

Professional Educator

VOLUME 8 • NUMBER 2 • JUNE 2009

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Australian education: How good is it?

Plus:

Education and online access; ICT and
leadership; Danny Katz on punishment



...leading educators



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EDITORIAL

The Australian College of Educators (ACE) celebrated its 50th anniversary as Australia's peak association for professional educators at the ACE Digital Fair in April. The event, which addressed the digital future, was held at Geelong Grammar School, where the founding convention of the ACE was held, at the invitation of Dr James Darling, to form an association to enable educators from all sectors to collaborate and share professional practice. What will the next 50 years bring?



Inside insight

TEACH FOR... TWO YEARS?

A new program to attract 'the best and brightest university graduates into the nation's classrooms,' modelled on Britain's Teach First and the United States' Teach for America programs, emerged into the cold light of day in April. Deputy Prime Minister and Commonwealth Minister for Education Julia Gillard, speaking at the launch of the unimaginatively titled Teach for, um, Australia program, explained that, 'High-achieving graduates from Australian universities will sign up for a unique and intensive two-year placement in Australian schools where they can make the greatest difference.' Whether that means they can make the greatest difference in schools or the greatest difference in their first two years of teaching remains unclear. The idea is that participants will earn a teaching qualification after two years and then begin careers with the corporate employers who support Teach for Australia. 'Teach First in the United Kingdom and Teach for America in the United States have been shown to deliver better student outcomes and help raise the status of the profession,' Gillard said. Australian Education Union federal president Angelo Gavrielatos told ABC Radio News that Gillard's claim was 'demonstrably not true.' 'The assertion that it would lift the status of the profession is...insulting to teaching and the profession as a whole,' he added. With funding worth \$550 million, the program will begin in Victoria, where up to 90 graduates will be recruited for 2010.

SPEAKING WITH OUR REGIONAL NEIGHBOURS

Prime Minister Kevin Rudd wants at least 12 per cent of Year 12 students to be literate in an Asian language by 2020, and has coughed up funding of \$62.4 million for the three years to 2011 for the National Asian Languages and Studies in Schools Program (NALSSP). According to the Commonwealth Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, 'The aim of the program is to increase the level' – or should that be number? – 'of school students studying the languages and cultures of Australia's key regional

neighbours, namely China, Indonesia, Japan and Korea' – with 'beached-as, bro' apologies, naturally, to New Zealand. NALSSP provides \$43.68 million to government and non-government education authorities in each state and territory; \$9.36 million to higher education providers, businesses and Asian communities; \$6.24 million to primary and secondary schools in each state and territory, with grants up to \$20,000 per school, through the Becoming Asia Literate program run by the Asia Education Foundation; and \$3.12 million for a range of other national projects.

SWINE FLU PANDEMIC

Nine students and a teacher from Auckland's Rangitoto College, New Zealand's largest school, were treated for suspected swine influenza A virus subtype H1N1 after a three-week trip to Mexico where the outbreak began in April. All returned to school within a week of treatment.

ENGLISH: IT MAY BE SCUM, BUT IT'S OUR SCUM

English teachers be advised, Ben Yagoda, a professor of English at the University of Delaware writing in the *Chronicle of Higher Education*, rates Henry Hitchings's *The Secret Life of Words: How English became English* up there with Fowler's *A Dictionary of Modern English Usage*. A third of the book deals with the old complaint about new English words. Quoting Richard Verstegan's 1605 *A Restitution of Decayed Intelligence, in Antiquities*, which described English as 'of itself no language at all, but the scum of many languages.' Yagoda's retort? 'Well, it may be scum, but it's our scum.'

'SLOW WRITING' IS COMING

Advocates for slow food, move over: Kitty Burns-Floreay, author of *Script and Scribble: The rise and fall of handwriting*, has called on teachers to embrace a 'slow writing' movement, because students still need legible handwriting so they can take tests, but mostly because children master reading best when they write a word as they learn it. If you think this will end with you having to teach cursive, don't panic: Burns-Floreay advocates the use of italic.

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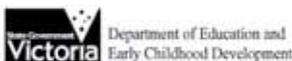
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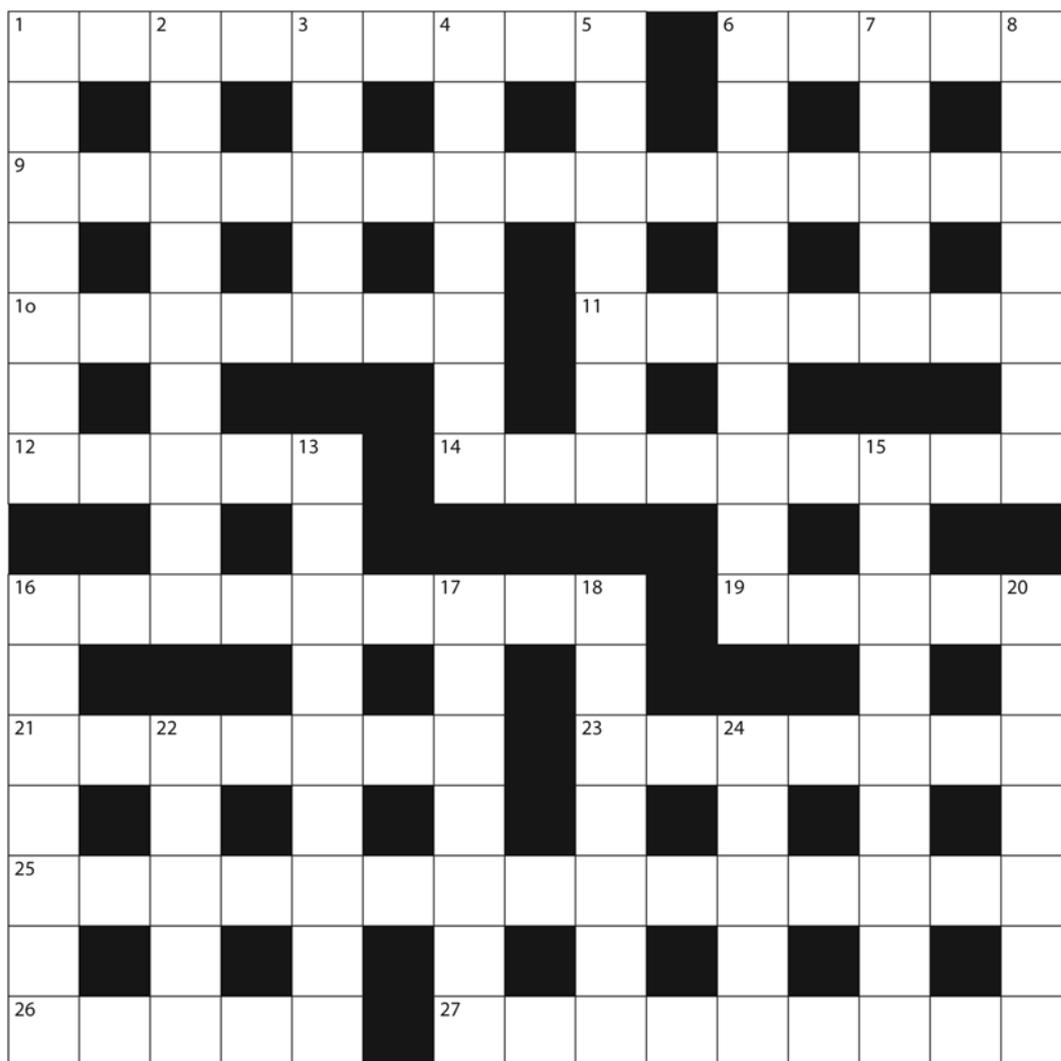
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GOAL SETTING

Fail to plan, and plan to fail, right?

- Goal setting in essence asks: where are we now, where do we want to be and how can we get there?
- Goal setting requires an audit of available resources, and strategies and tactics to achieve identified objectives.
- According to Adam Galinsky, author with Lisa Ordóñez, Maurice Schweitzer and Max Bazerman of 'Goals gone wild,' in the *Journal of the Academy of Management Perspectives*, though, goal setting 'can lead to crazy behaviours to get people to achieve them.'
- Goals need to be broad enough, few enough and flexible enough that they remain useful as circumstances change.

More on goal setting on page 42.



Across

- 1 Agent 50 takes a shine, unfortunately, to refill (9)
 6 Existed in a backward way, possibly Tasmanian (5)
 9 Treat car-sick jumping ace? A crime! (7, 3-5)
 10 Regret about code (7)
 11 Composer is smaller; nothing in it (7)
 12 Alien (a girl's) could knock you out (5)
 14 Not long ago, you strayed; naughty! (9)
 16 Ability shown by William in one-cent fiasco (9)
 19 Down-and-out may start in back section (5)
 21 Approaching time, as firm holds on (7)
 23 Soften sausage mince (7)
 25 Failure of nerve; can't sail round ten in defence role (8,7)
 26 Character in a pet hospital (5)
 27 Give out, returning part of watch, perhaps (9)

Down

- 1 Respect first swallow in turn-around (7)
 2 Puff about Indian maid; a straw cover (6,3)
 3 Mathematician broke rule after finishing degree (5)
 4 Faulty aim; grey pictures (7)
 5 Annoyance raises these; cut the French (7)
 6 Dessert in hollow shortfall (9)
 7 Sees direction in contests (5)
 8 Parasite lays blame centrally on targeted victim (7)
 13 Belief systems in areas round red-light centre (9)
 15 Make much of, but nip at odd issues (9)
 16 Keen and fashionable future, possibly (7)
 17 Tour ends in precise part of larger entity (7)
 18 Put final recovery money in back of boat (7)
 20 Go first, quietly, then go back (7)
 22 Negative temperature contrasts a mark of achievement (5)
 24 Deplete a group of shops (5)

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Education



It's time to agitate for significant, systematic and sustained change if we want world-class schools, says **Brian Caldwell.**

Agitation Hill in Mount Alexander, near Castlemaine, was the site of a major uprising in 1853 following the decision of Governor Charles La Trobe in 1851 to introduce a monthly licence fee on the goldfields of Victoria. Others were the Monster Meeting at Forest Creek, the Red Ribbon Rebellion around Bendigo and the dramatic events at Eureka in Ballarat in 1854. These agitations and the language of radical dissent they invoked were key events in the story of democracy and responsible government in Australia.

Now, 150 or so years later, it's again time for the community to adopt the language of radical dissent; to agitate for significant, systematic and sustained change; and, above all, to become more fully engaged in the governance of public education. This is necessary if Australia is to have world-class schools in which all students in all settings secure success. It is necessary, but not sufficient, for this engagement to occur at the level of peak organisations of teachers, parents, businesses and governments. It must occur in dramatically different ways at the local level.

Recently, I joined others in agitating for change in three areas. First, along with teachers and parents,

we drew attention to the run-down condition of state schools and the obsolete design of most schools in both public and private sectors. The former was palpably obvious to local communities whose pleas for action were either ignored or resulted in placements on priority lists that would leave one or more generations of students to complete their schooling in deplorable conditions. In relation to my personal advocacy on behalf of state schools, the response by every state minister for education was denial; they were content to report that expenditure on their watch was at record levels.

It has taken the global financial crisis to trigger the commendable initiative of the Commonwealth government of Kevin Rudd to commit \$14.7 billion to schools. In the longer term, however, this is wholly inadequate compared to the effort of the governments of Tony Blair and Gordon Brown in the United Kingdom: we need to triple this expenditure over 10 years in a combined effort of state, territory and Commonwealth governments.

Secondly, I joined the arts community in agitating for the inclusion of the arts in a national curriculum. The long overdue national curriculum taking shape was seriously unbalanced if priori-

ties in the Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young People were to be addressed in their entirety. The good news is that ministers at all levels of government have now agreed to their inclusion.

Thirdly, I endorsed peak organisations of business and industry that expressed their wish to support the work of schools. An example relates to the distressing condition of schools described above. There was powerful evidence that a combination of public and private capital was needed. This was the call for public-private partnerships. It drew heavy fire from those who believed that public schools should be built, owned, operated and funded exclusively by government. The response was ideological rather than educational and economic. There was never an intention for the curriculum to be controlled by the private sector. The good news is that governments in most states have accepted the merits of public-private partnerships, especially for the construction of new schools. This does not mean that they should be taken up under all circumstances, but they should proceed if the economics are right and if it means that more students can learn in the kinds of facilities that are required in the 21st Century.

Another example of public private partnerships has been cash or in-kind support of the ongoing work of schools. For years proposals along these lines have drawn the response that they open the door to control of the curriculum by fast food chains and the like. The headlines have been predictable every time the possibilities have been raised. In England, more than 95 per cent of 3,100 secondary schools have a partnership with a business that supports the school's chosen area of specialisation. For example, each of the nearly 500 schools with a specialisation in the arts has a partnership with the arts industry. It is almost certain that implementation of a national arts curriculum in Australia will require similar arrangements. The good news is that the Commonwealth government's response to the Australia 2020 Summit includes sponsorship of a Business-School Connections Roundtable, with all secondary schools benefiting from partnerships with the nation's top 100 companies.

There is a need for more powerful public engagement in the governance of public schools. Only one state, Victoria, has empowered the councils of public schools by giving them significant

autonomy. Other states have consistently resisted this, despite international evidence that the best-performing systems have a balance of autonomy, choice and accountability. In my work with government and non-government schools in recent years, I've observed at first hand the benefits for schools with autonomous and accountable boards, particularly in terms of the long-term sustainability of those schools. The argument that such boards cannot be created for small schools or schools in disadvantaged settings will only prevail as long as there is resistance to creating federations of schools in the public sector. The good news is that these are starting to emerge, notably in Tasmania, but we lag far behind England where they have been an important factor in the transformation of schools

My recent book with Jessica Harris, *Why not the Best Schools?* demonstrates that outstanding schools draw on four kinds of capital: intellectual, social, spiritual and financial. My emphasis here is on the importance of social capital: the strength of formal and informal partnerships and networks involving the school and all individuals, agencies, organisations and institutions that have the potential to support and be supported by the school.

The good news is that the ideological barriers have been smashed in some settings, with partnerships of schools and school systems through such enterprises as the Australian Business and Community Network. A standout example is the Schools First initiative, a partnership of the Foundation for Young Australians, the Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER) and the National Australia Bank. Awards totalling \$5 million per year for three years are available for public and private schools that model good practice in school-community partnerships. There are 80 workshops underway across the country to provide guidance on how to achieve success. The effort is underpinned by a solid evidence base assembled by ACER.

Australia is, however, a late starter in these matters. Unconscionable delays in rebuilding schools, balancing the curriculum and securing the support of the whole community would not have occurred if public support had been mobilised at the local level and made effective through the empowerment of key stakeholders in school governance. It may require the language of radical dissent and agitation on a grand scale if we are to achieve a new alignment of education, society and economy that is the prerequisite for a world-class school system.

Brian J Caldwell is managing director of Educational Transformations and a former dean of education at the University of Melbourne. He is co-author, with Jim Spinks, of Raising the Stakes: From improvement to transformation in the reform of schools, published by Routledge in 2008, and, with Jessica Harris, of Why not the Best Schools? What we have learned from outstanding schools around the world, published by ACER Press in 2008.

The opinions expressed here are drawn from his Agitation Hill Lecture delivered in Castlemaine on 29 May, 2009.

Photo by Yaroslav Bragin courtesy of stock.xchng



Australian schools

Three questions; three answers

How good is Australian school education, how fair is Australian school education, and how could we do even better? **Barry McGaw** has some answers.

To assess Australian school education we could take two approaches. One would be to compare it with the past; the other would be to compare it with education in other countries in the present. Comparisons with the past are very difficult to make if we want to use more than adults' fading memories of their own childhood and, worse, memories that are often filtered through rose-coloured glasses. Such empirical evidence from the past that exists is difficult to interpret. Old curricula and examination papers give some notion of what students were expected to learn but, in the absence of marked student responses to examination papers we can gain little appreciation of exactly what was required. We would also need good information on the nature of the student cohort.

It is better to use current international comparisons where possible. This article draws on data provided by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), most particularly its Program for International Student Assessment (PISA). PISA provides direct, internationally-comparable assessments of the school achievement of 15-year olds.

HOW GOOD IS SCHOOL EDUCATION?

In PISA 2000, students were assessed in reading literacy, mathematics and science, with reading literacy as the main domain and mathematics and science as minor domains. In PISA 2003, mathematics was the main domain and reading and science minor domains together with problem solving which was an additional domain. In PISA 2006, the three original domains were assessed, with science as the main domain. PISA assesses students' capacity to use the knowledge and skills they have acquired rather than whether they have learned the specific content of their curricula. Sample items, illustrating the content and form of assessment, are provided on the PISA website at www.pisa.oecd.org. Other international comparisons are provided in *Education at a Glance*, the OECD's annual compilation of international comparisons in education.

Figure 1 shows the mean performances of countries in reading literacy in PISA 2000. Reading literacy assessed in PISA is the capacity to use, interpret and reflect on written material. The line in the middle of the box for each country gives the mean performance of 15-year olds in the country. The size of a box reflects the precision with which a country's mean is estimated. Where the

boxes overlap on the vertical dimension, there is no significant difference between the means for the countries. Further details are in the PISA report. The results reveal marked variations in performance levels among the 42 participating countries – ranging from Finland, significantly better than all others at the top, to Peru, significantly worse than all others at the bottom. Australia ranked in fourth place, but its mean was not significantly different from those of two countries above it or six below it. It is, therefore, appropriate to say that Australia ranked between second and 10th or that Australia tied in second place with eight other countries.

In PISA 2003, Finland was again the only country significantly ahead of Australia in reading. In PISA 2006, however, Finland, Korea, Canada, New Zealand and Hong Kong-China were all significantly ahead of Australia because performances in Korea and Hong Kong-China had improved and those in Finland, Canada and New Zealand had stayed the same while Australia's had declined, as shown in Figure 2.

In PISA 2000, Korea had the narrowest spread of performances in the OECD, with very few students at the lowest level but also relatively few at the highest level. The improved mean performance by PISA 2006 was due to improved performances at the highest levels due, it seems, to a new curriculum with more emphasis on essay tests and expanded use of essays in assessments for university entrance. The decline in Australia's mean performance by PISA 2006 was due to a decline at the higher levels, as shown in Figure 3.

The performance level at the 95th percentile – the level below which 95 per cent of students perform – declined markedly for Australia, as did those for the 90th and 75th percentiles. At the lower end of the distribution of performances in Australia there was no such decline. The worrying sign for Australia is that, while the mean performance remains high, it has slipped somewhat because our best 15-year olds are not reading complex text as well as they did just six years earlier or as well as the best 15-year olds are in other high-performing countries.

In mathematics, PISA assesses whether 15-year olds can use the mathematics they have learned in school. It does not focus primarily on the curriculum content to determine whether students have learned exactly what they were intended to learn. Instead, it assesses whether

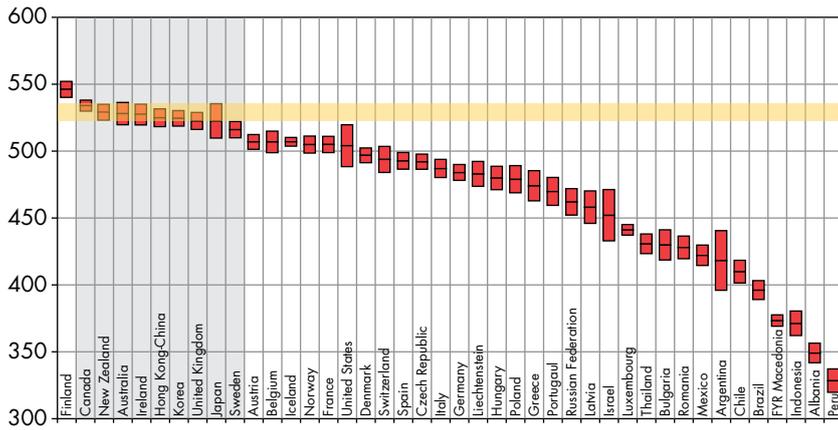


Figure 1. Mean reading performances in PISA 2000
 Source: OECD (2003), *Literacy skills for the world of tomorrow: Further results from PISA 2000*, p. 76.

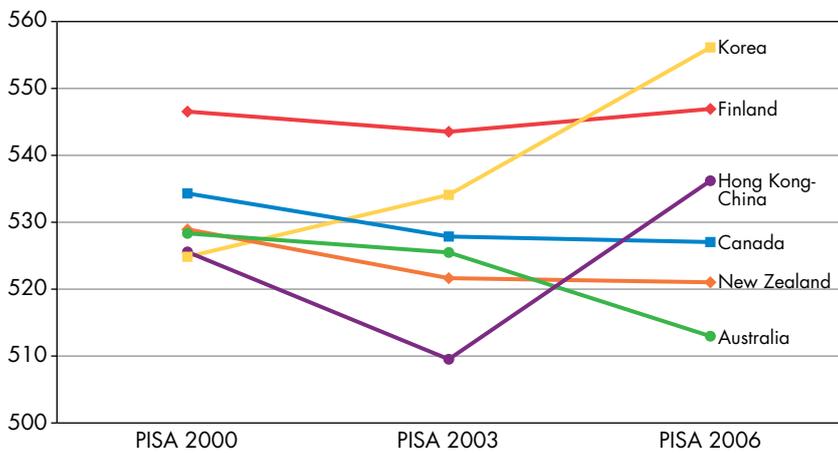


Figure 2. Trends in reading performances in PISA
 Source: OECD (2007), *PISA 2006: Science competencies for tomorrow's world, Vol. 1: analysis*, pp. 296-97.

students can recognise that a problem can be solved mathematically, are able to represent it mathematically and then solve it.

In PISA mathematics, Australia is also among the high-performing countries but does not perform quite as well relatively as it does in reading. In PISA 2000, Australia ranked sixth but only Hong Kong-China and Japan were significantly ahead of Australia so Australia was tied in third place, according to the OECD's *Learning for Tomorrow's World*. In PISA 2003, when mathematics was the main domain of assessment, Australia ranked 11th but tied in fifth place with Finland, Hong Kong-China and the Netherlands the four significantly ahead – the Netherlands had not been in PISA 2000.

In PISA 2006, Australia ranked 13th and tied in ninth place. The four countries signifi-

cantly ahead in 2003 remained so but had been joined by Switzerland and Canada, which had not been different from Australia in 2000 or 2003, Macao-China which had participated for the first time in 2003 and had not been different from Australia, and Taiwan which joined PISA for the first time in 2006.

Actual performance levels, as opposed to rankings, can be compared in mathematics only for PISA 2003 and PISA 2006 since comparable scales were used in those two assessments. Australia's actual mean performance level did not change but its rank slipped somewhat because the 'opposition' is not standing still. An examination of the full distribution of Australian performances shows that the higher performers were not doing as well in 2006 as in 2003 but that the lower performers were doing somewhat better in 2006 than 2003, the net effect being to keep the mean stable.

In science, PISA assesses whether students can recognise a scientific question, know what counts as evidence to deal with such a question and can marshal such evidence to deal with a question. In PISA 2000, Australia ranked eighth but tied in third place significantly behind only Japan and Korea. In PISA 2003, Australia ranked sixth but tied in fourth place, this time significantly behind only Finland, Japan and Korea.

In PISA 2006, when science was the main domain of assessment, Australia ranked eighth but tied again in fourth place, this time significantly behind Finland, Hong Kong-China and Canada, according to *PISA 2006: Science competencies for tomorrow's world*. The science scale in PISA 2006 is not directly comparable with those used in 2000 and 2003 when science was a minor domain. It is not possible to compare actual levels of achievement over time. That possibility will emerge for science from PISA 2009 on, as it already has so emerged for reading and mathematics.

In PISA 2003, problem solving was assessed as an additional minor domain. Three types of problem solving were assessed: decision making; system analysis and design; and trouble shooting. Sample items are provided in the OECD's *Problem Solving for Tomorrow's World* and the PISA website. Australia ranked seventh overall but was tied in fifth place, significantly behind only Korea, Hong Kong-China, Finland and Japan, according to the OECD's *Problem Solving for Tomorrow's World*.

The picture of the quality of Australian school education revealed by the OECD's PISA results is very positive. There is no quality crisis, despite the way in which a crisis is often manufactured to create or support political debate about education in Australia. That does not mean, however, that there are no challenges or grounds for concern.

Australia is among the high-performing countries, though not at the very top. Australia is a country that aspires to gold, not silver or bronze, in international sporting competitions so there's no reason why it shouldn't have similarly high expectations of its schools. The worrying sign from the latest PISA assessments in 2006 is that there has been some decline in the performance levels of Australia's best students. The poorer-performing Australian students have not declined in reading and have actually improved a little in mathematics. To drive up the mean performance, Australia needs to improve its performance levels throughout the full performance range, but particularly among higher performers.

HOW FAIR IS AUSTRALIAN SCHOOL EDUCATION?

In judging the performance of our education system, we should consider not only the quality of our students' performances but also their equity. This is a country that declares that one of its core values is a commitment to a 'fair go.'

Judging fairness by spread of performance

One simple way to address the issue of equity is to examine the spread of results in different countries. Results will always be spread because of individual differences, but the spread can vary significantly in particular countries.

In the main domains of assessment in PISA, there is sufficient information to establish and describe well-defined levels of performance on the relevant scale. In PISA 2000, five levels of performance were defined on the reading scale, with an additional lower domain not well measured and described only as 'below Level 1.' Students at this level may be literate in the sense



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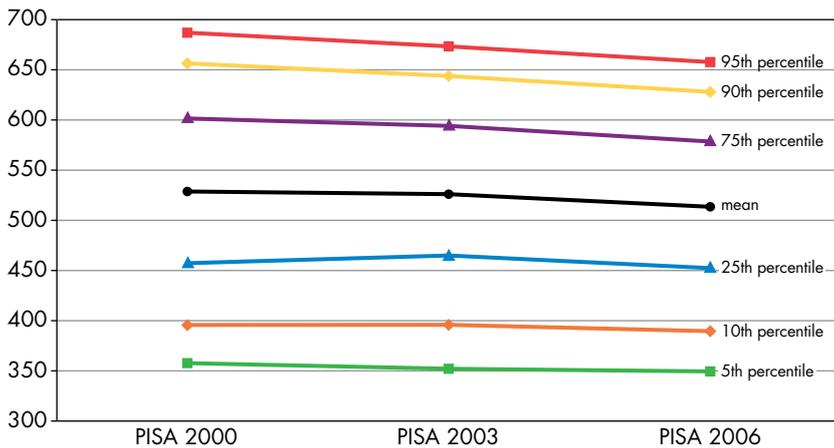


Figure 3: Trends in Australia's distribution of reading performances in PISA
Source: OECD (2007), *PISA 2006: Science competencies for tomorrow's world, Vol. 1: analysis*, pp. 296-97.

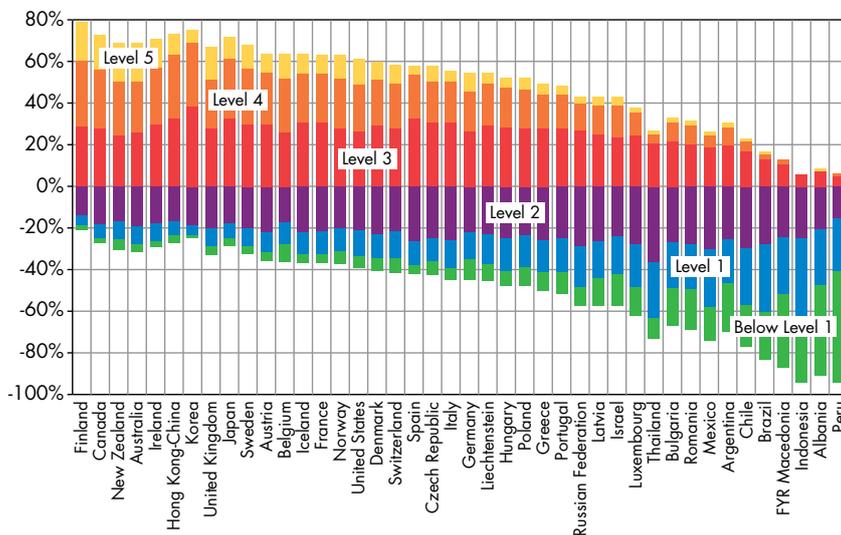


Figure 4. Percentage of students at each reading proficiency level in PISA 2000
Source: OECD, UNESCO (2003) *Literacy skills for the world of tomorrow*, p. 274

of being able to decode printed words and to read text, but do not have a level of literacy sufficient for further study. Even those at Level 1 are likely to be deficient in this respect.

Figure 4 shows the percentage of students at each reading proficiency level in each country in PISA 2000. Countries are arranged in order of their mean performance, with the percentages of students at Levels 3, 4 and 5 shown above the horizontal zero line and the percentages at lower levels shown below it.

Australia stands out in one important respect. Compared with other high-performing countries around it – Ireland, Hong Kong-China, Korea, Japan and Sweden – Australia has a considerably higher percentage of students at Level 5, a consid-

erably smaller percentage in the middle at Level 3 and a larger percentage at the lowest levels. Australia is leaving its poorer-performing students further behind in reading than do these other high-performing countries. New Zealand is rather like Australia, but has an even higher percentage of students at Level 1 and below Level 1. Korea provides an interesting contrast. It had a considerably smaller proportion of high achievers but a correspondingly small proportion of very low achievers.

Similar analyses of performance in mathematics in PISA 2003 and science 2006 show Australia's distribution across proficiency levels to be similar to those in other high-performing countries. In mathematics, as distinct from reading, poorer performers in Australia are not left behind to any greater extent than in other countries that are similarly high performing on average. The message of there being no quality problem in Australian schooling can be nuanced by the additional observation that in reading, which is a fundamental skill on which most other learning depends, although Australian 15-year olds perform at a high average level, there are relatively more poor performers than in other countries. In mathematics the proportion of low performers is in line with other high-performing countries.

Judging fairness by impact of students' social backgrounds and their performances

A second way in which to examine equity is to investigate the relationship between students' educational performance and their social background.

The positive relationship between social advantage and educational achievement has been long established in research in many individual countries, and it can lead to a counsel of despair. If the relationship between social background and educational achievement is strong, education can seem to be impotent, unable to make a difference. Other research evidence provides assurance that schools can make a difference to the life chances of their students. The PISA results also provide this assurance, if the relationships in different countries are compared.

The social gradients for reading literacy in PISA 2000 in four countries are shown in Figure 5. The lines for Finland and Canada are significantly less steep than the one for the OECD as a whole, indicating that increased social advantage in these countries is associated with a greater

increase in educational achievement than in the OECD as a whole. Their results are more equitable than those of the OECD overall.

The differences between these four lines at the left-hand end are substantial. Socially disadvantaged students do very much worse in some cases. The gap in educational achievement between similarly socially disadvantaged students in Germany and Finland represents around three years of schooling. Similarly disadvantaged students in Australia fall about half-way between, around one and a half years behind their counterparts in Finland.

More detailed analysis of the German data shows the pattern to be strongly related to the organisation of schooling. From age 11, students are separated into vocational and academic schools of various types on the basis of the educational future judged to be most appropriate for them. Students from socially disadvantaged backgrounds generally end up in low-status vocational school and achieve poor educational results. Students from socially advantaged backgrounds

are directed to high-status academic schools where they achieve high-quality results. The schooling system largely reproduces the existing social arrangements, conferring privilege where it already exists and denying it where it does not.

If lines for more countries were added to Figure 5, the pattern would become difficult to discern. A clearer picture for all OECD countries is provided in Figure 6. Mean performances of countries in reading literacy are represented on the vertical axis. The slope of the regression line for social equity on reading literacy is represented on the horizontal axis as the difference between the slope for the OECD as a whole and a country's own slope. This places to the left countries where the slope is steeper than in the OECD as a whole – countries in which social background is more substantially related to educational achievement – and to the right countries where the slope is less steep than that for the OECD as a whole – countries in which social background is less related to educational achievement.

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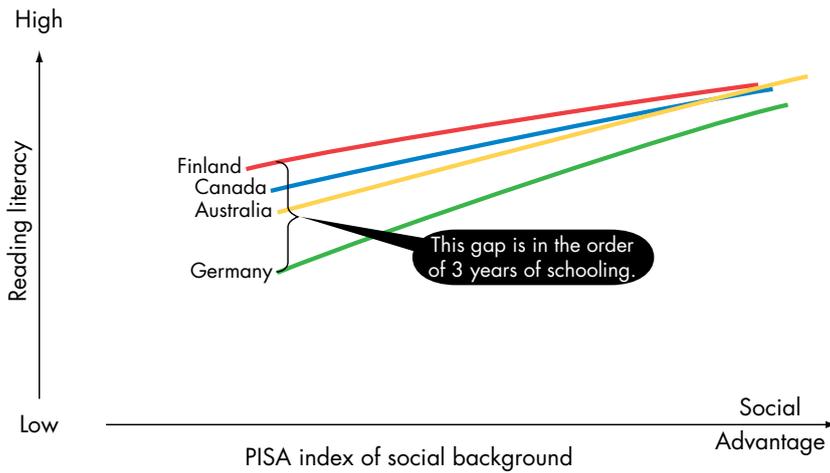


Figure 5. Social background and reading literacy (PISA 2000)
 Source: OECD (2001) Knowledge and skills for life, p. 308

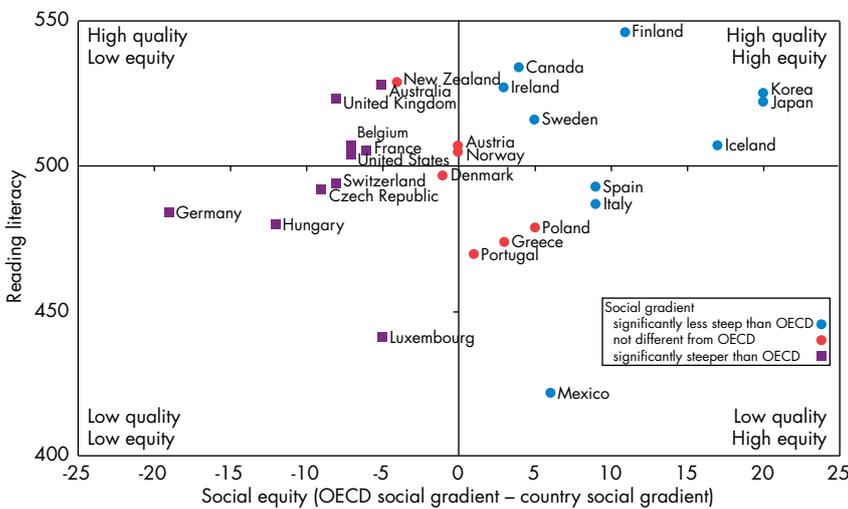


Figure 6. Relationship between social gradients and mean reading literacy in PISA 2000 for OECD countries
 Source: OECD (2001) Knowledge and Skills for Life, p. 308

Countries high in the figure are high quality and those to the far right are high equity. The graph is divided into four quadrants on the basis of the OECD average on the two measures. The presence of countries in the ‘high-quality, high-equity’ quadrant at the top right, including Korea, Japan, Finland and Canada, demonstrates that there is no necessary trade off between quality and equity – it’s possible to achieve both.

Judging fairness by impact of students’ social backgrounds on school differences

A third way to examine equity is to investigate the variation in student performance between schools. In Figure 7, the variation in student performance in reading in PISA 2000 for each coun-

try is divided into a component due to differences among students within schools, above the zero line, and a component due to differences between schools, below that line.

In Iceland, Finland and Norway there is very little variation in scores between schools. There choice of school is not important because there is so little difference among schools. Among countries in which there is a large component of variation between schools, there are some in which this occurs by design. In Belgium, Germany and Hungary, students are sorted into schools of different types according to their school performance as early as age 12. The intention is to group similar students within schools differentiated by the extent of academic or vocational emphasis in their curriculum. This is intended to minimise variation within schools in order to provide the curricula considered most appropriate for the differentiated student groups. It has the consequence of maximising the variation between schools.

In some other countries, the grouping of students is less deliberate but, nevertheless, results in substantial between-school variation. In the US, for example, 30 per cent of the overall variation is between schools. In Korea, 37 per cent is between schools. For Poland, in PISA 2000, 63 per cent of the variation in reading was between schools whereas in PISA 2003 in mathematics only 13 per cent was between schools. This remarkable difference was due to a reform in which early streaming of students into schools of different types was abandoned in favour of comprehensive schools for students up to the age at which PISA measures their performance. Not only was the between-school variation reduced, but Poland was the only country to improve its average performance significantly on all measures used in both PISA 2000 and PISA 2003. It did so largely by raising the achievement levels of its poorer performing students.

In Australia, 68 per cent of the between-schools variation can be accounted for in terms of differences between schools in the social background of their students. Among OECD countries, the percentage is higher in only Luxembourg, the United States, the United Kingdom, Hungary and Germany.

In Luxembourg, Hungary and Germany, students are sorted into schools of different types and given different subsequent expectations on the basis of their educational achievement from around

the age of 12. Sorting also involves separation on the basis of social background. The percentage of variation in performance between schools that can be accounted for in terms of differences in students' social backgrounds is 80 per cent in Luxembourg and 69 per cent in Hungary and Germany.

The US at 73 per cent and the UK at 71 per cent are like Australia, with no formal sorting of students into schools of different types, but rather with a disposition of school types that produces the same consequence. In the US, school differences reflect community differences. In the UK and Australia, they reflect community differences and the availability of a large number of private providers that sort students in part based on parents' financial capacity to pay the fees required.

In mathematics performance in PISA 2003, 70 per cent of the variation between Australian schools can be explained in terms of differences between schools in the social background of their students.

The final nuance to be added to the quality and equity story in Australian school education is

that our schools are strongly divided on the basis of the social background of the students they enrol. Little of the difference among schools in the educational performances of their students is a consequence of what the schools do; 70 per cent of it is due to whom they enrol.

We cannot tell to what extent this is a consequence of the public-private divide in Australian schooling since the information on what kind of school the Australian students participating in PISA are enrolled in is suppressed. The Australian sample covers schools of all kinds. The information is available in Australia but not published here and not provided to the OECD. Australia is the only country that withholds this information.

Judging quality and fairness by completion rates for secondary education or equivalent

Another way in which to judge the fairness of Australian education is to consider the completion rates for secondary education or its equivalent.

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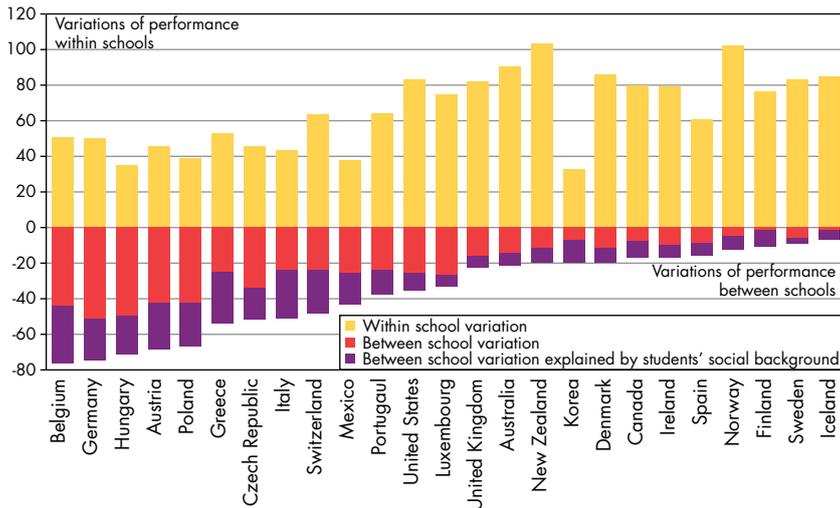


Figure 7. Sources of variation in student performance in reading literacy in PISA 2000
Source: OECD, UNESCO (2003). *Literacy Skills for the World of Tomorrow*, p. 357

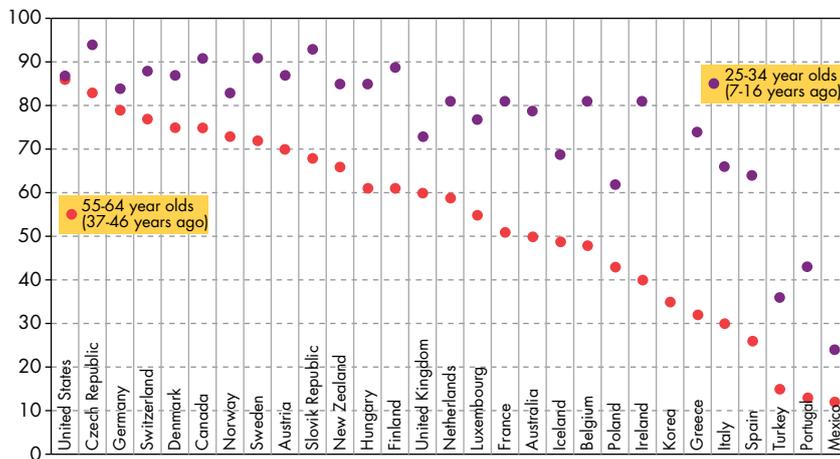


Figure 8. Percentage of age groups completing upper secondary education or equivalent
Source: OECD, *Education at a Glance*, 2007, p. 37

There are no internationally comparable data on trends in completion rates for upper secondary education, but a picture for past decades can be obtained from the percentages of the population in different age brackets that have attained this level.

The percentage of 55- to 64-year olds who have attained upper secondary education indicates completion rates 37 to 46 years ago. The picture is only approximate because some will have attained this level as adults, long after having left initial education, and also because some of the population will not have survived to this age group. Younger groups provide corresponding pictures for more recent decades.

Figure 8 shows the attainment rates for 55- to 64-year olds in OECD countries. The rates

for 25- to 34-year olds reveal that, by seven to 16 years ago, 18 OECD countries had achieved attainment rates of 80 per cent or higher. Australia was not among them.

The Republic of South Korea started from a low base but grew quickly, rising from 24th to first. Over the same period, Japan rose from 10th to third. The US started from a high base but grew quite slowly, slipping from first to 11th. Australian rates have grown relatively slowly from a comparatively low base, with the rank slipping marginally from equal 18th to 20th. Meanwhile Canada held its ranking at seventh.

In the mid-1960s, South Korea had a gross domestic product (GDP) per capita equivalent to Afghanistan and behind all countries in Latin America. South Korea is now in the OECD, with a GDP per capita just below the top two-thirds of members. Education reform and a deep national commitment to education and skill development are, according to Angus Maddison in *The World Economy: A millennial perspective*, key drivers of its remarkable economic growth.

By international standards, Australia has high-quality but relatively low-equity schooling. It also has far too few young people finishing upper secondary education or its equivalent. On this latter measure, Australia is now in the bottom third of OECD countries.

HOW COULD AUSTRALIA DO EVEN BETTER?

While we can deny there is a quality crisis in Australian school education, we must admit there are equity problems. We should, nevertheless, ask how we could do better on both fronts.

Improving quality

First, how could we improve quality? We should aspire to be number one in education. We should not look to the OECD average and be content with being well above it. We should look for comparison and challenge to Finland, Japan and Korea, and outside the OECD to Hong Kong-China and Singapore, which will participate in PISA from this year onwards.

It is, no doubt, true that nothing succeeds like success. It is also true that nothing fails like failure. Nothing accumulates like successive failure or early disadvantage. Early identification of poor performance in school and appropriate inter-

vention to build a secure foundation for continuing learning is important.

In Finland, students do not commence school until they are seven years of age. Almost immediately, more than 35 per cent of them are identified as needing some additional support. The proportion receiving such support then drops away but remains much higher than in the US, as shown in Figure 9.

Teachers are the key to high-quality education, but many OECD countries face a problem in the recruitment and retention of high-quality teachers of the kind that they say they desire. Finland is not among them. It is more difficult in Finland to gain entry to a teacher education than medicine. Teaching in Finland remains a high-status occupation, entered only after six years of Masters-level initial education that provides a strong basis in both content and pedagogy.

That is not the case in Australia. One of our difficulties is that we tend to address the supply problem only on the supply side. We reduce higher

education contribution charges for teacher education, assuming that cost is the barrier to entry. We should look at the demand side and ask whether the salaries and conditions that we offer teachers is sufficient to attract people of the kind we want into the profession. Australian teachers reach the top of their salary scale in less than 10 years. The top is less than one and a half times the starting salary, according to the OECD's *Education at a Glance* report. It's little wonder we have trouble retaining many. Salary is not the only thing that draws people to teaching, of course, but it does send a strong signal about the value that our society actually attaches to teaching.

Perhaps it is time to pursue a radical solution. One of the reasons that it is difficult to raise the salaries of teachers is that teachers constitute a fairly large labour force. One way to raise their salaries would be to have fewer of them. We could do this if we differentiated the labour force in schools, employing teachers for only those aspects of the work for which professional teaching skills

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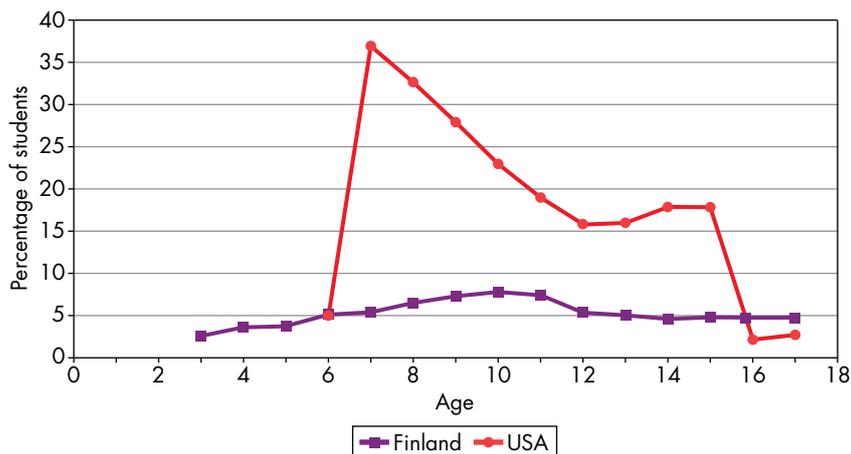


Figure 9. Percentage of students receiving additional resources in regular classes
Source: OECD, *Students with Disabilities, Learning Difficulties and Disadvantages*

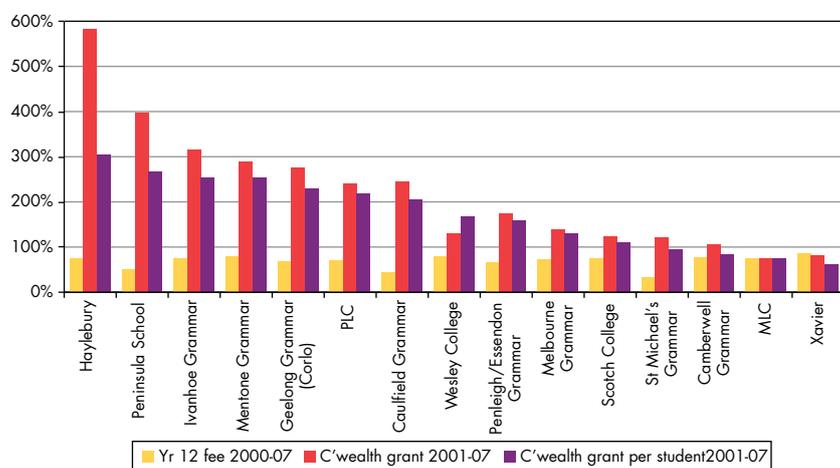


Figure 10. Income increase for selected Victorian non-government schools
Source: Blair, A., *Presentation to WA Secondary School Executives Association Conference, Perth, 2007*

are required and remitting other tasks to a range of other workers. England provides a good example of this development.

We also need to strengthen the evidence base for effective teaching and to build our teacher education programs more strongly around it. We still suffer from the legacy of teachers colleges that built teacher education as a kind of craft knowledge around 'tips for practice' from effective practitioners. There is a research base of which we should make much greater use and to which we should more actively contribute.

Most of the state departments of education now use student performance data to monitor school performance and to provide stronger reviews and additional support for those that underperform. We do not generally have such

strategies in place for non-government schools to even know which is underperforming let alone to do something about it.

A strong curriculum is a key influence on student performance, particularly one that sets high expectations of students. We should look in some detail at what students in the higher-performing countries are expected to learn, and we should do this as well for the final years of secondary education – beyond the point at which PISA assessments are gathered.

As we debate the value of a national curriculum, there are two issues: whether it would be wise to abandon the natural experimentation and competition that eight separate jurisdictions can provide; and what form the curriculum should take. Finland's curriculum provides an interesting example. Its national curriculum document has, for each subject area, statement of objectives, lists of core content to be covered and descriptions of what would amount to good student performance at the end of a period such as Years 3 to 5. It's a good mix of content and outcomes. It also provides for a good balance between central specification and school responsibility, since considerable professional responsibility is left with schools and teachers.

Improving equity

Improving equity will require a focus on low performance, not on disadvantaged social background per se, but we cannot ignore the fact of poor performance being more strongly related to social disadvantage in Australia than in other high-performing countries. As noted earlier, the information on whether students are in government or non-government schools is suppressed in the Australian PISA data file. There is little other evidence on the basis of which to compare systems in ways which separate the effects of the social background of students and the influence of the school, so we are left not knowing much about the influence of the public/private divide in Australian schooling on student learning. We do, however, know a great deal about differences in funding.

Since 2001, the Commonwealth government has based its funding of non-government schools on the socioeconomic status of the communities that the schools are presumed to serve. This is determined on the basis of the socioeconomic characteristics of the people living in the same area

as the students enrolled in the school, though this may bear little relationship to the socioeconomic status of the students who actually enrol in the non-government school. Students from wealthier families in relatively deprived areas, such as some country towns, bring with them to a non-government school Commonwealth government support based on the socioeconomic characteristics of those they leave behind.

Furthermore, the level of support for non-government schools is also based on average government schools recurrent costs. Government support per-student for non-government schools is at a lower rate than this average, but that does not take account of the influence on the average cost in government schools of the cost penalties involved in providing for the full range of students and doing so in small schools in remote locations.

This has resulted in remarkable increases in funding. As the figures for some of the best resourced schools in Victoria in Figure 10 show, funding has increased in seven years by between 82 per cent and 503 per cent. Since the enrolments in the schools have altered it is more appropriate to consider the increase in per-student funding. That increase has been between 59 per cent and 305 per cent. Despite the substantial increase in government support, fees have also been raised by between 30 per cent and 54 per cent for Year 12 students.

Non-government school funding levels ought not to be reduced, but the resource levels of government schools should be substantially raised. This is not the politics of envy. It is the politics of fairness in a country that often loudly proclaims a commitment to a 'fair-go' as one of its central values.

It is often claimed that schools are the only agency that provides common experiences for young people growing up in modern societies that can, in turn, build shared understandings. In fact, schools frequently divide on the basis of gender, faith, social background, wealth, geography and so on. It is schooling, not school, that is the common experience. Diversity offers choice, though choice is by no means available to all, particularly those who have no choice other than an under-funded and poorly-resourced local government school.

The Netherlands provides an interesting contrast to Australia. In the Netherlands, 70 per cent of students attend non-government schools but all schools are funded by the government at the same level. Non-government schools are not distin-

guished from government ones by their resources levels since a condition of the government funding is that they may not charge fees. In the Australian context, we need to explore ways in which schools of a different kind might collaborate.

The story on Australian school education is that there is no crisis in quality, but there is room for improvement if we set ourselves the goal of being number one. There are problems of equity, less to do with our poorer performers being left too far behind than with level of influence on school achievement of differences in students' social backgrounds. We should aim to be high equity as well as high quality.

We need to increase the completion rate of upper secondary education. We also need to improve the quality of our teaching force by granting teachers through higher salaries the higher status we declare we wish to give them. We should explore ways of achieving this through a radical restructuring of the workforce in schools. We should also ensure that professional practice in teaching is more firmly grounded in a research base that provides evidence on what works.

Finally, we must reduce the resource disparities between schools by raising the resource levels of the most poorly resourced, which are predominantly government schools.

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

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Barry McGaw is the Chair of the National Curriculum Board and a Professor of Education at the University of Melbourne, director of the Melbourne Education Research Institute and a consultant with McGaw Group. From 1998 to 2005 he was deputy director for education in the Directorate for Education, Employment, Labor and Social Affairs at the OECD and then the first OECD director for education.

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Improving Adolescent Literacy

Bloody tough, but absolutely rewarding



With a Bachelor of Communication already under her belt and about five years of journalism experience, **Gemma Patterson** felt confident that she could handle a bunch of teenagers and become a high school English teacher.

Having grown up in a town in country Victoria, I was lucky enough to attend nice, small schools where bullying was rare and of course no one had mobile phones or iPods.

Like many of my classmates I used to say I hated school and constantly came home whingeing about the 'mountain' of homework those 'horrible' teachers had given me. How dare they make me do work at school? As a teen, school was a place to socialise and occasionally fit in some learning, here and there.

Despite this somewhat disinterested attitude to learning, somehow I made good grades and left school with plans to forge a career as a journalist, lawyer or psychologist. Of course I went for the job that paid the least money, but that's what happens when you follow your passion. Mind you, I would never recommend anyone choose a job based solely on financial prospects.

Fast-forward five-and-a-bit years and I found myself working as a journalist on the Gold Coast. While I loved many aspects of the job, I couldn't

see myself playing Lois Lane forever. I'd found my very own Superman and luckily his financial support meant I could give up work for eight months while I studied a Graduate Diploma of Education.

With a Bachelor of Communication already under my belt and about five years of journalism experience, I felt confident that I could handle a bunch of teenagers and become a high school English teacher.

Boy, was I in for a shock.

I never realised how much work teachers do behind the scenes. Sure, teachers get about 12 weeks of annual holidays, but what I've realised these past months is we really do deserve them.

Like many people, I used to shake my head in disbelief when those 'whingeing' teachers held yet another strike for better pay, conditions and the like.

'What are they complaining about?' I used to think, as I kicked back at my computer desk.



'All they have to do is work 9am to 3pm; it can't be that hard.'

Actually, it can.

During my eight-month course I was thrown headfirst into the teaching world and, armed with only weeks of knowledge, I had to complete a four-week practicum at a local high school teaching English and Drama.

There were days when I was screaming inside, my throat hurt from berating misbehaving teens and I grew increasingly frustrated when my world-class lessons didn't go exactly to plan.

I learned that teachers have to do paperwork. A lot of paperwork. And as one wise lecturer told me, teachers have a multitude of roles – mentor, guardian, counsellor, careers advisor, coach – the list goes on. It's not about standing in front of a class and dictating information, although sometimes you have to do that. It's about helping your students to grasp concepts, learn new things, discover who they are and where they want to go in life.

It's a bloody tough, but absolutely rewarding job.

I knew what to expect when my second prac came round. Being the final term, the teachers were running around like headless chooks, rushing to finalise their students' grades, set and mark exams and write reports.

My, the work those teachers put in was impressive. Late nights and weekends they were there, slogging away at the computer, writing detailed notes about how little Jimmy performed in Maths and how little Rose loved English.

I was there a matter of mere weeks, yet I received countless thanks from the students and even a couple of hand-made Christmas cards. It's these little things that motivate teachers to keep returning to the classroom, year after year.

This year, I've returned to the schoolyard, the new kid in school, and if you see any new teachers wandering around with a confused frown, please help them out. That lost new teacher could be Miss Patterson.

Gemma Patterson is a teacher on the Gold Coast, Queensland.

Photo by Lars Sundström courtesy of stock.xchng

Post-school pays off

Post-school education or training pays off, according to a recent analysis of longitudinal data. **Steve Holden** reports.

It pays to undertake post-school education or training, according to a report by Gary Marks, a Principal Research Fellow at the Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER). Marks found that students who pursue post-school education or training typically work in higher-status occupations and earn more than those who don't.

According to his research report, *The Occupations and Earnings of Young Australians: The role of education and training*, post-school education and training generally leads to higher status occupations and higher earnings compared to not doing any further study or training, and these benefits are stronger for young women than young men, especially for those who enrol in bachelor degrees, although the gender effect works in the other direction for apprenticeships.

The report indicates that social background plays only a small role in accounting for differences in occupational status and earnings, which indicates that education is enhancing social mobility.

While that's a positive thing, the report also shows that not all forms of post-secondary education and training are equally beneficial, measured in terms of occupational status and earnings.

Apprenticeships and especially university degrees tend to have stronger effects on earnings and occupations than other forms of post-secondary education and training in the early stage of young people's careers.

According to the report, differences between apprenticeships or university degrees and other forms of post-secondary education and training suggest that there needs to be continuing attention to the match between the knowledge and skills produced through different forms of education and training and the knowledge and skills required by the labour market.

Drawing on data from the Longitudinal Surveys of Australian Youth analytical program conducted by ACER for the Commonwealth Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, Marks found that apprenticeships and university degrees tend to have stronger effects on earnings and occupations than other forms of post-secondary education and training in the early stage of young people's careers.

'This variability suggests...the need for continuing emphasis on career guidance and counselling to help young people choose the programs most appropriate to their interests and needs,' Marks concludes.

At a glance:

- completing a bachelor degree on average increases earnings by about 30 per cent
- completing an apprenticeship on average increases earnings by about 20 per cent
- completing a TAFE diploma on average increases earnings by about 14 per cent
- completing a university diploma on average increases earnings by about 20 per cent
- completing a traineeship on average increases earnings by about 8 per cent, and
- completing a TAFE certificate on average increases earnings by about 5 per cent.

The report also found that:

- gaining a qualification is generally associated with higher earnings, other factors being equal, than participating without completion, with some exceptions, such as traineeships and some TAFE courses, with TAFE diplomas appearing to have a larger impact than TAFE certificates on occupational status
- working since leaving school, either full-time or part-time, has a small positive effect on earnings
- leaving school before Year 11 is associated with a 51 per cent increase in earnings by

age 24, while leaving school in Year 11 or 12 is associated with a 37 per cent increase in earnings, which is partly explained by extra years in the workforce but also suggests that early schooling leaving is not necessarily detrimental in the early stage of young people's careers

- prior experience of unemployment has a negative effect on occupational status, but, unexpectedly, is also associated with higher earnings, which suggests that, during the period of strong jobs growth covered by the report, a substantial proportion of unemployed young people may have been 'shopping around' for jobs with higher earnings, and
- the average weekly earnings of young men are about 20 per cent higher than those of young women, after controlling for educational qualifications and labour market experience, but not hours worked.

Marks found, surprisingly, that the occupational status of students undertaking an apprenticeship or traineeship tends to be marginally higher for participation than for actual completion.

Marks also found, however, that while participation in a bachelor degree course is associated with an increase in occupational status, the impact of actually *completing* a bachelor degree qualification is larger. 'On this measure, it clearly pays to complete the course,' Marks concludes.

Photo by Kiel Latham courtesy of stock.xchng

LINKS:

For the full report, visit www.acer.edu.au/documents/LSAY55.pdf

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With \$14.7 billion for schools on the table, now is not the time merely to change the colour of the carpet, says **Seamus O'Grady**.

There's an age-old adage 'festina lente' or 'hasten slowly' that tempers the pace of educational reform, and it's suffering a battering at the moment as principals and bureaucrats rush to devise new building and refurbishment plans under the Commonwealth government's Building the Education Revolution (BER) fund. With \$14.7 billion for schools on the table, though, this is not the time to change the colour of the carpet, but rather to ensure that our learning spaces assist both teachers and students to become 21st-century learners.

No school in the country has been spared the challenge of sprucing itself up under the automatic funding allocation, Pride of the Nation. Every primary and secondary school gets between \$50,000 and \$200,000, depending on February 2009 census enrolment.

For the secondary schools, there's a further \$1 billion on offer – competitively, but including socioeconomic standing and need, for new or refurbished science laboratories and language learning centres. It is expected that some 500 secondary schools – that's about a quarter of the nation's secondary schools – will benefit from this element of the package.

The primary schools, however, are the real winners, each being eligible for up to \$2 million, depending on enrolment, for libraries, multi-purpose halls, classrooms or early learning centres designed for 21st-century learning.

Never have I see such a flurry of activity around an educational initiative since the heady days of the Whitlam era! Principals so used to 'making do' are suddenly confronted with a request

for building needs. Slow down, aren't our modern principals more knowledgeable about pedagogy and learning than building design? Besides, if form follows function, what sort of pedagogy have we in mind for these buildings on offer?

A guru from the human resources field once told me that successful teachers have 'their goals set in concrete, but their plans in sand.' That way, when the call comes, they're ready to move!

Our principals have known for years what 21st-century learning could be, but have been faced with 20th-century or earlier facilities, usually built to absolute minimum standards. They dared not dream too much because the level of funding, except in a minority of schools, would never enable those dreams to become a reality.

Now, however, the money is there. The timeline is incredibly tight, although the guidelines are pretty flexible, and the architectural designers are falling over themselves to get a piece of the action, and the builders are waiting outside. Can we all deliver? Can the BER in the short space of 18 months produce school facilities that will benchmark learning in the 21st Century?

One has to steel the nerves and proceed under intense pressure. The prize goes to those who without compromise can articulate their educational philosophy and translate it into bricks and mortar – or maybe make that steel and glass – that will enhance learning for the young of today and tomorrow.

Learning spaces in the 21st Century need to reflect learner activities. These new learning spaces need to support multiple learning activities and project-based learning. They can motivate learners and promote learning as an activity, support collaborative as well as formal practice, promote a personalised and inclusive environment, and be flexible in the face of changing needs. The social domain needs to be reflected in all learning spaces.

I've outlined below some key design features for different spaces developed by the curriculum team of the Sydney Catholic Education Office.

Contemporary learning centres – aka libraries – need designs that equip them for:

- wireless networks
- digital equipment
- online learning
- multimedia
- adjustable modular and mobile furniture

- collaborative learning
 - project work
 - individual learning
 - small and large group instruction, and
 - connection to outdoor learning spaces.
- For secondary schools there are a few other considerations to address:

- a move away from computer labs to wireless connectivity and student laptops or netbooks
- flexible learning/teaching spaces incorporating transparent partitions
- rethinking the function of the library for 21st-century learnings – from quiet study to multifunction learning centre
- the need for spaces for practical investigations, collaborative group work, problem-based learning activities and direct instruction in science labs, as identified in the National Curriculum Board's 2008 *National Science Curriculum Framing Paper*, and
- the need for purpose-built or refurbished language learning centres to provide language teachers and students the status and comfort of 'a place of their own' to pursue languages acquisition.

For early learning centres for four- to eight-year olds there are other considerations to do with:

- multi-level floor spaces
- studio spaces
- natural lighting and ventilation
- connection to outdoor spaces
- a central large space
- appropriate work spaces for teachers
- restrooms for young children, and
- heaps of storage space.

When it comes to multi-purpose halls, we need to make sure designs:

- are acoustically sound
- are technology rich
- provide wet and dry areas
- have blackout potential
- provide natural light
- have good ventilation, and
- have facilities for catering.

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

Photo by Lotus Head courtesy of stock.xchng



Find your voice

Real professional renewal

Allow the educational agenda to come from outside of the school or the profession, and we hand over the reigns of pedagogical reform, say **Peter Noonan** and **Peter Hayes**.

For too long, educational reform – from government agendas to the latest packaged program or even the last professional development session – has been governed from outside of the classroom. Even from within the educational fraternity, those seeking to support pedagogical renewal talk about getting teachers to ‘buy in,’ almost as though teachers are consumers capable only of purchasing ownership of someone else’s agenda. This perpetuates a ‘quick-fix’ mentality, which keeps teachers in a passive role that hinders their engagement in a process of ongoing professional renewal.

There is another way, a process that respects teachers’ experience and knowledge, but also their capacity to investigate their own profession, discern their own needs and choose how, how much and what to apply in their own settings from the range of theories, resources and programs available. Just as comprehensive data about students are used to make the best instructional decisions

in the classroom, so too data about teachers’ current practice and student attainment can be used to make wise decisions about pedagogical renewal. It’s the teachers in each school’s professional community who are best suited to make these kinds of decisions.

BUILDING A HEAD OF STEAM

The development of a community in which pedagogical renewal is an ongoing reality begins when members of that community develop a consensus on what it is they believe about students, learning and teaching. This consensus includes a shared understanding of what the community members believe constitutes effective teaching practice. This encompasses a shared understanding of how students learn and how this information can be used to support the teaching and learning processes employed with the students in their school. This school-wide vision of pedagogy draws

together the knowledge and successful experience of the teachers, the individual nature of the school community and the authoritative pedagogy revealed in professional discourse around educational research and theory.

While this initial phase can take considerable time and, even once completed, remains open to continual review, it allows educators to explore their practice and profession and, over time, to galvanise their common purpose. This phase requires dedicated and unwavering leadership from the principal and teachers alike.

We've had the privilege of working alongside more than 2,000 teachers as they take on the challenge of ensuring that their classrooms and their schools provide the best possible educational experiences for their students. These teachers are involved in the Raising Achievement in Schools (RAISE) initiative, forming a collaborative network of more than 90 schools in Western Australia's Catholic education sector. The RAISE initiative was developed to support school personnel as they install the operational structures that best support ongoing pedagogical renewal, and provide advice and direction concerning factors that support student learning, particularly in literacy and numeracy. What we want to do here is share our experiences and insights from working with school personnel as they enter the second phase of ongoing pedagogical renewal, where teachers turn their attention to their craft or practice.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT PARADIGMS

Hear 'professional development' and chances are you think of workshops held on 'student-free' days or offsite events run by an education system or a private provider. Such events are an important part of the professional development process as they provide opportunities for people to reflect and learn away from the day-to-day busyness of their classroom, but we've known for a long time that one-off teacher learning experiences result in limited changes to classroom practice unless they're embedded in a process that supports teachers to implement and adapt their new learning in their own context.

Teachers use professional development events to expand their knowledge of effective teaching practice, content knowledge and the skills

required to identify the individual needs of their students, but they also understand that 'knowing' this information isn't enough; they also need to bring all of this together in unique and multiple ways to match the learning needs of each of the students in their classroom. That's why the most significant teacher learning occurs in the school and classroom, when teachers interact with students and their professional peers. A collaborative approach that enables teachers to work together as they investigate research, and academic and theoretical knowledge and how it translates into practice, appears to have a more positive impact on classroom practice.

Our experience in working with a large number of schools over an extended period of time has led us to believe that dialogue is a core element in this process. Since talk can too easily lead to more talk when we need it to lead to action, however, it's important to stress that we're talking about a certain sort of talk that is constructive and focused on teachers' practice in relation to their students. This dialogue centres on the changes that the community is trying to implement. In schools that take this approach, talk becomes the work.

STRUCTURES TO SUPPORT TALK

Changing what we do or the way we work is always difficult. Years of personal and professional experience informs every teacher's practice and it would seem foolish to discard this activated history for a new 'something' without reflecting, comparing and contrasting new ideas with the current reality. Dialogue not only supports teachers as they investigate possible new realities and make decisions concerning which changes would be the most beneficial for their students, but also helps them to implement the change and embed it in their practice.

Schools working within the RAISE initiative install six structures to support dialogue as a medium for reflecting on and reviewing current realities.

Action learning

The schools and teachers with whom we work know that, because no single professional development provider or organisation can know their school, their students or their needs as keenly as they do, it's their role to use action learning

Teachers in schools implementing RAISE are given the time and opportunity to work alongside their colleagues as they translate their new theory of action into practice in real time with real students in real classrooms.

processes to explore what is happening in their school, analyse student data, identify areas for investigation, tease out these areas and form questions around which to target their own learning and action.

As instructional change is implemented in their classrooms, teachers in the RAISE initiative use dialogue, in conjunction with formal and anecdotal data gathering, to monitor their progress, refine their new theory of action, and determine current and future professional development needs. The data may be in the form of a formal assessment, classroom observation notes or informal transcripts, work samples or a combination of these.

By underpinning their change agenda with an action learning process, educators are able to support the adoption and embedding of new realities in a practical way, but it takes time, with each investigation taking three to six months to complete. Initially, some schools are concerned that such a commitment of time, energy and resources to investigate, say, spelling, questioning techniques or the teaching of number is unfeasible, but teachers soon discover that the time spent on a focussed investigation leads to the establishment of embedded practice and often results in positive change in other areas of teaching practice.

Professional learning community meetings

Fortnightly professional learning community meetings provide a natural cycle of discussion, action, investigation and review to the action-learning cycle. These meetings ensure that reflection on practice is viewed as both a collaborative and a dialogic act where reflection requires talking about practice enriched by inputs from reading, observing others' practice and examining student data. Discussions encompass not just the 'what' and 'how' of the new theory of action but also the 'why.'

Action-learning investigations begin with an initial meeting to define an area for investigation and propose a question or small series of questions for investigation, followed by regular meetings that enable teachers to build toward defining

their proposed new theory of action by discussing classroom experiences, classroom observations, ongoing data collection and further professional development events. As the new theory of action replaces the old reality, meetings focus on classroom experiences and classroom observations, allowing time for teachers to refine classroom practice and embed new teaching practices or organisational methodologies.

The agenda for these meetings must be led by the members of the community and, over time, responsibility for the organisation and operation of these meetings is shared among each member of the community. The focus of each meeting is on discussing changes to practice, avoiding the lure of running mini 'expert'-led workshops or discussing procedural and administrative concerns which, while important, are best left to scheduled staff meetings. Teacher learning is the focus and student data in the form of assessments, work samples or recorded anecdotal evidence is a central feature of every meeting.

Professional development events

Schools implementing RAISE also provide opportunities for teachers to host and attend classroom observations and visits to other schools, time to read and discuss professional literature, and opportunities for teachers to attend and present at conferences.

Observing colleagues teaching is a powerful thing, since the teacher being observed has a heightened awareness of what they say and do while the visiting teacher observes through the lens of their own teaching and classroom. In schools engaged in the RAISE initiative, visits are focused on the changes that the community is investigating or trying to embed and are supported by professional dialogue before and after the event. These are not about a 'more expert' teacher instructing a 'less expert' teacher, but about collaboration. Many educators find it useful to visit other schools to observe and discuss the solutions their colleagues have implemented in their context in response to the same questions they are investigating. Such visits also extend the professional learning community beyond the gates of the school.

Professional reading, and talk based on that reading, is crucial to professional development in the RAISE initiative since it enables teachers to

make links between their practice and the practical side of the theoretical world. Members of the community share responsibility for sourcing professional reading from the wealth of professional resources available in most schools, along with the resources of the internet.

The first wave coordinator

While professional learning community meetings and professional development events support teachers to expand their knowledge outside of the classroom, real change occurs when teachers are given access to support at the same time as they deal with the issues of implementing new ideas in their own classrooms. Teachers in schools implementing RAISe are given the time and opportunity to work alongside their colleagues as they translate their new theory of action into practice in real time with real students in real classrooms, with the support of first wave coordinators who work with teachers during class time.

First wave coordinators aren't necessarily experts in the focus curriculum area nor are they the most experienced teachers. They coordinate the action learning at a school by allowing opportunities for dialogue, ensuring that the talk stays focussed, provide support when the going gets tough and connect colleagues if these connections are not initiated by the teachers.

Teacher leaders

Teacher leaders, in contrast, are chosen for their interest and expertise in particular subject areas. They maintain an up-to-date knowledge of teaching and learning in their chosen area and attend targeted professional development events. They translate this knowledge into practice, providing onsite models of practice for colleagues to observe, discuss and critique.

Teacher leaders welcome colleagues into their classrooms, and provide advice and support in relation to practical classroom implementation, making themselves available for co-teaching, demonstrations and discussion, and the induction of new staff members. Since they understand that there is no single model of classroom instruction, they provide possible solutions for those teachers who are struggling with classroom issues concerning day-to-day teaching, learning and assessment. Effective teacher leaders continually learn from colleagues who are seeking

solutions to the same instructional questions that they are asking.

The principal

Principals understand that they have primary responsibility for ensuring the effectiveness of the teaching and learning programs offered at their school, but they're also aware that the role of educational leadership has greater impact when the associated powers and knowledge bases are shared across staff members within their school.

Principals of schools implementing RAISe are learning focussed. They ensure that competing agendas and influences from outside the school are kept to a minimum, assisting teachers to focus on providing effective instructional programs and on implementing the targeted instructional changes. They promote collaborative and evidence-based problem solving by maintaining the focus on shared action learning, and involve themselves in regular discussions about teaching and learning with their staff members and the leadership team. They regularly visit classrooms to observe and discuss teaching, participate in professional development about teaching and learning with their staff, and ensure access for teachers to professional development to support school action learning.

HELPING TEACHERS TO FIND THEIR VOICE

After years of leader-centred educational reform, many communities of teachers will be unused to taking the lead in driving change. In these communities, sensitive leaders install supportive school structures so that teachers can find their voice. Processes that aim to involve teachers, sharing responsibility for pedagogical leadership and school improvement can also help to inspire, motivate and build confidence.

Positive changes to structures and processes of the kind we've described here lead to positive cultural changes, which, in turn, lead to positive changes to structures and processes. Systems and schools aiming to support pedagogical renewal are best served not by predetermining the agenda, but by activating the profession and asking educators to apply their professional knowledge to the issues at their school site.

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

Peter Noonan is a whole school development consultant with the Learning & Teaching K-12 Team of the Catholic Education Office of Western Australia. Peter Hayes is co-leader with the Learning & Teaching K-12 Team of the Catholic Education Office of Western Australia.

Rollercoaster

Education and online access

It's time all Australian schools started educating students for a digital world, rather than pretending that world doesn't exist, says **Mal Lee**.

Do changing policies on the educational use of the online and networked world in your school make you feel like you're on a rollercoaster? Do you find yourself creeping up the incline to online access, only to find yourself hurtling back down to policies on prohibition?

Are you actively educating your students for a digital future or are you assuming the best way forward is to protect them from it, in an artificial world called the school? Does your school have an overarching educational vision about the use it makes of all the current and emerging online

educational opportunities, and how to use them appropriately, or are those decisions made on an ad hoc basis by network managers within your school or education authority?

As I've indicated in some of my earlier writings on proactive and reactive schools or education authorities, one of the clearest indicators that a school or education authority is preparing its young for a digital future is its proactive attitude to the school use of online opportunities and the access such opportunities provide to students.



Where the proactive have a vision for a networked mode of schooling, and make early use of emerging opportunities, the reactive tend to look at the many negatives and shape the student use of online opportunities accordingly.

Pru Mitchell, from education.au, and I decided to have a closer look at the stance taken by Australia's 40-plus education authorities, and independent schools, on student access to the major online educational facilities.

What we found was that, in 2008, education authorities and schools all appreciated that

some kind of constraint was required, although we found remarkable inconsistencies when it came to what access was, and was not, permitted.

We also found that there was immense variability across Australia, with the access policies of schools and education authorities to be found at all points along a continuum from highly liberal to tightly constrained. In general, though, most of the nation's education authorities and schools held a largely negative attitude towards student access to the online facilities, and took a prohibition stance, tending to place ever greater control

over student use of the internet, particularly in terms of emerging opportunities.

That trend has been noted in the leadership seminars I've conducted this year, with state school principals often livid about controls imposed on student access to facilities that they can readily access at home.

Put simply, there's nothing remotely resembling a common national approach to student access to online facilities.

While the Commonwealth government is promoting its 'digital education revolution,' Stephen Conroy, Minister for Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy, has remained decidedly quiet about a national policy addressing student use of the internet, even while the Commonwealth government embarked on the national broadband networking of all classrooms.

If anything, Conroy's filtering trials of internet service providers are reminiscent of the censorial approach taken towards online access by the previous Commonwealth government of John Howard.

We did, however, come across pathfinding schools and education authorities across Australia at the liberal end of the access continuum that had embraced online access and were showing how, with a little care and acumen, this immense resource can be used to advantage.

The online environment, like anything, needs to be used wisely, but it's apparent that Australian education has yet to decide how best to use the greatest free resource ever provided schools.

What's your situation? How extensive are the constraints on internet use by students and teachers in your school? Has your school shaped its own vision on how best to use the internet, or is this dictated by your education authority? Chances are that many of the decisions about internet access for your school have been made by middle managers, network controllers, your information and communication technology coordinator or teacher librarian, and not by the leaders of your school.

You need to consider some looming online opportunities – or threats, depending on your point of view. How, for example, will your school handle the 'smartphone tsunami' that will inevitably hit?

Do you, as most now do, try to erect ineffective dykes or do you seek to harness what is in reality an immensely powerful handheld compu-

ter that is already the ubiquitous computing so many schools are seeking? If, Hans Brinker-like, you have your finger in the dyke, how do you reconcile your prohibitionist policy with the fact that teenagers have unfettered access to the internet on their smartphone up until the classroom door?

Most internet use, particularly mobile access, in Australian homes is largely unfettered, perhaps because 96 per cent of parents say home internet use improves their children's life chances, according to a 2007 Australian Communications and Media Authority study. For more on the level and nature of home internet use by students see *Leading a Digital School*, with co-author Michael Gaffney, or *The Use of Instructional Technology in Schools*, with co-author Arthur Winzenried.

To really understand school or education authority approaches to online access, however, you need to get to the finer detail. To do that, Pru Mitchell and I asked educators in schools, education authorities, and the state and territory departments about student access to and use of the worldwide web, email, resources for internet site creation, podcasts, blogs, wikis, chat rooms, VoIP and Skype, social networks, online games, online music, YouTube and smartphones.

We found that the schools and education authorities with the fewest constraints were mainly those that had been preparing for digital education since the mid-1990s, such as Western Australia's Department of Education and Training, for example, or the Lismore Catholic Education Office, which ask individual schools to determine their own policy.

In some of the more extreme cases of prohibition, we had to wonder why schools or education authorities even bothered networking the classrooms, such was the degree of control imposed.

We also found, in education authorities where a prohibitionist approach held sway, that centralised control was intensifying.

It appears that education authorities take a little time to identify the latest online opportunities, but that as soon as they do the default approach is to significantly curtail or block use. Teachers expressed considerable frustration in one state system that banned teacher blogs in early 2008, even though they had been operating well for some time.

Most notable, however, were the marked inconsistencies between the policies adopted by

Mal Lee is an educational consultant specialising in the development of digital technology in schools. He is a former director of schools and secondary school principal and has written extensively on the effective use of information and communication technology in teaching practice. He presented a paper on 'Taking your whole school digital: The major operational challenges for school leaders' at the Australian College of Educators' Digital Fair: Word of mouse conference in April.

His latest book, with Arthur Winzenried, is The Use of Instructional Technology in Schools: Lessons to be learned, published by ACER Press.

This article was written with the substantial help of Pru Mitchell, Senior Information Officer at education.au

Photo by Kevin Cloutier – www.theartwebreathe.net

various reactive schools and education authorities. Facilities as diverse as email, social networking, YouTube, Flickr, Skype and computer games were prohibited by some authorities and endorsed by others. We found it difficult to work out the logic behind some of the decisions to prohibit or endorse and were little surprised that teachers living in a networked nation expressed so much frustration.

We also found inconsistencies in the way reactive education authorities controlled school internet sites, with some controlling all school internet sites centrally and determining what is prohibited or endorsed, while other similarly-inclined authorities gave each school control of its own site.

It's hardly a surprise to find that many educators are frustrated and dissatisfied. According to one New South Wales educator, carefully phrasing that frustration, 'The dissonance between community-based value systems and school- or government-based value systems has become pronounced.' One territory teacher more bluntly explained, 'It's a blame culture and no one takes

responsibility for problems. Mobiles, iPods, games, YouTube are all banned and yet students use them daily. We're so far behind, it's not funny.' A number of educators, however, explained that their school had overcome centralised controls, either by using proxies or by setting up their own internet access infrastructure. As one NSW teacher librarian commented, 'I haven't allowed the constraints of the government intranet to impede learning in the library.'

Interestingly, while the use by students of mobile technologies like MP3 players or smartphones was banned in the majority of reactive authorities, the pathfinders were researching the best educational uses for them at exactly the same time.

The wise use of the online and networked world is now a normal part of contemporary life and work, except in the majority of Australia's schools. It's surely time they joined everyone else in educating students for a digital world, rather than pretending it doesn't exist.

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Timetables and technology

Hands up if you want to be your school's timetabler. If your hand is up, chances are your school uses timetabling software rather than fitting together the pieces of the timetable jigsaw puzzle, piece by agonising piece; but software hasn't taken over the job, as **Peter Crowe** explains.

Timetables: they're the basic foundation of any school organisation. The smooth daily implementation of a school's curriculum depends largely upon a well-structured timetable. Time once was, for many staff, that the school timetable was a mystery, just there, ready for both teachers and students in the first week of February. How it was created, and how much time that took, very few really knew. If teachers happened to visit the school over the summer, they might come across the timetabler, usually the

deputy principal or senior Maths teacher, working on the timetable using the time-honoured method of pinning coloured cards, representing classes and teachers, onto a board so large that it couldn't be moved; hence the timetable always had to be constructed at school rather than at home. This, a mystery to most people, was the jigsaw puzzle that was timetable construction. Constructing one was such a time-consuming and complex task that, once finished, the timetable did not change, no matter what might hap-

pen. Late staff changes simply had to fit within the existing timetable.

Consider how much the process has changed since those desperate days. Senior teachers no longer work through their summer holidays, isolated at school for hour after hour, as the jigsaw is slowly fitted together, piece by agonising piece.

Information technology has eventually caught up and there are now computer programs like The Timetabler that assist with this task, although technology hasn't quite taken over the process. It's not the case that you just hit the auto button and all the jigsaw pieces fall into place without any teacher or subject or room clashes.

The school timetabler is still in control, but the use of a timetabling program provides considerable speed, control and flexibility when it comes to creating a school timetable. Not the least advantage is that creating a timetable by using a computer program means timetablers have considerable flexibility as to where and when they work; they're no longer trapped at school over the summer.

Consider the demands that are now being placed upon timetable construction. New courses and curriculum offerings such as the International Baccalaureate and vocational education and training courses, as well as the drive to offer senior students as broad a subject choice as possible, are making timetables more complex and intricate.

This was not always the case. Time once was, schools determined the subjects they would offer according to staffing and room availability, and then assigned students to available classes.

Students were grouped into either Maths and Science or Humanities streams, depending upon their performance in those subjects the previous year. Now, schools create the senior grids or lines to satisfy subject choices for the majority of students, then set about staffing and rooming the resulting classes.

Conducting the process this way can create some uncertainty, as from year to year the decisions as to the number of classes that are offered, or even whether some subjects are offered, are determined by student choice. There is no doubt, however, that this approach more effectively meets the needs of students.

The student options module of The Timetabler program is designed to facilitate the quick and efficient setting up of senior grid lines or blocks based upon maximising subject choice for

all students. Subject preferences are entered either electronically or manually into the program. It's then possible to check the data to see whether the students have satisfied the required prerequisites. By using the program to set up these lines, a school gains far more control and flexibility than was previously possible. Grid lines can be created and recreated, essentially trying different combinations to get the best fit for the students and the school. A typical scenario might be to set up grid lines with four Maths classes on one grid line, with a comparative grid with the four Maths classes on four different lines. This is only possible because of the speed and accuracy of the program, which provides schools with the flexibility to experiment so as to determine the best grid scenario for students.

The student options module also enables the efficient and accurate analysis of the entered student data. The number of students who have selected a subject can be quickly viewed, and accurate decisions made as to how many classes need to be timetabled for a subject or whether a subject will even be offered.

The student options module can also create exam timetables and class lists for teachers. One of the more recent developments in technology is the facility for students to enter their subject selections online using their web browser, saving administration staff many hours of inputting of student preferences.

One of the early steps in timetabling is to ascertain that the 'staffed' and 'roomed' senior lines can be placed under each other on a period in the cycle without creating any clashes. The next step is to check whether the middle school elective lines can then fit under these pairs of lines without also creating any clashes. Until this has been established, there's no point in taking the timetable construction any further. In the past, this was always a hugely time-consuming and difficult process, often requiring the swapping of teachers from one class to another to make the lines fit. The use of a timetabling program has enabled this stage of timetabling to be undertaken quickly, efficiently and accurately. After all the course information has been entered The Timetabler program creates a clash matrix of the proposed Years 11 and 12 grid lines with subject teachers and specialist rooms added. The Timetabler can actually do this testing and show where there are clashes.

Computers are assisting timetablers to create very complex timetables more quickly, even to the point of being able to complete a number of variations of the timetable to allow the school leadership team to select the best fit for the school. Because students often select subjects for one semester only, schools may need a new timetable each semester, or in some cases even each term. This was an onerous task for the timetabler before timetabling programs were available.

Timetabling software is also making it easier to accommodate the added complexity brought about by Australia's growing part-time teaching staff.

All staff and students in a school directly benefit from computer-generated timetables, since a master timetable, individual teacher timetables and individual student timetables can be produced. It's become the accepted practice for teachers and students to receive individual timetables as they begin a new year or semester. With the creation of network-based programs, such as the general access module in The Timetabler, all these printouts can be readily available.

As a consequence of the increased use of technology to assist with timetable creation, the role of the timetabler in schools has changed significantly. In the past, the timetabler was typically a very senior person, and the position was a pathway to promotion in a school. Members of some of today's school leadership teams may mistakenly believe that the timetabling program can do all the work and might therefore disregard the wide range of skills you need if you're to construct a good timetable.

It's a mistake to offer the role to someone simply because of their computer skills, since the timetabler is crucial to a school's smooth operation and the skills required to satisfy all aspects of the task are vast. Not only do good timetablers require well-developed interpersonal skills, communication skills and empathy, but they also need to have a detailed knowledge of the curriculum, school facilities, specialisms and priorities. They also need to be a person who is both a lateral and linear thinker who can be creative and logical.

Above all, they need the people skills to be able to negotiate and broker effective compromises.

Different groups in a school can often place opposing demands on the timetabler. No teacher wants to teach Year 8 Maths last period on Friday afternoon, but someone has to teach that period: it simply can't be Physical Education or Creative Arts for every year level. Equally, when subjects are blocked together, some subjects work best with double periods while others in the same line work better with single periods. The timetabler needs to have both the people skills and the authority to negotiate the necessary compromise.

The person who takes on the timetabling role must be able to work with a wide range of groups within the school organisation. A number of groups from the governing council to the staff and the students have a stake in the outcome of the timetable, and often view the requirements of the timetable only from their perspective. It's important that the school timetabler understands the needs of each of these groups so that the timetable they construct best meets the needs of everyone involved. It's also important to recognise that there will be times when all the requirements of the various stakeholders cannot be met, and the timetabler must have the people skills and the seniority required to negotiate an effective compromise. Schools that don't include timetablers in the senior executive or administration teams have a problem: good timetablers should be part of the decision-making process at all levels of a school.

The advent of computer programs to assist in the creation of school timetables has transformed the challenging work of implementing an increasing complex school curriculum. An effective timetable meets the needs of all the stakeholders involved. With speed and efficiency unmatched by any manual timetabling operation, a timetabling program in the hands of a knowledgeable educator will analyse complex data and provide multiple solutions for specific problems in the process of constructing a sound and extremely functional timetable – and a well-planned timetable is an essential foundation for an efficient, economical and successful school where all the stakeholders are satisfied.

Peter Crowe is a national trainer for Timetabling Solutions.

LINKS: www.timetabling.com.au

Information technology has eventually caught up, but it's not the case that you just hit the auto button and all the jigsaw pieces fall into place without any teacher or subject or room clashes.

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National perspective

With \$14.7 billion for the schools sector, and \$2.6 billion for higher education, there's plenty of stimulus for education right now, as **Steve Holden** reports.

The Commonwealth government will commit close to \$2.6 billion from the Education Investment Fund for priority infrastructure projects in Australia's tertiary institutions and research agencies for the 2009-10 financial year, with a total of \$5.3 billion for the next six years, Treasurer Wayne Swan announced in the May Budget.

The 2009-10 funding includes:

- \$934 million for 11 teaching and learning projects, eight research-based projects, and 12 vocational education and training projects around the nation
- \$901 million for 21 research projects in space, marine, climate and nuclear science, and
- \$750 million for future funding rounds from the Education Investment Fund.

Minister for Education and Training Julia Gillard explained after the Budget announcement that the Commonwealth government intended a gradual phasing in of recommendations made in last year's Bradley review of higher education and the Cutler review of innovation to do with deregulating higher education, reforming student welfare and funding research. What about the schools sector? 'The Rudd government is investing a record \$62.1 billion in Australian schools from 2009-12,' Gillard said.

That \$62.1 billion includes the Building the Education Revolution (BER) program to spend \$14.7 billion over the next three years, via state and territory education departments for government schools and relevant block grant authorities for non-government schools, for building or upgrading Australia's schools, touted by Prime Minister Kevin Rudd as 'the largest single school modernisation program in Australia's history.'

The BER program has triggered a flurry of activity across schools and school systems now racing to operate within the Commonwealth government's tight timeline. Primary schools, special schools, and Kindergarten to Year 12 schools get \$12.4 billion for large-scale infrastructure through the Primary Schools for the 21st Century program. Construction at schools approved in the first round must start this month, with construction at schools in the second round to start in July

or August, and third-round schools beginning construction by December 2009. All projects are supposed to be completed by March 2011.

Secondary schools get \$1 billion for up to 500 new science laboratories and language learning centres through the Science and Language Centres for 21st Century Secondary Schools program, with schools funded on the basis of demonstrated need, readiness and capacity to complete construction by June 2010.

Every school will receive between \$50,000 and \$200,000, subject to size, based on February 2009 census enrolment, from a \$1.3 billion pool to refurbish existing infrastructure and undertake minor building works through the National School Pride program, with 60 per cent of projects to commence in this financial year and the remaining 40 per cent to commence next financial year.

While the \$14.7 billion fund will help many schools, Adam Rorris, a former World Bank educational economist and former manager of the Taskforce on Schools Resourcing for the Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs, says the massive spending program narrows, but does not close the funding gap between students in public and private schools.

Rorris estimates capital investment at \$1,774 per private school student and \$948 per public school student last year. Adding this year's BER money, he estimates the capital investment is now \$3,020 per private school student and \$2,470 per public school student.

According to Rorris, speaking at the National Public Education Forum, convened by the Australian Council of State School Organisations, the Australian Education Union, the Australian Government Primary Principals Association and the Australian Secondary Principals Association, in late March, the fact that funds will be allocated on the basis of a school's size rather than need 'remains a significant weakness.' Rorris conceded, however, that the gap isn't simply between public and private schools. 'The gap remains between public and private schools, and between the poorer and wealthy private schools,' he told the *Sydney Morning Herald's* Anna Patty.

SUB CAMPAIGN

According to Justine Ferrari in the *Australian* in March, teachers in favour of a whole-language approach to the teaching of literacy were urged to conduct 'a subliminal campaign,' directed at News South Wales Minister for Education Verity Firth, to undermine a phonics approach. This was, presumably, in response to Firth's announcement earlier that month of a pilot study to compare the efficacy of phonics and whole-language approaches. Ferrari reported that the subliminal campaign was touted in an email sent to a network of literacy educators by Wollongong University associate professor in education Brian Cambourne. Teachers in favour of a phonics approach to the teaching of literacy are presumably planning a superliminal campaign directed at the NSW Minister for Education.

A TASK AHEAD

The National English Curriculum framing paper from the National Curriculum Board has likewise prompted a bit of interest in phonics. The Australian Association for the Teaching of English (AATE), in its formal response through the 14-member AATE Council, reaffirmed its commitment to a national curriculum for English, but noted that a 'stress on phonics... (in the framing paper) comes at the expense of the focus on a balanced reading program.' On grammar, it also noted, 'work will need to be done as part of the writing of the curriculum to develop and codify a national grammar for Australian schools.'

ANZAC BUNGLE

Schools in Western Australia and the Australian Capital Territory took a public holiday on Monday 27 April, since Anzac Day fell on a Saturday, but it was business as usual everywhere else – except NSW, where schools took the day off while everyone else went to work. NSW Education Minister Verity Firth told the Newcastle *Herald's* Alison Branley the holiday was a mistake made by the NSW Department of Education and Training in 2003, when the 2009 school calendar was gazetted. 'They assumed that the Monday would be a public holiday,' she told Branley. The Monday

holiday was followed by a student-free professional development day for teachers. According to Rhet Watson and Tim Vollmer from Sydney's *Daily Telegraph*, 'That decision...left the parents of 750,000 public school students clambering to find (child)care for children.' They had to clamber, presumably, because childcare is very high up in NSW.

CREDIT WHERE CREDIT'S DUE

The Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF) Council, set up in May last year by the Commonwealth and state and territory governments to ensure a unified system of national qualifications in schools, vocational education and training and the higher education sector, wants 'to ensure (the AQF) is nationally and internationally robust and supports flexible cross-sectoral linkages and pathways.' The AQF is chaired by John Dawkins, Minister for Employment, Education and Training from 1987 to 1991 in the Hawke government and the name to the Dawkins Revolution reforms of the higher education sector, including the Higher Education Contributions Scheme, so it's a fair bet it will wield considerable influence. Speaking at the Higher Education Congress in Sydney in March, Dawkins proposed a national database of all work-based and academic qualifications to make it easier for students to move between educational institutions while maintaining credits. The AQF Council has already begun work on an improved credit transfer system.

McMATHS

McDonald's Australia has bankrolled the Maths Online program, making what was a \$40-a-month online tuition program free to Australia's 1.46 million high school students. Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Education Julia Gillard described the Maths Online program as a great resource. 'As we strive toward creating a world-class education system for Australia, programs such as this...are crucial to help prepare students for further education, training and to live and work in a digital world,' she said.

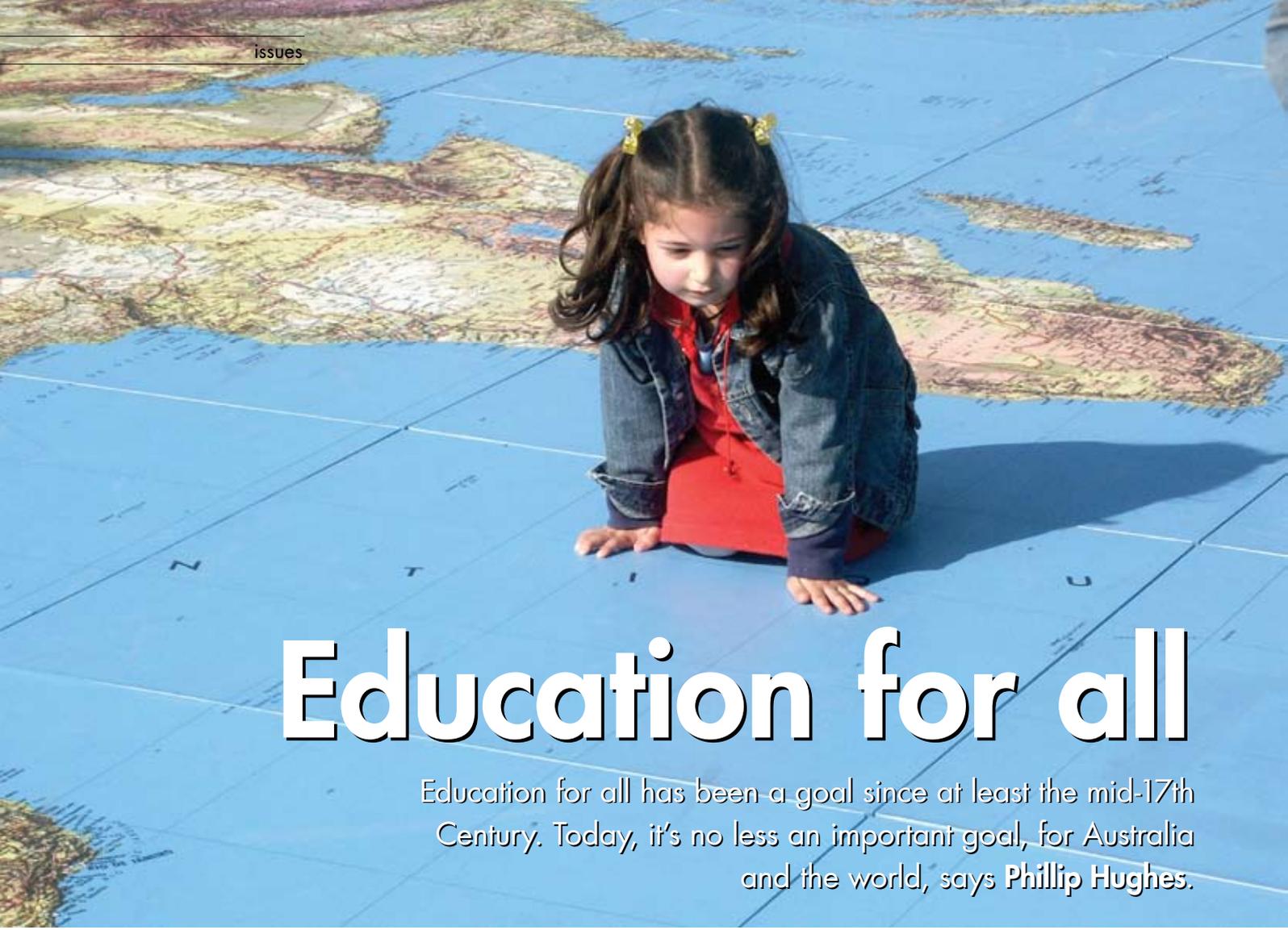
LINKS: www.mathsonline.com.au



WHO SAID IT?

'Students are looking for ready access to qualifications, including the ability to navigate appropriate pathways between qualifications.'

John Dawkins, chair of the Australian Qualifications Framework Council, speaking to the Sydney Morning Herald's Heath Gilmore.



Education for all

Education for all has been a goal since at least the mid-17th Century. Today, it's no less an important goal, for Australia and the world, says Phillip Hughes.

The Education Revolution has become a familiar, and perhaps too familiar, term. It's easy to dismiss it as an election slogan that has been dwarfed by the issues arising from the global financial crisis that has prompted the Commonwealth government's \$14 billion for schools that have often been underfunded. Whether those funds will help schools to address the most urgent issues in Australian education, however, remains to be seen.

Do we have any agreement on which of the many existing needs are most urgent? For me, the most urgent needs relate to students, not buildings. Of course we'd all like to see better equipped, more attractive and more spacious schools, and better pay for teachers. The greatest urgency, however, is to ensure that all students receive an effective education that equips them personally, socially and vocationally. That is an area in which Australia is not succeeding. For many years this was seen as a need for developing countries, a stage of development which we had left behind. We now know that this is a need for Australia, where many thousands of students leave schools every

year without the levels of achievement to enable them to play a useful role in society.

Education for all has been an aim for the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) for more 60 years. The need was first accepted as one for developing countries where initially millions of students were not in education at all. Most countries now manage to provide schooling at the primary level for all their students, an aim which UNESCO seeks to achieve for all by 2015. That aim, however, involves more than attending school: it includes the provision of what UNESCO calls basic education.

As UNESCO Director-General Koïchiro Matsuura put it at the closing meeting of the Rencontres de Versailles in June, 2000, 'Basic education denotes the minimum skills and knowledge needed in order to be able to make a full contribution to one's environment and to be in control of one's life. In an increasingly interdependent world, the contents, and therefore the very notion of the "quality," of basic education are evolving. It can no longer be reduced to learning reading, writing

and arithmetic. It must also teach individuals to be, to do, to learn and to live together.'

In June 2007, the UN provided a progress report on the achievement of its eight Millennium Development Goals. The assessment showed mixed results. No one had made sufficient progress to ensure the achievement of the goals by 2015. The proportion of people living on less than a dollar per day had fallen from 23.4 per cent in 1999 to 19.8 per cent, broadly on target but with massive variations. The eradication of hunger was still remote, with 46 per cent of the under-fives in Africa registered as underweight. Infant mortality was down by one-sixth; the target was a two-thirds reduction. Whereas China and India and other parts of Asia had increased school attendance, 12 per cent of children globally and 30 per cent in Sub-Saharan Africa were still out of school. Other targets, particularly in Africa, displayed similar patterns.

UNESCO's *2009 Monitoring Report* is pessimistic about the possibility of success. 'When financial systems fail, the consequences are highly visible and governments act. When education systems fail the consequences are less visible, but no less real. Unequal opportunities for education fuel poverty, hunger and child mortality, and reduce prospects for economic growth. That is why governments must act with a greater sense of urgency.

'The bad news is that the world is not on course for achieving the international development target of universal primary education by 2015. According to partial projections, at least 29 million children will still be out of school in 2015. This headline figure is an underestimate as it does not include conflict-affected countries such as the Sudan and the Democratic Republic of Congo. In all, 12 countries will have over half a million out-of-school children in 2015.'

We now see these aims as equally relevant for Australia and the struggle to achieve an effective education for all, which we had assumed was successful, is clearly still a priority for the future. For me, it's the greatest priority.

In 2009, as we look anxiously towards the future, it's curious that an educator born in Moravia in 1592 should have a relevant message for us, in Australia and universally. Jan Amos Comenius lived from 1592 to 1670, born in Central Europe in Moravia, which is now part of the Czech Republic. He spent much of his life on the run, persecuted

because of his ideas, particularly the heretical belief that all people deserved and needed a good education. Paradoxically, his ideas were spread more widely through Europe because of the campaign to silence him. Fleeing from the Inquisition, he lived and worked in Moravia, Poland, Sweden, England, Prussia, Hungary and Holland, where he died. In all these places he played an active role educationally, aided by the fact that, like all learned people of his day, he wrote in Latin, ensuring a continent-wide audience.

Comenius is now best known for his contributions to teaching techniques that, along with his principles of education, are presented in *The Great Didactic*. He was the first to teach Classical languages by the use of parallel passages of the ancient and modern languages; and his *Visible World in Pictures*, a book for learning Latin, is believed to be the first illustrated textbook for children. His death in 1670 did not end the campaign for universal education; Comenius speaks to us today with even more authority as we seek to achieve a goal he first identified almost 400 years ago.

Australia's recent history indicates that education for all is still a problem for us, for the many thousands of Indigenous students who attend school so irregularly that their progress is very limited, for the many thousands of students who leave schools every year in Australia without the level of success that enables them to enter productive work or to continue in their education. These students have little prospect of leading successful lives in our qualification-based society.

Professor Phillip Hughes, AO FACE, is visiting fellow and adjunct professor at the Australian National University. He has worked in universities and education systems in Australia, Europe, America and Asia. He was president of the Australian College of Educators from 1989 to 1991 and was awarded the College Medal in 2002.

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Photo by José A. Warletta courtesy of stock.xchg

The Jan Amos Comenius Medal, created jointly by the Ministry of National Education, Youth and Sport of the Czech Republic and the Director-General of UNESCO in 1992 on the occasion of the 400th anniversary of Comenius's birth, rewards outstanding achievements in the fields of educational research and innovation, and exceptional examples of personal devotion to education and the ideals of UNESCO. In the 17 years of the award, 44 educators have been recognised, including Paolo Freire of Brazil and Torsten Husen of Sweden. In 2008 Phillip Hughes became the first Australian to be awarded the Comenius Medal.

NOW

**is the
time**

for

educational

organizational

change

The worst of times could indeed be the best of times for constructive and purposeful educational change. **Norman McCulla** explains why.

We are caught in the midst of an economic downturn that few saw coming and with dire predictions of likely scenarios and outcomes. What does it mean for education? To even begin to answer this question, we need to understand that education and the economy are now intricately linked, and it's only after you've been around for a while that you can begin to see the subtle impact of this linkage on our profession.

The very busyness of our day-to-day professional lives can sometimes obscure the more subtle changes that are affecting us. We go about our daily work, meeting deadlines, implementing new mandated policies, teaching, assessing, reporting, undertaking professional development courses that help us to do the new things required of us – you know the scenario well – yet we seldom stop to think, indeed don't have time to stop to think, that every one of our daily actions creates and reflects broader patterns of behaviour that are underpinned by values and ideologies that the busyness of our workplaces sometimes obscures from us. We are what we are in our professional practice often not as what we choose to be, but rather as what we become in responding to the demands of others.

Change, clearly, is once again at hand, and in case that prompts feelings of dread, let me be quick to explain: the change I mean is very large-scale, generational change that comes along every now and then, shaping the very ways we go about our work as teachers and school leaders.

We are at the very beginning of a key turning point in the evolution of our education history. Let me share with you the reasons why I think this and, in doing this, examine two distinct economic paradigms, each of which sharply contradicts the other, that have governed and directed our work in schools since World War II.

We no longer trust the economists. The incredible events in the worldwide economy in the last year take us into uncharted waters, with more to come. We've seen the old absolutes challenged.

Schools in Australia up to World War II had been fairly well insulated from economic matters. The decades immediately following the war were, of urgent necessity, expansionist ones for Australia.

Secondary schooling was made more readily available for all young people. Education was seen as the means of fuelling growth and expansion. Postwar reconstruction and a baby boom generation saw a burgeoning number of secondary schools. Governments were prepared to spend to stimulate and promote growth. The dominant economic theorist was John Maynard

Keynes who advocated interventionist government policy, by which governments would use fiscal measures to stimulate the economy.

One tangible expression of this expansionist mood was the encouragement of schools to make many more local decisions about curriculum – the school-based curriculum movement – and funding for teacher professional development was ramped up accordingly. Tertiary education was made free. Progressive education philosophies became more dominant in primary schools with their focus on a better understanding of how children learn and on approaches that enable student learning. The focus in the curriculum changed from content to process. Then, almost dramatically it now seems in retrospect, it all changed.

Moving into the 1980s, Australia faced a dilemma in recognition of the fact that our industries and companies needed to be more competitive in a globalised world. Education was no exception. Teachers, it was said, needed to be more accountable for what it was that students were learning and subservient to economic need. As a consequence, teachers were discredited, almost vilified in the public media by means of a 'declining standards' rhetoric.

The curriculum was again centralised, changing to an outcomes-based model. Management responsibilities were devolved to schools albeit within the confines of an increasingly regulated and accountability-driven environment oriented to competition, parental choice and free markets – an economic paradigm introduced that has

extended until today. What was not as apparent to us as teachers as we struggled to make sense of these developments were the economic theories underpinning it all, grounded especially in the work of free-market economic theorists such as Friedrich von Hayek. von Hayek identified consumer choice and markets as the mechanisms to stimulate the economy and saw the individual as subservient to the need to build the human capital necessary for a nation to be globally competitive.

The organisation, too, became more important than the individual as economic rationalism led to constant restructuring of education bureaucracies to make them more 'dynamic.' The 'strategic planning,' 'alignment' and 'performance management' discourse of the private sector was introduced to public sector instrumentalities. At the same time, responsibility for personal welfare shifted from the state to the individual in matters of education, health, retirement savings and the like.

In order for this neo-liberal agenda to work in education, certain things had to be put into place. First and foremost, schools needed to compete for students, and this competition depended on a centralised and standardised outcomes-based curriculum. School funding policies needed to open up and support new markets of education, which, some would subsequently argue, required a discrediting of public education as the hitherto dominant provider. Principals needed more local autonomy to make day-to-day management decisions in their schools to attract clientele, but not in a way that was unfettered, so the number and nature of the regulatory requirements affecting school governance was increased. Testing programs were needed for surveillance to see which schools, and teachers, were succeeding or failing and how competitive the nation was on a global scale against defined areas like literacy and numeracy.

Interestingly, we now have a whole generation of teachers who know only this as the paradigm for their work.

It would be churlish indeed to suggest that there have been no positive gains in each of these eras. From the first post-war education paradigm, we learned much about pedagogy, an interest that continues to the present. From the second paradigm, we learned about accountability and the need for education to make its contribution to Australia's global competitiveness.

As a profession, we are now far more sophisticated in our capacity to assess student progress and to articulate the basis of our own professionalism. Each paradigm was underpinned by different needs and different economic circumstances. That is not to say that one is better than the other, but rather to acknowledge that there have been both gains and losses for students and teachers in each. What these are, of course, is the subject of considerable debate.

Why, then, could we be at a key turning point in our education history?

First, and foremost, we no longer trust the economists. The incredible events in the worldwide economy in the last year take us into uncharted waters, with more to come. We've seen the old absolutes challenged. Keynesian solutions are now being applied to shore up the dykes from free market excesses. Consider how funding is now being applied in Australia to building projects in government schools.

One of the lasting memories from this era will be the high financial rewards for executives based on short-term measures that actually masked the fact that their companies were failing. There's a lesson for education here, when reliance on constant testing programs can obscure the fact that the true learning performance of one school or schools generally is actually in decline in a globally-competitive marketplace despite high rankings on league tables.

What then do we need to do? First, as professional educators, we need to be more prominent in the debate about preferred futures. We have regained the moral high ground to do so. We have, in our major professional associations, a thoughtful leadership that can steer education, but we need to accept that elements of the economic paradigms we've previously experienced may not have been helpful in moving us forward.

It's more than likely, for instance, that schools will continue to compete in the marketplace, but that doesn't prohibit teachers working collegially across schools and school sectors. Schools and teachers will continue to be scrutinised for the outcomes they achieve, but the real question is whether the outcomes that we measure are indeed outcomes worth measuring. National and international testing programs will continue, but the real question is whether they serve the curriculum or dictate it.

To remain globally competitive in education, it is becoming increasingly apparent that we cannot continue to rely on standardisation at the expense of innovation and creativity. An increasing tendency towards centralisation in Australian education through, for instance, the development of a national curriculum and testing programs, as well as the articulation of professional standards, will need to be reconciled with the need for local innovation and creativity, providing more space for teachers to be truly inspirational in their teaching and responsive to the contexts in which they teach. The quality of teaching and teachers will remain paramount, but will need to be balanced by better understanding the quality of student experience at school.

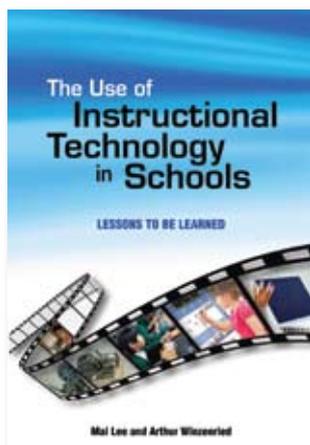
With the vast majority of schools now funded in some way from the public purse, it may well be time to reconceptualise 'public education' as a means of moving beyond the public-private divide. It follows that, to accurately apportion funding to schools genuinely in need – both 'public' and 'private' – we need richer and comparable data sets from all schools. How else do we create a more level playing field in the resourcing of all schools, and support schools in moving to a higher, value-added performance on outcomes that really do matter?

There's more on the list besides outcomes and testing, standardisation and centralisation, and funding, suggesting that many of the points of tension before us might ultimately be resolved through balance, not division, if we allow the common good to prevail over positional or sectoral gain.

History shows us that challenging times are indeed times of change. The economy has changed once again, and large challenges lie before us as a nation. Educational change is clearly on the agenda if Australia is to be truly competitive internationally through the contribution that schools make in developing the full potential of all of our students as well as enabling a fair and just society. Bad times could indeed be good times for constructive and purposeful educational change.

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Photo by Andrew Cascaval courtesy of stock.xchng



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Arthur Winzenried

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The Use of Instructional Technology in Schools

The use of information and communications technology (ICT) in Australian schools in recent years has received a good deal of support since the injection of national funds for computers, infrastructure and professional learning. Australia began nationally to develop networking and strategic planning for the educational use of ICT in 1993, although local implementation, until recently, has been driven by the states. A number of significant national efforts over the last two decades, however, have put in place national agreements about ICT standards, content, access to educational online services and policy. Of particular importance has been the development of the *Learning in an Online World* series for Australian schools and the work of the Australian ICT in Education Committee.

In journalistic and easily readable style, Mal Lee and Arthur Winzenried have set out, as they explain on page 3, to 'provide educators, particularly in leadership roles, with an in-depth appreciation of how history with its successes and failures can contribute to identifying the way forward.' As the title of the book, *The Use of Instructional Technology in Schools*, implies, the focus is on teaching and the support that is necessary to successfully use technologies in education.

The book begins and concludes with a discussion of nine interrelated variables that need to be addressed. They are: teacher acceptance; working with givens; teacher training and support for teacher development; the nature and availability of the technology; appropriate content or software; infrastructure; finance; school and system leadership; and implementation.

Most of the book is devoted to a perspective on the history of the use of technological devices in education. This makes for both fascinating and nostalgic reading, especially for those who have been able to witness these many trials and experiments with technological devices.

Lee and Winzenried's history highlights the acceptance by the teaching profession of three technologies: slide projectors, overhead projectors and interactive white boards (IWBs). They

argue that these technologies, especially IWBs, are consistent with the work of teachers and flexible enough to enable modification and adaptation, for class purposes, at a moment's notice.

Lee and Winzenried base their analyses of the use of instructional technology on interviews, a literature review and case studies. Much is made of comments from the content of 30 interviews of principals, teachers, teacher-librarians and former educational administrators. These comments are interspersed with references from the literature and the author's views and conclusions about the reasons for the successes or failures of the use of various technologies in education. The greatest highlight in the book, however, lies in five case studies of schools that have been successful.

The Use of Instructional Technology in Schools is an interesting book which emphasises the importance of linking the home and school now that ICT makes that more possible than previously. It finishes with a number of factors for success and a life cycle for technology, yet the real gems towards the end of the book are those that identify the need for further action: a statistic on ICT use in classrooms, say Lee and Winzenried, is a statistic worth gathering; we need more research on the effective use of instructional technology; and educational policy should be guided by research.

Quite. There's a clear need for much more effort to identify successful uses of instructional technology and to share good practice since schools where ICTs have been implemented successfully are schools where student learning has improved.

Gerry White is a Principal Research Fellow at the Australian Council for Educational Research.

LINKS:

For more on the Learning in an Online World series published by Curriculum Corporation for the Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs, visit <http://www.curriculum.edu.au/mceetya/publications,11582.html>

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

JUNE 19

Australian Awards for Teaching Excellence

An initiative of the Commonwealth government and managed by Teaching Australia with the assistance of the Australian College of Educators, the Australian Awards for Teaching Excellence offer 64 awards in six categories, with individual prizes, 50 per cent of the prize money going to the winners' schools. Categories are: Excellence by a Teacher, with a major prize of \$30,000 and 17 prizes of \$10,000; Excellence in Teacher Leadership, with a major prize of \$30,000 and five prizes of \$10,000; Excellence by a Principal, with a major prize of \$30,000 and seven prizes of \$10,000; Excellence by a Beginning Teacher, with a major prize of \$20,000 and five prizes of \$10,000; Excellence by a Support Staff Member, with a major prize of \$30,000 and six prizes of \$10,000; Excellence by a School and its Community, with a major prize of \$50,000 and 18 prizes of \$15,000. There's also an award for Excellence in ICT. Nominate online by 19 June.

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JULY 16-17

History in the Making This year's History Teachers' Association of Australia National Conference is a great opportunity for all History educators across Australia to become involved in a dynamic professional learning opportunity. Sessions include up-to-date information on the National Curriculum, History in the middle years, History in the primary school, integration of tech-

nology into the History classroom, developments in pedagogy, academic lectures, practical workshops and much more.

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AUGUST 7-8

The Education Show, Melbourne

A unique opportunity for pre-primary, primary and secondary school teachers, and management and administrative staff to find out about the latest education resources, products and services from 100 exhibitors. The Education Show features a seminar program with more than 45 presentations on key education issues including curriculum initiatives, teaching opportunities, learning technologies and leadership. Entry is free.

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AUGUST 15-23

National Science Week

'Astronomy: Science without limits'

Join the annual nationwide celebration of Australian achievements and capabilities in science. In schools around the nation, thousands of teachers and students from early childhood to senior secondary levels organise and participate in a diverse range of activities and events.

PHONE 02 6282 9377

WEBSITES www.asta.edu.au or www.scienceweek.info.au

29 SEPTEMBER-2 OCTOBER

Engage, Explore, Celebrate:

Australian School Library Association XX1 Biennial Conference

This year's ALSA conference aims to bring together school library staff, information specialists, executive staff members, classroom teachers and school library academics from all over Australia and neighbouring countries to share their knowledge and engage in productive dialogue to explore the challenges and issues for teacher librarianship and school libraries. The conference will provide a strong focus on information literacy, and an emphasis on literature and engagement with young adult and children's authors. Speakers include Michael Stephens, Mark Treadwell and Libby Gleeson.

PLACE Perth

CONTACT Conference Secretariat
EECW

PHONE 08 9389 1488

WEBSITE www.asla.org.au/pd/conference

MAY 25-28, 2010

Inclusive Learning Technologies Conference 2010

This biennial conference focuses specifically on technologies designed to advance independent achievement for people with disabilities, people with complex communication needs and students experiencing literacy difficulties. It's a great opportunity to update your knowledge not just of new technologies, but of practical, real-world applications for your students.

PLACE Surfers Paradise, Queensland

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Danny Katz
suspects teachers
sometimes pine
for the un-PC
days of corporal
punishment.

On punishment

‘C’mon up, hurry up, c’mon!’ yapped the teacher out the front of the swimming pool. He was rounding up a pack of high school students after a swimming carnival, guiding them towards a minibus like a sheep dog herding a bunch of wet sheep toward a crutching cradle.

I was walking past the pool, and I stopped to admire the grace and skill of the native Australian sheepdog-teacher as he mustered his flock with keen-muzzled determination. Then he looked down at one of his sheep-student’s hoofs and said,

‘No Lachy, you can’t wear your thongs back to school. Put your shoes on please.’

And Lachy the sheep looked up and said ‘Why can’t I wear thongs?’

And the sheepdog-teacher said, ‘Because it’s school policy. You might slip in thongs, so please put on your shoes like everyone else.’

And the sheep-kid said, ‘But I don’t wanna put on my shoes.’

And the sheepdog-teacher said, ‘Look, I asked you to put on your shoes. I’m a teacher, you’re a student, you do what I say!’ and the kid just stood there and stared at the teacher and the teacher just stood there and stared back – he had a frustrated fired-up look in his eye, like he wanted to give this sheep a good crutching, and a mulesing too, with blunt rusty old shears. But the poor teacher couldn’t do anything. He was helpless, powerless to deal with a student revolt from a revolting student.

The only punishment a teacher has left is detention, which is no big deal anymore – it hasn’t been a big deal since *The Breakfast Club* when detention suddenly became retro-cool because everyone wore fingerless gloves and made out while listening to Simple Minds.

Watching this bitter teacher-student standoff, I began to wonder if teachers pined for the much-easier un-PC days of corporal punishment; the days when they could indulge in crazed-eyed throat-rasping kid-YELLING.

They could grab a boy running down the corridor and spit-scream in his face, ‘EXCUUUUUUSE ME, THIS CORRIDOR IS NOT A PLAYGROUND!’ then yank him up

by the collar, his little legs flipping backwards and forwards in mid-air like a pair of tailor’s scissors.

Do teachers long for the gratifyingly brutal era of ruler-whopping? It could be performed in so many exquisite ways: a meek wooden-ruler-slap to the back of the leg for chatterboxing girls in school assembly; a more sadistic metal-ruler-strike to the knuckles, favoured by music teachers on potty-mouthed boys who suggested a different word for ‘F’ in the ‘Every Good Boy Deserves Fruit’ mnemonic; or the extreme ruler-punishment in Tech Drawing: a whole T-square across the thigh, delivered with a fun little isometric leap for extra projection.

Do teachers reminisce over the romantic ’70s-era of duster-hurling? A highly-athletic teacher with a good shooting-eye could deliver a blackboard duster to the back of the classroom, striking a kid on the forehead – and teachers always knew they hit their target when they saw a white puff of chalk-dust, like a clay pigeon exploding in an Olympic skeet shoot.

Do teachers’ eyes well with wistful tears when they think back on those marvellous mediaeval days of the bamboo cane, once as common as peanut butter sandwiches and staffroom ashtrays? There was the noble schoolmaster’s ‘Grand Duke’ with the crooked handle: elegant, sartorial. Kids knew they were in the whipping-care of a six-of-the-best-specialist and it was very reassuring. Less reassuring was the varnished willow owned by the Eastern European woodwork teacher who made it himself on a lathe, turned it, flamed it, split the tip for extra skin-damage – although, ironically, he wrapped terry-towelling round the handle to provide a relaxed, comfortable grip because he had very sensitive hands.

Do teachers hunger for the days when they had power over a kid? I bet they do.

As the minibus pulled out of the swimming pool carpark with Lachy the sheep inside, still wearing his thongs, I saw that pitiful hangdog teacher peering at me out the bus window, as if to say, ‘Please... find me a Singapore rattan cane... a sharp-cornered blackboard-duster... and a set of mini-mathematics protractors that I can fire like Ninja shuriken-stars....’

Photo by Stephanie Berghaeuser courtesy of stock.xchng

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Evaluation of the Leading Australia's Schools Program – a report by Atelier Learning Solutions (p.10)

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Paul Wood, Narrabeen North Public School, Narrabeen, NSW

"I believe the involvement of principals in high quality leadership development is central to ensuring Australia has a great education system for the future."

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Leading Australia's Schools is an opportunity for principals to build their professional knowledge and leadership skills.

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- current and future trends in leadership, including contemporary educational thinking
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- planning and implementing change
- developing team and leadership capability
- operating strategically with a focus on critical issues
- personal professional growth.

Teaching Australia provides for all program costs, travel and accommodation for successful applicants.

The program is offered by Teaching Australia, in partnership with Hay Group and the University of Melbourne. It is supported by national principals' associations.

Applications for 2010 open July 2009

For further information

Website www.teachingaustralia.edu.au

Free call 1300 337 872

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