Australian Educator

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Global moves against bullying

UNESCO is working to address school violence and bullying around the world by promoting evidence-based action by educators, policy makers, professionals and practitioners.

How do you talk to kids about racism?

Helping children navigate the complex issues of racism, discrimination and prejudice is important but often the approaches are contested.

Gonski on the line in 2017

The Turnbull government is trying to put an end to needs-based funding this year.

Early childhood

Time to press for the permanency of 15 hours’ preschool a week for four-year-olds.

Slow progress

Closing the gap in Indigenous education hampered by shifting targets, limited data, inconsistent policy and funding.

New global goals

Governments need to step up with more money and better policies to “transform our world” within 13 years.
Public education in the United States is facing a serious threat following the Trump Administration’s confirmation of anti-public education activist and billionaire Betty DeVos as education secretary.

U.S. teachers’ union, the National Education Association (NEA), says the nation is entering “dangerous, uncharted territory.”

The new education secretary’s sole ‘qualification’ for the job is the two decades she has spent attempting to dismantle the American public school system, says the NEA.

“DeVos has used her extraordinary wealth to undermine our public schools and, in so doing, has harmed our students. She and her family have spent millions to promote failed private school vouchers and unaccountable for-profit charter schools while working to destabilise and defund public education,” the NEA says.

The union is calling on teachers around the world to support high-quality public schools by adding their name to a petition calling on DeVos and political leaders at every level to commit to the vision of public education for all.

“Our leaders must understand that our students and communities need schools that answer to them and their elected representatives. This compact is undermined when billionaires, corporations, hedge fund managers and others seek to substitute their will for that of educators and the people and communities who rely on our public schools. Ninety percent of American children attend public schools. They deserve leaders who are committed to building up our students with supportive policies that ensure equal opportunity rather than continuing discriminatory policies that abandon the students who need us most,” the NEA says.

You can add your name at tinyurl.com/jtycxsu

Our leaders must understand that our students and communities need schools that answer to them and their elected representatives...

You can add your name at tinyurl.com/jtycxsu

Tapping into the National Library from anywhere

Many children don’t have the chance to check out the National Library’s vast and important collection in Canberra, but, thanks to technology, at least part of it can be as close as the nearest computer.

The Library’s Treasures Gallery is a digital collection developed especially for schools. It’s aligned to the Australian Curriculum and includes activities to engage students using materials from the collection. The Treasures are varied and include the Endeavour journal of Captain James Cook, the landmark papers of Edward Koiki Mabo and Keith Murdoch’s Gallipoli Letter.

The Library says the resources allow students to analyse sources, develop historical skills and draw their own conclusions about the Australian story.

You can find resources by Year level at nla.gov.au/digital-classroom

The Library also runs a teacher professional development program.
Former AEU federal president Angelo Gavrielatos has been named in the Australia Day honours. He was awarded a Medal of the Order of Australia (OAM) for services to industrial relations and educational organisations.

Gavrielatos is now working with Education International, the global federation of teacher unions, to coordinate the response to the privatisation of public education.

“I’ve been very fortunate in my political life, and privileged to do what we do. We get to live out our politics every single day and we do so in trying to achieve something great,” says Gavrielatos.

“It’s a great cause that we’re all a part of, and it’s the cause of trying to achieve quality education for every kid, every young adult around the world, and we should never forget that privilege,” he said.

Beginning his career as a high school teacher in New South Wales, Gavrielatos served as AEU federal president for eight years until 2015.

Former prime minister Julia Gillard was awarded a Companion of the Order of Australia (AC).

Australian Educator recently interviewed Gillard in her new role as chair of the Global Partnership for Education. See story on page 29.

Data compiled from 19 low and middle-income countries found that 34 per cent of students aged 11–13 reported being bullied in the previous month, with eight per cent reporting daily bullying. The figures are contained in the Global Status Report on School Violence and Bullying, produced by UNESCO.

No country can achieve inclusive and equitable quality education if learners experience violence in school, UNESCO assistant director-general for education Qian Tan told a recent international symposium on school violence and bullying in Seoul.

You can find educators’ presentations to the symposium at tinyurl.com/hzukqua

Rethinking teaching and learning: podcast

We need to rethink what it means to teach effectively and to learn to help build inclusive, stronger and democratic societies, says a leading US education academic.

Dennis Shirley, Professor of Education at the Lynch School of Education at Boston College, argues in a podcast on Education International EdVoices says: “We have to stand up and speak on behalf of young people that nobody else will speak on behalf of, it could be immigrant youth, youth with disabilities, youth from impoverished backgrounds.”

The EdVoices podcast can be downloaded on iTunes.

What’s hot in literacy?

Despite the pervasiveness of technology, digital literacy is not considered as important as other matters when it comes to the broader subject of literacy, a global study has found.

The international Literacy Association asked a total of 1,500 teachers, policy-makers and literacy academics from around the world, including Australia, to rate 17 literacy topics as either “hot” or “important”.

The study found that teacher professional development is extremely valued by educators and that we should be paying more attention to literacy in resource-limited settings.

Early literacy was also marked as both important and hot and assessment/standards was a hot topic.

You can read the survey results in full at tinyurl.com/gq9ykmp

Global movement to eradicate violence and bullying in schools

UNESCO is working hard to address school violence and bullying around the world, using a series of international meetings to promote evidence-based action by educators, policy makers, professionals and practitioners.

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How do you talk to kids about racism?

Helping children navigate the complex issues of racism, discrimination and prejudice is important but often the approaches are contested.

There are many myths, writes Naomi Priest, a Fellow at the Australian National University’s Centre for Social Research and Methods in an article on The Conversation, but there’s plenty of scientific evidence to help light the way.

“A strong discourse still maintains that we shouldn’t talk to children about issues of race, racism and diversity,” she writes.

“Myths persist that children don’t notice difference or ‘see’ race and so we shouldn’t unduly bring it to their attention. These ‘colour blind’ approaches instead focus on a shared, common humanity – that we are all part of the one human race – without explicitly recognising that difference and diversity are pervasive. In other words, that sameness and difference co-exist. 

“Critically, this also ignores the incontrovertible evidence that some groups in society, including children and young people belonging to those groups, are treated unfairly on the basis of this diversity and difference. That is, that racism and discrimination remain alive and well. That, throughout the world, some racial, ethnic and cultural groups are considered inferior, treated unfairly and not afforded the same opportunities and resources in society as others.

“A strong discourse still maintains that we shouldn’t talk to children about issues of race, racism and diversity”

“Australian data shows Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and youth experience high levels of racial discrimination, with associated negative impacts on their health, wellbeing and academic outcomes. Data also shows another group of children and youth exposed to racial discrimination and its harms are those from refugee and some migrant backgrounds.

“Sustainable, multi-level whole-of-school and whole-of-community approaches that specifically address racism and support cultural diversity among children and young people are an ongoing priority.

“Yet more training and resources for teachers are needed in this area. A recent survey in New South Wales found that only half of classroom teachers had undertaken professional learning around incorporating anti-racism strategies into lessons. And 20 per cent had not undertaken any professional learning in the area of multiculturalism.”

Teaching resources

Priest points to some newly developed tools for schools, teachers and parents. Reconciliation Australia’s Narragunnawali program supports reconciliation in early learning centres and schools. An app for primary school children helps them identify and challenge exclusion and racism and provides resources for teachers to use in their classrooms.

The Australian Human Rights Commission also has a series of resources for schools as part of the National Anti-Racism Strategy. It has released materials for promoting diversity within early childhood settings, curriculum materials and an online resource for teaching students about human rights.

An audit tool to assist schools to review existing policies, procedures and practices to support diversity and address race-based discrimination is also available.

“Now, more than ever, we have a responsibility to ensure all children learn to navigate the complexities of our diverse world with empathy and respect,” writes Priest.

Rather than avoidance or denial, we must become better at recognising when racism or prejudice occurs and knowing how to respond.

“Ultimately, we must all as individuals and as a society find new and creative ways to prevent it from happening in the first place. Our children and their futures require it.”

To read the full story go to tinyurl.com/gv3kjux
The good news is that educators will be returning to schools that are receiving more resources than ever through Gonski funding. The bad news is that funding is not guaranteed to continue after 2017.

Our challenge is to stop the federal government pushing ahead with its plan to cap school funding at 3.56 per cent after 2017 and end needs-based funding altogether.

Not only would this see schools and students miss out on resources but it would mean a return to the days of funding based on sector, which saw disadvantaged public schools miss out.

State governments, who understand the importance of delivering these resources to schools and students, are standing firm. At a meeting in December 2016, federal education minister Simon Birmingham was rebuffed by state education ministers who not only refused to agree to cuts but refused to consider other changes until the funding issue was resolved.

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Only a third of Gonski delivered so far
By the end of 2017, schools will have received only one-third of the funding the Gonski Review recommended. Without the last two years of increased funding, schools won’t receive the resources they need to be able to build on their success and provide much-needed services such as speech or occupational therapy, literacy and numeracy support, one-to-one mentoring or gifted and talented programs.

Shelby Papadopoulos, principal of Colac Primary School in Victoria, says the school has never had the funds to provide the level of support its students require.

“It would be heartbreaking if, having had a sense of what can be achieved through our 2016 Gonski funding, we lost not only the capacity to maintain what has been achieved but also the possibility of being able to make that same difference for all our students.”

As well as state governments, we need the Senate to stand firm and reject any attempt to amend the Australian Education Act to cut Gonski funding. This is why it is great to see Labor’s education spokesperson Tanya Plibersek and her Greens counterpart Sarah Hanson-Young speak out in favour of needs-based funding in this edition of Australian Educator.

Benefits outweigh costs
This year will be a big one for the AEU with the ongoing Gonski campaign, our campaign to stop TAFE cuts and ensure TAFEs receive a minimum of 70 per cent of public VET funding, and our campaign to secure permanent funding for universal access to 15 hours of preschool for four-year-old children.

Research shows that quality preschool makes a lifelong difference to a child’s ability to succeed at school and in life. Researcher Stacey Fox calls it a “wonder drug” that more than repays its cost in the huge and varied benefits it delivers to children.

So, it is bizarre that this vital part of our education system is treated as an afterthought, with preschool funding in doubt from year-to-year.

The current funding agreement, which sees the federal government top up state funding to ensure all four-year-olds can get the vital 15 hours of preschool, finishes at the end of 2017. That means parents and educators will face another year of uncertainty about funding.

Our kids can’t afford to lose access to preschool and we need the federal government to guarantee the long-term funding of 15 hours for all children so that the sector can safely plan for the future.

Focusing on the costs rather than the benefits of education is short-sighted and does not do students any favours.

Gonski needs-based funding and universal access to 15 hours of preschool are both changing lives and helping our children achieve their potential.

That’s what public education is about, and that’s what we’ll keep fighting for.

Correna Haythorpe
AEU FEDERAL PRESIDENT

Our challenge is to stop the federal government pushing ahead with its plan to...end needs-based funding altogether.
We know Gonski is working, so why is the federal government prepared to jeopardise students’ education by ending it?

Gonski on the line in 2017

More Gonski funding than ever will be delivered to our schools in 2017, which means more students will get extra support at school and will have their lives changed by the power of education.

But the future of Gonski is on the line this year with the Turnbull government pushing ahead with its plans to end needs-based funding after 2017.

This would be a disaster for schools because two-thirds of the increased Gonski funding that schools need is to be delivered in 2018 and 2019, which makes securing the last two years of Gonski absolutely vital.

Gonski is dramatically lifting results, through extra programs and in-class support, more professional development and an increase in resources for schools. Most importantly, while all schools benefit, the biggest funding increases are targeted at schools with high numbers of disadvantaged students.

Ending Gonski after 2017 would be a backward step for schools, and entrench inequity in funding. We need the full six years so all schools get the funding they need.

The Turnbull government’s plan would stop $3.8 billion in extra resources from going to schools in 2018 and 2019 alone and would effectively scrap needs-based funding. Most of the extra federal government funds would go to private schools, 62 per cent compared with 20 per cent under Gonski, even though public schools educate the majority of students.

The Turnbull government has flagged the COAG meeting in April as the time to settle a funding agreement with the states. Many states have strongly opposed cuts to schools funding, and have consistently spoken out in support of Gonski needs-based funding.

Regardless of what happens at COAG, the federal government will still need the support of the Senate to amend the Australian Education Act to implement its funding plan. The AEU has continued to lobby crossbench senators in support of Gonski, and we have obtained commitments from Labor, the Greens, the Nick Xenophon Team and independent Senator Jacqui Lambie.

The next phase of the Gonski campaign includes the launch of two new Gonski buses. These will be travelling around the country in March, visiting schools and communities, raising awareness of what Gonski is achieving, and building support for needs-based funding. The bus tour will arrive in Canberra in late March to send a strong message to MPs that the Australian public wants their schools funded properly.

States standing up for Gonski

There is now considerable pressure on the Turnbull government to reverse its position and deliver our schools the funding they need to support their students.

The December meeting of state and territory education ministers brought much-needed resistance when ministers from both Labor and the Coalition rejected cuts to funding. They told education minister Simon Birmingham they would not negotiate
on other changes until the funding issue was resolved.

Victorian education minister James Merlino spoke strongly, saying his state would be $950 million worse off without Gonski, and that the funding was vital for disadvantaged schools.

He said the federal government was treating schools and students “with contempt” by not giving them details of its funding plan.

He joined SA’s Susan Close and the ACT’s Yvette Berry to present the I Give a Gonski campaign’s 10,000-signature petition to Minister Birmingham, calling on him to maintain needs-based funding after 2017.

New NSW Premier Gladys Berejiklian has reaffirmed her state’s commitment to Gonski, saying she’ll continue to fight for the full six years of funding.

“It’s not just about the money; it’s about making sure the money that is available goes to where it is needed most. Quality public education is fundamental to giving everyone in this state equality of opportunity, which I believe is fundamental to a fair go.”

While the Gonski funding agreements are the results of years of work, with input from thousands of expert and public submissions, Minister Birmingham wants to develop a new funding system with no input from anyone — not even the state governments that run most of our schools.

He has suggested on several occasions that he wants to “redistribute” funding between states, on top of his cuts to Gonski needs-based funding, but still won’t say which states he wants to see lose money.

This lack of detail is another sign that the Turnbull government has no real vision for schools beyond cuts to funding.

There is now considerable pressure on the Turnbull government to reverse its position and deliver our schools the funding they need to support their students.

Gonski key to lifting test scores
The end of last year saw the release of the most recent PISA and TIMSS results, and a public debate about why Australia’s ranking, while still above the global average, had declined over the past decade.

What was lost in this debate around our PISA scores is that our scores have dropped at a time when government-funding for schools was becoming less equal, and when the biggest increases in resources were going to private schools.

From 2009 to 2014 combined government funding per student for private schools increased by 30 per cent per student, compared to a 14 per cent increase to public schools.

The most significant issue in our PISA scores are the persistent gaps in results based on geographic location and social background.

By the age of 15, students from the most disadvantaged quartile are three years behind those from the most advantaged. Gaps in resources between schools are reflected in our results, and if we want to turn those results around we need to close those gaps.

In fact this is exactly what the Gonski Review warned us of in December 2011 when it noted our slipping PISA scores and stated that: “International evidence confirms that targeted investment in disadvantaged students is the most cost-efficient way to improve.”

The full PISA report for 2016 tells us what we need to do when it says: “Education systems that are successful, both in quality and equity, attract the highest quality resources to where these resources can make the most difference.”

Gonski is not the problem; it is the solution — the only serious model that is designed to address the issues exposed in the PISA 2015 results.

Educators in schools with Gonski funding know that it is working. Support in classrooms lifts the effectiveness of teachers and helps students to learn.

But we need the full six years of Gonski funding so that every school has the minimum amount of resources to educate all its students.

The public school systems of every state are currently below the Schooling Resource Standard that the Gonski Review recommended, and without an increase in funding they will never reach it.

This year will be crucial for the future of needs-based funding and our public schools. The AEU will continue to fight for needs-based Gonski funding because we know it is working for our schools and their students.●
Ending the universal uncertainty

For the third time in four years, early educators are ramping up the campaign to make 15 hours per week of quality preschool, taught by a university-trained teacher, a permanent, ongoing entitlement for every four-year-old.

The evidence of the value of preschool is growing stronger every day, and educators in kindergartens, long-day care and primary schools can see the proof in every child they teach. Fifteen hours makes a significant difference to their charges’ confidence, relationships, development and readiness to learn.

However, the federal government funding that since 2013 has made ‘universal access’ possible will run out – again – at the end of 2017.

AEU members are firm in their resolve to secure ongoing funding to protect preschools from the uncertainty of another 18-month or two-year extension.

The AEU will run a campaign this term, aimed at asking parents to tell MPs how important this funding is, and that it must be made permanent in this year’s federal budget.

Next year’s children could lose as much as a third of their preschool time.

“Five hours doesn’t sound like much to an adult. But in a little life, it is,” says Victorian preschool teacher Kay Bryan.

“For some of them [preschool] is the only time when they are speaking English or dealing with other children and getting to understand that ebb and flow of conflict and negotiation and sharing.”
Continued impact
Bryan’s concerns are supported by research. Dr Stacey Fox, policy fellow at the Mitchell Institute at Victoria University, says the impact of a year of preschool continues throughout primary and secondary school.

Its immediate effect is demonstrated by the Australian Early Development Census, which assesses children about six months into their primary schooling against five domains: physical health and wellbeing; social competence; emotional maturity; language and cognitive skills; and communication skills and general knowledge.

Nearly a quarter of children (22 per cent) will be developmentally vulnerable in at least one domain.

“These are children who are right down at the bottom of their cohort, children who are significantly struggling,” says Fox.

For children who receive at least one year of preschool, the risk of registering as developmentally vulnerable falls by at least a quarter.

“Preschool benefits children from low socioeconomic status backgrounds the most. But it also has an impact on kids throughout the socioeconomic spectrum. It’s a bit of a wonder drug that way.”

However, for preschool to have a sustained effect, children need at least 15 hours a week for at least a year, preferably two, she says.

“Fifteen hours appears, from the international studies, to be the minimum for those impacts to be sustained in the long term.”

The reason for this lies in the building of relationships with adults and other children, which takes time for a four-year-old in a new and complex world. It also gives teachers more time to assess each child’s needs and interests, adapt their curriculum to suit, and access any support they need.

“Children are developing social skills, the ability to get on with their peers, to talk about what they think, feel and see,” says Fox. “They grow in confidence, in language, in their ability to explore and ask questions, discover how things work. They become little scientists who solve problems.

“These things are every bit as important as the fundamental building blocks of numeracy and literacy they might be developing.”

The campaign will engage with educators, parents, communities and politicians to build support, pointing to the gains that have been made since universal access began.

Depth of experience
David Coulter, director of Darlington Children’s Centre, in Seacombe Gardens, Adelaide, puts it this way:

“In a play-based environment such as preschool or kindergarten, 15 hours gives children more time to rehearse or go more deeply into practising new skills or new thinking.

“It also gives educators more time to work with the children in a deeper way and, particularly in that first term, more time to identify those children who need additional support. More hours means more time for educators and families to get to know each other.”

Bryan, who teaches four-year-olds at Tarralla Kindergarten in Melbourne’s east, says relationships are key to preschool. “Preschool is a relationship-based setting where we’re building self-confidence and self-regulation in the children.”

In a typical year, more than half of Bryan’s class won’t have experienced early education or even childcare. Many will be the only child in their family, so they may be experiencing regular sustained social interactions with other children for the first time.

“We really focus on these emotional literacy skills,” she says.

Martel Menz
AEU’s federal early childhood representative

Resources
To join the campaign for permanent preschool funding, go to protectourpreschools.com.au
Consider our product disclosure statement before making a decision about First State Super. Call us or visit our website for a copy.
FSS Trustee Corporation ABN 11 118 202 672 ASFL 293340 is the trustee of the First State Superannuation Scheme ABN 53 226 460 365.
Many children need extra scaffolding to build these skills because they are very shy or have self-regulation issues. “There are some busy children who think ‘everything’s mine and I want it now’ [and] we need to help them understand they are affecting other children. They’ve only been on earth for four years. [With 15 hours] we are able to give them a space where they can take command and show us what they want to learn.”

A 10-hour week would most likely mean children attending for two full consecutive days, so they aren’t coming back for a long time, and children will forget things, says Bryan. “I’d actually like to see the 20 hours that was first mooted, so we really have time to reinforce those skills.”

**Many repercussions**

It’s not just about the children. The Coalition’s failure to commit to long-term funding means educators and parents are struggling with uncertainty.

Ramping up to 15 hours required a major reorganisation and investment that would have to be dismantled. “A lot of infrastructure was put in place – we had an extra room built onto our service – and that would be a waste,” says Bryan.

Many teachers and support staff would lose hours and some would lose their jobs. Any parents planning to return to work would have to make other arrangements in a childcare sector already bursting at the seams.

“Parents will lose a day of education for their kids,” says Martel Menz, the AEU’s federal early childhood representative. “The childcare sector can’t accommodate all these children.”

This term the AEU launched a major national campaign, Protect Our Preschools, and early childhood members will travel to Canberra in March to lobby ministers and MPs to make the funding permanent in the May 2017 budget.

The campaign will engage with educators, parents, communities and politicians to build support, pointing to the gains that have been made since universal access began.

“We’re going to be inviting politicians into preschools to get a really strong sense of the education that goes on,” says Menz.

“Our members in early childhood, and our members in primary schools who receive those children in their early years classes, all tell us that universal access has been nothing but successful. Teachers say that, when children transition to primary school, they are truly ready to start their formal education. They have the self-regulation and social skills. They are ready to thrive.”

Nic Barnard is a freelance writer.
Teachers give “a gift that lasts forever” when they inspire students, says federal deputy opposition leader and shadow education minister Tanya Plibersek but it takes proper funding to support teachers to do their jobs. She spoke to AEU federal president Correna Haythorpe on what schools need and her own experiences.

“I understand the world better”

Correna Haythorpe: Was there a teacher who particularly influenced you?
Tanya Plibersek: I loved school. I had great teachers throughout.

The real difficulty for me is to choose one teacher who had a great influence because so many did.

There was my Year 6 teacher, Rosemary Beard. I don’t think I’d have a sense of humour if she hadn’t taught me. I learned so much from her, her subject teaching was very good, and she was probably the first clearly identifiable feminist I met.

I had lunch a few weeks ago with Bronwyn Haddock, an English teacher of mine, Cheryl Rutherford, my history teacher, and Anna Lewis, an art teacher. And, if I could have found my maths teacher, Gail Gibson, I would have invited her too.

The teachers that inspired me loved their subject matter and they inspired in me a love of what they were teaching.

I look at the world differently because of the way my art teacher taught me art. When I travel overseas and go to a museum or art gallery I feel like I understand the world better and differently because of what she taught me, and because of what my ancient history teacher taught me.

The love of the subject matter you’ve been taught is a gift that lasts forever.

I went to an ordinary public school that wasn’t very well resourced but I had teachers who said you could do anything you set your mind to. That’s an extraordinary gift to give a child.

You’ve held the education portfolio since last year, what really motivates you about education?
I’ve always been interested in this portfolio. Even before it was mine I followed it very closely in our cabinet discussions.

Education is the biggest chance we have to help people attack poverty and to let them fully realise their gifts and aspirations.

As legislators, we know that this investment has massive returns for our economy. We know that it’s the key to good quality, high paying jobs, to innovation, to discovery, to a return on that investment by providing a high-wage, high-productivity nation.

Public schools have a high number of children who come from disadvantaged backgrounds. How do we cater for the needs of those children?
We fully fund our schools.

The debate we’re having now – that says education funding doesn’t matter – parents know that’s nonsense. They don’t stay up late at night baking for the cake stall or running the sausage sizzle on the weekend because funding doesn’t matter.

Other things matter, too, but we can’t do those other things unless we properly fund our schools.

The disadvantaged kids are the ones who’ll benefit most from proper needs-based funding, because those kids will get the individual attention they need to catch up if they’re falling behind their peers.

The new funding agreement for the final years of Gonski funding is expected to be finally put in place by April. How do you see this playing out and how will you work to ensure that our schools have the full funding they need?
I don’t know how we’re still talking about this – it’s leaving it a bit late.

It’s very difficult for schools to cope with the many coalition funding proposals. It’s been a shambles from beginning to end.

We will continue to argue that the needs-based funding model should be rolled out to states and territories. We will never accept the $30 billion that the coalition has cut from future years of schools’ funding.

We don’t believe that you can do the same job with $30 billion less. We know that the early investment is already making a difference and we will hold the government to account.

They made a promise to fully fund a needs-based funding
system and they should be kept to that promise.
But it won’t be Labor alone. We’ll involve parents’ organisations, teachers and their unions, community members and the business community to make sure everyone joins with the profession to ensure our schools are properly funded.

You’ve been visiting schools. Have you seen examples of how needs-based funding is making a difference?
I’ve met so many kids for whom it’s making a difference. I’ve met so many teachers who tell me that this is the first time they’ve had the time to reinvest in their own teaching practice; to think about how they can mentor other teachers, to seek out mentoring themselves. It’s giving them the space to continue to hone their craft.

Minimbah Primary school in Armidale is a great example. It’s almost entirely Aboriginal kids and they’ve hired Aboriginal teachers because they think it’s important for their kids to have Aboriginal role models. What a great way to make a difference to those kids.

Heatley Secondary College in Townsville is another one. They started hiring extra, highly skilled teachers to help their younger, less experienced teachers. They’ve had a 15 per cent improvement in their results.

The principal said to me that while it shows up in the academic results, the biggest change they’ve noticed day-to-day is they have fewer behavioural problems because they’re teaching every kid in the way that child can learn best. Those students are getting the support they need in the way that best suits their learning style; they’re becoming active learners, their attendance has improved dramatically as well as their behaviour in the classroom.

There are so many great examples from lots of different schools. Every school I’ve visited has benefited from the extra funding. Teachers will tell you it has changed their experience. 

Continues on p18
AGENDA

Teaching is “the most challenging job there is”, says Greens education spokesperson Senator Sarah Hanson-Young and it needs proper financial support. She spoke to AEU federal president Correna Haythorpe on the moral and economic imperative to provide equal education opportunities.

“The funding was promised”

Correna Haythorpe: Was there a teacher who influenced you and why?
Sarah Hanson-Young: I had an interesting education experience. I grew up in a remote part of country Victoria and for most of primary school I was home schooled because there just wasn’t a local school and no school buses.
When I went to high school I had to move closer to town and I went to Orbost High. The teacher I met in my first couple of days there in Year 7, Mr Harvey (Eric Harvey), really stuck with me all the way through to the end of Year 12.
He was my English teacher, and in Year 12 he was my drama teacher. I topped the state in drama in that Year 12 group.
He was really important to me. He encouraged me to explore ideas and to be confident in finding different ways to express them. More than anything it was about understanding that if you have an opinion, find out the way to communicate it and don’t be afraid to stand by it.

You’ve got the schools portfolio for the Greens, what has sparked your interest in terms of education; what motivates you?
Education is the great equaliser.
If we’re talking about how to give kids the best start in life, in terms of early childhood education, the evidence is there for us to see. We know that investing in those early years makes kids more resilient and ensures we’ve got smart and healthy individuals who can contribute positively to society.
As we see frustrations swirling around about the rise of inequality - not just here in Australia, we’re seeing it in other places, whether it’s Brexit or the rise in support of Trump in the US - I believe that has to be taken on directly and strongly and through an education lens.
There’s a risk of an anti-education - some may frame it as anti-intellectualism - crusade that could derail that.
If you want to tackle inequality head on, you have to invest in education.

BRIEFLY

BRIEFLY

Sarah Hanson-Young, Greens education spokesperson

kids that’s really needed. And it makes the job of a teacher pretty hard.
I think you have to come back to the idea that education is an asset and you need to look after your assets and that means the personnel involved as well.

We are in the middle of a big Gonski campaign - how important is needs-based funding for our schools, and what does it mean for you?
The Gonski campaign has been fundamental in starting to shift the discussion around how we fund education, and therefore the value we put on it.
The Gonski report was brilliant in so many ways and is really important. The campaign following that report engaged students, parents and the broader community as well as the business community.
What I’m worried about is that it can all be thrown out the window with this ridiculous obsession by the current government to find budget savings by trying to cut funding from schools.
We have to stand up to that. Obviously having the funding protected in legislation is really important and we’ll be doing everything we can to make sure the senate does the right thing.
We are saying no to funding cuts because education is the only way of tackling inequality and you cannot be serious about tackling inequality if you’re prepared to cut billions of dollars from schools.
The Turnbull government has flagged a new schools funding agreement by April this year to replace the Gonski needs-based funding system. What commitment can you make to ensuring we have the full Gonski?

The government has rocks in its head to think that cutting almost $4 billion from school funding is a good idea.

I’ve been trying to keep an open dialogue with the minister to say the Greens will not agree to billions of dollars’ worth of cuts. But we are prepared to work out how we can make sure that the funding that schools need is sustainable and long term.

While most parents perhaps aren’t as clued in to what is currently happening with the government’s plan to cut funding from schools, they sure as hell will be once they find out that their school is going to lose money.

Since you’ve taken on the education portfolio have you had an opportunity to see firsthand some of the programs?

Some, and we’re doing more of that with a national listening tour of education, talking to teachers and parents.

The programs that are the most at-risk are those that deal with the most disadvantaged students. We need to ensure that teachers have the support to deal with the different needs of the students in their classroom.

It might mean an extra teacher here or there. It might mean a few extra hours a week to engage with the parents. This is about dealing with the complexities of individual students and sometimes the whole family unit.

As a parent (my daughter is going into Grade 5 this year) I don’t know how the teachers do it, really.

You want to know that the teacher your kid is going to spend most of their day with should have enough time for them to listen and see things before something happens.

The Greens have a strong policy position about kids with disabilities and delivering the loading that was promised in 2013. What are your thoughts about how we secure that loading, because we’re very concerned about the 270,000 students in the system who need it.

Look, we had it costed at $4.8 billion over the forward estimates. So it’s not cheap. I understand that.

But the reality is that, if we don’t find ways of investing this money, these kids are going to continue to fall through the cracks. And it’s going to cost the budget in the long run — whether it’s in other types of welfare services, the health system, or having to try and help young people struggling to get into the workforce.

How do we secure that funding? Well, we have to stand up to the government on their cuts to the years 5 and 6 of Gonski. The funding was promised.

Early intervention is always the best strategy, and making sure there are programs in schools to help kids with a variety of disabilities is the best way of ensuring they’re looked after from a moral and social perspective and also from a budgetary one.

Continues on p18
[The Turnbull government] made a promise to fully fund a needs-based funding system and they should be kept to that promise.

Tanya Plibersek
Shadow education minister

Continued from p15

One of the areas of concern for us is that the promise to introduce a disability loading that has been broken over and over again. I think it’s one of the most shameful failures of this government. It is a complex policy area, we acknowledge that. But you can’t keep putting it off forever.

They’ve promised it since 2013. It’s one of the areas Labor will fix as soon as possible. We’ll keep putting pressure on the government to fix it because it’s unconscionable. A variety of experts say that probably one child in every two needing extra support isn’t getting it.

We feel it’s very important that student teachers have the support they need to enter the classroom. What’s your view on what we need to provide for them?

There’s a technical aspect of being a teacher but we don’t just want to graduate technically proficient teachers – we want to graduate people who can inspire a love of learning as well.

Of course, you have to know the subject matter and be good at it but you also have to have a calling, a passion for teaching. That’s a little harder to teach but universities need to think carefully about attracting people who want to be teachers because they want to inspire in children a love of learning.

I think the feedback loop between schools and universities needs to be much better and stronger than it is.

I’ve heard a lot of teachers who supervise students saying they often feel the feedback to the university about the students doesn’t really make much difference to how the university goes on to build on their strengths and correct weaknesses. We need to give more respect to people who are giving up their time and energy to supervise.

It’s probably the hardest thing in the world to be a supervisor. A teacher’s natural inclination is to encourage, promote and help get the student over the line. But if they haven’t got it and you say that to the university and the university doesn’t take any notice...

I’ve also been thinking about the flipside of that.

When I was health minister I spoke to lots of doctors about what kept them in the public system. Many said what they loved about the public system was teaching hospitals and teaching students, and doing research.

Treating patients is the centre of their work, but continuing to develop their own research interests, being part of the system that brought on the next generation, meant a lot to them in terms of professional satisfaction.

I want to think about how we give teachers, particularly highly skilled teachers, more opportunities to do that. Perhaps they want to stay connected to the university where they did their undergraduate degree, to go back and update their skills, or to do research.

There should be a way of getting that opportunity much more to people – a structured way of refreshing their service.

Many students are about to start their teaching courses at universities across Australia. One of the key issues for us is to make sure that when students complete their courses they’re proficient and are confident to step in front of a classroom. What are some of the challenges you think are facing these students?

We have to ensure that people who go into a teaching course feel good about the decision – that they’re choosing to be teachers because they see the value in education.

I struggle to see why we haven’t had governments take on public engagement campaigns like they’ve got in places like Scandinavia, where teaching is seen to be something you strive for. You want to be a teacher because the education system is something to be proud of.

We can’t just teach teachers about the facts and figures of the subject, they have to learn how to be teachers and connect with their students.

It’s not an easy job. I reckon teaching is the most challenging job there is, frankly, and we don’t give teachers enough respect.

But we also let down our graduates. We need more mentoring of new teachers.

We hear the government say money isn’t always the answer. But without if you can’t fix the things you know are problems. And one of them is making sure that there is enough time for new teachers to be mentored and learn the craft.
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AGENDA

Slow progress on gap strategies

A new report into remote and very remote education for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students highlights huge gaps in key measures of educational attainment.

One of the most startling statistics shows that the percentage of students in Years 1 to 10 who attend school at least 90 per cent of the time is as low as 22.8 per cent. This compares with 70 per cent for non-Indigenous students.

In remote locations, as few as 29 per cent of 17-year-old Indigenous students are attending school at any given time, and this figure drops to as low as 16 per cent in very remote communities.

Knowledge of such gaps between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students isn’t new. In 2008, under the Rudd Labor government, the Council of Australian Governments recognised that “coordinated and significant national action” was required to address the levels of disadvantage facing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Six targets were established, with an additional one added in 2014. Four related to education.

At the time, the government ambitiously set these targets to:

- Ensure access to early childhood education for all Indigenous four-year-olds in remote communities by 2013.
- Halve the gap in reading, writing and numeracy achievements for children by 2018.
- Halve the gap for Indigenous students’ attainment rates in Year 12 (or equivalent) by 2020.

In 2014 it added a new goal: to close the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous school attendance within five years (by 2018).

The new report tracks the progress – or lack thereof – that has been made on these key targets, and its findings are damning.

The report, Educational Provision for Remote Indigenous Communities: Government responses to delivering the Closing the Gap targets for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, was commissioned by the AEU and written by education consultant Peter Johnson.

Johnson has a wealth of experience in education and the public sector, and was heavily involved in the 2011-15 More Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Teachers Initiative.

Dearth of data

On the subject of overcoming Indigenous disadvantage, the federal government’s 2016 Productivity Commission reported that:

- The level of progress in the areas of early childhood education and improvement in literacy and numeracy achievement is unclear.
- There has been no significant change in school attendance.
- There has been some progress in year 12 attainment.

Johnson told Australian Educator that
Paul Bridge
Principal in remote WA schools

The most successful models of remote education have been built on a close connection between schools and their communities, with a respect for local culture.

independently evaluating the progress made on each measure had been a difficult task because data was hard to find.

“You could be cynical and suggest that government knows the achievements are not good,” he says.

“This is serious. Sixteen per cent [of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students attending school at 17 years of age] is virtually a non-enrolment.”

Johnson is especially critical of the lack of progress on attendance rates.

During Tony Abbott’s tenure as prime minister, he appeared particularly insensitive to the complexity of this issue, saying only that it was “hard to be literate and numerate without attending school”.

This led to the Coalition government establishing the goal in 2013 to “close the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous school attendance within five years” (by 2018).

The Coalition government has taken this approach to another of the original Closing the Gap goals, amending the target of having 100 per cent preschool attendance for Indigenous children in remote communities to 95 per cent of all Indigenous four-year-olds enrolled in early childhood education by 2025.

These shifts in targets rarely go noticed by anyone other than policymakers. For Johnson, however, they speak loudly of the government’s level of commitment to eliminating Indigenous disadvantage:

“What they’re saying is that it’s acceptable that three per cent of these kids won’t go to preschool. That’s unacceptable. And to say it’s going to take an extra 12 years on top of that to do it? That’s incredible.

“They’ve just thrown out a white flag and said, ‘this is all too hard’.”

Indeed, the Coalition appeared to do

“Gonski loadings deliver extra funding to remote schools and to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, in recognition of the challenges they face,” Haythorpe said.

“That funding is already helping provide programs that can be targeted to local communities and culture. Stopping those extra resources will make it very hard for schools to build on the progress they have made.”

“On top of that the Turnbull government plans to cut funding to public schools in the NT, which educate thousands of students in remote communities.”

Cultural insensitivity

The cuts highlight a fundamental misunderstanding of the issues remote and very remote communities face, says Johnson.

“At the centre of this issue is the need for educational provision which better engages with remote and very remote communities, and is sensitive to the cultural diversity of these communities,” he says in his report’s conclusion.

Change can’t happen, he says, while the government continues to push solutions that are made without “proper consultation with the communities that are the future subjects of their implementation, and an absence of adequate and ongoing funding”.

As a key example of a culturally insensitive approach, Johnson singles out the current practice of sending Aboriginal children from remote and very remote communities to metropolitan high schools.

“It totally disconnects them from their community. They stand out like a beacon because they are one of only a handful of Indigenous kids in a school and they are meant to conform to a lifestyle that’s very different to what they have at home.”

exactly that in 2014 when it announced $534 million in cuts to Indigenous programs, including to key initiatives such as Aboriginal Child and Family Centres. The centres act as a conduit between families with preschool children, health services and schools.

AEU Federal President Correna Haythorpe said the Turnbull government had no positive agenda for lifting Indigenous education, and its cuts to Gonski funding would make it harder for schools educating Indigenous students.

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Overwhelming experience

Paul Bridge, a principal with more than 28 years of teaching experience in rural and remote Western Australia, knows first-hand the dangers of such an approach.

An Indigenous man, Bridge was raised in the Kimberley region of WA and sent to boarding school in Perth where, despite being a “resilient” teen, he found the experience gruelling and very difficult.

“It’s quite overwhelming,” he says. “I got through because I had strong support from my family, who were committed to seeing me succeed. But even I really struggled in terms of coping with the climate and the whole different cultural experience.

“If we’re going to send kids away, we need to put in place appropriate support. “We have this situation where we create all those support structures in remote communities – being connected to country, connected to family, connecting schools to community – and then at the end of primary school we say, ‘Off you go… and we want you to succeed.’

“Isn’t that a great set-up for failure?”

In fact, there’s little evidence to show that sending Indigenous students away from remote communities has been successful in any state or territory, he says.

Bridge is especially critical of the neo-colonial undertones of sending Aboriginal children away to predominantly white, metropolitan schools while remote communities face continuing funding cuts, as well as the alarming prospect of being ‘closed’ altogether by state and federal governments.

Governments need to respect the importance of remote communities to Aboriginal people, he says.

“Remote communities are out there because Aboriginal people are connected to their country. Think of all the other social impacts if people weren’t living out on country and they weren’t connected to their community.

People are living out there because they want to be out there and it’s safe for them to be out there, and they want to stay there.”

Bridge believes the most successful models of remote education have been built on a close connection between schools and their communities, with a respect for local culture.

“There are some really good examples of remote communities and schools that do wonderful work because they have a clear understanding of what the community expects in terms of educating students. They support their staff and build capacity around their staff and achieving the community plan, with significant community ownership of education.”

Such success relies on bipartisan, ongoing funding and support, Bridge says.

They’ve just thrown out a white flag and said, ‘this is all too hard’.

‘If you look at some of our processes… we’re constantly looking for the silver bullet, the quick fix. When new governments come in, their agenda is different, they go and change it. They take the funding from you.

“Allow schools and communities to have sustainable funding over time, to develop, implement and imbed these programs. In terms of getting traction, you won’t have significant change over two or three years. Sustainable change takes five to 10 years.

“Remote communities are that bit more complex. It comes down to consistency of approach over time.”

Teaching follow-through

When it comes to Closing the Gap measures, it’s too simple to say they weren’t working, says Bridge. What they needed was more cultural sensitivity, follow-through and funding.

He notes, for example, the success of the More Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Teachers Initiative, but says the teachers needed further training and investment.

“Traditionally, remote schools have been training grounds for teachers. You have inexperienced school principals leading inexperienced school staff. The principals need support from experienced principals. The teachers need support from experienced teachers who come into the classroom to observe and mentor.”

He says he supported the initiative, but quality assurance was needed to make sure the teachers could deliver programs to the highest standard “because Aboriginal students deserve the best”.

“Aboriginal students can achieve in the same way as non-Aboriginal students,” Bridge says.

Kate O’Halloran is a freelance writer who has a PhD in gender and cultural studies.
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The first year in any career brings many challenges, but these new teachers see their past experiences in the workplace as an advantage.

BY ROMONY ROGERS

Coping with the switch

One thing graduate teachers soon discover is that work doesn’t stop when they close the classroom door. “In the jobs I’ve had in the past, you didn’t take your work home, but teaching does become your life,” says Trish Chapman, a primary school teacher in the Pilbara mining town of Tom Price, Western Australia. It’s more demanding than Chapman’s previous jobs in offices and hospitality. “You wake up in bed and remember something you have to do, or you get an idea for something,” she says. “The accountability can be confronting sometimes because, as graduates, we’re still learning and there’s so much to take in. It’s really overwhelming.”

Hannah Papworth, a Year 6 teacher at St Mary’s District School in rural Tasmania, says there’s a misconception in the community that teaching is an easy ride, with excessive holidays. “I’m often doing extra time on top of my eight hours a day, whether it’s a school camp, graduation dinner, extra planning or marking on the weekend. I’ve done the maths with my partner [who works in a trade] and my holidays only equate to his rostered days off when I add up all the extra time I do out of pocket. “It’s certainly a reason why I joined the union. Having a partner in a trade with a strong union, I realised what it can do for you in terms of your rights at work.”

As a relief teacher in Adelaide, Sara Husi has the benefit of not having to plan for the next day. But she says she would be happy to take a contract, for the security of regular pay. Her partner

A little boy gave me a big hug one day, walking through school. That’s when you go, ‘Wow, this is what it’s all about’.

Trish Chapman
Primary school teacher, Tom Price, WA

Former auditor Oliver Baumeister has been able to apply data analysis skills to his teaching.
first started, I was creating everything from scratch. I had to learn not to reinvent the wheel. I realised it was far better to adapt what had already been created."

**Individual strengths**

Baumeister’s auditing background means he thrives on analysing student data, and he was surprised to discover how much data analysis there is in teaching.

“It’s very interesting to look through data and see what topics the students are struggling with, but it is very time-consuming as well.”

Using data to drive student achievement is something Papworth has come to appreciate since working closely with a literacy coach. However, her background as a bushwalking guide and outdoor education camp worker means that relationships with students are a stronger driving force.

“I’m a teacher who’s big on giving people respect, time and empathy. As a result, I feel respected by the students, and that’s very affirming.”

Chapman is also driven by personal relationships.

“My son was diagnosed with significant delayed speech and language development as a toddler, so I wanted to know everything I could about how to help him once he went to school.”

Chapman spent a lot of time going to professional development conferences with occupational therapists and eventually realised how useful these skills would be.

“I’ve been able to apply those skills in the classroom. I’m able to more easily identify fine motor issues, and give students fun activities that develop their skills.”

Husi has also been able to apply her previous training to teaching. Having a degree in sport and recreation management, she is aware of the importance of taking children outside – “to get kids out, giving them a more rounded education”.

We will be following these new teachers throughout 2017 and featuring their challenges and achievements in each issue of *Australian Educator* during the year.
Women members of the AEU and its branches and associated bodies are encouraged to apply for the 2017 Rosemary Richards Scholarship.

Rosemary Richards was a proud feminist, unionist and educator. She was a respected leader, colleague and friend who played a crucial role in shaping the AEU as an organisation that reflects feminist principles. Sadly, Rosemary passed away in November, 2006 after a long battle with illness. This scholarship, now in its eleventh year, recognises the significant contribution that Rosemary made to the AEU as an organisation and to all its members, women in particular.

Across the AEU, women’s employment rights and women’s union participation have been steadily advanced due to an active, committed and predominantly female membership, but challenges remain.

The scholarship is aimed at providing the opportunity to a woman member to increase her skills and experience in the union’s work at a state/territory/national or international level and, by extension, supporting the AEU’s women members. The proposal may include (but is not limited to):

- The establishment of a work-shadowing arrangement or a mentoring arrangement;
- Research or study experiences;
- Formal and/or informal training and development opportunities (e.g. attendance at an appropriate conference); or
- The design and implementation of a discrete project.

The scholarship is valued at up to $10,000 per year.

For more information please see the guidelines.

APPLYING FOR THE AWARD

The guidelines and nomination form can be obtained from Suzanne Lowndes at slowndes@aeufederal.org.au or (03) 9693 1800

CLOSING DATE FOR APPLICATIONS FRIDAY 28 APRIL 2017
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Behaviour and planning
Some students' unpredictable behaviour and level of prior knowledge has meant Baumeister has had to be flexible in his planning.

“Nothing really goes to plan, so you have to be prepared with a plan B.”

Coming up with multiple plans for every lesson to respond to the unpredictable behaviour has been the most stressful aspect of the job so far.

Papworth found her first class very challenging.

“They had driven another teacher out of the profession. In my first two terms, I nearly gave up teaching because of one student who was effectively bullying me in front of the class.”

Fortunately, her new school has a much more supportive environment.

Rural and remote
For Papworth and Chapman, getting ongoing work has meant taking a position far away from their home cities.

Chapman has moved from Perth to the Pilbara and has just been made permanent. “It’s really difficult to secure a classroom position in Perth. I’d been doing supply for a couple of years and then I was offered a contract position here.”

The isolation and added travel expenses to see family have been challenging.

“Teachers can be quite scrutinised in a small community, which I found confronting. You feel like you have to have a professional demeanour all the time”.

Last year the Royal Flying Doctor Service flew Chapman to Perth after a motorbike accident that saw her out of the classroom for five months. Accessing ongoing rehabilitation has also been complicated.

And yet Chapman loves the opportunities that living in the Pilbara has given to her two teenage sons. They have become more independent and resilient, and feel safe in a small-town community.

“I don’t mind if they come home late on a Friday night. In Perth, I wouldn’t let them go out at night.”

Her sons spend time at the local skate park, where older children teach younger children tricks. They have achieved senior first aid certificates and use their skills when other children are injured.

In north-east Tasmania, Papworth commutes 90 minutes every morning. After two years of contracts, she has just been made a permanent replacement teacher, which entitles her to more leave conditions and guaranteed employment for 2017.

Going to a rural area to gain permanency has been a good thing, but seeing less of her partner is a disadvantage.

“In his trade, they are paid for travel, meals and accommodation, and sometimes I feel a little ripped off.”

Baumeister says his school has been very supportive and has just granted him permanency.

Husi says contracts are hard to get in Adelaide, but she is enjoying doing relief teaching.

“It’s a good experience for beginning your career because I’ve seen lots of different classroom setups with different age groups.”

Career choice
All four teachers are positive they made the right choice of career.

“Every day is different,” says Papworth, “and as long as I’m fair, kind and respectful, then I have the grounds for my students to listen to me, and I enjoy refining my practice.”

For Baumeister, the opportunity to “share my knowledge and inspire a similar interest with the students is great”.

Husi feels she is making a difference when she gets a concept across to a group of students and sees it click.

“A little boy gave me a big hug one day, walking through school,” says Chapman. “That’s when you go, ‘Wow, this is what it’s all about.’”

Romony Rogers is a freelance writer.
New global goals

Education is at the heart of an ambitious United Nations strategy, aimed at ending poverty, fighting inequality and tackling climate change by 2030.

“While education is not the solution to the challenges we face, there is no solution without education,” says AEU federal president Susan Hopgood who is also president of Education International, the world’s largest federation of unions representing more than 32 million educators.

The UN’s Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) include 17 targets covering social, economic and environmental issues. While one of the 17 covers education exclusively – “To ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all” – education is also included in goals on health, growth and employment, sustainable consumption and production, and climate change.

For the goals to be achieved, governments will need to demonstrate their political will with appropriate funding, says Hopgood.

“But it’s also about policy and legislative changes that ensure we’re going to reach the teacher targets. We need trained teachers to provide quality teaching.”

The biggest threat to quality education for all is the creeping privatisation or corporatisation of education, says Hopgood.

“Large corporations are moving into poor countries and taking advantage. That’s a real danger.”

Targets can work

A previous set of UN goals proved that targets can bring vast improvements.

While “a full primary education for every child in the world by 2015” was not achieved, primary school enrolment for children in developing countries is now at 91 per cent, according to the UN’s most recent data.

However, on current trends, only 70 per cent of those children will go on to complete primary school in 2030. Many more still have no access to formal education, including 57 million children living in sub-Saharan Africa, in conflict-affected countries, and in refugee camps around the world. And, of the 103 million young people worldwide who lack basic literacy skills, more than 60 per cent are women.

Closing these gaps – and advancing the directive beyond primary education – will require enormous political resolve from the leaders of 193 poor, rich and middle-income countries who adopted the non-legally binding SDGs.

“Every country has things to do, whether it’s in relation to early childhood education, primary and secondary education, vocational and higher education or quality and access,” says Hopgood.
They're so short of teachers, for example, that even if every person who went to university today elected to do teaching they still wouldn’t be graduating enough teachers to fill the gaps.

Julia Gillard
Global Partnership for Education

Poor and struggling countries will need assistance from wealthy nations but it will take more than money. “You’ve got kids living in crisis, whether it’s internal country crisis, war with another country or a crisis increasingly brought about by global warming. Governments have to find a way to address these issues,” says Hopgood.

No more ‘business as usual’

Former Australian Prime Minister Julia Gillard has been devoted to education reform since leaving office. She chairs the Board of Directors of the Washington DC-based Global Partnership for Education (GPE), an organisation that works with governments in the world’s 65 poorest countries to build education systems that offer a quality education to all children.

‘If the clock just keeps ticking and our efforts remain as they are now, it will take 100 years before we see the first generation of sub-Saharan African girls go to primary and lower secondary education,’ says Gillard. “They’ll be the last children on earth to get access to 10 years of schooling.”

To achieve the Sustainable Development Goal for education, Gillard says today’s global education expenditure of $1.2 trillion in low- and middle-income countries will need to expand to $3 trillion. That’s a big lift, exacerbated by the fact that most financing for education comes from domestic sources. Only three per cent comes from foreign aid.

“Unless you’re lifting domestic expenditure there’s no way you can be making a huge change,” says Gillard. “But often in those countries the real economy is very small, very underdeveloped, so it’s not generating a great deal of revenue.”

Increasing spending by all sources isn’t the only barrier to success, and Gillard doesn’t underestimate the task. “There are capacity constraints in many developing countries. When you see what is available on the ground, how strong the capacity constraints are, it really strikes you.”

“They’re so short of teachers, for example, that even if every person who went to university today elected to do teaching they still wouldn’t be graduating enough teachers to fill the gaps,” she says.

“We need a huge lift from ‘business as usual’ and we haven’t accomplished that, so we’ll be urging the global community to replenish GPE funds,” Gillard says. ●

Cyndi Tebbel is a freelance writer.
Spotlighting crimes against education

In many parts of the world, governments threaten and persecute teachers for their political views and increasingly education unions are restricted in their activities or eliminated altogether. South Korea and Ecuador are two countries where the governments recently took steps to make the teacher unions illegal.

Academic freedom also comes under attack, and individual educators and unionists can be subjected to imprisonment and torture, and even killed. Recent cases involve teacher unionists in Bahrain, Colombia and Iran.

Global bodies such as Education International (EI), the International Labor Organisation, UNESCO, Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch are cooperating to protect vulnerable educators and unions. They have set up legal defence mechanisms for detained teachers and they keep the spotlight on governments that defy international law.

"Education threatens dictatorial governments because educated citizens are more critical and willing to ask authorities to be answerable for their actions," says Dominique Marlet, EI’s human and trade union rights senior coordinator.

She encourages education unions and individual teachers to give visibility to the plight facing teachers in some countries by launching solidarity appeals through various communication channels and by informing foreign ministers and diplomatic offices.

"These governments don’t like anyone to know what is happening in their countries, so exposing their transgressions is crucial," says Marlet.

Education threatens dictatorial governments because educated citizens are more critical and willing to ask authorities to be answerable for their actions.

Asia-Pacific
Despite presidential elections in Fiji in 2015, the political climate remains unstable and teachers’ rights are under threat.

“Teachers can be transferred from one school to another without any dialogue or bargaining," says Marlet. “And the fact that there are two education unions isn’t ideal because the government is always playing one against the other. It has been like that for decades.”

Prime Minister Frank Bainimarama pledged to make education a priority, and investment in new and existing schools may eventuate.

But Marlet says the situation for teachers – their wages, status, working conditions and academic freedom – isn’t improving. Many are voting with their feet by migrating to Australia, New Zealand and the United States.

"EI is watching the government and continues to provide capacity building to the unions to help them sustain their cause," says Marlet.

In Indonesia, primary school teacher and human rights activist Johan Teterissa has been imprisoned since 2007 for leading a peaceful protest that included waving the banned Republic of South Maluku flag, which enraged the then-president Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono. Amnesty International has reported that Teterissa and his co-protesters were tortured – whipped with cables, beaten with rifle butts and forced to crawl on their stomachs on hot asphalt – before being convicted of ‘rebellion’.

It is calling on Indonesian authorities to release the prisoners, who are in ill-health. Pending that, it says they should be transferred to a prison closer to their families, who live thousands of kilometres away.

South America
Colombian academic Miguel Ángel Beltrán has been in and out of jail since 2009. He was labelled a terrorist by the government, which used illegal evidence to falsely imprison him on a charge of rebellion for studying the rebel group FARC.

The organisation Justice for Colombia, international trade
unions and 5,000 academics have campaigned for Beltrán’s release. In September 2016, shortly before a referendum on a peace treaty with FARC, the Colombian Supreme Court repealed his eight-year prison sentence. Beltrán was not reinstated at Colombia’s National University.

“He’s had some teaching appointments in Argentina, thanks to the cooperation of the higher education union. But his career in Colombia is finished,” says Marlet.

In Ecuador, EI is following the “persecution” of the teacher union National Union of Educators (UNE).

“The president, Rafael Correa, is a social democrat and his election [in 2007] was considered good news for trade unions and the social movement,” says Marlet. Ecuadorians head to the polls on February 17 to elect federal lawmakers. “We’re not sure how this situation will evolve. In the meantime, the ministry of labor [in charge of registering unions] has set up all kinds of regulations that organisations have to adhere to in order to be recognised as legal entities.

“They’ve found a gap in the procedure that the education union followed, and the UNE, which has existed for 70 years, has been de-legalised.”

Iran
EI is also urging member organisations to firmly protest the unwarranted six-year jail sentence imposed on Esmail Abdi, a leader of the Tehran Teacher Trade Association, for “assembling and colluding against national security”. EI has told authorities of the Islamic Republic of Iran that the charges are unjust and contravene various human rights conventions in the context of protecting freedom of expression and association, and that the union has a right to be consulted on education policies.

“They are attempting to silence teachers’ grievances through repression and the extended incarceration of unionists and activists,” says EI general secretary Fred van Leeuwen.

Iran’s revolutionary guards arrested Homa Hoodfar, a Canadian-Iranian professor of social anthropology, while she was undertaking research. After three months of intense psychological interrogation, Hoodfar, 65, spent 112 days in Iran’s notorious Evin prison, sometimes in solitary confinement, for “dabbling in feminism and security matters”. EI, Canadian and international supporters rallied behind Hoodfar, whose release was granted on “humanitarian grounds” in September.

Cyndi Tebbel is a freelance writer.
Monitoring their every move

At Chatswood High School in Sydney, PE teacher Emily Graham uses devices and apps in her classes to monitor performance and provide instant feedback.

Her students wear chest-mounted GoPro cameras when playing games or doing drills. "Teachers and students can watch the playback and analyse technique, and the students also learn by watching their position on the field relative to the ball," says Graham.

Students make their own short videos or GIFs of physical activities during circuit training and put them into a Google Slides presentation app. By listening to an embedded voiceover commentary, it’s easy for them to understand what they need to do – “and there’s no need for me to explain it 30 times”.

Slow-motion video is used in providing feedback, rather than relying on verbal explanation alone. "We examine technique and see where any adjustment is needed. Students can [more easily] see any mistakes they are making."

As for motivation, just the simple act of wearing a heart rate monitor or step-counting pedometer personalises PE and makes students more interested in their effort and activity.

Comparing data
At Gungahlin College in the ACT, year 11 and 12 exercise science teacher Aaron Hill fits students with heart rate monitors for rowing and running at different intensities.

"Students compare results with each other and, as a class, we discuss energy system interplay and fuel contribution using data that’s immediately available. We can talk about what’s happening and why, rather than wait until the next class.”

Hill and his colleagues create half-hour podcasts on topics covered in class, based on the latest research and using real-life examples. As well as being an initial teaching tool, the podcasts are an appealing method of revision.

“We try to make them engaging and entertaining, using a conversational style rather than reading from a script,” he says.

Access for all
A big challenge in using technology is equity of access, says Dr Amanda Benson, senior lecturer in exercise sciences and PE at RMIT University, in Melbourne.

“Getting the technology is easy for some schools, but not for others with smaller budgets. One solution is to access technology from the library, or buy class sets rather than each student having to purchase their own.”

Another consideration is the data students generate. “Who owns it?
There’s an app for just about anything, and that includes many aspects of PE, from understanding muscle movement to “fleeing from zombies”. Emily Graham at Chatswood High School uses the Coach’s Eye Video Analysis app to record students’ sporting performances.

“They can clearly see what they are doing right or wrong and how to improve,” says Graham, “and teachers can add annotations and voice-over comments”. Graham films all of her lessons and uploads them to YouTube for students who have missed a class.

“Technology has given us more access to resources. For example, I’m not a yoga instructor, but I can access specialised videos online that I can play in class.”

She also uses an app called Plickers that provides a multiple choice test using QR codes. “I can scan the room immediately to see which students know the material. It’s great for students because they aren’t embarrassed in front of their classmates if they don’t know an answer,” says Graham.

Pokémon Go gets students outside and moving. “One child who didn’t like sport told me he did 15,000 steps in one day chasing Pokémon,” says Graham.

Anatomy and physiology apps such as iMuscle show students the muscles in action during specific exercises and stretching. They can be used to assign personalised workout sessions and progress can be recorded in the app for feedback and analysis.

“Students can see the mechanics in limbs and the skeletal system, and make adjustments accordingly,” says Graham.

Zombies, Run! is an immersive audio drama app that talks students through strategies to escape from zombie hordes. “It turns exercise into a game, telling students, for example, that they need to reach a location in five minutes; so they have to run to get there. Students walk, jog or sprint along with the story.”

The Hudl app is used at Gungahlin College, in the ACT. “A slow-motion camera films a cyclist on a bike with different seat heights, or bouncing balls to show how they react on different surfaces in different temperatures, or how different shoes or barefoot running can change a runner’s cadence on a treadmill,” says teacher Aaron Hill.

In health classes, Graham introduces students to the Smiling Mind and Headspace meditation apps. “A lot of students suffer from anxiety, and I’ve seen firsthand that these apps can help some of them.”

Cynthia Karena is a freelance writer.
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First Language App
(Android, iOS)
Produced by the Australian Literacy and Numeracy Foundation, the First Language app includes a digital dictionary and a sounds and letters app. The Foundation works with Indigenous communities to develop digital resources in first language, such as dictionaries. It aims to preserve endangered Indigenous languages and teach first language literacy. First language speakers record their language for students to learn. A turtle in the app takes students through how to draw the shape of a letter and how to make the sound, says Richards. “The turtle won’t let students make an incorrect shape.”

Reading Doctor
(Android, iOS)
This is a reading improvement suite of apps that teaches students to read and spell using synthetic phonics, which links letter patterns and speech sounds. “We use this in reading groups, and it’s a great app for independent work. The junior students love it as they can proceed at their own pace,” says Richards.

Book Creator
(Android, iOS)
Students at Richard’s school make ebooks in both English and Pitjantjatjara languages. They can add text, music and images, including photos and videos. “It’s amazing after a class bush trip to have students create an ebook on how to make bush medicine or cook goanna, as well as reflecting on visits to the city or the store,” says Richards. “This is a great app for younger students as well as for older students who like to make books for the younger children,” she says, adding that she wants activities that enable students to produce something quickly so they stay focused and motivated.

More apps to explore...

iBooks Story Time for Apple TV
(iOS)
Reading books out loud makes for an engaging reading experience. iBooks StoryTime for Apple TV takes this a step further into paperless territory. The app displays books on the screen and students can flip through the pages themselves, or choose the narration option. Some books have sound effects and words are highlighted on the screen as they’re read aloud.
The way students think about mathematical problems is as important as coming up with the correct numerical answers.

BY MARGARET PATON

Counting on thought

Dealing with student misconceptions and understanding how numeracy cuts across all curriculum areas are issues at the crux of developing mathematical thinking in secondary schools.

Maths thinking is a particularly non-uniform area of learning. Research indicates that, in any one maths class, students could be operating on as many as seven levels that span primary and secondary degrees of understanding.

Top-ranking student misconceptions include decimals (thinking the numbers after the decimal point are whole), ratio and proportion (assuming ethics or fairness come into play), algebra (understanding rate as it applies to function) and probability (believing previous outcomes affect subsequent ones).

Overcome these misconceptions and students are truly on their journey towards maths thinking, which isn’t just about ‘getting’ maths processes, says maths education researcher Merrilyn Goos. It involves asking if something makes sense, recognising that you could be wrong, having strategies for getting unstuck, and working out when to try something else.

“Mathematical thinking is messy, it’s not necessarily linear. It can go around in circles and you can go off on tangents,” says Goos, a professor at the University of Queensland’s School of Education.

“That means it’s not easy to teach. As a teacher, you have to model it yourself and show the messiness when you go down the wrong track and recover from that.”

“Textbooks present maths as beautifully neat, but what is presented is the end point of the process. It’s not the way we think about interesting maths problems.”

Real-life purpose

In the second edition of Teaching Secondary School Mathematics: Research and practice for the 21st century (Allen & Unwin, due for publication in March), Goos, co-authors Colleen Vale and Gloria Stillman, and other experts, explain research insights and practices for teaching maths well. The book also covers numeracy, named as a general capability in the Australian curriculum.

“Numeracy is maths with a real-life purpose - not maths for dummies - and it’s more than just about numbers,” says Goos. “It’s about everything mathematics does, and it involves high-level thinking, judgment and decision-making. It doesn’t just live inside the mathematics curriculum.”

Goos and other researchers have mapped out the ‘numeracy fingerprint’ for every subject.

“The purpose is to help teachers see the numeracy demands and opportunities in the subjects they teach. For example, the history curriculum mentions timelines from Year 1 to 10, but only asks students to sequence historical events. You also need to know about scale to show how far apart these events are in time. This is especially important for events that happened in different parts of the world at the same time, or in overlapping time periods. If students can’t construct accurate timelines they won’t be able to understand relationships between historical events.”

Exploring ideas

Students who don’t understand multiplicative thinking are struggling the most with ratios and proportions, says Vale, associate professor in mathematics education at Deakin University.

“For year 5 to 8 students it’s important and crucial in all walks of life, but some of the maths textbooks in use don’t fully explore the range of proportional ideas.
This edition includes new research and insights about teaching maths.

"Students bring a whole lot of other beliefs about the way things should work in the world. It’s not that they are wrong. They need to be thinking about the mathematical answer, using additive rather than multiplicative maths processes, and be aware there are other solutions than those based on the assumptions you make in the real world." It’s about students having a "critical orientation," says Goos. This means asking questions about supposed facts presented, such as election campaign promises (can the government afford that?) or what categories of non-working people are included or omitted in arriving at the official unemployment rate.

Another student misconception that adults keep perpetuating concerns probability, such as tossing a coin or when the next lottery numbers will come up. "Newspapers will publish how many weeks since particular lotto numbers came up, as if it’s their turn to come up again. Mathematically, that’s completely wrong."

Online tools

Digital tools and resources are increasingly more accessible. Think of the free online software GeoGebra or the free coding site ScratchEd.

Goos points to Web 2.0 as a future star tool: "There’s still a long way to go in doing that. Some of our maths teachers still want students to do, based on their particular learning needs, and sometimes digital tools help you identify those learning needs. At other times they are useful for practice. "When it comes to using technology to explore and investigate maths concepts, some of our maths teachers still want to be more in control and choose what will happen. They don’t know what to say when a student says ‘Look at what the technology can do.’"

Perhaps part of the problem is teachers’ disposition to maths; the way they feel is that they are wrong. But can it boost mathematical understanding? Perhaps not yet, says Vale, who sees it helping lower primary school students develop their maths skills. "There’s still a long way to go in doing exploration with software, especially in junior secondary years. "You need to have a selection of things for students to do, based on their particular learning needs, and sometimes digital tools help you identify those learning needs. At other times they are useful for practice. "When it comes to using technology to explore and investigate maths concepts, some of our maths teachers still want to be more in control and choose what will happen. They don’t know what to say when a student says ‘Look at what the technology can do.’"

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RECESS

Matt Scott has developed ways to put the practical purpose back into learning to boost student engagement.

BY MARGARET PATON

Keeping it real

MATT SCOTT

This year he’ll be taking up a NSW Premier’s Scholarship to explore STEM and project-based learning in the United States.

STEM is integrated into the curriculum for all Year 7 and 8 students at Canobolas. All students also have the opportunity to complete project-based STEM learning at the school’s STEM centre, regardless of their ability. In Years 9 and 10, students can choose STEM electives before pursuing in-depth study with specialist STEM teachers for the Higher School Certificate.

Scott says it was the students’ varied levels of engagement that prompted him to take on the STEM challenge.

In technology classes they were working with their hands and learning from peers about skills relevant to their lives. We wanted to replicate that project-based learning success and apply it to maths and science where we were seeing disengagement and behaviour issues.”

For example, the STEM approach taken to engage students in learning about adaptations in science started with a visit to Dubbo Zoo.

“We then got them to build a standardised Lego robot and challenged them to use problem solving and coding to give their robot one adaptation that would enable it to survive the longest in a robot war.” The students could apply to the task their knowledge of how animals and plants adapt to their environment.

Scott gets input from organisations and businesses where students eventually seek training and employment.

“We say, ‘Look at our program. We’re teaching them to be better collaborators, creative thinkers and problem solvers. What do you need your future employees to be?’ Then we bring the findings back to our program.”

If students can’t make a connection between what you’re teaching them and what’s happening in their lives, they won’t see the point of it...

Margaret Paton is a freelance writer.
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