

# professional EDUCATOR

The ACE forum for policy, research and practice in education



# professional EDUCATOR



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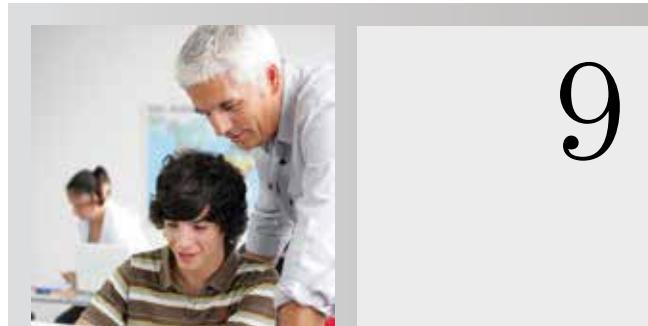
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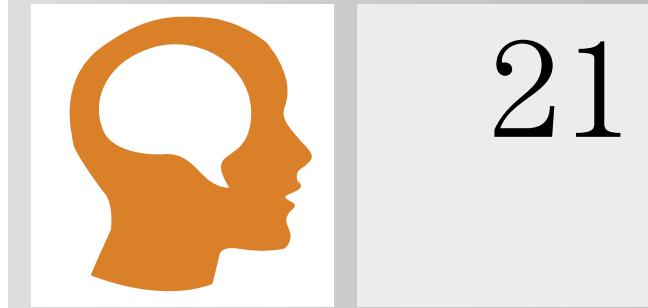
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# The activist profession

On 21st May the University of Melbourne and the Australian College of Educators (ACE) hosted the inaugural Jean Blackburn Oration. Our speaker was David Gonski AC. More than 700 educators filled Wilson Hall to listen to Mr Gonski break his silence about the significant Australian report he chaired, *Review of School Funding*, released in 2011.

Mr Gonski's reflections and thoughts carried even more weight and attracted even more attention given the context of the recently released Federal Budget. There was significant media interest in his presentation, which was broadcast later nationally on ABC television. (Further details are available on the College website).

This event was a significant demonstration of the College's commitment to engaging with and influencing contemporary educational policy. As I have mentioned in my address to the New South Wales Branch Fellows (see page 7), the profession has been either silent or silenced in many contemporary education debates. You would have noticed a significant increase in the involvement of ACE in the broad area of educational policy over the past 12 months.

We take the role of providing a voice for the profession very seriously and have increasingly drawn upon our membership to provide expert commentary and

advice to various agencies. We are also a partner with the Melbourne Graduate School of Education (MGSE) in the current evaluation of the implementation of the Australian Professional Standards for Teaching. We have also recently engaged Maren Klein as a part-time education policy officer to assist with policy work. Recently, I met with Minister Pyne's Teacher Education Ministerial Advisory Group (TEMAG) in Melbourne on behalf of ACE, and this was followed by a formal submission developed by a very active and highly experienced group of our members and fellows.

There are some fundamental changes occurring within Australian and international education and some of these are going largely unnoticed. These will, however, have a significant impact in the years ahead. ACE will continue to strive to present a strong evidence-based critique, commentary and position in respect of these developments on behalf of our members and the profession more generally.

In this edition of *Professional Educator* Dr Norman McCulla FACE, chair of the ACE Publications Committee, takes up the issue of education as an activist profession. Norman calls upon the teaching profession to recommit itself to being an activist profession from the classroom upwards to the national level. The College is well placed to take up this challenge and to assist others to do so.

Another of our contributors to this edition is John Marsden, a well-known author and teacher. He uses the case study of his own school to highlight many of the pressures on schools generally that detract from the core business of schooling, which is a focus on individual students and their academic, personal and social development.

Jacqueline Robina Voff provides a nice counterpoint to these high-level considerations in describing her personal account of her journey and development as a teacher, a journey which has seen her in a variety of roles and in a variety of countries before undertaking postgraduate work in education in Australia prior to taking up a new role in an International Baccalaureate school in Southern Taiwan. It reminds us that many members of the teaching profession have a very rich and varied background which they bring to their role. It also reminds us that teachers are always learning.

I commend this edition of *Professional Educator* to you and also note the positive response we have been receiving to the monthly *Notebook* in recent times. There are more exciting developments in the pipeline and you'll be hearing about these in due course.

**Professor Stephen Dinham OAM PhD  
(FACE) FACEA FAIM  
National President**



# The activist teacher

NORMAN McCULLA

You have to admire the medical profession. For over 2400 years the *Hippocratic Oath* has served that profession well. Sworn voluntarily by doctors at graduation, and sometimes redrafted by the graduating cohort, the oath has at its core an ethical commitment to patients and to the medical profession. While discussion and debate have taken place about aspects of the oath, its fundamental intent and structure have remained remarkably constant over time (McNeil & Dowton, 2002). One of the purposes of the medical oath is to 'declare the core values of the profession and to engender and strengthen the necessary resolve in doctors' (p.125).

A problem for the teaching profession is that our version of a Hippocratic-style oath has always been an unstated one. It is implicit in the beliefs, values and actions of the vast majority of teachers and their professional associations, but it is never made explicit in the public domain.

As individuals, medical professionals subscribe to a commitment to 'treat the ill to the best of one's ability', and the oath provides elaboration as to what this means. The professional educator appears to subscribe to something along the lines of the following:

*'to teach and to lead to the best of one's ability for the optimum learning, development and welfare of young people'.*

Underpinning this there is a commitment to social justice and equity. In the Australian idiom this might be interpreted as meaning 'to strive so that all young people get a fair go to be part of, and realise their potential in, a truly democratic society'.

Throughout our profession there are countless examples of colleagues who go about their day-to-day work selflessly and tirelessly, doing exactly that. Some of these teachers are recognised for their commitment and innovation by awards for quality teaching or services to education, often after nomination by colleagues and/or their community; others share their learning and expertise by leading professional development or leading high quality schools. Higher-order professional standards are encouraging teachers to self-identify for recognition at this level. An unstated oath for the teaching profession is often reflected in a school's ethos or motto and its culture. But does it all stop there?

Writing on the theme of the 'activist professional' in the early years of this millennium, researchers such as Professor Judith Sachs provided insights as to what that term actually means as well as sounding some prescient warnings (Sachs, 2003). Activist professionals, it is argued, work strongly in the interests of students and the communities in which their schools and other education workplaces are located. To improve the learning opportunities for students, activist professionals develop trust, manage transformative politics, position themselves strategically working collectively with others, and lead through learner and profession-oriented strategies. There are some good examples of the activist professional at work in this edition of *Professional Educator*.

As for the prescient warning, caution was sounded on the rise of a sterile 'audit society' in education internationally. This idea centred on accountability though bureaucratic surveillance of teachers' work. This, it was held, would be at the expense of teacher judgement, ownership, innovation and professionalism. An activist profession was seen as a response (Groundwater-

Smith and Sachs, 2002). Subsequent research has shown just how powerful policy frameworks are in supporting or undermining teacher commitment, resilience and professionalism (see McCulla, 2012 for examples).

*An unstated oath for the teaching profession is often reflected in a school's ethos or motto and its culture. But does it all stop there?*

A level of trust can exist between the profession and the broader society that enables teachers' work and sits between rigid, external surveillance on the one hand and blind trust on the other (Fink, 2012). It is this balance that many argue needs to be restored; the balance demands freedom but not license; increased authority but not total autonomy. Command and control strategies, together with mechanistic attempts to improve teaching and teacher quality through regulatory approaches so favoured by many outside the profession, ignore the fact that schools and school systems are not businesses but delicate social ecosystems. Change in one area has multiple repercussions in others, such as the inter-relationships. The '30-second clip' favoured by the media ignores these inter-relationships and often makes it difficult for professional educators to give a considered response to an interviewer's question when a considered response is both essential and time consuming.

One could argue of course that an activist profession is alive and well at the grass roots level of the classroom and school, evidenced by the consistent stories of local achievements in all curriculum areas. The question is to what extent these achievements are because of, or despite, 'the system'? Too often, it seems

these stories have become masked in the public arena by a fixation on school competition fuelled by narrow test results and international league tables. Good news stories are seldom highlighted in the general media but local communities know all about them. It seems that two worlds co-exist in education: the real world of schools; and the world of education policy.

Teachers contribute to professional associations as a bridge between these worlds. Indeed, Australian education has been characterised by teacher involvement in professional associations. They have enabled teachers to speak on behalf of the profession in a diverse range of forums from curriculum reviews to school funding and from teaching standards to industrial matters. Professional associations have enabled teachers to speak their minds on matters that would otherwise have remained unspoken because of the policies of employing authorities. Any fair historical appraisal would confirm that our professional associations have been foundational and instrumental to maintaining a strong and internationally recognised, high-performing school system across Australia. They have been instrumental too in supporting the development of teaching as a profession. They have been underpinned by that unspoken 'oath' of working for the optimum learning, development and welfare of young people. This has sometimes put them at cross purposes with the government of the day or the media and fuelled criticism that teachers are 'self-serving' or standing in the way of educational 'reform'. ▶

*Professional associations have enabled teachers to speak their minds on matters that would otherwise have remained unspoken...*

► Professional associations have been a source of continuity in a world of constant change. Align this thought with your observations of the political process. Governments come and go. There has been a revolving door of Ministers of Education in all states and territories as well as nationally. Claiming various mandates from the electorate to implement 'policy', the question becomes why does this word need quotation marks? Quick-fix schemes have often been borrowed from elsewhere and transplanted unsuccessfully in the Australian context (see Reid and Reynolds, 2013 for some examples). Notice how much the word 'reform' has become used in the public discourse to give legitimacy to a new policy or program. With an emphasis on leaving one's mark and on short-term change, it is the exceptional Minister who sees the role in terms of being a long-term steward of education rather than a short-term change agent. Unquestionably,

*“ Those in the teaching profession know full well that true educational change is fundamentally a process of continuous improvement. ”*

those Ministers, most acknowledged and remembered by the profession, have gone about their work in deep consultation with the profession and on the basis of considered, apolitical, problem-centred and evidenced-based reviews led by a person eminent in the field. And they have acted on the recommendations.

Those in the teaching profession know full well that true educational change is fundamentally a process of continuous improvement. Continuous improvement and real change are grounded in ways that teachers recognise and acknowledge as enhancing student learning and advancing teaching as a profession. The two, of course, are not mutually exclusive.

The lack of a consistent policy direction has seen in the last 12 months alone in Australian education counteracting centrifugal and centripetal tendencies at the national level. Whereas one government wants to centralise aspects of education policy at the national level, another wants to decentralise. Question marks hang over the future direction of a national curriculum, school funding, professional standards, assessment policies, local school management and a myriad of other issues. On the other hand, students and teachers turn up in schools, day in and day out. Life goes on but is made far more complex than it need be by volatile and inconsistent policy directions. Two questions come to mind as being worthy of discussion. Is the political process failing education? And what, indeed, are the most fundamental and important questions that we need to resolve in Australian education to secure the future for our young people?



What we have considered here are some of the reasons why it is important that the teaching profession re-commit itself to being an activist profession from classroom to the national level. Many argue that it has long lost its voice as a profession in the national policy debates. It is essential, therefore, that this be rectified and that professional associations such as the Australian College of Educators play a leading role in advocacy and in helping to shape the future of Australian education. It is uniquely positioned to do so.

Perhaps the development of a (Socratic?) oath by the College for graduates entering the profession may not be such a bad idea after all. It would stand as a symbolic reminder to us: Pupil, parent, professional and politician – about what precisely this great profession stands for.

**Dr Norman McCulla FACE is the Co-ordinator of the Educational Leadership Program at Macquarie University, Sydney. He chairs the College's Publications Committee.**

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# Current developments in Australian education: A tsunami approaches

STEPHEN DINHAM



*ACE National President, Professor Stephen Dinham's (FACE) address at the College's NSW Fellows dinner - March 2014.*

Over the past few years there has been growing concern with and focus on the quality of teachers in Australia. A range of simplistic, unproven or disproved remedies has been promoted by various bodies to 'fix' teachers and teaching. These have included merit and bonus pay for the best performing teachers ('carrots') and sacking poorly performing teachers or denying them salary increments ('sticks') (Dinham, 2013).

The context in which these measures have been proposed includes Australia's declining performance on international measures of student achievement and the seemingly intractable achievement gap. In addition to this focus on teacher quality, there are powerful new developments emerging in Australia. These have largely been copied from Britain and the US, despite a lack of supporting evidence, something that epitomises the Australian approach to educational innovation where we have a tendency to copy the worst of both worlds.

These more universal factors and beliefs that are playing out go back as far as the Thatcher and Reagan years. They include the view that public education has failed and a belief that the free market, choice and competition are the answers to almost any question about education (see Berliner & Glass, 2014).

Related beliefs include the 'fact' that teacher education is ineffective and needs reform, that the value of a teaching qualification is questionable and even unnecessary, and that there are benefits that will accrue from appointing non-educators as principals and running schools as businesses (Dinham, 2014).

These developments include the fostering of government funded, for profit independent schools. These go by names such as charter schools (US), free schools (UK) and may be part of chains or academies owned by the private sector. In some cases these schools are exempt from employing registered teachers and even from following the curriculum (New Zealand). Teaching staff are often employed on contracts, some of which prohibit union membership.

Another powerful development is the movement of teacher education to schools, a return to an apprenticeship, craft-based form of professional learning and a direct result of the belief that teacher education is ineffective. In England this has seen the demise of a number of long established faculties of education due to their loss of pre-service teacher education programs. This makes education research problematic as research tends to be subsidised by teacher education courses. It will also worsen the so-called 'theory-practice' divide and make it more difficult to break the cycle of teachers teaching as they were taught.

As well as introducing new forms of independent schools, there is a push for greater autonomy for government schools, which in reality usually means more responsibility and less support. The research evidence on this practice is once again either inconclusive or non-supportive (Hopkins, 2013; Berliner & Glass, 2014).

A further development is the entry of big business into education. There has always been a commercial aspect to education with providers of textbooks, resources and equipment, but this is escalating almost exponentially. Publishers are now moving into large scale vertical integration whereby they have commercial involvement with curricula, teaching resources, teaching standards, teacher development and appraisal and student testing, in effect gaining control of the entire education supply chain. This is not illegal and these firms are responding to opportunity, but the outcomes will be interesting and quite possibly profound.



Implicit and explicit in these developments is heavy criticism of existing education and educators. Decades of research are either ignored or disregarded. Educators themselves have been either silent or bypassed in these debates and decisions. Teacher unions, professional associations and other bodies have made little effort or headway in critiquing such change. This is not just a matter of defending public education, however, because these developments have the potential to be equally disruptive to 'traditional' non-government education. It is hard not to conclude that what we are seeing is a deliberate strategy to dismantle public education, partly for ideological and partly for financial reasons.

If these developments continue, the inevitable outcomes will be greater inequity and continuing decline in educational performance, something that will provide the proponents for such

change with further 'evidence' to support their position and for even more far-reaching change.

Australia is becoming a less equitable society both generally and in respect of education. As Wilkinson and Pickett (2009) have demonstrated, inequality in society is actually worse for everyone.

A tsunami comprises waves with very long wave lengths. Often these go unnoticed until it is too late to do anything about them. When they reach land great devastation can result. The 'long wave' changes to education outlined above need to be subjected to intense scrutiny before it is too late. If the profession remains silent and passive in the face of some of these developments we will only have ourselves to blame for what might eventuate.

**Professor Stephen Dinham (FACE),  
ACE National President**

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# 'Building positive expectations': Literacy interventions with vulnerable youth

HELEN KENT & SHANE DUGGAN



*'It's all very well reading second-hand accounts of 'different' learners and their varied needs, but there's nothing quite like meeting these young people for yourself to really understand the implications those differences have.'*

*Emilia: Teacher candidate*

Recent graduate Emilia Hayes was concerned for the 'presumptuous imposition' of being considered a 'do-gooding university student' when she first signed up to volunteer her Sundays to work with the young people at Parkville College. However, the thought of spending two hours each week working with students in the Parkville Juvenile Justice Precinct was immediately appealing for the new language teacher, as it was for well over one hundred of her fellow candidates.

Reflecting on her participation in the program, Emilia recalls being drawn to the edge of her seat in the packed lecture theatre, as she listened as College Principal Brendan Murray explained in a deliberate tone: 'The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Article 26 states that 'Everyone has the right to an education', and 'Education shall be directed toward the full development of the human personality.'

For Emilia the College's values were a refreshingly development-based response to working with vulnerable young people. Instead of offering 'stop-gap' responses to challenging behaviours, the College focused on 'unconditional positive



regard' and 'building the capacities of young people based on their social and emotional needs.' To Emilia, at the time, this seemed both a strength of the College, as well as a lesson in the strategies she could take forward in her career.

The Parkville College tutoring program invites secondary teacher candidates to work with the students at the College once a week in a structured small-group tutoring environment. Having received well over one hundred expressions of interest in each of its two years of operation, the program includes some of the most able candidates from the Master of teaching course. It has a two-fold focus: building the literacy capacities of young people with diverse learning needs; and modelling a 'therapeutic approach' to working with learners who have experienced trauma.

Reflecting upon the theme of the activist professional for this issue of *Professional Educator*, we see the Parkville tutoring program as an attempt to contribute to a much larger and more dynamic shift in providing alternative education both locally and internationally. We are both informed by the long-standing traditions of critical pedagogues such as Paulo Friere and Bell Hooks, in particular, Hook's assertion that 'it is crucial that critical thinkers...collaborate in a discussion that crosses boundaries and creates a space for intervention' (Hooks 1994, p. 129). We would add to this

***“The Parkville College tutoring program invites secondary teacher candidates to work with the students at the College once a week in a structured small-group tutoring environment.”***

sentiment that it is particularly important for teachers to open spaces for radical dialogue, change and invention for our candidates in ways that develop their capacities to engage in the dynamic environments they will encounter in their future careers, as well as to break down stigma around vulnerable and disadvantaged young people.

There is increasing traction both in Australia and internationally for the value of targeted teaching programs for young people in the justice system. For example, an action co-research project between university students and incarcerated youth in San Francisco has provided young people with an increased sense of completion and accomplishment, as well as showing signs of reducing recidivism amongst those involved. Similarly, the university students who participated reported an increased capacity to confidently engage with vulnerable young people (Williamson, Mercurio & Walker 2013).

The architects of that program reported that incorporating critical thinking and targeted literacy activities, which took account of the needs specific to incarcerated young people, demonstrated profound benefits for all aspect of the lives of young people, including self-efficacy, literacy skills, and positive self-regard. This latter point is of high importance to our program, given both our literacy focus, as well as our commitment to build the capacities of our

teacher candidates who commensurate with the Victorian Government's *Calmer Classrooms* framework for working with traumatised young people (Downey 2007). This is an increasingly important part of the work our candidates are required to undertake in their teaching careers.

Surrounding continued popular debate over 'entry standards' to teaching and the sedimentation of 'audit culture' thinking, there is mounting pressure amongst teachers to justify their practices and programs within a framework of quantitative metrics, and to fill teacher education courses with a 'value-added' culture of measurement (Snyder 2012). However, within this culture of public scrutiny too, there continues to be an underlying pattern that although 'everyone has a right to an education,' the word 'everyone' does not seem to meaningfully include those who are double-or triple-marginalised.

Parkville College is a site which more or less exclusively caters for learners in these categories. It often includes those whose circumstances are compounded with a range of emotional, physical, and behavioural challenges. Another teacher candidate from the program, Ally Larkey, commented that, when she first entered the unit, one boy she sat to work with had said to her: 'I can't do that I'm a dumb s..., Miss'. Ally went on to build a strong rapport with the boy, and over the following weeks he taught her to play guitar, card games, and write rap poetry. She explains that, during her time with him, the young learner never stopped prefacing his comments by saying he was stupid, or slow, or similar. But that Ally found his rhymes to be sophisticated and his vocabulary diverse. Working with him had made her view her classroom differently—and that now she wanted to tap into everyone's special talent!

Our goal in facilitating the program has always been to make the systems, processes and identities that exist visible within the alternative educational landscape, and also to engage in discussions about the implications of these for new teachers. In its first iteration, the program did present challenges which have resulted in significant alterations for its 2014 delivery.





These were namely training, contingency, and the building of specific capacities for both candidates and students (Guerra 2012). Importantly, the candidates who participated in the program were also responsible for negotiating its direction, and for providing detailed feedback on how to best facilitate it, both *in situ* and after the fact. Unanimous from both the candidates and staff at the College was the desire to engage more in the day-to-day curriculum, as well as the specific approach that the College offered. Linking the candidates to evidence-based approaches whilst working with the students at the College is not only a key aim of the program, but also speaks to the core learnings that the Master of Teaching seeks to build.

In 2014, we are shifting to a targeted product-based approach to literacy intervention which seeks to compliment the curriculum at the College. Working with Campus Principal Matthew Hyde and teacher Shannan Roberts, this year's program has incorporated increased observation of and professional development of the candidates by College staff around the therapeutic approach to classroom management. It has paired the highly successful approach from one of the lecturer's (Helen's) long-running collaboration with the National Gallery of Victoria with that of the College's education consultant, Maddie

**“** *Linking the candidates to evidence-based approaches whilst working with the students at the College is not only a key aim of the program, but also speaks to the core learnings that the Master of Teaching seeks to build.*

**”**

Witter's *Reading without limits* provides an approach to promoting reading to young people. The sessions both develop student confidence in building narrative and the candidates' understanding of what Witter (2012, p. 27) calls 'rigour' by 'leading the development of each student so that they become incrementally stronger and stronger'. The candidates design and implement a short story mentoring program of which they will deliver in small groups to young people across a number of units to produce and publish fictional narratives.

There are, of course, many points to consider when planning this type of program. Our candidates engage in multiple safety briefings, as well as ongoing sessions with College teachers focused on the specific needs of the students. Many of the young people at the College have encountered highly interrupted schooling and, in a number of cases, institutional and self-exclusion from regular participation in a classroom environment. Most come from social and home environments that have resulted in significant trauma. Our candidates are aware of both of these facts, and they work with the staff at Parkville to explore the implications this might have for their pedagogy and practice.

In our first visit to the College, Matthew Hyde took us on a tour of the precinct and College grounds. As a group of boys moved between buildings, he waved, shook hands, and introduced us both, many of the boys taking the opportunity to shake our hands as well. As the boys left, he said: 'Before they came to us, most of them hadn't spent a full week at school in the last five years, let alone a school term. When we get them, some of them barely even have the clothes on their back. But look at them now, attending school six days per week, clothed, fed, laughing and joking. Yes, this is still a prison, but they are just students like anyone else and we're teaching them.'

At the end of last year's program, an expression of interest was circulated for 'ongoing tutoring' on a regular basis. Over one-third of the candidates replied. Similarly, a glance down the staff list at the College's two sites, Malmsbury



and Parkville, reads like an honour-list of Master of Teaching and Teach for Australia graduates. Concern for social justice and a deep commitment to engaging the full diversity of learners within the Australian education system is deep within the bones and the arteries of the candidates who participate in both courses. Given these qualities, and the calibre of those interested this year, whittling the list down to the small number of spaces we have in the program will be no easy feat.

In our eyes, their desire to participate was understandable given the opportunity it provides to engage in such a diverse and progressive educational environment.

**Shane Duggan is a lecturer in wellbeing and pedagogy at the University of Melbourne. His research investigates the relationship between identity, equity, and policy in senior-school education and teacher training.**

**Helen Kent has taught Language and Literary at secondary and tertiary levels for more than a decade. Her research interests include visual literacy (working with contemporary indigenous art).**

**Helen and Shane would like to acknowledge the dedication of the candidates involved in the Parkville College tutoring program, especially that of Emilia Hayes and Ally Larkey. They would also like to mention the ongoing hard work and support of Shannan Roberts and Matthew Hyde in making this program possible.**

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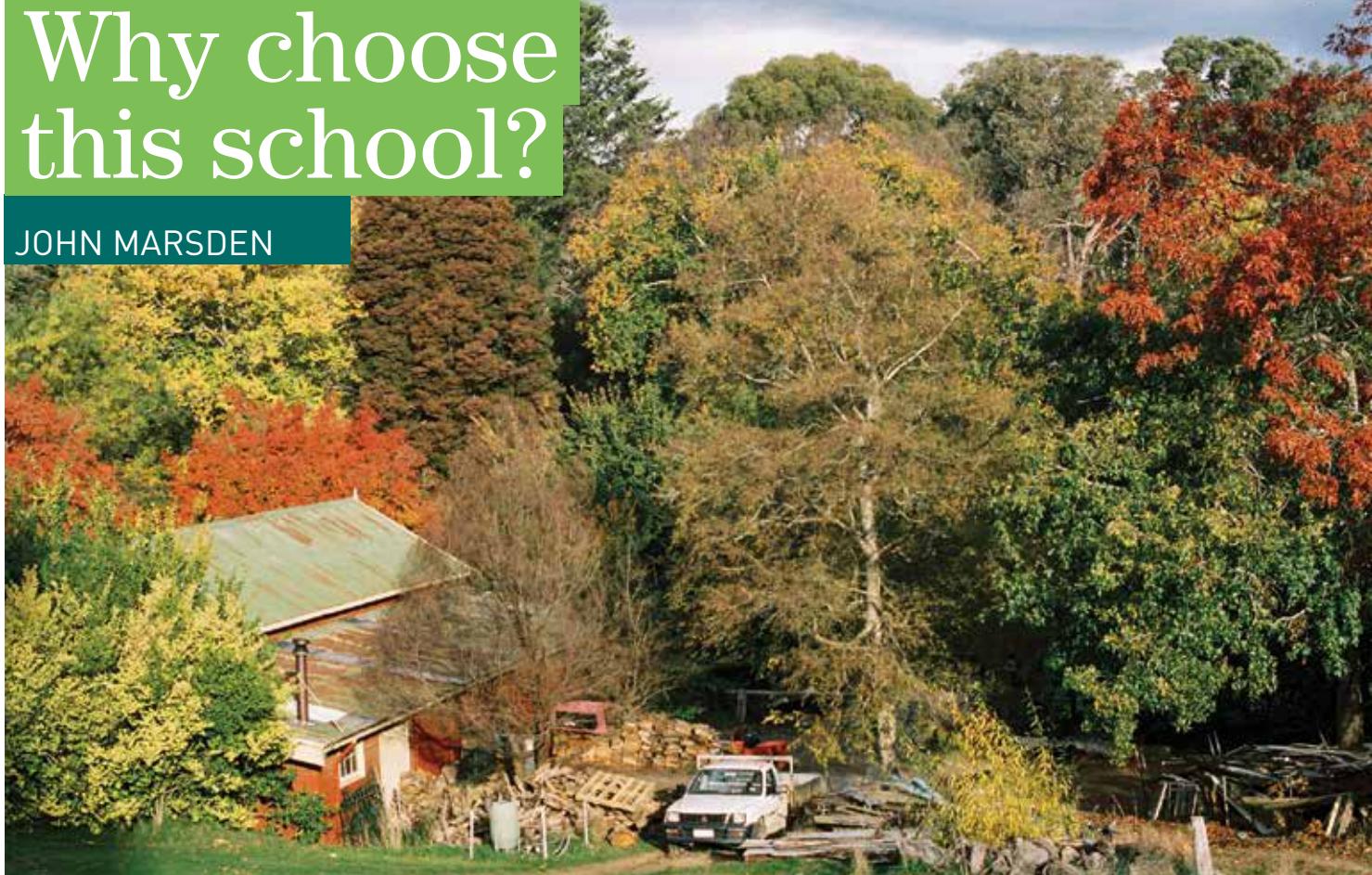
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# Why choose this school?

JOHN MARSDEN



**Recently, when interviewing a woman who wanted to enrol her children at Candlebark, I asked her the obvious question: 'Why choose this school?'**

She looked at me with a steady gaze and answered: 'Because the other system is broken.' Then, after a pause, she added: 'It was broken when I went to school, in the 1980s, and it's even more broken now.'

After all my years in education, trying to articulate what I thought was wrong with schools, I could only admire the brevity and force of her statement. Yes, the system is broken, and always has been. The idea that we can take 300, 500, 1000, 2000, young people, squash them into the smallest possible space for the greater part of the day, and assign the lowest possible number of adults to educate them, is inherently ridiculous. The fact that it kind of works some of the time

and does not often result in riots and disaster is a tribute to the good nature of most young people and the patience and strength of their teachers.

If we set out to design a perfect school I think most of us would agree on the essential elements. Firstly, space, and lots of it. In Australia we are blessed to have the space we do, yet we give more of it to car parks, golf courses and freeways than we do to children.

Next, we would want interesting buildings, good resources, and challenging playgrounds. We'd probably also ask for great internet connectivity, an organic garden and a variety of farm animals.

None of this is difficult to achieve. But the fact that schools tick so few of the boxes I've just listed is evidence that our much vaunted 'caring for children', is as meaningless as mass mailings of

Christmas cards from a politician. Forget the mindless bleating of 'children are our future', which has become the silly mantra of the 21st century. Let's look at the present: why are we so cruel to children? Our actions don't match our rhetoric. We talk a beautiful talk but walk a walk of shame.

Candlebark, now in its ninth year, is fifty minutes from the Melbourne CBD, in 1200 acres of forest, 850 acres of it bought in 1998 for \$950,000. It had been a camp, and had nine good buildings, capable of housing sixty people. An imaginative government could have bought it for a school, but no representatives from the Department of Education were glimpsed at the auction.

The buildings have been extended and modified, but remain simple yet attractive. There is an organic garden and there are sheep, pigs, horses,



chooks, geese, ducks, goats and a cow called Hettie. It costs no more to run Candlebark than it costs to run the average government school.

We have 150 students – we are small by choice. We could have had 800 if we'd taken everyone who applied. But we don't screen kids; in fact we deliberately take more than our fair share of 'challenging' students – for example, currently we have nine autistic students.

You could say that we 'fail' with some kids, but that is a relative term, and one difficult to measure. I now know that in the face of poor parenting a school cannot succeed. We can ameliorate the behaviour of the child, and we can improve his or her resilience, self-control, values, confidence, trust, attitude and work ethic, but ultimately we will always fail. Of course, that's no reason to give up: a five per cent improvement in a child's emotional health may make the difference between the capacity to have an enduring relationship or not, between being employable or not. But for these students, unless they get long-term, skilful help, much of life will be a painful struggle.



One of the major problems schools face is bullying. No, not bullying of children by children, despite the relish with which politicians express their horror at this practice. How wonderfully easy it is for them to say that they deplore it! How delighted they are to condemn it! They seem oblivious to the fact that their behaviour consistently shows many of them to be among the worst bullies in the country.

Children will stop bullying other children when adults stop bullying each other. Don't hold your breath.

No, I'm more concerned with the bullying of teachers and principals by parents; the bullying of schools by bureaucrats, the bullying of teachers by principals, and the bullying of children by their parents.

One of the characteristics of poor parents is that they attempt to throw their weight around when dealing with teachers and principals. 'My child didn't get a big enough role in the play,' one parent complained furiously. Hmmm, strange to relate, his child was fearful of adults and always terrified of being 'in trouble'.

**“ Children will stop bullying other children when adults stop bullying each other. Don't hold your breath.**

A parent wanted to have yet another meeting to discuss a subject on which he was a self-appointed expert, viz. the safety of kids on an upcoming school hike. 'Thanks, you've canvassed your views with us at length already and we understand your position', I replied, turning down his request. He marched off huffily into the sunset, taking his kids with him. We were their fifth school. Hmmm, strange to relate, his kids were passive and insipid.

'My child ate some dried apricots at school (we supply all students with food) and as a result experienced bed-wetting and behavioural difficulties that night,' a parent wrote. Hmmm, strange to relate, her child appeared malnourished. Food-obsessed parents are dangerous to children's health.

Being a small and relatively new school, and being 'alternative', whatever that means, probably leads some parents to believe that they can impose their agenda on us. They don't seem to notice that we have an agenda of our own.

We have to remain steadfast in the face of this bullying behaviour. I don't find it easy. My nature is to avoid conflict, to hide under the desk when these people come at me. But I know it would be fatal for the school were I to do so. I have to remind myself that I am the servant of the school, and that I have to do what the school requires of the person in my role. My personal feelings are for me to deal with, separately. I remind myself of a conversation to which I was privy years ago, where a strong female principal told a powerful mother that she was to stop hitting her daughter; that it must never happen again. The mother wilted in the face of the principal's moral authority.

We are seeing an epidemic of terrible parenting at the moment. Not just the familiar benign (and sometimes malign) neglect of decades past, but a new phenomenon: educated middle-class parents who don't just love their children, but are in love with them. This is another manifestation of narcissism. The fruit of their loins must be superior to every other child who has walked the earth. 'I tell him he has special qualities, qualities other children don't have,' one parent gushes when speaking of her son, one of the most troubling children we have had here. 'Special qualities?' I think. 'Yeah, like sticking his middle finger down at kids instead of up and then telling the teacher it's OK, because he's not "giving the rude finger". Yep, clearly gifted, and talented.'

Such parents agonise over every little disappointment their child suffers, lavish them with praise when they manage to eat a green bean ('We are so proud of you'), record every moment of their lives on camera, encourage them to parrot adult phrases at each other ('Scott, you hurt my feelings when you took my pencil sharpener yesterday'), manipulate their friendships and encourage their feuds, subvert the school by listening avidly to any criticisms of teachers and believing every ludicrous story their child brings home—and then appear at school clothed in righteous indignation to advocate for their child only to find that they are missing vital information ('Oh! Maggie bit her? Are you sure? No, she didn't mention that actually...').

In short, they minimise their child's transgressions, block the school's attempts to create a culture with consistent and easily-understood values, have no regard for those who are hurt by their child's narcissism, and blame the school for the child's aberrant behaviour. They are doing awful damage, irreparable damage, to their kids.

Teaching is not currently a very high-status profession, and educated middle-class parents can hold (usually unconsciously) a view that teachers are their intellectual inferiors. One meeting began with parents protesting the content of my email inviting them to discuss their son's attacks on other children.



'This is a very serious charge,' they said sternly. 'You'll need to substantiate it. It's completely out of character for him.'

At this point another teacher at the meeting intervened. 'I can substantiate it,' she said calmly, 'because I have been the victim of his attacks, many times.' After that I did not need to add that the Principal of his previous school had already told me that this unctuous couple broke all records for interviews with him about their child's aggressive behaviour. 'There was hardly a week went by,' he said, 'that I didn't have to call them in.'

After I'd painstakingly investigated a serious fight between two students I wrote to the parents of both. One parent, a lawyer, replied: 'I have discussed it with Quincy and in substance your version of events seems to be on the mark.'

'So patronising,' I thought. 'I wasn't inviting you to hold an enquiry where you call one witness, your son, and then pass judgement on my investigations. I was actually inviting you to contemplate your son's behaviour and even maybe to do something about it.'

A Sydney school principal told me that in dealing with the children of high-achieving parents I could expect them to be more concerned with process than substance. 'Rather than look at their child's problems, they'll attack you for "not contacting them earlier", or "for suspending them when they've got exams next week." They'll ask to see the school's discipline policy, so they can catch you out.'

How right he was!

High-achieving parents often believe that we can be bluffed or intimidated. It's important sometimes to remind them

of the essentials, unglamorous though they may be. I was once approached by a parent who could be deemed a celebrity. He did a lot of corporate work, had written books and was a media favourite. 'What can I do to help Candlebark?' he asked earnestly.

'Get your kids to school on time,' I replied.

Ah, I could go on. But I won't. Despite the horror stories I've recounted, I can say that Candlebark is highly successful. The atmosphere is energised and positive. The kids are good-natured and welcoming. We do remarkably well in every form of competition with other schools. Our graduates have been spectacularly successful, often in surprising ways.

Why then are we not a 'broken' school? There are a few reasons. Our teachers are chosen because they are adventurous people who can demonstrate a zest for life and a range of interesting experiences. Our students spend less time in class than kids at other schools, and enjoy lots of time to play. We encourage them in first-hand learning, such as getting their hands dirty. We encourage risk-taking: tree-climbing, stick wars, riding rip-sticks and bikes, British Bulldog. We have a huge range of camps, hikes, sleepovers, excursions and incursions. As I write this, there is a sleepover at school – a French Masterchef night for the Year 7s. Two nights ago a motley bunch of kids belonging to the Explosions Club had a sleepover. Next week Preps and Year 1s will be camping for two nights at Healesville.

Above all, we treat children well. Not as equals. But we treat them with courtesy and generosity. As principal, I'm clear on my main role. It's to say YES, whenever possible, to everyone who comes into my office.

**John Marsden** is an award-winning author and teacher. His interest in education has never waned. In 1998 he bought the Tye Estate, 850 acres of natural bush, on the northern edge of Melbourne, and later added the property next door. For eight years he ran enormously popular writers' courses and camps at Tye, before founding his own school, Candlebark, in 2006.

JULIE KEMP



## Service learning

We are not the only school that offers service learning activities to its students, but we believe we offer a program that is diverse and benefits the local, national and international communities with whom we establish partnerships.

We are a grounded part of our local community, and we feel part of our national community of Australians, but increasingly we have developed a number of international partnerships in recognition that we are part of a global world. For us, service learning refers to community engagement that is really an embedded part of our ethos and learning. It is an integral part of our 9 ASPIRE program which aims to develop in our students an ethical sense of social responsibility. Our goal is to develop ongoing partnerships which advance equity and social justice within the communities in which we work. There is a double action at play here; we are also aware of the benefit for our students who are on a journey towards becoming ethical and informed global citizens and

who aspire to helping the communities in which they live.

Our **9 ASPIRE** program focusses on creating and developing the attributes that are needed to have the 'right' kind of **Attitude: Striving for excellence, Personal responsibility, Independence, Resilience and Respect and Experiencing success** – hence the acronym ASPIRE. These are the qualities that we endeavour to instil in our students throughout Year 9 and beyond.

In line with other activist professionals at our school we consider the interests of the students and offer a program that is, we believe, transformative in design and outcomes. It has benefits for both the communities we work with and the students themselves. As activist professionals we seek to position ourselves strategically to work collaboratively with other communities and organisations. Our program 9 ASPIRE combines rigorous academic learning with service learning, a teaching methodology that has increased in

popularity in recent times. Our teachers work towards empowering students by gradually increasing the magnitude, breadth and degree of individual responsibility.

Teachers, whilst respectful of individual student's needs, encourage students to take risks and accept responsibility independently. A variety of learning opportunities exist beyond the classroom that incorporates a practical and hands-on approach to learning through real-life experiences. Students are encouraged to generate their own goals, devise strategies to achieve them, implement strategies and review their own performance. Self-direction and connection to the community become a central theme to enable students to set their own path for the future.

At a local level, our students provide two days of community service in a rural primary school on Bruny Island. They offer workshops in Dance, Art and Physical Education. Students plan and coordinate learning and creative

**“ In line with other activist professionals at our school we consider the interests of the students and offer a program that is, we believe, transformative in design and outcomes.**

**”**

activities and then workshop these with the Kindergarten to Year 6 students who attend the cooperating school.

While relatively accessible to the mainland of Tasmania, Bruny Island has a small and scattered population. In the main, the children come from small farm holdings. Our students spend five days in the community learning about the history and culture of the land before embarking on a tree planting project in collaboration with the Indigenous Land Corporation and Conservation Volunteers.

Spending a week in one of these different but local communities is a great experience for the students; our annual visits there are warmly anticipated and enjoyed by the local school and community.

At a national level, we offer the opportunity for students to work in an Indigenous Community in either Central Australia or on North Stradbroke Island. In Central Australia, we participate in a cultural immersion program, whereby the students gain an experiential understanding of the practices and traditions of a diverse culture and environment and build ongoing partnerships in a local Indigenous school.

During their time on North Stradbroke Island, the students spend six days learning from the Quandamooka people. This experience gives all students an opportunity not only to build on their classroom knowledge of indigenous culture, but also to experience firsthand the issues surrounding mining and sustainability practices of the local Indigenous people.

At a global level, our students are able to participate in a number of programs, including work in the Solomon Islands, Fiji or Laos. These programs

include being part of both primary and secondary classrooms at local schools and our teachers are able to assist with professional learning for teachers. We seek to make each experience not just a whistle-stop tour but an ongoing community engagement.

For example, our annual visit to the Solomon Islands allows teachers to share their knowledge of contemporary pedagogy and child development. Our teachers take resources that they can leave with the community and they have initiated the funding of a number of teachers from the Solomon teachers to undertake teacher training, covering the tuition fees and the accommodation costs for the two years of the training. In the villages, working with the Anglican Sisters of the Church on one of the small islands, we have built a school and a women's refuge centre. The impact on the community here has been far-reaching and the connection between the two communities is a lasting one.

In Laos, we have established the St Michael's Collegiate Scholarship fund and have committed to providing two scholarships to enable students to continue their education over the next four years.





Service learning has numerous benefits for our teaching and learning program as it allows students to contextualise their place in our society whilst being encouraged and mentored to become ethical, informed, reflective and responsible decision-makers. These opportunities cater for individual learning styles and prepare our students for lifelong learning because they are exposed to practical experiences. They are encouraged to identify areas that require assistance and to make meaningful contributions to a community, thus encouraging critical thinking and an increased sense of efficacy and social development. Of course, all of these outcomes are consistent with the expectations of the Australian Curriculum.

The communities with which we have built partnerships have also noticed significant benefits, including being able to identify community issues and realise both short and long term solutions. Our partners in these communities report improved attendance at school, particularly in the Indigenous communities we work with. Our partnerships in Laos have enabled opportunities for teachers in local schools to obtain resources, to network with colleagues in other countries and to access academic institutions in Australia.

Although service learning is a worthwhile and significant teaching methodology, it is not without its challenges. Time constraints are some of the biggest challenges faced by educators today, and service learning requires a lot of time. It takes time to build relationships with communities and to coordinate meaningful projects that are sustainable and ongoing. It takes time to prepare the students for their journey and to reflect on their learning at the conclusion of the experience.

A further challenge is being able to provide a mutually beneficial project that impacts positively on the community, rather than devaluing or disrespecting the culture, beliefs and traditions of the community. Too often, people work and visit remote destinations and believe they have a duty to fix things, perhaps working in a post-colonial mindset. It is this approach, however, that often hinders

***“The communities with which we have built partnerships have also noticed significant benefits, including being able to identify community issues and realise both short and long term solutions.”***

and damages trust, which is an essential ingredient for successful service learning.

It is important that the students have prior learning and knowledge about the community they will be working in and incorporating this into an already hectic curriculum schedule can be difficult.

Finally, much of the learning that takes place in these experiences extends beyond the classroom; therefore, assessing knowledge can be challenging.

We can see that real learning has taken place, but it is not easily quantified and assessed. A teacher-guided reflection is a critical part of the process and at the end of the project experience this can be used to evaluate the effectiveness of the program, to identify ongoing projects and to determine student learning objectives.

Service learning is not about replacing academic and core course content. Rather, it can be used as a tool to enhance and enrich classroom learning in fundamental and unique ways. It provides opportunities for a new form of professionalism within the teaching profession. It can help to create a quite different and transformative teacher identity. Put quite simply, service learning reshapes teaching as a moral and democratic process where each member of the group works collaboratively and cooperatively towards a common goal. This is our goal as educators in much of what we seek to do with students. Service learning provides an outstanding vehicle for the expression of this goal.

**Julie Kemp is HPE Teacher of Year 9 at St Michael's Collegiate School, Tasmania.**



The career of an activist teacher is characterised by many pathways, challenges and opportunities. One such teacher tells her story here.

There is a figure of speech, 'Jack of all trades and master of none,' referring to a person who is competent in many skills, but is not outstanding in any one in particular.

I have always thought of myself as being that Jack. I have had many opportunities during my life to dabble in different occupations. I commenced as a primary teacher in the mid-1970s at a newly-built, open-planned, inner-city school, at a time when Victoria's primary schools were being introduced to child-based pedagogy, school-based curriculum and multiculturalism. The school was built for 500 children; during its first Open Day 700 children came through the doors, the majority being Turkish and Yugoslav refugees.

I had no idea what I was doing, and looking back now I don't think many of the other teachers did either. I struggled through six months with 40 children in grades 2,3,4,5 and then a prep class of 30. It was mayhem! We had to ask parents to provide evidence of the age of their children before admitting the younger ones because they were as young as three and being dropped off at the school. We followed children to the toilets to see which door they went through with their friends in the hope of working out what sex they were. Everyone had short hair and wore tracksuits. What I remember more than anything is singing songs, my way of getting them to read, something you just don't hear enough of in primary classrooms today. I survived five years at that school and became richer in cultural understanding and community awareness because of it.

I married an American teacher who had been flown in with many others during a teacher shortage crisis in the early 1970s and I went to live in the Pacific Northwest of the United States. I wasn't able to teach because I didn't hold the correct teacher registration, so I got a job as a front desk receptionist at the Western International Hotel in Seattle, now known as the Westin. I loved the constant contact with people, the problem solving and

JACQUELINE ROBINA VOTH

# Building a teaching career





using computers for the very first time. It was during this job that I realised I was a people person. We moved to Portland, Oregon and I applied for a job with a bank, again a customer service-oriented position.

When I returned to Australia I applied to go back on the teaching roll. However, because I was three-year trained, I needed to get 'points' towards my fourth year and I could do this by going back to university or accumulating points from emergency teaching days. I had no money to go back to university, so emergency teaching was a slow but only choice. This pathway lasted until the end of the 1980s when mortgage rates reached 17.4 per cent and I needed a steady income. I went back to the banking industry and after a few years became a Customer Service Manager at a new bank in Melbourne.

Opportunity knocked when my husband was offered a position at a national school in Brunei, Darussalam. In 1996 after researching we took our two daughters, aged 9 and 11, to a quiet Muslim country on the island of Borneo. I was offered a position at the international school and over the next five years I continued on my educational pathway.

Immersing the family in a different culture had many positives. Instead

of reading about different cultures we were able to live in one. When my girls returned to Australia they found themselves experiencing quite unexpected culture shock. Everything was different and they just didn't get it. 'It' included the language, lack of manners, closed-mindedness and friendship groups, to name just a few of the challenges.

When I returned to Australia I worked in Darwin teaching English and also became the Pastoral Care Coordinator to indigenous children at an Anglican boarding school. This was an International Baccalaureate Diploma school, my first contact with IB. Within the first few months we decided to return to Asia at the end of our contracts and we accepted jobs at an international

**“ Opportunity knocked when my husband was offered a position at a national school in Brunei, Darussalam.”**

school in Jakarta. After that contract finished I returned to Australia once more and accepted my first position at an IB, Primary Years Programme School. Over the next six years I worked in two culturally diverse IB schools.

The first school was an upper middle class preschool for Year 12 girls that had just introduced co-education up to Grade 3. This school was working with the Primary Years Program only. The other school was an inner suburban Muslim school that ran all four IB programmes: PYP, MYP, IB Certificate and the IB Diploma. Their Diploma Programme was introduced in 1994.

During 2007 – 2008 I completed a Post Graduate Certificate in Education, International Baccalaureate Primary Years Programme through the University of Melbourne. This strengthened my belief in inquiry-based learning and the need for a values-based curriculum. It was after this course that I decided to follow the pathway towards school management.

In August 2009 I applied for a position as Head of School to a small international school campus in East Kalimantan, Indonesia. I was offered the job and I took up my first management position in January 2010. After four years in Indonesia I have once again returned home, this time due to an age limit on expatriate working visas. In August this year, I will be heading to Taiwan where I will be Director of Primary at an international school in Kaohsiung that offers all four IB programmes.

I no longer feel that I am a 'Jack of all trades and a master of none'. I am working extremely hard at becoming a master in educational management. In a small way, I feel I have paid my dues and the road toll over the past four years. There are more roads and more tolls to pay, yet I am happily starting down the next pathway.

Jacqueline Robina Voth is currently completing the degree of Master of Education at the University of Melbourne. She will be taking up a new role shortly as the Director of Primary at an International Baccalaureate school in Kaohsiung, Southern Taiwan.



## WHAT COUNTS AS QUALITY IN EDUCATION?

Adelaide 11-12 September 2014



**The ACE 2014 National Conference, held in Adelaide this September, is a 'not to be missed' opportunity encouraging all educators nationwide to gather and engage in the significant debate around: 'What counts as quality in education?'**

Following the success with the inaugural Jean Blackburn Oration, given by Mr Gonski AC at the University of Melbourne in May this year, ACE's National Conference will also offer 'on the ground policy and advocacy work' which is at the heart of the College. The full two-day program (available from the ACE website) is evidence for this with presentations such as Professor Robert Lingard's 'Quality counts: challenging education policy' and a policy launch on 'Attracting quality candidates to teaching' held on the second day.

Our members and all educators benefit when the profession speaks publicly and with vision about the critical issues facing education in Australia, and the ACE 2014 National Conference will be the space in which to do this.

Following is a selection of some of the presenters participating at the 2014 Conference. They have been asked by *Professional Educator* to answer a few questions about their work, as well as the current climate surrounding the teaching profession in Australia.

# Presenters at the 2014 ACE National Conference

PAOLA GHIRELLI



**Dr John Quay (MACE), Senior Lecturer and Program Coordinator at the Melbourne Graduate School of Education, the University of Melbourne**

**PE: What current work are you doing in Education?**

JQ: My work concerns the deeper connections that exist between education and life.

**PE: Given the theme of 'quality' how is your abstract relevant?**

JQ: Determinations of quality are always based on some kind of premise. In my paper I question an underlying premise of education—how it relates to the future—by developing an analogy with Christian teachings: the Old Testament and the New Testament. In doing so, I highlight concerns with educational quality at a much deeper existential level.

**PE: What do you think about the recent budget cuts and the current state of education in Australia?**

JQ: The recent Federal Budget seems to be encouraging a shift in the university sector that further emulates the current state of schooling in Australia. We seem to be pursuing a market-based mentality across the entire system now that sets up a new (competitively-orientated)

definition of fairness – different to the 2011 Gonski review of school funding.

**PE: How do you envisage education in Australia in the not too distant future?**

JQ: The institutionalisation of education means that the sector is beset by a significant amount of inertia. In other words, change tends to occur gradually. For this reason I cannot see major change occurring within the next ten years. However, over the longer term we continue to manage ideological shifts that swing like a pendulum from one perspective to the other and back again.



**Professor Collette Tayler (FACE), Chair of Early Childhood Education and Care Project Leader, E4Kids study CI, ARC-SRI Science of Learning Research Centre**

**PE: What current work are you doing in Education?**

CT: I am studying the contribution of early education to children's development and wellbeing, in a range of urban, regional and remote Australian settings. I'm continuing to refine a specialist teaching course at the University of Melbourne – the Master of Teaching (EC/EY) that addresses intentional teaching within informal and formal settings, including play-based programs, and that highlights learning how to teach.



**PE: Given the theme of 'quality' how is your abstract relevant?**

CT: High-quality birth-to-age-five ECEC has demonstrated positive effects on a variety of life outcomes, particularly for children who live in disadvantaged circumstances. Early education and care environments that foster responsive interactions and relationships are the most likely to bring about higher levels of child functioning and development.

**PE: What do you think about the recent budget cuts and the current state of education in Australia?**

CT: Fiscal reductions to the provision of public education and efforts to improve the effectiveness of education provision puts at risk the on-going welfare of the society.

**PE: How do you envisage education in Australia in the not too distant future?**

CT: I hope that continued attention to raising the standard and quality of provision in the early childhood phase of life (birth to age eight), such as has been occurring through COAG and the National Quality Framework, will reward us with young people who are thriving as they progress through high-quality primary and secondary education programs.



**Mr Greg Whitby (FACE), Executive Director, Schools Catholic Education Diocese of Parramatta**

**PE: What current work are you doing in Education?**

GW: The focus of my work is on the nature of learning and teaching and ensuring greater relevance in schooling. My role is to support the work of our schools by creating the right environments and frameworks for that work to flourish.

**PE: Given the theme of 'quality' how is your abstract relevant?**

GW: The core issue of my paper argues for a new model/s of schooling to ensure greater relevance and improvements in learning and teaching. We can't tweak the old model but we can first change our understanding of what teaching is in a contemporary world and then match the toolkit and environments to support good teaching.

**PE: What do you think about the recent budget cuts and the current state of education in Australia?**

GW: I think education in Australia is of a high standard despite the politics. While the budget and financial constraints are a reality, we know extra funding does not necessarily lead to improvement. We need to ensure funds are going to the right areas that will improve learning and teaching.

**PE: How do you envisage education in Australia in the not too distant future?**

GW: My crystal ball is no clearer than anyone else in education. But I believe we will continue to see new models; increasing professionalism; and more robust partnerships with a range of industries, sectors and the wider community.



**Ms Ann Bliss, Executive Director, Federation of Catholic School Parent Communities (SA)**

**PE: What current work are you doing in Education?**

AB: My work is essentially to bring the parent perspective to the shaping of education policy and practice across all levels of influence and impact - from government to sector to school to classroom to home. It involves: policy leadership, the development and provision of services and resources including consultancy, professional development and training.

**PE: Given the theme of 'quality' how is your abstract relevant?**

AB: I will explore effective parent and family engagement in learning as a driver of quality in education.

**PE: What do you think about the recent budget cuts and the current state of education in Australia?**

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AB: A strong investment in education is the hallmark of any progressive society. Public funding must enable the delivery of a quality education for all children and young people in Australia. Any increases in government funding to education over time must be aligned to the real costs of delivering a quality education. Public funding for education is an investment that pays dividends.

We need to 'speak-up' about education in Australia. Currently the public discourse is focussed on the negative. As a community, we need to have faith in our education system and have a collective commitment to ensuring it stays strong

**PE: How do you envisage education in Australia in the not too distant future?**

AB: A setting that has adapted to a different world. A world where educators fully embrace evolving technologies acting as facilitators of learning, acknowledging children and young people as agents of their own learning and student engagement becoming stronger.



**Professor Robert Lingard (MACE), Professorial Research Fellow, the School of Education, the University of Queensland**

**PE: What current work are you doing in Education?**

RL: One of my current research projects is to understand the expansion and

enhanced significance of international testing for schooling systems and policy. This has focused specifically on the work of the OECD, especially PISA and OECD attempts to expand its scope, scale and explanatory power.

**PE: Given the theme of 'quality' how is your abstract relevant?**

RL: As a nation we need to come to an agreement about what a quality schooling system is and accept that quality means and demands socially just provision of schooling for all. Central to my argument will be the assertion that quality and equity must be worked together.

**PE: What do you think about the recent budget cuts and the current state of education in Australia?**

RL: The Gonski Review of government spending offered a solution to the issue of equitable funding for all schools in Australia. The adoption of this review's recommendations would have put funding on an equitable basis. Instead the current government has proffered very lukewarm support and appears to have little commitment to equity. Indeed, the burden of budget cuts is to be borne by the worst-off in our communities in an unjust way.

**PE: How do you envisage education in Australia in the not too distant future?**

RL: If inequality in society continues to grow, we will have more inequitable provision of schooling and a denial of proper equality of educational opportunity for all. As a consequence, our society will become more fragmented and less cohesive. The issue of equity in schooling policy must be confronted. Apart from New South Wales, it seems

that conservative governments at federal and state levels have evacuated concern for providing a socially just schooling for all. In evacuating equity policies, all policy now focuses on more autonomy for schools and teacher quality.



**Ms Louisa Rennie Director (MACE), Australian Principal Certification Program, Principals Australia Institute (PAI)**

**PE: What current work are you doing in Education?**

LR: My work is focussed on the design and development of a principal certification program that will recognise and value the vital work of principals as the leaders of education communities.

**PE: Given the theme of 'quality' how is your abstract relevant?**

LR: The Australian Principal Certification Program will be designed by principals, to denote quality in educational leadership. Its purpose will be to provide opportunity for principals to demonstrate the Australian Professional Standard for Principals in action.

**PE: What do you think about the recent budget cuts and the current state of education in Australia?**

LR: Australian principals are at the forefront of educational practice and are well positioned to comment on the needs of their students in their local

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context. Expenditure of education funding must always ensure that the focus is on the needs of students, improving their access to opportunity and improving their educational outcomes.

**PE: How do you envisage education in Australia in the not too distant future?**

LR: We must all strive to instil a love of learning in the learner. Education must be agile and ready to change and adapt to the needs of learners, prepared to embrace technology and acknowledge the need for all learners to continuously develop their intercultural capacity and ability to engage with people of diverse background experience.



**Dr Eeqbal Hassim, Senior Manager, Research and Curriculum, the Asia Education Foundation (AEF)**

**PE: What current work are you doing in Education?**

EH: I lead research and curriculum operations at AEF. The research is geared towards providing sound conceptual frameworks for the once slippery concept called 'Asia literacy'.

**PE: Given the theme of 'quality' how is your abstract relevant?**

EH: Developing Australian students' Asia-relevant capabilities is an important area of education in this country given our regional and global context. My paper provides school educators with robust frameworks to help achieve this goal based on extensive research conducted by the Asia Education Foundation.

**PE: What do you think about the recent budget cuts and the current state of education in Australia?**

EH: As far as Asia-relevant capabilities are concerned, I believe that social sustainability is key. Our research and professional learning activities are geared towards sustainable change for more Asia capable schools that are resilient

in promoting Asia, languages and intercultural understanding regardless of the political context.

**PE: How do you envisage education in Australia in the not too distant future?**

EH: I'd like to see us as global leaders in the Asia engagement and intercultural space. To enable this to happen, the public discourse on education (conceptually and operationally) needs to be lifted.



**Professor, Kathryn Moyle (MACE), Principal Research Fellow, the Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER)**

**PE: What current work are you doing in Education?**

KM: My current work includes undertaking two evaluations in Indonesia. One of those involves leading a national Indonesian team to evaluate the Principals Preparation Program.

**PE: Given the theme of 'quality' how is your abstract relevant?**

KM: My paper looks at what the policy context is for what counts as quality learning when that question is considered in light of teaching and learning with technologies.

**PE: What do you think about the recent budget cuts and the current state of education in Australia?**

KM: As I am attending this conference on behalf of ACER, this question is outside my purview.

**PE: How do you envisage education in Australia in the not too distant future?**

KM: I hope there is a move away from accountability models that do not involve trust. I also hope there is an increase in the status of educators at all levels from early childhood to universities, and that there is a profession that is highly-qualified and well paid.



**Professor Roger Harris (FACE), Division of Education, Arts and Social Sciences, School of Education, the University of South Australia**

**PE: What current work are you doing in Education?**

RH: My research work has, in the recent past, highlighted the movement of learners particularly between the VET and HE sectors, which is happening irrespective of policy directions. My involvement over the past seven years in a Cooperative Research Centre (CRC) as Program Leader, Education and Training, is focused on the importance of workforce development.

**PE: Given the theme of 'quality' how is your abstract relevant?**

RH: What does research say about quality in VET? I will be exploring the reputation of the Australian VET system that hangs on 'quality'.

**PE: What do you think about the recent budget cuts and the current state of education in Australia?**

RH: Chris Robinson, then Managing Director, NCVER, now Chief Commissioner, ASQA, confidently boasted in 2000, that Australia was a world leader in VET and a model for other countries. If this claim has any validity, what has gone wrong?

**PE: How do you envisage education in Australia in the not too distant future?**

RH: I hope for a much closer connectivity between VET and HE, as well as an in-between school VET and post-school VET. I also hope for a higher status for VET, though to acknowledge that will be a very difficult achievement within our Anglo context; a context that has such reverence for university education. I suspect competition and contestability will have to be increased to the point where demarcations between public and private will have become virtually indistinguishable.



**Ms Virginia Simmons AO (FACE),  
a consultant specialising in VET/TAFE  
at Virsus Consulting**

**PE: What current work are you doing in Education?**

VS: As a consultant specialising in VET/TAFE, my domestic commitments involve work in a number of Australian States in both the public and private sectors. My international work is in Africa and the Pacific in the aid sector.

**PE: Given the theme of 'quality' how is your abstract relevant?**

VS: My abstract is relevant to the question in that it highlights the difference between what counts as quality for students and what counts as quality for governments. In the VET sector, the two are not the same.

**PE: What do you think about the recent budget cuts and the current state of education in Australia?**

VS: The cuts to education and the stepping back from commitment to the Gonski Review are highly regrettable and represent a lost opportunity to improve public sector schooling.

**PE: How do you envisage education in Australia in the not too distant future?**

VS: The current environment would suggest that education funding is increasingly based on user-pays principles. If this continues education will become the province of the elite and the rich; those with the capacity to pay.



**Dr Michael Barton (MACE), Director of Curriculum and Academic Development,  
Snowy Mountains Grammar School, NSW**

**PE: What current work are you doing in Education?**

MB: At my school, I'm involved in leading a number of initiatives at the school including the Embedding Excellence Program through AISNSW, Learning Frontiers through AITSL and two exciting collaborative research projects with Robb College at the University of New England focused on students in Years 11 and 12.

**PE: Given the theme of 'quality' how is your abstract relevant?**

MB: Australian schools cannot divorce themselves from the student voice when exploring a quality education system. Students in the 21st century are active drivers of reforms as they challenge the traditional confines of schooling. By harnessing the views of students, as active collaborators of their learning journeys, teachers and school leaders are better equipped to drive forward the quality of the profession and the learning experiences.

**PE: What do you think about the recent budget cuts and the current state of education in Australia?**

MB: The quality of our education system rests with the quality of the leadership of education at a Federal Government level. It is pleasing to see Minister Pyne wanting to have an active role in shaping the educational agenda at a federal level. As economic realities are explored within government, the investment and security of our country's educational wisdom must be preserved for future generations.

**PE: How do you envisage education in Australia in the not too distant future?**

MB: The level of accountability will increase and the expectations upon the profession will increase. The quality of the education setting will be dependent upon governments, at state and national

levels, making a significant financial commitment to the provisions of services for schools.



**Professor Jennifer Gore, School of Education, Faculty of Education and Arts, the University of Newcastle (UoN)**

**PE: What current work are you doing in Education?**

JG: My research focusses on Quality Teaching and professional learning. I am currently the Director of the Teachers and Teaching Research Program and on the Editorial Boards of Teaching and Teacher Education, the Australian Journal of Education, and Sport, Education and Society.

**PE: Given the theme of 'quality' how is your abstract relevant?**

JG: My paper directly addresses the distinction between quality teachers and quality teaching in thinking about education reform and argues that current efforts that frame education quality as a problem of teacher quality are limited.

**PE: What do you think about the recent budget cuts and the current state of education in Australia?**

JG: There are many reasons to be concerned about both education and higher education with the several regressive steps recently taken.

**PE: How do you envisage education in Australia in the not too distant future?**

JG: My guess is that little will have changed, sadly. The pace of educational reform has often been described as glacially slow. Fads and politics play too great a part. Research is under-funded and under-valued.

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Jan Lokan

## Jean Blackburn's influence, David Gonski and the search for fairness

The University of Canberra

Looking at the photograph of Jean Blackburn's broad smile in the last issue of *Professional Educator* (p. 25), I could hear her infectious laugh. I was fortunate to be appointed to Western Teachers College in Adelaide in 1966, as a young Mathematics lecturer, at the same time as Jean was on the staff there, and the photograph brought my memories of her to life. She did not know it, but a couple of years earlier, Jean had had a profound effect on me.

Early in 1964, I was mostly at home in Melbourne, playing the role of traditional wife and mother to three children. Two were already at school or kindergarten and I had a convenient child-minder available in my friendly neighbour. It hit me rather hard that I couldn't imagine being contented with this sort of life into the future. I had a university degree, had achieved excellent academic results and began to wonder how I could extend my life beyond domesticity.

In 1963, a booklet co-authored by Jean, called *Australian Wives Today*, appeared and someone lent me a copy. The forward states that Jean had 'long taken an active interest in women's place in the community'. She would then have been in her forties and was clearly in an environment that allowed her to work on this booklet. She discussed how 'the statistically-average woman of today' (1950s) differed from such a woman in the 1890s, supporting this with tables of

statistics. From our 21st century vantage point, this made fascinating reading, especially given the changes that have occurred since the 1950s.

My background was similar to Jean's in that we both had families. It encouraged me that she had managed to combine university studies with caring for her family and the pursuit of a career. The discussions in *Australian Wives Today* resonated with my feelings that I wanted to get out of the house and make some use of my university qualifications.

In 1965, I moved back to Adelaide where I had relatives and willing child-minders, and that enabled me to study for a Graduate Diploma in Education (part-time). Midway through that course, I was offered the position at Western Teachers College. Although I subsequently moved a great deal (including living in Canada for ten years), I was able to complete a PhD and build a career in educational research and university teaching until I retired. I owe some of that to Jean, who started me off and gave me the belief that 'it could be done'. Imagine the thrill of finding myself in the same staffroom as Jean in 1966!

On returning from Canada to the education scene in Australia in 1978, I learned that Jean had made influential contributions to Australian education in the form of research projects on which she had worked with Peter Karmel. She was continuing to make an influence in her role on the Schools Commission. I came to know her further as someone who was always concerned with social justice and equality of opportunities in education. Her work on enhancing opportunities for a range of disadvantaged groups and on the Victorian Government's *Ministerial Review of Post-compulsory Schooling* in the 1980s was outstanding, as summarised recently by Margaret Clark.

In 1988, in recognition of her contribution to education by that time, Jean was the first woman to be awarded the College Medal, the highest honour of the then Australian College of Educators. She went on to hold other influential positions and be awarded honorary doctorates by Melbourne, Flinders and Adelaide Universities. For quite some time the College had wanted to honour her achievements and in 2013 the Jean Blackburn Oration was established. The well-attended and very successful first of these, with David Gonski AC fittingly chosen as the orator, was held in May 2014 at the University of Melbourne.

Assisted by an expert panel, David Gonski carried out the first review of school funding in about 40 years. The previous review, done by the Interim Schools Commission, led to many reforms but also left problems in its wake. The panel presented a very thorough report following wide consultation, backing up their position and recommendations with substantial research evidence. Panel members visited many schools, noticing 'the enormous difference' in facilities and levels of resourcing, to which Gonski referred to in his oration. From these visits, their consideration of submissions and research data from national and international studies, the panel could see that the funding model currently in place was leading to more inequity of opportunity rather than less.



Jean with family at her father's 100th birthday celebrations

In the OECD Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), Australia has one of the highest correlations between socio-economic backgrounds and performance in 15 year olds. This country also has one of the longest 'tails' of students not reaching the basic level of competence defined by the OECD as skills that enable them to live as effective citizens (PISA uses rigorous random sampling and its tests focus on reasoning and problem-solving, rather than school learning). Breakdowns of both NAPLAN and PISA results clearly illustrate the marked differences in students' achievement by levels of social disadvantage. Gonski's report also illustrates the slippage in Australia's standing in the PISA literacy domains since the first cycle in 2000.

The Gonski review (with the difficult rider that no school should be worse off as a result) was charged with proposing a transparent, fair and financially sustainable funding system for Australian schools that would be effective in promoting excellent outcomes for all students, such that differences in outcomes 'should not be attributable to differences in wealth, income, power or possessions'. Clearly we have a long way to go in this respect.

A visiting former Director-General of Education in Finland (a high-achieving PISA country) recently commented on the 'entrenched inequity' he saw in the Australian education system, stressing that funding, as recommended by Gonski, needed to take into account individuals' and schools' needs before significant improvement in equity could be achieved.

Earlier I remarked that David Gonski was 'fittingly chosen' to give the oration. The review's recommendations are clearly directed towards the objectives of social justice and fairness in education that Jean would have fully supported. It is a coup for the College, and an endorsement of the high regard in which Jean's work is held, that he accepted the invitation to be the orator, in what was the first time he had chosen to speak since the review was released. Understandably, he expressed his regret that the six-year span of the recommendations is likely to be curtailed.

**Jan Lokan (FACE)** was the Assistant Director of the Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER) and directed Australia's participation in the first cycle of PISA. She was also on its International Management Committee. Today Jan is an active member of the ACE Archives Committee.



# Educators have their say on the implementation of the Standards

Schools are beginning to use the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers (the Standards) in ways that may influence teaching practices and student learning.

More than 6000 education professionals participated in a National Survey to share their views on their knowledge and use of the Standards in 2013. The 'Evaluation of the implementation of the Standards' is a three-year project which aims to assess the usefulness of the Standards for teachers and as well as their effectiveness in the classroom and the impact on teacher quality.

The 'Interim report on baseline implementation' was released by the Australian Institute for Teaching School Leadership (AITSL) and the Centre for Program Evaluation at the University of Melbourne in November 2013. This report revealed some key findings from the 'Evaluation of the implementation of the Standards' based on the data collected from the 2012 National Forum and the 2013 National Survey. One of the key findings saw reasonably high awareness of and engagement with the Standards, given their recent implementation.

Main stakeholders such as teachers, school leaders, pre-service teachers and teacher educators participated in the 2013 National Survey. An average of 70 per cent of the respondents reported that they were familiar with the Standards, with 61 per cent indicating they used the Standards in their practice since their

implementation. The responses from pre-service teacher and teacher educators included:

- **72 per cent of pre-service teachers and 93 per cent of teacher educators reported having some knowledge of the Standards**
- **93 per cent of pre-service teachers and 83 per cent of teacher educators indicated that they had a positive attitude toward the Standards**
- **more than 90 per cent of pre-service teachers and teacher educators indicated that they plan to use the Standards within the next six months**
- **89 per cent and 82 per cent of pre-service teachers and teacher educators reported that they are likely to have the opportunity to use the Standards in the next six months.**

Teacher educators also reported using the Standards predominantly for discussion with pre-service teachers and for planning teaching content. Pre-service teachers reported that they were using the Standards in a number of ways, most commonly for assignments and during practicum.

## Case studies

The Evaluation's current activities involve case studies which have been taking place nationwide. These are expected to assist in the shaping of the current status of the implementation of the Standards and showcase how they are being implemented across Australia. This project is funded by AITSL with funding provided by the Federal Government.

For further information on the Evaluation, please visit <http://aitsl.edu.au/research-and-evaluation/case-studies>, or email APSTevaluation@aitsl.edu.au

## Further information:

Please see the 'Interim report on baseline implementation: 2013 key findings' at <http://aitsl.edu.au/research-and-evaluation/findings>

AITSL was established by the Federal Government in 2010, with the mandate of providing national leadership in promoting excellence in teaching and school leadership throughout Australia. Please visit [www.aitsl.edu.au](http://www.aitsl.edu.au), or email: info@aitsl.edu.au.



# Defining the activist profession

Teachers walk a fine line between teaching and social interpretation. Often we find ourselves not just delivering the curriculum, but also interpreting the world around the students we interact with in a way which often reflects our personal views and ideologies. As professionals, teachers are meant to be neutral and are not meant to impose their own ideologies upon our charges. However, this is can be a difficult position to maintain and one which is often not realistic.

Teaching is a profession which has evolved considerably over time. The role of a teacher has been evolving to one that is informed by government departments and the expectations of parents and the community. Teachers are supposed to model and encourage a commitment to lifelong learning. They need to be passionate and curious about their learning areas, continually and critically analysing their pedagogical approach to the profession, as well as trying to differentiate the learning experiences of all students to ensure that their needs are met.

Each school is a unique environment that is reflective of the community in which it is embedded. For any teacher to be effective they must become an active member of their school and knowledgeable about the intricate workings of that school. A sense of ownership is essential to becoming an effective teacher within the school environment. A teacher must actively support school welfare policies, wider regulations and rules as well as the school's core values that exist to form the ethos of the school environment. Empowering students to embrace



education and to engage with learning has become itself a challenge as their demands and personal experiences are continually changing in a world dominated by social media and technological advancement. Students need to know that their teachers *really* do care. This may sound simple, but it is by far the greatest challenge for any teacher. Students need to know that their teachers want to teach and more importantly want to teach them. This is reflected in the actions of a teacher that students will observe every single day of the school year.

Students do look towards their teachers for an interpretation of, at times, a very confusing and contradictory world. Education plays an important role in the fabric of society and the strengths of future generations is dependent on the quality of the education system and the infrastructures which support it. Teachers generally go into education with a passion for an area of study or

subject combined with a genuine want to improve the lives of the young people they work with. This is often impacted by social, economic, emotional and political environments beyond the control of the teacher. Working around these barriers can be frustrating and cause doubt in the effectiveness of any one teacher.

The activist profession may be interpreted as a career that is based in unionism; namely, the protective role of the Teachers' Federation seeks to ensure that education funding is not reduced and that government budgets support Gonski's recommendations. It also supports teacher education, monitors training so that high standards are maintained throughout the career of all teachers and ensures that equity and excellence underpins all educational standards.

Activism starts at the ground level. Teachers must be the activist professional in the areas that they work in on a daily basis by providing a safe

and secure environment for students to achieve their personal best and by providing an environment that empowers students to be challenged and by challenging the conventions of modern society. The activist professional seeks to provide environments that teach students the importance of responsibility and ownership for future growth and life-long education.

Never underestimate the ability of any teacher to have a significant impact on an individual student. This is the very essence of the activist profession to which all teachers belong. Teachers must understand that they can play a very powerful part in the lives of their students while at the same time strongly interacting with the ethos of schools and empowering students to be good citizens.

**Linda McGregor is the Head Teacher of Personal Development, Health and Physical Education at South Grafton High School, NSW.**

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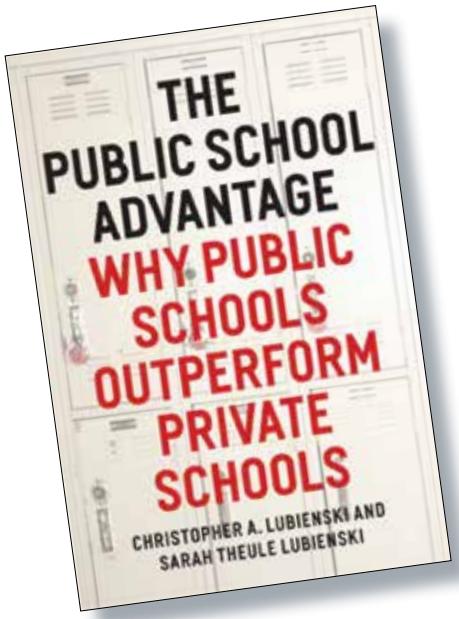
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Conventional wisdom suggests private schools are more effective than public schools. Indeed, the notion of private school superiority is deeply entrenched in the public imagination and policymaking circles.

Governments from both sides of the political divide promote the idea that public schools would be more effective if they were more like private schools. This assumption drives a range of market-based reforms in public education.

Of course, when it comes to academic results, private schools do outperform public schools on nearly all measures. But why is this? Are private schools actually more effective? Or is it because private schools typically enrol students from more privileged backgrounds? In other words, is it *the school or the student's background* that makes the difference?

These are the central questions driving this new book by Christopher and Sarah Lubienski. The book provides a detailed comparative analysis of private and public school effectiveness in America and, as the title suggests, reveals some big surprises that challenge many common beliefs.

The Lubienski's base their arguments on an analysis of national student achievement data in Mathematics, using the National Assessment of Educational

## *The public school advantage: Why public schools outperform private schools by Christopher A. Lubienski & Sarah Theule Lubienski*

Book review by Glenn Savage

Progress, and the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study. Maths was chosen as it is a strong indicator of school effectiveness, given it is learned primarily in school, in comparison to subjects like English that are more influenced by young people's home lives.

And here are *the surprises...*

When controlling for student background factors, the researchers found that students in public schools actually outperform those in private schools. In other words, when *demographically similar* public and private schools were compared, public schools were actually more effective than private schools.

The researchers also found that private schools academically outperform public schools in overall terms not because they are more effective, but because their students typically come from more privileged backgrounds, which offer young people greater support in the home. Put differently, public schools generally do worse academically because they enrol more disadvantaged students, not because they are less effective. A student's background, therefore, makes a bigger difference than their school.

These findings have many implications, but arguably the most significant is the serious doubt cast on current moves by governments to re-model public education in line with market models. In Australia, like the US, the marketisation

of public education is one of the most unquestioned policy beliefs of our times. Reforms such as Independent Public Schools, for example, operate on a spurious set of assumptions about the effectiveness of market strategies, such as increasing school autonomy, parental choice, and competition between schools.

The Lubienski's, however, provide compelling evidence to suggest market models are unlikely to provide better outcomes. In fact, they argue that school autonomy, a hallmark of market reform, might actually be the reason private schools underperform. Contrary to dominant thinking, they suggest the more regulated public school sector embraces more innovative and effective professional practices, whereas private schools often use their autonomy to avoid such reforms, leading to stagnation.

The biggest strength of this book is that it provides solid and carefully considered evidence. It avoids simplistic comparisons between private and public schools, it recognises grey areas and limits, and steers clear of polarising ideological debates. It is high time for policymakers to start learning from research like this, about how markets actually work, rather than basing policies on ideological assumptions about how they should.

Glenn Savage (MACE) is a lecturer in Education Policy at the Melbourne Graduate School of Education.

## Australian College of Educators

*Professional Educator* is the professional journal of the Australian College of Educators (ACE), a professional association representing educators across all sectors and systems of education. We encourage and foster open, collaborative discussion to enable our members to provide the best outcomes for Australian students across all levels of education.

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