

Professional Educator

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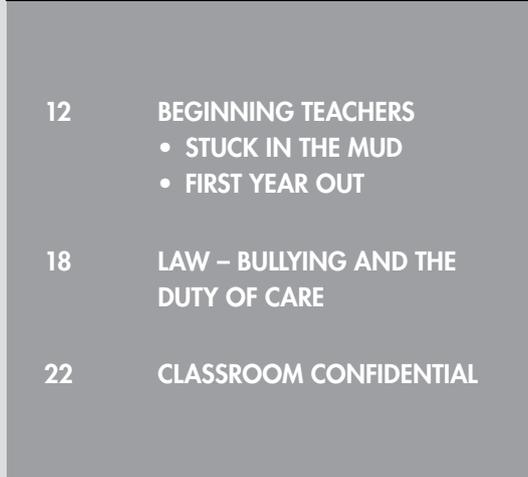
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EDITORIAL

'National schools policy has been piecemeal, amateurish, lazy even.' So said Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Education Julia Gillard in her Fraser Lecture in May. We need to pursue both excellence and equity, she said. To improve excellence and equity, Gillard wants the Council of Australian Governments to improve teacher quality and to develop more flexible ways to tackle student disadvantage. And funding? Gillard wants a new funding agreement that promotes collaboration.

Inside insight

TOP OF THE CLASS

Dorothy Hoddinott, principal at Sydney's Holroyd High School, interviewed in *Professional Educator* 5(3), was appointed an Officer of the Order of Australia in June. 'For service to education and the teaching profession, particularly through the Australian Joint Council of Professional Teaching Associations and through the professional development of teachers of English as a second language, and to the community through the support of immigrant and refugee students.' As she put it in that interview, 'I'm brought back to earth every day. I'll leave this interview to have an interview with a refugee boy coming back from suspension in an accountability conference based on the principle of restorative justice. Kids bring you back to earth all the time to the reality of the everyday world. At Holroyd High School we're working with students who in some cases are so damaged by their past experience that we fail to help them, but our aim is not to fail.'

YOU SAY YOU WANT A REVOLUTION

Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Education Julia Gillard announced in June that the Digital Education Revolution was finally underway, with 896 secondary schools across Australia to receive \$116 million in funding from the National Secondary School Computer Fund for 116,820 new computers. The schools were identified as being most in need because they had a computer-to-student ratio of 1:8 or worse. The funding from the first round aims to bring that ratio up to one computer for every eight students. So much for ratios. Now for the software. What was really neat, if you went to the Australian Labor Party website where Gillard's announcement was posted, was that when you clicked 'here' for details, the only detail you got was 'The file is damaged and could not be repaired.'

BULLYING RESEARCH

According to a report by the Australian Childhood Foundation, called *Children's Sense of Safety* that 57 per cent of children worry about teasing, 52 per cent worry about bullying, and 54 per cent

worry about not fitting in, but identify teachers as the second most important source of support, after family.

INTELLIGENT CURRICULUM DESIGN?

God bless America. Where else would you find yet another battle in the war between evolution and intelligent design? The conflict now playing out on a science textbook battlefield in Texas is over two words and, no, they're not 'intelligent design,' they're 'strengths' and 'weaknesses.' Never mind that the teaching of 'intelligent design' was prohibited in Pennsylvania by a federal judge in 2005. All you have to do is stop using the words. The 'strengths and weaknesses' terminology made its way into the curriculum standards in Texas, according to the *New York Times's* Laura Beil, to appease creationists when the State Board of Education made the teaching of evolution mandatory in the late 1980s. 'Intelligent design' has evolved into 'strengths and weaknesses' as the proponents of creationism develop new strategies to replace those that don't survive in court. It's a neat form of natural selection in action. Does the content of science textbooks in Texas really matter? Well, yes. Texas is one of the three biggest buyers of textbooks in the US, and publishers want textbooks that can be used across states in every classroom, so if Texas wants textbooks on the 'strengths and weaknesses' of evolution, chances are other states will get them, too. The question, of course, is what's a weakness? According to Science coordinator for the Lewisville Independent School District in North Texas Kevin Fisher, who is a member of a committee of science educators appointed to review the Texas curriculum, 'When you consider evolution, there are certainly questions that have yet to be answered, but a question that has yet to be answered is certainly different from an alleged weakness.' State Board of Education chair, and creationist, Don McLeroy, however, believes the Earth is thousands of years old, not 4.5 billion. 'I believe a lot of incredible things,' he told Beil. Maybe the moon really is made of apple pie, the sun is made of cheddar cheese and the stars are made of lemon drops.



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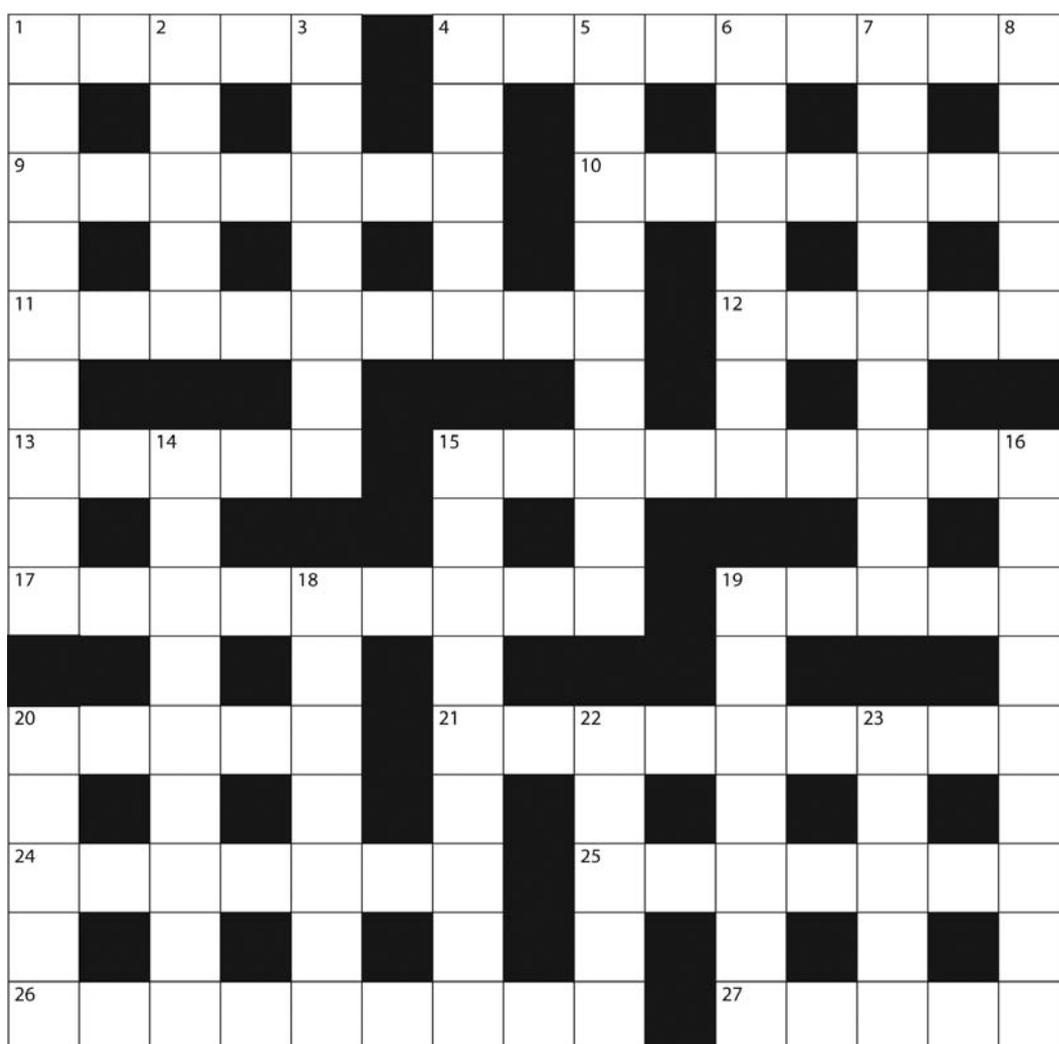
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- Performance management is only one aspect of a successful school community.



Across

- 1 & 27 Teaching aid confuses a bride who takes tea (5,5)
- 4 A paragraph ends, or is a manuscript of sayings (9)
- 9 Lettuce in; one's not assessed round island capital (7)
- 10 Plan for weight (7)
- 11 Spreading fear about duck and sheep (9)
- 12 Giant fought it, and contained it (5)
- 13 Animal where e-mail comes from? (5)
- 15 Rush to tip out academic post (9)
- 17 Requisition this half, and distribute (4,5)
- 19 Sound like two of this kitchen implement (5)
- 20 Keep hitting the stick (5)
- 21 An empty church, or fellow TV presenter (9)
- 24 In favour of the incomplete (7)
- 25 Doctor in reach; mouldering cheese (7)
- 26 Industry's odd deed about desecrated ceiling (9)
- 27 See 1 across

Down

- 1 Primary producer destroyed new spires (9)
- 2 Ancient civilization like a finished film (5)
- 3 Followed direction in, and made certain (7)
- 4 Clock start of a lap, and rewind meter (5)
- 5 Bound to cancel schoolyard diversion (9)
- 6 Bounder's better half acts as 4 down (7)
- 7 Device used by artists and paramedics (9)
- 8 I'm controlled by my heir a classroom authority (5)
- 14 Laura: tune arranged, but not spoiled (2,7)
- 15 Cover 8 in train crash (9)
- 16 Accompanied funeral centre in split (9)
- 18 Sport seen round country properties (7)
- 19 Singular of 4 across to confirm rhythm 'n' blues (7)
- 20 One of us turns number over in the cot (5)
- 22 Treasure trove about a guerilla (5)
- 23 Greek woman in some deadly play (5)

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Video games and addiction



Everyone knows someone who is addicted to video games – although have you noticed it's always someone else? Gamers who have lost relationships and jobs due to excessive play populate internet forums. Governments have even set curfews and commissioned research into the damaging effects of video gaming.

Video game addiction was first investigated in the 1980s after researchers became concerned over reports of arcade gamers playing to excess and engaging in antisocial behaviours similar to pathological gamblers, including stealing to fund play. The basic premise is that video game play can sometimes become excessive and players become dependent. Video game addiction can mimic characteristics of other addictions, primarily pathological gambling, and can cause significant disturbances with social, family and work life.

Typically, most studies investigating video game addiction have superimposed pathological gambling models onto video gaming. Video game addiction scales have been developed by taking the clinical diagnostic criteria for pathological gambling and literally replacing 'gambling' with

'video game playing.' Researchers have then used responses to questions based on these criteria to look for similarities, and to identify relationships with variables of interest such as personality characteristics, motivations of play and negative consequences.

Researchers have guessed that those with social difficulties may be attracted to the agency provided via video games, and that video games may stunt the social development of children and adolescents who play them. Back in 1984, Gary Selnow called this 'electronic friend theory' in 'Playing video games: The electronic friend.' Selnow investigated whether video gaming may be replacing socialisation in some gamers. In addition to the agency provided by acquiring skill and developing a character in the game, many modern games also offer the allure of an online community which can facilitate in-game status and communication, free of all the fear provoking cues of face-to-face social contact for those who are socially anxious. Researchers have hypothesised that individuals attracted to playing video games excessively will exhibit social distress or difficulty, and that playing video games

There's a clear link between video games, addiction and social dysfunction, right? Wrong, says **Dan Loton**.

excessively may lead to social deficiencies and even withdrawal.

Clinical case studies have provided some evidence of this, and describe excessive game players as having low self-esteem, depression, social difficulties and feelings of inadequacy.

Well, I've been playing video games for most of my life, as have many of my friends and people my age, and because those conclusions don't seem to fit well, I decided to design a study to investigate the relationships between problem game playing, self-esteem and social skills.

To measure social capacity I used the Social Skills Inventory (SSI). The SSI is made up of six sub-scales, spanning both the emotional or non-verbal and social or verbal communication domains, with each domain containing expressivity or sending skills, sensitivity or decoding or receiving skills and control or appropriateness. It's a varied and detailed scale, and is often used for recruitment or promotion as it's been shown to predict leadership potential and emotional intelligence. Additionally, the

scale has accurately measured social capacity in past studies, including predicting friendship network size and social support. Results from the scale match laboratory tests of emotional recognition, psychopathology and panel ratings of role playing and social skills in observed interactions.

The scale used to measure problem play was based on modified pathological gambling and substance abuse criteria from the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*. The Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale, detailed by Morris Rosenberg in *Society and the Adolescent Self-image*, is commonly used and well validated and was employed to assess a measure of global self-esteem.

Conducting the research online was the most efficient way to target a sample of heavy gamers: they're familiar with the technology, have a strong internet presence and, if there is a subset of socially withdrawn gamers with severe social difficulties, this is most likely where I'd find them.

I advertised the study on a variety of gaming forums, and the response rate was surprisingly large – 621 adults, 560 of them males, mostly from Australia and America. The mean age of the sample was 23, and the mean hours per week of game play was also 23.

I used a multiple regression, to predict problematic play scores with all SSI subscales and the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale. Contrary to expectations, only a tiny relationship emerged, indicating social skills and self-esteem explained less than five per cent of problem-play scores. Problem gamers displayed a slightly elevated level of social sensitivity, and slightly lower self-esteem. Social sensitivity represents an awareness of social norms, and higher scores on this scale have been related to social anxiety in other studies. Nonetheless, the magnitude of the prediction was miniscule – if social difficulties were behind problem gaming much stronger relationships would be expected. I conducted further analyses to unearth this socially deficient subset of gamers, to no avail.

I'd expected to find gamers had dramatically lower self-esteem and social skills on many domains. Instead, an analysis of the relationships between problem play and social skills indicated they were barely related at all.

If hardcore gamers were socially deficient or isolated, then striking relationships between problem-play scores and a well-established measure of social skills should have emerged. Instead, this absence of relationships indicates that hardcore gamers are no less socially capable than those with less problematic play, and suggests that social variables only play a small role in excessive or dependent video game playing.

Of course, the research has weaknesses: the sample was self-selected, and despite the sample containing gamers whose play represented addiction and high play time per week, those gamers who are the most dependant are likely to decline an online survey that takes away 15 minutes of good gaming time. Additionally, the problem-play scale draws heavily from pathological gambling.

Even so, the lack of relationships found in this study is at odds with other contemporary research that highlights the importance of behavioural self-regulation, or lack thereof, in problem play. My study suggests we need to con-

My study suggests we need to consider whether researchers are merely measuring video game preoccupation, not an actual addiction.

sider whether researchers are merely measuring video game preoccupation, not an actual addiction.

Considering the stigma that can come with a psychopathological diagnosis, researchers and clinicians must be cautious not to read too much into the qualities of addiction being present in behaviours. These qualities are likely to be found in almost all activities people find compelling, and therein lies a major challenge for researchers. They will have to establish where the line should be drawn that delineates an exciting and compelling activity – playing sport, say, or collecting stamps – from an addiction. This distinction should hinge largely on the resulting negative consequences, and be informed by what the individual feels and wants.

The results of this research, taken together with other studies that have found only small relationships or no relationships between excessive gaming and deleterious variables, indicate

that even at the most extreme end video gaming is an adaptive behaviour for most people.

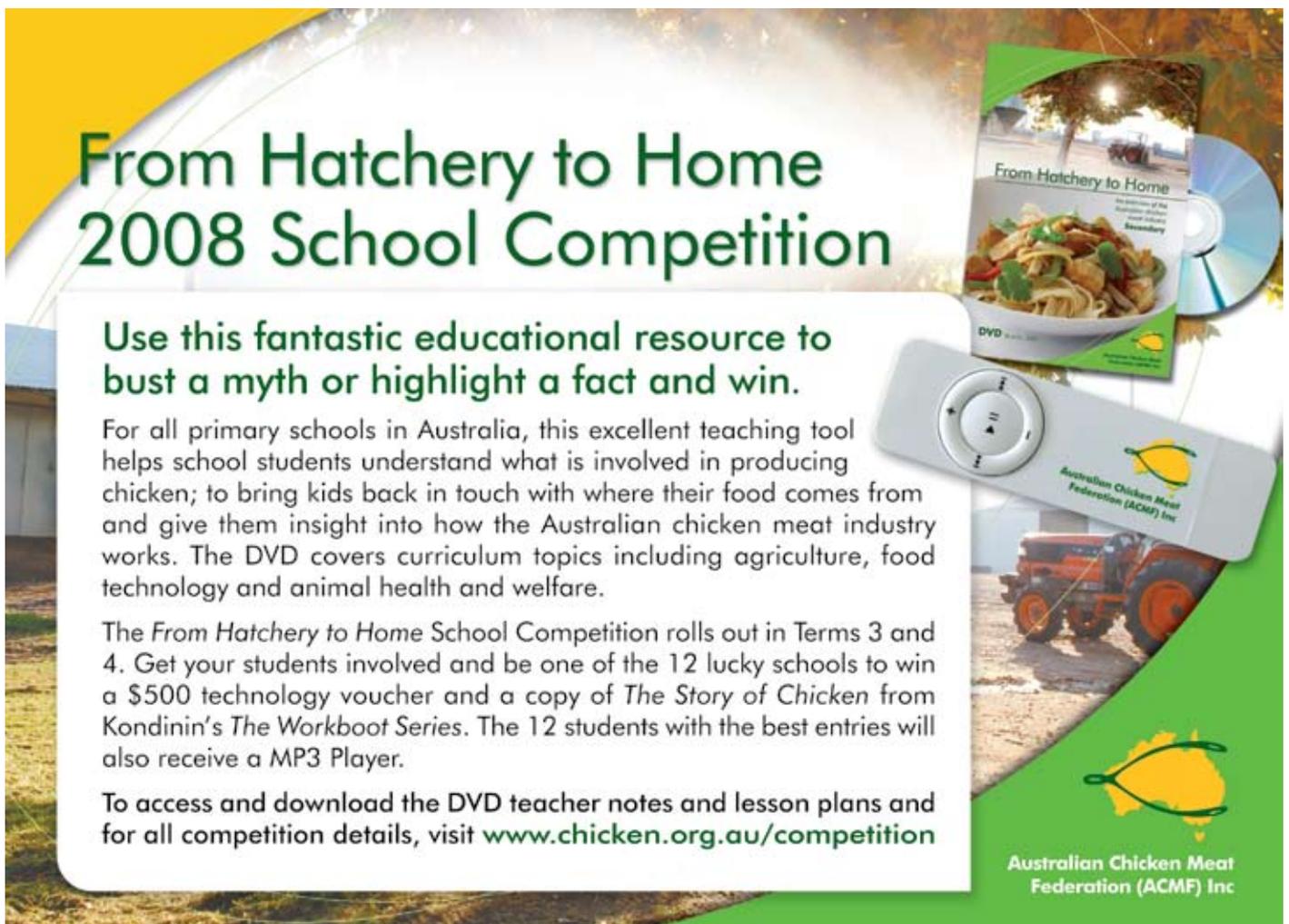
Dan Loton is an Ethics Officer at Victoria University where he completed his Bachelor of Psychology (Honours) in 2007.

LINKS: www.computergameresearch.com

Photo by Juergen Jester courtesy of stock.xchng

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Summer schools

The bad news? They're history

Teachers of Australian History face a number of problems, and they're not all in the classroom, as History Summer School participant, **Julian Jefferys**, explains.

'I've never ever been treated this well in all my 25 years as a teacher,' a colleague says. 'It makes me feel like a professional.' We're in the foyer of a Canberra hotel on the first day of the History Summer School, held for the first and last time back in January this year.

I was lucky enough to join 100 colleagues from every state and territory and every school system for this all-expenses paid conference, funded by the previous Commonwealth government and hosted by the Australian National University in conjunction with many of the cultural institutions of Canberra and the History Teachers' Association of Victoria.

The History Summer School program enabled participants to engage with many of the new

directions and theories influencing History teaching in Australia, and Australian History in particular. We addressed many striking issues raised in a forum that enabled us to voice our thoughts and concerns about the status quo and future direction of Australian History teaching.

It was, for me, a unique experience and, as my hotel colleague pointed out, a unique professional experience.

At the heart of the conference lay the complex nature of the problems that face classroom teachers as they try to make the teaching of Australian History interesting and engaging.

Let me explore three of these.

The first problem is, apparently, that History teachers are saddled with an inadequate curricu-

lum which they are unable to interpret to make Australian History live.

Recently, there has been a massive emphasis placed on teachers to develop curriculum. Teachers now find themselves in the unenviable position of being either constrained by an over-prescriptive curriculum or confused by nebulous values statements that they must somehow adhere to.

Much of the effort to develop curriculum has focused on making material more engaging and meaningful for students, particularly in the middle years of schooling. Much of this effort is in vain, however, when it has little effect on what happens in the classroom.

Many so-called curriculum arguments are largely irrelevant when you look at what actually happens in the classroom. The debate raging over whether a narrative approach or a thematic approach to Australian History should be used to construct curriculum is a good example.

In the lead up to last year's federal election, the narrative approach to teaching Australian history through the examination of landmark people and events became a hot topic. The previous Prime Minister, John Howard, had decided views on curriculum regarding Australian History.

Speaking to the National Press Club in the Great Hall of Parliament House, Canberra, in 2006 he said Australian History 'is taught without any sense of structured narrative, replaced by

a fragmented stew of "themes" and "issues," that fails to offer a coherent and meaningful version of the Australian story.

'The time has... come,' the previous PM said, 'for root and branch renewal of the teaching of Australian history in our schools, both in terms of the numbers learning and the way it is taught.'

The mistake that John Howard and others make, however, is that they polarise Australian History as though it can only be taught using either a thematic approach or a narrative approach.

Just suppose, for a minute, that the previous PM had been an enthusiastic supporter of a thematic approach to Australian History. Before we teachers dished up this stew, it would be necessary to present our students with a menu that provided a chronology of important dates and key personalities as a way to identify relevant themes and issues.

Similarly, if we were forced to teach a narrative approach that comprised lists of landmark people and events, we teachers would necessarily tease out themes and issues to make those people and events meaningful.

Curriculum documents, after all, are the starting point, rather than the finite sum of any course or unit. Good teachers take any curriculum and explore it to its maximum potential. One way of achieving this is through meaningful and engaging professional development such as we experienced at the History Summer School.



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The second problem is that Australian History and other forms of History are diminished when they are subsumed within the broader subject, Studies of Society and the Environment, (SOSE) or Human Society and its Environment (HSIE).

History is increasingly being taught within a broader study of the Humanities or Social Science. Admittedly, participants at the History Summer School were not exactly a random sample, yet our discussion of this issue revealed, overwhelmingly, that very few schools offer stand-alone History courses or operate with stand-alone History faculties. Add to this the number of teachers teaching Australian History and History in general who are not specialist History teachers and have had no formal tertiary education in History at all and we do have a problem.

Could there be a link between these two trends?

It appears as if there's a growing belief in all states and across independent, Catholic and state school systems that 'anyone' can teach a SOSE or HSIE class, presumably because we all live in a society, and maybe a growing belief that 'anyone' can even teach a History class, presumably because we've all lived in a society for some historical period – and hopefully can remember things from the old days.

This is a worrying trend since it's difficult for anyone without formal training in historical skills and content knowledge to make Australian History, or any History, interesting and engaging or to appropriately locate it in a broader and global historical framework.

Interestingly enough, universities are now following the lead into the murky world of SOSE or HSIE. In an effort to remain relevant, education degrees are increasingly being developed around a generalist approach to the teaching of the Social Sciences. As a result, graduate teachers come into schools as qualified generalists, reinforcing the belief – or perhaps making necessary the belief – that anyone can teach a SOSE or HSIE class, or even a History class.

The third problem is, apparently, that Australian History teachers have lost their passion for teaching the subject.

This, I have to say, is a furphy – a term, incidentally, that arose among Australian soldiers overseas during World War 1 since they gathered

around furchies, or water-carts, which became sites for gossip and rumour.*

The passion that teachers display for the teaching of Australian History was perhaps the most positive and reassuring thing I experienced at the History Summer School in Canberra. The excitement was electric as teachers listened to and engaged with some of the best thinkers on Australian History. Each time we had a break, discussions flowed about how new ideas might be worked into our classes.

It's impossible to imagine how the previous PM could've thought Australian History is taught using a thematic rather than a narrative approach. It's simply not the case that teachers of Australian History form a monolithic block. The opinions expressed by speakers at the History Summer School were hotly contested and the views of those at the coalface are as varied as the students whom they teach.

The Commonwealth government's Budget papers indicate the Summer Schools for Teachers program, slated to run through to 2011, is to be scrapped. Funding went from \$25,436,000 for 2007-08 to zip for 2008-09 according to Commonwealth Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations Budget statements.

That's a shame. The Summer Schools for Teachers program may have had its failings, but it provided teachers like me the opportunity, time and space to engage with colleagues from all school systems around Australia in order to learn and share – not to mention the sense that our teaching professionalism is valued.

Julian Jefferys is a teacher of History at Wesley College, Melbourne, and the assistant head of learning for the Humanities department.

Photo by Angel Norris courtesy of stock.xchng

** While on the historical origin of words for rumour or gossip, did you know that the equivalent American term for a furphy – scuttlebutt – originated in a similar a fashion, among sailors? A scuttlebutt was the word for the water butt or bucket kept on a ship's deck for drinking from. If you thought the water cooler was the original location of the rumour mill, you're not a History teacher.*

Seek

Stuck in the mud

How can we get professional experience moving again?



The school-based professional experience component of teacher education in Australia is stuck in the mud, says **Norman McCulla**, but there are ways to unstick it.

If you're familiar with the children's game 'Stuck in the mud,' you'll know it's a game played in a defined area in which one or two children chase the others. Those caught stand still until someone else that is free can crawl through their legs without being caught to unstick them again. The goal for the chasers is to have everyone stuck in the mud, progressively working on this until the game comes to a standstill, unless of course a superhero emerges to free a number of children to get things moving again. Great, but what has 'Stuck in the mud' got to do with the school-based professional experience component of teacher education in Australia?

Professional experience – that is, the school-based observations, practicum and internships that take place in teacher education programs – has reached a crisis point. Using 'Stuck in the mud' as a metaphor, we can begin to see why.

HOW THE GAME IS BEING PLAYED

The simple fact of the matter is that professional experience placements in schools are becoming harder and harder to find.

Ideally the process of placing student teachers in schools for professional experience should be free-flowing with the inhibitors of these placements – the 'chasers' – rendered ineffectual. The problem is that the opposite is occurring: the movement is slowing and showing signs that, ultimately, it may come to a halt. This is how the game is being played at present. Professional experience is virtually stuck in the mud at a time when recognition of the importance of professional experience in connecting practice with theory has never been more pronounced. It's stuck in the mud at a time when there are calls to both increase the quantity of professional experience as well as its quality. It's stuck in the mud at a time when the progression from teacher education to practising professional is recognised as one of the two key career transitions – the other being progression to school leadership. It's stuck in the mud at a time when employing authorities are concerned about effective recruitment, induction, retention and succession; and when universities are looking at more effective ways of building their research agendas through supporting the communities they serve.



The administration of professional experience is governed by Commonwealth funding through an industrial award for teachers that has remained virtually unchanged since the early 1990s. The award sets the daily rate for 'practicum supervision.' The relationship is one in which the Commonwealth funds universities for the payment of teachers, and universities administer practicum funds through an office responsible for professional experience placements. This arrangement also draws on university resources in terms of both funding and staff time.

The one-to-one relationship between the university's professional experience staff and the individual teacher is such that, historically, it has tended to bypass employing authorities. Employing authorities as a consequence generally have no direct involvement, or interest, in determining which student teachers go to which schools and who mentors them while they are there. There are two related issues on which to focus attention: the arrangement of school-based placements and the quality of the placement experience itself.

The placement process for student teachers is generally an ad hoc one relying more on favour and goodwill between professional experience coordinators, academic staff and individual teachers than systematic planning and coordination. It places onerous and time-consuming demands on both school and university staff. Multiple telephone calls to the same school are made by different universities, or even by different academics in the same university, to secure placements. Multiple calls are often made to a number of schools by the same university to secure a single placement. There's competition between universities to secure school placements in a diminishing pool of schools. An ageing teaching profession, increasing workloads of teachers, a reported reluctance among teachers to supervise and mentor new teachers, and inadequate payment are all cited as reasons why it has become increasingly difficult to place student teachers in schools. School-university partnerships do form but are often not sustainable because of staff mobility.

From the schools' perspective, there's considerable disparity between those schools that are willing to make a contribution to initial teacher education and those that are not. Some impose conditions on participation; others claim that parents are non-supportive given the school's 'high academic expectations' or fees. Some regularly accept numbers of student teachers. Without school placements, student teachers cannot satisfy the requirements of their teacher education programs. It is, potentially, a litigious situation.

The motives of teachers offering to mentor and supervise student teachers also vary greatly. They include altruism and commitment to beginning teacher development; relief from face-to-face teaching for professional development and other school initiatives; or a desire to supplement personal income, albeit marginally. Under the *Australian Higher Education Practice Teaching Supervision Award 1990*, teachers have been paid \$21.20 per method per day – a rate that has been virtually unchanged since the time of the award – almost half of which goes back to the Commonwealth anyway in personal taxation. It's hardly a monarch's ransom and, at best, a symbolic gesture for what is seen industrially to be an additional workload.

If the motives for teachers accepting placements vary, it follows that the quality of those placements will also vary.

The fundamental problem in all of this is that the one-to-one relationship between participating teacher and university bypasses the formal structures in schooling to a point where the work being done by established teachers to support beginning teachers is not recognised to any great extent by the employing authorities. That's ironic, given that the real beneficiaries of teacher education programs are the employing authorities themselves in terms of high-quality recruitment, seamless induction, improved retention and effective succession planning.

There are of course exceptions to the rule where there are examples of effective partnerships between student teacher, mentor, school and university. If we've learnt nothing else from the voluminous professional literature in the area it's that these examples are indeed patchy rather than widespread. They exist despite the system rather than as an outcome of it. Dr Paul Brock titled his review of 21 national and New South Wales reports on teacher education in the period 1980-1999 as *Two decades of 'sound and fury' but what's changed?* In short, the system is still not working a decade later and tinkering at its edges won't save the day.

HOW MIGHT THE GAME BE PLAYED?

Superheroes, by popular definition, have the capacity to perform acts of derring-do in the public interest. Superheroes usually start a chain of events from which good ultimately prevails. Who then might be the superheroes that help start a chain of events that gets professional experience moving again?

1. Employing authorities

Employing authorities have been on the bench, observing the game. Consider what might happen if they joined in the game to a point where they, rather than universities, would be responsible for professional experience placements. Think of the flow-on effects. For a start, it would soon be abundantly clear as to who the leaders are in the field, both within schools and in the structures supporting schools.

Imagine the difference it would make if the placement of student teachers was an unequivocal requirement of all schools, with related benefits and support. Imagine the difference if universities simply advised employing authorities of the number of students requiring placements with the employing authorities advising the universities of the placement details in return. It seems logical

that employing authorities might accept a pro-rata share of placements commensurate with their market share of student enrolments.

Here, economies of scale do matter. State and territory coordinating groups using an effective and interactive schools database could get things moving effectively. By drawing on current good practice in the use of databases for this purpose, a prototype could soon be developed.

If it's as simple as that, why hasn't it happened already? Part of the answer is in the 'R' word – resources. State government departments in particular, as the major employers, have been reluctant to take on such roles given that the funding for the placement of student teachers is held to be a responsibility of universities given the current arrangements. Why resource something that others have the responsibility to do?

2. Teachers and schools

Teachers tend to agree in principle that supporting the professional growth of student teachers is a professional responsibility. It's the practicalities of doing this that get in the way, so what kind of practical reward and recognition structures should be put in place for teachers making a personal commitment to the area?

The idea of additional allowances appears not to fit well with current views about teacher professionalism. That said, in performance-related cultures, teachers do need to be recognised and rewarded for what they do in this area in terms of job satisfaction and career path progression. The question is one of how.

Early career teachers – those that have been teaching for four or more years who are ready to move to the next stages of professional growth but who still remember what it's like to begin as a teacher – often make excellent mentors, given appropriate support. What better way to demonstrate more accomplished teaching skills and a capacity for staff development and school leadership than by mentoring and coordinating programs for new teachers? What better way to gain postgraduate qualifications as you do so?

3. Teacher accreditation and registration bodies

Also watching from the sidelines are the various teacher accreditation and registration bodies across the country responsible for defining professional teaching standards and accrediting or registering teachers. Such bodies develop requirements

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for teachers to demonstrate professional competence and higher order professional standards of accomplishment and leadership. We should expect to see mentoring new teachers and coordinating whole-school pre-service and induction programs as clearly defined pathways for demonstrating professional standards at all levels. Given such a requirement, teachers could not be denied access to these pathways by any school leader denying student teachers access to the school.

4. Universities

Universities have a prime role in assuring the quality of their graduates. It follows that they also have a prime role to play in association with employing authorities in the professional development of teachers mentoring and supervising student teachers. No-cost or low-cost professional development options provided by universities in association with employing authorities that articulate with postgraduate study and research are one means of viable support. Once again, good practice is already there, but it's patchy.

Significantly, student teachers commonly ask for more time in schools in their teacher education programs. When university funding formulae tie funding to semester-long units, universities understandably lean towards minimum requirements for in-school experience for students rather than determining what might be in the best interests for students, schools and the teaching profession.

Universities, therefore, have some in-house work to do to ensure that professional experience, rather than being cramped for administrative convenience into units on the periphery of teacher education programs, is a key driving force across the entirety of the teacher education program.

Those who fund research across universities also have work to do as the area is not prominent in the national research agenda.

IS THERE A SUPERHERO IN THE HOUSE?

Professional experience is stuck in the mud because it's beyond the preserve of a single teacher, school, university or employing authority to solve the current problems. A new way of doing things is essential that brings all of the parts into a far better alignment than that which exists at present. Who resources what is less important than getting a new model right in the first instance. Form and funding should follow function.

Any new alignment of relationships can only be driven at the most senior policy level by the joint meetings of Commonwealth and state and territory Ministers for Education. Whatever solution is arrived at, a little give and take will be necessary on all sides if the professional experience component of teacher education is to be brought into the kind of alignment necessary to secure its future.

The superheroes are there. They just haven't run onto the playing field as yet.

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A black and white photograph showing the silhouette of a person walking a tightrope. The person is in the center, arms outstretched for balance. The tightrope is supported by two vertical poles. The background is a dramatic, cloudy sky. The overall mood is one of balance and challenge.

First year out

Catherine Brown explains the attractions of a job that is different every day.

Like most teachers in their first year out, I began my first year of teaching last year with a mixture of apprehension and excitement. The thought of being in front of a class, without the safety net of a master teacher was frightening. The thought of being responsible for the learning of all those students was both frightening and invigorating. The thought of finally beginning what I had spent so long studying towards was extremely exciting.

I had the security, however, of beginning my career at Rooty Hill High School in Sydney's west. I was in the unique position of having done 50 days of practical teaching at Rooty Hill High the year before, and I knew that this was a school with a head teacher mentor, a successful induction program, and a steady flow of new and beginning

teachers. I knew much of the culture of the school, and some of the students in my classes.

I've wanted to teach for as long as I can remember. I loved school, particularly the humanities subjects, but I was also a very shy person at school, and at the end of my Higher School Certificate, I backed away from teaching.

At the time, having decided I wouldn't be able to handle the students or the stress, I enrolled in a Bachelor of Arts (Communications), and focussed my studies on English and writing. While I was at university, though, I discovered that I wasn't such a shy person after all. I loved giving presentations and began to think that maybe teaching wasn't a ridiculous dream. After I finished my degree, I enrolled in a Graduate Diploma of Education program.

What originally drew me to the profession, and still helps me get out of bed each morning, was the prospect of a job that will be different every day. Yes, there are bad times, but the good times – watching a student enjoying a text, seeing a student's marks improving, seeing my students enjoying being in the classroom – make everything worth it. Teaching is full of rewarding experiences. I really don't think there is any job quite like it.

I love the intellectual stimulation that it brings, not only in the classroom, but also within the collegial environment. I've never regretted my choice of career. Having said that, however, I know a lot of the people that I went to university with have already been disillusioned, and have been seeking jobs with higher pay, less stress and less work to be taken home.

I have, I think, been lucky. As a first-year teacher at Rooty Hill High, I was given access to a tremendous amount of professional development and support. Without that, I don't know if I would still be teaching. Certainly, I wouldn't be teaching as successfully as I am today. During my first term of teaching, I was given access to professional development about relational pedagogy, using non-verbal signals, classroom management, child protection and lesson design. I found that in that first term, I learned much more than I could have done at university. The difference wasn't in the quality of instruction. It was simply in the fact that I could experiment with and implement whatever I was learning, with my own classes. I found that once I was teaching alone, I was much more willing to take risks than I was when I was a practical teacher. I had the support of both a wonderfully supportive and sharing faculty, and an outstanding head teacher mentor.

The role that my head teacher mentor has played in my career has been significant. Not only did she regularly observe my classes and provide me with feedback, she ran an induction program, coordinated professional learning, provided a sounding board when I was struggling with classes or students and gave me constructive help to resolve any issues. She helped me design resources, and gave me a model of what a committed teacher can be.

The English faculty has also had a large impact on my teaching career. All of my colleagues have been happy to give me advice or lesson ideas. They all freely allowed me to observe any of their

classes, at any time. Not once did I feel that I was alone in the classroom. I knew that if I was having any problems with classroom management, my head teacher or my mentor were always willing to help. This is the most important thing for beginning teachers. We want to feel supported.

I've also found our induction program immensely helpful. I met with my head teacher mentor and other beginning teachers once a week after school. The induction program covered many things, from school policies to a tour of the school community. The induction program helped me to become a part of the school, and to understand the culture of Rooty Hill High. It was invaluable professional development.

The other thing that I've found has helped me to succeed in my first year of teaching in New South Wales was the accreditation process required by the NSW Institute of Teachers. Although it looked intimidating at first, I found it made me reflect on and improve my teaching processes. It forced me to make sure I was meeting all of the quality teaching standards.

At Rooty Hill High, we have a fairly young staff, with lots of beginning teachers coming through. Although beginning teachers have a lot to learn in their first year, we also have a lot to offer our faculties and our schools. Part of what we offer comes out of the new and up-to-date learning we received at university. Part of what we can offer is a different perspective on how to do things, technological know-how, new resources, fresh creativity and a willingness to get involved.

I really enjoyed my subjects at university, and I found my 50 days of practical teaching were invaluable, but there were certainly a lot of things about teaching that I didn't learn about at university – classroom management being at the top of that list. In my experience, I've found that my teacher training was adequate, but it was once I got to my school, started to teach, shared what I was doing with other teachers, and designed lessons and units that I really began to learn what it is to be a teacher. Sometimes, it's much harder than I thought it would be, but most of the time I have a lot more fun than I ever thought I would have.

Catherine Brown is a teacher at Rooty Hill High School, Sydney.

Photo by Kristin Smith courtesy of stock.xchng



Bullying

and the duty of care

Educators and educational institutions need to take reasonable steps to protect students from harassment and bullying, says **David Thomson**.

All educators have a legal responsibility or duty of care for their students, as Steve Holden pointed out in 'Duty of care' in the April 2008 edition of *Professional Educator*. The recent case of *Cox v State of New South Wales* shows why educators and the educational institutions in which they operate need to take reasonable steps to protect students from repeated harassment and bullying.

Born in 1988, the plaintiff, Benjamin Cox, was enrolled at the Raymond Terrace Public School in New South Wales in January, 1994, but a family move in April of that year necessitated enrolment in the kindergarten class at Woodberry Public School. Shortly afterwards, Benjamin began to suffer headaches and experience nightmares, and his behaviour deteriorated.

Benjamin began to refuse to attend school. He told his mother that an older boy, identified

as TH, had regularly been taking his pencils and books from him, and pushing him into walls at the school.

Previously keen on playing rugby, Benjamin became nervous before games and refused to use the changing rooms and lavatories.

On a number of occasions in 1994, he came home crying. Benjamin's mother spoke to a teacher at the school who indicated that the staff would 'keep an eye' on her son. Despite this assurance, Benjamin's behaviour continued to deteriorate. He would not sleep alone, did not want to leave the house and panicked when his mother went out. His school refusal escalated.

In February, 1995, Mrs Cox arranged a meeting with the principal of the school who indicated that she knew the identity of Benjamin's tormentor, TH, and said that steps would be taken to keep the boys apart.

A few days later, Mrs Cox was called to the school and found Benjamin shaking and crying. He had red marks on the front of his neck and what appeared to be burn marks on the back of his neck. A teacher told Mrs Cox that another student had attempted to strangle her son. Benjamin told his mother that it was the same boy who always bullied him. Benjamin was severely traumatised by the incident and refused to return to school for the next two weeks.

Mrs Cox spoke to another member of the school staff who told her that the boy who had attacked Benjamin suffered from attention deficit disorder. Mrs Cox spoke to officers of the NSW Department of Education in Maitland and Newcastle where one allegedly told her that 'bullying builds character' and that he thought it was 'a good thing that Ben got bullied.'

A doctor in the family's general practice referred Benjamin and his mother to a psychiatrist in Wallsend and a few months later to a paediatrician. Benjamin reluctantly returned to school.

In late July he was attacked again by the same boy and suffered red welts across the back of his body. The boy told Benjamin that he would be hurt again if he told anyone.

Further complaints to the school elicited assurances that the attacker would be penalised and that his parents would be required to supervise him at school, but this appears not to have happened.

In early August, Mrs Cox was again called to the school and found Benjamin crying, a tooth missing and his lip swollen, cut and bleeding. His attacker had allegedly tried to push Benjamin's jumper into his mouth.

Assured by the school principal that Benjamin's attacker would receive a detention and that his parents would again be informed, Mrs Cox tried to persuade her son to return to school but to no avail.

Not sure what to do next, Mrs Cox decided to report the matter to the police. Two days later, Benjamin returned to school, was confronted again by the same boy who allegedly laughed about the police visit, but said that if they came again he would kill Benjamin.

Mrs Cox withdrew Benjamin from the school in September, 1995. In 1996, he was enrolled in the Black Hill Public School where he experienced anxiety but attended regularly.

A family move to Stroud in 2000 resulted in Benjamin being enrolled in Year 5 in the Stroud Public School. During the following year, the selection of a high school needed to be made and he was duly enrolled at Dungog High School but he attended for only one day due to a re-emergence of his anxiety condition. In 2002 he was enrolled in Year 7 at Gloucester High School but, due to significant anxiety symptoms, his attendance was sporadic. The distance education program run by Camden Haven High School was tried in 2003,

Flinders

but Benjamin was unable to comply with the work requirements and his enrolment was eventually terminated.

Benjamin Cox sued the State of New South Wales claiming that the Woodberry School authorities were in breach of their duty of care to

der. Evidence was led that these conditions were unlikely to abate. Benjamin was considered to be unemployable and was receiving a disability pension.

In order to hold a defendant liable in negligence, it's necessary to establish that the plaintiff was owed a duty of care by the defendant, that the defendant breached that duty of care and that the harm suffered by the plaintiff was caused by the breach of duty.

The State of NSW, through the Woodberry School authorities, owed a duty of care to Benjamin Cox. Justice Simpson explained this by reference to the 1969 case of *Richards v State of Victoria*: 'The duty of care owed by [the teacher] required only that he take such measures as in all the circumstances were reasonable to prevent physical injury to [the student]. This duty not being one to ensure against injury, but to take reasonable care to prevent it, required no more than the taking of reasonable steps to protect the plaintiff against risks of injury which ex-hypothesi [the teacher] should reasonably have foreseen.'

Justice Simpson cited another section of the joint judgment in *Richards v State of Victoria* to explain the rationale for the duty: 'The reason underlying the imposition of the duty would appear to be the need of a child of immature age for protection against the conduct of others, or indeed of himself, which may cause him injury coupled with the fact that, during school hours, the child is beyond the control and protection of his parents and is placed under the control of the (teacher) who is in a position to exercise authority over him and afford him, in the exercise of reasonable care, protection from injury.'

Clarifying the state's responsibility for the actions of the school and its staff, Justice Simpson quoted Justice Ninian Stephen in the High Court case of *Geyer v Downs*: 'It is for schoolmasters and for those who employ them, whether government or private institutions, to provide facilities whereby the schoolmasterly duty can adequately be discharged during the period for which it is assumed.'

Justice Simpson held that the State of NSW, being responsible for the operation of the Woodberry School, had failed to discharge its duty of care to Benjamin in that the school made no attempt to deal with a serious problem. In

DUTY OF CARE: FAST FACTS

- A teacher, school or school authority is required to take reasonable care of a student or students, and to avoid injuries to them which could reasonably be foreseen.
- A teacher, school or school authority must take reasonable care to prevent injury, but is not required to *ensure* against injury.
- In Australian law, that duty can extend beyond the normal operating hours of the school and beyond the school gate.

DUTY OF CARE: ASK YOURSELF

- Do you allow students into the school grounds early or to remain after school ends? If you answer yes, you are establishing a legal duty of care for those students under those conditions.
- If you do have a formal system of playground supervision if children are at school before or after school, do you inform parents as to the operating times of that playground supervision, including the fact that no formal supervision of the playground occurs outside those hours?
- Do you organise any activity using the services of an external organisation? If you answer yes, you should remember you cannot delegate accountability for the safety of your students to that organisation. You, your school and your school authority have a duty to ensure that reasonable care is taken and that you are satisfied that the external organisation is competent to undertake the activity, that the activity is appropriate to the age and skills of the students, and that it is properly supervised.

The information contained here is not intended to be comprehensive, does not constitute legal advice and is not to be relied upon without first seeking and obtaining independent legal advice.

him by failing to take reasonable steps to protect him from repeated harassment and bullying in 1994 and 1995.

During the course of the trial before Justice Carolyn Simpson in the Supreme Court of NSW Common Law Division, details of Benjamin's treatment at Woodberry became clear and expert psychiatric evidence was provided.

Psychiatric assessment determined that Benjamin suffered from depression, separation anxiety disorder and post-traumatic stress disorder.

ignoring the behaviour of Benjamin's attacker, school authorities at the Woodberry School grossly failed in their duty of care to him. Communication within the school so that all teachers were alerted to what had been alleged, and that all were required to take special concern to observe the boy who had been named on a number of occasions as the perpetrator of the bullying, did not take place. Counselling of both boys, in accordance with the NSW Department of Education's critical incidents policy, did not occur, nor were reports to the Department of Education, required by that policy, ever submitted.

The conditions described by the psychiatric witnesses as separation anxiety disorder and depression were the result of that breach of duty. Justice Simpson stated that the 'school authorities responded quite inadequately to an escalating problem and failed to take such steps as were reasonably required to protect (Benjamin) from the conduct of a plainly behaviourally disturbed older pupil.'

The requirements for a successful action in negligence were thus established.

Benjamin Cox was awarded substantial damages in compensation for what Justice Simpson described as a whole-of-life injury, awarding \$213,000 for his pain and suffering, plus compensation for past and future economic loss calculated on the basis of average weekly earnings less 25 per cent, totalling about \$1 million.

There are some clear lessons for all schools and the authorities which run them to be learned from *Cox v State of NSW* to do with their bullying prevention philosophy, policies and methodologies, in particular their management plans for addressing cases of bullying, and to do with their procedures for supervision, communication and reporting.

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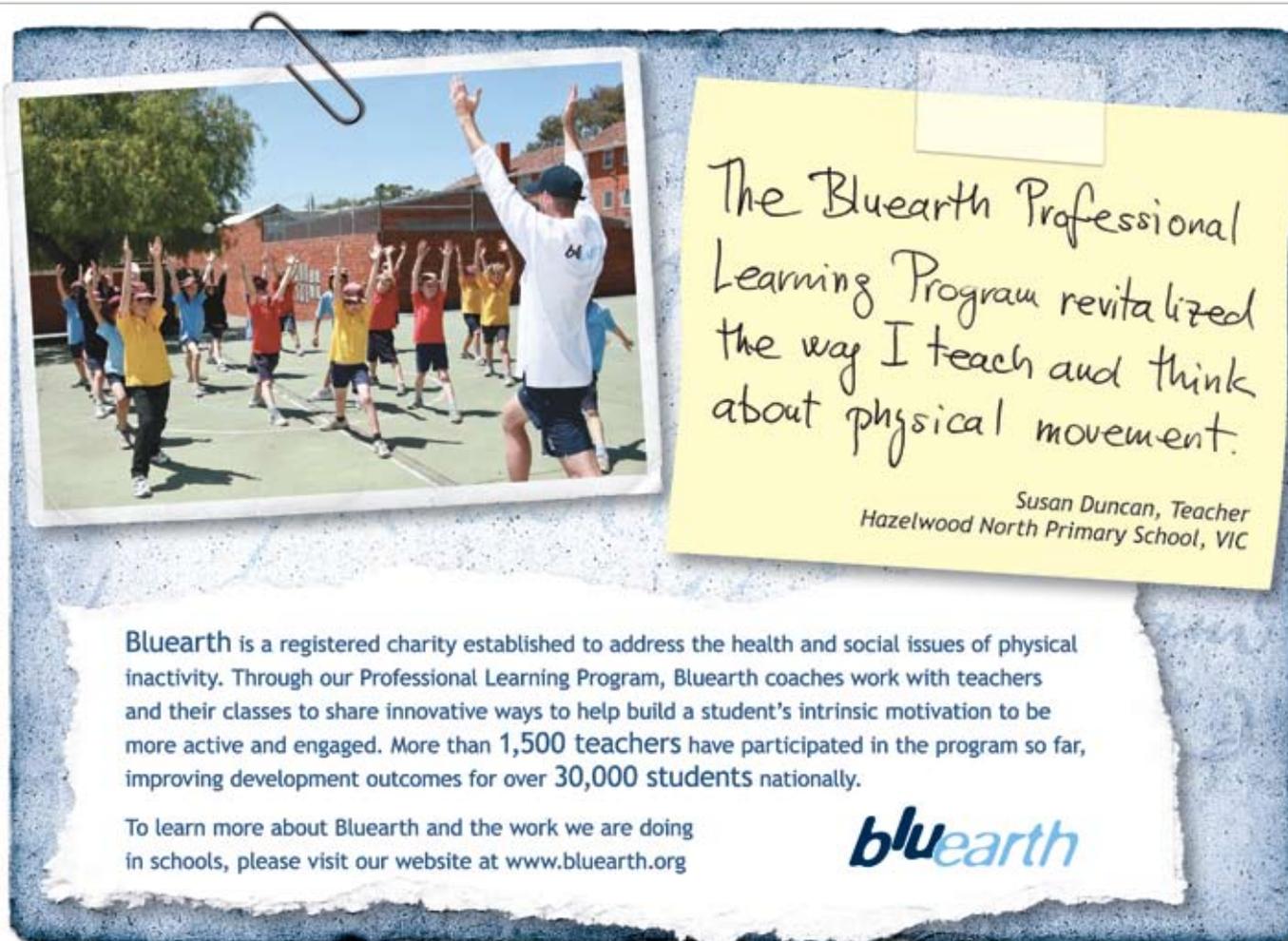
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LINKS: www.victorialaw.org.au

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David Thomson is Schools Consultant at the Victoria Law Foundation and is a Fellow of the Australian College of Educators.

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Susan Duncan, Teacher
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The missing link?

Retention and trade training centres

Is it possible to retain students who wish to undertake vocational education and training in the school environment to Year 12? **Seamus O'Grady** says it is.

The introduction of significant vocational education and training (VET) in schools in the last 10 to 15 years has undoubtedly provided many students with satisfying senior years at school – VET has achieved a 34 per cent participation rate in New South Wales schools – even though only a minority of students studying a VET course in school actually go on to a career in that area.

Of course, most schools lose a percentage of their Year 10s – often gratefully and with the reassurance that many are proceeding into the workforce or further training. More significantly a number of students begin Year 11 studies only to drop out partway through them. Our concern is that, according to the Dusseldorp Skills Forum *How Young People are Faring* report for 2007, 50 per cent of students who left in Year 10 or earlier are not engaged in fulltime work or study, a statistic that presumably fuels government concern to promote retention to Year 12. (See Figure 1.)

These considerations worry many parents and educators. I was taken aback at a significant parent meeting last year when told by a father that the Catholic Church seems intent on providing schooling in a Catholic environment for students seeking university entrance, and now providing post-school options at two Catholic universities in Sydney, but doing nothing religious for his son

who left school in Year 10 to enrol at an institute of technical and further education.

My instinct to defend the tremendous efforts made by schools to retain such students as his son by providing as broad and relevant an education, including VET quietly faded as I pondered what I'd just heard. In all honesty, despite magnificent efforts to provide for those who have a preference for hands-on, work-related learning, ubiquitous Catholic comprehensive high schools have been unable to meet the needs of every student.

Institutes of technical and further education and other vocational providers around the country do what they do extremely well within an adult education environment although, it seems, many parents these days want school-type security and pastoral care support for their sons and daughters while they're in training.

The question that government, industry and school systems have tried to address is this: how can we keep these students with their peers in the school environment to Year 12 while engaging them with industry-recognised education and training? For those of a religious persuasion, the further question is this: who provides religious education, and the pastoral care, for these youngsters?

A recent study by Dr Alan Laughlin for the Catholic Education Office, Sydney, reveals that high schools find it extremely difficult to timetable and provide support for students engaged in school-based apprenticeships and traineeships. In the Sydney system in 2008 we have six apprenticeships and 43 traineeships in a cohort of some 10,000 senior students.

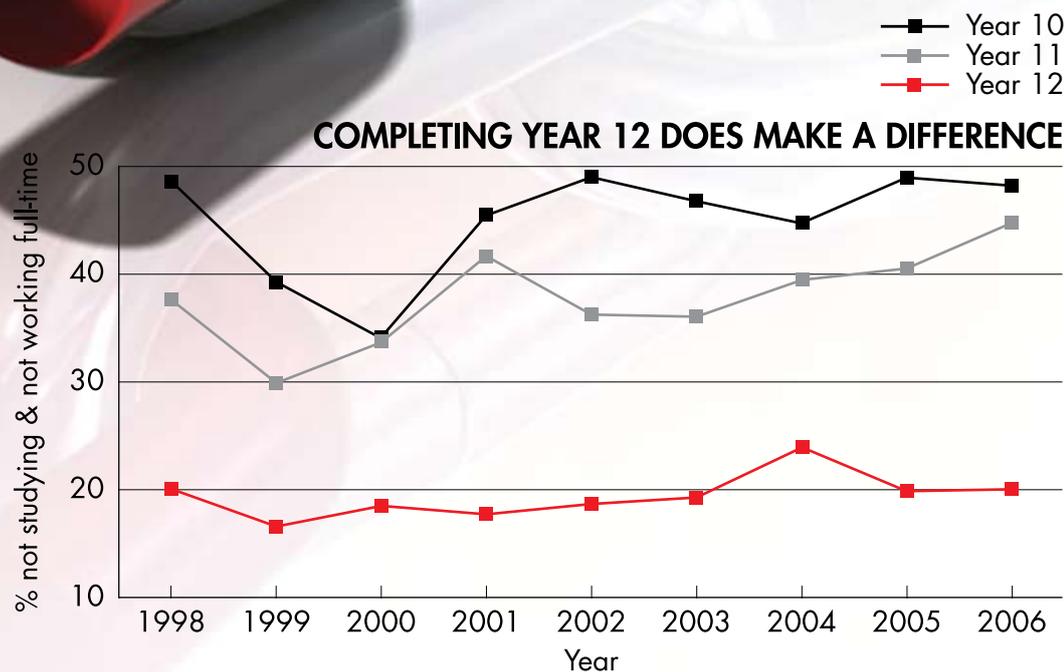


Figure 1: Completing Year 12 does make a difference. Survey of Education and Work, ABS, customised tables, in Dusseldorp Skills Forum How Young People are Faring 2007 at a glance

Such students are typically required to be out of school for on-the-job training one or two days a week. Trying to catch up on missed classes is simply too hard and timetabling to assist in this process just too difficult – not to mention duty-of-care and industry liaison responsibilities for staff.

The announcement by the Prime Minister, Kevin Rudd, of the Commonwealth government's offer of a grant up to \$1.5 million for every school to establish Trade Training Centres has stimulated new directions to assist students to continue to Year 12 and complete a substantial proportion of some industry-recognised training qualification.

Individual schools quickly recognised that the Commonwealth assistance is for capital works only and would not easily solve all those timetabling and other issues. Both the Commonwealth government and schools, however, could see that the formation of consortiums of schools, pooling their potential capital funding and creating a critical mass of such students, could deliver a Trades Training Centre on one or more sites or even greenfield sites to serve their student populations.

Similar examples of this approach already exist in some school systems. Although very early days, the state education system has recognised

this issue and begun to set up Trade High Schools in selected areas.

The biggest challenge is not the provision of capital works but rather the recurrent costs of such centres. The consortium approach, encouraged by the Commonwealth Department of Education, Employment and Work Place Relations (DEEWR), can open up opportunities for schools not only within one system, but across sectors to provide a Trades Training Centre.

In the Sydney Catholic school system, seven systemic high schools have been joined by four congregational – that is, non-government but also non-systemic Catholic schools – to promote the development of a Trades Training Centre at Burwood. It's currently the subject of a first-round application to DEEWR.

The widespread enthusiasm for such a development has caught me by surprise – but clearly the development of a coeducational senior college catering for a range of trades training while providing the opportunity for students to complete the Higher School Certificate, but not to gain a universities admission index measure, in a faith-based environment could fill a void identified by that critical parent.

It may be the missing link.

In May 2006, substantially fewer school leavers who had completed were not fully engaged in study or work than students who left school after Year 11 (45 per cent) or after completing Year 10 or earlier (50 per cent). Early school leavers were not fully engaged in learning or work. School completers were advantaged in terms of education and labour force destinations.

Seamus O'Grady has been the Director of Curriculum in the Catholic Education Office, Sydney, for the past 10 years. Previously he was a consultant for Sydney Catholic Schools after 16 years as principal of colleges in South Australia, Victoria and New South Wales.

Photo by Sigurd Decroos courtesy of stock.xchng

LINKS:

For the Dusseldorp Skills Forum report, How Young People are Faring 2007: At a Glance, visit <http://www.dsforum.org.au/papers/197.htm>

For Alan Laughlin's full report on a Catholic vocational college for Burwood, visit http://www.ceo.syd.catholic.edu.au/cms/webdav/site/ceosydney/shared/About%20Us/Bulletins/Bulletin_104-A_Catholic_Vocational_College_for_Burwood.pdf

Radical reform

Investing in teacher quality

The Business Council of Australia and the Australian Council for Educational Research have together outlined a plan for radical education reform. **Rebecca Leech** reports.

Radical action is needed to recognise and reward teachers who reach high teaching standards, according to a recent research paper by the Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER).

The paper, *Investing in Teacher Quality: Doing what matters most*, written for the Business Council of Australia (BCA), outlines the education reforms necessary for Australia to become a top-five Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) country.

According to the BCA, the country should aim for 'the development of the best educational system in the world that inspires learning and optimises opportunities for every Australian,' and judged by the results of international student assessment programs, Australia's education system compares relatively well to those of other developed countries.

The OECD last year released the 2006 results from its Program for International Student Assessment (PISA). Australia's results were above the OECD average in each of scientific and mathematical literacy, but Australia's ranking against other OECD countries has slipped somewhat.

These results indicate that Australia already has a world-class education system, but does need to work on areas of equity and consistent quality to ensure all students have access to a good education.

As the more sophisticated analyses of PISA results noted at the time, direct comparisons of countries' student achievement can often be less than enlightening due the substantial differences in countries' cultural and educational systems.

More important than Australia's educational system being 'the best in the world' is its capacity to ensure all students receive a good education and graduate from school equipped with the skills they need to function effectively in society, a view taken by the authors of *Investing in Teacher Quality*. Professor Stephen Dinham, Dr Lawrence Ingvarson and Dr Elizabeth Kleinhenz of ACER identify reforms required at various levels of the educational system – system governance, school leader-



ship and classroom teaching – that will result in the best opportunities for all students to achieve successful learning outcomes.

The paper recommends five reforms to Australia's education system:

1. Recruitment of the most talented, capable and committed people into the teaching profession.
2. Implementation of a new national certification system that recognises excellent teachers and provides the basis for a new career path for the profession.
3. Implementation of a new remuneration structure that rewards excellent teachers and demonstrates that, as a society, Australia values the teaching profession.
4. Implementation of a comprehensive strategy that supports teachers in continuing to learn and improve teaching throughout their careers.
5. Implementation of a national assessment and accreditation system for teacher education courses.

TALENT SCOUTING

The paper proposes raising entry standards to teaching degrees, and improving the quality of the degrees themselves through a system of national accreditation of teacher education courses.

The authors criticise the current methods of recruitment of students into teaching degrees. They point out that the need to attract sufficient quantities of students to fill workforce demand for teachers often works against the equally important imperative to attract students of a high calibre. The problem has long been recognised: if teaching courses drop entry standards to encourage enrolments, the attractiveness and status of teaching as a career declines.

Teaching courses currently have a range of entry standards; cut-off entry scores require applicants to have achieved Year 12 scores from within the 60th percentile up to more than the 80th percentile, depending on the course and institution.

Many courses do not require students to have studied the subjects they intend to teach.

According to the ACER paper, 'Universities alone cannot be held accountable for the quality of students they take into their courses, but the current practice whereby universities are free to enrol students in teacher education courses until they

fill course quotas, regardless of academic ability, clearly needs to be reviewed.'

The paper recommends setting a minimum university entrance score of 75 per cent for teaching courses and requiring all primary teaching students to have studied English, Maths and Science in Year 12. The loss in recruitment quantity could be countered through improving the status of teaching in other ways, such as more attractive salary and conditions.

MONEY MATTERS

Improved salaries and conditions would attract more talented graduates to teaching and retain existing teachers. *Investing in Teacher Quality* suggests a top salary of \$130,000 for classroom teachers who reach high standards.

According to the paper, surveys have shown that money alone is not a strong motivator for current teachers; however, no research can gauge whether the relatively low salary and status of teachers discourages potential teachers from ever joining the profession.

The authors criticise 'archaic, lock-step salary structures which peak too early' and 'pay systems that don't encourage or reward professional learning.'

Salary increments are awarded automatically based on years of service rather than any measure of job performance, and fully-qualified teachers reach the top of the typical incremental salary scale within about eight years in Australian schools, effectively leaving many teachers to contemplate another 30 years in the profession without a pay rise. Once at the top, qualified teachers earn only 1.47 times the starting salary. Comparing Australian salaries to those overseas, it's not surprising that some teachers leave the country to further their careers: the average top salary across OECD countries is 1.73 times the starting salary. It's up to 2.48 in Japan and 2.78 in Korea.

The paper contends that there is a spike in teacher resignation rates after eight to ten years of teaching that coincides with teachers reaching the top of the salary scale. As the authors put it, many teachers 'develop a strong sense that there is nowhere for them to go in status or career terms. The pay scale says, in effect, they are as good as they are going to get as teachers or that they are as good as they are expected to get, even though few believe there is not much more to learn about

how to teach effectively. Consequently, the salary structure provides weak incentives to improve professional performance.’

There is substantial evidence to show that this structure needs reform. Only a minority of principals surveyed in this year’s ACER Staff in Australia’s Schools survey reported that their school’s salary structure was ‘very effective’ or ‘effective’ in attracting and retaining teachers and in attracting teachers to leadership positions.

According to *Investing in Teacher Quality*, ‘Salary may not be a strong reason why current teachers have chosen to teach, but it is a strong reason why many abler graduates choose not to teach, and this is cause for considerable concern if we want our education system to remain among the best in the world....There is no justification for assuming from this that our society can continue to get away with not paying teachers what they are worth.’

The ACER paper raises some serious questions for policymakers and administrators of reform: ‘Who really believes that a top salary for classroom teachers of about \$70,000 means we place sufficient value on teachers’ work to attract the best university graduates? Who really believes that the typical office spaces in which teachers are expected to prepare and assess student work and carry out their business are indicators of an attractive and esteemed profession?’ No one, the paper concludes.

Instead, the authors propose an increase in wages for accomplished classroom teachers. The best classroom teachers, an estimated 20 per cent, would be eligible for a salary up to \$130,000, which would be 2.5 times the starting salary and double the current average teachers’ salary.

The BCA estimates that such a proposal would eventually cost an extra \$4 billion per year, and should be funded equally by the Commonwealth and the states and territories. To be eligible under the plan, teachers would have to undertake extensive professional development and meet strict performance standards.

As the authors of *Investing in Teacher Quality* put it, ‘There are no cost-neutral ways to ensure that in the future Australia will have a teaching profession equal to the best in the world, but there will be major costs if we do not.’

STANDARDS OF PRACTICE

Strict performance standards could be ensured through a national accreditation system for

teacher education courses and through a national certification system that recognises excellent teachers, the ACER paper posits. Such systems would ensure a unified approach to managing teacher supply and demand; provide a basis for offering more attractive salaries and career paths to graduates and those who seek to change careers; and strengthen incentives for professional learning and widespread use of successful practices.

A unified approach would remove unnecessary duplication between government bureaucracies and ensure more resources are devoted to the delivery of education services in our schools.

The paper is highly critical of current governance arrangements. ‘Education in Australia is still highly bureaucratised, and it is time to question whether bureaucratic management of schools by state education departments is sufficient to deliver the kind of leadership that influences teachers’ practice significantly or improves student learning outcomes,’ write the authors.

‘Although there is strong agreement that teacher quality is fundamental, it is currently difficult to find evidence of coherent, concerted, coordinated policy efforts at state and federal levels focused on teacher quality. Accountability for ensuring quality teachers and school leaders is unclear and diffused.

‘State teacher registration bodies responsible for the quality of entrants to the profession have little power to implement rigorous, independent procedures for accrediting teacher education courses. Teacher registration is a key quality-assurance mechanism, but is merely a rubber-stamp operation in most states and territories.’

Under ACER’s plan, a national body would assess all teaching education courses against consistent and rigorous standards.

Graduates from accredited courses would have to be awarded provisional registration by a national registration agency as a compulsory condition of employment in the teaching profession.

New graduates from accredited courses, after provisional registration, would not achieve full registration until successfully completing a rigorous standards-based assessment of performance after a three-year probationary period.

Teachers who achieve full registration would be paid 1.25 times the starting salary.

ACER envisages a voluntary national system for the top two levels of teaching proficiency, over-

seen by an independent national teacher accreditation agency.

This agency would assess teachers' achievement against a set of proficiency standards. Teachers would not be judged on years of service, but to reach the level of 'accomplished teacher' a teacher would be required to have the sorts of skills typically seen in the best teachers after 10 years in the profession. Teachers who were judged to have achieved these standards would be awarded 'accomplished teacher' status and be paid twice the starting salary.

The next level of proficiency would be for teachers judged to be 'leading teachers', and who typically would have proven skills in leading and managing colleagues and improving student learning and welfare. 'Leading teachers' would be paid at 2.5 times the starting salary, or up to \$130,000.

The report estimates that it will take 10 years or more to reach a stage where 50 per cent of teachers have been certified as 'accomplished' or 'leading teachers.' This estimate is based on the plan for voluntary certification of approximately 10,000 teachers per year. The rigour of the standards required to achieve certification would mean that only about 20 per cent of teachers would ever achieve the 'leading teacher' level.

WILL IT WORK?

The ACER paper acknowledges that more than 100 inquiries and reviews of teacher education have been undertaken in the last 30 years, and that despite the consistent recommendations of many of these, teacher education has not changed substantially in this time.

So, will this review make any difference?

The ACER researchers claim that the strength of their proposal is the detailed, comprehensive, national and integrated approach that is advocated.

'Suggestions to improve quality teaching tend to be simplistic, populist and non-evidenced-based. Such approaches include things such as higher salaries, "merit" pay, payment by results and getting rid of poorly performing teachers,' says Professor Stephen Dinham, ACER's Research Director of Teaching, Learning and Leadership, and lead author of the paper. 'What we have advocated in this report for the BCA is a much more comprehensive, integrated, evidenced-based, national approach to drive the quality of teaching upwards and to lead to increased student achievement.

Central to this approach is a new career and salary structure for teachers to encourage and award greater levels of professional accomplishment.'

Elements of the plan have the support of the Commonwealth government. Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Education Julia Gillard has agreed on the need for reform, stating in a recent press conference that the Commonwealth government was working with the state and territory governments on a raft of policies to address issues of 'how to inspire people to go teaching, through how to better reward teachers, better value teacher excellence and keep the best teachers in front of classrooms.... I think it's important to have a unified approach to national registration. I think it's important to have a national cooperative scheme on teacher quality and that is what we're working towards.'

While Gillard flagged the need for 'reward structures,' she hasn't committed to the new remuneration plan outlined in the ACER paper, saying only that basic wage rates were decided by state and territory governments, and the Catholic and independent school systems.

Opposition education spokesman Tony Smith called this a cop out and urged the Commonwealth government to confront the states on the issue, claiming that, 'The state governments' refusal to act to improve teacher quality in Australia has reached crisis point.'

The authors of *Investing in Teacher Quality*, for their part, call for an end to politicking and a focus on solid policy. As they put it: 'Education policy needs to focus more clearly on what matters most to student learning.... We know that good teachers matter, but we must start to act as if we really believed it.'

Rebecca Leech is a journalist at the Australian Council for Educational Research and winner of the prestigious Writer of the Year trophy in the 2007 Bell Awards, staged annually by Publishers Australia.

Photo by Alaina Cherup courtesy of stock.xchng

LINKS: The Investing in Teacher Quality report can be downloaded at http://www.acer.edu.au/documents/MR_080526_BCA08.pdf

Only a minority of principals surveyed in this year's ACER Staff in Australia's Schools survey reported that their school's salary structure was 'very effective' or 'effective' in attracting and retaining teachers and in attracting teachers to leadership positions.



Vocational education

Applied, engaged and connected

Schools, universities and TAFEs need to work together to support each and every young person to secure their future, says **Malcolm White**.

Some young people come to a position in their lives where they disengage from formal school learning, despite the good work of talented and dedicated teachers. Some have learning difficulties, some are talented but uninterested. Either way they separate from school either physically or in their commitment.

The current level of this youth disengagement from learning is unacceptable.

The failure to achieve a meaningful qualification places individuals and families at risk of marginal participation in the economic and social life of the nation. This in turn leads to family and societal difficulties and represents an enormous lost opportunity to contribute to Australia's prosperity and wellbeing and a considerable cost to the nation, particularly considering our ageing demographic.

The culture of the formal school education system is struggling to adapt to the concept, and value, of applied learning beyond the aspirational goal of providing a pathway to higher education even though only a minority of school leavers enters university and a still smaller group succeeds in gaining a university qualification.

That is not to say that some secondary schools and colleges are not doing an excellent job in vocational education and training (VET). There are many examples of programs that are valued highly by employers, students and parents, but in general the performance and outcomes of VET in schools is too variable.

While many school leavers find their way to TAFE and subsequently to good vocational outcomes and jobs, the crucial cohort, the one we must turn our attention to, is the group of young people who simply disengage and remain disengaged from learning. The only competitive advantage these young people have is their age, but this disappears quickly and many are unemployed after a few years. Even in buoyant times, like now, the currency is skills and that is unlikely to change. The path to re-engagement is individual and arises by linking learning to a passion or interest, which in turn is linked to work life or purpose.

TAFE is different from school in that students encounter an environment more like work and are treated more like work colleagues than students. This environment prompts a different response in many young people. The emphasis

on applied learning or use of actual workplaces provides a motivating force for many who do not wish to pursue, or are unsuited to, academic methods of learning.

Even so, TAFEs don't always meet the social and pastoral needs of young people, especially those who attend as fulltime students. This can also be a key concern for parents. The leap from secondary school to more independent individual learning at TAFE, often styled to adult needs, can be too great for some. While apprenticeships provide a supportive transition, in the time-honoured way, not all young people are able to, nor wish to, gain an apprenticeship. Moreover, being a demand-led system, the availability of apprenticeships rises and falls on economic cycles.

From the point of view of the learner, each system therefore has something important to offer, but they frequently appear separate and distinctively apart. This disconnect between secondary schools and TAFE has deprived many young people of the opportunity to gain valuable and meaningful qualifications and skills. It has deprived students of access to skilled trade and technical teachers, to infrastructure and, most importantly, to effective relationships with employers.

There are reasons for this disconnect. At a cultural level, our society has yet to value applied learning and technical and trade skills as highly as it does academic learning and professional qualifications. While the status of the trades has risen in recent years, partly due to unprecedented skills shortages, there remains a need to raise applied learning to a much higher level of aspiration in the minds of students, parents and educators, although employers need no such convincing.

Similarly, some students like to follow an academic path while others are inclined to learn better by acquiring and applying skills and knowledge to practical situations. Importantly, both paths lead to success and should be equally esteemed.

Funding of TAFE delivery is, in most jurisdictions, different from that for schools. It is complex and clings to notions of teaching hours, notwithstanding the competency-based curriculum. On the other hand, schools are usually funded by numbers of students. In neither case is funding focused on the success of individuals as they navigate their way through educational institutions to a meaningful qualification and a career. TAFEs and secondary schools that have sought to work

together have soon discovered the barriers erected by these disparate funding systems.

So, how might it look if the territory was less 'stamped out,' if supporting systems changed to focus on the learner rather than the delivery system and the primary goal was realigned to a meaningful qualification for each and every young person in our society?

Given that neither the secondary education system nor TAFE is effectively addressing the unacceptable rate of youth disengagement, a new model is required – one that has the pastoral and social support networks of the school system combined with the skills training capability and employer relationships of TAFE.

Such a model, whether implemented through collaboration or reorganisation, would meet the needs not only of the disengaged, but of all those who prefer the applied learning path. Effective applied learning is conducted well when it's done in partnership with employers. Skills are reinforced either through workplace learning and assessment or in simulated situations. This leads to workplace confidence in students and employers that further supports the value of a vocational qualification.

An applied learning environment is ideally one where learning is tailored to individual training plans within a supportive environment, where important networks are formed around common vocational interest. It's ideally an environment where learning is first anchored to a vocational interest or passion and steadily built to a Certificate III qualification as a minimum goal. It's not a narrow environment and may include Years 11 and 12 subjects, and sports and cultural opportunities to provide a richer experience. Literacy and numeracy are supported in the context of the vocational training, with the aim of meeting the generic proficiency required by the learner's chosen occupational pathway rather than just his or her first job. Ultimately, it's an environment where successful vocational outcomes through life are what matter most.

Our communities and employers have an expectation that education and training institutions, whether schools, universities or TAFEs, will work together to support each and every young person to secure their future.

It may seem like a big shift, but it is one we need to make.

Malcolm White is the Chief Executive Officer of TAFE Tasmania and a member of the board of TAFE Directors Australia. This is an abridged version of his paper at the Future Directions in Vocational Skills for Youth Forum held in Hobart in April.

LINKS: For the full proceedings of the forum, visit www.tda.edu.au



Participation, engagement and vocational education

Martha Kinsman
reports on the
Future Directions
in Vocational Skills
for Youth Forum
held in Hobart in
April.

A key target of the Rudd Government's education revolution is for 90 per cent of young people to complete a Year 12 secondary education or its vocational education and training (VET) equivalent by 2020. While some cynics may remark that there's nothing new or particularly credible about this target, the proceedings of a recent forum in Hobart indicate there are grounds for believing that, this time, the target for post-compulsory education is realistic and achievable – perhaps even ahead of time.

The Future Directions in Vocational Skills for Youth Forum, jointly sponsored by TAFE Directors Australia (TDA) and the Australian College of Educators with financial support from the Commonwealth Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR), included keynote papers from a number of high-level experts and a range of relatively detailed case studies from experienced educators in both the TAFE and the secondary school sectors that reflected the understanding that now exists of both the complexity and the diversity of the post-compulsory transition experience for young people in Australia.

The central focus of the forum was the 10 to 20 per cent of young people who become disengaged or marginalised from both work and study between the crucial transition ages of 16 and 22. In the absence of solutions and options which maintain the participation of this group, the 90 per cent target is unachievable and the consequent knowledge base of Australia's workforce will remain sadly lagging compared with most comparable countries.

Emeritus Professor Denise Bradley, opening the forum, insisted that a critical success factor would be the strength and direction of cross-

sectoral and inter-institutional relationships and cooperative endeavour.

This message was echoed by Rebecca Cross, a senior DEEWR officer, who noted the greater opportunities for successful systemic reform that have been opened up by the unusual synchronicity of Labor governments across all Australian jurisdictions. Cross focused on the heightened Commonwealth awareness of the need for a variety of institutional arrangements. Funding for the new Trade Training Centres, for example, would encourage collaboration not duplication, including, wherever possible, the clustering of schools or schools and TAFE institutes to ensure high-quality, relevant equipment and teaching and a wider range of choices for students, with a focus on arrangements and pathways for the continuation of education and training, as well as employment, after school.

The Commonwealth Minister for Employment Participation, Brendan O'Connor, identified the importance of post-compulsory completion not as a stand-alone target but as part of a more comprehensive set of policy objectives that recognise the requirement for continuous upskilling of the Australian workforce with progressively higher proportions being skilled at the Certificate III level and above. Implicit in these kinds of remarks is the expectation that VET in schools is a starting, not a finishing point for students.

The Minister also made it clear that this focus on productivity is itself closely connected in the mind of government with a comprehensive social inclusion agenda, emphasising the importance of post-school education and training places for young Australians, pointing to the 450,000 additional job seeker and existing worker places which the Commonwealth government has already commenced rolling out.

The twin objectives of productivity and inclusion were also the theme of a presentation by Megan Lilley of the Australian Industry Group (AIG), the chief executive of which has recently been appointed to the peak advisory body, Skills Australia. AIG has developed a 10-point reform plan to ensure that all young Australians have strong opportunities and incentives for post-school participation in both employment and further education and training. Interestingly, and somewhat unusually for an industry body, this plan includes improving the primary and middle years of schooling rather than focussing solely on the post-compulsory transition years. In this regard, the AIG plan mirrors the whole-of-life perspective on reform that has been adopted by all Education and Training Ministers.

What about the sticking points to improving youth engagement and participation? Peter Noonan, a VET expert and consultant to government, tackled the difficult issue of the different pricing and costing models used to fund public secondary schools and TAFE respectively. This is frequently a major disincentive to collaborative delivery and often renders cross-institution attendance by students virtually impossible. Drawing on an approach utilised in one Australian state, Noonan proposed a funding model that could overcome many of these difficulties and could be further streamlined and simplified by the states and territories agreeing to the principle of 'funding following the student' and nation-wide uniform student tuition fees and charges for TAFE.

Malcolm White, Chief Executive of TAFE Tasmania, took on the task of opening the 'black box' of the teaching and learning experience. White contrasted the pedagogy of TAFE and secondary schools, finding in each of them strengths that the other lacks, and suggesting each could learn from and adopt key characteristics of the educational culture of the other.

Forum participants heard how the pedagogical propositions and challenges at the core of White's paper were being worked out in practice, with case-study presentations from a range of TAFE institutes, schools and one Australian Technical College. One example, the Berwick Technical Education Centre (TEC) at the Chisholm Institute of TAFE in Victoria, is a government funded 'institution within an institution,' which focuses not on a particular 'type' of education, but on its client group – the continuing and re-entry

learning needs and aspirations of 16- to 20-year olds. It offers both VET and senior secondary qualifications, combining skilled vocational teaching and fully-equipped facilities integrated with general education, individual mentoring, and the pastoral and social support that are inherent in a more pedagogically authentic approach than has perhaps been affordable across much of TAFE in recent years. Importantly, university and higher-level TAFE qualifications as well as employment, are all pathways open to TEC students.

In concluding the forum, Geoff Hawke, a senior VET researcher at the University of Technology, Sydney, drew on both the literature and the forum contributions to identify the essential characteristics of good vocational teaching and learning. They are:

- a solid foundation in the underlying concepts and principles that guide action within the field
- a close link with contemporary industry practice in the field
- an appropriate level of socialisation into the vocational field of practice, and
- a critical appreciation of the operational contexts in the field of practice.

Further, there are four key requirements for good vocational teaching and learning:

- an understanding that vocational learning extends beyond, and cannot be defined only by, terminal outcomes
- an understanding that vocational learning is primarily concerned with the development of judgement
- an understanding that vocational learning requires an immersion in the field of practice at some stage, and
- contrary to the current focus solely on learning, an understanding that teaching is an essential component of effective vocational learning.

All of these, Hawke pointed out, require a sophisticated and competent teaching workforce with considerable knowledge and expertise in the discipline of education.

It'll be interesting to see whether the Commonwealth government recognises and acts on the extensive overhaul of teacher education, which will be necessary to achieve the economic and social goals to which it aspires on behalf of all young Australians.

Martha Kinsman is a TDA Research and Policy Consultant and a Fellow of the Australian College of Educators.

LINKS: For the full proceedings of the forum, visit www.tda.edu.au

National perspective

Across early years education, school education and post-compulsory education it's been a busy few months. **Steve Holden** reports.

A \$130,000 SALARY?

The Business Council of Australia (BCA) has proposed paying teachers up to \$130,000 a year and fixing the minimum entry score for all teacher training courses at 75 per cent or above, but the proposals, outlined in *Teaching Talent: The best teachers for Australia's classrooms*, which incorporates *Investing in Teacher Quality: Doing what matters most*, written for the BCA by the Australian Council for Educational Research, have so far received a lukewarm reception.

New South Wales Premier Morris Iemma pointed out in May that \$130,000 a year for 'leading teachers' would cost NSW more than \$2 billion a year. The Australian Council of Deans of Education (ACDE), meanwhile, warned in June that the proposal could worsen the teacher shortage, if fewer people were to enter teacher training as a consequence.

Bill Loudon, a member of the ACDE board, told the *Age* that the BCA paper's proposal on pay would more quickly and efficiently boost entry standards. 'There are a number of good international examples where teacher salaries have been substantially increased and it's had a successful impact on the number of people applying to enter courses,' he told the *Age*'s Caroline Milburn. The Australian Academy of Science, meanwhile, supported the BCA proposal, particularly in the area of Science teaching.

For more on *Investing in Teacher Quality: Doing what matters most*, see page 24.

COMPUTERS IN SCHOOLS

Question: how much does it cost to instal a computer in a school? Answer: according to the Commonwealth government, the unit cost of computers has been calculated at \$1,000. In NSW, however, where 302 schools were successful in the first round of funding from the National Secondary School Computer Fund, Treasurer Michael Costa wanted a further \$245 million from the Commonwealth to pay for installation and other costs – like switching from ADSL technology to wireless, charging stations, battery storage and training for teachers. The state government agreed to accept the fund-

ing after negotiations, which included a phone call between Prime Minister Kevin Rudd and Premier Morris Iemma. The NSW computers, calculated at \$1,000 per unit, cost approximately \$39 million.

SA TEACHERS STRIKE

More than 11,000 South Australian government school teachers took stopwork action, with more than 6,000 marching on Parliament House, in June as negotiations for a new enterprise agreement with the SA government stalled. The Australian Education Union (AEU) is seeking a 21 per cent pay rise over three years. The SA government has offered 9.75 per cent. The AEU log of claims for a new agreement include class size and workload limits, professional development funding and incentives to attract and retain staff, and a single enterprise agreement for preschool, school and TAFE employees, besides salary increases.

APPRENTICESHIPS INCREASE

Latest figures from the National Centre for Vocational Education Research for the December 2007 quarter show that apprentices and trainees in vocational education or training have increased slightly. Overall, 405,500 apprentices and trainees were in training as at 31 December 2007, an increase of one per cent from the previous year. The number of people commencing an apprenticeship or traineeship increased by four per cent to 276,200; the number of people completing an apprenticeship or traineeship rose by three per cent to 145,700; the number of people cancelling or withdrawing from an apprenticeship or traineeship grew by seven per cent to 135,200; and the number of people undertaking a 'traditional apprenticeship' increased to 16,600, up seven per cent from the previous year.

SCHOOL VIABILITY

A declining student population could mean some state schools may no longer be viable, Tasmanian Premier and Minister for Education David Bartlett said in June. State school student numbers dropped from 66,662 in 2007 to 65,744 this year. The Premier expects a nine per cent reduction in the state's student population by 2017.

In brief

LEARNING THE HARD WAY

ABC Learning shares were suspended in June after the childcare company reported a bargain-basement share placement. ABC Learning sold 22 million shares in Funtastic – more than two-thirds of its shareholding in the toymaker – to Archer Capital at 50 cents a share. Archer had made an 80 cent per share offer. Shares in ABC Learning fell from above \$5.00 a share in January to 88 cents in July. According to Crikey.com's Stephen Mayne, ABC Learning chief executive officer Eddie Groves is now Australia's 'most sackable CEO.' Six British-based rival childcare centres or equity firms pitched buyouts for the British wing of the business, but ABC Learning says it's unlikely to sell before next year.

OFFICIALLY AMONG THE POOR

According to a report by Nora Gamolo in Manila's *Sunday Times*, the education systems of Singapore, Malaysia and Hong Kong are successful because government school teachers are paid well in those systems. And in the Philippines? 'Right now, call-centre agents earn very much more than public school teachers,' Francisca Castro union Secretary-General of the Philippines' Alliance of Concerned Teachers (ACT), told Gamolo. 'Raising our salaries to the Salary Grade 20 level is necessary to preserve the dignity of the teaching profession and bring it closer to today's cost of living,' she said. According to the ACT, Philippines teachers earn the equivalent of \$263 a month, \$190 after tax. 'They are now officially among the poor,' ACT Chairman, Antonio Tinio said.

PEARSON EXPANDS INTO CHINA

Pearson Education has bought into two privately-owned English language school chains in China – acquiring an 80 per cent stake in the Learning Education Centre, which operates 17 English-language schools mainly in Shanghai, and a 50 per cent stake in Dell English, which offers English language training in partnership with more than 20 schools, mainly in Beijing. Pearson plans to use existing content from its Penguin and Pearson Longman brands in China.

FRIDAY 13

NSW Premier Morris Iemma suspended Minister for Education John Della Bosca on Friday, 13 June after learning he was the author of an apology given to him by a Gosford bar without advising the Premier. 'I am standing John aside on this basis: that is, (that) the faxing and drafting of the apology was not in (his) report,' the Premier said. The suspension followed a week of bad press after staff at Gosford's Iguanas Waterfront Bar alleged that the Minister for Education and his partner, Commonwealth member of parliament, Belinda Neal, had threatened and abused them. The Minister was also under fire after explaining he had driven home from the Gosford bar. In May he announced he had received a seventh speeding ticket while driving on a probationary licence after accumulating demerit points for six speeding offences. 'I advised the Roads and Traffic Authority that I was the driver and, as a result, I expect to lose my driver's licence for six months,' he said in a statement in May. 'Although I have not yet received official notification about my licence status, I have ceased driving.' The suspension ended a bad week for the Minister, after striking teachers occupied his offices to protest against a new statewide transfer system.

SUSTAINABLE DESIGN

Architects FMSA took out the national prize in the 'Szcencorp Green Building' category of the World Environment Day Awards of the United Nations Association of Australia for their design for the Cornish campus of the St Leonard's College Sustainability Centre at Patterson River, Victoria. The design features solar chimneys, passive heating and cooling systems, wind and solar power generation and water recycling systems, all designed to be operated by students, as well as recycled and environmental building components. FMSA has also designed the Victorian Department of Education and Early Childhood Development's new rural campus at Glenormiston, a residential campus for middle year students from government schools for nine-week periods, which also focuses on sustainability through various design features.



WHO SAID IT?

'For too long in Australia, debates about the quality of children's education have revolved around public versus private schools and which system deserves more government support.... Let me be clear: some non-government schools serve some less affluent communities, and some public schools serve some more affluent communities. I am not interested in taking resources away from schools. What I am interested in is getting additional resources into disadvantaged schools.'

Deputy Prime Minister and Commonwealth Minister for Education Julia Gillard in an opinion piece for the Sydney Morning Herald in May.

A new beginning Indigenous education

Schools can provide a safe and secure environment in which Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students can thrive, but they can't do it alone, says **Anthony Hockey**.

'To the Stolen Generations, I say the following: as Prime Minister of Australia, I am sorry. On behalf of the Government of Australia, I am sorry. On behalf of the Parliament of Australia, I am sorry. And I offer you this apology without qualification. We apologise for the hurt, the pain and suffering we, the parliament, have caused you by the laws that previous parliaments have enacted. We apologise for the indignity, the degradation and the humiliation these laws embodied.

'We offer this apology to the mothers, the fathers, the brothers, the sisters, the families and the communities whose lives were ripped apart by the actions of successive governments under successive parliaments....

'I know that, in offering this apology on behalf of the government and the parliament, there is nothing I can say today that can take away the pain you have suffered personally. Whatever words I speak today, I cannot undo that. Words alone are not that powerful. Grief is a very personal thing....

'The truth is: a business as usual approach towards Indigenous Australians is not working. Most old approaches are not working. We need a new beginning.'

So said Prime Minister Kevin Rudd in his apology to Australia's Indigenous peoples in the House of Representatives of the Commonwealth Parliament on 13 February. In the light of those words, it's worth reflecting on the role schools play in dealing with trauma and grief in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

Trauma and abuse have become a daily way of life for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities in many parts of Australia, and the trauma is not restricted to remote communities. Communities in urban centres are also subject to abuse and violence.

Government policies have been responsible for much of this trauma and abuse, sometimes deliberately, sometimes because of ignorance and neglect, and sometimes because of the difficulty those from an Indigenous culture have in adapting to aspects of the dominant Western culture.

One of the problems for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities is that trauma and abuse is often intra-generational and, because of this, normalised as a part of daily life, a point made emphatically by Rex Wild and Patricia Anderson in their 2007 report of the Northern Territory Board of Inquiry into the Protection of Aboriginal

Children from Sexual Abuse, *Ampe Akelyernemane Meke Mekarle: Little children are sacred*.

As the PM said in his February apology, 'symbolism is important, but unless the great symbolism of reconciliation is accompanied by an even greater substance, it is little more than a clanging gong.' Whether that apology will amount to more than a symbolic gesture remains to be seen, but it's safe to say that our education system is more than a clanging gong when it comes to trauma and grief in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. Schools play two vital roles: first in dealing with the signs and symptoms of trauma, and second in the prevention of the many of the causes of trauma.

The trauma and abuse experienced by students can lead to poor attendance and behaviour problems, typically with attendant lower grades, and to symptoms like stomach aches, headaches, pains, increased irritability, aggression, anger, poor attention and concentration, excessive talk and persistent questions about the kind of event that has caused the trauma.

Many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in Australia have, however, been subjected to traumatic events *because of* our education system. In situations where educators and schools fail to recognise the cultures of those they teach and insist on the primacy of school culture, education is responsible for the alienation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who fail to accept that culture. More than that, as Quentin Beresford and Jan Gray have pointed out in the *Australian Journal of Education*, the exclusion of Aboriginal people from state schools is itself a form of abuse and a cause of trauma.

One of the biggest problems is, as California State University researcher Christine Sleeter puts it, the 'whiteness of the school system,' a view confirmed by Merridy Malin and Debra Maidment. Many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students typically feel alienated from the schools that do not accept their culture, according to Malin and Maidment, because teachers typically appear to lack a cultural awareness of Indigenous issues and history, and too often use unfamiliar words and kinds of text.

Is it really so bad for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students? Well, in a word, yes. In 2003, Anne Hickling-Hudson and Roberta Ahlquist compared the indigenous populations of Australia and the United States. Around 70 per cent of Native

Americans are high school graduates compared to 6.6 per cent of Indigenous Australians, while nine per cent of Native Americans have a university degree compared to 1.3 per cent of Indigenous Australians. Their statistics also show that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students have higher rates of suspension, expulsion and dropout.

A further problem is that many schools in remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities have high levels of teacher turnover. One of the main causes, ironically enough, is that teachers often feel alienated because they're unfamiliar with the culture and struggle with the isolation of a remote community. It's also the case that the teachers trying to teach in remote communities in an environment that can be a daily life of disadvantage, disarray and trauma are usually young, middle class and white, and they very often experience a substantial culture shock.

The further problem of poor communication between non-Aboriginal and Aboriginal people in schools as a result of cultural barriers or poor literacy levels make it harder for a community to deal with trauma, as Wild and Anderson have pointed out.

If that paints a picture of doom and gloom, there is a light on the pictorial horizon: schools can provide a safe and secure environment in which students can confide in their teachers. The key, of course, is to have staff that can be trusted, but schools must become more Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander friendly.

A good start, say Hickling-Hudson and Ahlquist, is to become more inclusive of the history and culture of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. Schools need books using Indigenous languages: in acknowledging the language, a school is also acknowledging the culture. According to Donald Hones, who reported on programs at Cherbourg State School in central Queensland and Kuranda State School in far north Queensland, by bringing Indigenous culture into the classroom, Indigenous students will be more connected to schools and not see it as a foreign white institution.

Malin and Maidment point out, further, the benefit of employing Indigenous staff who are more likely to stay in the community, thereby decreasing staff turnover. A further benefit is that teachers from elsewhere can see culturally appropriate ways of disciplining children being modelled. Indigenous staff are also important role models

for students who may become the next generation of Indigenous professionals, be they teachers, interpreters, counsellors, youth workers or doctors.

Schools have a direct role to play in teaching about trauma, especially when a traumatic event has occurred at the school. Teaching and other staff can teach students about some of the common thoughts and feelings associated with trauma to address the students' feeling that they are going crazy or going it alone, and can teach them about emotional awareness and coping skills to deal with trauma such as basic relaxation skills, the use of self-calming phrases, distraction techniques and positive activity scheduling.

Schools are often the first point of contact for people seeking access to mental health services, and can play a number of roles in the delivery of counselling to students suffering the effects of trauma. Teaching staff in schools are a valuable first point of contact for identifying students who may need counselling because they're often the first to see the signs of trauma in their classrooms including common stress reactions, such as social, emotional and behavioural changes. It's worth pointing out, of course, that teachers may themselves need counselling as they come to terms with dealing with trauma.

Recent policy initiatives to increase school attendance by linking attendance to welfare payments have taken place without the infrastructure to support them. Schools that were already lacking basic resources now have further problems. Yes, they have increased attendance, but they are unable to cater to the students because they don't have enough teachers or adequate facilities.

The starting point for any successful strategy to address the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in Australia is to make sure schools have good quality teachers in them. That's about incentives, but these must go beyond financial means. As Sue Roffey has pointed out, paying extra money doesn't necessarily encourage good teachers to go to remote communities since high performers are less motivated by money than by the challenge to do the best they can. We need to give high-performing teachers opportunities to enhance their own teaching and also to enhance the schools in which they teach. This includes opportunities for leadership and for professional development. Employment could also be linked to sponsorship of extended postgraduate study on

condition of an agreed term of employment. It's essential, however, that teachers do not suffer a financial disadvantage to teach in an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander community.

As Sue Roffey explains, every one dollar spent in early childhood saves an estimated \$17 later. Addressing early childhood education in Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander communities specifically, Sue Gordon points out that positive early childhood experiences lead to better school performance, fewer social and behavioural problems, fewer health problems, fewer school drop outs, less reliance on welfare, less crime and less need for remedial education in later schooling. As she points out, many Indigenous children experience problems that are preventable early in their lives and that prevention is the most effective intervention.

When Donald Hones visited Cherbourg State School he met principal Chris Sarra, a leading Aboriginal educator who inherited a school with high absenteeism and low-performing students. One of the biggest issues Sarra had to address first was the

low expectations of the teachers. As Sarra explains, better educational outcomes can be achieved simply when teachers have higher expectations of Aboriginal students than they currently have.

Schools cannot solve the trauma and abuse experienced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students alone. They need productive partnerships, using school facilities with health services, social services and other infrastructure services, but most importantly with the community. If the community is not communicating with the school, then you can expect every initiative to fail.

It seems at times that this issue is too big. It would be easy to give up and walk away. Behind the high turnover of staff you'll often find that typically heroic people who have burned out, but Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities don't need heroes, they need everyone to think systematically and long term. The good news is that we have a lot of schools, and a lot of schools provide a safe and secure environment for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.

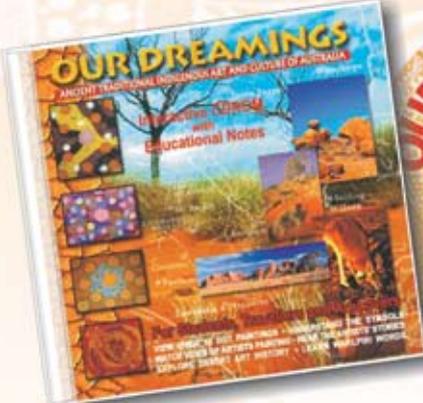
Anthony Hockey is Deputy Principal at Sacred Heart Primary School in Preston, Melbourne. He spent five years teaching in schools in Alice Springs.

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Gifted children plainly, simply, utterly and absolutely deserve an appropriate education, say **Peter Merrotsy, Linley Cornish, Howard Smith and Susen Smith.**

It would be kindest, perhaps, to interpret the monologion by Catherine Scott in the April edition of *Professional Educator* as a work of satire. Like Machiavelli's *The Prince*, it seems to bear the hallmark of the genre, but it's less subtle and witty than, say, Jonathan Swift's *A Modest Proposal*, and relies on polemic and vituperation. This is surprising from an academic of Scott's apparent standing, and surprising too that the opinion piece – the term is used advisedly – is devoid of the supporting evidence expected of a professional educator. Moreover, it is sad, very sad, because of the damage that the article may do, wittingly or unwittingly, to the gifted and talented children who most need our help.

With so many blatantly misinformed and misinforming statements in such a short article, none of which include a meaningful reference to the peer-reviewed research literature, it's difficult to know where exactly to begin to respond to Scott's diatribe. This cabal, sorry, 'cadre of academics' will propose here a prolegomena for any future professional dialogue on 'gifted and talented education' through a reflection on special education, IQ and underachievement.

SPECIAL EDUCATION

A quick glance at the journal *Gifted*, for example, will reveal how large the 'gifted-and-talented industry' actually is in Australia. Many people, perhaps half a dozen, offer counselling services for families of gifted children. Such services would appropriately belong in a school setting, but, in most instances, they are not to be found there. In any case, those who profit from this industry do not appear to have particularly much in the way of material assets, certainly not as much as those who profit from other educational industries, such as educational psychology.

The lacuna of educational services for gifted and talented children is also reflected in a lack of understanding and support by many teachers and the wider community who have neither knowledge nor experience of the cognitive and affective needs of gifted children. The gifted students themselves are disenfranchised, and do not have a 'voice' to seek equity of educational provision. Indeed, very few people have felt empowered to advocate for gifted children, and as Miraca Gross points out in *Exceptionally Gifted Children*, those who do are usually derided with taunts of 'elitism'

that are insidiously underscored, according to Susen Smith and Lorna Chan in their study of the attitudes of primary school teachers, by widespread ignorance.

A growing recognition among many parents and at least some educators of the need for organisations to support gifted children by providing accurate information about giftedness, by facilitating networks for teachers, parents and children, and by advocating for gifted children at a political level, led to the foundation of state associations for gifted children, and the establishment of a national body, the Australian Association for the Education of the Gifted and Talented.

There are about four and a half academics around Australia whose title Lecturer in Gifted and Talented Education might suggest that they are the ones who have made 'promoting gifted-and-talented into a career winner.' They will attest, sotto voce, that their teaching, research and service demand about 80 or 100 hours per week for 50 or so weeks per year. Apparently, the years of doctoral work and the move from the chalkface to academia result in neither an increase in salary nor an increase in status. That doesn't sound like much of a career move. They're just like most other academics, really.

These three groups of people have one thing in common: their work is predicated on service to gifted and talented children and youth. But who are the gifted and talented?

François Gagné's Differentiated Model of Giftedness and Talent has been widely adopted by education systems in Australia. Gagné distinguishes natural abilities or giftedness and systematically developed abilities or talent. It's a model that describes the dynamic relationship between high potential and high performance: how one achieves talent is a result of the interaction between the gifted person and intrapersonal and environmental factors. The dichotomy of giftedness and talent allows, among other things, for an expanded model that is inclusive of the gifted student who is underachieving. An education system that adopts Gagné's model accepts responsibility for the identification of high potential in students, and for providing appropriately for their education.

Education systems have been slow to accept the notion that giftedness implies special learning needs, perhaps fearing the resource implications that it entails.

Nevertheless, according to a select committee inquiry into the education of gifted and talented children by the Senate Employment, Workplace Relations, Small Business and Education Committee, there's a problem. 'These children have special needs in the education system; for many their needs are not being met; and many suffer underachievement, boredom, frustration and psychological distress as a result,' the inquiry found.

While the use of the term 'special education' here is apropos, as Chris Forlin and Peter Forlin note in their overview of special education research in Australia, education systems have been slow to accept the notion that giftedness implies special learning needs, perhaps fearing the responsibility and resource implications that it entails.

On a different political level, there is certainly plenty of research that clearly links the inhibition of appropriate provision for the individual educational needs of gifted children to negative attitudinal factors by the wider community. See, for example, work published in 2007 by Selena Gallagher, in 2006 by Gross and in 1998 by Smith and Chan. The result for many gifted students is an unchallenging curriculum and rejection by same-aged peers. Advanced intellectual ability, after all, is often not appreciated by others. Both make school an unhappy place to be.

Parents certainly desire 'to do the best by their children,' or at least want to affirm that 'each child has a right to realise their potential,' which is, of course, a premise of most educational bodies. Correctly understood, and casting all false impartiality aside, this will naturally lead to the adoption of the language and philosophy of special education: gifted students deserve an 'individualised' and 'appropriate education' within 'the least restrictive environment.'

IQ

It's interesting to note that Scott draws our attention to the spectre of IQ tests. Sad to say, such animals still dominate the educational landscapes of North America and England, even though some, like Jane Piirto or James Borland, suggest, or hope, that a 'paradigm shift' has taken place or is taking place. In Australia, IQ tests have fallen into desuetude. This is not to say that IQ tests have no

use as a measure of phenotypic intelligence or as a diagnostic tool for 'gifted students with learning disabilities,' but rather to say that cognitive ability relies on a large number of component processes, a variety of which may not even be measured by any standard IQ test, as Nicholas Mackintosh properly explains. We need multifaceted approaches to identify giftedness, although perhaps we could do even better and adopt the more dynamic '360 degree assessment and feedback' model developed by Anoma Ariyaratne.

Mackintosh points out that any careful reading of Lewis Madison Terman's classic study, *The Measurement of Intelligence*, will counter the popular 'wisdom' that high IQ is not correlated with high achievement, a view supported by Hans Eysenck in *Genius: The natural history of creativity* and, surprisingly, by Howard Gardner in *Frames of Mind: The theory of multiple intelligences*. Nevertheless, recent studies of IQ and success, for example by Robert Sternberg, tend to measure success or high achievement by social status and income, despite Noam Chomsky's warning that: 'Wealth and power tend to accrue to those who are ruthless, cunning, avaricious, self seeking, lacking in sympathy and compassion, subservient to authority and willing to abandon principal for material gain.'

These are not exactly the characteristics that most parents want to see in their children. Indeed, the research literature suggests that these characteristics are not correlated with giftedness. Gifted individuals are certainly capable of behaving in morally reprehensible ways as Abraham Tannenbaum notes in 'Giftedness: The ultimate instrument for good and evil,' but the research literature strongly supports the notion that giftedness is correlated with advanced moral development according to Sal Mendaglio, and with empathy according to Peta Hay and colleagues. Therefore, better measures of success and high achievement, says Mendaglio, would be measures of autonomy, authenticity and altruism.

Just because our then Prime Minister had trouble recognising one of our own high achievers to be Australian in 2007 doesn't mean that we need look past our own shores to find an excellent example of what appropriate identification of giftedness followed by appropriate educational provision can do to translate high potential into high performance.

At quite a tender age, Fields Medallist Professor Terence Tao AM was identified, by his parents

Gifted students, like all other students, have a right to realise their potential, but high potential won't be realised if it goes unrecognised.

no less, to be 'gifted,' even survived the administration of an IQ test or two and enjoyed the benefits of a differentiated approach to his diverse curriculum. It's difficult to imagine what his school life would have been like without the special provision that addressed his special educational needs, and his individual cognitive and affective needs.

UNDERACHIEVEMENT

The 'little fish big pond' – or is that 'big fish little pond' – debate raises two important and related issues about ability grouping and the affective lives of gifted students. First, the research support for the various forms of ability grouping is very strong and quite unequivocal. See, for example, the work by Nicholas Colangelo and colleagues. Second, in traditional, lock-step classrooms, many gifted children are unchallenged, mask their ability, underachieve, have few if any friends at school and are unhappy at school. When working with and relating to like-minded peers, gifted children tend to be intellectually challenged, engaged with their schoolwork, performing closer to their ability, happy at school, and have good friends at school, according to Adrian Ashman and Peter Merrotsy, and Gross.

If we are 'to uncover a likely explanation for underachievement' we need to understand the notion of 'talent mask,' and how the 'forced-choice dilemma,' as Gross put it in 'The pursuit of excellence or the search for intimacy?' is a powerful demotivator that directly contributes to underachievement. The forced-choice dilemma refers to the choice that gifted young people often have to make between excelling in an area of talent that is not valued by the peer culture, and being accepted by that peer culture. If there is a primary need to form or maintain relationships with age-peers, for example, the intellectual potential or interests will retreat behind a talent mask so that the person can conform to a value system that may be markedly at odds with their often asynchronous development.

Another important explanation of underachievement is found in Graham Chaffey and Stan Bailey's 'invisible underachiever.' An invisible gifted underachiever is a student whose assessed potential is less than their actual high potential and who also underperforms in the classroom. Gifted children and youth from backgrounds of disadvantage – low socioeconomic status, forced cultural minority status, and rural and isolated contexts – are par-

ticularly at risk of being invisible underachievers. For more on this, see Merrotsy's 2006 paper and Merrotsy and colleagues' 2008 paper. In some cases, the underachievement is a result, consciously or unconsciously, of decades or generations of educational neglect, exclusion and disengagement.

Let there be no doubt: underachievement is insidious and pervasive. It's even more pernicious when nurtured by attitudes that reflect ignorance of the individual needs of all students, including those who are gifted. Non-identification of high potential will result in the status quo of no provision and of underachievement. Alternatively, appropriate identification of high potential, appropriate recognition and appropriate educational intervention will result in educational participation and academic engagement, and will have enormous benefits for affective development. For an example, see Merrotsy's report on the Wii Gaay Project.

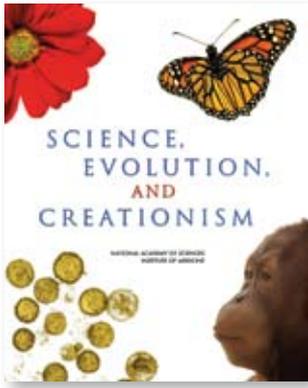
Research by Colangelo and colleagues and by Gallagher strongly links negative teacher and community attitudes, like the ones to be found in Scott's opinion piece, to underachievement by gifted students. Gifted students, like all other students, have a right to realise their potential, but high potential won't be realised if it goes unrecognised, and of course identification of high potential implies that appropriate educational action will necessarily follow.

Gifted children plainly, simply, utterly and absolutely deserve an education that meets their current educational needs, their current cognitive and affective needs, and their current intellectual, social and emotional individual needs. This is a moral imperative if social justice is to be realised.

Dr Peter Merrotsy is a lecturer in gifted and talented education in the School of Education at the University of New England. Linley Cornish is a senior lecturer in the School of Education at UNE. Dr Howard Smith is a lecturer in the School of Education at UNE. Dr Susen Smith is a lecturer in gifted and talented education in the School of Education at UNE.

LINKS: For more on the Australian Association for the Education of the Gifted and Talented, visit www.aaegt.net.au

For references, go to www.acer.edu.au/profed/references.html



Science, Evolution and Creationism

Science, Evolution and Creationism is, technically speaking, a book, and a beautifully presented one, but it's also part of a battle between the scientific academy and creationists in the United States. That raises a major question: should my review consider it against its own frame of reference or should I review it from my own perspective on evolution and creationism? I've opted for the latter position, but first let me describe the contents.

The first chapter considers the concept of evolution within the scientific paradigm, and ends with several pages setting out extracts from statements by religious leaders and scientists who see no conflict between their faith and science. To me these are perhaps the most significant aspects of the book, but more of that later.

The second and longest chapter presents the evidence for biological evolution. This is well written, with interesting and well-presented illustrations throughout.

The third chapter deals with creationism. It indicates the range of views that fall within this broad category and presents a refutation of these views. The authors argue that 'Creationist views reject scientific findings and methods,' and that "Intelligent Design" creationism is not supported by scientific evidence.' The chapter concludes by making explicit the rationale for the publication, arguing that 'the pressure to downplay evolution or emphasise non-scientific alternatives in public schools compromise science education.' The final two pages of the chapter present excerpts from court cases in the US concerning the teaching of creationism in schools.

The final chapter, 'Conclusions,' ends thus: 'Science and religion are different ways of understanding. Needlessly placing them in opposition reduces the potential of both to contribute to a better future.'

The book then presents answers to 'frequently asked questions' such as 'What's wrong with teaching critical thinking or "controversies" with regard to evolution?' Finally, there are five

pages devoted to biographies of the committee members, staff and consultants. It's an impressive list of people from the field of science!

What should be said about this book? The trouble I have is that, while I don't want creationism in any of its forms 'taught' in schools, nor do I agree with the assumption of the authors of this publication that in Science classes children should only be exposed to the facts, laws and theories of science. All the evidence suggests that such an approach is failing to interest today's students in developed countries. The proportion of students taking courses in Science beyond the years of compulsory schooling is falling. Research shows that many students find current content and pedagogies uninteresting and irrelevant.

The real challenge facing Science educators is to win them over. While this is not the place to mount all of the arguments about how this can best be done, it seems from the evidence that students are interested in the moral and ethical issues that arise from the study and applications of science. They don't want to study Science courses that deal only with the discipline itself. Within this context I'd suggest that to simply tell students that 'science and religion are two different ways of understanding the world' doesn't help. There is a place in the Science class for discussion of the issues arising from these two paradigms.

All people want to be able to create meaning for their own life. If science education is to make itself relevant to students, there must be space for them to integrate science into their worldview, and this goes beyond arguing over the merits of evolution and creationism. The stories of how others have done that can help. While there's a small attempt to do this in this volume, I suggest that there would be merit in further expanding such an approach.

David Symington is an Honorary Professor of Deakin University and also the Chair of the Church Council in his local Uniting Church.

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Art 4 Aid presents students with a chance to showcase their talents. This year's theme is 'Stop Child Labour.' Students can enter paintings, sculptures or photographs (entries close 19 September) or postcard, T-shirt or bumper sticker designs, or short films using footage provided by World Vision (entries close 14 October).

WEBSITE www.stir.org.au/art4aid

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Bell Shakespeare and acclaimed children's author Andy Griffiths have collaborated to create *Just Macbeth!* Directed by Wayne Harrison, it's a really silly version of Shakespeare's gory tragedy starring Andy, Lisa, Danny and – yuck! – Jen from the *Just Tricking!* *Just Stupid!* and *Just Shocking!*

books, plus a severed head that talks Shakespearean. 19 September to 5 October in Melbourne, then 8 October to 26 October in Sydney.

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SEPTEMBER 26

Screen It Presented by the Australian Centre for the Moving Image, Screen It is Australia's national film-making competition for primary and secondary school-aged students. This year, entrants will be asked to create works on 'Australian Identity.' What does

it mean to be Australian today? How may this change in the future? What has it meant in the past? Entrants can enter in the live action film, computer game or animation category in either the primary or secondary school sections. Register online by 26 September. Entries close on 17 October.

WEBSITE www.acmi.net.au/screenit

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WEBSITE www.anzela.edu.au/images/Conference_docs/anzela_08_brochure.pdf

OCTOBER 20

School Chook Challenge The competition, from the Australian Chicken Meat Federation (ACMF), encourages students to bust a myth or highlight a fact from the ACMF's *From Hatchery to Home* DVD, which covers curriculum topics on agriculture, food technology and animal health, and humanities. Students can enter work in a poster or digital format. State winners will receive one technology gift voucher for their school valued at \$500, while 12 lucky students will each receive an MP3 player. Entries close on 20 October, with winners announced on 8 December.

WEBSITE www.chicken.org.au/competition



Danny Katz explains how work experience teaches students how to be responsible, reliable future members of the workplace.

Work experience

As every secondary student approaches the end of their schooling, they get a chance to do a very special thing called work experience. This is where you can try out a career for a week or two and see if it suits you – it's kind of like sleeping with somebody before you commit to a long-term relationship, just to make sure you're both compatible, and satisfied, and there's no weird rash they never told you about.

When I was in Year 10, everyone knew what they wanted to do for work experience except me. Jim Karaniki really wanted to be a dentist, so that's what he did: he worked a week at his father's dental clinic where he performed proper orthodontic procedures like tidying up the stack of *New Ideas* in the waiting room and dusting off the foyer-poster of the pretty little girl with a malformed occlusion. And the Caruthers brothers were the school bullies, so they did work experience rolling lawns at Bronte Bowls Club – these guys were tremendously gifted at thumping things flat, and when they tried to rise up, thumping them flat again.

Me, I didn't know what to do. I knew I wanted to be creative and internationally-acclaimed, so first I contacted a film studio and they said I could work as a production assistant, but I said no, because I really wanted to direct. Next I approached an advertising agency, and they said I could do some copy-writing for them, but my mother said no, because it was the early '80s and advertising was too druggy and boozy and bearded. Finally I contacted the ABC and they said I could do a week with them so I said yes because this sounded perfect – maybe they would offer me the job of Middle East correspondent, or I could stand in for Bert on *Sesame Street* – we shared the same self-loathing and the unibrow.

As it turned out, I was given an extremely prestigious position in the ABC radio department: I was sent down to a little basement where I sat all by myself at a tiny table, and I had to record every new vinyl record that came into the record library.

Yes, that's right: I WAS THE RECORDER OF RECORDS IN THE RECORD LIBRARY RECORD-BOOK at THE ABC.

Each morning a small stack of albums would arrive at my desk, and I'd have to write down the artist's name, then jot down the record title, then finally, thrillingly, I'd have to hold the album-sleeve underneath a special electric-branding machine and burn the ABC logo into the corner – I felt like some kind of macho cowboy from the American mid-west, branding his cattle. Flat cardboard cattle. In the ABC basement.

Day after day, I sat in my corner and branded album-covers – classical, pop, jazz – oh yeah, I could do them all, even polka-disco Bollywood fusion. It was on my final day, at around 4:06pm, just after I'd branded the cover of Itzhak Perlman's *Concerto for Violin in D Major*, it occurred to me that maybe – just maybe – I was supposed to take the vinyl record OUT of the cover before I branded it. For four solid days I'd been burning the ABC logo onto both the album cover AND the vinyl inside, destroying approximately TWO HUNDRED AND FIFTY-ONE BRAND NEW RECORDS, ALL OF THEM NOW UNUSABLE. I destroyed Benjamin Britten operas, Duke Ellington tracks, Barbra Streisand releases, Chick Corea concerts, and even a single of Hot Chocolate's 'I'll Put You Together Again,' although that didn't upset me so much, and I branded it once more, right in the middle, with extreme prejudice.

Of course, work experience teaches you how to be a responsible, reliable future member of the workplace, so I did the right thing – I snuck all 251 damaged records into the record library, and hoped nobody would ever look on the shelf way down the back marked 'Kenny Loggins Duets.'

Needless to say, I never pursued a career with the ABC, although I did maintain a keen interest in recording technology, and was very relieved when about a year later, in 1983, vinyl records miraculously became obsolete, and everyone switched to CD.

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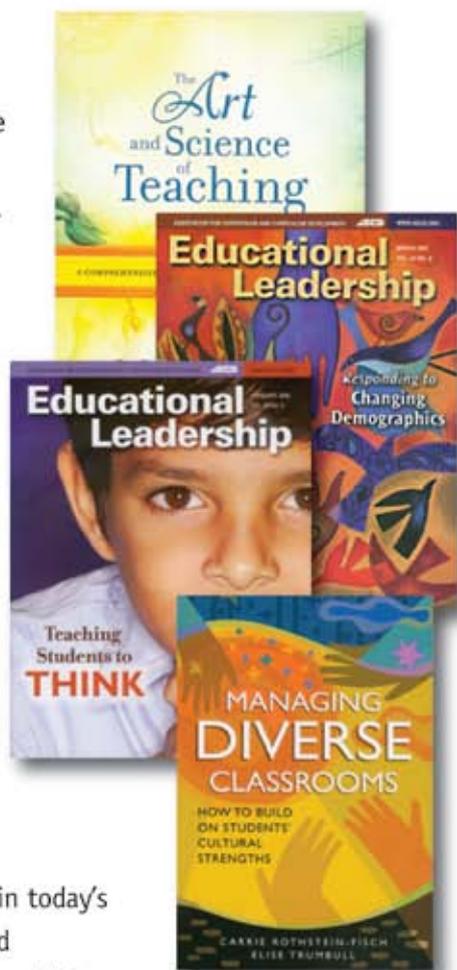
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