and develop
- and where the rule of law is sometimes a fragile thing.

The Torrid Zone, the tropics, is that place. It is a place that deserves our attention as we transact our academic work and as we express our moral, humanistic concerns from an intellectual base. More needs to be done to focus on the tropics. It is easy to resist this idea – there is

something deep about western cultures' unease about the tropics. The Torrid Zone is often seen as not a place for us to be. At worst, there may be a sense that this is a zone that is not worthy of our enduring attention – or if it is, we'll do field work and then rush back to the comfort of our temperate world to do the real work. This fly-in, fly-out – almost colonial idea – of research and engagement just won't do.

Western culture's unease reflects a vein of deep suspicion and deeper distaste for the tropical world – driven from the earliest conceptions of the Torrid Zone. Negative descriptions and attitudes toward the tropics dominated western literature and thought for hundreds of years. They have been counter-balanced in some times and places by utopian depictions. For much of western history, our understanding of the tropics has lurched between pestilence and paradise – but the enduring theme in much of western thought has been that the tropics is not a proper place, not a regular place, not a place that white people should inhabit or even visit.

This negative notion persisted and was amplified in the late 19th century. Institutes of Tropical Medicine were established as part of the colonisation project and as a military essential. The first two established were the Liverpool School of Tropical Medicine and the London School of Tropical Medicine and Hygiene, both in 1899. Between 1900 and 1910, similar institutes were established in other old colonial powers in Lisbon, the Netherlands, Antwerp, Hamburg and also in Townsville; yes, Townsville.

The Australian Institute of Tropical Medicine was the very first medical research institute – indeed the first national research institute of any stripe – in Australia and was set up as part of that international movement in 1910. The key problematic to which they all responded was to understand how white people could live and work productively in the tropics. In Australia, we saw this as a great problem for our new nation – there were fears associated with the “mongrel North”, a part of Australia that was rich with ethnic diversity, including indigenous peoples, a sizeable Chinese population, people we would today call Indonesians, Islanders and more. Put

plainly, the Parliamentarian who spoke in the new Australian Parliament, then in Melbourne, described the development thus – he said, ‘(the aim of the Institute) is... to establish whether civilized man could live in the tropics without succumbing to moral degeneracy.’

Ideas did not progress in the pre-WWII period. In part one – on page one – of his 11 volume 1935 tour de force entitled *The Story of Civilization*, writer, historian and philosopher, Will Durant, could write:

*The heat of the tropics, and the innumerable parasites that infest them, are hostile to civilization; lethargy and disease, and a precocious maturity and decay, divert the energies from those inessentials of life that make civilization, and absorb them in hunger and reproduction; Nothing is left for the play of the arts and the mind.*

Then, in the meat of the 20th century – at the very time social movements gained independence for many former colonies in Asia and in Africa, the same time that human rights were centre stage in the West, and into the 60s when Martin Luther King spoke his great entreaty to the American people and when Australian indigenous peoples were at last recognised as Australians like all others – one event in a long history of ‘indifferent inclusion’ according to my James Cook University colleague and historian Russell McGregor – our words and perspectives changed from at least some engagement with the idea of the Tropics to reframe this and related issues as a function of development. ‘Tropics’ – a term that had some purchase, for all its negativity – was replaced with ‘developing’, and in this change we found a new way of marginalising the tropical world, forgetting about the Torrid Zone.

Two thousand years of history – an unsatisfactory history in many ways – and, from where I sit, it is time to take this on. The tropics is worthy of attention, of definition and engagement – it simply must be by virtue of the weight it carries – and will carry – in the world. I have set myself the great challenge to change the world view of the tropics. James Cook University is engaged in this as the tropical agenda resonates with us, in our place, in our souls – in my soul.

James Cook University was established to be Australia's University for the Tropics – and I am quoting here from early documents prepared by Sir Leslie Martin, then President of the Australian Universities Commission. Our foundation story is rich with foresight, meaning and intent. Starting in 1960 as part of The University of Queensland, we became a university in our own right on April 20th, 1970 – commemorating the day that Captain James Cook, that great British navigator and explorer, noted in his log that he has sighted the coast of Australia.

We claim Eddie Koiki Mabo as part of our heritage. He was a gardener at JCU when he had an historic conversation over lunch with two historians, raising his consciousness that the land on Murray (Mer) Island wasn't his. Much of the work for the early court cases was done in our library, now named for Eddie Koiki Mabo.

Cook and Mabo represent our twin histories. Ours was a potent birth and development. Ours is an activist history.

And that continues in the University's Statement of Strategic Intent where we say our university is about delivering a brighter future for life in the tropics world-wide, through graduates and discoveries that make a difference. We work to four strategic themes: people and societies in the tropics, industries and economies in the tropics, tropical environments and ecosystems, tropical health, medicine and biosecurity... everything we do – learning and teaching, research and engagement – must respond to one or more of those themes. We have a university plan to activate this, we have recruited tropical leaders, focused our research in centres and institutes, refreshed our curriculum and we're currently going through a stepping up process to even more fully engage with this intent.

JCU is leading a consortium of 12 institutions around the world to develop a report on the State of the Tropics and whether life in the tropics is getting better. Data sourced from the World Bank, the UN and other valid and reliable sources have allowed us to examine multiple indicators, over time. One of those indicators, of course, is education, particularly literacy.

“ *By 2050, more than 50 per cent of the world population will live in the tropics. Climate change means that even more folk will be affected by conditions previously confined to that zone of the world between the Tropics of Cancer and Capricorn.* ”

The recently released report shows that there have been improvements in youth literacy rates. Youth literacy rates in the tropics has grown from 79.8 per cent in 1990 to 86.2 per cent in 2010 while in the rest of the world, youth literacy rates have increased from 88.4 per cent to 93.7 per cent in the same period. This means the gap in literacy between youth in the tropics and in the rest of the world remains unchanged at around 8 percentage points.

We know where the greatest improvements have occurred (in northern Africa and the Middle East). Despite these solid improvements, the number of illiterate youth in the tropics only fell from 78 million in 1990 to 73 million in 2010, a drop of around 6 percentage points, where in the rest of the world, the number of illiterate youth fell by from 64 million to 36 million – a 43 per cent drop.

Some areas in the tropics are doing well. Oceania – so very near us, the developed country with the largest tropical land mass with scientific, health and education assets focused on the issues of the Tropics – is the only tropical region where youth literacy is estimated to have fallen since 1990.

Adult literacy lags youth literacy, as one might expect. Major improvements in adult literacy are evident in China over the past 30 years. Adult literacy rates in the tropics overall have improved from 56 per cent to 77 per cent in the thirty years

to 2010, compared with an increase from 71 per cent to 88 per cent in the rest of the world.

What is the point of all this work? It is geopolitical. Our aim is nothing less than changing the way the world views itself. It is about recognising the power of the lateral view of the world and in particular the great significance of the tropics with all its challenges, its opportunities, its climatic similarities that drive common problems and hold in prospect common solutions. By 2050, more than 50 per cent of the world population will live in the tropics. Climate change means that even more folk will be affected by conditions previously confined to that zone of the world between the Tropics of Cancer and Capricorn.

The challenge is not ours alone. It is for all of us, particularly those of us from Western traditions that have, over the sweep of human history, turned our faces away from the Torrid Zone. My aim is to reprise a fundamental Aristotelian insight, that of a lateral conception of the world, a conception that is thick with power, so that we may view the tropics for what it is. Not as pestilence or as paradise, but as a real place, a place of great significance in the world, where more than 2.8 billion of the world's people need us, need me, to recognise and engage.

Professor Sandra Harding is Vice-Chancellor and President, James Cook University – Townsville, Cairns, Singapore. She was recipient of the Australian College of Educators Queensland Medal in 2012 in recognition of her leadership of education in the Tropics.

This article is based on Professor Harding's Queensland Medallist Oration delivered in Brisbane on 2 November 2012. The full oration is available on the ACE website at [www.austcolled.com.au](http://www.austcolled.com.au)



# Q & A

## with Lea Waters

Associate Professor Lea Waters is internationally recognised for her expertise in wellbeing, organisational psychology and positive psychology. She is a registered psychologist (AHPRA, APS), with a PhD in Organisational Psychology. Lea is the Director of the Master in School Leadership and the Director of Positive Psychology Programs (undergraduate) at the University of Melbourne. In 2009-2011 she was listed in the Marquis Who's Who in the World for her outstanding research. She has presented and published her research in the United States of America, Canada, UK, Asia and Europe. In 2004 she was named the Australian and New Zealand Academy of Management Educator of the Year. In 2007 she received an Australian University Teaching Excellence Award for Business, Economics and Law and in 2011 she was awarded the Melbourne Graduate School of Education's Teaching Excellence Award. She has consulted to multinational and national organisations across industries such as banking, investment, retail, professional services, health, education and sport.

There is growing interest in student wellbeing and the role of positive psychology in fostering wellbeing. Associate Professor Lea Waters, a keynote speaker at the upcoming Forward Thinking conference in June, shared her thoughts on the positive psychology movement with *Professional Educator*.

### PE: What are the origins of the positive psychology movement?

**LW:** Positive psychology actually has a long history linking back to one of the original psychologists in the field, William James, at the turn of the 20th century. The idea of a psychologist helping people to achieve their fullest height in order to thrive as individuals and to use their gifts, talents and virtues to help others was also a big theme in the 1950s Humanistic Psychology Movement and was important in the 1980s Coping and Adaptability Psychologies. Positive psychology was formally introduced as a field in 1998 by Professor Martin Seligman, University of Pennsylvania. Positive psychology builds on the earlier fields mentioned above and draws upon key ideas from neuroscience and the philosophy of virtues. The scientific study of positive psychology topics has increased by 415% over the past 2 decades.

### PE: How is positive psychology different to 'traditional' psychology?

**LW:** We must be careful not to draw binary distinctions between traditional psychology and positive psychology as there are many topics that overlap both fields such as the topics of resilience, flow, courage and mindfulness. However, the basic distinction put forward in the literature is that traditional psychology has a healing orientation and thus seeks

to heal/fix pathology and problems. In contrast, positive psychology has a heliotropic, strength-based, orientation and seeks to promote positive states and qualities in individuals and groups.

### PE: Why do educators need to develop an understanding of positive psychology?

**LW:** There are several reasons why it is important for educators to understand positive psychology:

1. Positive psychology adopts a growth mindset and has a basic philosophy that all people are capable of learning and growing to become better people. This philosophy is also shared by the field of Education.
2. Positive psychology fits into the twenty-first century education paradigm which understands we need to educate the 'whole' student - socially, emotionally, physically, spiritually and intellectually. Positive psychology is evidence based and has empirically shown that the skills of wellbeing can be taught just as we also teach the skills for numeracy and literacy.
3. Positive psychology adopts the notion of primary prevention and seeks to assist young people to learn wellbeing skills before they need them. This way, when life throws a challenge at the young person, in most cases, they will be equipped with a psychological tool kit which can assist them to cope. ►

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4. The latest science shows that wellbeing is positively correlated with academic achievement and success in co-curricula.

**PE:** What is meant by a 'positive institution' and how can fostering a positive institution enhance student learning outcomes?

**LW:** Positive institutions are those that move individuals toward citizenship, compassion, integrity, altruism, citizenship, responsibility and tolerance. It is critical for a well-functioning society that schools meet the ideal of a positive institution. Schools serve as an important institutional vehicle through which positive psychology can serve to promote flourishing individuals and a better society.

**PE:** What would need to happen for institutions to become sufficiently humanised for character traits such as responsibility, moderation, tolerance and work ethic to be allowed to flourish?

**LW:** Institutions support these strengths through their ethos, policy and practice. We see inspiring examples of organisations that are ethically, socially, environmentally and morally aware. Indeed, the research now shows that being a 'good' organisation is beneficial for business as consumers are becoming more selective with their purchasing power.

Moving away from the consumer model, which is not an appropriate model/metaphor for schools, I do believe that there are many schools now aiming to be ethically, socially, environmentally and morally aware, not only in the way they educate students but also in the way they support their staff, interact with the wider community and the environment. I can say that one of the things that attracted me to the school that both my children attend is that the school has a strong environmental sustainability program, community outreach and a social-

*“...I do believe that there are many schools now aiming to be ethically, socially, environmentally and morally aware, not only in the way they educate students but also in the way they support their staff, interact with the wider community and the environment.”*

emotional learning curriculum. I was seeking a 'human', socially enabling institution in which to educate my children. I think many parents feel the same as I do.

**PE:** What is the balance between the role of educators and families and the wider community in developing students' positive psychology?

**LW:** A systems approach is needed if we are to get the full benefits of positive psychology for young people. Schools who are adopting positive psychology can educate families through parent nights and through changing aspects of the parent-teacher relationship. For instance, some schools are now beginning parent-teacher interviews by the teacher identifying character strengths in the student, this opens up the conversations for some of the other (perhaps less positive) topics that need to be discussed at the interview. I also know of some schools that have altered the school diary to ask parents to record 'what is going well at home' each week in the diary. Schools can link in with community institutions to allow young people to have opportunities that bring engagement, meaning and purpose.

**PE:** Some of the articles in this edition of *Professional Educator* address issues around student assessment. Let's consider positive psychology and assessment for a moment. How can positive psychology be incorporated into assessment? Should assessment of students take factors other than academic achievement into account?

**LW:** Carol Dweck's notion of process praise aligns with summative feedback and some of the visible learning practises.

I do believe that teachers can track and help to build character strengths in young people, for example perseverance and compassion. This requires teacher knowledge and a meaningful rubric for teachers to use but I would not go so far as to say that positive psychology should be formally assessable. However, I have seen teachers be clever and build positive psychology concepts into formal academic curriculum. In this way the students formal knowledge of positive psychology related ideas is developed and assessed but not the students personal wellbeing per se.

I certainly endorse the idea that schools can be supported and assessed on their provision of the wellbeing culture and opportunities they provide for students, staff and parents. Academic achievement, numeracy and literacy levels are very narrow measures via which to assess the success of a school and do not match the ethos of twenty first century education. Perhaps we can find ways to legitimise and celebrate the wellbeing outcomes of schools. The question of how to assess success is not just being asked by schools and education systems, for example the Bhutan and British Governments have both announced that they will measure wellbeing as well as GDP to 'round out' the idea of what makes a nation successful.

# Teacher performance, context and professional judgement

TEACHERS' PROFESSIONAL PRACTICE CANNOT BE BROKEN DOWN TO SETS OF COMPETENCIES AS IN TRADES TRAINING ARGUES DAVID TRIPP

A key feature of the federal Labor Government's education policy platform is to improve educational achievement by improving teachers' classroom performance. A major initiative to achieve this has been to set up the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL) with a brief to develop national performance standards for both classroom teaching and school management.

AITSL's approach has been to produce 3 Domains of practice, each domain having multiple standards which have multiple focuses at 4 levels of career progression. For example, in the domain of, *Professional practice* we find 5 standards, the fourth of which is *Create and maintain supportive and safe learning environments*. There are 5 Focuses for this standard, the third being, *manage challenging behaviour*, and the requirement for the *Proficient* level of career development is described as: 'Manage challenging behaviour by establishing and negotiating clear expectations with students and address discipline issues promptly, fairly and respectfully.' There are then a number of short illustrations of practice at that level. When fully developed, these standards are to be used at a national level to unify teacher education curricula, performance assessment, and professional development.

Wisely, AITSL has so far avoided the competency-based approach of TAFE training courses atomised into specific elements and range statements, but it is difficult to see how anyone could use their highly general competency statements for performance assessment without offering much more specific detail. This chosen approach is well suited to professional performance, and in the next how it might be possible to move towards further specification through the explication of teacher craft knowledge.

## Competency as professional judgement

As I have argued elsewhere (Tripp, 1993/2011), the main difference between a trade and a profession lies in the amount of judgement involved and the nature of the outcomes of practice. While it is very easy to specify the one correct troubleshooting procedure and the competencies involved in checking the fuel system of an engine, for instance, it is impossible to specify the one correct procedure for getting a child to stop talking to their neighbour.

Even though it is easy enough to say that a competent teacher knows and can 'Manage challenging behaviour by establishing and negotiating clear expectations with students and address discipline issues promptly, fairly and respectfully,' no one will ever be able to

specify exactly what they need to be able to do to best achieve those outcomes in any given situation. First, there are so many more variables in teachers' work than in any trade, that even though each new situation is similar in some ways to other situations, each is also significantly different and requires very different strategies. Second, and again in contrast to the trades, the outcome of a strategy is often quite different with different students in different contexts.

For example, simply asking a child to stop talking is a very common discipline strategy which can work with one child in one situation, but may not work with another in another situation, or even with the same child later in the same lesson. And no strategy will work with all children on every occasion. So although it is possible to identify a range of strategies for successful classroom management, context means that it is not possible to specify beforehand how successful the outcomes of using it will be. Nor is it necessarily fair, as when, for instance, the child who is talking is politely responding to a question from another child that the teacher did not hear.

Furthermore, and perhaps most important, the stakes in teaching are much higher than in most work in most trades. Very little judgement about what is best for the client enters into getting a car engine running well, failure to do so

will cause little more than inconvenience, and matters can always be corrected later. In contrast, in teaching there are a great many very different ways to obtain obedience from a reluctant child, each one of which will have different short- and long-term outcomes in regard to subsequent behaviour, willingness to learn, self-image, and so on, quite apart from also affecting the other children in the room in different ways.

The point here is that although it is straightforward enough to write professional performance standards at a general level, it is not possible to determine how they should best be achieved: the contexts of use are just too complex and variable. The only way out of the problem is not to try, so AITSL is instead producing a large number of short videos of practice that illustrate each standard. Those can then be used to communicate the meaning of each standard and inform judgement about whether it has been achieved or not.

### Professional judgement and context in practice

The approach is not without problems, however; judgements of performance can only be made in a particular instance of practice. Furthermore, in over 30 years experience in the analysis of critical incidents in teaching, I have found some highly effective practices to include aspects that could be harmful in many situations.

For instance, consider the following incident abbreviated from Tripp (1993/2011: 4-6).

A teacher enters a very noisy classroom to start the lesson.

**Teacher (loudly):** Rick is that you making all the noise?

**Rick:** No Sir!

The class noise subsides as students take interest in the exchange between the teacher and Rick. The teacher looks round all areas of the classroom.

**Teacher:** Well then, who is making all the noise?

Silence.

This very experienced teacher walked into the very noisy classroom and in a few seconds silenced the whole class with two sentences to create a *Ripple Effect*. This works by making an intervention that turns everyone's attention towards it, much as the ripples from the splash of a stone thrown into a pond spread across the whole surface. Here the intervention is a 1-1 interaction that the teacher can control, and controlling the event gradually controls the class. Highly accomplished teachers have a large repertoire of such strategies.

So it worked effectively, but wasn't it unfair to just 'pick on' Rick who was only one of many noisy students? And why didn't Rick object to being the only one of many co-offenders to be picked on? To understand this we have to look at their relationship and how he picked on him. The teacher seems to have said something rather silly, asking a single boy if he was solely responsible for what was obviously a whole class noise, and that was an accusation that the pupil could sensibly and legitimately deny, even if he were a prominent noise maker. The teacher did not then have to admonish the student, so he did not feel picked upon.

The teacher then deliberately continued to assert that there must be one person making all the noise, and making eye contact with other individuals, he told the class that he was about to pick on someone else, so they all stopped talking. So, without anyone being punished or losing face, the whole class was instantly and effectively silenced. One can only admire the technical expertise of teachers who develop such ways of managing a class. Clearly this teacher is operating at a highly accomplished level of performance.

Context was also a significant factor here: the teacher picked on Rick because he was a habitual noise maker and they had a well-established, trusting and sparky relationship: the teacher knew Rick would take his accusation in good part, and in the tape of the interchange one could hear Rick responding with humorously exaggerated indignation, whereas another student might indeed have felt unfairly picked upon, and Rick too, without the crucial all in making the noise.

Though at first glance it mightn't have looked like it, this is in fact an example of a teacher managing classroom discipline 'promptly, fairly and respectfully'; and rather than trying to define any competency involved in detail, it is more useful to see it as informed by teacher craft knowledge encoded as a 'tip for teachers' which could be worded as: *To control a whole group, pick on individuals*. What one cannot specify is the best way to pick on individuals, and certainly not, *when picking on individuals, make a nonsensical accusation*, although that was actually what made this teacher's action so effective in this context.

At a more general level of professional performance, one could also see it as an example of the teacher enacting the teaching tip, *The key to good discipline is to maintain it without building resentment (and thereby producing further resistance)*, which is why *fairly and respectfully* are so important in the standard.

Thus while it is necessary for teachers to be able to competently achieve control of a whole class, it will never be possible to reduce their professional practice to sets of competencies with specific elements to achieve and the range statements of when and where they should be applied as is the case in trades training, nor to specify how anything should best be done regardless of context. Such teaching tips can provide a further level of detail about teachers' knowledge and the quality of their practice. What that means for teacher assessors and educators will be the topic of a future article.

**Dr David Tripp is an Adjunct Associate Professor at Murdoch University now working as an educational consultant.**

The book referred to here is:

Tripp, D.H. (1993) *Critical incidents in teaching: developing professional judgement*. London and New York: Routledge [Now with a new preface and published in the *Routledge Education Classic Edition Series*]

*In a follow up piece in the June edition of Professional Educator Dr Tripp will provide an account of how teacher professional knowledge can be captured as principles of practice and implications of this for the profession.*



# A response to the Labor Government's Education Bill 2012

On 28 November last year the federal government introduced into Parliament the Australian Education Bill. This was presented as a response to the Gonski Review, and while it promised a broad commitment to increase funding, it said little about how the recommendations would be implemented. At the same time it addressed many issues not discussed in the Gonski Review and provided a broad overview of where the Government felt School Education should be going and how to achieve this. A request was made to the Australian College of Educators to provide a submission on the Education Bill and this submission is now on the College website. The following is a personal reflection on the Bill.

This mixture of aims can be seen in the government's own summary of the Bill. The expressions 'highly equitable' and 'needs based funding' referred specifically to the Gonski Review but the rest of the statement outlined an overall aim and referred to a 'National Plan' to achieve this:

*The bill establishes three goals for Australian schooling, namely: for Australian schooling to provide an excellent education for all students; for Australian schooling to be highly equitable; and for Australia to be placed in the top five countries in reading, science and mathematics, quality and equity in recognised international testing by 2025; and commits the Commonwealth to work collaboratively with states, territories, the non-government sector and other partners to meet these goals through developing and implementing a national plan for school improvement and needs-based funding arrangements.*

At the outset I believe it is important to acknowledge that this government has taken education reform seriously. While there will always be policy aspects that can be criticised, the implementation of an Australian Curriculum, the inquiry into the teaching workforce, the Gonski

Review, the progress on teaching and leadership standards and now the Education Bill have brought education to the forefront in a way that we have not seen for many years, and if there is a change in government in September we must do all we can to ensure that this momentum is not lost.

In its submission ACE was critical of the Bill's setting the goal for Australian Education as being in the 'Top Five' by 2025 for a variety of reasons. Primarily it says nothing about what a high quality and equitable education for Australia in the twenty-first century should look like and does nothing to define the directions in which Australia should move; and as the contrasting results from the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMMS) and the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) indicates, each method of testing has its own inbuilt assumptions. For example Finland's Mathematics results on TIMMS are just above the international mean while on PISA they are near the top of the scale. The March issue of *Professional Educator* looked in some depth at a variety of concerns around international comparisons.

But perhaps more dangerously, as Alan Reid has pointed out in the latest ACE Publication, *Equity and Education*, a superficial goal leads to a repeat of superficial solutions: more autonomy, more competition between schools, more testing and more accountability all of which occurred as part of the 'national plan for school improvement'.

The Bill makes references to equity but lacks specific policies to address inequity. In the ACE submission it was proposed that the government adopt the definition of the Gonski Review where equity in schooling was defined as:

*ensuring that differences in educational outcomes are not the result of differences in wealth, income, power or possessions. ... all students must have access to an acceptable international standard of education, regardless of where they live or the school they attend (p. 105).*

This definition could provide the basis for specific policy directions aimed at addressing the particular factors that hinder the achievement of equity.

Another area of concern was the failure to recognise that the knowledge, expertise and experience in managing education were in the hands of the states and territories. Comments by the Prime Minister in her Press Club address on September 2 that she would not 'be held to ransom by States who aren't genuinely committed to reform – and I am prepared to work quickly with those States and systems who share my commitment to school improvement' or the statement in the Bill itself that 'states and territories, and non-government education authorities, that agree to implement the national plan will be provided with school funding ...' implying that states and territories had to accept the plan in full before receiving funding are unnecessarily confrontational. There are

some references in the Bill to advancing education being a partnership, but there should be greater emphasis on this and evidence of an awareness of the different roles the two levels of government can play in this. The federal government for example through its management of the tertiary sector can play a greater role in supporting innovations in teacher education. More funding directed here would save states having to deal with less effective teachers further down the track. The federal government could also support the states by coordinating resource material for the Australian Curriculum, particularly in the area of increasing student knowledge of Asian history and culture.

In the submission ACE also expressed concern that the government had appeared to reject Recommendation 35 of the Gonski Review: the setting up of a National Schools Resourcing Body whose members would be appointed 'on the

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► basis of merit and expertise' to maintain and refine the data used and monitor its success.

While it might be argued that such a body was just introducing another level of bureaucracy, the reality is that we got into the situation where funding has become inequitable because the whole process was continually politicised. Data will have to be collected and interpreted by some organisation and it is far better that this be an independent statutory one and not have its research or conclusions clouded by political pressures.

Such a body would not be a threat to the authority of Parliament, as long as its role was just that of presenting information to the Parliament. The Parliament could then provide its justification if it did not follow certain recommendations. The government wants schools to be politically accountable and it should also be accountable.

At the time of writing (mid April) final negotiations are taking place with the states and territories. All the discussion is about who gets how many millions of dollars and who misses out and there is practically no discussion of how the extra money might be spent.

Hopefully when the dust has settled we may be able to get down to just what steps need to be taken so that a good education can become an excellent one including how to really address educational disadvantage, and it is vital that ACE plays an increasing role in the public debate.

Ian Keese FACE has degrees in Science and History and taught in city and country schools in NSW, predominantly in the government sector. He retired in 2003 having spent the last 15 years of his teaching career as History Head Teacher in schools in western Sydney.

“ The federal government for example through its management of the tertiary sector can play a greater role in supporting innovations in teacher education. More funding directed here would save States having to deal with less effective teachers further down the track. ”

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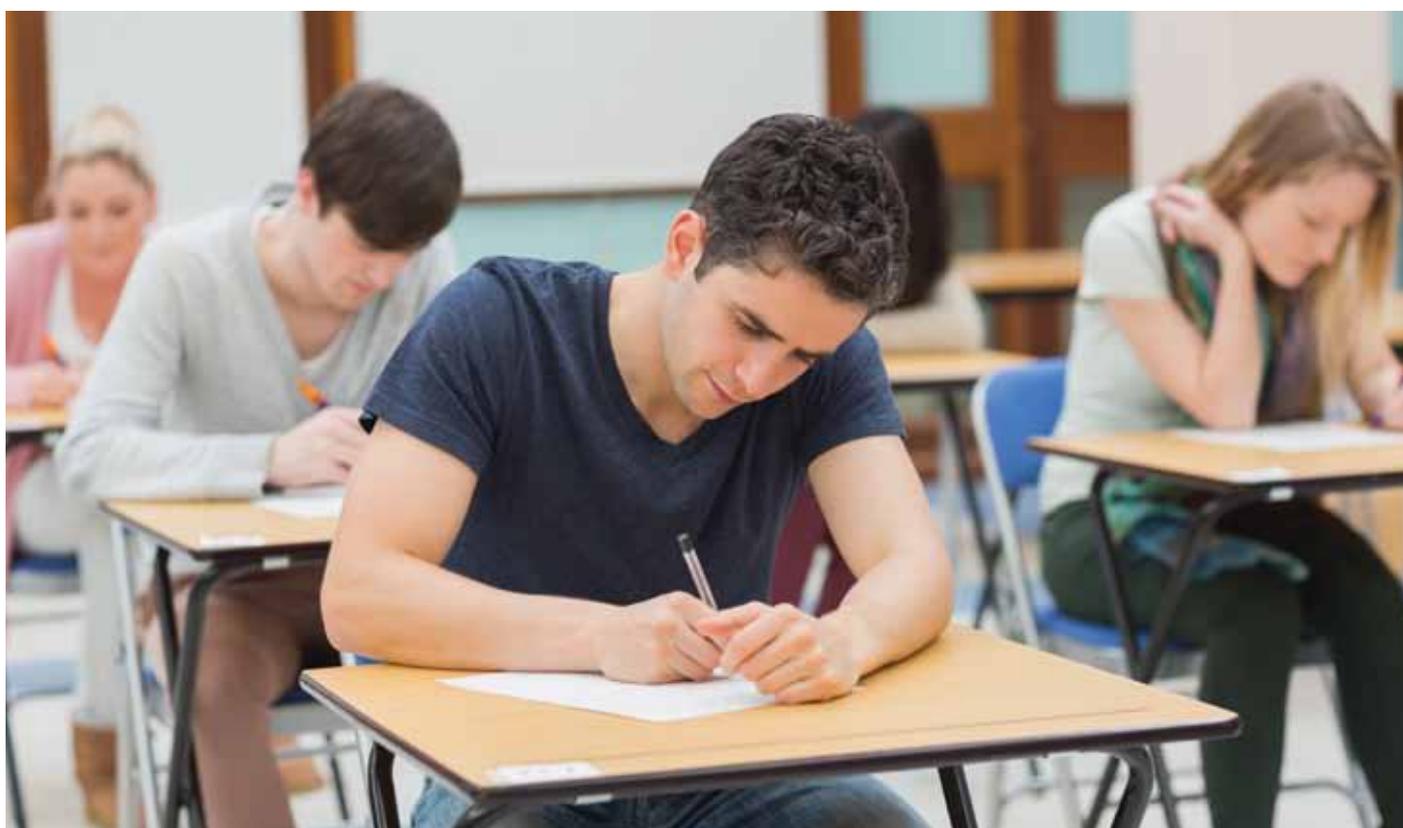
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# The basics of assessment

CATHERINE SCOTT DESCRIBES  
WHAT TEACHERS NEED TO  
KNOW ABOUT ASSESSMENT



CATHERINE SCOTT

Good teachers know that assessment does more than measure what children have learned: it also provides feedback on how students are faring and allows for constant adjustment to teaching practice. This is particularly the case when teachers wish to differentiate their instruction to better meet the learning needs of individual students.

Good assessment regimes thus facilitate the gathering of specific, personalised, and timely information needed to guide both learning and teaching. Used this way assessment is more than assessment *of* learning, it becomes assessment *for* learning.

It is undoubtedly true that students learn what is assessed: 'Will this be in the test?' is a question heard at all levels of education, wherever assessment is practised and that's, well, everywhere. Good assessment thus both targets the essential learning of a unit of work

and provides both teacher and learner with vital feedback on how a student is going, how performance compares to expectations and where to next for that student's learning.

There are three main types of assessment, classified by purposes these serve. The first two types are probably familiar to most readers, the third, perhaps less so.

The three types are

- Formative
- Summative
- Diagnostic





## Formative Assessment

Formative assessment occurs during a teaching unit and is designed to provide feedback to both the teacher AND students about how learning is progressing: it is a guide to the teacher's teaching and the students' learning. Formative assessments can include both formal and informal methods although they are usually marked, they may not contribute to final marks in the unit of work or subject.

Involving the learner in assessment is a vital part of the shift from assessment of learning to assessment for learning. Examples include giving students the rubrics or criteria to be used for marking, so that these can be used as guides for the standards and content expected. Students can also be shown examples of excellent work and helped to analyse the aspects that make it good work. Guides such as this are invaluable for helping students to improve their work.

Peer and self-assessment are also very useful ways to involve students in assessment. Requiring students to keep a record of their work also aids them to learn to be aware of their own learning and to see how far they have come in mastering a topic.

Assessment of learning means more than just how well a student is achieving but should include looking for information about why this level of attainment is being reached. As an example, via formative assessment tasks, teachers can become aware of students' approaches to learning and where these may be less than optimal. Encouraging student involvement in learning aids with making these discoveries about habitual approaches and strategies being employed.

Assessments certainly don't need to be written to be useful. Teachers can use questioning to establish how students' knowledge and understanding are progressing. Careful questioning, particularly that which goes beyond requiring yes/no answers or questions requiring only a few words to answer can give insight into students' conceptions and misconceptions of subject matter (see Scott & Meiers, 2009).

Effective questioning can also help students become aware of and reflective about their own thinking, a practice known as 'metacognition'.

Meta-cognitive awareness – knowledge about thinking, what strategies to use, how to manage one's own problem solving and how to assess progress, has been shown to be related to how well students achieve. Often students who seem learning disabled lack not so much the capacity to learn but the meta-cognitive knowledge to manage their own learning. It can be surprising to hear that some learners do not know that more effort leads to better outcomes, for example. However, when the apparently learning disabled are taught systematic approaches to their learning, achievement can improve dramatically and what were thought to be basic ability deficits may disappear.

Once a formative assessment has been administered the results can be used to plan corrective teaching, if necessary. Learners can be grouped according to who needs extra assistance to master particular content or who needs extension activities. High and low achieving students can be paired for co-operative activities. Patterns of scores may also indicate specific problems, for example that many students lack essential prior learning, in which case steps can be taken to address this deficit.

Research on formative assessment has revealed that it is a very effective means for increasing overall student achievement. Most importantly, as Black and Wiliam (2001, p.3) note '...improved formative assessment helps the (so-called) low attainers more than the rest, and so reduces the spread of attainment while also raising it overall'.



### An example of meta-cognition: Meta-memory

Beliefs about memory are important: older adults who experience memory problems accept these as a fact of later life and often do not take steps that can improve their memory, for example, by practising deliberate strategies. Even younger people can harbour self-defeating beliefs 'I am HOPELESS with names'.

Whether you are dealing with old people or children (as a parent or teacher), or adult students, you should remember this:

- What they believe about intelligence or memory matters.
- What they believe about themselves matters.
- Any cognitive failure is generally a strategy failure (if there is no brain damage).
- Strategy failures can be fixed.

## Summative assessments

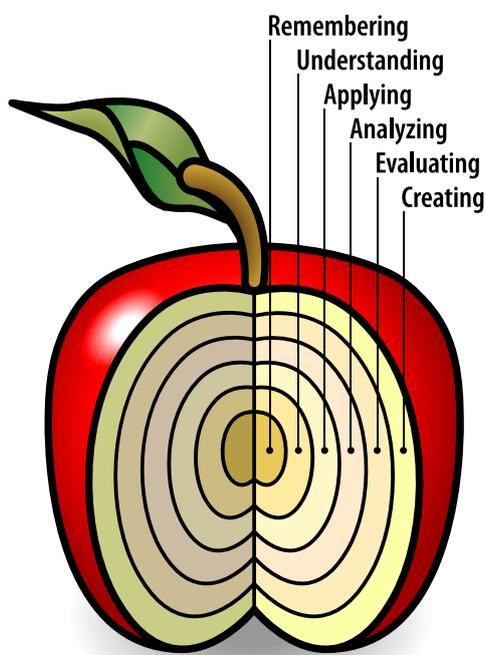
Summative assessments summarise what students have learned at the conclusion of a unit or course. These tend to be evaluative, and teachers typically report assessment results as a mark or a grade. Familiar examples include tests, performance tasks, final exams, culminating projects and work portfolios.

The design of assessment tasks should include consideration of the sorts of outcomes that are the aims of the topic or unit of work. We've already seen that learning about how students tackle tasks is as important as seeing how well they are learning content. Learning objectives for a course usually include more than 'just' learning the content. Teachers generally aim for students to be able to understand what they have learned and to be able to apply, analyse and/or critically evaluate it. Assessment items should target these outcomes.

Bloom's Taxonomy (see diagram) has been around for several decades but forms a good basis for thinking about learning outcomes and how to assess these. It draws particular attention to the importance of the foundation levels of learning and reminds us that higher order outcomes, such as analysis and evaluation, are built on a solid foundation of knowing and understanding subject matter.

The taxonomy provides a useful reminder that if students are to reflect on and assess their own or other students' work they will need guidance and structure to do so effectively. A relative novice in an area will have difficulty providing a sound evaluation of work without assistance. It is particularly the case that it is difficult to provide good feedback without a solid understanding of the relevant knowledge domain.

Later revisions of the Taxonomy have replaced 'evaluating' with 'creating' but in either version it remains a useful instrument for designing appropriate assessment.



## Diagnostic assessments

The third type of assessment is in actuality the first that ought to be used in a teaching and learning sequence. It is called diagnostic or, sometimes, pre-assessment.

Diagnostic assessments generally occur before teaching a unit of work. They are designed to check students' prior knowledge and skill levels, identify student misconceptions and profile learners' interests. They are generally not graded and they also allow students themselves to become aware of their own level of knowledge and understanding before a unit of work commences.

Properly conducted diagnostic assessments assist planning of teaching and guide differentiation but importantly they can also give the teacher vital information to be used to form a baseline against which what has been learned can be judged and measured.

More than a few theorists have noted that diagnosis is a vital first step in teaching and learning. To commence teaching without becoming aware of the students' current level of knowledge and understanding is akin to starting a medical treatment before making a diagnosis.

## Conclusion

Assessment is more than finding out what students can do at the end of a unit of work. It is vital tool for learning that supports both the teacher and the students in their classroom endeavours.

Without excellent assessment practices teachers are working 'blind' and students are also stumbling towards an uncertain learning outcome.

**Catherine Scott is a senior lecturer at the University of Melbourne Graduate School of Education.**

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