

professional EDUCATOR

The ACE forum for policy, research and practice in education

October/November 2016 Volume 15 Issue 5

ACE 2016 National Conference

Changes and Challenges

The power of education to build
the world to which we aspire

VOICES of Children & Young People

A different perspective of education

ISSN 1447 - 3607
ISSN 2206 - 5245 (Digital)

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Changes & challenges

ACE 2016 NATIONAL CONFERENCE

p.8

Professional Educator

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Professional Educator is printed by ACE's preferred printing and distribution partner Greenridge Press, Toowoomba, Queensland

REGULARS

Editorial

The Hon. Bronwyn Pike, MACE

CEO Report

Modern Professional Associations:
Who do they serve? What do they do?

NEW COLUMN

DebatED



ACE 2016 National Conference

What kind of education is needed to build a better world?

Emeritus Professor Colin Power AM, FACE

9

Teaching human rights

Megan Mitchell, National Children's Commissioner
Australian Human Rights Commission, NSW

14

The best possible start

Rachel Hunter, Deputy Chancellor, Griffith University and
former Chair, Australian Children's Education and Care Quality
Authority (ACECQA) Board

20

*Changes and challenges: Is our education system
equipped to prepare students for a brave new world?*

Ms Erin Canavan

Winner ACEJASG Student Educators - Writing the future Award
Bachelor of Primary Education (Special Education)
University of Southern Queensland

24



Voices of Children and Young People

Slipping into an imperceptible crack?

Brendan Hyde, PhD, MACE

27

Through my eyes:

*A parent's experience of Autism Spectrum Disorder in a main
stream primary school*

Jasmin Cresp

30

*Having a voice: My perspective and insight on having a
'voice' in my tertiary studies and aspects of this that I value*

Richard Kant

33

*The golden age of social media: Immediacy, voice and
safety*

Caitlin O'Meara

34

Book Review by Michael Young

Education policy: Mapping the landscape and scope
Sandra Bohlinger, Thi Kim Anh Dang and
Malgorzata Klatt (eds) - Peter Lang Edition 2016

36



Changes & Challenges

Australian College of Educators

Editorial by ACE National President, the Hon. Bronwyn Pike, MACE



Working in the education profession is a challenge! The education environment is constantly changing and evolving and our profession is vital in contributing to Australia's future economic, social and environmental success. Being an educator is about being part of a broad-based, far-reaching network and it is essential that our profession is at the forefront of the education debate. Through the College, educators have a truly representative professional association that addresses the difficult issues and drives education change by confronting the challenges faced by our profession across Australia.

The ACE 2016 National Conference was held on 26-27 September in Sydney. Unlike some of the 'edutainment' conferences currently being offered, the ACE National Conference focused on linking theory to application in the most practical and relevant ways possible. The theme of this year's conference was *Changes and Challenges: The power of education to build the world to which we aspire* and welcomed many impressive education 'thought leaders' from around Australia who shared with delegates the most up-to-date information on a range of topics from Teaching Human Rights to The New Work Order.

It was also particularly relevant and timely to have the 2016 National Conference opened by the (very) newly appointed Secretary of the New South Wales Department of Education, Mark Scott. Mark's opening address set an excellent tone for the Conference as a whole, as he noted the many changes and challenges he is now facing in his new position.

This edition of Professional Educator includes some of the keynote presentations delivered at the 2016 Conference as well as investigating the changes and challenges that affect children and young people in our modern age. We have secured articles from a broad cross-section of writers including students, parents and pre-service educators.

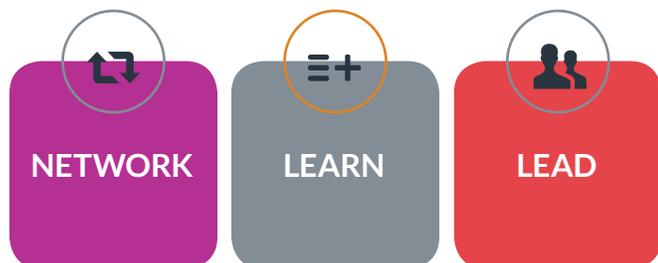
Work is well underway for the ACE 2017 National Conference to be held in Melbourne on 3-4 July. The theme for next year's conference is *Think Global, Teach Local* and is guaranteed to deliver quality presentations from around Australia and the globe that will have practical application and relevance to your profession.

Remember, this is your publication. Articles are selected to inform, inspire and ignite healthy debate. Your active participation is encouraged and submissions and suggestions for content are welcome.

Wishing you good reading and happy educating!

Modern Professional Associations

Who do they represent? What do they do?



Since commencing with the Australian College of Educators in July this year, I have dedicated a significant amount of time travelling and meeting with educators, regulatory bodies, ministerial advisers and incredibly dedicated ACE volunteer committee members, to develop a better understanding of the organisation.

ACE means different things to different people. ACE has been an exclusive, invitation only club, a peak representative association, a professional network promoting and fostering collegiality, and a valuable point of connection for those new to the profession and/or establishing themselves in a new city or town.

Over the course of the organisation's nearly 60-year history, the world of education has evolved dramatically and with it, the needs and requirements of those in the profession. Education has developed from being a 'vocation' to being a profession and as a result, a plethora of representative organisations based on sectors, systems and subjects (to name a few) have appeared.

The education profession seems to be awash with associations, groups and clubs all offering a range of services and support. As a non-educator, the choice is somewhat overwhelming! Delving a little deeper into this market, it becomes clear that all these membership-based groups offer similar services and support, each with a slightly different perspective depending on the areas of interest.

As the new CEO of the Australian College of Educators, this has led me to ask difficult questions of members, non-members and those working in and around the profession. What is ACE? Who do we represent? What do we do? In essence I have been seeking out the ACE point of difference in an incredibly crowded membership association market. So what has been discovered so far?

Well first and foremost, there is a core membership base of the College that is incredibly committed and dedicated to the profession and our professional association that they have been involved for over 10, 20, 30 years or more. These members view ACE as the leading education professional association both in the country and their respective states and territories. Then there are members who gain beneficial professional development and networking opportunities through our local, state and national events. Members continue to rank the collegiality of the College as an essential component that ensures their continued membership.

The one thing that does stand out and has been repeated to me many times throughout my travels, is that the Australian College of Educators is the ONLY professional association that broadly represents the profession across sector, system, subject and specialisation. This is, I truly believe, the ACE up our sleeve!

ACE represents THE education profession and we are, and continue to be, the only association that truly does this - our point of difference. Through ACE, educators become part of a broader 'college' and it is the COLLEGIALLY that is essential in the constantly evolving education profession.

But what has also become clear is that ACE also needs to evolve into a truly modern professional association. What this looks like and what we do is completely determined by answering the first question: Who do we represent? As has been made very clear to me, ACE represents the EDUCATION PROFESSION - all of it, not just particular sections and in this incredibly competitive membership market, that really is a point of difference.

Representing the education profession, however, is not an easy feat and presents various challenges. I would argue that more than any other profession, education is particularly multi-layered and complex. How does ACE truly represent the education profession in an effective way when there are so many differing opinions and views?

Member Engagement

In order to be a truly representative professional association, it is critical that there is regular, constructive and effective engagement with members. Engagement can be through a variety of mechanisms including events, surveys, publications, on-line discussion forums, webinars, social media - the possibilities are endless.

ACE is focused on developing and introducing a range of new, innovative and practical membership engagement strategies. Improvements to the College's on-line presence and capabilities to facilitate more timely member engagement on issues of critical importance are currently underway. Educators with opinions on a range of issues, from higher education funding to primary classroom size, will soon be able to actively engage in on-line discussion and debate with colleagues from around Australia (and even the globe) to help inform ACE's position on critical policy matters.

Another key engagement strategy for the College is the introduction of free Associate Membership for pre-service educators for the duration of their study. Actively engaging with the next generation of educators is essential to ensure ACE continues to evolve and be a truly modern professional association.

Member Services

ACE does a number of things really well. Our local and state events, training and professional development opportunities are some of the best on offer. Members are also able to utilise the respected ACE post nominals (MACE for Members and FACE for Fellows) and contribute to ACE collegiality.

However, in this highly competitive membership market, ACE has to be more than events. Many education associations offer events; they even offer EDUtainment promoting big names and big speakers who deliver big topics that may have little practical application to the day to day work of an educational professional.

ACE is committed to being a membership-driven professional association that delivers services and support that are of REAL value and benefit to education professionals. What these look like and how they are delivered must be determined by members! What do members need to assist them as professional educators? In the coming months, ACE will be calling on members to provide feedback and advice on services and initiatives that will deliver real and tangible benefits to ACE members. ACE is committed to being an essential component of the professional lives of all educators and we are working to build a suite of services that deliver practical support to our members.

Changes and Challenges

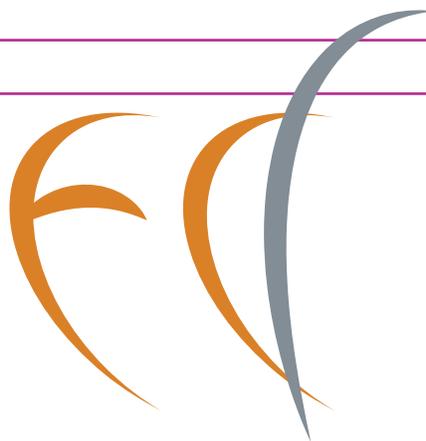
As with all businesses and associations, ACE must continue to develop and mature as a membership-based association. How we do this depends in large part on the requirements and preferences of the education profession as a whole. Developing new services and support mechanisms that are dynamic, practical and relevant is an essential part of the changing face of ACE as a modern professional association.

ACE is entering an exciting and challenging period that has been necessitated by the evolution of the education profession. As the only truly, broad-based representative professional association for the education profession, ACE is ideally positioned to develop services and support that provide tangible benefits to you - engage with us, we are ready to listen and look forward to hearing from you!

Helen Jentz
Chief Executive Officer



Debat



DebatED is the new Professional Educator column that highlights current hot topics and policy issues for the purpose of igniting member commentary and input.

School Workloads

The recently released State of Our Schools survey by the Australian Education Union (AEU) indicates that increasing teacher workloads are reaching a critical point.

A summary of the findings includes:

- 77% of teachers say their workload has increased in the last year; only 2% say it has decreased.
- 26% of teachers say they are working more than 55 hours per week (up from 23% in the 2015 survey) and another 45% say they are working more than 45 hours (up from 42% in the 2015 survey).
- There has been significant growth in the number of teachers who believe it is getting more difficult to retain teachers: now up to 69% from 58% in 2015.
- Almost 1/5 of teachers (17%) are considering leaving the profession; this number has increased from 14% in 2015.
- For these teachers, workload is by far the biggest issue, with 74% saying it would be the most important factor in any decision to leave (up from 66% in 2015).

The AEU holds that the results highlight the critical importance of school funding and on-going issues regarding resourcing.

Vocational Education and Training (VET)

Australian Council for Private Education and Training (ACPET) CEO, Rod Camm noted in a media release on 25 October that:

"While there were very significant issues with the administration of the VET FEE HELP scheme, it is extremely important that, in fixing the problems, we don't undermine the foundations of Australia's strong and vibrant VET sector."

The VET-Fee Help program and the activities of certain providers have come under increasing scrutiny by the federal government following the release of the 2015 VET FEE HELP Statistical Report.

Minister for Education and Training, Simon Birmingham stated:

"Vocational education is a key feature of post-school learning in Australia and it is fundamental to our future success as we transition to a 21st century economy. But that means we also need to ensure that taxpayer support for students is targeted at skills that are in high demand and valued by employers."

A Model for Tertiary Education Funding in Australia

Key note speaker at the ACE 2016 National Conference, Professor Peter Noonan, Mitchell Institute Professorial Fellow proposed a new model for tertiary education funding in Australia.

Professor Noonan suggested several essential elements for the tertiary funding system that in his opinion should be determined on a consistent national basis:

- the direct public subsidy and the policies that underpin how subsidies are set and at what level
- the balance between public and private contributions
- the extent to which student contributions can be offset by income contingent loans
- the subsidies involved in income contingent loans.

Professor Noonan concluded that:

"It is of concern that the most recent Intergenerational Report forecasts a decline in expenditure on tertiary education as a proportion of GDP, although the forecasts only seem to relate to Commonwealth outlays and the assumptions behind the forecasts are not entirely clear.

I have continually argued that that needs to be modelled under a range of scenarios with a focus on, at a minimum maintaining participation rates, and beyond that moving to tertiary education becoming a near universal system for young people, with increased capacity for adult and workforce retraining and upskilling."

2016 ACE National Conference

The power of education to build the world to which we aspire

Changes and Challenges



ACE National President, the Hon. Bronwyn Pike, ACE Chief Executive Officer, Helen Jentz and Mr Mark Scott AO Secretary, NSW Department of Education

The Australian College of Educators 2016 National Conference 'Changes and challenges: The power of education to build the world to which we aspire' was a wonderful success, highlighting the fact that the College is the only national professional association that represents educators across all sectors, systems and subjects.

Being an educator in Australia is both challenging and rewarding due to our political, economic and social environments.

All aspirations for the future of Australia from economic, social, environmental and community perspectives are intrinsically linked to education.

The UN Secretary-General's Global Initiative on Education notes that:

- For every year at school, earnings increase by 10 per cent
- If a country's population is educated by one extra year on average, its annual per capita GDP growth gets a 25 per cent boost
- If all women had primary education, almost 1 million child deaths could be averted. If all women had secondary education, child mortality would be halved.

At the present time, there is much focus on teachers/educators and their education. Criticisms have been levelled at the profession and much debate has occurred at both state and national levels to attempt to 'fix' this 'problem'. As a profession we are acutely aware that the issue is more complex

and deeply rooted than what is being presented in the media. Teacher education is a critical component of building a strong, vibrant, and adaptable education system that can face the challenges and changes of the world in which we now operate. Teacher education is, however, only one of the broader set of challenges presented to education in Australia.

2016 Conference discussions highlighted that as leaders in the education profession we must work to ensure that these broader issues are not lost in the current 'blame game' agenda.

It is imperative that there is a united, powerful, and relevant 'voice' for the education profession across the country. In order to achieve fundamental change in the way that education is approached, it is essential that educators have a truly representative organisation advocating on their behalf. The Australian College of Educators is this organisation.

The College and its members need to be at the forefront of the education debate, not only here in Australia, but globally. We need to ensure that policy-makers and the broader community are clear about the essential role educators play in shaping the future. As members of the education profession, we need to analyse, assess and provide direction and solutions for the education sector in Australia. Our profession and our College must lead the public debate on education challenges and changes; debate based on research and evidence derived from the Australian experience.

The College is a truly independent representative association for the education profession in Australia. It is through engagement with the College that professionals from all education sectors, systems and levels can actively contribute to determining the education agenda.

The Australian College of Educators is your professional association. By working together, you, the educators of Australia, will ensure that the profession is prepared to respond to the challenges confronting education and truly contribute to building a world to which we all aspire.

What kind of education is needed to build a better world?

Emeritus Professor Colin Power AM, FACE

Increasingly, the destinies of individuals, nations and the planet are being shaped by global forces. The changes that have flowed from advances in Information Technology (IT), Science, the opening up of markets and also new concepts mean that shrinking space, shrinking time and disappearing borders are linking people's lives more deeply, more intensely and more immediately than ever before. Our common future will depend on the degree to which we all become better global citizens, working together to solve global problems and to live in harmony with each other and nature. Our collective wellbeing, even survival, will increasingly be dependent on the extent to which education contributes not only to the empowerment of individuals and nations, but to the entire global community.

The power of education

What kind of education is needed to build the world to which we aspire? To address that question, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) set up an International Commission on Education for the 21st Century, chaired by Jacques Delors. The report (UNESCO, 1996) argued that education must build the strong foundations needed to continue to learn throughout life. It saw a narrow education as disempowering, insisting that education at all levels be based on four pillars: learning to know, to do, to live together and to be. 20 years later, UNESCO (2015) reaffirmed that position, restressing the importance of education for global citizenship, lifelong learning and the responsibility we have towards each other and the planet.

My latest book (Power, 2015) focuses on the power of education to build the world to which we aspire. An empowering education lifts us up to be more than we could be. It provides us with the knowledge and skills we need to achieve what is important for us and our families. But more than this, an empowering education is emancipatory; it opens minds and doors. It develops the inner

qualities needed to triumph over adversity, to fight injustice and oppression, to be innovative, to continue to learn throughout our lives.

Empowering nations and communities

No nation or community aspires to be poor, weak and unstable. Yet many are, while others have high standards of living and are strong, stable and vibrant. But how can we account for the huge differences? Acemoglu and Robinson (2012) suggest that the differences stem from the political and economic institutions that determine who has power in a society and to what ends it is used. Failing states have 'extractive institutions'; institutions that are controlled by those in power at the expense of the masses. Access to education is limited, and the more divided and unequal the education system of a nation becomes, the more likely it is that the nation will fail. Conversely, the basic institutions of the most vibrant and harmonious nations are 'inclusive'. They provide the framework necessary for stability, sustainable development and social harmony.

The education systems of successful nations are inclusive and empower both individuals and the nation.

Australia exemplifies the role that education plays in nation building. If it is to empower, we must learn from our successes and failures and from the experience of other nations. We will need to be more innovative in addressing the weaknesses in our education system and the global challenges facing us.

Education for all

For the foundations of development to be strong, all must have access to programmes designed to meet their basic learning needs. When I joined UNESCO in 1989, the number of out-of-school-children stood at over 130 million, drop-out rates were increasing and the number of adult illiterates had climbed to over 900 million. In developed countries, 'functional illiteracy' was, and remains, a serious problem. Ensuring all have access to quality basic education is a major global challenge. To meet that challenge, UNESCO, the United Nations Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF), the World Bank and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) joined forces,

pushing donors and governments to agree on targets, priorities and the action needed to make progress towards the goal of Education for All (EFA).

Over the past 25 years, the EFA global partnership has helped realise the right to basic education of millions of children, youth and adults. The number of adult illiterates has fallen to around 770 million and the number of children-out-of-school to 57 million. Gender gaps have narrowed, drop-out rates have fallen, and 91 per cent of children attend a primary school. Yet much remains to be done to meet education targets agreed by world leaders (the Sustainable Development Goals).

Australia was once one of the most equitable of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) nations in wealth, income and education, but now we are one of the least equitable. We are falling short in our responsibility to help meet the basic learning needs of all, especially the poor, both at home and beyond our borders.

Learning throughout life

While retaining the traditional breakdown of the components of education, we need to remember that learning is a continuous lifelong process. We must rethink how we have structured and formalised learning in national systems of education, and what we cram into the courses, textbooks and examination systems. Have the structures we have created become prison walls for many of the young people trapped in our education system? The greatest gift an empowering education can give is a passion for learning and a zest for life, a passion that inspires learners to become more versatile, creative and caring. As I often warn new university graduates by saying, “your degree is a milestone in your education, do not let it become a tombstone”.

The number of days Australian teachers spend on professional development is roughly half the OECD average. Ensuring that our teachers continue to learn and update their knowledge and professional skills is a challenge we cannot ignore.

Learning to know and to do

Learning to do is about acquiring the skills we need to participate in life and work in a changing world. Whereas Australia was once in the top echelon of performance in the knowledge and skills assessed by the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), it has now fallen to 14th place. Our top students perform well by international standards, but 11 per cent of 15-year-olds have serious problems in Reading, Mathematics and Science, a much higher proportion than countries like Finland (seven per cent).

When times are tough, there are few jobs available for new entrants to the labour market, and the available jobs are generally poorly paid and insecure. Education may not be a miracle cure for youth unemployment, but our education institutions must equip all with the basic skills needed for employment. They must engage with employers, communities and government to generate coordinated and flexible approaches to learning and earning. The government's funding package to boost youth training and employment represents a good start. Incentives are needed to encourage employers to provide internships, to which I would add government supported internships in community service organisations. Similarly, tertiary education institutions need to do more to develop the generic skills that drive productivity and innovation in globalised workplaces, including cross-cultural competencies and communication.

Learning to be

Learning to be is about the all-round development of each individual – cognitive, social, aesthetic, physical and moral. For the most part, the focus of our education system is on knowledge and skills, particularly on those demanded by the world of work. Learning to be is about the development of our talents as individuals and a nation, but also our understanding of ourselves and the world, empowering us to do the most good we can, combining expertise with ethics. At times, educational institutions fall short, as one teacher in a Master of Business Administration (MBA) programme lamented: “In this course we do not teach human beings, we train barracudas. As a nation, we are failing to meet our obligations under international law to meet the needs of the children of asylum seekers.”

The modern scourges of western civilisation, such as suicide, drug abuse and violence, are usually explained in personal, social or economic terms. But something more fundamental is taking place in the modern world: the failure to provide a sense of meaning, belonging and purpose in our lives—what the Delors Report means by ‘learning to be’. That failure creates the conditions under which violence, extremism and terrorism flourish. Young people need to have something to believe in and to live for, a sense of inclusion and connectedness. As a nation, we must do more to meet the challenge of providing an education that gives meaning and purpose to all our students, especially those ‘at risk’. Empowering teachers do not give up on the children and youth who are falling behind. They expect them, and work hard at helping them, to learn. Empowering schools help all their students to ‘bloom where they are planted’. They nurture the treasure within, the human spirit, challenging students

to strive for excellence, and to find fulfilment in life by helping others.

Innovation, Science and Technology

'When the winds of change blow, some build walls, others windmills' (Chinese proverb). Education is about empowerment, about building windmills rather than walls. An empowering education equips us with the inner resources we need to face changes, complexity and the unpredictable. Schools and tertiary institutions need to be educational 'windmills' if they are to make full use of the opportunities created by the winds of change.

To develop the skills needed to solve problems, teachers at all levels need to make greater use of well-designed inquiry and cooperative and problem-based approaches to learning. As educators, we need to blend good teaching with smart use of the new technologies. Most innovations are the product of the work of multidisciplinary teams, sharing ideas and venturing outside the box. Innovations that improve the quality of teaching and learning stem more from educators sharing knowledge and ideas than from cut-throat competition.

Australia ranks a lowly 17th in terms of innovation. Why? Innovations build on advances in knowledge. In Australia, enrolments in Business and Law are way above those of other OECD nations, but low in Science, Technology and Engineering. This shortfall, combined with the relatively

low status of teachers, make it difficult to recruit and retain well qualified Science, Mathematics and IT teachers. One ought not to be surprised that the quality of teaching and levels of achievement in Science and Mathematics are falling. This is a challenge that must be addressed if we are to achieve the goals of the innovation agenda.

The funding challenge

Education is both a basic human right and a public good. It is one of the best investments that an individual or a nation can make, yielding a wide range of economic, social, health and cultural benefits. In economic terms alone, OECD estimates put the net rate of return for tertiary education at 8.9 per cent for individuals and 13.4 per cent for the nation as a whole. Countries investing in quality education for all are those enjoying the most rapid and sustained economic growth and the highest quality of life. Given that individuals and society benefit from investing in education, it is not unreasonable to expect the cost burden to be shared. Australia's total level of investment in education is slightly above the OECD average, but what has changed is that individuals and families are bearing more of the cost burden. In the 1970s, Australia was one of the few nations where public investment in education exceeded seven per cent of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP), but it has now fallen to 26th place among OECD countries.

The challenge is to find funding solutions that are fair and affordable. At all levels of education, needs-based funding along the lines of the Gonski model is necessary to assure fairness, equity and quality. At the tertiary level, HECS-HELP has helped, but what if fees and debt levels climb? More public and private scholarships, debt relief via discounts contingent on performance, debt swaps for community service, and education-industry joint ventures are possibilities to be considered. Deregulation would only make things worse.

Global warming

Of all the challenges facing us, global warming and climate change pose the most serious threat to our common future. The reports of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) paint a gloomy picture of our planet's future. To facilitate the professional development of teachers, it makes sense to use the United Nations (UN) website (<http://sustainabledevelopment.un.org>) and UNESCO multi-media packages (for example Teaching and Learning for a Sustainable Future). It is imperative that all young people and adults be empowered as global citizens with the knowledge, skills and determination needed to tackle the challenges we face as our planet warms. Ensuring that education for sustainable development is a priority is a challenge yet to be met.

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Global citizenship: Learning to live together

The number of students crossing borders has tripled in the last 20 years. Increasingly as well, our graduates are finding work overseas. If current trends continue, the combination of international assessments of student achievement, cross-border education, advances in Information and Communications Technology (ICT) and global commercial activity in education goods and services will continue to grow exponentially, accelerating the internationalisation of education systems. Internationalisation creates new opportunities for enhancing international understanding and cooperation. However, the driving force in the global education market seems to be self-interest. We must use the opportunities created by internationalisation to educate for global citizenship, for unity in diversity, not just to prop up our tertiary institutions.

Education for global citizenship is about opening minds and doors to the wider world. It seeks to deepen our understanding of other countries, peoples, cultures and ways of life in order to create a world where all human beings live together and with nature in peaceful co-existence. That means that in the teaching and curriculum of all areas, (especially the Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences) more attention needs to be given to the treasures within all of the world's cultures, and to the people and ideas that have helped to build a better world.

Throughout human history, the quest to build the world to which we aspire has been about a shared destiny, about the common good, about basic rights and freedoms, about justice and equity. We need to learn to live and work together for the common good, or perish.

We must meet the challenge of educating for responsible global citizenship.

Conclusion

To empower learners, communities and nations, education must be of high quality, inclusive and lifelong. But education empowers only if it leads to learning, that is, to the development of knowledge, expertise, talents and values, and to the wise and ethical use of that knowledge and expertise. Quality education empowers communities, nations and humanity as a whole, but only if it is equally accessible to all, and certainly not if what is provided to the masses is restricted and/or of poor quality.

If nations work together to ensure an empowering education is accessible to all throughout their lives, a quiet revolution is set in motion: education becomes the engine of sustainable development and the key to a better world.

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EMERITUS PROFESSOR COLIN POWER
AM, FACE

Colin Power is an Adjunct Professor at the University of Queensland and Chair of the Commonwealth Consortium for Education. Formerly Professor of Education at Flinders University, he served as Deputy Director-General of UNESCO and Assistant Director-General for Education from 1989 to 2000. As such, he played a key role in international

efforts to improve access to, and the quality of, education at all levels. Colin's latest book (*The power of education*, Springer, 2015) documents how inclusive quality education systems empower individuals, communities and nations, and what needs to be done to build the world to which we aspire.

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Melbourne,
Victoria



Teaching human rights: Transforming classrooms and changing the world

Megan Mitchell

There are a number of international human rights instruments that place legal obligations on the Australian Government. These instruments include: the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights; the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights; the Convention on the Rights of the Child; the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women; the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities; the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination; and of course, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Common among many of these frameworks, is the recognition of the right to education.

The right to education

The right to education was first recognised as a fundamental human right by the international community in 1948 in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), the foundational document for human rights.

The UDHR states that everyone has the right to education and also that:

Education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. It shall promote understanding, tolerance and friendship among all nations, racial or religious groups (Article 26(2)).

This sums up the powerful role that education plays in creating the kind of societies we want to see in our world. Education assists individuals to fully realise their potential and to meaningfully engage in civic and economic life; it can provide a platform to surmount entrenched socio-economic disadvantage and discrimination and it equips individuals with the tools to stand up for their rights and the rights of others.

Dedicated and proactive teachers are vital to ensuring that children and young people in Australia, and around the world, receive all the benefits that education has to offer.

The right to education has been further elaborated in international human rights treaties that have followed the UDHR including the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and the Convention on the

Rights of the Child. These treaties strongly articulate the aspirations we hold for education to create the world we wish to see.

Of course in reality, the distance between international agreements on human rights and the substantive realisation of those rights can be vast. While the right to education is widely recognised and formally available in Australia, the uneven manner in which



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education is provided, and the disadvantages that some students experience outside the school system, mean that unfortunately there continues to be children who fall through the cracks in our system and whose human rights are not substantially realised. Many Australians are already well aware of this inequity.

These concerns have also been raised by the international community. In their last review of Australia in 2012, the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child raised concerns about access to education for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, children living in remote areas, children with disability, children in care and children from non-English speaking backgrounds, noting that these groups have consistently been vulnerable to non-enrollment and low attendance and had poorer learning outcomes. While the Committee recognised that there had been some progress made, including the development of new plans and frameworks that focus on education outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and the creation of my role, the office of the National Children's Commissioner, it also noted that Australia still has some real work to do if we wish to achieve equity in educational opportunities and outcomes.

The Australian Government has made a commitment to improving the educational outcomes of all children in Australia through its participation in the development of, and commitment to, the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The SDGs build on the progress made by the Millennium Development Goals (2000-2015) in reducing global poverty by establishing '17 goals to transform our world.' Sustainable Development Goal 4 relates to education. Its specific targets include: 'ensur[ing] that all girls and boys complete free, equitable

and quality primary and secondary education' and:

Ensuring that all learners acquire the knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development, including, among others, through education for sustainable development and sustainable lifestyles, human rights, gender equality, promotion of a culture of peace and non-violence, global citizenship and appreciation of cultural diversity and of culture's contribution to sustainable development.

The SDGs explicitly establish education about human rights and good global citizenship as key priorities for the international community over the next 15 years.

The right to human rights education

The SDGs are of course not the first international initiative to highlight the importance of human rights education; as mentioned earlier, the UDHR referred to this as early as 1948. However, over the last few decades, there has been increasing recognition of the importance of building human rights learning into the formal education system. Schooling, at least in many countries, has moved well beyond the traditional 'chalk and talk' model; it is now understood that the education system must act as a primer for life when children inevitably venture beyond the classroom walls. Though this was espoused in the UDHR, it was not necessarily generally accepted by society more broadly. Today however, teachers, families, schools, government, civil society and students themselves understand that the education system plays an important role in preparing students to be informed, engaged and active citizens.

While education itself is a basic human right and equitable access is vital to the creation of a just society, education specifically

related to human rights and responsibilities is also critical. Human rights education is crucial to ensuring that people are aware of, and able to exercise, their rights, as well as their responsibilities to respect and protect the rights of others.

The single most important document for my role as National Children's Commissioner is the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC). The CRC reminds us that in addition to possessing all of the rights set out in other international instruments, children and young people have additional rights and special protection due to their particular vulnerability to exploitation and abuse. The CRC expressly acknowledges 'the right of the child to education' (Article 28(l)) detailing that education shall be directed to:

(a) The development of the child's personality, talents and mental and physical abilities to their fullest potential;

(b) The development of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, and for the principles enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations;

(c) The development of respect for the child's parents, his or her own cultural identity, language and values, for the national values of the country in which the child is living, the country from which he or she may originate, and for civilizations different from his or her own;

(d) The preparation of the child for responsible life in a free society, in the spirit of understanding, peace, tolerance, equality of sexes, and friendship among all peoples, ethnic, national and religious groups and persons of indigenous origin;

(e) The development of respect for the natural environment. (Article 29).

The CRC specifically references human rights learning, including for the development of respect, tolerance and understanding, as a right for all children.

The movement in support of human rights education is very much a global one. In 2005, the United Nations established the World Programme for Human Rights Education under the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights. Their hope is that:

By promoting respect for human dignity and equality and participation in democratic decision-making, human rights education contributes to long-term prevention of abuses and violent conflicts. By educating children about human rights from a young age, we can create a better, more peaceful, world in the future.

In 2011, the UN took this idea a step further by adopting the Declaration on Human Rights Education and Training. This landmark statement affirms the right of all people to have access to human rights education.

At the domestic level, National Human Rights Institutions like the Australian Human Rights Commission are strong advocates for, and leaders in, human rights education. The Commission believes that developing a moral and ethical understanding of the world, and an appreciation for the rich diversity of people within Australia is an integral part of young people becoming active and informed citizens.

However, it is not just the Commission advocating for educating ethical, engaged and informed Australian citizens. The 2008 Melbourne Declaration on Education Goals for Young Australians, developed by Education Ministers from across the country, identified students becoming 'active and informed' citizens as a

critical objective of the Australian education system. Human rights education was also identified as a key priority in Australia's Human Rights Framework (2008) and again in the National Human Rights Action Plan (2012) which outlines a variety of measures aimed at promoting protection of, and respect for, human rights.

Despite all these international and national aspirations and commitments, there remains much room for improvement. The United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child, which I mentioned earlier, made a number of recommendations in 2012. They recommended the addition of 'public education on child rights as a core objective of its [then] proposed National Human Rights Plan' and the inclusion of 'mandatory modules on human rights and the Convention in [the] school curriculum and in training programmes for all professionals working with or for our children.' Although Australia has certainly made some progress in incorporating human rights and child rights learning into the education system, we could be doing much more.

Realising human rights through human rights education

Now that we've established that the international community and Australia are in agreement that there are rights to both education and human rights education, perhaps it would be useful for me to elaborate what I mean by human rights education. The commonly accepted definition of human rights education is that it includes teaching about human rights content, and involves incorporating human rights through teaching and learning practices that exemplify and model behaviours reflective of human rights principles such as equality, fairness, non-discrimination and respect. Perhaps most importantly, human rights education is also

about teaching for the realisation of human rights, or in other words, using pedagogical approaches that empower students to stand up for their own rights and for the rights of others. Inherent in teaching human rights education is using a human rights-based approach.

The principle of participation is central to a rights-based approach. Everyone has the right to participate in decisions which affect their human rights. Participation must be active, free and meaningful, and give attention to issues of accessibility, including access to information in a form and a language which can be understood. This concept is also one of the guiding principles of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Article 12 gives to every child, including very young children, the right to be taken seriously and be heard in matters affecting them. These views should be given weight in accordance with the child's age and maturity. As the recent Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse has so clearly demonstrated, silencing children does not protect them.

In the school context, as children are key stakeholders in the education system, their views and opinions are crucial to the development and design of their own learning. Hearing from children is not only empowering for them, it helps adults to get things right. Every day, policies, programs and laws are being developed that impact directly or indirectly on children and young people. As the experts in their own lives, ignoring their experiences and perspectives will invariably lead adults to intervene in ways that just don't work.

A good example is the national consultations that the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) conducted around the development

of the Australian Curriculum. Throughout the curriculum development stages, ACARA consulted openly and widely and encouraged children and young people to make submissions and participate in consultations, and for this they should be congratulated. However, the engagement of children and young people remained limited and we have to ask if the processes themselves were really as accessible as they could have been to all children. Did we go far enough to genuinely support the full participation of children and young people in this area in which they have a critical stake?

There is undoubtedly an opportunity for improving the extent to which children and young people are consulted and involved in decisions relating to their own education. I like to think that the education system has shifted away from the idea of teaching as 'the sage on the stage' towards a more participatory approach of 'the guide on the side'. This means supporting learners to articulate and advocate for themselves, including by ensuring that they are aware of their specific rights under the Convention on the Rights of the Child, and in particular, the right to have a say in decisions that affect them. In 2013, I conducted a national listening tour which I called 'The Big Banter'. Through interviews and postcards, thousands of Australian children and young people told me what was most important to them. Many of them expressed a desire to be heard and more engaged in decisions affecting them and their communities. They also said that they wanted all children to be aware of their rights. A 15-year-old from Victoria said:

I have a little sister who is 9 years old. We both know that kids and young people should be safe and be able to go to school and have food, but we'd never heard

of the UN Convention that puts all of this in writing. In fact, I don't think many young people know about the Convention. But we should know because it's important to see this in writing and for me, it was comforting to see that I and other young people are recognised this way.

A desire for greater equality within Australian society was also a common theme. Unsurprisingly, non-discrimination and equality are also crucial elements of a human rights-based approach. This approach demands that all forms of discrimination in the realisation of rights must be prohibited, prevented and eliminated. It also recognises that priority should be given to people in the most marginalised or vulnerable situations who face the biggest barriers to realising their rights. All Australian children, regardless of location, circumstances, background or ability, should have equal access to high-quality, free education. In the words of one Australia teenager, "Education is knowledge and knowledge is power. And all children should have the chance to use their power to better our country."

Challenges to human rights education in Australia

There are, of course, specific barriers within the Australian education system when it comes to implementing human rights education. For several years now, the Australian Human Rights Commission has been developing free resources on a variety of human rights issues. Last year, the Commission conducted an evaluation of all our current RightsED resources. Through interviews, focus groups and surveys, over 1,000 educators were consulted about their views on the Commission's school resources. Almost all respondents (98 per cent) considered it important to educate students about human rights, with over half (56 per cent) indicating

that they thought it was extremely important.

However, the evaluation also highlighted how teaching human rights can be a daunting undertaking for many teachers. There are significant barriers to incorporating human rights education into the classroom. In the survey, respondents identified the main barrier as the crowded curriculum. 58 per cent of respondents said they didn't have enough time to cover human rights education in their classes. Another 27 per cent of respondents said that they didn't teach about human rights because it wasn't a mandatory requirement or a cross-curriculum priority. On top of this, human rights subject matter is often very complex and sometimes controversial.

Teachers also related some concerns regarding human rights education. One of the most common was a concern about negative parent or carer reactions to the incorporation of human rights learning into the classroom (21 per cent) and the lack of knowledge and understanding of how to integrate human rights into their teaching (17 per cent).

So, in light of this challenging context, how do we begin to incorporate human rights into the classroom?

Supporting teachers

There has been some recent progress in linking human rights to the curriculum. During the development of the new national curriculum, the Commission worked with ACARA to ensure that human rights content and principles were interwoven throughout. Through ACARA's consultation process we provided extensive advice, particularly in relation to the development of the General Capabilities:

- Ethical understanding
- Intercultural understanding
- Personal and social capability.

We also made contributions on how to strengthen human rights education in the subjects of Geography, Health and PE, History, Civics and Citizenship and Business.

Many of our suggestions were then incorporated into curriculum content. As a result, human rights can be explicitly found in:

- Geography, where students are asked to consider the liveability of spaces for people from diverse cultures or people with disability
- History, where students are required to consider the significance of the Bringing Them Home report or the Sex Discrimination Act
- HPE, where students are asked to examine and challenge stereotypes about race, violence, sexuality and ability.

However, the Australian Human Rights Commission believes that human rights can be taught in any subject area. For example, in:

- Mathematics, by teaching students about statistics using data on the disparity of outcomes across different communities
- Science, by teaching about the commercial use of Indigenous knowledge biodiversity.

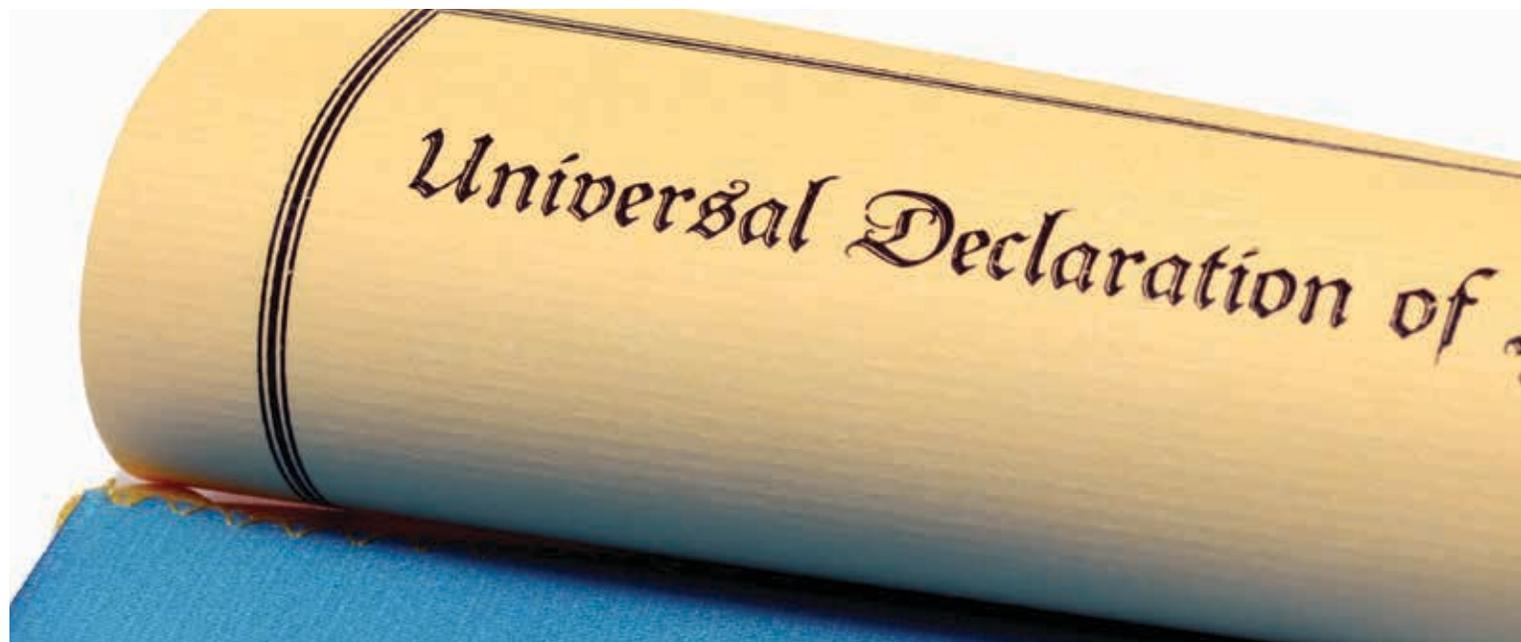
Supporting human rights education

To support teachers in doing this, the Australian Human Rights Commission has developed a range of human rights education resources for students of all ages, across a range of learning areas. These resource are designed to assist students gain a critical understanding of their human rights and responsibilities, and to develop the attitudes, behaviours and skills to apply human rights within their day to day lives and in their communities. These resources are easily accessible and free to download via the Commission's website at <http://humanrights.gov.au/education>.

Our resources are designed with the crowded curriculum and the existing constraints on teachers' time, in mind. Each resource is mapped to the Australian curriculum and includes lesson plans and suggestions for interactive activities for teachers to

use with their students. Resources have been designed for a variety of subjects at the primary (especially Years 5 and 6) and secondary (especially Years 7-10) levels. Many of the resources are mapped to the Civics & Citizenship, History and Health and Physical Education curriculum, but we have also developed resources for Geography, Mathematics, Economics, Legal Studies, English, Arts/Drama and others. I am also very excited to let you know that we have just developed our very first RightsEd resource, 'Building Belonging' for early childhood education, which will be released very soon. This builds on our growing work in the early childhood sector following the development, with Early Childhood Australia, of 'Supporting young children's rights: Statement of intent (2015-2018)'.

One of our newest RightsED resources - 'Introduction to Human Rights and Responsibilities' - is mapped to the Humanities and Social Sciences curriculum for Years 5 and 6. It has been designed to be used with an interactive whiteboard but can also be used on any internet enabled device, including a computer or tablet connected to a data projector. This resource includes two interactive lessons with accompanying teacher



resources (including lesson plans) and suggested homework activities.

In order for human rights to resonate with young people, (or anyone actually!), they must be relevant to their personal experiences. Recognising this, we try to use appropriate current examples and case studies, and incorporate practical interactive activities in our resources. For example, in this particular resource, students work together to create a classroom charter of rights and responsibilities. They are then asked to apply the knowledge and principles at home by discussing what they have learned with their families and developing a family charter. In this way, students also become potential change-makers, introducing human rights education to their families!

The Commission is currently working on developing a new suite of resources for Years 7-10. With the overarching theme 'The Story of our Rights and Freedoms,' these resources

will explore Australian democracy, the Constitution, the 1967 Referendum and women's suffrage. Consultation with students and teachers will be a key part of the design and development process.

Conclusion: Teachers as change makers

Developing a moral and ethical understanding of the world, and an appreciation for the rich diversity of people within Australia is an integral part of young people becoming active and informed citizens. Teachers can facilitate this by encouraging students to think critically about social issues and by promoting learning about enduring ethical, moral and legal issues. Teachers can create engaging and substantive learning experiences that challenge stereotypes, accepted 'truths', and the ways in which we do things that perpetuate inequalities that are entrenched within our society.

To ensure that human rights education is fully, rather than just formally, available to all students, we need courageous educators who will champion supportive and inclusive learning environments. Learning about fundamental rights and freedoms, such as those contained in the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the

Universal Declaration of Human Rights, can equip students with the knowledge and skills to bring about positive change in their lives and communities. Teachers, as change-makers, have the power to introduce new ideas and educative methods that reach out to all students. Teachers can build greater cohesion in the classroom and beyond by encouraging ethical and intercultural understanding, and developing personal and social capabilities. Teachers can initiate changes to school facilities and activities that enable and engage students of all backgrounds. And teachers can call on governments to collaborate and ensure that every child, regardless of their background, has their right to education fulfilled.

Being a true leader, in the education sense, means going beyond typical expectations to improve student learning in a real and practical way. By creating inclusive learning environments that redress social inequalities, and by empowering students to become active and ethically aware citizens, Australian teachers and educators are at the forefront of building a just and cohesive society. Human rights education frameworks and programming can provide a platform for assisting teachers to build the world to which we all can aspire. And by transforming classrooms, you can change lives and change the world!

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The best possible start

Rachel Hunter, Deputy Chancellor, Griffith University and former Chair, Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority (ACECQA) Board

Investment in quality early childhood education and care is an investment in a child's future and ultimately, in the productivity and prosperity of a nation. With more and more children spending the majority of their waking hours in some form of child care, the quality of services, educators and learning experiences is of acute importance for their development and future educational success.

The fundamental premise underpinning quality reforms in early childhood education and care is that children are active learners from birth. The early years lay the foundation for a child's resilience, success as a learner and development. Research has shown that quality education and care early in life leads to better health, education and employment outcomes later in life.

The introduction of the Australian National Quality Framework (NQF) in 2012 was a vital first step in assuring the right of every child to a quality early learning experience. In designing the NQF, Australia drew on a significant body of international research in neuroscience, child development, and early learning.

The NQF provides for nationally consistent accreditation and quality rating of more than 15,000 services providing education and child care for children from birth to 13 years of age. These services include long day care, family day care, some kindergartens (or preschools), and outside school hours care (OSHC).

The introduction of the NQF is, however, just the beginning if Australia is to address the growing levels of educational disadvantage and underperformance which are becoming increasingly evident in national and international educational rankings.

Background - The National Quality Framework

The NQF is underpinned by the applied Education and Care Services National Law (the National Law) and the Education and Care Services National Regulations (the National Regulations). The National

Law and Regulations integrated previous regimes for child care licensing, minimum enforceable standards and quality assessment into a single, nationally consistent regulatory model.

The National Quality Standard (NQS) is a key element of the NQF. The Standard includes seven quality areas and is the primary vehicle for regulating, rating, and driving improvement in service quality.

The NQS also provides two nationally approved learning frameworks: *Belonging, Being & Becoming - The Early Years Learning Framework for Australia*, which focuses on play-based learning for children from birth to five; and *My Time, Our Place - Framework for School Age Care in Australia* which provides for school age children in OSHC services.

Data and information reported by the Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority (ACECQA) provides invaluable information for families, educators, (in education and care, and schooling), and policy makers about the current state of quality in over 15,000 services across the nation.

The positive news is that the

NQF reforms are witness to an improvement in quality. According to the ACECQA Snapshot (2/2016: p. 10), of the 684 service reassessments undertaken, 67% resulted in an improved overall quality rating. Of the 32% of reassessments that did not result in an improved overall quality rating, almost two-thirds (64%) did result in improved performance against the elements of the NQS.

Compelling Evidence

Research has consistently demonstrated that the first months and years of life set the stage for lifelong development. Gerhard (2004: p. 18) reinforced the importance of early interactions and effective parenting, describing babies as "... the raw material for a self. Each one comes with a genetic blueprint and a unique range of possibilities. There is a body programmed to develop in certain ways, but by no means on automatic programme. The baby is an interactive project, not a self-powered one."

Neglect during the first two years of life has a profound effect on the development and health of a child. The World Health Organisation (WHO) (2007: p. 7) reported that "Research now shows that many challenges in adult society -

mental health problems, obesity/stunting, heart disease, criminality, competence in literacy and numeracy – have their roots in early childhood.”

The National Scientific Council on the Developing Child (2016: p. 8) reported that early intervention has the potential to at least partly remediate harm. “If appropriate intervention occurs very early – in various studies the benchmark age for removal from extreme deprivation has been identified as 6, 12, or 24 months – substantially improved functioning in cognition, attention, memory, and executive functioning can be achieved.” This evidence was most poignantly demonstrated by a follow-up study undertaken of Romanian orphans by Harvard Medical School neuroscientist Charles Nelson. (Marshall, 2014: p. 752). The study showed that the children who were placed at two years of age in foster care developed within normal ranges, contrasted with those children retained in orphanages.

In a response to the Productivity Commission’s 2015 Issues Paper, ACECQA cited evidence which indicated that children from disadvantaged backgrounds stand to gain the most from quality education and care; improved developmental outcomes, including learning skills, and improved quality of life (2016: p. 4 Attach A). ACECQA noted that children from disadvantaged backgrounds are also more vulnerable to negative impacts from poor quality services, meaning that the provision of low quality education and care can entrench disadvantage (2016: p. 4 Attach A).

ACECQA findings also cited evidence from United Kingdom and Australian studies which demonstrated the benefits of investment in quality. A longitudinal study into preschool provision in the United Kingdom which tracked children from the

age of three years onwards, found that high quality early childhood education and care ameliorates the effects of social disadvantage and prepares disadvantaged children for success at primary school (2016: p. 4 Attach A). Evidence from E4 Kids, a recent Australian longitudinal study which tracked children from the age of three to four years onwards, similarly reported a positive relationship between the quality of a service and educational outcomes.

Maintaining Momentum

Introducing and maintaining the momentum of national quality reforms has not been easily achieved, nor will future developments. This is principally due to the complexities of a federated system of policy determination, regulation and funding in the early childhood education and care arena.

The NQF created a national system by replacing “... a fragmented state-based system of licensing and quality assurance arrangements with a single, cohesive national structure, merging nine regulatory and quality assurance systems into one” (ACECQA, 2016: p. 1).

Effectively the ‘owners’ of the NQF are the Commonwealth, state and territory governments, with stewardship of the federated regulatory system delegated to the Ministerial Education Council. The national regulatory body, ACECQA, has a number of regulatory powers, but is principally responsible for monitoring the consistent implementation of the NQF by state and territory regulatory bodies. Regulatory powers related to service accreditation, compliance and quality rating remain a matter for states and territories.

The sector too, is complex in configuration. According to the latest ACECQA Snapshot (2/2016) there are over 15,330 services, of which 6,980 (46%) are ‘private for

profit’; 3,762 (25%) are ‘private not for profit-community managed’; 1,850 (12%) are ‘private not for profit-other organisations’; 1,315 (9%) are ‘State/Territory and Local Government managed’; 771 (5%) are ‘State/Territory government schools’; 447 (3%) are ‘Independent schools’; 197 (1%) are ‘Catholic schools’; and ‘Not stated/Other’ – 11 (0%).

To add further complexity, there is significant variability in service mix and provider scale across jurisdictions and the nation. Nationally, 93% of services are centre-based and 7% are Family Day Care. The proportion of approved providers with services by size were Large (25 or more services) – 1%; Medium (2-24 services) – 16%; and Small (1 services) – 83% (31 March 2016).

The Need for a Sustained Policy Focus

While Australia has increased levels of investment in early childhood education, 2014 OECD data showed that 18% of 3-year-olds participated in early childhood education, compared with 70% on average across the OECD. Australia ranked at 34 out of 36 OECD and partner countries (OECD, 2014: p. 1).

According to O’Connell et al (2016: p. v) “There is a mismatch between investment and opportunity in early childhood policy in Australia. The early years are a critical window for building the foundations that enable all children to become creative, entrepreneurial, resilient and capable learners. Yet current policy settings are not meeting the needs of the children who stand to benefit most.”

O’Connell et al (2016: p. viii) made five recommendations worthy of policy consideration for future investment in the accessibility and quality of early childhood education and care. They are as follows:

1. Establish affordable access to preschool as a legislated entitlement, make a permanent commitment to funding Universal Access for 4-year-olds, and commence work on extending Universal Access to 3-year-olds.
2. Scale up evidence-based, high-intensity programs for the most vulnerable children, prioritising the communities in each state that are in the bottom decile for developmental vulnerability in the Australian Early Development Census (AEDC).
3. Ensure the NQF is achieving its objectives and is appropriately resourced to do so, and that all services are meeting the NQS, at a minimum, by mid-2017.
4. Deliver a national early childhood data strategy that establishes the information infrastructure needed to drive policy and practice improvement into the future.
5. Commence a national campaign to strengthen family and community knowledge and beliefs about children's early learning.

Lifting the Bar and Closing the Gap

The child care sector provides a vital starting point for many children in the continuum of education. A national policy priority on children's education and care is vital for a high equity, high quality education system.

In Australia, 15%, or 60,000, of children start school developmentally vulnerable (Guardian, 2016: p. 1). This has serious implications for their successful transition to and achievement in schooling.

While ACECQA (2/2016) national data shows the same percentage of services (28%) working towards the national standard in 'least'



and 'most' disadvantaged areas, communities with lower levels of school readiness have a higher proportion of services at the Working Towards NQS quality level, meaning ones that do not meet national standards, than communities where levels of school readiness are highest (Educational opportunity in Australia 2015: p. 11).

The greatest difference in the proportion of services below the national standard is in Quality Area 1, *Educational program and practice*. In communities with the lowest levels of school readiness, 28.1% of ECEC services fall below the national standard on this measure, compared to 20.9% in communities where the level of school readiness is highest (Educational opportunity in Australia 2015: p. 11).

Lamb et al (2015: p. iv) provide a picture of how young Australians meet or miss key educational milestones. 78% enter school on track in all AEDC domains, while 71.6% meet or exceed academic achievement benchmarks by Year 7, and 74% attain a Senior Certificate or equivalent in Year 12.

The data revealed that around 10% of children who enter school developmentally vulnerable never recover. However more positively, Lamb et al noted that 'there

are also points at which young Australians are behind or missing out, but recover over following stages succeeding at the following milestone" (2016: p. V). This turnaround requires sustained curriculum intervention, a positive school culture, and quality teaching.

The 2015 PISA results demonstrated that Australia continued to slip in international education rankings. However, Wilson, Dalton and Bauman (2015: p. 1) reported that the real concern since 2000 was that the scores of Australian 15-year-olds in reading, maths and scientific literacy have recorded statistically significant declines since 2000; that is a decline in real scores, while other countries have shown improvement.

The recent Australian Government report on 'Quality Schools, Quality Outcomes' acknowledges that while PISA describes Australia as having a high equity, high quality education system, more needs to be done. Our performance both relative to other countries and in real terms has declined over time and there is a significant gap between our highest and lowest performing students (2016: p. 1).

The Report goes on to acknowledge that results indicate there has also been a decline in the number

of high performing students in mathematics and reading, despite increased government funding over the last decade (2016: p. 1). The Report noted that “the OECD has found that how money is allocated across the system matters more in education spending than the amount of money that is spent” (2016: p. 1).

Conclusion

The OECD (2014) has predicted that if Australia was to improve its performance on the PISA tests by 25 points, GDP would expand by 7.2% (equivalent to \$4.8 trillion) by 2095. This requires sustained investment in the quality of education, which starts with early childhood.

WHO (2007: p.7) reported that “Economists now assert on the basis of the available evidence that investment in early childhood is the most powerful investment a country can make, with returns over the life course many times the amount of the original investment.”

The NQF has established a foundation for ongoing quality reforms in early childhood education and care. Sustained policy focus on, and funding for quality early childhood education and care needs to be a priority if Australia is to deliver the best possible start for all children, and yield generational social and economic dividends for the nation.



RACHEL HUNTER, DEPUTY CHANCELLOR, GRIFFITH UNIVERSITY AND FORMER CHAIR, AUSTRALIAN CHILDREN'S EDUCATION AND CARE QUALITY AUTHORITY (ACECQA) BOARD

Rachel was a Governor-in-Council appointee on Griffith University Council 2000-2013 and was re-appointed in 2015. She was elected as the Deputy Chancellor in October 2015.

She was formerly the Chair of QCOMP and of Legal Aid Queensland and Deputy-Chair of the Queensland Performing Arts Trust Board.

Rachel has extensive Queensland public service experience and was Director-General of the Department

of Justice, (including private and public sector industrial relations and workplace health and safety), a position from which she retired in July 2010. Prior to this, Rachel was Director-General of the Department of Education, Training and the Arts from September 2006.

She also served as Queensland's Public Service Commissioner from December 2000 until November 2003.

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Changes and challenges: Is our education system equipped to prepare students for a brave new world?

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This paper proposes that the current climate of education in Australia prepares students for a future that is based on a systemic idea of success, rather than individual needs and wants. Drawing upon anecdotal evidence, educational research and policy claims to quantify the argument throughout the paper, there is an initial exploration of the need for change in the academic and social domains of general and special education, respectively. In the subsequent discussion of global changes and challenges and the implications for education, the paper looks closely at the role of the educator in developing students' understanding of global change, as well as the need for active advocacy of diverse post-school options within the classroom. Ultimately, this paper illustrates the need to transform our current, narrow conception of a 'future focus' of education into one that supports students to participate in a world that they will make their own.

Early philosophers and political luminaries often lauded education as the catalyst for affecting profound global change. In contemporary Australia, however, education's global focus has shifted from affecting change to inciting competition. Educational authorities justify the current performative culture of education as the vehicle for students to engage and prosper in society, and ultimately, to compete in a globalised world (ACARA, 2010). The rhetoric surrounding this future focus has had a profound impact on the context and purpose of teaching and learning in Australia. As such, this paper will problematise the culture of national education through two lenses: changes and challenges in education and changes and challenges in building the world to which we aspire, and in doing so, uncover fundamental systemic paradoxes and confronting truths about the efficacy of Australian education in preparing students for their futures.

An examination of changes and challenges in education is not a discrete process; the contested nature of education means that they are currently inextricably tied. Although my professional experience so far is limited, I have come to realise that contextualising changes in the national education system is best articulated not in terms of what is, but what should be. Across my practicum placements, I have consistently observed pedagogies that are shaped exclusively by mandated requirements, creating an environment of pressure, accountability and ultimately, a 'future' focus that is short-term, narrow and predicated on a universal ideal of success. This paradigm has barely shifted from my experiences at school, leading me to the conclusion that, in a world that is changing so rapidly, education has become stagnant. Even though Australia's education system is touted by many as dynamic, inclusive and intellectually rigorous, the

consistency borne of uniform performance expectations highlighted to me a need for transformative change. However, this need for change is complicated by the competing discourses that shape our education system. The prominence and pressure of standardisation and the concurrent, ironic emphasis on differentiated practice has created a system that is clouded by competing priorities. Therefore, the ambiguity of values in our education system foregrounds the need for significant change to create clarity of purpose.

Furthermore, the intimate connection between changes and challenges in our education system is particularly prominent when examining the degree to which social issues are acknowledged and addressed. Such a narrow focus on accountability, data collection and qualitative achievement in education has insidiously impacted the attention given to social issues. Indeed, McGaw (as cited in Atweh &

Singh, 2011) has suggested that even though data from standardised tests indicates that Australia has a high quality education system, it performs less well in dealing with issues of educational inequality. In my practicum settings, the notion of equality has commonly been viewed as something automatically addressed by legislation, creating the misperception that nothing further needs to be done to optimise access, participation and achievement in education for students with special needs. Furthermore, I have observed that students with special needs who are educated in inclusive settings are often negatively stigmatised by classroom teachers. As such, these students tend to adjust their performance and participation in class in accordance with the teacher's expectations. Thus, the need for change in education clearly extends beyond the academic sphere.

An examination of change in relation to building the world to which we aspire is underpinned by an understanding of the nature of global change itself. In a world that is increasingly diverse and rapidly developing, formal education cannot possibly claim to teach children everything they need to know. While Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) (as cited in Casinader, 2016) claimed that the Australian Curriculum addresses the knowledge, understanding and skills needed for life and work in the 21st century, I would argue that the linearity of the curriculum belies the constantly changing and inherently dynamic nature of the world in which we live. However, as teachers we can manipulate the context and practise of the curriculum in order to heighten students' sense of position in the global context. Using an activity like a role play that considers both students' roles and responsibilities

in the world and key developmental considerations, like technological evolution, in conjunction with curriculum content might give students a more authentic understanding of global change and their role within that. As such, while the concept of global change is difficult terrain to traverse with students, it can be navigated without tokenism or passive engagement.

While the notion of 'inclusive aspiration' suggested by creating the world to which we aspire is admirable, it is a challenge in and of itself. Constructing a 'cohesive', inclusive world cannot be a global endeavour, simply because we strive to foster a sense of self-determination in our students that is entirely unique - I pluralised 'future' in my introduction for this very reason. For example, again based on my experiences in special education, the world to which some students aspire might be gainful employment and a sense of subjective wellbeing. As such, it is critical that we use our position as classroom teachers to acknowledge and celebrate the inherently unique and diverse futures and opportunities that are presented to our students. This might be achieved through parental involvement and, when appropriate, tailoring contexts for assessment and learning activities to reflect students' specific post-school goals and aspirations. In spite of the difficulty of creating a universally inclusive world, teachers can advocate the potential and possibilities present for all students in their post-school lives.

In summary, an examination and analysis of changes and challenges in national education has revealed significant tensions in terms of a 'future focus'. While effecting significant change to such intransigent discourses is undoubtedly an incremental

process, it is imperative that our parochial systemic views of education are broadened. Ultimately, we need to strive for an educational paradigm that focuses less on competition in a globalised world and promotes the individual's ability to contribute to, participate and learn in a world that, despite perennial change, really is what they make it.

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Voices of Children and Young People

This edition of Prof Ed presents different perspectives on issues affecting children and young people in this modern day and age.

Interrogating our practice in these ways may help us to ensure that the learning stories we compose accurately reflect and foreground the voices of the children we teach, and that we might access the voices in danger of slipping into an imperceptible crack.

Brendan Hyde

Working with a child with ASD should not feel insurmountable if you have the support and understanding of the entire school community and if you remember that a child with ASD is like any neuro-typical child; they need to feel that their efforts are noticed and rewarded, feel proud of themselves...and feel included and liked by adults and peers.

Jasmin Cresp

My parents grew up in the 70s, so my childhood television watching included all seven seasons of the iconic Brady Bunch...As a result, I idolised Marcia Brady – her outfits, her preppy American lifestyle, and most importantly, the hours she spent talking on the phone to friends.

Caitlin O'Meara



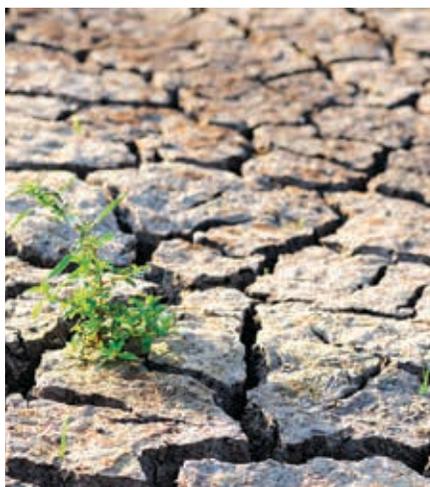
Slipping into an imperceptible crack?

Brendan Hyde, PhD, MACE

The question of the ability of learning stories to foreground children's voices

Some years ago now, I was reviewing an edited compilation on children's voices and perspectives in religious education. Given that the title of the book explicitly included the words 'children's voices', I was both intrigued and disappointed to discover that there was a key factor missing – the voices of the children themselves. The reader did not hear the voices of the children in relation to religious education. While there were one or two notable exceptions, most of the contributions appeared to represent scholarship's theorizing about children's voices and perspectives in religious education, without allowing the voices of the children themselves to be heard – an incredible irony given the title of the book! A postcolonial critique may well have argued that this amounts to a form of colonization, in which the voices of children are, for the most part, effectually disempowered and silenced (Cannella & Viruru, 2004), although there was much theorizing about them on the part of those who dominated the discourse!

My own work in this field has sought to find effective ways in which educators might actively listen to the voices of children, and to act upon this in ways that might positively affect learning (2011). To this end, I have promoted the use of learning stories in early years classrooms. But here too, there is a need for both caution and criticality. Is it possible that learning stories may in fact censor and discipline the very



voices that educators are hoping to foreground? While affirming the notion of, and the possibilities presented by learning stories in foregrounding the voices of children, this short article seeks to raise some questions in relation to the ability of this pedagogical tool to accurately document the voices of children.

Learning stories

The capability of stories to highlight critical incidences of children's learning in early childhood contexts is well attested to in the literature (Dunn, 1993; Gettinger & Stoiber, 1998; Lyle, 2000). Situating her work within this field, and emanating from a dispositional framework, Carr (2001) presents a discussion on the notion of learning stories, maintaining that they are similar to narrative style observations, but with greater structure since they are organized around each of the five domains of

learning dispositions – taking an interest, being involved, persisting with difficulty or uncertainty, communicating with others, and taking responsibility. They are observations carried out in everyday settings which, over time, “provide a cumulative series of qualitative ‘snap-shots’ or written vignettes of individual children” (p. 96) displaying one or more of the identified domains of learning dispositions. A single, isolated learning story may be of limited value. However, a series of learning stories, over time, begin to build a picture of the processes – the dispositions – each child brings to the act of learning. Learning stories may begin with a focus on one domain of learning disposition. However, Carr's research suggests that other dispositions are quickly brought into focus through such observation, and that overlapping – the process in which related domains work together – occurs. The critical point to note here is that the learning story is process-oriented. Its focus is not the learning outcome(s) which may or may not have been achieved, but rather the dispositions, orientations, or habits of mind that the child brings to the act of learning. In other words, the learning story attempts to describe how the child is disposed to learn or to act in a particular way. By indicating what children can do via the processes or dispositions they bring to the act of learning, learning stories apply a credit rather than a deficit approach to assessment.

A second important (and practical) feature of learning stories is that they are not intended to be lengthy. They comprise short, 'snap-shot-like' descriptions of the observation. Key words and phrases are recorded which capture the kernel of the incident being observed. They may be accompanied (with the child's permission) by a photograph or sample of work which exemplifies the disposition(s) displayed in the observation. It is here that the notion of including and foregrounding the child's voice within the learning story becomes prevalent. Carr (2001) notes the possibility of including a series of photographs or drawings that might document a child's learning, and of having that child dictate a story about the learning that the teacher transcribes. In this way, children are included as "active participants" (p. 157) in the process, and their voices are foregrounded...or are they?

An imperceptible crack

Can an early years practitioner ever really be certain that the voice of the child they seek to hear is an indicator of expressed thoughts, ideas and opinions? What of voice that also occurs in silence – when a child does not audibly voice an opinion with words, but instead 'voices' displeasure, discomfort or disagreement with silence? And given that voice can be expressed through art, dance, music and the like, how can an early years practitioner be certain that her or his interpretation of such a voice, recorded in the form of a learning story, is authentic? Is it even possible to capture such an uncontainable voice?

In contesting the very notion of what might constitute voice, Mazzei (2009) questions what we are in fact listening for when we seek to give voice to those to whom we listen. It is possible, she maintains, to be so self-assured in the knowledge that we can know the voices of those to whom we seek to

listen, that we fail to notice voice beyond its recognizably constituted form. Such forms may include silence and other non-verbal cues – gesture, body language, dance and the like. When this happens, we as educators, effectually allow those unrecognizably constituted forms of voice to slip into an imperceptible crack – a fissure that represents the lost opportunities to hear and listen to what the child might really be saying. The crack is imperceptible because we do not notice it. We hear the voice that we expect to hear, and do not notice the silences, the gestures, and the many other forms of voice, all of which might be conveying a quite different story. When this happens, we, in effect, settle for the easy reading of a child's voice and thereby lose the possibility of engaging with those voices that speak beyond the limit of our knowing, and which might render a very different interpretation. If those unrecognizably constituted forms of voice are allowed to slip into an imperceptible crack, leaving us with the easy reading of a child's voice – the voice which we feel we can know, then does the composing of learning stories in fact censor and discipline the very voices that educators are hoping to foreground?

The act of interpretation can be fraught with dangers and pitfalls. In terms of learning stories, the danger specifically lies in the Practitioner – the teacher – speaking (through the interpretation of what has been observed about the child) for the Other, the child. In exploring the problem of speaking for others, Alcoff (2009) notes that the position of the speaker (the teacher) is both privileged and dangerous. It is privileged because the teacher is perceived as the authenticating presence that confers legitimacy and credibility in terms of what has been learnt and mastered by the student. At the same time it is dangerous because there exists

in this scenario an imbalance of power between the adult, the teacher, who is effectively speaking on behalf of the child, and the child whose voice may not have been accurately captured and interpreted. Even when the child has agency and has contributed to the learning story through pictures, photographs, or through a dictated account that the teacher has scribed, the learning story is nonetheless composed through the lens of the teacher. This may often render, albeit it unintentional, the censoring and disciplining of the voice of the child which the teacher is attempting to foreground. The learning story then becomes perspectival, that is, composed from the perspective of the teacher, and in terms of what the teacher understands the child to have learnt and mastered (or what the child has failed to learn and master). Again, the authentic voice of the child may have managed to slip into an imperceptible crack and the teacher has settled for the easy reading of the child's voice, perhaps oblivious to those voices that speak beyond the limit of knowing.

Interrogating our practice

As stated at the beginning of this article, I have promoted the use of learning stories in early years classrooms both for their ability to capture instances of student learning and for the possibility of foregrounding the voice of the child in the act of her or his learning. At the same time, there is a need to exercise caution and criticality. In offering a way forward, I would propose the following short list, adapted from Alcoff's (2009) work, as a means by which to interrogate our practice in using learning stories:



- Be aware of the imbalance of power that exists between the adult and the child, and look for ways to reduce this imbalance in our practice. For instance, when composing learning stories, be alert to the other forms of voice that might be presenting themselves to us, and try to take account of these in our compositions of learning stories.
- Speaking, or interpreting the voice of the other, should always carry accountability and responsibility towards the one to whom that voice belongs – the child. This could entail the teacher sharing the composed learning story with the child to see that what has been recorded, as far as possible, reflects accurately the voice of the child.
- There is a need to consider carefully the effects of the words and phrases composed in the learning stories we create. That is, we need to consider where the learning story goes once it is completed, and who will see it – the child, parents, families, educational reviewers, and the like. Equally, we need to consider the effects that the words and phrases we use might have upon those who view and read the learning stories we compose.

Interrogating our practice in these ways may help us to ensure that the learning stories we compose accurately reflect and foreground the voices of the children we teach, and that we might access those voices in danger of slipping into an imperceptible crack.

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Through my eyes

Jasmin Cresp

A parent's experience of autism spectrum disorder in a main stream primary school

My child

Imagine jumping every time your phone rings while your child is at school. Always expecting the worst news. Not that your child is hurt, but that they have hurt someone else. That is my reality as a parent of a child with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD).

Sam* was diagnosed with ASD at age six, although as his parents, we knew something was 'different' from much earlier. We sought help from paediatricians, general practitioners, kinder teachers, primary school teachers, family, friends, everyone. Yet we always received the same answer: "It's a phase; he'll grow out of it".

To those who knew him, it seemed like there were two Sams. There was the kind, caring, inquisitive little boy who loved animals, yet at other times, he was violent, cruel, and seemed to hate all of us. We now know that those outbursts were meltdowns; when the world just became too overwhelming for his brain to handle.

Diagnosis was a relief. Suddenly we could begin the journey to understanding the world our little boy lived in - to begin to understand the reasons for his behaviour. All of a sudden you realise your child is like anyone trying to exist in a foreign world. He simply didn't speak the language and, like a foreign visitor, he would say the wrong phrase at the wrong time. The world was too bright, too noisy and everything just felt too hard.

When your child is diagnosed with ASD, you have two choices: to either put your head in the sand and pretend that it isn't really happening, or to become his advocate, his rock, his interpreter in a world that doesn't make sense to him and where he doesn't make sense to anyone else. I chose to become an expert in what works and what doesn't work to help my child.

ASD and School Life

School life has been difficult for Sam. There are so many social situations to comprehend, new rules to follow, and new body language to interpret. Added to this, he was without his interpreter (me) to make sense of it all for him. When you throw in learning to read and write, maths, art, and everything else in between, school life became very hard for Sam. He had his big brother at the school, but after dealing with the ups and downs of having a brother with ASD all the time at home, school was like an escape for Sam's brother. He needed that respite to just be himself.

The school we chose is a wonderful small school where every teacher knows every child. It is a very calm and kind environment for neuro-typical students. Kinder had been a roller coaster of incident reports and phone calls to collect our son when he became "unreasonable". Over time, the kinder staff had discovered a technique that worked; give Sam small tasks that he could complete and he was much more settled. However, without a formal diagnosis it was hard for the school environment to take our concerns about Sam

seriously. All they saw was a child who was kind one minute and violent toward adults and children alike the next. Prep was a tumultuous year for all of us. There were phone calls to collect our "unreasonable" child, with us hanging our head in shame every time we had to walk into the schoolyard after another child had been hurt.

Finally, at the end of the prep year, Sam was diagnosed with ASD. It was like a whole new world had opened up; a world with possible avenues for help. The hard part was that it was our job as his parents to do the research and to find the help. All while still receiving phone calls to collect him from school early, or to come and calm him, and at weekends dealing with violent meltdown after violent meltdown.

After school each day Sam would be overwhelmed after trying to 'hold himself together' all day. More often than not, he would meltdown at the end of each day. This meant my husband or I would spend time (sometimes an hour) walking with Sam after school trying to calm him, without really knowing what to do, until it was safe to travel.

Getting support for Sam

To say that the early days at school were tough would be a massive understatement. We felt alone. We felt like we had the child that no one liked. We felt like we were doing something wrong. And we were constantly watching our other son suffer because of it.

It was not until Sam had been repeatedly suspended from school in Grade 1 that we finally received the help we needed.

Sam was provided funding under the Severe Behaviour category, which was used to fund an Integration Aide. We had previously tried to get funding for his ASD alone but his IQ was too high, his language too advanced and his needs not quite high enough. This was despite the fact that at age 7 he was still not reading or writing and was struggling with life in general.

What we needed in those early days after diagnosis was somewhere within the education department to turn; someone who could suggest different proactive strategies that we could try to help Sam, rather than reactively responding to each situation as it happened. With the funding came the opportunity to have Student Support Group meetings (SSGs), where we could work together with the school's Vice Principal, a district psychologist and Sam's teacher to compile strategies to support Sam. It finally gave us the opportunity to feel heard, to suggest things we had found that worked at home and to be listened to as a part of a team rather than 'just a parent'. A representative from Western Autistic also visited the school. They provided a wealth of information about strategies to prevent meltdowns rather than reacting to them. We have been really fortunate that Sam has always had the support of amazing teachers who have gone above and beyond to ensure Sam reaches his full potential.

What has worked for Sam?

While there are still the occasional issues at school, Sam has the support of a wonderful Integration Aide who helps him unpack each situation. She is his interpreter in a world that is still complex and challenging, but no longer feels impossible.

We have also had the support of the Royal Children's Hospital Mental Health team at the Travancore Campus. They have appointed a Case Manager who has attended SSGs as our advocate, and have made links between Sam's school and the Travancore School. The teachers from Travancore offer a wealth of knowledge and resources. Their support has been invaluable in ensuring Sam's continued success at school. Unfortunately the support they can offer is limited due to the amount of children requiring support and often we are discharged before an issue is completely resolved, but we know a referral is always possible and the knowledge that support is there when we need it can often be enough.

This is not to say that navigating the world of ASD within a government school hasn't been difficult. Sam's teachers have put in their own personal time and hours of extra planning time with often little or no support. They have tried many different strategies that we have drawn from different resources. The strategies currently being used in the classroom and at recess and lunch are not difficult to implement and are not new ideas. For example:

- Sam has a chill out space that he can choose to use when he feels anxious. It is filled with pictures of his dog and his favourite things. It includes a box of sensory toys, like stress balls.
- To help Sam visually identify when he is making the right choices he has a reward system that is an empty jar in which a pom pom is placed when Sam makes a good decision; whether that be to walk away from a situation, read by himself, or even just when he learns a new word. The reward is always negotiated with Sam at the beginning of each week. Like

every child, Sam likes to feel validated for doing the right things rather than punished for the wrong ones.

- We have a communication book that travels between school and home so we can record if he is having a particularly bad morning or if there is something that is causing him anxiety.
- He uses his school diary daily to remind himself of homework or other important events so they don't sneak up on him and cause unneeded stress.
- Sam's aide is working with him on work that the district speech pathologist has set and they do that a few times a week. This extra personalised learning has enabled his confidence to grow and anxiety about never being 'good enough' to lessen.
- Sam doesn't line up with the other children. He goes directly to the classroom before school, and at the end of recess and lunch. He also stays inside the classroom after the bell to allow the hustle and bustle and noise to settle before he goes out.
- The classroom has visual timetables and each of his books have a visual representation as well as the word so he can identify his books easily without having to ask for help thus improving his sense of independence.
- Sam's teacher always gives plenty of warning that an activity is going to end.
- His specialist teachers are now aware of these strategies and implement them as appropriate in their own classrooms. Consistency is key for a child with ASD in a world where there are already so many inconsistencies. Different teachers have different rules, different body language and different emotive language; these tiny differences confuse

Sam but can be coped with if everything else within the school is consistent.

- There is a Red card/Green card system that can be used if Sam becomes aggressive in any way. This enables the teacher in charge of the class to send one of the other children to the office to get additional help before the situation gets out of control and without the other children becoming anxious, thus fuelling the situation.
- Sam has an individual learning plan that has goals that are achievable for him. A sense of achievement is integral to Sam's success. We found that when he felt like he was never 'good enough' in comparison to his peers, his anxiety and behaviour would escalate. Everyone likes to feel that their effort is making a difference.
- He has a playground plan that previously included a card that he wore around his neck that he had hole punched by a yard duty teacher several times during playtime. That way he checked in with the yard duty teacher, told them where he was playing, who with, and could talk about any issues before they became problems.
- He has a visual card he can present to the staff room at recess or lunch if he needs his classroom teacher, even just

to talk.

- His playground plan also includes talking to his Integration Aide about what he would like to do during recess and lunch and making a plan before each playtime starts so that the time is broken into smaller more manageable parcels.

There are many more strategies that have been used over the years at different developmental stages. We have found that the most important thing is to regularly review the strategies in place so that they can be adjusted as Sam develops and learns new skills.

In an ideal world, there would be more funding for kids like Sam; kids who are at risk of being lost in the system because they didn't have a diagnosis. There would also be a lot more funding and support for teachers to access so they didn't have to use their own time to find the strategies that could help. Working with a child with ASD should not feel insurmountable if you have the support and understanding of the entire school community and if you remember that a child with ASD is like any neuro-typical child; they need to feel that their efforts are noticed and rewarded, feel proud of themselves, (not ashamed of things that are outside of their control) and feel included and liked by

adults and peers.

I must emphasise, that while things have improved a lot for Sam, and for our entire family, we still have a long way to go. Importantly, the school is becoming more inclusive. Parents, teachers and children alike know Sam and know how to help him to integrate within the school environment. That has led to a much happier school life for Sam.

I hope that for the next child with ASD and his parents who walk into Sam's school, the road is now a little easier.

Looking forward

To anyone who meets Sam today you would not believe that this is his story. He is an incredibly capable young man who navigates the world and its social complexities with incredible strength and determination. He is in Grade 4 now and can now read simple chapter books. He can write a story with almost correct spelling. He has friends who want to play with him and no longer fear getting hurt. He smiles. He is happy. Sam is a sixer at Scouts and is an exemplary role model to younger kids. He is kind and compassionate. He now has the potential to achieve anything. He will need help, but he can do it.

That said, I still jump whenever my phone rings between 9.00am and 3.20pm.

**Sam's real name has been changed to protect his identity.*

Jasmine Cresp lives in Melbourne and here provides an account of her personal experiences as a parent of a child with disability.



Having a voice

Richard Kant

My perspective and insight on having a 'voice' in my tertiary studies and aspects of this that I value

My Bachelor of Education [BEd] (Primary) studies commenced with Open University Australia (OUA) in 2013. Studying online was convenient, but there were several other aspects that I considered before embarking on, and during this journey. Before enrolling, and again during my first unit, I investigated whether the OUA online learning program was going to engage me or not. Secondly, I wanted to ensure that my 'voice' was going to be heard. I also looked for opportunities to tailor the course to suit my interests and needs and develop my self-direction skills.

It was important to me to investigate whether online learning was going to actively engage me in my studies. Research conducted by Scott (2005) states that course design, academic staff and support systems are significant factors influencing student 'voice' and are areas on which universities should focus student feedback. In my experience, these three aspects of online learning encouraged and supported me to be engaged, actively involved and enthusiastic.

Firstly, the design of the program was engaging as all 29 units were well sequenced and course direction was clearly articulated. Before enrolling into units, I was able to view the weekly course outline and assessment details. Having access to this information allowed me to select units that would balance my workload.

Secondly, the academic staff (tutors and unit coordinators) encouraged active involvement. They were easily accessible through online

discussion forums and email. Being able to get immediate feedback and advice encouraged me and fuelled my enthusiasm. I always felt that the academic staff were interested in my opinions and questions. In some units, discussion board participation was a requirement that contributed to assessment. I found this to be a rich and motivating learning experience as it allowed me to express my opinions about the content being studied in a less formal manner. Upon reflection, the accessibility, teaching skills and attitude of the staff are salutary. The effect on my progress was extremely positive; staff support generated enthusiasm and encouraged my best effort, which is something I value.

Thirdly, the support systems in place were important in retaining me as a student. The online discussion board facilitated networking and academic relationships. The online learning environment was user friendly and the learning resources were engaging, current and in no way contradictory to what was being taught in the units.

These three aspects contributed to my engagement, active involvement and enthusiasm, and ensured that I had a 'voice'; they promoted my learning and positively influenced my development as a pre-service teacher. Throughout my studies, the course design and academic staff facilitated my active participation.

Nelson (2014) stated that one of the key dimensions of student 'voice' and pedagogy is to allow students to be influential as decision makers with teachers.

In my experience as a student teacher, not once did I feel that I was a passive recipient of teacher education. The hierarchy of teacher and student roles always seemed fair and balanced to me, and this equitable partnership gave me the confidence to express my thoughts and ideas about every aspect of each unit. I recall in several units, academic staff accommodated assessment modifications to suit my interests and needs. For example, in one unit I was able to customise an integrated teaching program assessment to suit my musical interests. We were required to create a three week integrated program but I requested permission to design a 10 week program (30 lessons) to challenge myself and make the task authentic. The tutor acknowledged my reasoning and approved the request. This was one way in which I had influence in my education. I think this was possible because the course design, academic staff and support systems facilitated this customising.

Another way in which I was able to influence the learning experience and ensure that my 'voice' was heard was through online discussion board communication and participation.

The discussion board provided a space where I could receive feedback from academic staff and peers, collaborate, and share ideas, resources and experiences. This provided me with significant control of the online learning classroom. This also allowed me to tailor my course to suit my interests and needs, and even manage my own learning.

I strongly believe that the online learning environment requires and encourages learners to be self-directed. Candy (1991), states that self-direction covers four domains: personal autonomy, willingness, independence and learner-control. I found evidence in every unit that course designers had carefully considered ways to prepare students for self-directed learning.

The course outline and unit modules provided me with a framework that enabled me to create my own timetable of readings and weekly tasks that suited my lifestyle. This gave me control of my learning. Each module had a wide variety of resources and support systems that I could access to supplement my independent study. Then there was a place on the discussion board where I could post questions and observations of my studies. In each unit there

were also weekly tasks which I could discuss in this forum. This allowed me to test and evaluate my independent learning without having it formally assessed. Finally, unit assessments set foundations for self-directed learning while working to deadlines, for example, there were assessment tasks which required creating a portfolio and maintaining a journal.

I am grateful that self-directed learning options were considered by the course provider and that my input was valued by academic staff. I value these skills because I can transfer them to other situations and contexts.

The course design, capable academic staff and support systems provided in the online program allowed me to be actively involved in my learning and made it easier for me to have a 'voice' in my education. I was able to ensure that my 'voice' was heard through

forming balanced partnerships with academic staff and peers and through participation on the discussion board. Now as a third year BEd (Primary) pre-service teacher, I realise that the aspect of the course that I value most is the foundations established for self-directed learning. It is a skill that I will be able to readily apply during my future in the teaching profession and as part of my ongoing professional development.

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The golden age of social media

Caitlin O'Meara

Immediacy, Voice and Safety

As a young adult, my worldview has been shaped by the television programs I watch and have watched, programs whose scripts have their own concepts of both normalcy and the absurd. My parents grew up in the 70s, so my childhood television watching included all seven seasons of the iconic Brady Bunch. It was a way my Mother could relive her youth! As a result, I idolised Marcia Brady – her outfits, her preppy American lifestyle, and most importantly, the hours she spent talking on the phone to friends. Little did I know that this was a form of communication that was to become slightly outdated. When I reached my teenage years, my medium would become mobile phone-based texting rather than the analogue crawl

of my Mother's era. While almost four decades apart, Marcia and I are both products of the society and the times in which we live. As it stands, the perception of social media for teenagers is viewed by adults as an addictive and destructive force – detrimental to a teenager's socialization. This type of thinking is in some ways misguided and may very well be harmful.

The need to socialise is simply a basic human instinct. It is not a digitally-based 21st century construct, it has existed for millennia. It was Aristotle who said "man is by nature a social animal" and this has developed and manifested itself in different ways over time. It is in the teen years that humans develop their social skills more rapidly

than before, as they are more often than not placed in situations where they must find ways of connecting with others without the guiding hand of parents and caregivers. The teenage addiction to social media should not be seen as a poor reflection on young people as ultimately, it stems from an urgency to socialise – a historical notion that has existed for hundreds of years. It is not an addiction to technology but rather is an intense desire to join the bigger sphere of conversation. As someone who was born in 1999, I have been raised with this technology, and, particularly in my teenage years, social media. I think this is often forgotten in the hyperbole surrounding teenage social media use. Unlike our parents who have learnt and adapted to this

medium, we have been exposed to it since birth.

As we stand on the brink of adulthood, there arises a challenge between wanting to have a say and not yet having a voice. The denial of a voice is not readily accepted by young people. A most potent example of this was in the 70s, when student activists protesting against the Vietnam War, became household symbols of questioning. It was the era of flower power and the peace sign as symbols of *disestablishmentarianism*. This generation of young people are doing what every generation has done before; we are seeking to find this power in our own societies, and we are doing this through the means of social media.

To the current generation of young people, social media has provided a strong platform for voicing opinions in an open forum, equipping us with the tools to have direct contact with those in positions of power. It was former US President Bill Clinton who once mused that when he wanted to know what was going on, he would listen to young people's songs! Our voice is significant and should not be ignored. While this is the case, there can be little denying that the flip side of all of this is a growing sense of narcissism and banal self-focus.

While the benefits of social media are numerous, the potential for evil remains ever present. In an effort to understand the use of social media by the younger generation, the potential social media has to place young people in danger cannot be ignored. While arising almost four decades later, the Orwellian notion of panopticism is beginning to become a frightful reality for teenagers. The dangers associated with anonymity are creating a notion of presence that is destabilizing at its core. The ability to deceive, blackmail and exploit has not only left many teenagers vulnerable and insecure, it has provided those with a desire to harm with an eas-

ily accessible forum to do so. While teenagers are frequently warned about online risks, in a situation when you are unsure of a person's identity, it is easy for the naive to believe the persona presented by the stranger. We have all heard the horror stories about young people being caught in extremely dangerous circumstances after engaging in online conversations with someone whose sole aim was to exploit or entrap. Edward Snowden poignantly captured this in saying that "a child born today will grow up with no conception of privacy at all - they will never know what it means to have a private moment to themselves, an unrecorded, unanalysed thought." (Gioux, 2015). As the main users of this technological superstructure, teenagers are hopefully exposed to more benefits than costs. However, it is how we choose to manage social media that will ultimately determine how these benefits and costs are realised.

The harsh reality is that social media cannot be ignored by any generation. It enables connection across generations, allowing both information, and unfortunately disinformation, to disseminate quickly. It is entertaining, fun and at our finger tips. Individuals, businesses and government use it. It has become all-pervasive and ever-present. Under the current status quo, many adults stress the need for youth to 'disconnect' and avoid social media at all costs. How realistic is this request? It is our medium. To teenagers, social media is a habitual part of daily life. It is counterproductive to ask the youth to disconnect, when such connection is integral to effective participation in the world - a world that is digitised to its core. It is like asking other generations to stop reading newspapers or stop watching the news.

Bearing this in mind, we have to adapt to the times and regain power over social media. We, as teenagers, must engage in what is happening and know with what we are dealing. Once we have this understanding, we can enjoy what social media can provide and use it to our advantage and hopefully for good.

Caitlin O'Meara is a Year 12 student at Brisbane Girls Grammar School.

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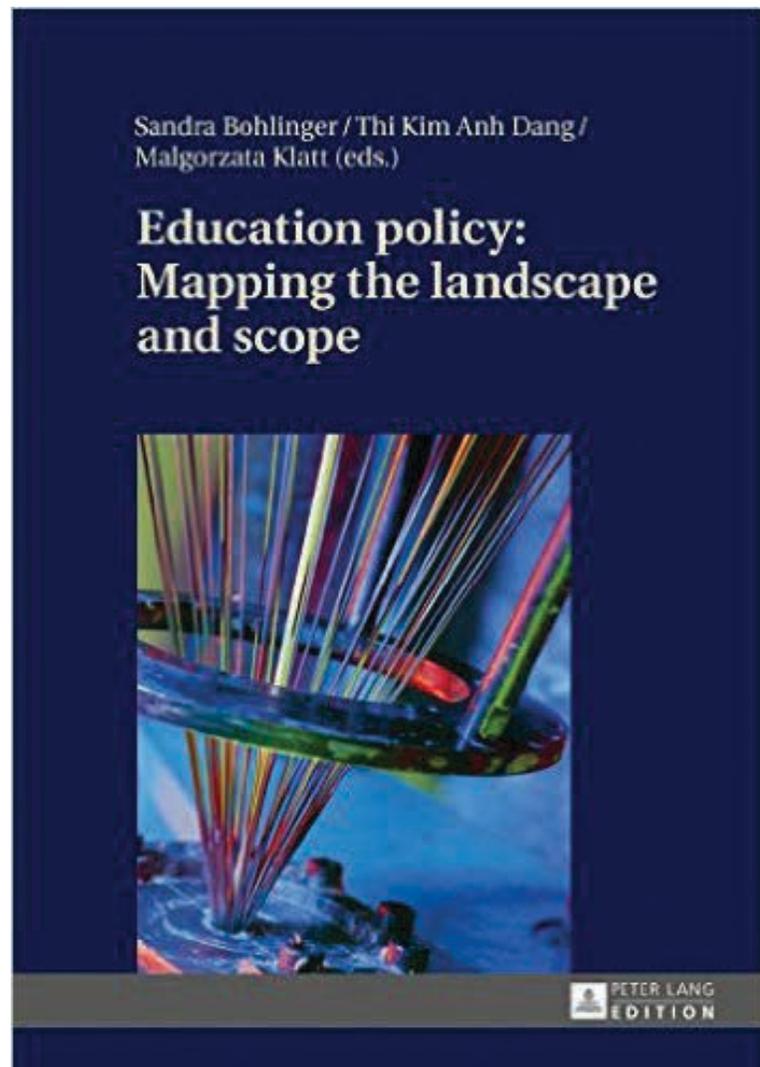


Education policy: Mapping the landscape and scope

Sandra Bohlinger, Thi Kim Anh Dang and Malgorzata Klatt (eds)
Peter Lang Edition 2016

*Reviewed by Michael Young
UCL Institute of Education*

This is a novel collection of empirical studies of the design, development and implementation of educational policy in a diverse range of fifteen countries. It is a welcome complement and alternative in a field that is over-supplied with generalised and over-polemical tracts. The authors tell us again and again about the failures of policies and how this is explained by the pervasive effects of neo-liberalism. It is not that this book presents a defence of neo-liberalism; what makes it welcome is the extent to which it reminds us that, as Bell and Stevenson, quoted in the introduction, explain, the “fuzzy, messy, and complex process of education policy making” takes place in specific contexts, however much of it is inevitably shaped by global forces.



Despite the wide range of international examples presented, the collection is illustrative rather than comprehensive. However, the structure of the book, with chapters categorised in different sections, and the detail of many of the case studies offer readers a framework of comparison not often found in collections of this type.

Sections 1 and 2 contrast policies for higher and vocational education. This is valuable for two reasons. Firstly, the two sectors are presented as interdependent and shaping each other. Secondly, instead of being limited to the more frequently researched countries such as UK, France, Germany and USA, the chapters focus on Australia, (where two of the editors are based). Two very different approaches to higher education reform in Vietnam and two European countries - Spain and

Denmark - that are less frequently discussed in the Anglophone literature, are also presented.

Section 3 addresses the familiar debate about the limitations of policy borrowing and the importance of policy learning. However in the countries studied, the policy borrowing/policy learning distinction is applied to previously Soviet-dominated countries in Europe and Asia.

The four papers in section 4 move away from a sectoral approach to a more system-wide analysis. The first three chapters explore the role, and in most cases, the failure of recent attempts to use the reform of qualifications as a strategy to bridge the gap between the workplace demands made by employers and the skills that young people acquire at school or college.

The section concludes with a chapter by George Psacharopoulos reflecting on the role of economics of education.

This book is clearly designed for the university library and international agency market rather than the individual policy maker, lecturer or post graduate student unless he/she is a specialist. It offers a valuable resource to lecturers and post graduate students in educational policy studies and comparative education and is also relevant to those studying a specific sector. For those studying the design and implementation of policies in vocational or higher education contexts, it will alert them to the extent to which the two sectors are inter-related and cannot be considered in isolation from each other.

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