Australian Educator

Early childhood
Low pay and uncertainty threaten sector

Revolution school
There’s more to the story than we saw on TV

Indigenous rights
How the Wave Hill walk-off woke up Australia

Technology toolkit
Why virtual reality could rewire learning

We’re on board
The battle for Gonski continues
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Celebrating teachers

This year’s events to celebrate World Teachers’ Day on 28 October take on a certain historical significance.

It’s 50 years since a conference of governments met in Paris to agree on rights and responsibilities for teachers and international standards for their education, recruitment, employment, teaching and learning conditions. The recommendations to the conference were sponsored by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) and the International Labour Organisation (ILO). The 1966 agreement provided an important set of guidelines to promote teachers’ status in the interest of quality education.

UNESCO later began World Teachers’ Day to mark the event. Education International encourages education unions to participate so that the voice of teachers is heard around the globe. World Teachers’ Day is also a reminder to governments of their obligation to improve the status of teachers.

**What can you do?**
UNESCO suggests celebrating the profession by helping to generate awareness about teacher issues. “Take the opportunity of the day to discuss, compare, learn, argue, share and improve.”

Meanwhile the annual UNESCO Hamdan prize for outstanding practice and performance in teaching will be awarded on the day.

The US$300,000 prize, created in 2008 to support the improvement of teaching and learning quality in achieving the Education for All goals, is awarded every two years. It is equally divided between three winners whose projects aim to improve the performance and effectiveness of teachers.

**Contact wtd@unesco.org to find out about World Teachers’ Day events near you or to provide details of your own local event.**

Recognising & rewarding

Nominations are open for the Arthur Hamilton Award for outstanding contribution to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education.

The award is named in honour of Arthur Hamilton, a proud Palawa man, educator and union activist, who worked tirelessly throughout his life to promote equity and social justice, cross-cultural awareness, the recognition of Indigenous peoples and the elimination of racism in schools.

This award recognises AEU members who are committed to ensuring that all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students have the right to high quality public education throughout their lives.

The winner will receive a $1500 prize and will be flown to Melbourne to accept the award at the AEU’s annual federal conference in February 2017.

For nomination forms, contact Suzanne Lowndes on slowndes@aeufederal.org.au or (03) 9693 1800.

If you would like to know more, please contact AEU federal secretary Susan Hopgood at aeu@aeufederal.org.au or visit aeufederal.org.au
Getting to the real truth of NAPLAN

A claim by education minister Simon Birmingham that increased schools funding had failed to produce improvements in results has been described as an “unscrupulous duplicity” by researcher and Save our Schools convenor Trevor Cobbold.

Cobbold says, while total funding per student has significantly increased in real terms for private schools, public schools have suffered cuts to funding despite serving the majority of disadvantaged students.

“Cuts to public school funding have partly financed the significant increases in private school funding,” says Cobbold in a report.

Funding by federal, state and territory governments has favoured private schools, he says, while state governments have cut funding to public schools.

“You can find suggestions for school activities at dyslexiaempowermentweek.com.au

Walk together

Tens of thousands of Australians are expected to participate in the annual Walk Together march, to be held in every capital city and many regional centres around the country on Saturday 22 October.

The march, run by the Welcome to Australia organisation, aims to be “a huge celebration of diversity and a loud declaration that thousands of Australians believe we can become a nation known for our compassion, generosity and welcome”.

The organisation also provides support and resources to schools planning Walk Together events.

For more information, go to welcometoaustralia.org.au

Dyslexia Empowerment Week

Now in its fourth year, Dyslexia Empowerment Week will be held 16-22 October.

With as many as 20 per cent of the population estimated to have dyslexia, the week aims to increase awareness around the issue.

You can find suggestions for school activities at dyslexiaempowermentweek.com.au

Events

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Fleecing India’s poor

Multinational education corporations backed by global venture capital firms have spied a profitable new market — poor people in India.

Private schooling is growing significantly in India, an independent report commissioned by Education International has found.

More than 80 per cent of all students attend private schools in Hyderabad according to the report, Profiting from the Poor: The emergence of Multinational Edu-businesses in Hyderabad, India.

The city has become a laboratory for global edu-businesses such as Pearson PLC, international investors and private equity firms to test new private education models on students from low-income homes.

Hyderabad is home to about 1,300 ‘low-fee’ private schools.

Schools for the poor are expected to operate on a large scale with unqualified teachers who are paid subsistence wages. Pearson, along with venture capital firms and private foundations are promoting edu-businesses to sell products and services to the low-fee schools. They also offer school proprietors high interest loans to set up franchises and create profitable business models for schools for the poor.

It’s disturbing that the Indian government’s investment in education represents just 3.8 per cent of GDP, says Education International project director Angelo Gavrielatos.

“It is equally disturbing that the government is failing... to guarantee every student the right to be taught by qualified teachers, delivering an engaging curriculum in school infrastructure consistent with national standards.”

Overcoming poverty and hardship

The global refugee crisis has added a new urgency to Anti-Poverty Week, to be held from 16 to 22 October this year.

During the week, Australians are encouraged to organise or take part in an activity that highlights or aims to overcome poverty and hardship.

The annual event was established in Australia as an expansion of the United Nation’s annual International Anti-Poverty Day on October 17.

Poverty and severe hardship affect more than one million Australians and more than one billion people worldwide.

The main aims of Anti-Poverty Week are to strengthen public understanding of the causes and consequences of poverty and hardship, and to encourage research, discussion and action to address the problems.

Resources for groups and schools can be found at antipovertyweek.org.au
The Coalition is planning to end needs-based funding and favour private schools.

**Why we’ll keep fighting for Gonski**

Daniel* is a young sandy-haired lad I met during the election campaign and whose deep blue eyes and story have stayed with me.

He was in out-of-home care and had moved through several schools in recent years. Daniel had significant learning needs and was keen to tell me how important his MultiLit program was to him as I watched his lesson.

He was engaged, motivated and smiling as he told me that, for the first time, he had been able to attend a school camp this year because his behaviour had improved in tandem with his increased self-esteem and understanding of literacy.

Daniel’s literacy intervention program was a direct result of needs-based Gonski funding in his school. He is just one of thousands of students who are seeing the benefits of Gonski funding and need it to continue.

They are why we campaigned hard during the election and why we won’t give up the fight now. I want to thank everyone involved in the campaign.

Two things are clear: firstly, that opposition to Gonski cost Malcolm Turnbull votes, and secondly, that the Coalition has no mandate to end Gonski.

**Coalition punishes public schools**

We still don’t know the details of Malcolm Turnbull’s post-2017 funding alternative but we do know that it will leave schools almost $4 billion worse off in 2018 and 2019 alone.

We also know that it won’t be needs-based and that an independent analysis of the federal budget shows 62 per cent of the extra funding the Coalition is promising will go to private schools.

Add to that confirmed cuts in funding for public schools in Tasmania and the Northern Territory after 2017 and it is clear that public schools will be the big losers from a Coalition government.

But to do this the Coalition will still need to reach agreement with the states and territories and will require the support of the Senate to end Gonski funding.

Working with the ‘I Give a Gonski’ community, we will continue our campaign for proper, needs-based funding of our schools because we have made too many real gains for our students to give up on an issue that is vital for Australia’s future.

Thousands of schools are delivering improved results because they are at last able to give their students more one-to-one support, smaller classes, literacy and numeracy programs or time with a speech therapist.

Educators and parents are seeing the benefits of Gonski first hand and during the election campaign they stepped up to fight for it.

Our election campaign mobilised our supporters, succeeded in lifting public awareness of Gonski and changed votes in marginal seats.

Gonski needs-based funding remains vital for the future of our schools and their students. It is the only way that our students will be able to get the support they need.

We cannot have a return to the days where funding was not based on the needs of students and where students like Daniel risked missing out on support that could make a huge difference to their lives.

Every student, at every school, deserves the chance to reach their potential and the only way that can happen is through Gonski.

“We have made too many real gains for our students to give up on an issue that is vital for Australia’s future.”

*Not his real name

Correna Haythorpe
AEU FEDERAL PRESIDENT
The Coalition’s narrow election victory, its failure to control the Senate and strong public awareness and support for Gonski will make it tougher for Malcolm Turnbull to end Gonski after 2017. As will potential opposition from state and territory governments, which he needs to negotiate with on his funding deal.

The AEU’s “I Give a Gonski” campaign mobilised supporters in marginal seats across Australia, turned Gonski into a federal election issue, and helped to reduce the Coalition’s majority.

The campaign’s next challenge is to stop the re-elected Turnbull government moving away from needs-based Gonski funding to a system that will deliver a majority of extra funding to private schools, regardless of their need.

That’s not a system that serves the interests of our most disadvantaged schools and students, and should not be supported.

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In addition, the AEU ran advertisements on free-to-air and pay TV in NSW, Queensland, Tasmania and the Northern Territory — highlighting the effect the Coalition’s cuts would have on schools.

There was a strong swing against the Coalition in almost every one of the target seats, especially those in outer-suburban and regional areas. In Eden-Monaro, Lindsay and Macquarie, winning Labor candidates specifically mentioned Gonski as a key issue. Of the AEU’s other target success to their local communities. Principals and other educators helped by publicising their school’s ‘Gonski stories’ and letting people know the difference that increased resources made to them.
seats, the Coalition also lost in Hindmarsh (SA), Longman (Qld), Dobell (NSW) and Bass (Tasmania). Several others recorded bigger-than-average swings away from the Coalition.

Gonski makes a name for itself
As well as ensuring that Labor and the Greens went to the election backing the full Gonski, the AEU’s campaigning has lifted awareness of the importance of needs-based funding.

Exit polling by SKY News on election day found that education was the second biggest concern for voters (63% rated it as very important) behind Medicare and health (72%) and ahead of economic management (51%).

Awareness of Gonski among Australian voters rose from 45% in 2014 to 66% in August 2015. By April 2016, a poll of target seats showed that 84% of voters were aware of Gonski.

Support for needs-based funding was also high. AEU polling in NSW marginal seats just before the election found that:

- 61.6% supported Gonski, compared with just 17.4% who opposed it (21% undecided)
- 63.4% preferred investment in schools to Malcolm Turnbull’s cuts to company tax (36.6%)
- 51.5% were “very aware” of Malcolm Turnbull’s plans to cut Gonski funding after 2017, and another 29.8% were “somewhat aware”

Building on the momentum
The challenge now is to ensure that we build on the momentum we have generated, and the high levels of support and awareness for Gonski in the community.

It is especially crucial that we do so because the Coalition’s alternative funding model to Gonski would deliver a terrible outcome for public schools, in particular those with high levels of disadvantage.

Under the alternative funding model, schools will be $3.9 billion worse off in 2018 and 2019 alone.

Apart from the ACT, no state or territory will have its schools meet the minimum resources standard laid out in the Gonski Review.

But, most disturbingly, the new model moves away from needs-based funding and will deliver 62% of funding increases to private schools and just 38% to public schools.

Public schools in Tasmania and the Northern Territory will see their funding cut after 2017 even though they have the highest needs in Australia.

The AEU will continue campaigning for states to oppose the funding deal that Malcolm Turnbull is trying to push them into. So far no state or territory has publicly supported the new funding model. In fact, the Liberal Tasmanian Premier Will Hodgman has written to Mr Turnbull asking for the restoration of the full six years of Gonski funding.

At this stage the details of the Coalition’s funding model are unclear but there has been no indication that states will be required to maintain their own funding to schools, a key part of Gonski.

Senate can make or break future of schools funding
The Coalition will need to get amendments to the Australian Education Act passed by the Senate if it is to change funding formulas after 2017. With the balance of power held by minor parties this may prove difficult. For example, the Nick Xenophon Team has already expressed support for needs-based funding.

Polling taken directly after the election by The Australia Institute found that 64% of Australians wanted the Senate to vote to keep Gonski.

The AEU will continue to make the case to all senators that Gonski funding is delivering results, and that our schools and students need the full six years of funding.

We will keep fighting to ensure that Gonski remains a key political issue, because we know needs-based funding is the best way to ensure that all schools get the resources they need to give all their students the education they deserve.
OVERWHELMING SUPPORT FOR GONSKI

The AEU’s continuing battle for proper schools funding put Gonski on the agenda and changed votes during the federal election campaign.

Photos (clockwise from top): Big crowd of supporters awaiting the Gonski billboard on NSW South Coast; Gonski supporter in Bungendore; Teachers from Belmont State High School, Qld; Signing up a supporter in Victorian seat of Deakin; Students on NSW Central Coast want Gonski; Support staff at Sunshine Bay PS, NSW, giving a Gonski.
Thousands of volunteers flooded 17 marginal seats during the federal election campaign to help explain to voters the need for adequate and appropriate funding for schools.

And, across the country, schools proudly told their stories of improved results and learning successes thanks to their increased funding delivered by the needs-based Gonski model.

It’s been a year of intense work by branches, members, the local campaign co-ordinators in marginal seats and the thousands of Gonski supporters and volunteers, says AEU federal president Correna Haythorpe.

“We’ve let Australians know how important Gonski is for our students,” she says.

“We can be proud of what our campaign has achieved so far and we will keep fighting for our members, for our schools and for every student who needs support at school.”
Tension is building in the early childhood sector as low wages and federal government indecision clash with issues of accessibility, sector growth and respect for professionalism.

**How Canberra is failing the early learning sector**

After the re-election of the Turnbull government, Australia’s early childhood sector faces renewed uncertainty and a looming teacher shortage.

A national survey of 1,200 early childhood teachers and educators in kindergarten and long day care has found that one in five plan to leave the sector in the 12 months to June 2017, forced out by low wages, heavy workloads and a lack of public respect.

Meanwhile, the future of universal access – the provision of 15 hours a week of preschool education to every child in the year before primary – remains under a cloud, with funding due to expire at the end of 2017.

The Coalition went to the federal election without a pledge to make 15 hours an ongoing entitlement. Until now it has been funded under the former Gillard Labor government’s national partnership, extended by the Coalition while a long-term decision has been repeatedly deferred.

Demand for degree-qualified early years teachers and certificate III or diploma-qualified educators is growing, thanks to Gillard’s national quality and early years learning frameworks. They set minimum qualifications for educators and for the first time required every long day care centre to employ a qualified teacher.

From 2020, many long day care centres will be required to employ two qualified teachers.

It is in long day care that pay and morale are lowest, according to the Australian Research Council-funded study by Queensland University of Technology (QUT) and Charles Sturt University academics.

Kindergarten teachers are generally covered by union-negotiated agreements similar to those of school teachers, and several states boast pay parity between preschools and primary.

However, long day care centres are largely covered by award rates that can be as low as $18 an hour for educators and less than $33 an hour for centre directors – roughly the starting rate for a graduate school teacher.

**Planning urgency**

Governments and employers urgently need to begin workforce planning for the sector, says study co-author Susan Irvine, associate professor at the School of Early Childhood, QUT Caboolture.

A common refrain was that they could afford to work in early childhood only because their partner had a better-paid job.

Susan Irvine
Associate Professor, School of Early Childhood, Caboolture

Children suffer from high teacher churn rates.
"Steadfast" campaign win in Victoria

Preschool teachers in Victoria are receiving pay rises of 8-13 per cent, backdated up to a year, as they celebrate striking hard-fought new agreements.

Almost four years after AEU Victoria served its log of claims on employers, and after a year of industrial action and a rare statewide strike, Fair Work Australia has signed off on the agreements.

The deal sees teachers in community and local-government-run preschools win parity with school teachers at the top and bottom of the scale for the first time.

Importantly, they also secured safeguards against workloads rising under the sector’s national reforms.

AEU early childhood vice-president Martel Menz says a workload index would help “put parameters around teaching time, non-teaching time and caseload” – essential because new staffing ratios can mean classes of up to 33 children per teacher.

An excessive and unreasonable workload clause links to formal dispute resolution processes, and an annual workload survey conducted by the Education Department will feed useful data into future negotiations.

“I credit members with the outcome we got,” says Menz. “They remained steadfast throughout the campaign and they got parents really engaged as well.

“Parents understood this wasn’t about greedy teachers wanting a pay rise. It was about really significant concerns about workload and making this a better profession for their kids and the community.”

One key action was the ‘Leave on time, leave it behind’ limitation. “People were brilliant in adhering to that and it exposed their workload concerns to parents.”

Most of our teachers are 50-plus - they’re highly experienced - but there isn’t a new generation coming in behind them.

Martel Menz
AEU early childhood vice-president

High turnover

In Victoria, AEU early childhood vice-president Martel Menz estimates that 30-40 per cent of teachers and educators work in long day care and warns that the sector is losing an entire generation.

“There is a high turnover in long day care, particularly for graduate teachers, which we just don’t have in stand-alone preschools because the pay and conditions are better,” says Menz.

“Long day care is where they enter the profession, and they’re lasting such a short amount of time. And unfortunately they’re not just leaving to find work elsewhere. They’re leaving [the sector] entirely.”

Teachers in particular have dual qualifications that allow them to work in primary schools, and many end up there.

“Most of our teachers are 50-plus - they’re highly experienced – but there isn’t a new generation coming in behind them.”

Churn is bad for kids as well, says Menz.

“These children in long day care centres aren’t getting the consistency and continuity of education and care they need. They’re constantly seeing new faces coming in and out, and that’s clearly not good for them.”

The study team, which was led by QUT psychology professor Karen Thorpe, is now analysing its findings and has begun working with governments, employers and unions to plot a way forward. The federal government says it will decide next year whether to continue universal access provision beyond 2017.

“It has been put in the too-hard basket for too long. It’s the forgotten issue,” she says.

“We have some extremely motivated and highly skilled people in the workforce who are really keen to do the right thing by their children and think their work is important. We also have this continual focus on accessibility and affordability and growing the sector.

“So we have to ask: who is going to be working there?”

Dissatisfaction with pay and lack of respect was amplified among long day care staff, with nearly all feeling underpaid, says Irvine. A common refrain was that they could afford to work in early childhood only because their partner had a better-paid job.

They also felt undermined by the national discourse that described early childhood education and care as vital to allowing new parents to go back to work. Many felt that reinforced the view of their work as glorified babysitting.

“There’s been an overemphasis on workforce participation and a neglect of recognition that [early childhood] is the foundation of a modern education system,” says Irvine. “It should command more respect from the government and the community.”

AGENDA
The way Kambrya College’s teaching achievements were portrayed in the TV series *Revolution School* was impressive, but it didn’t tell the full story.

### Documenting success

In 2008, Kambrya College’s results placed it in the lowest 10 per cent of schools in Victoria, allowing it to access funding under the federal government’s National Partnerships needs-based model that was a precursor to Gonski.

Muscat says National Partnerships was “a godsend” because it allowed him to run programs targeted at high-needs students and to hire a leadership coach and leading teachers for literacy and numeracy. Within 12 months of these changes, behaviour, attendance and attitudinal data all showed improvement.

“In 2008, Kambrya’s results placed it in the lowest 10 per cent of schools in Victoria, allowing it to access funding under the federal government’s National Partnerships needs-based model that was a precursor to Gonski.”

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“From 2008 to now,” says assistant principal Keith Perry, “all the key indicator data has steadily increased but more prolonged was the literacy and numeracy data, which showed sustained improvement.”

Data-driven culture

The leading teachers were in charge of professional learning teams of teachers that met weekly during the school day to look at the data and work out ways of differentiating for their students.

“I don’t know if it fully came through [in *Revolution School*] that, since 2008, the school underwent a massive transition and it came through the blood, sweat and tears of the teachers, students and parents. It was not a ‘one-year revolution’ but an ongoing commitment to revolutionise our school.”

**Data-driven culture**

The leading teachers were in charge of professional learning teams of teachers that met weekly during the school day to look at the data and work out ways of differentiating for their students.

“The professional learning teams didn’t really get covered in the documentary, but they were instrumental in creating a data-driven...”
...the school underwent a massive transition and it came through the blood, sweat and tears of the teachers, students and parents.

"Patience, persistence and empathy"

Kambrya College teacher Sarah Day says many parents have told her that ABC TV’s Revolution School opened their eyes to the complexities of day-to-day teaching.

“They said teaching was much more complicated than they thought it was. There are things they never thought we would have to consider a part of our jobs.”

Kambrya parent David Denny says he was impressed with the way the show portrayed the amount of patience, persistence and empathy teachers put into their work.

“They put in a lot of extra effort. I think it takes a special person to be a teacher and to be able to apply those skills on a daily basis,” says Denny.

Day says the filming was a useful tool.

“It gave me the opportunity to do a video analysis of my own practice and to get great feedback from Melbourne Uni scholars.”

Principal Michael Muscat says one “terrific outcome” of the series was the way it portrayed the school as effective in the local community. But he notes that some teachers were “very annoyed” that the producers didn’t understand the hard work they had done to improve the school.

Assistant principal Keith Perry says he was happy overall with the way the documentary portrayed the school and allowed it to contribute to a national conversation about education.

“But it’s important to remember that the doco was always going to be just a snippet of our journey.”

Day adds: “I felt really positive about the experience, particularly when the show finished with all our long-term improvement data, I felt incredibly proud of the school.”
We do everything as if you are here

You work hard to support the community; we work hard to support you.

Your needs, your goals, your retirement.

You wouldn’t have it any other way. Neither would we.
Schools around the country are celebrating Enviroweek with inspiring projects that showcase how little changes can make a big difference.

Growing strong

Since 2007, Cool Australia’s Enviroweek campaign has gone from 200 participants to 300,000. It’s an astonishing achievement that has engaged teachers, students and community members across Australia in activities that focus on environmental issues across the spectrum.

From kitchen gardens and waste management programs to energy efficiency and sustainability, schools are becoming pro-active community hubs that demonstrate the positive effects of changing everyday habits.

Enviroweek (11-17 September 2016) celebrates the achievements of participating schools.

“We’re encouraging schools to engage in year-long programs of action, and they’re taking it on,” says campaign manager Lynn Freebairn.

Teachers can choose from a series of age-appropriate challenges, or link up with an existing program. Each challenge is flexible and includes free resources to help kick start and maintain momentum.

“They can be embedded into the curriculum so they become part of the student’s work in the class, not just an off-site project,” says Freebairn.

Good grounding

Repurposing school property for native gardens that attract wildlife or grow food are popular ways for students to get in touch with the environment.

At Cowandilla Primary School in South Australia, the school garden was laid out to resemble a lizard that can be seen from the air as planes come in to land at Adelaide Airport.

Murray Bridge South Primary School, also in South Australia, introduced Stephanie Alexander’s Kitchen Garden initiative, transforming a weed-filled patch into a productive year-round plot. After three years of hard work, teacher Jenna Longstaff’s Year 7 students are finally seeing the fruits of their labour. And the enthusiasm is spreading throughout the school.

Litter is now on the agenda and a recent Wipe Out Waste audit has led to upgrading the school’s recycling receptacles.

“It was amazing how much was going in the wrong bins,” says Longstaff. “Now the kids are asking if we can paint the bins so they look like monsters eating the rubbish.”

Three of Longstaff’s students have been appointed to the Youth Environmental Committee, a state-wide forum that brings representatives from across South Australia to develop leadership skills.

Green sleeves

Beyond terra firma, Australian schools will be presenting an array of events. At Victoria’s Dimboola Memorial Secondary College, students have scoured Op-shops to present a recycled fashion show.

Children at Balaklava Primary School in South Australia, who researched the effects of pollution on people and wildlife, have turned their efforts into a successful breeding program for Mitchell’s hopping mice, an endangered species.

Jenna Longstaff says teachers should embrace a thematic approach to include environmental issues in the curriculum.

“If they become responsible citizens when they leave the school, that’s a bonus,” Longstaff says.

For more information: enviroweek.org
The Wave Hill walk-off had far-reaching implications for industrial relations and Indigenous land rights but 50 years later there’s still a lot of ground to cover.

The longest industrial dispute in Australian history began in August 1966 when Gurindji man Vincent Lingiari and 200 Indigenous stockmen and their families walked off Wave Hill Station in the Northern Territory.

The Wave Hill walk-off was a protest sparked by poor or non-existent wages (often paid in meagre rations), squalid living conditions and paternalistic bosses.

Above all, the Gurindji wanted their land and to be able to control their own lives. They refused to concede until they were recognised as traditional owners.

The stop work lasted eight years. It was immortalised in Paul Kelly and Kev Carmody’s powerful tribute From Little Things Big Things Grow, and the iconic image from 1975 of Gough Whitlam pouring sand into the hands of Lingiari, symbolising the return of Gurindji land.

A year later the Northern Territory Aboriginal Land Rights Act was established, prompting broader movements for native title and land rights.

The effect of the walk-off on social and industrial issues was significant, says ACTU Indigenous officer Kara Keys.

“It was a momentous achievement against systemic racism and oppression, and a turning point for the union movement.”

Making a choice

Wave Hill presented the NT union with a stark choice: continue to protect white jobs from the threat of Indigenous workers who were paid little, or join the case for varying the industry award to include Aboriginal stockmen. It chose the latter.

Union and their members in the Territory played a big part in spreading the word and organising support from around the country. Food, money and in-kind donations poured in to support the strikers.

“Wave Hill really could have been out of sight, out of mind. But the union movement said we’re going to highlight what these workers have been exposed to and make it a national issue,” says Keys.

The 50th anniversary of the Wave Hill Walk Off is cause for celebration, but the fight is far from over.

“Attitudes and institutions are slow to change. You see it playing out in policy,” says Keys.

It was a momentous achievement against systemic racism and oppression, and a turning point for the union movement.
“There might not be protectionist acts anymore, but everything we see that is happening shows that that mentality is still alive and well in this country.”

“When you have children as young as 10 committing suicide in WA, and reports that have led to the NT Royal Commission into youth detention, it’s a big red flag. People are saying this is ‘line in the sand’ time, enough is enough.”

Ramping up
The ACTU, the AEU and other affiliate unions continue to support the ongoing fight for justice for Indigenous Australians.

This anniversary is a reminder that much more needs to be done. For example, says Keys, there’s the NT Government’s Community Development Program, which applies only to remote communities where the majority of people are Indigenous. It forces people to work 25 hours a week for nothing apart from their Newstart allowance.

‘They have no federal OH&S coverage, no federal workplace workers’ compensation coverage and no conditions of employment. This program discriminates on the basis of race, and has no place in a modern society.

“It’s right back to Wave Hill. I seriously cannot get over the irony of it, that we’re still fighting for what we fought for 50 years ago,” says Keys.

The driving force behind the Wave Hill walk-off, that Aboriginal people should have control over their own destinies, has suffered a backlash for well over a decade, says AEU NT president Jarvis Ryan.

“It goes back to the abolition of ATSIC [the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission] and beyond, and it intensified with the NT intervention in 2007.

I seriously cannot get over the irony of it, that we’re still fighting for what we fought for 50 years ago.

Kara Keys
ACTU Indigenous Officer

“In education, we’ve seen things like the winding back of bilingual programs, the attempt by the former Labor government to introduce a compulsory four hours of English a day, and now we have direct instruction programs that introduce American-scripted materials that have no cultural basis in these communities.

“The government is trying to impose its policies on people rather than working with them to get better outcomes. They’re not talking to the people who’ll be directly affected and putting them in the driver’s seat,” he says.

Go to worksite.actu.org.au for school resources including a 1968 television interview with Vincent Lingiari and a copy of the original petition to the Governor General signed by the Gurindji leaders.
Feeling fit for the challenge

Making the mid-winter transition from Term 2 to Term 3 can be nothing to sneeze at for new teachers.

BY NIC BARNARD

Stand back! This feature may be contagious. Just when they had found their feet, the winter bugs hit the cohort of four new teachers Australian Educator is following as they negotiate life in the profession.

“ syllable’s new educator representative told me that the second year was the year I’d get really sick, and she was right,” sniffs Aiko Wendfeldt, one of the two Japanese language teachers at Campbell High School in Canberra. She’s been struggling into school to conduct conversation tests. “You can’t ask a relief teacher to give the tests because they can’t speak Japanese.”

Down in Gippsland, Victoria, arts teacher Cally Grogan collapsed in a heap in the school holidays.

“I guess every teacher can identify with that,” she says. “I’d been getting a bit sick during the term. Then you get to the holiday and the body starts to relax, and it hit me hard. I collapsed on the bed and didn’t wake up for seven or eight hours.”

Melbourne primary school teacher Tom Davis says a dodgy tummy kept him off the flying fox at school camp.

Wendfeldt, Grogan and Jenny O’Reilly, an English and history teacher in Tennant Creek, in the Northern Territory, are in their second year of teaching. Davis is in his third.

The annual colds and flu season is just another facet of school life they are getting used to. Wendfeldt says she has been working to improve her skills in the last of these, using some of the 15 release days the AEU’s ACT branch has won for new teachers across their first three years.

“Even with the reports I’ve had to write - that, when I was healthy, wasn’t exactly a joyful experience but when I was sick, I could hardly spell words properly. I got my colleagues to read over my reports and there were so many mistakes.”

Using release days

Colds, tests and reports sum up Term 2 for many teachers. Wendfeldt says she has been working to improve her skills in the last of these, using some of the 15 release days the AEU’s ACT branch has won for new teachers across their first three years.

“I spent a lot of time on my comments last year, but felt they weren’t very well rounded. I wanted to write more meaningful comments. So I took two new educator days so I could study other...
teachers’ reports, because some of the teachers in my school write really amazing reports. “This time around, I think I’ve targeted a wider range of the students’ activities. Those two new educator days were really great - thanks to the union.”

O’Reilly, a former journalist, is that rare creature who can say, “I actually enjoy writing report comments.” Her background has made it one of the things she finds easier, she says. “I’ve received consistently good feedback on my report writing style. Writing comments helps me reflect on my teaching, as well as on the students’ learning. I hate giving letter grades.”

For Grogan, at Bairnsdale Secondary College in rural Victoria, the end of Term 2 means getting ready for a new crop of students. Being an art teacher, she mainly has students on six-month electives, so the new semester rings the changes.

Grogan arrived at the school towards the end of Term 1 and admits her first few months were challenging. Most new teachers in Australia are employed on contract or casually, and her move highlights the pitfalls. She’s adapting to a school serving a very different community and students than she’s used to, and with a different approach to behaviour management.

“Starting halfway through the course, it was hard to get my bearings,” she says. “I’m looking forward to starting afresh this semester with new classes, and setting expectations and directing what we do a bit more.”

She’s particularly keen about teaching photography to Year 10. “That was my major at uni, so it’s exciting.” Also firing Grogan up has been the school’s adoption of the Safe Schools program for LGBTI students and a professional development day with Safe Schools rep Joel Radcliffe.

“We’ve had some students identifying in different ways, and the school was looking for ways to support them,” says Grogan. “I’ve done a few other things with the AEU on gender diversity and sexual diversity before, so the PD was an opportunity to get a bit involved in that on the local level. It’s an issue of real importance to me.”

**Confidence growing**

At Tennant Creek High School, O’Reilly was about to take PD on developing common assessment tasks and had also made “an excellent departmental connection with a very experienced teacher who’s willing to support me and offer specific advice about my teaching area”.

She says she can feel her confidence growing. “When a colleague says, ‘We’re going to do xyz,’ I know what xyz is, instead of sitting there looking blank. It has been hard to go from being very competent in my job as an experienced newspaper sub-editor to the work-

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experience kid who has no idea what’s going on.”

Meanwhile, for Davis, at Montmorency South Primary School, the buzz was around a new maths program introduced by Rob Vingerhoets, author of Maths on the Go.

“We only had two PD sessions after school and that was enough to create a huge buzz around the school,” he says. “Everybody really wanted to tap into that inspiration and enthusiasm. It created a lot of energy and pizzazz.

“We’ve restructured our maths programs a bit and made them more hands-on and authentic. The kids have been eating it up. Kids that hadn’t been putting their hands up before have been starting to do that, and going from easy answers to harder, more complex answers and explaining their thinking.”

He’s also joined a school-wide PD on writing pedagogy. “That’s helped me get my head around how to enhance the experience for reluctant writers – like myself.”

Building links

The term has seen our new educators get further involved in school and community life outside the classroom, from Davis organising the Year 4 camp at Warburton (“Flying foxes, archery, rope walks, orienteering... it’s a fantastic camp”) to impromptu Thai lunches for Grogan with her new colleagues.

Wendfeldt was preparing for this term’s Japanese exchange, while O’Reilly was looking forward to the school formal and the annual Desert Harmony Festival.

“I like living in a small place where you can really build links and be part of something,” says O’Reilly.

Wendfeldt is now the second of our new educators to have a permanent position, alongside Davis. A Japanese citizen, she became eligible for ongoing status on gaining permanent Australian residency only this year.

Grogan is still searching for an ongoing position. O’Reilly says her 12-month contract is “still the right situation” while she’s working in Tennant Creek, but she’ll want a permanent position in the longer term.

For Wendfeldt, it was naturally cause for celebration. A colleague gave her a shiny new $1 coin from the Royal Australian Mint, dated 2016 to mark the year she got permanency.

But she also knows that, among new educators, she is lucky.

“There are so many incredibly talented teachers I have so much admiration for, and it’s really hard for them to get permanency. I’m really lucky because I teach Japanese, which not many people can do. If I was teaching SOSE [Studies of Society and Environment], it would have been much harder.”

Nic Barnard is a freelance writer.
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For many children on islands in the Pacific, climate change is a harsh reality that is already affecting their education and perceptions of the future.

BY CHRISTINE LONG

The tide that won’t turn

When Kirara Akeimo talks about the effects climate change is having on children in her country, she can cite examples that range from small details of daily life - such as taking umbrellas to school - to being prepared for and coping with natural disasters that devastate her entire nation.

Akeimo is from Tuvalu, a group of atolls and reef-ringed islands in the South Pacific, midway between Hawaii and Australia. Along with other low-lying Pacific nations including Kiribati and the Marshall Islands, Tuvalu is under serious threat from rising sea levels.

Four of the world’s 10 most natural disaster-prone countries – Vanuatu, Tonga, the Solomon Islands and Papua New Guinea – are also in the Pacific, where the frequency and intensity of cyclones and tidal surges are increasing as a result of climate change.

“The daily temperatures [in Tuvalu] have steadily increased and seem to be slowly increasing overall from the normal average of 29 degrees [Celsius] to 31 degrees,” Akeimo, from the Tuvalu Teachers Association, told the AEU’s New Educator Conference in Hobart late last year.

As the humidity increases, children and teachers lose concentration by becoming restless, uncomfortable and sleepy in the hot classrooms, she says. There is a need for fans or air-conditioning to be installed, or class times to be shifted to the cooler times of the day.

Most of the children walk to school, and intense, unpredictable rain can take its toll. “Many get drenched on the way, then go home to change and don’t return,” says Akeimo.

One answer could be for all children to carry umbrellas. Or bus services could be provided, complete with shelters the children could wait under.

Power of Pam

This is all small stuff when compared with the devastating winds and flooding tidal surges brought about by frequent storms and cyclones.

Tuvalu was one of many Pacific Island nations that fell victim to Cyclone Pam, the most intense tropical cyclone in the southern hemisphere last year (with Vanuatu being worst hit).

“Food crops and trees were damaged and many dwelling settlements were destroyed in Tuvalu,” says Akeimo. “Subsequently, schools were closed for up to three weeks.”

Waves up to five metres high swept into many of the islands, with one of the outermost islands being flooded in its entirety. Some islands’ water supplies were contaminated by seawater and declared undrinkable. An estimated 45 per cent of Tuvalu’s 10,000 people were displaced.

In the month before Cyclone Pam, a ‘regular’ king tide caused considerable damage to Tuvalu’s coastal roads.

Between 1978 and 2001, a tide gauge installed in Tuvalu by the University of Hawaii measured an average sea rise of 1.2mm a year, and the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change predicts that sea levels around the world will rise a further 40cm by the end of the century.

That may not seem too threatening in Australia, but Tuvalu’s islands average just under 2m above sea level, with a highest point of about 4.6m.

The nation is considering constructing better seawalls and more resilient housing in the hope of putting up a better fight against cyclones and tides certain to be even more powerful in the future.

Meanwhile, the Tuvalu government is seeking help to establish evacuation centres for children and their families that could also keep them safe in the event of tsunamis caused by earthquakes.

Of course tsunamis strike with little warning, so teachers and children would need to be well drilled in evacuation plans.

Food crops and trees were damaged and many dwelling settlements were destroyed... schools were closed for up to three weeks.

“Kirara Akeimo
Tuvalu Teachers Association

Drought cycle

At UNICEF, which has been playing a role in helping other climate-change affected nations with disaster risk reduction strategies, Jessika Bohr says even a simple lack of access to clean drinking water in a drought can affect basic services in schools and health clinics.
Schools in Papua New Guinea and the Pacific Islands have had to shorten their days so children can help their parents look for drinkable water.

Jessika Bohr
UNICEF’s emergency preparedness officer

“Schools in Papua New Guinea and the Pacific Islands have had to shorten their days so children can help their parents look for drinkable water,” says Bohr, UNICEF’s emergency preparedness officer, East Asia and Pacific. “Families have to spend more and more time walking or travelling great distances to access it.”

In the Solomon Islands, UNICEF has helped schools stay open by providing water containers and purification tablets. It has also trained teachers, social workers, parents and community and church leaders in child protection in emergencies.

Droughts in the region have been caused by the El Niño climate cycle, which isn’t caused by climate change, but is made more intense by it.

With signs of water shortages emerging in Timor-Leste and Cambodia, UNICEF is conducting assessments while making plans for addressing current and future problems. “For example, planning how to increase alternative water sources and how to protect children from malnutrition,” says Bohr.

Wellbeing and rights

In its recent publication Unless We Act Now, UNICEF sets out a 10-point climate agenda for children. It highlights steps that governments, the private sector and communities can take to safeguard the wellbeing and rights of children.

One point is that coordinated planning and policies on climate change adaptation, preparedness and disaster risk reduction are necessary to take into account children’s needs – including education – before, during and after severe climate events. “Schools must be safe and education must not be interrupted,” says the report.

Another point targets climate change education, awareness raising and training. “Climate change education increases the adaptive capacity of children and their communities, helps to foster environmental stewardship, and develops children’s capacity to be agents of change and active citizens. If climate change education is built into the curriculum of primary and secondary schools, and becomes part of higher, alternative and vocational education, children and young people will develop an early understanding and appreciation of all aspects of environmental sustainability, including climate change adaptation and mitigation.”

In Kiribati, studies on climate change are now a part of the school curriculum, says Tanua Pine from the Kiribati National Union of Teachers. Kiribati’s Ministry of Environment’s Curriculum Development and Resource Centre and Kiribati Teachers College have set down activities and indicators that aim to ensure the delivery of appropriate education, training and awareness programs.

Years 3-6, 7-9 and 10-12 each have set targets for incorporating content and learning outcomes on climate change and disaster risk management into their syllabuses. The aim is to further develop teaching materials and increase the number of extracurricular activities that schools conduct.

Christine Long is a freelance writer.
NEW WEBSITE FOR TEACHERS

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Earthshaking developments

Mary Franklyn was shaken to the core when she represented the AEU in an international group of teachers’ union trainers who visited New Delhi, India, in late last year. Literally shaken, that is, because an earthquake interrupted a training session.

“As the building shook, nobody moved,” says Franklyn, general secretary of the State School Teachers’ Union of Western Australia. “There were no [health and safety] procedures, so I went into panic mode and said, ‘We’re evacuating!’”

Franklyn and trainers from teachers’ unions in Canada, France and Malaysia visited New Delhi as part of the John Thompson Fellowship Union Leadership Program Asia XIV. This Education International (EI) initiative, to which the AEU contributes funding through the International Trust Fund, offered three weeks of training to state affiliates of the All India Primary Teachers Federation.

Participants engaged in workshops to increase their skills in negotiation, social dialogue, and financial, communications and strategic planning – the skills that define effective union leadership.

The earthquake aside, Franklyn experienced a ‘seismic’ shift in her appreciation of certain aspects of Indian culture. In particular, the ability of local unionists to organise without a traditional financial framework.

“I was there to train others, but I learned as much as the participants.”

Union membership is strong in India, but most members don’t pay dues and union officials don’t receive a salary. Union officials are full-time teachers. Almost everything they do is typically outside school and family hours.

“They share our commitments to children having access to quality education, and they face the same threats to achieving that goal – governmental interference, lack of funding, privatisation and increased workloads.”

Gender balancing

Awareness of and support for gender equality is growing in India, but few women occupy positions in the top levels of teachers unions. EI sought to redress this by mandating gender and generational, balance for October’s program. Twelve of the 24 participants were relatively young female union leaders and classroom teachers from various parts of the country including geographically tough and remote areas.

“It wasn’t easy for them. One woman was permitted to attend only after her husband had deemed it ‘appropriate’, and all had to work hard in making arrangements for their homes and children in their absence.

The training was extremely useful in helping to enhance participants’ leadership and managerial skills, says Shashi Bala Singh, chief coordinator in EI’s Asia-Pacific Regional office.

“One of the major achievements was the solidarity build-up among the participating organisations and leaders,” she says. “They exchanged information without hesitation in a very transparent way, helping each other find solutions to the problems unions are facing in their day-to-day operations.”

For Franklyn, the biggest takeaway was the realisation that teachers everywhere have universal goals.

“Global aims

The AEU’s International Trust Fund promotes the global development of teachers’ organisations.

The ITF provides funding to support the John Thompson Fellowship Program’s aims of improving the information exchange and understanding between Australia and other countries, and furthering the professional development of teachers and extending educational opportunities for all children.

The program, launched in 1982 by the Canadian Teachers’ Federation, is dedicated to the memory of John M Thompson, a former secretary-general of the World Confederation of Organisations of the Teaching Profession and a distinguished international advocate for education and peace.

Cyndi Tebbel is a freelance writer.
When students take part in citizen science projects, they do more than learn knowledge - they help to create it.

BY CYNTHIA KARENA

Terrifically scientific

Citizen scientist programs are a win for everyone. Students get to learn about and appreciate science and the natural environment by functioning as ‘real scientists’. Professional researchers expand their data collection on a scale they couldn’t achieve on their own. And, in the long run, the environment is better understood, which is to everybody’s benefit.

Without help, it’s impossible for many scientists to collect all the data they need, says Dr Kathryn Paige, a senior lecturer at the University of South Australia’s School of Education and co-author of the paper: Two models for implementing citizen science projects in middle school.

Observing birds can also be a valuable lesson in patience.

Using citizens to collect additional data increases the number of places where information is collected - in backyards and school playgrounds, for example. “It increases the knowledge of iconic species, their numbers, habitats and location,” says Paige.

The high school, and sometimes younger, students who participate in the programs might monitor beach sand erosion or the water quality in a river, or identify bird species or plants.

By learning to observe and record data, they develop an understanding of common species they may have previously taken for granted, and ultimately develop a connection to the natural world, says Paige. It may involve something as readily present as observing the magpies that come down to feed on food scraps left behind during school breaks. “Students can be ‘real scientists’, their data is uploaded to a central website and included in reports for scientists to analyse.”

Sitting quietly to observe birds and the like can also be a lesson in patience, and there are sometimes safety aspects to teach (don’t pick up the spiders!).

Active roles

“The lowest-level version of research is regurgitating previous knowledge in books, and cutting and pasting from websites,” says associate professor Robert Hattam, Paige’s colleague and co-author. “But real research is producing new knowledge, and citizen science projects are actively involving young people – five-year-olds as well as older students – in the production of knowledge that science is about.”

Many students say they have no idea what a scientist really does, and they can’t imagine how to be a scientist, says Darcy Moore, an English and history teacher and deputy principal at Dapto High School in NSW.

“Citizen science has the potential to help students make the link.”

Students in Moore’s Year 9 big history class submitted swabs of their saliva to National Geographic’s Genographic Project, which is analysing patterns in DNA to better understand people’s ancestral pasts.

“Through their participation, students can play an active role in this historic endeavour. They want to do something real, not just fill in worksheets. Citizen science is doing science rather than just learning about it.”

When National Geographic

BRIEFLY

Primary and high school students can take part in a wide range of citizen science projects.

They collect data used in genuine scientific studies.

The tasks they do and skills they learn complement many areas of the school curriculum.

Using citizens to collect additional data increases the number of places where...
As an authentic inquiry-based experience, citizen science can be applied in all of the science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) areas, says Dr Erin Roger, citizen science coordinator at the NSW Office of Environment and Heritage.

"Key competencies that have been attributed to citizen science include science and technology, digital competence, sense of initiative and entrepreneurship," says Roger, whose organisation’s citizen science programs for schools include monitoring water and soil quality, animals and plants.

“We’ve been involved in projects where students are able to relate the kind of tests and measurements they are making in the field to what they have learnt in the classroom, for example with pH, salinity and experimental design.

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“We’ve been involved in projects where students are able to relate the kind of tests and measurements they are making in the field to what they have learnt in the classroom, for example with pH, salinity and experimental design.

The process was made possible through partnerships that the school has developed, including one with the University of Wollongong, which funded the Geno 2.0 kits the class used.

“The students were very committed to the project and excited by this journey, and they organised their own meetings out of class time,” says Moore. “The only problem was the eight-week wait for their results.”

In response to a Twitter posting by Birdlife Australia, Moore invited the organisation to come in and talk to his students. A representative of the Birds in Backyards program introduced them to the Aussie Backyard Bird Count and outlined the latest urban bird research. She showed students how to set up a monitoring regime and discussed potential project ideas.

Cynthia Karena is a freelance writer.
The latest technology seems to be a surefire way to make students goggle-eyed about learning.

BY CYNTHIA KARENA

Virtually mind-goggling

The technology is on the cusp of being used in classrooms, says Gregory, who is also a member of the university’s information and communications technology education team. As VR becomes cheaper and more accessible, schools can start exploring its educational opportunities.

“Seeing a virtual world on a screen is immersive, and using the goggles even more so. Your view moves as your head moves. It’s as if you are there in the environment.

"A third of the people I had using a rollercoaster app on VR goggles had to stop because they were feeling sick."

She is, as you may have guessed, talking about virtual reality (VR) headsets. The motion-tracking gadgets – also known as VR goggles – are designed for immersion in virtual worlds, from deep sea diving to the Egyptian pyramids to outer space.

Student engagement will be fantastic, says Dr Sue Gregory, chair of research at the University of New England, in NSW. “To be in the world of Macbeth – to see the ghosts and avoid the vines as they come to grab you. In physical education, students can learn balance by walking along a virtual tightrope. In science, students can blow things up without any consequences and create chemical reactions without toxic fumes.”

Google Cardboard goggles
"The learning goes much further when they start to produce their own three-dimensional worlds, rather than just walking around in a simulated environment. And creating virtual worlds is cheaper than buying a class set of VR goggles and associated apps. “It’s early days. I’m still researching and looking around, and I’m expecting more educational apps around soon.”

Cardboard alternative

The expense of class sets of VR headsets can be minimised by using Google Cardboard goggles, which turn a mobile phone into a VR headset. They can be purchased for less than $20, says Gregory. “Google Cardboards aren’t as immersive as the [state-of-the-art] Oculus Rift headset [released in March this year] and the graphics aren’t as good, but they are a great way to get started.”

Cynthia Karena is a freelance writer.
An Australian literacy and numeracy e-learning program is proving to be a big hit at home and around the world.

By Margaret Paton

Free Aussie learning app takes on the world

When the creators of an educational product say their mission is to “radically improve education around the world”, you can usually take it with a pinch of salt. However, with Skoolbo, an Australian-designed online literacy and numeracy program for primary schools, the claim may have some weight.

The program has been localised for Australia, New Zealand, Canada, Mexico, India, the United Kingdom, the United States and the Philippines. China is next.

Students can compete with others at more than 44,000 schools worldwide, and there is also a preschool version.

In Australia, since its introduction in February 2014, Skoolbo has spread by word of mouth to more than 5,000 primary schools – about two-thirds of the total number – where it is being used to boost learning.

Kindergarten to Year 6 students play for free, online or offline, on a desktop computer or smartphone. If they answer a specific number of questions correctly, they are rewarded with certificates or prizes.

Fun and motivation

At remote Wyangala Dam Public School, 40 kilometres from Cowra in NSW, principal Greg Pomering says his students started using Skoolbo a year ago and there were a few teething problems.

“But it’s running seamlessly now. The students have found it a lot of fun and are learning at their own level. Importantly, the questions increase in difficulty and speed, motivating them to try harder.”

The school receives reports on what the students are achieving and uses them for assessment.

Pomering says the program works well for students with special needs because it has many phonic words that are sounded out for them to repeat.

That aspect of Skoolbo is echoed by teacher Nadine Dwyer at Carenne Public School in Bathurst, NSW, which also caters for students with disabilities.

“For the first time, we’ve found an e-learning program that engages students with a broad range of disabilities,” she says.

“It’s astounding to see a child with limited communication show us their talents with literacy and numbers... to see a teenager who has continually failed academically discover success and build self-esteem.”

Dwyer says Skoolbo’s biggest appeal is that every child can take part “at their own level, with no shame and no judgment”.

Breaking barriers

The global, for-profit Skoolbo organisation was founded by former Australian teacher Shane Hill (also of Mathletics, Spellodrome, da vinci Decathlon and Friend Our World fame). Fairfax Media is a major partner.

In May this year Skoolbo won a SIIA CODiE Award for Best Game-Based Curriculum Solution, which Colin Brown, Skoolbo’s chief operating officer, says is akin to an international Oscar for education.

He recommends children play the program between three and five times a week for up to 20 minutes.

“We believe radical [educational] improvement is possible,” says Brown. “We don’t subscribe to the philosophy that children should gain two to five per cent improvement a year. There should be no barriers to learning.

“Our goal is to change the educational outcomes of 500 million children in five years [by 2020], and we’re ahead of schedule. We’re focusing on where we can make a difference – early development from ages five to eight.”

“When you take the cost of internet connectivity and devices out of the equation, we believe that students across the world can learn to read for less than 10 cents.”

Margaret Paton is a freelance writer and casual primary school teacher.

Resources

Skoolbo: skoolbo.com.au
CODIE Awards: siia.net/codie/2016-Winners
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Anti-Poverty Week
16-22 October 2016

Poverty and severe hardship affect more than a million Australians. Around the world more than a billion people are desperately poor.

In Anti-Poverty Week help fight poverty and hardship.
- A poverty information poster competition to be displayed in the local community
- A school event to raise awareness and money for a local charity
- A School Assembly speaker to talk about poverty and related activities during the week

For more information and ideas for activities:
- visit www.antipovertyweek.org.au
- email apw@antipovertyweek.org.au
- call 1300 797 290
**My best app**

**Instagram**  
(Android, iOS; free)  
The photosharing app is a source of inspiration and ideas for D’Alfonso, who follows Italian grammar posts such as @instantlyitaly and @aforismi_official. “People put up an Italian verb to think about, or a noun and photo, or a fun fact about Italian grammar that I can discuss in my classes.” To find more posts about the language, D'Alfonso searches for Italian themed hashtags, such as #dailyItalian or #Italiangrammar.

**Scaffolder**  
(Windows; free)  
D’Alfonso uses Scaffolder to map out his entire teaching year, and to generate “big picture” plans. “I can easily plan the whole year. I can look at what I did last year and clearly see what needs to be done the following year. The main benefit for me is forward planning without a great deal of effort. The cool thing is that this app can create lessons from that overall plan. It’s a mind-map app on steroids.”

**Quizlet**  
(Android, iOS; free)  
Students and teachers can create flashcards on any topic, or choose from flashcards designed by other Quizlet users. “Quizlet goes beyond creating vocabulary lists,” says D’Alfonso, who uses the app so his students can practise verb conjugation. “It’s not just a repository of vocabulary. It allows me to easily create a flashcard package so I can pair verbs with verb tenses – for example a travel verb list with past, present and future tenses.” Offline access lets students study wherever they are. “This means they can practise on the go, when they’re travelling.”

**Developed by nine-year old Australian schoolgirl, Anvitha Vijay, Smartkins Animals lets children record their voices speaking the names of animals colourfully illustrated in a series of digital flashcards. It’s a simple, engaging app, using talking as well as pictures and reading to learn names of animals. There are 10 animals in the free pack, and a $1.49 in-app purchase reveals more than 100 others.**

**Ngurrara - Australian Aboriginal Interactive Storybook**  
(iOS; free)  
Ngurrara is an engaging app suitable for a range of ages that tells a Dreamtime story about the Ngarluma people in the Pilbara region of Western Australia. Students follow the journeys of three young Ngarluma men as they fish, hunt, and carve their stories on rocks. There are illustrations with sound, animation and voice-overs. Students can also try their hand at rock carving. As they draw on a rock with their fingers, realistic rock scraping sounds are made as they carve their own stories.

**Anthony’s Tip**  
“Evaluate technology thoroughly. Is it a fad and just a time waster? Or is it useful, enhancing your professional progress or students’ learning? When students use apps, encourage them to ask questions and engage. It’s all about using the technology to make them think.”

**SHARE YOUR SECRETS**  
Which apps do you find useful in the classroom? Let us know at educator@hardiegrant.com.au
Research showing that looking after infants and young children is never ‘just babysitting’ has transformed the expected standards in early childhood education.

BY MARGARET PATON

**Children of the revolution**

The ball game for early childhood educators has changed significantly in the past two decades, and we’re not just talking about kids at play. Advances in pedagogical theories, practices, regulations and frameworks relating to children under nine years old are continuing to transform and professionalise the sector.

Children are no longer viewed from a narrow cognitive developmental perspective as individuals without any connection to the world they live in, says Dr Joanne Ailwood, senior lecturer in early childhood education and care at the University of Newcastle.

“We understand them as much more richly and deeply connected to their families and communities,” she says. “It has enabled us to think of children as much more competent and able to do more than we have given them credit for in the past. Given space and opportunity, they can do much more than we often expect.”

With that change, the introduction of the Australian Quality Framework’s seven quality standards and Early Years Learning Framework, plus the recently updated Early Childhood Australia Code of Ethics, comes an impetus for greater professionalism among early childhood practitioners and teachers.

“We don’t just wheel out the collage trolley, play with children and change nappies,” says Ailwood, who has co-edited the book *Understanding Early Childhood Education & Care in Australia: Practices and Perspectives* (Allen & Unwin, 2016) with Dr Wendy Boyd and Dr Maryanne Theobald. “We observe children closely and we are closely engaged in educational decision-making. What we do has thought and an intention behind it.

“We need to be more articulate as a field and profession because our jobs are incredibly complex.”

**Beyond tolerance**

One shift has been to acknowledge early childhood educators’ professional knowledge and their expertise in partnering with families and communities.

Another has been from tolerance of diversity to valuing diversity, respectful relationships, and cultural competence and understanding, which the code of ethics underpins.

Sticking points for professionalism in the sector include a lack of pay parity with school teachers in some states, and that early childhood educators work with children eight hours a day, leaving little time for programming and writing up documentation.

While trainee educators are encouraged to keep a journal to reflect on their practice, it may not help them develop.

She suggests educators discuss issues with more experienced colleagues, attend conferences and workshops, and create informal local peer groups.

Theobald echoes the need for peer work and urges teachers to ask their centres to subscribe to key academic journals, such as the Australasian Journal of Early Childhood.

“You need to be up to date with current issues, not only in your state, but nationally and internationally,” says Theobald.

Overall, teachers are being “more reflective, more accountable, having to show and really think about their practices” in relation to the quality standards,” she says.

The national curriculum for schools has also put the spotlight on educational outcomes.

There has been a question about “the level of push-down of the academic curriculum (in early
childhood education] and the value of that, with moves to ensure teaching styles are matched to learning styles of children in the early years”.

Ailwood says professionalism in the sector is increasingly about performance management. “We’re seeing the impact of having an external accreditation authority and new ways of measuring our work. This affects the everyday work of teachers. We’re constantly raising the bar in terms of quality.”

**Infant undervaluing**

A wealth of research confirms the early years as critical to lifelong learning. Synapse connections crucial to learning peak at around age five, and research indicates the physical and human environment have a significant influence on these connections.

This is changing the way early childhood education is viewed. “Learning is often only valued when it is explicit, such as when children begin to read and write, and recite numbers up to 10. However, deep learning occurs from birth onwards, and infants express themselves in ways that communicate their intent, so long as they have adults to respond to their expressiveness.”

Boyd cites United States Nobel laureate and Harvard University economist James Heckman whose research found that, for every $1 invested in early childhood education up to age five, $7 was saved in terms of educational improvement, lower delinquency and less likelihood of being jailed.

“Former prime minister Kevin Rudd used that quote when he came into power in 2007 and introduced the

**Risk aversion**

Boyd says the care aspects of early childhood education – feeding, changing nappies, toileting, putting to bed – are “opportunities to connect” in relationships with children. Some of her students say of working with babies, “I can’t work with them. They can’t talk.” But Boyd encourages them to communicate with infants, who, over time, become very responsive.

She urges early childhood practitioners to reflect on how they view infants. Do they see them as needy, for example, rather than as developing, capable and competent? “If we view children as innocent and vulnerable, we are unlikely to let them take risks, [and] that may inhibit their development.”

Boyd notes the Early Years Learning Framework has broadly prescribed learning outcomes for infants from birth to age five.

“The five outcomes can be applied across the lifespan really, such as having a strong sense of identity, wellbeing, to be effective communicators,” she says.

Margaret Paton is a freelance journalist and casual primary school teacher.
Concern for students with learning difficulties led Joyce Michael into her role of devising and coordinating ways to help them.

BY CYNDI TEBBEL

Paying it forward

JOYCE MICHAEL

Joyce Michael has been a teacher for more than 20 years, motivated and inspired by her mother, an immigrant from Croatia whose father didn’t believe in educating girls.

“My mother only finished primary school,” says Michael, “but she loved reading and vowed that if she ever had children, she’d make sure they could all go to school.”

Because of their mother’s “insistence and persistence”, Michael and her three siblings all have university degrees. They represent the best of generational change, and Michael has spent her career paying that forward by helping children who struggle in school to discover the joy of learning.

As learning support coordinator at Lynwood Senior High School in suburban Perth, she manages teachers, education aides and volunteers who deliver support programs focused on literacy and engagement.

Michael started at Lynwood 18 years ago as the reading resource teacher. It surprised her that some new students couldn’t read. There were 12 and 13-year-olds with reading levels as low as those of six-year-olds.

Over time, she discovered that myriad factors can affect a child’s grasp of literacy and began developing strategies to help students with learning difficulties and disabilities.

“You can look at what happened in primary school, if they had a word-processing difficulty, dyslexia or other learning difficulty. But it can also be a result of social, emotional, home or mental health issues.”

The 14 teacher aides and 20 volunteers (former students, parents and retirees) in Michael’s team work one-on-one with the students. Her role includes timetabling, assessing students’ needs and matching them with the person best suited to work with them.

Extended support

Lynwood includes students with a disability in mainstream classes, so Michael collaborates with teachers to make sure the programs presented to them have the required modifications.

As a level three, equivalent to a head of department, she has been able to extend support programs for students across the board.

They include a community access program to give disabled students work experience and help them learn to become more independent.

A student host program for Years 7 and 8 builds new skills for participants while they run errands and provide other in-school support.

An after-school homework club started with two participants and now has 30, and Lynwood’s lunchtime chess club recently took part in an interschool tournament for the first time.

Michael is also a member of the student services team that meets weekly to discuss students who need individual case management.

“If a student isn’t coming to school or is disengaged, we want to ensure something is in place for them,” she says.

That may include being by Michael’s side during recess, or in her office, where she has an open-door policy.

“I never know what I’m going to get. Sometimes the phone’s ringing, someone’s at the door, I’m in the middle of a meeting... But they make up the bright moments of a teacher’s life, when you realise that what you’re doing is worth it.”

Cyndi Tebbel is a freelance writer.

WE ASK ...

If a student isn’t coming to school or is disengaged, we want to ensure something is in place for them.

Why do you teach?

We’d love to hear your best tips for engaging young minds. Email us at educator@hardiegrant.com.au if you’ve got something to share. You can provide a written piece or we’d be happy to interview you.

Joyce Michael of Lynwood Senior High School

Cyndi Tebbel
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