

Professional Educator

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A national curriculum

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Post-school transitions

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Drug education

– and Danny Katz on World Teachers' Day



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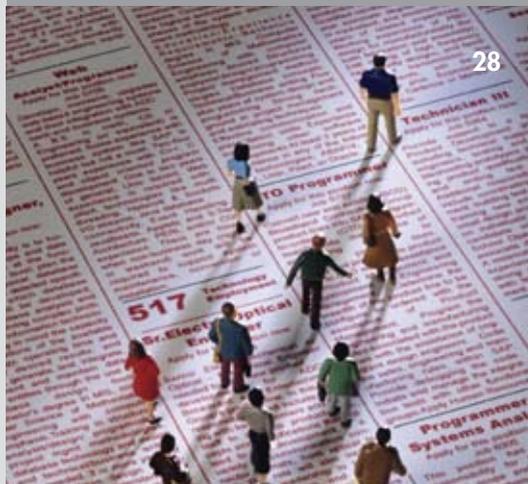
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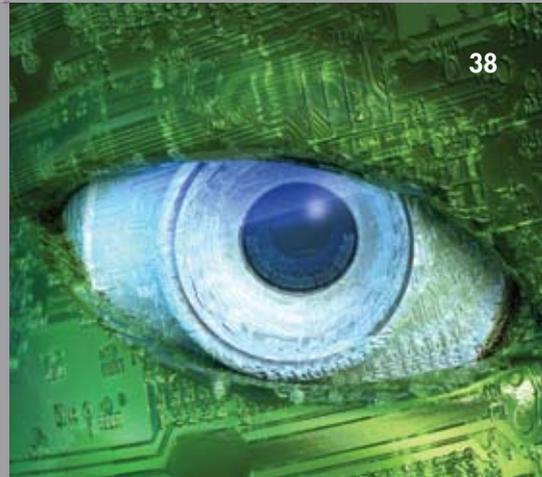
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EDITORIAL

Prime Minister Kevin Rudd's 'biggest school reform agenda in history' may have stolen the limelight in August, but let's hope it doesn't upstage the 'open and transparent review' of school funding of Deputy PM and Minister for Education Julia Gillard. The aim of that funding review, expected to be completed by 2011, is 'to establish an approach that is fair for all schools,' the Minister told a 'parliamentary forum' of the Independent Schools Council of Australia in Canberra in September.

Inside insight

CLONE WARS 1

Prime Minister Kevin Rudd announced what he called the 'biggest school reform agenda in history' in August – to recruit and retain the best teachers; assess and report on students and schools; use national data to target funding to underachieving schools; and make school principals autonomous, at least in terms of staffing. The PM said he expects some good, old-fashioned federal-state 'argy bargy.' Could that be because the 'biggest school reform agenda in history' agenda looks like a clone of the former Coalition government agenda for a national curriculum, testing, plain-language reporting to parents and school league tables?

CLONE WARS 2

According to a report by Justine Ferrari in the *Australian* in August, state and territory education ministers believe Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Education, Employment and Workplace Relations Julia Gillard is following the same departmental advice as her predecessors. 'There was a feeling that a lot of things Julia Gillard is talking about are exactly the same things Julie Bishop was talking about,' Ferrari's source said. That sounds like another case of cloning, but, it appears, the suspicion is more along the lines of channeling. 'The thinking is that it's the same person who's really doing the talking here, and that's (Commonwealth Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations Secretary) Lisa Paul,' Ferrari's source said. That impression appeared to be reinforced when Gillard and Paul both spoke at a 'parliamentary forum' of the Independent Schools Council of Australia in Canberra in September. 'Everything we require of public schools, we will require of non-government schools and everything we require of non-government schools we will require of public schools,' the Minister told the forum, while Paul said the Commonwealth government hoped to move to a single, needs-based system of funding for government and non-government schools. Whoever's speaking, it may mean the end of the existing socioeconomic status index currently used in the non-government schools funding mechanism, but

Gillard denied that her agenda was being determined by her department. 'The agenda we are dealing with is my agenda,' she told Ferrari. 'It has been generated by me, assisted by the people in my office working with our department.' *Inside insight* has run those two sentences through sophisticated speech recognition VIPERS – vocabulary-intonation-phrasing-enunciation-rhythm-syntax – software to see who was really doing the talking here, but the machine broke down.

PRINCIPALS AUSTRALIA

The Australian Principals Associations Professional Development Council has changed its name to Principals Australia, but will continue to provide professional development and learning for principals and aspiring principals. The demise of one of the last unpronounceable acronyms – APAPDC – is mourned by many in the education sector.

WHAT THE DICKENS?

Jarndyce and Jarndyce, aka *Australian Education Union v the honourable Vice President Lawler, the honourable Senior Deputy President Kaufman and Commissioner Smith, members of the Australian Industrial Relations Commission, the honourable Vice President Ross, a member of the Australian Industrial Relations Commission, Registrar Williams, Industrial Registrar, Terry Howard and Frederick Wubbeling and Australian Principals Federation*, aka *AEU v APF*, is over, maybe. After 10 years of legal dispute estimated to have cost the AEU and APF each about \$1 million, the Federal Court of Australia in July quashed the APF's registration. Not many people get to do quashing these days – you pretty much have to be a judge. The Federal Court quashed the APF registration because it did not have a purge rule, that is, a rule to do with ending the membership of a resigning or retiring member. If you were to think that this scarecrow of a suit has, in course of time, become so complicated that no man alive knows what it means, you would not be the first. The novel-length judgement, at 62,000 words, is available at www.austlii.edu.au/au/cases/cth/FCAFC/2008/135.html

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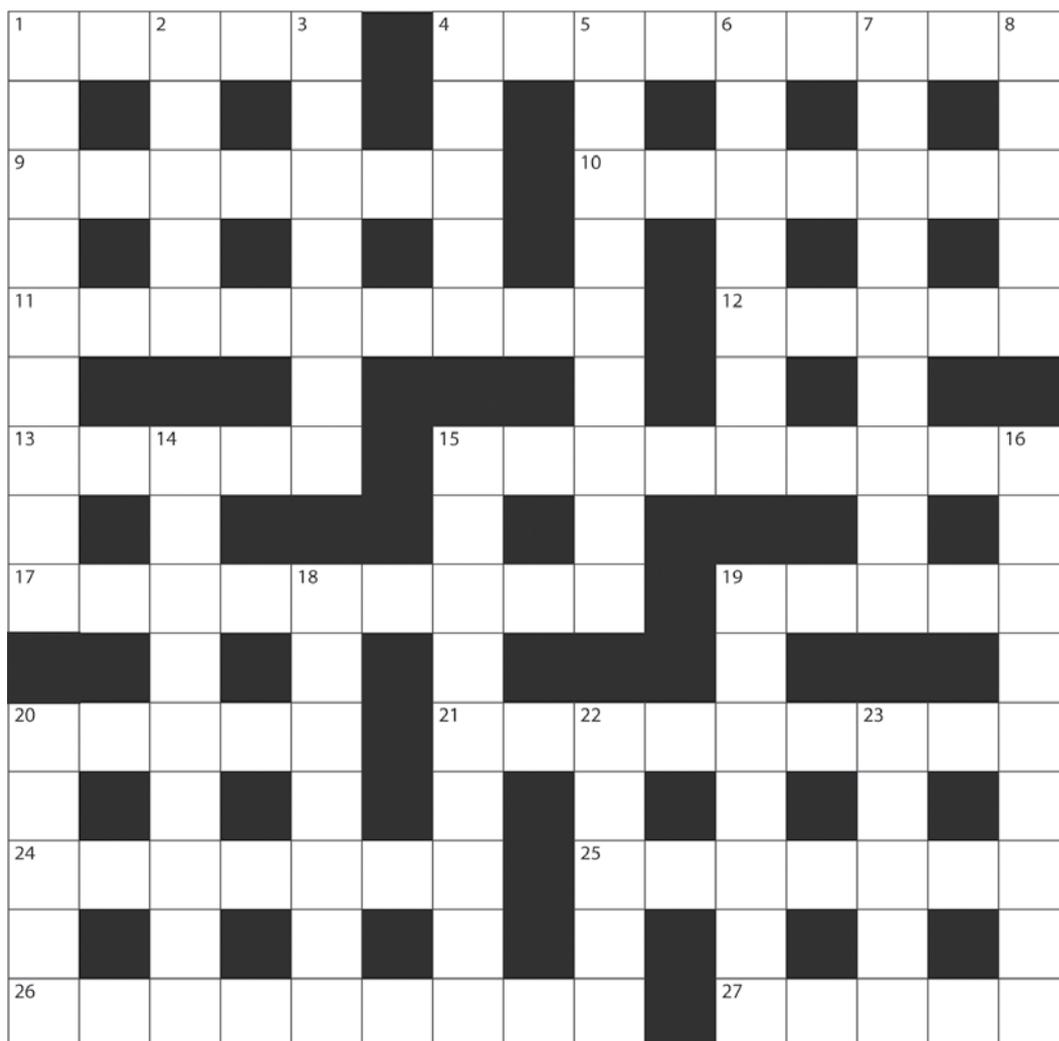
FEEDBACK

The most useful feedback is:

- individualised to fit the specific person and situation
- given with concern for the person receiving the feedback
- focused on behaviours, not personalities
- delivered without presumptions about the motivations or intentions of the person receiving the feedback
- delivered in a timely way – sufficiently close to the particular event being discussed for it to be fresh in the minds of both the person giving and the one receiving the feedback.

Don't say:

- 'You can't ever get it right'
- 'Just do it my way'
- 'I've helped as much as I can.'



Across

- 1 Shots issued from school (7)
 5 Put down woman in the school yard (7)
 9 Unspoiled degrees about topical discipline (4,11)
 10 Ridicule our behaviour (9)
 11 Furious rate about ten more (5)
 12 Jam opened with part of knife (5)
 13 Sharp-eyed old boy preceding underling (9)
 16 Not long ago, shabby bum went in; now lying down (9)
 18 Takes a breather, holding a weapon (5)
 19 Visit work in progress; it's not, initially (3,2)
 21 Asked for search into clarinet, perhaps (9)
 23 Strangely turns tail at sea a part of our home (10,5)
 24 Past performance largely ends without fault (7)
 25 Serious listener to settle down (7)

Down

- 1 Swift and soft in surprise attack (5)
 2 Standard media problem initially confused health worker (9)
 3 Push courtier in storm (7)
 4 Quietly and deviously votes to turn company round internally (5,4)
 5 Odd to be indebted in this way (5)
 6 Dilettante's half-hour following a friend (7)
 7 Party giver holds one in lift (5)
 8 Pull apart detective's cloak (9)
 12 School, for teachers, who unfortunately lack power (9)
 14 Student's piece of plastic put right (3,6)
 15 Judge it rank after bar brawl (9)
 17 Sped back in time, shattering tower (7)
 18 Lesser half controlling writer's writer (7)
 20 Tense argument opens the meal (5)
 21 Type of race put down once more (5)
 22 Lived and died with a scar (5)

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Stop playing games and get on with reform

It's time to stop playing games with the nation's most important infrastructure – education – says **Cheryl O'Connor**.

When Australian governments sit down to hammer out a national approach to education, you can bet there'll be some cooperation and some coercion, as Prime Minister Kevin Rudd's agenda-setting speech at the National Press Club of Australia on 27 August suggested.

Look at the work on a national curriculum by the National Curriculum Board (NCB) led by Professor Barry McGaw, though, and it's clear that cooperation still stands a chance. Notwithstanding the limitations and the timelines confronting the NCB, there's plenty of support from the states and territories, and the education community.

The NCB enjoys public, political and stakeholder confidence and, more importantly, it enjoys the confidence of teachers and school leaders not only because of its composition, but also because of a general professional weariness with the never-ending argy bargy that gets the work of schools absolutely nowhere.

School and department leaders, state and national, know that what is driving change is the international competitiveness of the Australia workforce. Point the finger of blame wherever you like, but it's clear that investment in the ongoing skills needs of teachers has been woefully neglected while the infrastructure in schools has been allowed to remain at little better than 1960s standards.

Australia is a rich country, yet we as citizens and we educators as a profession have allowed our political representatives to under-invest in our national long-term interests. Those countries with whom we compete have watched Australia's

performance and have not been sitting idle arguing over jurisdictional responsibilities.

Generally conservative educators are crying out for change. They know better than any that an education revolution is needed. They know the cost financially; they know the professional burden they will have to shoulder; and they know about students so disadvantaged that the Aussie 'fair go' is just a myth to be studied.

There can be no more delay. Get on with the national curriculum. Get on with the national accreditation of pre-service education. Get on with national teacher registration, supported by the kinds of high-quality ongoing learning that teachers must have if they are to remain relevant in a knowledge-based, technologically driven world.

When it comes to the national curriculum, start with English, Maths, Science and History. Add on Asian studies and Geography. Add anything that makes it clear to educators whatever it is they ought to be doing in this demanding profession.

It's time to stop playing games with what is ultimately the most important infrastructure in the nation. It's time to stop blaming the suckers in the classrooms for what politicians have not been wise enough to sort out. It's time to stop expecting miracles from schools that have been divided and short changed.

Get on with the national curriculum and then get on with funding education so this rich and capable country can be all that it might be – and you'd better believe it, the nation's teachers are the key to the nation's future.

Cheryl O'Connor is the Chief Executive Officer of the Australian College of Educators, Canberra.

Photo by Craig Jewell courtesy of stock.xchng



Gifted and talented

Any critique on gifted and talented education, it seems, is likely to stir up a deal of affront. What my critique in the April edition of *Professional Educator* appears not to have stirred up, however, is any response that consults the evidence about the consequences to children of labelling them in ways that persuade them to see their abilities as entities. Peter Merrotsy, Linley Cornish, Howard Smith and Susen Smith, writing in the last edition of *Professional Educator*, clearly hold to this harmful model, given their mention of 'phenotypic intelligence.' It's clear from their response that they have not consulted the several decades of conclusive research into models of ability and their consequences, but instead try to style my writing as 'an opinion piece'. This it is not: it is a report of the empirical evidence about the matter. If they find the conclusions unpalatable I suggest that they read the research carefully and provide empirically supportable reasons why the results are unsound.

Merrotsy and his colleagues resort to the standard argument to support of the labelling of children, that is, that children who do well in school are suffering from a particular disadvantage. The 'evidence' provided in support of the necessity to direct extra resources to the education of the successful can describe the needs of children of any level of educational attainment. Children doing well, badly or somewhere in the middle at school can be doing less well than they could with more help. In addition they can feel alienated, misunderstood and marginalised, and

suffer emotionally as a result. They can also feel pressure to underachieve to fit in with their peers. It takes an extraordinary desire to blind oneself to the realities of schooling for most children to maintain that children who struggle suffer less than those who find school easy. The only conclusion one can reasonably draw is that we are meant to be more upset by the suffering of the gifted because they and their difficulties matter more than ordinary people and their problems. Elitism anyone? The compulsory bad faith inclusion of the claim that smart kids can be found among the under-privileged is most instructive. Is anyone surprised to hear that? Why make the claim if not to cover up the undeniable fact that most children identified as gifted and given extra educational resources as consequence come from middle class families? To those that have it shall be given.

There's a great deal to be said for providing opportunities for children who are doing well at school to take their studies further and deeper. This is not, however, an argument for labelling children and trying to build a case that doing well makes people suffer. Such provisions can be made without an attendant public fuss about the special needs of the successful.

A technical matter: the writers talk about 'assessed potential,' yet by definition a potential is something that does not yet actually exist and so cannot be measured.

Photo by István Benedek courtesy of stock.xchng

Catherine Scott responds to Peter Merrotsy, Linley Cornish, Howard Smith and Susen Smith in the gifted and talented debate.

Dr Catherine Scott has taught in primary and secondary schools and has also worked as a school counsellor. She currently teaches developmental and educational psychology.

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Australia has an opportunity to lead the world with the quality of its national curriculum, if the new National Curriculum Board is allowed to do its job properly, says **Alan Reid.**



IT'S TIME

A national curriculum for the 21st Century?

One of the centrepieces of the Rudd government's program at the last election was the idea of an 'education revolution.' The phrase conveys a sense of dramatic and sudden change in the education sector, resulting in a sharp break with established traditions and practices.

It's early days, but on the basis of what has been announced so far, the Commonwealth government's policy, while setting out on some worthwhile tracks, is seriously limited by a lack of vision about the educational changes needed to keep pace with changing times. The mooted national curriculum is a case in point.

The quest for a national curriculum has been the holy grail of many politicians and education policy makers over the past 40 years, yet the various quests for this national curriculum have invariably foundered on the rock of state rights.

In recent times, both Brendan Nelson and Julie Bishop, when Ministers for Education in the Coalition government of John Howard, attempted to overcome perceived state intransigence on a national curriculum by threatening to withhold federal funds unless certain policy conditions were met. This approach alienated the states, partly because it was seen as an attempted takeover of a key state responsibility; and partly because the Coalition policy proposals were disparate and lacked coherence.

Although coercion appears to be the main strategy in relation to accountability in

The time for an Australian curriculum has come; however, it will be sad if this wonderful opportunity results in a flawed product because the National Curriculum Board has been given a partial remit.

schools, Labor Minister for Education Julia Gillard is taking a different tack by seeking to engineer a national curriculum approach through consultation and consensus. The key strategy here has been the establishment of a National Curriculum Board (NCB) comprising equal representation from the states and territories.

The composition of the NCB suggests that Minister Gillard may be successful. Ministers for Education from the states and territories have given guarded support to the idea of a national curriculum, and since many of the appointments

to the NCB are also heads of the various state and territory curriculum boards, it's likely that they'll work to achieve the goals of their respective state ministers.

The quality of the NCB is another positive factor. It comprises people with a depth of curriculum design expertise and an understanding of the political context. The NCB is led by Professor Barry McGaw who is well respected in the broad education community, and has a breadth of national and international experience as well as a well-developed political antenna.

These are favourable portents. The 'education revolution' will not be judged, however, by the fact that agreement has been achieved but by the quality of the curriculum product. Can the current process deliver a quality national curriculum that will meet broad and diverse aspirations among the Australian population in the 21st Century? It's on this score that I have some misgivings.

The process has commenced without a well-developed rationale for a national Australian curriculum. Such a rationale needs to go beyond technical issues such as reducing the duplication of resources or making it easier for children of families who move states – important as these may be. Asking why we need a national Australian curriculum is a much bigger question than asking whether it would reduce duplication.

A society's school curriculum is, after all, a reflection of what is valued in that society, and of what that society wants to become. It's only once such questions about values and direction

are widely and inclusively discussed and agreed upon that it is possible to identify the knowledge, skills and understandings that our young people will need if they are to contribute productively to their society in the future.

Of course, the process is not starting with a blank slate, but remember that this is an attempt to establish the first national curriculum in Australian history. It therefore needs to be more than simply an aggregation of what is common in existing state curricula.

Instead of starting with considerations about what curriculum content and organisation might be consistent with an agreed rationale, however, key curriculum decisions appear to have been made in advance. The NCB has been handed a remit which charges it with the task of developing four subjects – Maths, Science, English and History – without any sense of the whole curriculum.

Curriculum design should never be a piecemeal process. It's difficult to plan a segment of curriculum without knowing how it will relate to other segments to achieve your overall goals. That is, a curriculum is greater than the sum of its parts. Sure, the Commonwealth Minister for Education has flagged that Geography and Languages will be in a second phase of development, but drip-feeding subjects in this way means that the NCB will be always working too much in the dark.

I'm not saying that the four selected subjects should not be key parts of any curriculum. I'm arguing that only selecting those subjects runs the risk of downgrading other important areas of the curriculum such as the Arts, Health and Personal Development, and Design and Technology. It's hard to believe that a curriculum for the 21st Century could be developed without these areas of knowledge.

Of course Minister Gillard might insist that these subjects will be developed in later phases, but since she has not described these, the NCB can only work with the task it's been given. The development focus will be on Maths, Science, English and History. Since these subjects will also form the basis of a national testing program, it's not hard to guess where the bulk of time and resources will go.

None of this means that the task will not be completed. The quality of the people involved and the current good will of the states and ter-

ritories, and the education community towards the project suggest that the time for an Australian curriculum has come; however, it will be sad if this wonderful opportunity results in a flawed product because the NCB has been given a partial remit.

It's not too late to address these issues. Having established the NCB, Minister Gillard is now in a position to provide greater clarity by expanding the terms of reference of the NCB.

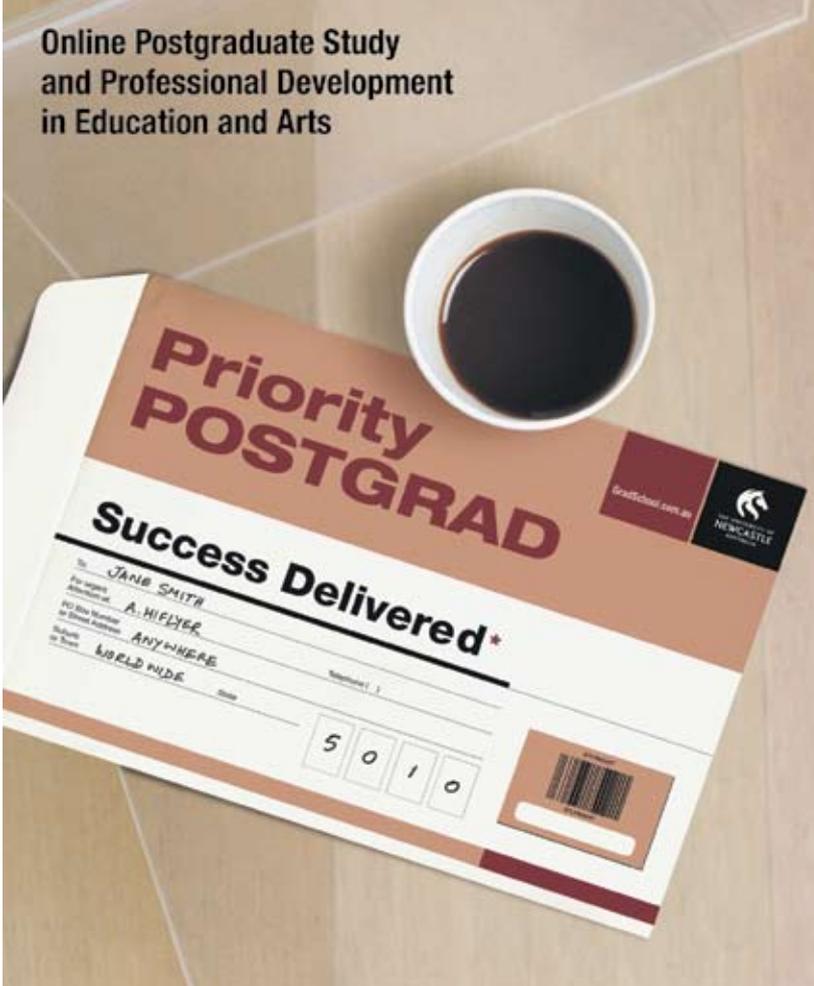
First, she should establish a clear and unambiguous link between the National Goals of Schooling and the national curriculum. The fact that the goals are currently being reviewed by the Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs provides an opportunity deeply to involve the NCB in these deliberations. This demands more than making random connections. It means that decisions about the National Goals of Schooling should inform, indeed determine, the shape of curriculum development.

Second, she should ask the NCB to consult widely in order to develop a picture of the whole curriculum, which can then be put to her for approval. This doesn't stop the development process from being broken down into a number of phases, with the first phase being the already-designated four subjects, but it does mean that at least the NCB can do its work with knowledge of the purposes that the curriculum will serve and an appreciation of the whole task.

As it stands, the NCB is being asked to develop a national curriculum for the 21st Century with the same set of subjects as comprised the curricula of the Australian colonies as we began the 20th Century. Unless its brief is expanded, Australia will have lost an opportunity to lead the world with the quality of its national curriculum.

Alan Reid is Professor of Education at the University of South Australia.

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Leadership

Is there a looming shortage?

Many school leaders will retire in the next few years, and their potential successors report little attraction in the leadership role. **Phillip McKenzie** considers whether we really face a looming shortage.

Read the headlines in the nation's daily newspapers and it looks as though we face a 'Looming teacher shortage,' a 'National crisis,' even a 'Looming teacher shortage crisis,' and many commentators have expressed concern about a looming shortage of school leaders. There are worries that many principals and deputy, vice or associate principals will retire in the next few years, and that leadership posts are not attractive to a large proportion of teachers. Both propositions are basically true, but does that really mean that Australia will not have enough well-qualified school leaders in coming years?

Until recently we have lacked a national data set that would enable us to answer such a question. The studies that had been done tended to involve quite small samples, or one state or sector, and generally did not involve both teachers and leaders in the same survey.

The Staff in Australia's Schools (SiAS) survey was commissioned by the Commonwealth Department of Education, Science and Training, now the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, to help fill data gaps around educator workforce issues, and to gather information to assist in future leadership planning. For details on this, see the *Staff in Australia's Schools 2007* report released earlier this year.

The study was conducted in 2006 and 2007 by the Australian Council for Educational Research and the Australian College of Educators (ACE) with the support of an advisory committee that included representatives of government and non-government school authorities in all states and territories. The last national survey of similar scope, the Teachers in Australian Schools survey, was conducted by ACE in 1999.

Here, I use part of the SiAS data to address three questions: who are school leaders and how many are there; what are their ages and career intentions; and how many teachers intend to apply for leadership positions?

THE SiAS SURVEY

The SiAS survey involved four populations:

- primary teachers: any staff member who was qualified and employed as a teacher, and who was employed in a primary school or the primary component of a combined primary-secondary school for at least one day

per week in the term concerned, including in non-classroom teaching roles

- primary leaders: any staff member who satisfied the criteria for inclusion as a primary teacher and who was also classified as a principal, or deputy, vice or associate principal
- secondary teachers: the equivalent definition to primary teachers for those working in secondary schools or the secondary component of combined primary-secondary schools
- secondary leaders: the equivalent definition to primary leaders.

The sample for each population first involved sampling schools with a probability proportional to their enrolment size, and then randomly sampling up to 15 teachers from a staff list provided by the school, and all those who met the criteria for inclusion as a leader. The questionnaire was administered online and took 20 or so minutes to complete.

We received 5,209 valid survey responses from primary teachers, a response rate of 30 per cent; 5,394 from secondary teachers, a response rate of 33 per cent; 1,116 from primary leaders, a response rate of 35 per cent; and 1,393 from secondary leaders, a response rate of 37 per cent.

Although the survey generated a large number of responses, and extensive efforts were made to assess the likely impact of response bias, the response rates were below expectations and therefore the data need to be treated cautiously.

ESTIMATED NUMBERS OF TEACHERS AND LEADERS

Table 1 draws on overall teacher workforce data for Australia from the Australian Bureau of Statistics and the definitions used in the SiAS survey to estimate the numbers of people employed as teachers and leaders in primary and secondary schools.

Of the overall teacher workforce of 270,000 persons, including those working part-time, around 140,000 are employed in primary schools – 121,000 as teachers and 19,000 as leaders – and 130,000 in secondary schools – 120,500 and 9,500, respectively. As there are fewer secondary schools than primary schools, and secondary schools are much larger on average, the average staff size – that is, teachers and leaders – in secondary schools of 48.9 is larger than in the primary school average staff size of 18.1. Notably, based on the SiAS definitions, there are twice as many staff classified

Table 1: Estimated numbers of teachers and school leaders

	Primary	Secondary
Teachers	121,000	120,500
<i>(per school)</i>	<i>15.6</i>	<i>45.3</i>
Leaders	19,000	9,500
<i>(per school)</i>	<i>2.5</i>	<i>3.6</i>
Total teachers and leaders	140,000	130,000
<i>(per school)</i>	<i>18.1</i>	<i>48.9</i>

Table 2: Age profiles of teachers and school leaders

Age band (years)	Primary		Secondary	
	Teachers %	Leaders %	Teachers %	Leaders %
21-30	18	2	16	1
31-40	21	13	21	9
41-50	29	33	30	35
51-55	19	29	19	31
56+	12	25	15	24
Average age	43 years	50 years	44 years	50 years

as primary school leaders – 19,000 – than there are as secondary leaders – 9,500 – and primary schools on average have a higher proportion of staff classified as leaders. This difference between the two levels of schooling has implications for the prospective numbers of recruits to leadership positions, as discussed below.

AGE PROFILES OF TEACHERS AND SCHOOL LEADERS

As Table 2 shows, the age distribution of primary and secondary teachers is quite similar. About 18 per cent of primary teachers and 16 per cent of secondary teachers are aged less than 30 years. The age band of 51 to 55 years includes 19 per cent of primary and secondary teachers. A further 12 per cent of primary teachers are aged more than 55 years, as are 14 per cent of secondary teachers. The relatively large numbers of teachers aged 50 years or older suggests that large numbers of teachers will need to be recruited in the next few years to replace teachers who retire.

Age distribution varies somewhat by gender. A higher proportion of female secondary teachers – 20 per cent – are aged less than 30 years than are male teachers – nine per cent. Correspondingly, a higher proportion of male teachers are in the

older age brackets: 38 per cent of male secondary teachers are aged more than 50 years, compared to 30 per cent of female secondary teachers. Around 90 per cent of the primary teachers aged less than 25 years are female, which suggests that the proportion of female teachers is likely to increase over time.

Table 2 also indicates that high proportions of school leaders are aged 51 to 55 years – 29 per cent of primary leaders and 31 per cent of secondary leaders. On average, school leaders are aged 50 years, which is six or so years higher than the average age of teachers. More than a half of the school leaders are aged 50 years or older, which suggests that large numbers will need to be replaced in the next few years as they retire.

A higher proportion of female leaders are aged less than 35 years than are male leaders, not shown here, and at secondary level a slightly higher proportion of female leaders are aged more than 60 years. On average, male school leaders are slightly older than female school leaders.

CAREER INTENTIONS

As Table 3, on page 16, shows, on average, primary and secondary teachers intend to continue working in schools for another 12 years, while primary

leaders intend to continue working in schools for another nine years, and secondary leaders for 11 years. Given the average age of teachers shown in Table 2 this implies that most teachers and leaders intend to remain working in schools until retirement.

It's interesting to note in Table 3, however, that around a half of the teachers and a third of the leaders are unsure as to how much longer they intend to continue working in schools. This suggests that teachers' career intentions are somewhat fluid, and difficult to predict with certainty.

Around six per cent of primary teachers intend to leave within three years, as do eight per cent of secondary teachers. These proportions were slightly higher among male teachers than female teachers, which suggest that teaching has slightly more difficulty in retaining males than females in the profession.

Table 3 also shows that higher proportions of leaders intend to leave teaching within three years – 13 per cent of primary leaders and 11 per cent of secondary leaders – which may well reflect the fact that leaders are closer to retirement age, on average. This is also reflected in the fact that a lower proportion of leaders – about 35 per cent – are unsure about how much longer they will continue working in schools than are teachers – 50 per cent.

There were no marked gender differences in leaders' intentions, except that a slightly higher proportion of female leaders were unsure about

how much longer they would continue working in schools. There was a clear relationship between leaders' age and the number of years that they intend to keep working: for example, only around two per cent of the leaders aged 36 to 50 years intend to leave teaching within the next three years compared to about 20 per cent of those aged more than 50. A higher proportion of leaders in government schools – 12 to 15 per cent – indicated that they were likely to leave teaching within the next three years than leaders in non-government schools – five to eight per cent – which suggests that government schools will have a proportionately greater need for replacement leaders in the next few years.

TEACHERS' INTENTIONS TO APPLY FOR LEADERSHIP POSITIONS

As Table 4 shows, only around 10 per cent of teachers intend to apply for either a principal, or deputy, vice or associate principal position within the next three years. The proportions who intend to apply are slightly higher in the primary than the secondary sector – 12 per cent compared to nine per cent, although the relatively high proportion of missing data on this question suggests some uncertainty about leadership aspirations.

There are noticeable gender differences among teachers in regard to their intentions about applying for leadership positions within the next three years, with much higher proportions of male



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Table 3: Teachers and leaders: number of years they intend to continue working in schools

How much longer do you intend to work in schools? (No. of years)	Teachers		Leaders	
	Primary %	Secondary %	Primary %	Secondary %
<1	1	1	1	2
1-3	5	7	12	9
4-6	8	9	16	12
7-9	4	4	8	7
10-15	12	13	16	22
16-20	1	2	2	2
>20	11	10	7	9
Unsure	53	49	36	35
Missing data	8	6	2	3
	100	100	100	100
Average number of years ^a	12	12	9	11

a: Excluding those who indicated they were unsure about how much longer they intended to continue teaching.

Table 4: Teachers' intentions to apply for a leadership position during the next three years

Within the next three years do you intend to:	Primary			Secondary		
	Males %	Females %	Persons %	Males %	Females %	Persons %
Apply for a deputy principal position	18	8	10	12	5	8
Apply for a principal position	9	1	2	2	1	1
Not apply for either position	60	78	75	72	80	77
Missing data	13	13	13	14	14	14

Note: This table includes those respondents who indicated that they intended to teach for >3 years or who were unsure about their intentions (94% of the primary teacher sample and 92% of the secondary sample).

teachers indicating such intentions. There were no marked differences between teachers' intentions towards applying for leadership posts in terms of the school sector in which they worked.

Among the small proportion of teachers who do intend to apply for a leadership position within the next three years, a variety of factors were rated as important or very important in their decision. Almost all such teachers – 97 per cent – indicated that confidence in their own ability to do the job was an important or very important factor, as was 'I want to lead school development' – more than 90 per cent. Only 35 to 40 per cent indicated that 'the high standing of school leaders in the community' was an important or very important factor.

In the main, teachers who intend to apply for a leadership position in the next three years feel

well prepared for the job. The survey assessed feelings of preparedness across 13 different aspects of leadership, and generally more than 70 per cent of teachers in this category feel that they are either well prepared or very well prepared. The major exception was in regard to 'managing school budgets and finances,' where only 40 per cent of the primary teachers and 60 per cent of the secondary teachers felt well prepared or very well prepared.

The SiAS survey shows that the majority of principals and deputy, vice or associate principals are aged more than 50 years, and that around 12 per cent of all leaders intend to leave teaching in the next three years. Furthermore, only around 10 per cent of teachers indicate that they intend to apply for a leadership position in the next three years.

While the proportion intending to apply for a leadership position is quite small, however, there will still be many more applicants among teachers than leadership vacancies if all of these intentions are realised. The reason is that the teacher workforce is so much larger than the school leader workforce – about six times larger in primary schools on the definitions used in the SiAS survey, and about 12 times larger in secondary schools.

Those teachers who do intend to apply for leadership posts report that they feel well-prepared for the job, although as with any self-assessment this result needs to be treated cautiously.

The results, though, are not grounds for complacency in terms of efforts to continue to make leadership posts attractive and to prepare teachers for these responsibilities.

There is a high degree of uncertainty reported by both teachers and leaders about their career intentions. When a half of teachers and a third of leaders are unsure as to how much longer they intend to continue working in schools, it's fair to say that career intentions are difficult to predict with certainty and that things can change quickly. Because the teacher workforce is so large, a decrease of only a few percentage points in the proportion who intend to apply for leadership posts, for example, could lead to leadership shortages.

There are also variations in the overall picture. There are likely to be proportionately more

leader departures, and fewer teacher applicants, in primary schools than in secondary schools, and in government schools than non-government schools. There are also likely to be proportionately fewer applicants for leadership posts from among female teachers than male teachers. These differences are a reminder that Australian schools face diverse circumstances.

As pointed out in the companion study on long-term planning needs, overall the SiAS results reinforce the need for regular, ongoing monitoring of the views and intentions of the teacher and school leader workforces, and for the collection of data as at disaggregated a level as possible.

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Online learning for school leaders

Susanne Owen explains how school leaders and aspirant school leaders can get professional learning support that's collaborative, experiential and practical – and all online.

Predicted school leader retirements, an impending shortage of willing recruits and a growing need for professional learning support: if you think that looks like a recipe for disaster in the area of school leadership, think again. According to the Staff in Australia's Schools survey commissioned by the Commonwealth Department of Education, Science and Training, now called the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, and conducted between 2006 and 2007 by the Australian Council for Educational Research and the Australian College of Educators, a small proportion of teachers do intend to apply for a leadership position within the next three years and more than 70 per cent of them feel that they're well prepared or very well prepared.

One of the reasons is that school leaders and aspirants have access to professional learning. One new program, called *Leaders Lead: L5 at work*, recently launched by Principals Australia, formerly the Australian Principals Associations Professional Development Council, now provides that access online. *Leaders Lead* provides school leaders and aspirant school leaders with support through 15 modules that address wellbeing, understanding leadership, building school culture, strategic improvement, sharing power and using influence to nurture change.

The 15 modules, which include 'Staying strong in leadership,' 'Leading resource management,' 'Leading professionals to improve practice,' 'Leading data-guided schools' and 'Leading technology-enabled schools,' provide an online package which is comprehensive and coherent. As Jeremy Hurley, the national coordinator of the program explains, 'We looked at learning about leadership in a general way and leading a successful school. We're not just talking about learning outcomes but talking about people in schools as whole people.'

The modules are organised by a framework of five principles about leadership, from which the *L5 at work* title is derived. Those five principles are that:

- leadership starts from within
- leadership is about influencing others

- leadership develops a rich learning environment
- leadership builds professionalism and management capability, and
- leadership inspires leadership actions and aspirations in others.

The consultatively-developed *L5 at work* framework is shaped by a number of key propositions to do with knowing yourself, having courage, balancing personal and professional demands, influencing others, overcoming teacher isolation, challenging notions of status and power, overturning fixed mindsets and nurturing collective visioning. Because school leadership is about creating a rich learning environment, *L5 at work* also focuses on student learning outcomes and the nurturing of professional inquiry teams for the purpose of local problem solving, using data to inform the decision-making process. The program focuses on cultivating professionalism in terms of professional standards and reflection on professional beliefs. It sees the role of leaders as one of support for teachers as agents for justice and social change, as well as one of inspiring and cultivating others.

Two years in the making, the *L5 at work* modules are accessible anytime, anywhere and available for all leaders and aspiring leaders with a computer connected to the internet. 'Learning is totally self-directed,' says Kate Castine, the project's professional officer. 'A structure, information, activities and references are all provided, but the modules are presented in a way that gives total control to the learner. Learners can choose which modules they study, when they study them, how they study them and what they learn from them.' The only assessment is self-assessment unless leaders choose to undertake higher-degree studies, with status towards masters level currently being negotiated.

In addition to the research-focused framework, practitioners and expert groups provided input on key design principles during the development of the modules, so that *L5 at work* is useful, helps leaders make sense of things and supports them in the complexity of their work in schools. The development process involved identifying

LEADERS LEAD ONLINE MODULES FOR SCHOOL LEADERS AND ASPIRANT SCHOOL LEADERS

Leading schools in
Aboriginal and
Torres Strait Islander
education
Leading wellbeing and
responsible behaviour
Staying strong in leader-
ship
School leaders connect
Learn: lead: succeed
Leading dynamic
schools
Leading strategically for
improvement
Leading with influence
Leading school culture
Leading learning and
teaching
Leading professionals to
improve practice
Leading community
partnerships
Leading resource man-
agement
Leading data-guided
schools
Leading technology-
enabled schools

capabilities and cross-referencing with worldwide school leadership frameworks, establishing expert advisory groups and recruiting and training experienced school leaders to write for online learning.

Ongoing practitioner feedback ensured that the modules accommodate the various learning styles of theorists, reflectors, pragmatists and strategists. As Hurley says, 'We've also used the approach of hearts, heads and hands, stuff that actually changes how you see things and your practices, so we've embedded a lot of activities in the modules. The modules are very much about reflection, but they're actually about planning.'

L5 at work also makes use of leadership storytelling so that the capabilities and outcomes become assertions in narrative form for each of the

15 modules. Each assertion in each module is supported by readings, videoclips and workbook activities.

The Leading Resource Management module provides practical templates in the *Budget Development Workbook*. School Leaders Connect links to Stephen Covey's checklist of the 13 behaviours of a high-trust leader.

For the Leading Professionals to Improve Practice module there is a link to the website of the Australian Council for Educational Research addressing 'The impact of leadership on student outcomes.' There are also downloadable workbook activities for each module, and online program participants are encouraged to undertake the course with other staff, colleagues and community members.

As Jeremy Hurley explains, 'The way the *L5 at work* modules will be used in most cases is in networks or collegial groups, either geographical or other networks. The way I see this working best is when a group of people get together to use it. We want people to establish collegial groups through the website. We've developed an add-on to the website so people can establish a seamless group online.'

Adult learning principles, distributed learning, transformational leadership, experiential learning, communities of practice and situativity theory form the key theoretical frameworks. It's about adults being internally motivated and self-directed; engagement in relevant and practical activities; building on professional and life experiences; collaborative learning based on joint enter-

prise, practical tasks and shared values; and capacity building and nurturing leadership in others.

Registration and trialling for current and aspiring leaders is available at www.leaderslead.edu.au Two free modules relating to wellbeing and educating in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander contexts are provided, with subscription rates payable for other modules. The modules will be regularly updated and additional modules will also be developed in response to new resources and online feedback.

The program is fully supported by the four peak owner associations involved in Principals Australia – the Australian Secondary Principals Association, the Australian Primary Principals Association, Catholic Secondary Principals Australia and the Association of Heads of Independent Schools of Australia.

Upskilling current principals but also nurturing school leadership for the future are the fundamental goals of *Leaders Lead: L5 at work*. As Louise Bywaters, a key consultant and module writer, explains, 'People who take on the job require a lot of courage and a lot of skills to build a community of educators. I'm so pleased to see something that addresses the complexity of leadership in schools and the various aspects that finally result in excellence for young people. We have a responsibility to capture that body of knowledge, build it, nurture it and then pass it on to the next generation of educational leadership. I see this as a handing over from one group to the next. This is just the beginning for *L5 at work*. We all have a responsibility to read it, get into it, critique it, recraft it. We can now build this resource into the 21st technological tools that we've got and take it somewhere no other nation has been able to go – building a network of communities informed in educational leadership.'

Dr Susanne Owen is an educational consultant and researcher to a range of professions, with an academic background focused on teacher and leader professional development. She was a writer for some of the Leaders Lead: L5 at work online modules.

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The way the L5 at work modules will be used in most cases is in networks or collegial groups, either geographical or other networks.

Transforming Schools Through Powerful Learning

Professor Guy Claxton

Professor of Learning Sciences, University of Winchester UK

Everyone agrees that schools should be preparing all young people to be confident, capable and enthusiastic lifelong learners. Unfortunately, many attempts at 'learning to learn' have ended up as little more than a few 'add-on' courses.

"If we are serious about really achieving the deeper goal, the ethos of a school has to change – and that means teachers making the effort to alter a few engrained habits."

Professor Guy Claxton (Author of *What's the Point of School?* 2008)

In this seminar, designed for teachers and school leaders who are ready to go deeper into learning, Professor Guy Claxton explains the thinking behind these changes, shows how busy teachers can work on creating those small but significant shifts, and illustrates practical ways for a school to become a more powerful learning community.

"Over three years, the culture of a school can be transformed."



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Not another article on

climate change

...but
would you like
\$50,000 to
spend on solar
panels?

'Everyone complains about the weather but no-one is doing anything about it!' Mark Twain's words were never truer than at present. Climate change, and what we should all be doing about it, is exercising everybody's mind, says Seamus O'Grady.

For years now, we teachers have been drilling students on our shared responsibility to care for our environment. Google hits on 'climate change' are massive, awareness must be at an all-time high, and there wouldn't be a school in the country that hasn't tried some program of recycling, revegetation, energy-use reduction and the like – even if the playground still gets littered at lunchtime.

We in schools and school systems – and society at large – are just beginning a structured, strategic and systematic approach to reducing our 'carbon footprint' and developing sustainable school environments. The piecemeal approach has run its course, thank God, and school and system leaders are committing their energies to bold plans.

Systems and funding bodies are insisting that schools and systems develop realistic environmental management plans. The national Sustainable Schools Initiative linked with similar programs in each state and territory is starting to bear fruit. The New South Wales Sustainable Schools website, for example, has a useful tool for developing a school environment management plan.

While supporting the initiative of individual principals, school systems are working collaboratively with schools so that they have the resources, information and material suppliers to ensure school development that is ecologically sound and sustainable. The school community – teachers, parents and students – play a vital role in this collaboration to develop the school in an environmentally responsible way. The key focus for schools, of course, remains the learning process – but this will be enhanced when students see solar panels appearing on the school roof, timed bubblers in the playground, recycled water or rain-water, or waterless urinals, used in the toilets, to name but a few of the many projects underway.

So what's this about \$50,000 for solar panels? Well, schools may now apply to the National Solar Schools Program for up to \$50,000 to install water and other energy-efficient items, which must include a minimum two kilowatt solar power system, although you can apply for up to \$30,000 if no solar power system is to be installed. Schools are encouraged to seek an energy efficiency audit and produce a school environment management plan as part of this program. Self-audit tools can be found through links on the Australian Sustainable Schools Initiative website.

Some school principals have complained that a two kilowatt solar power system would deliver less than five per cent of a typical school's electricity use. Whatever the truth of this claim, the symbolic impact of this installation and similar energy efficiency measures on students should not be underestimated. Rose-Marie Hoekstra, Principals at All Saints Primary, Liverpool, NSW, argues that such actions by school leaders powerfully reinforce what we're saying to students in class about environmental responsibility.

The Catholic Education Office Sydney has set a goal for its schools and offices to be close to carbon-neutral by around 2015. Setting such a target has spurred into action the system's school facilities unit, which is establishing formal links with government and community bodies that promote sustainable schools, and brokering agreements with suppliers to leverage the buying power of individual schools.

Six schools across the system are currently undertaking an energy audit with a commercial company, Carbon Planet, with a view to developing a system-wide approach to reducing the carbon footprint of all schools.

Appearing too is a growing alignment of educators, architects and builders regarding school building and refurbishment. The refrain is changing from 'We want as much space as possible for the cheapest price possible' to 'Whatever we build or refurbish must be ecologically responsible and sustainable into the future.' This can be a hard pill to swallow when we want the biggest and best facilities for our students – always on a limited budget. Sustainability comes at a real cost.

Whether we're propelled by the fear of the doomsday scenarios predicted by global warming left unchecked or by a determination to hand on the wonderful creation we've inherited to our children in the best shape possible, the truth is that in schools our actions are finally speaking louder than our words.

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.

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LINKS:

For the Catholic Education Office Sydney Annual Development Plan 2008, visit www.ceo.syd.catholic.edu.au
For more on the Australian Sustainable Schools Initiative, visit www.environment.gov.au/education/aussi
For more on Sustainable Schools NSW, visit www.sustainableschools.nsw.edu.au
For more on the National Solar Schools Program, visit www.environment.gov.au and follow the links.
For more on Carbon Planet, visit www.carbonplanet.com

Reality check

Effective school-based drug education

Clarissa Hughes reports on research that shows how understanding students' perceptions of reality can help to reduce risky drinking.



Youth drinking is a hot topic in Australia at the moment. Whether that's because of an actual increase in risky alcohol consumption by young people or because the issue is getting greater media attention, there's a sense of urgency about the need to get serious about tackling underage drinking.

A recent report by Bernadette Ward and Pamela Snow states that alcohol-related harm is one of the leading causes of the disease and injury burden among young people aged between 16 and 24. Assaults, damage to property, suicides, unwanted sexual activity and motor vehicle accidents are just some of the harms associated with drinking, particularly when this involves heavy episodic consumption, often referred to as 'binge-drinking.'

It is paradoxical that the ingestion of a substance associated with so much damage and misery is an unquestioned aspect of life for so many people. Alcohol is a readily available commodity. It's now sold in a range of outlets, including supermarkets, and recent years have seen an enormous increase in liquor outlet density in many regions. Alcohol is also relatively affordable. Many warehouse-style outlets sell bulk quantities at a greatly discounted price.

Alcohol is often consumed in a highly visible manner, and its over-consumption is met with varying levels of social acceptance. Some major sporting events rely on alcohol-industry sponsorship. In small community-based sporting clubs and associations, alcohol consumption may be a 'normal part of life,' even for young members. Furthermore, media coverage of the issue often gives the impression that 'bingeing' and 'drinking to get drunk' are 'the norm.'

SEARCHING FOR ANSWERS

It's clear that alcohol causes major problems for some people and that many of those are young people. What's not so clear is what should be done about it. Parents struggle to come up with the 'right' answers to some tricky questions about underage drinking. Should they introduce alcohol to their son or daughter at a relatively young age, in the hope that children will learn how to drink safely and responsibly in the family environment? Should parents provide their teenage children with a certain amount of alcohol to take to parties, in the hope that their son or daughter will consume less alcohol if they bring their own? Should parents forbid their children from drink-

ing in the home and prevent their attendance at parties or other contexts where underage drinking is likely, in the hope that they will learn that it's not necessary to drink to have fun, and will associate with peers who share that view?

Unfortunately, the research evidence doesn't always give clear-cut answers. It provides many and often conflicting messages about young people and alcohol, and how the relationship between the two is best handled. Evidence both for and against the early introduction of alcohol, parental 'secondary supply,' and a number of other alcohol-related issues can be readily cited. Academics have lengthy, and sometimes ultimately unhelpful, debates about these issues. In the end, parents must make a judgement call about what is best for their child, within the constraints of what is possible and practical.

ALCOHOL EDUCATION IN SCHOOLS

The vexed issue of evidence relates also to school-based alcohol health promotion, which has moved through a number of phases in recent decades. Early prevention work within schools in the past tended to focus on the provision of information to students, particularly concerning the pharmacological dangers of substance use and the possible risky consequences of drinking. These programs often incorporated deliberate scare tactics and are sometimes referred to as 'health terrorist' approaches. Despite some residual scare-tactic elements within contemporary programs, it's been generally agreed since the late 1970s that the information approach as a stand-alone method of tackling high-risk drinking among youth was a failure.

The ensuing phase of school-based prevention took a more holistic approach – seeking to build the self-esteem of young people so that they were less vulnerable to the vagaries of substance abuse. Sometimes these programs included resistance training components that sought to 'innoculate' youth against overt peer pressure to engage in risky behaviours. Over time such affective programs suffered the same fate as the preceding information programs – they were gradually, if reluctantly recognised as having only limited efficacy.

With the exception of the more recent and more sophisticated 'social influence' programs, there's not much evidence of success in alcohol programs for young people, either in Australia or elsewhere. Why might this be the case? Part of the answer lies in the fact that rigorous evaluations of programs

are not always conducted, in which case it's always hard to say whether or not a program was effective. Presumably, some programs were effective in achieving certain objectives, such as improved knowledge of the effects of alcohol on the body, even if that knowledge failed to lead to the behavioural changes that program designers were anticipating.

IDENTIFYING THE SECRETS OF SUCCESS

So what is known about 'what works' to reduce harm from alcohol and other drugs? Valuable contributions have been made by Richard Midford, Helen Cahill, Nyanda McBride and others, whose work on the essential ingredients for effective school-based drug education has informed curriculum development and prevention programs in this country. They have emphasised the need for programs to stimulate higher-order thinking, be non-judgemental in their approach and be transferable to real life circumstances. An interesting and engaging mode of delivery is very important, as is an interactive style.

It's also widely accepted that peer groups are important when it comes to young peoples' alcohol consumption. Many prevention programs account for, and make use of, the peer element, yet they sometimes do so in ways that assume that peer groups have a negative, 'contaminating' effect on young people. According to such a view, the appropriate response is to teach young people strategies for 'resisting peer group pressure' to drink.

One prevention approach which is based on a more positive and optimistic view of peer influence is known as a 'social norms' approach. Social norms interventions are underpinned by work in the social sciences that demonstrates the powerful nature of the *perceptions* of what others think and do, which often doesn't accord with the *reality* of what they think and do. Such interventions don't focus on educating about the harmful effects of alcohol, or empowering people to resist peer group pressure to drink. Rather, social norms interventions seek to ascertain the extent to which young peoples' ideas about what 'everyone else is doing' are in need of a 'reality check.'

Social norms approaches can differ from standard health promotion approaches in several key respects, as shown in Table 1.

School-based social norms interventions usually involve four key phases, which may be repeated several times:

	'CONVENTIONAL' HEALTH PROMOTION	'SOCIAL NORMS' APPROACH
Major focus	The individual student	Groups and the 'social environment'
Primary aim	To impart knowledge of risks and consequences	To gain knowledge of behaviours and perceptions
Student involvement	Often low – recipients of information/skills	Usually high – participants in the process
Community linkages	Restricted to the school environment	Links with the wider community

Table 1: 'Conventional' vs 'social norms' approaches to health promotion

- collection of data about alcohol use and attitudes using an anonymous questionnaire
- analysis of the collected data on a per-school basis to yield positive, data-based 'key messages'
- dissemination of the 'key messages' to the target groups using a media campaign, and
- evaluation of the impact of the campaign, in terms of recognition and understanding of the message, and changes to norm perceptions and behaviour.

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SOCIAL NORMS WORK IN AUSTRALIA

The University of Tasmania recently completed the first Australian trial of this approach. The Social Norms Analysis Project (SNAP), funded by the Alcohol Education and Rehabilitation Foundation, aimed to provide a realistic picture of alcohol-related attitudes and behaviours of the high school students attending four public schools in two rural regions of Tasmania. For more on this, see my article, with colleagues Roberta Julian, Matthew Richman, Ron Mason and Gillian Long in *Youth Studies Australia*.

We collected self-reported student data at the four trial schools using a self-administered anonymous survey in mid-2006 to establish a baseline, and twice in 2007, to identify mid-treatment results in first term and end-treatment results in third term. The student survey contains questions about students' own alcohol-related behaviours and attitudes, experience of alcohol-related harms, parental 'rules,' perception of others' alcohol-related behaviours and attitudes, and a range of questions relating to the last occasion on which the respondent consumed alcohol.

School-specific data from the baseline and mid-treatment rounds of student data collection

were used to develop 'key messages' which are positive and affirming – with no 'scare tactics' or negativity – for example, 'seven out of 10 Lakeside High Students rarely or never drink alcohol.' We tailored media campaigns at each of the schools, using colourful merchandise – posters, mousemats, drink bottles, wrist bands, rulers, badges and fridge magnets.

As Figure 1 shows, the 'logic model' for SNAP focuses on perceptions of reality, rather than on young people's knowledge about alcohol and their ability to resist peer group pressure.

SNAP RESULTS

The baseline data indicated that students underestimate the proportion of their peers who drink once a month or less, while they overestimate the proportion drinking once or twice a week or more. Similar misperceptions were observed in relation to drunkenness. Arguably, this environment of perceptual distortion exerts pressure to conform to the expectations and behaviour of 'imaginary peers,' independent of any 'real' peer group pressure to drink or become drunk.

Our SNAP evaluation results indicated significant decreases in: perceived peer drinking rates; perceived peer drunkenness rates; and self-reported drunkenness rates at the trial schools. Thus, the SNAP media campaigns apparently served as 'reality checks,' which emphasised students' healthy choices and helped to close the gap between what they perceived their peers to be doing, and what their peers were actually doing.

SNAP has provided great impetus for the future uptake of the social norms approach in Australia. Considerable interest in the project, and in the practical, theoretical and policy-oriented aspects of social norms work, has been shown

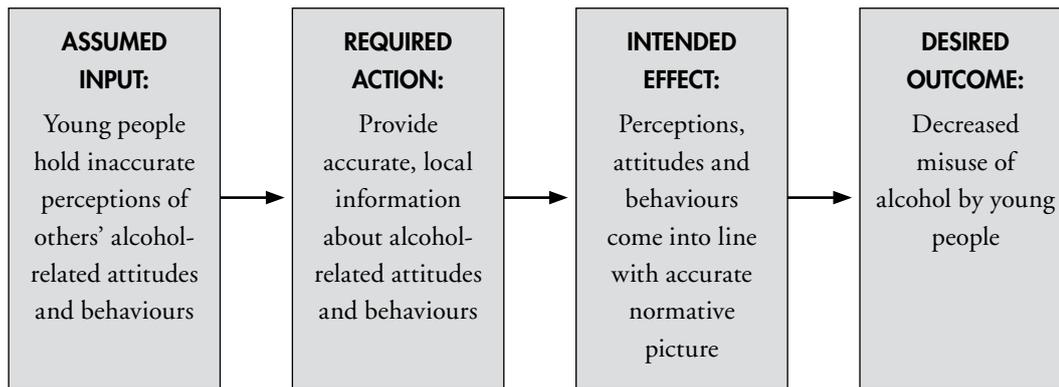


Figure 1: Simplified 'logic model' for social norms interventions

Dr Clarissa Hughes is a Research Fellow at the University of Tasmania, and was the Project Director of the Social Norms Analysis Project (SNAP) conducted by the Tasmanian Institute of Law Enforcement Studies and the University of Tasmania Department of Rural Health, funded by the Alcohol Education and Rehabilitation Foundation.

by many individuals and organisations around the country. Anyone wanting to find out more about undertaking social norms interventions will be interested in the 'how-to' guide, *4Real: An Australian guide to alcohol-focussed social norms interventions in high schools*, which has been designed for the secondary school setting.

THE POWER OF PERCEPTION

Short of conducting a full-scale social norms intervention at your school, what can you do? The answer is a lot! As a teacher, you're extraordinarily well-positioned to encourage your students to question their own taken-for-granted assumptions. You can stimulate discussion about how we form ideas about what others, especially our friends, think and do, and the potential for us to hold inaccurate perceptions. You can draw

attention to the ways in which television, movies, advertising, and magazines newspapers portray young people and their relationship to alcohol. You can also discuss with your students the ways in which negative stereotypes can become self-fulfilling prophecies, and what can be done to avoid that happening.

As a group, teachers will be well aware of the inaccuracy of the 'contaminant' model of peer influence. Teenagers don't simply encourage irresponsible, unhealthy or unhelpful behaviours in their peers. They often bring out the best in one another, and they deserve to have this acknowledged and encouraged. Rather than perpetuating the deficit model, good teachers focus on strengths, assets and positive contributions, and reiterate the reality that most young people make healthy choices about alcohol, most of the time.

LINKS: For more information on the social norms approach or SNAP, including the 4Real Guide, email tiles@utas.edu.au or call 03 6226 2328.

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Help wanted



Teenage unemployment is unacceptably high, and the education system must help young people complete Year 12 and make smooth transitions to further study or work, says education expert Professor Richard Sweet. **Rebecca Leech** reports.

Because the unemployed are unhappier, unhealthier, poorer and less involved in their communities than people who work, it's vital that we ensure all young people move smoothly from school to further education and training or paid work. To do that, state and Commonwealth governments need to work together throughout the education sector to create more tightly-structured, better-organised, higher-quality vocational pathways for young people.

These are the views professed by educational expert Professor Richard Sweet speaking at this year's Australian Council for Education Research (ACER) research conference. Sweet, who heads the international education and training policy consultancy Sweet Group and is a Professorial Fellow in the Centre for Post-compulsory Education and Lifelong Learning at the University of Melbourne, presented a keynote address, 'Round and round or fully rounded? How we can improve youth transitions.' He contends that a low level of Year 12 completion results in too high a rate of teenage unemployment despite a strong and youth-friendly labour market.

THE CURRENT MODEL AND INTERNATIONAL COMPARISONS

Many young people make very successful transitions from school to working life, but these success stories often fit a specific pattern: those who have superior academic competencies – especially high-level literacy, mathematics, science, technology and problem-solving skills – and social abilities, such as teamwork, initiative, communication skills, punctuality and persistence. Young people with such characteristics typically succeed at high school, often complete further study or training, obtain and settle into jobs quickly, earn good salaries and enjoy their work.

For some other young people, however, this is not the case. These young people tend to fit a different pattern: they have poor academic skills; drop out of school before completing it; don't obtain vocational or professional qualifications; lack work skills; take a long time to find work; accept low-paid work and poor working conditions; have unstable working histories, often drifting in and out of unemployment between short periods of casual work; and are unlikely to find satisfying or enjoyable work.

According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), up to 30 per cent of Australian adolescents fit the latter pattern. Figures for 2006 from the ABS show that 74 per cent of students complete Year 12, but that 30 per cent of school leavers are not in full-time work or full-time education.

In an older age bracket, among people aged 20 to 24, employment rates are relatively high, particularly for those who have graduated from tertiary courses; however, within this age group, those who left high school early are three times more likely to be unemployed than those who completed Year 12.

'The unemployment penalty experienced by young adults who have not completed Year 12 or its equivalent is among the highest in the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD),' Sweet states. 'Many other countries would absolutely reject the levels we have in Australia as completely unacceptable,' he says.

In particular, this level of youth unemployment is far higher than it should be given Australia's overall low levels of unemployment and what Sweet calls a youth-friendly labour market. This youth-friendly labour market is characterised by: youth wages, which encourage employers to hire young people because they can pay a lower wage to an inexperienced young person than they can an experienced worker; low employment protection, making it easier for employers to hire and fire employees; ample opportunities for secondary and tertiary students to work; and reasonable numbers of apprenticeships and traineeships. It's not all good news from the world of work, however: because the labour market in Australia puts a high premium on skills and qualifications, it punishes those without them, and this is part of the reason that unemployment rates are so high for those who don't complete Year 12.

As Sweet told the ACER conference, 'Australia's transitioning outcomes should be better given the fact that we are a wealthy country; they should be better given that we've had a period of 16 years of uninterrupted economic growth; and they should be better given the overall state of the labour market, in which unemployment has for a long time been quite low. What we see is not only a pattern that indicates we should be better, but a pattern of inequality. It is a pattern in which

outcomes are quite good for those who are at the top, while those who are weaker struggle.’

Rather than blaming the labour market, however, we should look to the education system to fix the problem, says Sweet. ‘Each year the education system continues to pump far too many poorly-qualified and inadequately-skilled young people onto a labour market that has little need for them,’ he says. ‘Put simply, we have far too many early school leavers, and Year 12 completion rates are far too low.... This is simply not good enough.’

TRANSITION SYSTEMS

The solution to the problem of high teenage unemployment, according to Sweet, is to create more tightly-structured, better-organised, higher-

quality pathways between education and work, whether it be directly from secondary school into the workplace, or via further education or training.

Sweet worked for seven years to 2005 as a Principal Analyst in the Directorate for Education of the OECD, overseeing major international reviews of the transition from education to employment. Drawing on this work, he says there are six key features of effective transition systems.

The first is a healthy economy and labour market, which Australia has.

The second is the existence of a tight connection between a qualification and its destination. An example of a tight connection can be seen in Japan, where schools award a fine grading of marks that directly influence career and higher education options. In contrast, the United States has a loose connection, where students who attend secondary school receive a certificate regardless of achievement, and employers and higher education institutions largely ignore the certificate. Australia needs to improve the connections between qualifications and destinations.

A third feature is the opportunity to combine work with study, which Australia allows.

A fourth is the tendency to take every young person very seriously. Countries that have effective transition systems focus resources intensively on students who are at risk of dropping out of school. This can be achieved through financial assistance, counselling and partnerships with communities.

The fifth is good information available equitably regarding education and careers.

Finally, effective institutions and processes are important. Institutions and governments need to work together across sectors, states and qualification levels to achieve the best outcomes for students, rather than competing with each other.

Australia’s education system exhibits some of these key features, but certainly not all. Sweet acknowledges that a range of state and Commonwealth government programs have been implemented in good faith, such as reforms to secondary certificates, vocational education and training in schools, workplace learning, school-based apprenticeships, school-community partnerships, transition brokers, mentoring and career advice initiatives, school-leaver tracking, local learning, employment networks and the promotion of TAFE as an alternative for early school leavers. But none of these has ultimately succeeded.

TAFE is not the answer, says Sweet, because most early school leavers tend to enrol in TAFE Certificate I or II courses. These courses have high drop-out rates, and those who do complete them have low-level qualifications that are unlikely to lead to satisfactory work or further study.

Other in-school and transition programs have also failed because they have not convinced young people that education can be enjoyable or worthwhile, and because they target only a limited range of students.

According to Sweet, ‘We have not created institutions that can foster a joy in learning among the full range of young people after the age of compulsory schooling, not just among those who find academic achievement easy.’

Traditional education suits those who are academically minded; trades centres and vocational programs suit those who are technically adept; and apprenticeship programs suit those bound for practical trades, but this still leaves a significant proportion of young people whose interests are not being catered to.

The question Sweet asks is, ‘Why is it that young people leave school?’ And he has an answer: ‘They leave school because there’s nothing interesting there for them; because they’re sick of being treated as if they are kids rather than as young adults; and because many of those who struggle, who don’t have basic academic skills or who have

‘In countries that have good outcomes you do not find the equivalent of the Commonwealth and the equivalent of the states fighting each other, and one state taking its bat and going home.’

personal difficulties can't get the type of personal support that they need in the traditional Years 7 to 12 high school.'

The key, then, to keeping young people in school is to give them a wider curriculum choice, at all levels of talent and for all types of interests; a more adult-like learning environment; and more support for at-risk students.

A NEW MODEL AND IMPLEMENTATION

The best way to do this, according to Sweet, is to separate non-compulsory from compulsory schooling by creating separate senior colleges and junior secondary schools.

A central premise of the plan is that separate senior schools will allow for larger grade cohorts and economies of scale and thus a wider curriculum encompassing a greater range of general and vocational subjects suited to the needs of all students, not just those with technical or higher education aspirations. Sweet contends that this will allow the majority of students to find a subject to interest them and keep them engaged in education.

A clear divide between junior and senior secondary education recognises that those students about to enter adulthood have different needs to those still in childhood, and should be treated differently. The fact that the Australian model has failed to convince many disengaged 15- to 18-year olds to complete Year 12 goes to show that these students need a more adult learning environment, not one based upon the discipline demands of 12-year olds, according to Sweet.

A senior secondary education system would also allow teachers in senior schools to provide adult teaching styles and discipline policies, and support services such as remediation, counselling and welfare for those who struggle the hardest.

Australia is one of the few developed countries in the world that does not consistently divide junior and senior secondary schooling.

Within Australia, schooling models are not uniform. Both Tasmania and the Australian Capital Territory already have a senior secondary college system, and according to Sweet, have recorded dramatic increases in Year 12 retention rates since introducing the system. In other states, a minority of individual schools divide their students between junior and senior campuses, while others cater only to senior second-

ary students. A study of these schools was completed for the University of Melbourne's Centre for Post-compulsory and Lifelong Learning in 2005. The study found the schools to be economically efficient and able to offer a wide curriculum, and that students reported high levels of satisfaction.

Creating a national model of senior secondary schools would take resources and, says Sweet, require political will from state and Commonwealth levels of government. Funding would be needed to convert and build infrastructure, and to retrain existing secondary teachers as junior or senior teachers. These short-term costs would be recompensed, however, by the increased economic productivity resulting from lower youth unemployment, he says. Perhaps more important, says Sweet, is the requirement that governments and sectors cooperate to achieve the best possible outcomes for students.

'Often there has been little coordination between multiple programs and less than optimum coordination between the different authorities that administer – read own – them: schools and TAFE; community groups, governments, employers and unions; state and Commonwealth governments; education, labour and welfare portfolios,' says Sweet.

'In countries that have good outcomes you do not find the equivalent of the Commonwealth and the equivalent of the states fighting each other, and one state taking its bat and going home and refusing to sign up to commonly-agreed programs and goals. You also tend not to find that there's competition between the education system and the labour market authorities to record good outcomes for young people. And you don't tend to find that schools and the equivalent of TAFE compete with one another for warm bodies,' he told the ACER conference.

Sweet's clear message: only reform of secondary education, and cooperation between governments and sectors to achieve that, can ultimately improve Year 12 completion and reduce teenage unemployment.

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.

Professor Richard Sweet heads the international education and training policy consultancy Sweet Group and is a Professorial Fellow in the Centre for Post-compulsory Education and Lifelong Learning at the University of Melbourne.

The ACER Research Conference 2008, 'Touching the Future: Building skills for life and work,' was held in Brisbane from 10 to 12 August this year.

Take your partners



Social partnerships in the vocational education and training sector enable collaborative networks and innovative solutions, but they need appropriate support, according to research by **Stephen Billett, Terri Seddon, Allie Clemans, Carolyn Ovens, Kathleen Ferguson and Kathleen Fennessy.**

Social partnerships are formed by a strategic alliance of partners from government, the public and private sectors, and civil society. Such strategic alliances create collaborative networks to develop innovative solutions to sometimes complex social and economic issues arising in local communities.

Solutions developed by social partnerships work best when they're sensitive to local people, encourage synergies between local agencies, and build practical and user-friendly relationships between people and services. The capacity to achieve such solutions, however, depends on the partnership operating successfully, in terms of both governance and delivery of services.

Social partnerships involving the vocational education and training (VET) sector are usually aimed at developing skills for work and providing 'second chance' learning. In addition, they can play an important role in building local capacity to support industry, individuals and communities during times of changing economic and social circumstances.

The research reported here examines the processes of forming, maintaining and sustaining social partnerships. The research builds on the first phase of a project that investigated the principles and practices underpinning the effective operation of 10 social partnerships involving the VET sector around Australia. The findings from that first phase showed that:

- there are different types of social partnerships – enacted, community and negotiated partnerships
- partnership work plays a central role in the development and continuity of social partnerships

- there are clear principles and practices associated with this work and their phases of development, and
- partnerships for collaborative action depend on processes that build trust and establish a culture for the partnership.

Through four case studies, the second phase of the research aimed to:

- verify the importance and applicability of the key principles and practices as identified in the first phase
- assess the ways in which those identified principles and practices are associated with establishing and developing social partnerships that are robust enough to manage changing circumstances, tasks and goals, and
- evaluate the usefulness of these principles and practices as a tool to inform the work of social partnerships.

The research examined the way the principles and practices of partnership work developed in the first phase were applied in four social partnerships over a 14-month period. Two of these partnerships were in the early stages of development and two were well-developed partnerships focused on maintaining their vitality and relevance over changing circumstances and times.

Three data-collection techniques were used at each site: informal monitoring of partnership development; repeat interviews with up to four key informants; and an assessment of partnership 'health' based on a comparison between informants' views of the ideal principles of partnership work and their perceptions of the actual practices in their own partnership.

To accomplish this, informants used a self-evaluation instrument based on the principles developed in the first stage of the project. From these data a profile of each partnership was built up. Critical moments in the partnership were also analysed, along with how these were addressed.

FORMING, MAINTAINING AND SUSTAINING SOCIAL PARTNERSHIPS

The case studies demonstrate that forming, maintaining and sustaining social partnerships depends upon effective partnership work. The five aspects of effective partnerships are:

- shared purposes and goals
- good relations with partners
- the capacity for partnership work
- good governance and leadership, and
- trust and trustworthiness.

Informants from partnerships in both phases of this project indicated that they found these principles useful as a way of thinking about the dimensions of the work necessary for the success of their social partnerships.

EFFECTIVE PARTNERSHIP WORK

The case studies demonstrated that success in transposing these principles into practice is influenced by the size and complexity of the partnership, the character of and enthusiasm for participation, the partnership's capacity – through the strength of its identity and its relationships – to respond to threats, and its leadership and governance.

The partnership in one of the case study sites – the community café – had a relatively straightforward structure, was focused on a single issue and had engendered sustained interest, trust and concerted effort in the local community. Consequently, when the continuity of this partnership was threatened, its size and lack of complexity meant it could respond quickly and effectively to the challenge confronting its viability.

The research found, in terms of process, governance and service delivery, that the day-to-day activities of a social partnership in pursuit of its specified goals are assisted by timely and pertinent guidance and direction, such that partici-

pants also learn during the process. Good governance is facilitated by the development of clear and transparent partnership structures and inclusive partnership cultures. Furthermore, partnership activities need to be sensitive to the broad concerns of stakeholders.

While generally informing practice across social partnerships, the principles and practices of partnership work were found to be particularly significant at different stages of the partnership and in relation to specific decision-making activities. Crises forced two of the four partnerships in the study to take action to prevent their disintegration, prompting participants to reaffirm their goals and purposes, and emphasising the need for effective working relationships. It seems that smaller and more focused social partnerships show more evidence of all five aspects outlined above when confronting change and challenges.

PERCEPTIONS OF PARTNERSHIP HEALTH

A participant's perception of the congruence between the ideal principles of partnership work and the actual workings of their own partnership provides a useful indication of its effectiveness. The self-evaluation tool developed during the first phase of the research was useful here, in that it encouraged participants to reflect on the 'health' of their partnership. While the numbers of respondents were small, the levels of congruency were consistent with the data from the interviews and could be correlated with events, such as threats, occurring in the partnerships. The research also identified a more significant difference between ideal principles and actual practices in the two partnerships reported as struggling to form and progress as partnerships, confirming that close alignment between these practices and principles increases the capacity of partnerships to be sustained through changing circumstances and goals.

SUSTAINABILITY OF SOCIAL PARTNERSHIPS

The sustainability of social partnerships is enhanced where certain conditions are met. These include an established structure and culture of partnering, committed sponsors, a supportive auspicing organisation, responsive partner organisations and, where appropriate, government policy that provides both structure and flexibility.

Social partnerships involving the vocational education and training sector are usually aimed at developing skills for work and providing 'second chance' learning.

Leadership is a critical factor in sustaining social partnerships because it mobilises, focuses and strategically directs partnership work. The case studies confirm that partnership health and sustainability is enhanced when leadership roles are clearly identified and distributed amongst the various participants enacting the partnership.

The organisational capacity of the partnership to build trust, implement inclusive governance and sustain the engagement of partners was a key aspect in the four diverse partnerships. Where there was insufficient organisational capacity, such that trust was underdeveloped or had withered, there were difficulties securing commitment, defining common purposes and sustaining activities, even when there were shared goals and concerns.

USING PRINCIPLES AND PRACTICES IN PARTNERSHIP WORK

The principles and practices of partnership work identified in the first phase of this research have been applied across the four case studies in the second phase. Having demonstrated their usefulness in partnership establishment and maintenance, the research suggests they can be used as a resource or a framework in the VET sector:

- to capture and draw attention to the dimensions of partnership work widely recognised as important by participants engaged in VET partnerships – essentially, cultural scoping, connection building, capacity building, collective work and trust building can support social partnerships or, by their absence, inhibit their development
- to provide, using the self-evaluation tool developed from the principles, an indication of the health of a social partnership in VET, based on the degree of consonance between the perceived ideal principles and the actual practices in social partnerships
- to guide participants engaged in VET partnerships by encouraging reflection on the important dimensions of their practice to consolidate the partnership as a distinct organisational entity, establish it as an effective steering and learning mechanism, and maintain the relationships and build capacity to realise goals and lead to improvements in the way the partnership operates, and
- to inform leaders and managers of partnerships, and sponsors and users, by focusing

attention on the challenges and constraints inherent to partnerships and providing a framework for assessing and trouble shooting the operations of social partnerships, particularly in relation to process and governance.

SOCIAL PARTNERSHIPS IN VET

Social partnerships make a significant contribution to VET in Australia, but this research has found they can be fragile. Ultimately, their sustainability relies upon the recognition that goodwill and individual commitment cannot replace:

- realistic funding of reasonable duration
- availability of personnel with appropriate skills to meet skill needs and succession
- authority delegated through government endorsement, and
- a democratic foundation that gives them legitimacy in their communities.

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For the full report, Sustaining effective social partnerships, published by NCVER, visit www.ncver.edu.au/publications/1985.html

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National perspective

Stand by for some argy bargy over 'biggest school reform agenda in history.' **Steve Holden** reports.

Prime Minister Kevin Rudd announced what he called the 'biggest school reform agenda in history' in August. The PM aims to recruit the highest-performing graduates; recognise and reward top teachers; and measure student and school performance and make such measures available to parents in a clear and simple format as well as through 'public reporting by schools of their performance on key measures including national test results'; and to use 'national data to target funding to underachieving schools.' The PM also wants school principals to have greater autonomy over staffing and salaries. 'Right now, we do not have accurate, comprehensive information to allow rigorous analysis of what schools and students are achieving,' the PM said.

'We will be making agreement on individual school performance reporting a condition of the new national education agreement to come into effect from 1 January, 2009,' he told the National Press Club of Australia. 'Within a year, we want to see increased information available to Australian parents and, within three years, a report that shows not just how their child is doing, but how their child's school is performing compared to similar schools. Knowing where there is underperformance will help us to target additional resources.'

According to the PM, 'We anticipate that governments' – and note the plural – 'will need to commit to additional investments of around \$500,000 per year for an average sized school.'

'I know some will resist these changes,' he told the National Press Club. 'There is little doubt that greater transparency will reveal some schools in Australia may be seriously underperforming.... Tough action is necessary if we are to achieve real change.'

Speaking with Kerry O'Brien on ABC TV's *7:30 Report*, the PM said, 'We are going to put forward national policy partnerships with the states on quality teaching and on how we provide additional funding for disadvantaged schools. We are also going to put proposals to the states concerning proper public reporting of the performance levels of schools. It will be a matter for them to accept or reject. I believe that any state or territory concerned about whether they are going to

have enough money in the system long-term to deal with these education challenges will have to have a very good excuse to turn their back on the national performance partnerships that we are about to offer.'

Former PM John Howard and his Minister for Education Brendan Nelson and Julie Bishop pursued a similar agenda between 2004 and 2007 for a national curriculum and a system of national testing, plain-language reporting to parents and public information on school quality and overall student outcomes. While the previous Howard government enjoyed little cooperation from state and territory governments, just how much cooperation and how much coercion the current Rudd government will exercise with its Labor counterparts in the states and territories remains to be seen.

According to a report by Justine Ferrari in the *Australian* in August, however, state and territory education ministers are being cold-shouldered in the policy development process of the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) productivity working group.

While each state and territory sends three officials to the productivity working group, they report directly to the chair, Deputy PM and Minister for Education, Employment and Workplace Relations Julia Gillard, not their state or territory ministers. The working group's recommendations then go to COAG's state Premiers, and territory Chief Ministers. It's believed that COAG's policy proposals include a national teacher registration body, a national accreditation system for pre-service teacher education and a national body for assessing quality teachers.

According to the *Australian* report, state ministers believe the current Minister for Education is following the same departmental advice as her predecessors. 'There was a feeling that a lot of things Julia Gillard is talking about are exactly the same things Julie Bishop was talking about,' Ferrari's source said. 'The thinking is that it's the same person who's really doing the talking here, and that's (Commonwealth Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations Secretary) Lisa Paul.'

A SINGLE FUNDING SYSTEM?

'An open and transparent review of the funding arrangements for non-government schools beyond 2012 will be held to establish an approach that is fair for all schools,' Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Education, Employment and Workplace Relations Julia Gillard told a 'parliamentary forum' of the Independent Schools Council of Australia in Canberra in September. 'The true target of our efforts must be individual students no matter which type of school they attend,' she said. The funding review is expected to be completed by 2011.

Department of Education Employment and Workplace Relations Secretary Lisa Paul, also speaking at the forum, said the Commonwealth government hoped to move to a single, needs-based system of funding for government and non-government schools. Paul said the existing socioeconomic status (SES) index would not necessarily be the basis for any future schools funding mechanism. The SES model estimates the funding needs of non-government schools on the basis of students' residential addresses cross-referenced with census data.

'Everything we require of public schools, we will require of non-government schools and everything we require of non-government schools we will require of public schools,' the Minister told the forum. The comments suggest the Commonwealth government may finally ditch the controversial SES funding model for non-government schools established by the previous Commonwealth government under John Howard, but not before 2013. It will retain existing Commonwealth funding arrangements, including the SES funding model and current indexation arrangements, for independent schools between 2009 and 2012.

ABC LEARNING THE HARD WAY

Computershare has bought ABC Learning's Busy Bees Childcare Vouchers business in Britain for £90 million. ABC Learning will use the proceeds of the sale to reduce its debt and will sell its remaining business and property assets in Britain. The sale did little to halt the problems at ABC Learning,

however. Shares in ABC Learning were trading above \$5.00 a share in January, but had plunged to 54 cents a share by August, when shares were voluntarily placed in a trading halt, despite a 10 per cent price rise in June courtesy of the Commonwealth government increase in the childcare tax rebate. ABC Learning shares were also suspended in June when the childcare company reported the sale of 22 million shares in Funtastic – more than two-thirds of its shareholding in the toymaker – to Archer Capital at 50 cents a share, even though Archer had made an 80 cent a share offer. The ABC Learning firesale began in April when the childcare giant sold its 60 per cent stake in the United States Learning Care Group to Morgan Stanley Private Equity. Meanwhile, IMF Australia, a publicly-listed company that funds legal claims, aims to support a legal claim by shareholders against ABC Learning on the basis of alleged misleading and deceptive conduct by ABC Learning in relation to the real performance of the business, particularly in relation to an alleged failure to disclose information on licence-fee income from property developers ABC Learning that meant profits were overstated. In a statement to the Australian Stock Exchange, ABC Learning says it has not received any claim or notice of claim from IMF Australia.

INDUSTRIAL ACTION

Members of the New South Wales Teachers Federation stopped work for two hours in early September in the first of a range of industrial protests with the NSW government over salary and staffing negotiations. NSW Teachers Federation President Maree O'Halloran said a majority of 20,000 voting teachers supported further strikes from October to January if the state government refused to offer a 16 per cent pay rise over the next three years. Department of Education Director-General Michael Coutts-Trotter said that NSW teachers had received a 4 per cent pay rise in January on the back of 4.5 per cent increases in 2006 and 2007. 'NSW public school teachers are among the highest paid in the country, with salaries ranging from \$50,000 for new teachers and \$75,000 for experienced educators,' he said.



WHO SAID IT?

'I believe that any state or territory concerned about whether they are going to have enough money in the system long-term to deal with these education challenges will have to have a very good excuse to turn their back on the national performance partnerships that we are about to offer.'

Prime Minister Kevin Rudd speaking with Kerry O'Brien on ABC TV's 7:30 Report after announcing the 'biggest school reform agenda in history' in August.



Cyberbullying

in schools

When it comes to cyberbullying, the challenge for schools is to keep on top of what is happening, do the research, develop the strategies to minimise the risks and implement them, says **David Ford**.

If you want to understand cyberbullying, a good place to start is by defining bullying. As Professor Phillip Slee and I defined it almost 10 years ago, bullying is ‘repeated intimidation, over time, of a physical, verbal or psychological – including indirect and relational bullying – nature of a less powerful person by a more powerful person or group of persons.’

So what is cyberbullying? By cyberbullying, I mean bullying carried out with the aid of recent technologies like email, chat rooms, discussion groups, instant messaging and mobile phone texting. These technologies allow a bully or a group of bullies to intimidate other students, for example, by:

- teasing and making fun of them online
- spreading rumours about them online
- insulting and ridiculing them in chat rooms – known as ‘flaming’
- putting photos of them on the web accompanied by nasty comments
- tricking them into sharing private information and then sharing it online, and

- sending unwanted messages.

These technologies also allow bullies to act anonymously. This is not new – the now almost obsolete landline telephone has been used by bullies in much the same way – but the scope for bullying has widened enormously as the new technologies have become easily accessible to school students. There would be very few secondary school students today who do not use the internet or have a mobile phone.

Cyberstalking is another form of cyberbullying. The expression ‘cyberstalking’ is often used when the bully harasses or stalks another person by email or some other electronic messaging system, usually very frequently and intrusively, and often involving threats.

Bullying has traditionally been associated with school, although bullying behaviour among children has also occurred in the home and the local neighbourhood, but cyberbullying can clearly occur anywhere and at any time.

I want here to focus, first, on the extent to which schools have a responsibility to take steps to



minimise the risk of their students being bullied in cyberspace and, second, consider the potential liability on schools where they fail to fulfil that responsibility.

WHAT DOES THE LAW SAY ON LIABILITY?

Duty of care

A school has a duty to care for its students while they are at school during usual school hours. That duty also extends beyond the school gate and before or after school hours. The duty of care arises as a result of the special relationship between teacher and student.

Breach of duty

The courts consider whether the school has fulfilled its obligations by asking several questions to determine if the school or its teachers have failed to take the precautions that a reasonable person in their shoes would have taken. If they have not, they will be in breach of their duty of care. There are three basic questions. Is the risk foreseeable? Is the probability of the risk more than insignificant?

Would a reasonable teacher have taken precautions?

When we're considering bullying, there are no real issues with foreseeability or probability. The issue for schools is what reasonable precautions ought to be taken to minimise the risk of harm to students through bullying.

Bullying out of school

Where the bullying takes place outside school hours or beyond the school gate, what factors will be relevant in deciding what, if anything, it is reasonable for a school to do? This is particularly important when considering cyberbullying.

In giving some examples to illustrate what a school is required to do to fulfil its duty to care, senior judges have said that:

- if a school was aware that, at a particular place, a student was habitually molested, it might arguably have an obligation to draw that matter to the attention of the parents, the police or others, and

- if a school was aware that a particular bus driver, who transported its students, was a dangerous driver or that on a particular journey older children habitually and violently bullied younger children, the duty may well extend so far as to require the school to take preventive steps or to warn parents.

An important factor is the awareness of the school. Even when bullying takes place at school, the school's awareness is significant in considering the school's liability. The hidden nature of bullying can make it especially difficult for teaching staff to discover and deal with. A girl in Scotland, who was subjected to the most appalling bullying in school, failed in her negligence claim against her teachers primarily because she did not report the relevant incidents, either to the school or to her parents. Accordingly, where a school is not aware of the occurrence of cyberbullying, wherever it is occurring, the school is unlikely to be liable.

It must be remembered, however, that a school could be liable for injury occurring where it was aware of the risk, as opposed to the actual activity, and did nothing about it.

The courts have recognised that teachers can use their disciplinary powers against a student who has attacked another child outside school. They have also recognised that there could be circumstances in which a failure to exercise those powers would be a breach of the school's duty of care to another student. In considering such a situation, all the usual factors have to be taken into account: foreseeability, the extent of the risk, the magnitude of the harm, and the practicality and likely effectiveness of any steps which could be taken.

A school's failure to discipline students who bully others will only give rise to liability if it is more likely than not that disciplinary action would have prevented the injury.

As the judge put it in his judgement in the Court of Appeal for England and Wales, in the case of *Bradford-Smart v West Sussex County Council*, brought by brought by a former student of Ifield Middle School, Leah Bradford-Smart, against West Sussex County Council, which was responsible for the school:

'There is no magic in the term bullying. Any school has to have sensible disciplinary policies and procedures if it is to function properly as a

school at all. It will no doubt take reasonable steps to prevent or deal with one-off acts of aggression between pupils and also recognise that persistent targeting of one pupil by others can cause lasting damage to the victim. In seeking to combat this it is always helpful to have working definitions such as those contained in the documentation we have seen. The problem is now well-enough recognised for it to be reasonable to expect all schools to have policies and practices in place to meet it.... We agree that such policies are of little value unless they are also put into practice. But in order to hold the school liable towards a particular pupil, the question is always whether the school was in breach of its duty of care towards that pupil and whether that breach caused the particular harm which was suffered.'

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE TAKING OF REASONABLE STEPS

As a lawyer, I cannot pretend to be an expert on what steps the reasonable teacher ought to take to minimise the risk of injury from cyberbullying materialising. Nevertheless, having acted for more than 50 educational institutions over several decades, I recommend that schools give serious consideration to the following.

Learn about cyberspace and cyberbullying

Even today, there are many in school leadership positions who are quite naive about what's happening in cyberspace, and many school leaders are relying on the antibullying strategies of a previous generation. In Australia, we currently have available many good research-based programs for the prevention of bullying. It's important that school leaders familiarise themselves both with the world of cyberspace and with the materials and programs available to schools and students to assist them to deal with the down side of cyberspace while enjoying its benefits.

Amend your policies

Most schools already have comprehensive policies dealing with discipline and bullying. These policies must be reviewed and, where necessary, rewritten to take into account cyberbullying.

Train your staff

In relation to bullying, the National Safe Schools Framework recommends training for all staff in:

- understanding what is happening in the school, making use of appropriate information gathering methods and related discussion
- positive student management
- knowledge and skills relating to methods of addressing bullying and harassment
- identifying and dealing with prejudice and discrimination, for example, as they relate to gender, race, sexuality, disability and the like, and
- understanding the effects of bullying and harassment on children and young people.

Implement bullying prevention activities

One of the guiding principles in the National Safe Schools Framework is the implementation of programs and processes to nurture a safe and supportive school environment. Judges have emphasised the importance of having in place procedures for detecting and dealing with bullying. It will certainly help in defending claims if your school's procedures reflect current best practice.

Educate and warn your parents

Parents have significant responsibilities in relation to bullying. Schools ought to bring this to the attention of their parents, warning them of the dangers to their children of life in cyberspace and either helping parents to know how to help their children or, at least, pointing parents to sources of help.

Educate and warn your students

There's useful material available to help schools to do this. A good place to start is the National Safe Schools Framework on the website of the Commonwealth Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations website. More can be found on the NetAlert site.

Strengthen your pastoral care programs

A teacher in England involved in the *Bradford-Smart v West Sussex County Council* case, who was a great example for those aspiring to good pastoral care, received this judicial commendation:

'The bullying which took place at home or on the way to and from school was not allowed to and did not spill over into school. Leah was closely and affectionately monitored by Mrs Ashworth, who saw to it that any threats raised at home were never fulfilled, and unostentatiously contrived to give

Leah the support and encouragement she needed to deal with the problems which confronted her at school. Without the dedication and experience of Mrs Ashworth, or a teacher like her, the problems at home might well have developed into bullying at school.'

WHERE TO FROM HERE?

According to Cleveland State University Professor Ralph Mawdsley, speaking at the 2006 Australia and New Zealand Education Law Association national conference in Hobart, 'Although school officials have access to proven strategies to reduce the prevalence of bullying, they have failed to take advantage of those strategies. In most schools, bullying continues unabated.' As he pointed out, quoting Anne Garrett, from her article, 'Bullying in American schools,' 'The most common way that schools deal with bullying is to ignore it. One Columbine student reported, "Teachers would see them pushing someone into a locker, they'd ignore it." A junior at Columbine said, "I can't believe the faculty couldn't figure it out. It was obvious something was wrong.'"

While the situation in Australia is probably healthier than Professor Mawdsley reports in the United States, schools and their teachers here cannot afford at any stage to rest on their laurels. Children can and do find new ways of bullying. The challenge for schools and for communities is to keep on top of what is happening, to do the research, to develop the strategies to minimise the risks and to implement them.

The law has its part to play. It is by no means perfect and is more often a hindrance than a help to the bullied student. Law reform must follow once the results of research point the way.

Contrary to the beliefs of at least one officer of the New South Wales Department of Education and Training a little over 10 years ago, bullying does not build character. It destroys it. Bullying is, as one judge said in a recent case, a serious problem. It must not be ignored.

David Ford is a Partner in Emil Ford & Co – Lawyers, Sydney and President of the NSW Chapter of the Australia and New Zealand Education Law Association (ANZELA). This article is an edited version of his paper presented at the ANZELA NSW Chapter 'Cyber Safety in Schools' seminar, held in Sydney in August.

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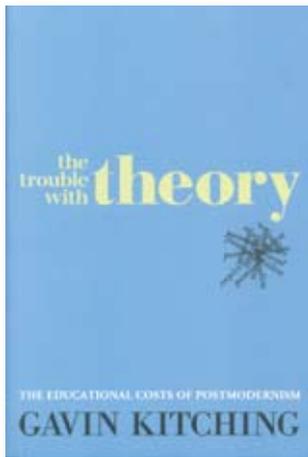
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CASES

Bradford-Smart v West Sussex County Council [2002] EWCA Civ 7

LINKS:

For more on the National Safe Schools Framework, visit www.dest.gov.au/sectors/school_education/publications_resources/profiles/national_safe_schools_framework.htm
For more on NetAlert, visit www.netalert.gov.au



The Trouble with Theory: The educational costs of postmodernism

In *The Trouble with Theory*, Gavin Kitching seeks to show that ‘a certain kind of theorising,’ namely postmodernist theorising, ‘does active intellectual damage to able young people’ and then to ‘provide a kind of manual by which both students and their teachers may be helped to avoid this damage and to do genuinely productive and rewarding intellectual work together.’

Kitching’s method is to analyse a range of undergraduate Honours theses to show how postmodernism reduces just about everything to an ‘alienated world’ of ‘matrices,’ ‘frameworks,’ ‘fields’ and ‘spaces’ in which ‘subjects’ – not people – are determined by ‘discourses’ and ‘power relations.’ Yes, Kitching finds fault with the ‘syntactically-tortured, abstraction-loaded, metaphorically impersonal’ and circuitous prose of postmodernist writers, but his main argument is that ‘discourses’ and ‘power relations’ don’t do things to people, people do things to people. In other words, words or discourses are powerful when people use them in ways to exert power over other people. What’s interesting about this, and typical in Kitching’s style, is that, for one thing, the language becomes relatively simple and, for another, the sentences become peopled. The subject is reintroduced into the alienated postmodernist sentence. Doing this is, in fact, Kitching’s first practical tip for teachers: ‘discourage the widespread or frequently repeated use of sentences that place abstractions in subject positions’ of the ‘subjectivities are constructed by’ or ‘the matrix of power produces’ variety.

The trouble with postmodernist theory, Kitching argues, is that what is true in postmodernist analysis is not original and what is original is not true. ‘To say that human beings give meaning to everything they see, hear, touch, use and experience, and that they do this predominantly through the language they use, is hardly an original insight,’ but to say that ‘reality is socially constructed’ in a determinist sense, where it is constructed in one and only one way, is false, while to

say that it is ‘constructed in a variety of ways by a variety of people for a variety of purposes’ is ‘true, but...unoriginal and, largely vacuous.’

More fundamentally, Kitching argues, the trouble with theory in the social sciences in general is that it ‘rests on the (usually unstated) premise that before one can make particular empirical claims or findings one must first make universalist theoretical assertions (often called a “theoretical context”) “within which,” as it is usually put, the empirical analysis can be located.... This is,’ says Kitching, ‘nothing more than superstition dressed up as methodological principle... that theory must always precede, and provide the setting for, empirical analysis, from a spurious analogy of [social scientists’] activity to some forms of natural science.’

The trouble I have with *The Trouble with Theory* is this: Kitching appears to be, as he puts it, ‘taking a massive philosophical hammer to smash what is, in reality, the softest of non-philosophical nuts,’ although he does this to ‘avoid being patronising, and treat theory with the intellectual seriousness with which the students treat it.’ It’s fair to say that he cracks his softest of postmodernist nuts, but would he also have cracked other kinds of theoretical or even empirical Honours analyses if he’d cared to hammer them? As he points out early in the book, one of the problems with ‘removing or occluding any authorial subject’ from theoretical prose and of filling it with ‘fields’ of abstract ‘objects’ is that it may not be just a typical postmodernist strategy. After all, as he points out, ‘English in particular is a language with an immense relationship vocabulary, so it is possible to describe such relationships in very tight, constraining or determining ways, or in very loose, vague or uncertain ways,’ which may be the case in any theory in the social sciences. Ought Kitching’s massive philosophical hammer smash the non-postmodernists too?

Steve Holden is the Editor of Professional Educator.

BY

Gavin Kitching

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REVIEWED BY

Steve Holden

Want to know about professional development opportunities, conferences and just plain useful stuff? **The Diary** tells you what's on.

OCTOBER 27

Pink Ribbon Day Cancer remains one of Australia's biggest health threats, with one in two men and one in three women diagnosed with cancer before the age of 85. Support the Cancer Council Australia on Pink Ribbon Day. It's one day of the year when students can pitch in to help the one in eight Australian women who will be diagnosed with breast cancer by the age of 85. Help to support breast cancer research and services for women with breast cancer right now, and educate women to be 'breast aware' on Pink Ribbon Day.

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WEBSITE www.pinkribbonday.com.au

NOVEMBER 10-11

C21st Learning: Acting (inter)nationally – Curriculum

Corporation Conference This year's conference will explore how education contributes to policy imperatives in an era of national cooperation, looking at our place in the world, a national curriculum, innovation and next practice, attracting and retaining quality teachers, the power of assessment data to lift performance, and participation for all.

WEBSITE www.curriculum.edu.au/conference/2008

NOVEMBER 10-16

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WEBSITE www.RecyclingNearYou.com.au

NOVEMBER 24-26

Shift Happens: Technology alone will not save us This year's annual conference of the Victorian Information Technology Teachers Association will focus on the frequently shifting educational and technological landscape and the need for us to all adapt. It will provide opportunities for educators to enhance their knowledge and skills, and provide fresh and inspiring approaches to teaching and learning. The VITTA Annual conference has established itself as the not-to-be missed educational event on the Australian calendar. Spread over three days, the conference offers more than 220 presenters, seven inspirational keynotes and 80 practical workshops on offer in eight diverse labs of computers, presenting the latest developments in information and communication technology in the education sector.

PLACE Rydges Bell City, 205 Bell Street Preston, Melbourne

PHONE 03 94956836

EMAIL conference@vitta.org.au

WEBSITE www.vitta.org.au/conference

NOVEMBER 28-29

Where Are You Now? The biggest search in Australian history is underway to find more than 60,000 people whose lives have been changed by one special event – the New South Wales Schools Spectacular. Organisers of the 25th Schools Spectacular know many of big names in the entertainment industry who made their first public appearances in the Spectacular – like Human Nature, Paulini, John Foreman and Simon Tedeschi – but they want to contact the multitude of talented performers who made the show what it is to celebrate the 25th anniversary.

WEBSITE www.schoolsspectacular.com.au

NOVEMBER 30- DECEMBER 4

Changing Climates: Education for sustainable futures – the Australian Association for Research in Education international education research conference

PLACE Queensland University of Technology, Kelvin Grove, Brisbane

PHONE 03 5964 9031

EMAIL aare@aare.edu.au

WEBSITE www.aare.edu.au/conf2008/index.htm

JANUARY 8

Trop Jr Tropfest and the Australian Children's Television Foundation with broadcast partners Cartoon Network and Boomerang is calling for entries in the second annual Trop Jr short film competition and festival for students aged 15 years and younger.

WEBSITE www.tropjr.com.au

APRIL 15-17

Word of Mouse Digital Fair The Australian College of Educators national digital fair will provide school-based teachers and leaders with the opportunity to hear about, see and be actively involved in the digital future for education. It will provide the opportunity to see first-hand how ICT can enhance the quality of teaching and learning, enable administrative efficiencies and create personalised online learning spaces. The Word of Mouse Digital Fair will provide direction regarding policies on evolving technologies, resourcing and school-based applications.

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Thank you, Greg Smith

*Let us go then you and I,
When the evening is set out against the sky
Like a patient etherised upon a table.
'The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock' by T.S. Eliot*

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

Not many people know this about me but I happen to be an ardent admirer of the literary stylings of T.S. Eliot: I studied 'The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock' in my final year of high school and thought it was the most brilliant poem I'd ever seen, apart from that other slightly less high-brow poem that went 'Twas on the good ship Venus, by gosh you should have seen us,' but unfortunately that wasn't on the syllabus in my year.

My passion for T.S. Eliot was all sparked by one person, Greg Smith, the school English master and also the rugby coach, a literature-loving scrum-scuffling contradiction of a man with inquisitive, witty eyes embedded in a chiselled cube-headed face and a refined newsreader-voice coming out of a ropy tree-stump neck. No matter where he went, there was always a well-worn copy of Shakespeare's *Richard II* tucked into his beefy, bratwurst-fingered oven-mitt hands.

Bullies and nerds, sportskids and wimps, smart-arses and dumb-arses alike, we all trembled in fear before the intimidating majesty that was Greg Smith. At the start of each English class, he'd plonk himself on the edge of his desk, his legs yanked apart with footybloke flexibility, then he'd read us passages of T.S. Eliot, Shakespeare, Graham Greene, Oscar Wilde, Arthur Miller, Bruce Dawe, and we'd all sit silently, listen hungrily and LEARN ABOUT LANGUAGE, every one of us desperate not to disappoint him – even Brett Carruthers, the mongrel-witted school thug whose only interest in literature had ever been holding down Year 8 boys and doing the type-writer on their chest until pee came out.

For the previous five years of high school, we'd only ever had spineless, lifeless, couldn't-care-less English teachers. All we learned in class was how to shoot chewed paper at each other through a ballpoint-pen blowpipe, and how to lasso a fly with a hair and create our very own remote-control insect-Messerschmidt. But with Greg Smith,

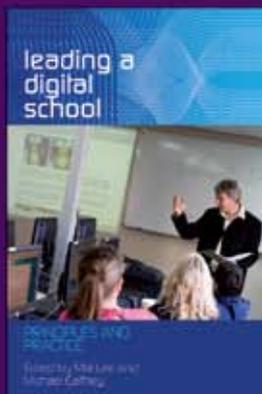
we were awestruck, scared-straight, and nobody more so than me. I'd sit up the back corner of the class, cowering in my plywood chair, hoping he wouldn't spot me there, hiding behind the massive afro of Charlie Corben, a Lebanese Jackson Five fan who dreamed that one day they'd ask him to join so they could become the Jackson Six. For that whole year I didn't make a peep, didn't utter a word, didn't put up my hand for anything – I just wrote whatever Greg Smith told us to write, read whatever Greg Smith told us to read and sat in whatever position Greg Smith was sitting, my legs yanked apart like his, my pelvis snapping like a wishbone, my coccyx driving into my kidneys.

And for a whole year he never spoke to me, never looked at me, never acknowledged my existence – until just a week before our final Year 12 exams, when he wandered down the back of the class, casting his huge prop-forward shadow over my little corner and sucking out all matter and energy from my universe.... then he looked down and said, 'You've done well this year, Danny. I'm proud of you,' and I just stared at his crotch because I was too scared to make eye-contact, emitting a weird, strained, 'Thhhnnkkkkks sirrrrrrr' noise, then he wandered off and I crawled back into Charlie Corben's afro and hid there for the rest of the year.

I never spoke to Greg Smith again, but I wound up getting unexpectedly good results in my Year 12 English exam, got into an arts course at uni, and eventually wound up earning a living as a writer – and meantime Greg Smith quit his teaching job, became the coach of the Australian Rugby Union team, and led the Wallabies to a 12-match unbeaten tour of Europe in 1996. I always meant to contact him and tell him that he was one of the reasons I became a writer, but he died of a brain tumour a few years back. So with World Teachers' Day coming up on 31 October, I'd like to quote T.S. Eliot right back at Greg Smith, and say thank you for those months of teaching-terror, because without you, I may have wound up a pair of ragged claws scuttling across the floors of silent seas.

Photo by Brenton Nicholls courtesy of stock.xchng

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Leading a Digital School

Mal Lee & Michael Gaffney
ACER Press 2008

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Passionate Leadership in Education

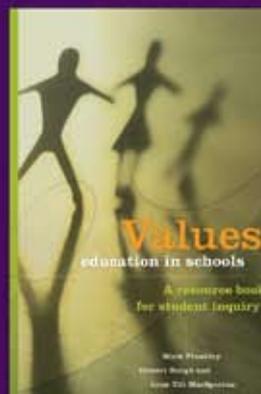
Brent Davies and Tim Brighouse
Sage — due September 2008

In this book, internationally recognised writers on leadership explore what makes leaders passionate about their role and their schools.

The contributors show that leadership must move on from the realm of a role or job towards an energy and commitment for enhancing children's learning and lives.

They maintain that passion must be the driving force that moves vision into action, through a range of chapters from internationally known contributors Brent Davies, Tim Brighouse, Geoff Southworth, Chris Day, John MacBeath, Andy Hargreaves, John Novak, Brian Caldwell, and Alan Flinham. What sustains and drives leaders to achieve in a changing and challenging educational environment? What maintains their passion for education and children's achievement? This book seeks to answer these questions.

\$62.00

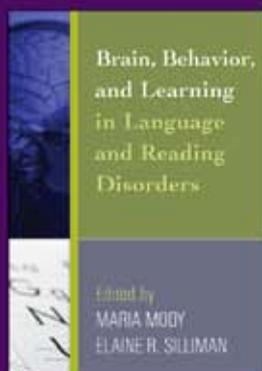


Values Education in Schools

Burgh, Freakley & Tilt MacSparran
ACER Press 2008

Values Education in Schools: A resource book for student inquiry is an important new resource for teachers involved in values and ethics education. It provides a range of 'practical philosophy' resources for secondary school teachers that can be used in English, religious education, citizenship, personal development and social science subjects. The materials include narratives to engage students in philosophical inquiry, doing ethics through the activity of philosophy, not simply learning about it.

\$39.95



Brain, Behavior, and Learning in Language and Reading Disorders

Maria Mody and Elaine R. Silliman
Guilford Press — due August 2008

Grounded in cutting-edge research on brain-behaviour relationships, this book explores how language and reading disorders develop – and presents exciting new approaches to examining and treating them. Experts from multiple disciplines investigate how children's learning

trajectories in spoken and written language are shaped by the dynamic interplay of neurobiological, experiential, and behavioural processes. The volume includes innovative neuroimaging applications and other state-of-the-science techniques that help shed new light on childhood disorders such as dyslexia, language impairment, writing disabilities, and autism. Implications for evidence-based diagnosis, intervention, and instruction are discussed. Illustrations include five color plates.

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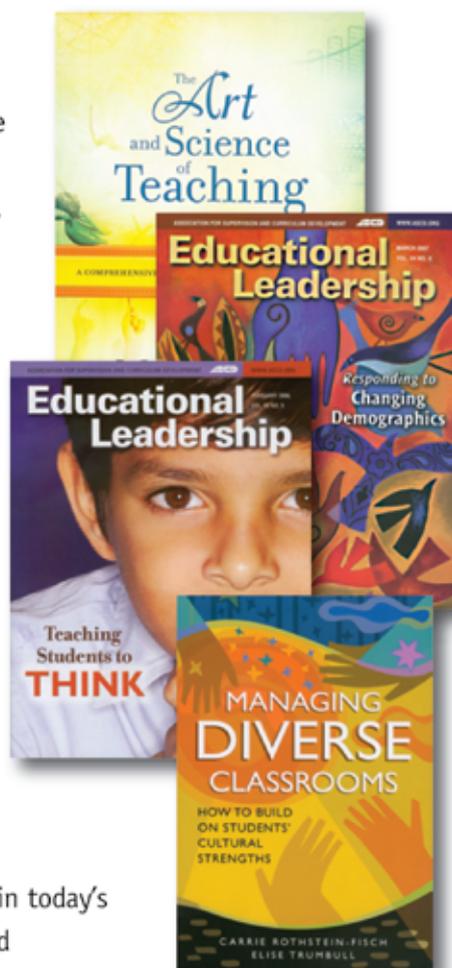
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Nancy Holodak

Nancy Holodak,
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