Closing the Gap
Indigenous leaders “have the solutions”

Teaching refugees
Profiteers prey on children in crisis

New educators
How they deal with unpredictable events

Online learning
Free courses boost teachers’ confidence

Their future at stake
Malcolm Turnbull wants to cut $22b in Gonski funding
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Little J & Big Cuz are helping close the gap

A ground-breaking new television series – the first animated children’s show to feature Indigenous culture – is now screening and available online.

The TV show, called Little J & Big Cuz, aims to support successful transitions to school for young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.

Featuring the voices of Miranda Tapsell, Deborah Mailman and Aaron Fa’aso, each episode is designed to build children’s understandings of their backyard, the school yard and country.

The Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER) initiated the series in response to studies showing that educational television programs can help improve children’s transition to school.

It’s not just about getting children ready for school, says ACER Foundation Director Deirdre Jackson. It’s also about getting schools ready for children, following a two-way learning model and focusing on the strengths that Indigenous children bring to school. ACER convened a team of Indigenous Education experts to develop a suite of Little J & Big Cuz educational resources mapped to the Early Years Learning Framework and the Australian Curriculum.

“The educational resources model a way for early years educators to bring Indigenous perspectives into the classroom as part of daily conversations – thereby creating classroom environments in which Indigenous children feel valued and have a sense of belonging,” says Jackson.

Focus on the early years is fundamental to Closing the Gap, says Gerry Moore, chief executive of SNAICC - National Voice for our Children.

“As Australia’s peak body representing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, SNAICC is incredibly proud to be part of this landmark project,” Moore says.

Little J & Big Cuz airs on NITV at 7:30pm AEST on Fridays and at 4pm AEST weekdays. You can also visit littlejandbigcuz.com.au to watch, play and learn.

How teaching a lesson saves school costs

Students at two Adelaide high schools have been using smart technology provided by SA Water to identify water and cost savings at their schools.

The pilot program, which is being run at Heathfield High School and Oceanview College, has allowed students to track their school’s water consumption to see how they could be more water-efficient.

SA Water says other schools would like to be involved in the smart metering program and it’s considering extending the program next year.

The smart metering program has direct links to the Australian Curriculum in the areas of Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics and is incorporated into the students’ studies.

The program is driven by the students, says Oceanview College teacher Bec Wouters.

“Students have the freedom to focus on wherever they believe they can save water, making the project engaging and authentic for them.”
UK teachers fight funding crisis

Teachers in England are threatening a one-day strike to highlight their concern over severe cuts to school funding that are causing increased class sizes and reduced resources.

With a general election due soon, the National Union of Teachers is ramping up its campaign to increase funding.

“We have head teachers resigning, sending begging letters to parents and lobbying MPs and the prime minister on the disastrous effect a lack of funding is having on their pupils,” says NUT general secretary Kevin Courtney.

The union has calculated that 98 per cent of schools will be worse off if the government implements its new so-called fair funding model.

The model robs one local authority to increase funding in another, NUT president Anne Swift told the AEU’s federal conference earlier this year. High workloads are leading to teacher burnout. The number of teachers leaving the profession, plus changes to teacher training have led to a shortage of teachers, says Swift.

“Local groups of schools are given the task of training, with little extra resources, putting even more pressure on existing teachers. The government removed the necessity to employ qualified teachers and classes are being covered by ‘teaching assistants or non-qualified staff,’ she says.

“In England a newly qualified teacher’s salary starts at about A$37,500, but progression is not guaranteed as performance-related pay is mostly based on test scores and lesson observations, with more and more duties and expectations piled onto teachers.”

Celebrating refugees

With Refugee Week just around the corner, the Refugee Council of Australia has produced a resources kit for teachers.

The annual celebration has been running for 41 years and is an opportunity to celebrate the positive contributions made by refugees to Australian society and help inform students.

There’s also a documentary - *Freedom Stories* - in which former ‘boat people’, who are now Australian citizens, tell their stories.

The Refugee Council says the documentary has the potential to change people’s minds about asylum seekers.

“Screening *Freedom Stories* is a great way to raise awareness of the support new arrivals require, and the practical things we can all do to make a difference,” the Council says.

You can find more information and the resources kit at [refugeeweek.org.au](http://refugeeweek.org.au).
Blueprint for equality

Leading feminist Anne Summers has issued a blueprint for achieving equality for women in Australia, calling on women to get behind a campaign movement.

“It’s no longer enough for us just to call ourselves feminists,” Summers says. “We need to be very specific about what we want and we have to make it happen. And we have to do it now.”

Launching the Women’s Manifesto on International Women’s Day, Summers acknowledged support from the AEU Victorian branch.

The Manifesto lays out “four simple and achievable goals”:
1. financial self-sufficiency
2. reproductive freedom
3. freedom from violence
4. the right of women to participate fully and equally in all areas of public life.

A first step towards achieving the goals are four significant reforms, drawn from each of the goals, that must be met within five years:
• Legislated equal pay for all women in all jobs
• Decriminalisation of abortion in New South Wales and Queensland
• Specialist domestic violence courts in every state of Australia
• Gender quotas dictating that women make up 50 per cent of all parliamentarians, all cabinets and other ministries and directors of all public company and government boards.

The launch of the Women’s Manifesto is designed to be the springboard for a collaborative process to define and design the goals, and become an organising tool for making them happen, says Summers.

“In other words, this is not my document. This is our document and you all need to become involved in bringing it to fruition.”

She’s invited everyone to contribute to the document, which can be found at annesummers.com.au/speeches.

You’ve got mail, minister Birmingham

A delegation of preschool educators delivered more than 14,000 postcards, signed by parents and preschool educators, as well as a petition with over 5,500 signatures, pleading with education minister Simon Birmingham to put an end to funding uncertainty for early childhood education.

The delegation warned that many four-year-old children would miss out on the 15 hours of preschool they need to give them a head start, if the government failed to deliver the crucial funding.

AEU federal president Correna Haythorpe reminded the minister that preschool prepares children for success.

“It means they start school prepared for learning and thriving. Children who attend preschool start prep with a bigger vocabulary, stronger basic skills and better learning habits. “Primary school teachers report that children who miss out on preschool start their schooling six months behind. Access to preschool education should not depend on parents’ capacity to pay. Every child deserves the chance to benefit from early childhood learning - regardless of their background,” Haythorpe said.
How will your school mark Anti-Poverty Week?

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

Anti-Poverty Week (15-21 October) aims to strengthen public understanding of the causes and consequences of poverty and hardship and to encourage research, discussion and action to address the problems.

Everyone is encouraged to help reduce poverty and hardship by organising an activity during the week or taking part in an activity organised by others.

How schools can get involved

The organisers suggest three ways for schools to become involved:

• Organise an activity as part of Anti-Poverty Week. You can find ideas here: tinyurl.com/7df3oy7

• Use the week as a focus to teach children about poverty, its causes and consequences and ways it can be prevented or resolved. See the education resources at antipovertyweek.org.au

• Use the week to launch a program at your school to ensure that students who are experiencing poverty or hardship are able to fully participate in all aspects of school life. For information and ideas, see the booklet: Social inclusion at school: how to help low-income families on the Anti-Poverty Week website.

Already have a plan?

If your school has an activity planned, no matter how big or small, the organisers would love to hear from you. Send your details to: apw@antipovertyweek.org.au

Clean and green

Dalkeith Primary School students in Western Australia collected 10 bags of rubbish and 15 bags of recycling material from local parks, bushland and river foreshore on Clean Up Australia Day. For an update on the upcoming Enviroweek and how schools can take part in a wider environmental sustainability movement, see page 26.

Strengthening the union movement

The newly elected secretary of the Australian Council of Trade Unions Sally McManus has called on working people to take action to protect and strengthen their entitlements.

“After more than two decades representing the interests of working people, I am honoured to continue to serve you and proud to be the first woman elected as ACTU Secretary.”

McManus, says there’s an urgent need to “take on corporate greed and tackle inequality”.

“The rules are not working for working people - that’s clear from the recent Fair Work ruling cutting penalty rates - and, the fact that jobs are being rapidly casualised. At the same time the rich are getting richer and more powerful. In Australia just two of our billionaires now have more wealth than six million other Australians. This just isn’t right,” she says.

“We are going to build and lead a movement to change the rules to bring fairness back to Australia. Everyone that wants to be part of this movement needs to join their union. Please spread the word and sign up your mates.”

McManus has also urged union members to do more by volunteering to help with ACTU campaigns. To find out what you can do, go to actu.org.au/get-involved

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The work of education support staff is integral to quality education but often overlooked, according to Jane Porter from the New Zealand Educational Institute Te Riu Roa.

In an interview on Education International’s podcast series EdVoices, Porter discusses some of the challenges faced by education support workers.

“In every school, teams of education support personnel work alongside teachers to ensure that all students have the opportunity of a quality education, but too often their work and contributions remain out of sight,” says Porter.

“In New Zealand, we often call them the ‘silent army’. They really make sure that those in education institutions can operate and children get support to learn,” she says.

Porter notes the “emerging role” of education support staff in helping students with special educational needs.

School-related gender-based violence (SRGBV) is affecting millions of children, their families and school communities around the world every day.

SRGBV is a violation of human rights and a serious barrier to learning. It has long lasting consequences on children’s psychological, social and physical wellbeing and affects their ability to learn and stay in school, according to the UN Girls’ Education Initiative (UNGEI).

Incidents of SRGBV have been recorded in every region and country where it has been studied. It cuts across cultures, regions, peoples and affects boys and girls, UNGEI says.

SRGBV is defined as acts or threats, based on gendered stereotypes, of physical, sexual or psychological violence or abuse.

School-related gender-based violence reinforces gender roles and perpetuates gender inequalities. It includes rape, unwanted sexual touching, unwanted sexual comments, corporal punishment, bullying, and other forms of nonsexual intimidation or abuse.

Evidence suggests that SRGBV can also have long-term and far-reaching consequences for young people who have witnessed such violence because they may grow up to repeat the behaviour and regard it as acceptable, according to a report, Global Guidance on Addressing School-related Gender-based Violence.

The report aims to provide a one-stop resource on ways of preventing SRGBV including diverse case studies and recommended tools for educators.

You can find the report at tinyurl.com/kbo95ag and other online resources at endwawnnow.org.

Giving a voice to the ‘silent army’

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It’s not too late for Malcolm Turnbull to change his mind and give our schools the six years of Gonski funding they need.

New funding model is “a con”

Three weeks of visiting schools across Australia, travelling on the Gonski bus, has shown me once again how well Gonski funding is working, and how strong community support for it is.

However, as we learn more about prime minister Malcolm Turnbull’s new funding model, announced on May 2, it’s clear that it’s nothing but a con.

For a start, the government’s own budget shows it will deliver $3.2 billion less to schools over the next two years than the Gonski agreements, and $22 billion less over 10 years.

The new model will, eventually, see the federal government fund public schools to 20 per cent of the Schooling Resource Standard and private schools to 80 per cent.

Education minister Simon Birmingham has admitted that it is up to state governments to ensure that their public school systems reach 100 per cent of the SRS.

But this approach abandons one of the key principles of the Gonski agreements: that state and federal governments work together to properly fund our schools. It means that some schools may never reach the SRS and their students will miss out on support.

The teachers and parents I spoke to during the AEU’s 2017 Gonski bus tour expect all governments to cooperate so that students get the support they need at school.

There is strong opposition brewing to Malcolm Turnbull’s plans.

Principal and parents go to Canberra

The bus tour saw two big green buses travel thousands of kilometres through South Australia, Victoria, Queensland and New South Wales. We met hundreds of educators and talked to their communities. Then, on March 22, the buses arrived in Canberra full of principals and parents to take the Gonski message directly to politicians.

Along the way, I visited Mount Gambier North Primary School in SA, which has a high number of students from disadvantaged backgrounds. Principal Jane Turner talked about how the school can now run a community hub, breakfast programs and early intervention support for children who have a high level of need. These programs are ensuring students are engaged with their learning.

At Magpie Primary School, near Ballarat, principal Peter Clifton explained how students from his school now read at above the state average after an investment in professional development and literacy programs.

He says: “Gonski funding is a ‘hand-up’ not a ‘hand-out’. It’s helping to change the learning outcomes for a generation of kids who deserve a chance.”

The message from schools is that the funding is making a difference but there is much more that needs to be done.

There’s real frustration that a program that works can’t be extended to all students who need it because the money simply isn’t there.

That’s why it’s a tragedy that Malcolm Turnbull won’t fund the Gonski agreements in full. He’s ignoring the great work that schools are achieving with Gonski and effectively abandoning the students who need help the most.

At the same time, he’s trying to get support for company tax cuts worth $48 billion. Can this really be a better investment for our nation than ensuring all students can get a quality education?

There is strong opposition brewing to Malcolm Turnbull’s plans. State and territory governments have criticised the new model and most have been vocal in calling on the prime minister to honour the full six years of the Gonski agreements.

With the continued support of the ‘I Give a Gonski’ community, we’ll keep fighting until all Australian schools have the resources they need to give their students the quality education they deserve.

Correna Haythorpe

AEU FEDERAL PRESIDENT

AUSTRALIAN EDUCATOR 94 WINTER 2017
A lesson for Mr Turnbull

When a school funding formula is proven to return results, it should be case closed. But the federal government wants to ignore the evidence that Gonski needs-based funding works. It’s taking $22 billion dollars from where they’re needed most – the education of our children.
Why does Malcolm Turnbull want to tear up the Gonski Agreements with the states and cut funds from our schools when all the evidence suggests Gonski is working? Despite the hype and media spin about his new schools funding package, the ugly truth is that it will take $22 billion of resources from schools promised in the Gonski Agreements and move away from needs-based funding.

Public schools will lose out. The Turnbull plan would see less than half of extra federal funding go to public schools, compared to 80 per cent under Gonski.

That is not needs-based funding, it is walking away from the most disadvantaged schools and students in Australia.

AEU Federal President Correna Haythorpe says Australians understand that giving all students a quality education is the best investment we can make.

“I visited schools across Australia during the AEU’s I Give a Gonski bus tour in March, and I saw the difference this funding is making to schools,” says Haythorpe.

Changing lives

“When you have principals telling you they finally have the resources to give every child the help they need, or when you meet kids who are reading for the first time thanks to extra resources, you understand that Gonski is not just lifting results, it is changing lives.

“It is incomprehensible that Malcolm Turnbull would want to put this at risk, and take funding from the schools and students that need it the most.”

Gonski funding represents extra staff in classrooms, more literacy and numeracy programs, more professional development and more support for students who need it.

This extra funding is already transforming the lives of thousands of students and giving them the promise of a brighter future. You can measure the change in improved literacy and numeracy results, but teachers are reporting another type of result – seeing a formerly disruptive and unhappy child discover that learning is something to be treasured.

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No school guaranteed full funding

That’s why it is so concerning that under the new funding system there is no guarantee that any school will reach the minimum Schooling Resource Standard that the Gonski Review recommended.

That means there is no guarantee that every student who needs crucial help will be able to get it. No guarantee that the programs already delivering success will be able to be maintained or extended to cover all students who need them.

The new funding model locks in inequity by requiring the federal government to fund 20 per cent of the SRS for public schools and 80 per cent for private schools, leaving state governments to fund the rest.

When asked how he would ensure that all schools reached the SRS, education minister Simon Birmingham admitted that there was no plan to do so, and that it was up to state governments.

It doesn’t matter to a student whether their support comes from the federal or state government, all that matters is they get it when they need it. That’s why the Gonski Review recommended that schools funding be a joint state and federal responsibility, so that every school could get the resources it needs.

Moving away from that principle is a big step away from Gonski.

The most immediate result is that public schools in the NT and Tasmania will get the lowest increases in federal funding, despite having the highest needs in Australia. What happens to their students if their state governments are unable to cover that funding shortfall?

Malcolm Turnbull has only developed a new funding model due to huge pressure from teachers, parents and state governments who had refused to back the plan he outlined in the 2016 Budget.

Sadly, the new funding model contains many of the same flaws, cuts resources from schools and fails to deliver needs-based funding.

Schools and parents know that education is an investment, and that ensuring all our children get the support they need is not a cost, but a long-term benefit to Australia.

It is a sign of how out-of-touch Malcolm Turnbull is that he is pushing ahead with a plan for $48 billion in company tax cuts, but refuses to fund Gonski. AEU polling shows that, when asked to choose, voters prefer Gonski to company tax cuts by a margin of two-to-one.

It is not too late for Malcolm Turnbull to listen and honour the full six years of the Gonski Agreements.
Two students share their stories of how Gonski funding has changed the way they see education and their own self-worth.

Marwa Abedine, a recent graduate of Sydney’s Canley Vale High School, credits her teachers as being hugely influential in her decision to enrol at Western Sydney University in the hope of becoming a secondary school teacher.

Their passion in the classroom and as advocates for public education helped her understand the importance that funding makes in schools.

“Gonski funds were very important to me, and my peers,” she says. “The variety of extra resources I had access to encouraged me to participate in class discussions, and consequently maximise my marks.”

She’s not drawing a direct comparison, but rather concluding that having additional support to guide her through her studies made her more confident about engaging in the classroom. In particular, the literacy program, which was introduced when Abedine was in Year 7.

“Everything I learnt in those classes is why I’m standing here today,” she told delegates at the 2017 AEU Federal Conference.

Abedine says the literacy program’s focus on the fundamentals of English helped her develop analytic and interpretive skills that helped her become a “quick, smart thinker”.

She used those skills to “muster every opportunity” that came her way, including joining the debating team in Years 10 and 11.

“I was able to dissect the information from the opposition team and I became a very good debater and a confident speaker,” says Abedine, who was Canley Vale High school captain in Year 12.

Boosting confidence

Gonski funding is providing additional programs that expand students’ capacity as critical thinkers. It’s giving schools the opportunity to develop interventions that re-engage students who’ve become disillusioned with the learning process. It provides students who have different learning styles with the support they need to achieve success in school, to believe in their own abilities and to build the skills necessary for a bright future.

Michael Pongrac is another student who knows the value of Gonski funding, which he says helped him achieve above and beyond what he thought possible only a few years ago.

He, too, became a school captain in Year 11 at Kambrya College in Melbourne. Yet five years earlier while in Year 7 at Lyndale Secondary College, he was getting himself in a lot of trouble.

“I was skipping classes, smoking and associating with people who had too much influence over my behaviour,” says Pongrac. His parents agreed with the school that he needed to repeat the year, but transferred him to Kambrya College.

However, by the end of Year 8 Pongrac had lost all interest in school and wanted to drop out. His life changed when he was selected to be in the school’s Darrabi Pathways Program for disengaged Year 9 boys.

“Darrabi showed me that even though I was disengaged I could still change direction and make myself a great person, but most importantly a better student,” he says.

“I passed my first ever maths test, improved my lab score three cycles in a row, and became school captain.”

Extra funding is “life changing”

Marwa Abedine says she’s living proof that Gonski supports students throughout their education and “sets us up for life”.

“Now I want it to help me as a teacher when I support my future students, and also my little brothers and sisters.”

Pongrac agrees that Gonski funding is life changing. He wishes all schools and students could experience programs like Darrabi. “They need extra funding and support so they can help people just like me,” he says.

“Every student has the ability to learn, we just need schools that have the resources to run programs that support us,” he says.
Enthusiasm and excitement
Principal Shelby Papadopoulos can look around her school and count the ways that Gonski funding is making a difference to her students.

She sees it in measurable results for speech, literacy and numeracy and, importantly, in the children's enthusiasm.

Colac Primary School, in western Victoria, is bursting at the seams with 250 students, the maximum enrolment. Most students are from low socioeconomic backgrounds and a large number are developmentally vulnerable, particularly in language, and need intensive support.

In an area where so many families already suffer disadvantage and there is a high number of family violence reports, the city was hit hard last year by the ‘dairy crisis’ – when the milk price paid to dairy farmers plummeted.

The children have paid the price for these family and financial problems. They arrive at school suffering a “high level” of trauma, says Papadopoulos. She immediately set aside some of the school's Gonski funding to train teachers to work with the most vulnerable children to help prepare them to learn.

“That’s seen a big difference for us, with teachers being able to intervene straight away to support those children who need a different response before they can be in the right head space to begin learning,” says Papadopoulos.

The training is carried out by the school’s wellbeing case manager, a position funded by the Gonski dollars. The case manager also co-ordinates the various agencies that might be involved in a child’s life – such as child protection – to keep a focus on education.

Improved language development
“While we say it’s really important that children are housed appropriately and their financial and day-to-day needs are met, we know the thing that will break the cycle of poverty for vulnerable kids is education. So, it’s really about keeping education at the core of everything that these agencies are doing,” says Papadopoulos.

Gonski funding has also allowed the school to hire a speech pathologist and that’s brought big improvements in oral language development after more than 12 months’ work with the early years students.

“It’s made a world of difference for those children,” says Papadopoulos.

Meanwhile, an intervention team has been working solidly with children struggling in literacy and numeracy and, apart from improved skills, the most pleasing result for Papadopoulos has been the increase in the children’s enthusiasm towards their learning.

“They’re the children who previously felt that they weren’t very good at things and they tended to do one of two things: either they’d try to fade into the background or their behaviour would escalate to cover the learning deficiency,” she says.

More confident
“Now they’re becoming more confident about their own learning. For us, that’s probably been the big win for our kids.”

One of the best examples of the change in the children, says Papadopoulos, is the young student in the middle years who had been assessed as 24 months behind his peers.

“He’d been a reluctant and disengaged reader since grade prep but, after working with a literacy specialist for all of 2016, he’s now level with his class in reading. ‘He’s making great progress and he’s really, really excited,’ she says.

Colac Primary has extracted every drop of value out of its Gonski funding allocation and it’s left Papadopoulos dreaming of what she could do with more.

“In an ideal world, if we had double that amount of money I could double my intervention team and meet the needs of all children six months or more behind. At the moment, because our need is so high, we’re working with children who’ve been identified as 12 months or more behind,’” Papadopoulos says.
Next year will mark 10 years since Kevin Rudd’s apology to Australia’s First Peoples – 10 years of attempting to Close the Gap in health, education and employment. With little sign of success, Indigenous community leaders now say it’s time to listen to them.

It has been a common refrain – made again in this year’s ninth Closing the Gap Prime Minister’s report – that attempts at progress are being “done to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, not with them”.

Last year, 24 years after Paul Keating’s famous speech, there was a new Redfern Statement. This time it was made not by a PM but by a fresh coalition of Indigenous bodies, led by the National Congress of Australia’s First Peoples and supported by more than 50 organisations including Oxfam and Amnesty International.

As Rod Little, co-chair of the congress and an Amangu and Wajuk man from Western Australia, told this year’s AEU federal conference, its underlying message was: “We have the solutions.”

Little, who has worked with Chris Sarra’s Stronger Smarter Institute and at the federal Department of Education, is overseeing the congress’s education policy. Underpinned by accountability and transparency, it calls for collaboration in design, development and delivery of programs and a focus on educational attainment and progress.

Call for bravery

The Redfern Statement says 25 years of official support for “self-determination” have proved to be only lip service while...
We, as First Peoples, have the solutions. We have the experience, we have the solutions. And we can achieve what we set out to achieve.

Rod Little

The challenges facing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island peoples continue to be marginalised, and the “transformative opportunities for government action are yet to be grasped”.

Little told the AEU conference that everyone involved in education needed to be brave enough to take a hard look at systems, policies and practices and have a genuine discussion with each other about what needed to change, and “excite people about where we go next”.

“We, as First Peoples, have the solutions. We have the experience, we have the solutions. And we can achieve what we set out to achieve.”

The Redfern Statement calls for the creation of a national representative education body to engage and promote policy with First Peoples. It would be a “single national education voice for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people” and build on the good but fragmented work being done locally in Australia’s atomised education system.

Preschool access
In early childhood, the National Congress goes beyond the Closing the Gap target of enrolling 95 per cent of Indigenous children in preschool in the year before primary school.

Indigenous children are twice as likely as non-Indigenous children to have a developmental vulnerability by the time they start primary school, but are half as likely to have had access to early childhood education.

The statement calls for 20 hours of subsidised access to early childhood education and care for all children. Key to this would be Indigenous community-controlled bodies that have already been proven to overcome barriers to access and respond to the needs of families.

Early childhood services also provide a gateway to health and social services that can strengthen families and prevent child abuse and neglect. This would reduce the risk of child removal. Forty-four per cent of children in out-of-home care were removed from their families before they reached primary school age.

The Closing the Gap report highlights that it is children in very remote areas who face the severest challenges, and whose attendance and attainment skew national statistics.

A perspective on life in a remote school came from Donna Bridge, principal at Fitzroy Valley District High School in the central Kimberley, who addressed the federal conference by Skype because wet-season floods had cut off her community.

For her, the need for all schools to work with their community is intensified in remote schools by the rapid turnover of staff and the fact that, more than most, they are “very much a reflection of the communities – so when communities struggle, schools struggle”, and it’s the schools that cop the blame.

For example, floods had kept alcohol out of her community for a few days. As soon as the road to Broome reopened, the alcohol returned, and school attendance immediately dropped. At such times, students were more focused on survival than learning, she said.

Beyond NAPLAN
These are things NAPLAN can’t measure, says Bridge. Nor can it credit
the school’s vital contribution to community wellbeing.

Not that NAPLAN doesn’t have its place, says Bridge. “It’s just that we tend to place more value on data that can be statistically measured, such as comparing progress and attendance. The two are very linked but are indicators of success in students who come to school ready to learn.

“Our measurement tools are centred very much around the westernised version of schooling. We don’t measure the story of change and empowerment that enables the achievement of NAPLAN and attendance.”

Fitzroy Crossing is full of abandoned initiatives that are testament to outsiders who come in with funding, drive a project then leave, she says. It takes time to build honest relationships, and principals and teachers in remote schools are usually on fixed-term contracts and are ready to leave after three or four years.

Having been at the school for seven years, Bridge is a rarity among remote principals.

“People are [finally] starting to realise I’m here and I’m staying. Therefore the level of trust has increased significantly so we can start real, sustainable conversations around how we work together to better support the community and the kids.”

If continuity can’t come from the school leaders, there is a need to start looking to the community for it, she says. The community needs “the capacity and the voice to say we want it done this way because this way works for us”.

Donna Bridge
Principal of Fitzroy Valley District High School in the central Kimberley

Our measurement tools are centred very much around the westernised version of schooling. We don’t measure the story of change and empowerment...

Missed targets

The ninth annual Closing the Gap Prime Minister’s report makes disappointing reading, despite the goodwill and success stories that fill its pages.

Not on track

- Halve the gap in child mortality by 2018. The gap has closed by 31 points since 1998 and better access to antenatal care and lower rates of smoking mean this target could be met.

- Close the gap in life expectancy by 2031. Indigenous mortality rates from cancer are rising although smoking rates continue to fall.

- Close the gap in school attendance by 2018. Attendance rates are unchanged at 83.4 per cent compared with 93.1 per cent for non-Indigenous students.

- Halve the gap in reading, writing and numeracy by 2018. Measured by NAPLAN literacy and numeracy results in years 3, 5, 7 and 9. Only one of the eight (Year 9 numeracy) is on track.

- Halve the employment gap by 2018. Non-CDEP (work for the dole) employment remains stuck at about 48 per cent, against 72.6 per cent for non-Indigenous Australians. One-third of Indigenous Australians in very remote areas are employed.

On track

- Halve the gap in Year 12 achievement by 2020. In 2014-15, 61.5 per cent of Indigenous 20-24-year-olds had attained Year 12 or equivalent, up from 45 per cent in 2008.

Awaiting data

- 95 per cent of four-year-olds enrolled in early childhood education by 2025. A new target set in December 2015. At that time SA, WA and ACT already enrolled 100 per cent of children, but nationally the figure was 87 per cent (98 per cent for non-Indigenous four-year-olds).
The day fete intervened.

Seeing how hard the school community worked to raise every dollar at our fete this year really made me think – as office manager, shouldn’t I be trying just as hard to get the most out of every dollar?

The thought played on my mind for weeks until the regular office supplies order was due.

*Then I was all over it.*

I took myself off autopilot and asked my Officeworks Specialist to come in.

He sat down with me and did a complete office supplies audit, suggesting ways we could save money. Who knew a 33 pack of writing essentials cost so much less than buying the same pens individually? Guess you never stop learning.
Cara Shipp has received recognition for her broadly collaborative, engaging approach to Indigenous education.

BY CYNDI TEBBEL

Wraparound success

Even when she was in primary school, Cara Shipp showed a precocious talent for literacy. Her teacher asked her to help the kindergarten kids who were struggling with their reading, and it was watching them improve that inspired her to become a teacher.

Shipp’s father, a Wiradjuri man from Dubbo, and her Welsh mother instilled in her a love of learning and pride in her heritage.

Her focus on Indigenous literacy has been recognised with the AEU’s 2016 Arthur Hamilton Award for Outstanding Contribution to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education.

The honour relates to Shipp’s work at Wanniassa School, Canberra, where – as the executive teacher for English, studies of society and environment, languages and Indigenous programs – she developed a strategy to improve educational pathways and outcomes.

The strategy relies on engagement, not only with students, but also with their teachers, families and the Indigenous community. It includes providing a personalised approach for students that takes account of their different levels of learning.

Shipp has brought this philosophy to her new role as department head at Campbell High School, Canberra, where she is responsible for programs similar to those at Wanniassa.

Collaborative strength

Shipp knows that producing lessons that value Indigenous culture and provide for different levels of learning puts added pressure on teachers. “It’s a lot of work to have a few different things going in a classroom at once,” she says.

The lack of time and resources in schools means that teachers are often forced to complete their preparation outside working hours – something that’s not necessarily possible for those with other commitments.

“We need to be a bit creative in how we get around that,” says Shipp.

Early intervention and planning is a good first step, she says, as it can result in less time spent dealing with behaviours that may stem from student frustration.

Another way Shipp fosters engagement with Indigenous students is through the Engoori process from the Stronger Smarter Leadership Program, which aims to show leaders, teachers and students how to honour their strengths, share their heritage and identify common values.

Engoori was developed by a group of Mithaka people in Queensland – specifically Torres Strait elder, the late Uncle Steve Mam, who came up with the idea of setting up the collaborative process.

“It can be a group of students, parents, staff or your class,” says Shipp. “You start by talking to them about what makes them strong, what is most important to them in their lives.”

That leads to finding commonalities and establishing the core values that group members will live by in their work and when they are with each other.

“Then you can bring in a curriculum that incorporates the things that increase engagement.”

Cultural exposure

Shipp also takes a community approach. She invites Indigenous and other experts into the classroom and takes advantage of local agencies.

She works with Gugan Gulwan, a local Aboriginal youth centre, to bridge the gap between home and school.

“They provide services to young people and families, such as one-to-one counselling and cultural activities.”

She invites Indigenous artists,
dancers and writers to work with teachers and students on how to embed culture in the classroom, and says that should be an important part of every school’s reconciliation action plan. The more children are exposed to Indigenous culture, the better. “It promotes positive identity. There might be some non-Indigenous students who haven’t really met Aboriginal adults before – adults who work hard, do well and are prominent in the community.”

No excuse
Shipp acknowledges many Indigenous students face external challenges that are sometimes too large for one school to overcome. But, she has high expectations for every student, regardless of what’s going on in their lives. “You have to expect them to put in as much effort as anyone else, to attend all their classes, on time, and do their assignments,” she says. “But you do it with support and love and care.”

Money, of course, is also crucial to Shipp’s programs, which have benefited from Gonski funding. It has gone towards bringing in people from the community who can do additional tutoring or counselling, and to providing essentials such as daily breakfasts. “That funding gives kids wraparound support, which has led to fantastic gains in attendance with some students because I’ve been free to work on developing relationships. “People say it’s a waste of resources to have one teacher spend a few hours a day with one child, but we’re talking about a person’s life. Every child counts.”

To read Shipp’s blog, visit missshipp.wordpress.com

Cyndi Tebbel is a freelance writer.
Opening the door to innovative learning

Early results from a four-year study into innovative learning suggest an important connection between classroom design and the type of teaching and learning that happens in primary and high schools. “There’s a link between teachers’ mindframes, students’ deep learning and the design of the classroom,” says key researcher Associate Professor Wesley Imms. “It’s looking like the more classrooms are open and flexible – but not open plan – [the more] they have higher instances of kids engaging in deep learning.

“It’s a relationship, but not yet proof that innovative learning spaces cause deeper learning.”

Imms, who is based at the University of Melbourne’s Learning Environments Applied Research Network (LEaRN), is an international leader in applied research to improve the design and use of learning environments in education.

His team is working with other researchers, from the Melbourne Graduate School of Education and the Faculty of Architecture, Building and Planning, on a project funded by the Australian Research Council. Their research looks at the link, if any, between quality teaching and the effective use of innovative learning environments. It will also create tools to help teachers adapt their teaching practices for deeper student learning.

Clear outcome

In the first stage of the project, about 820 schools in Queensland, New South Wales, the Australian Capital Territory and New Zealand took part in a survey to tap into school leaders’ and principals’ perceptions of what happens in their schools’ learning spaces.

“The survey was to work out to what extent our research’s assumptions are accurate. We never expected such a clear outcome at this stage,” says Imms.
We need to work with teachers to develop their competencies in spatial literacy.

Wesley Imms
University of Melbourne

The survey indicated that three-quarters of teaching was happening in traditional classrooms and was largely teacher-centric. There is some way to go before teachers really harness the potential of innovative learning environments.

Nevertheless, Australia is something of a world leader in the field. Victorian designers took out five of seven awards at the Design of Learning Environments’ World Congress last year.

The range of learning spaces encompasses traditional classrooms, those with breakout areas, those with movable walls, classrooms that open into transition spaces such as hallways, and barn-like open areas with no options to carve off rooms.

“We argue that the first two types are traditional. The other three are more open learning environments,” says Imms. “We’re starting to get an inclination, but not proof, that it’s probably the [movable walls and transition spaces] ones – those that are most flexible in design – that show higher levels of positive teacher mindframes and more positive students’ deep learning characteristics.”

Evaluating the effectiveness of the wide array of spaces is still “very slippery” because there is no tool for such assessment.

Developing competencies

Teaching in the rest of the 21st century will be about teachers engaging students as well as students engaging teachers, says Imms, a former secondary teacher.

“You need spaces for what you might call didactic teaching, which is still part of the teaching lexicon. But also, spaces where you can break classes into smaller groups, or work with a colleague, or have retreat spaces where students can work by themselves.

“We need to work with teachers to develop their competencies in spatial literacy and help them work out ways to use space as a pedagogical tool as much as a textbook and whiteboard are. ‘As teachers, we’re not often trained to change the physical space we teach in, and it’s not just about opening or closing doors. It’s about making demands on, for instance, the types of furniture we have and how they are used.’

He cites the example of a teacher who discussed with students how they could rearrange the classroom and created a chart with 10 different set-ups.

“You might have five minutes at the beginning of a lesson and five minutes afterwards to rearrange the furniture, but that can dig into the learning. This teacher put the set-ups on the chart and soon had the kids trained to quickly flip from one to another.”

Another school looked at revamping a large internal space and came up with a design for moveable multilevel seating units. The wooden sections on wheels work as student lockers on one side and could be pushed around to create an amphitheatre or divide smaller class spaces. This is an example of ‘smart furniture’ that doesn’t have to be expensive but allows quick transitions.

Investing billions

Since 2010, Australian governments have spent $16.2 billion on improving school infrastructure, largely through the Building the Education Revolution era.

“That’s an enormous amount of money, but a very small percentage goes into strategies to make these spaces actually work,” says Imms. “For a new building that costs $1 million, $50,000 is all that’s needed to have teachers assist in their design, workshop how to make the most of the spaces, and then conduct good, applied evaluation over time.”

The LEaRN centre is running workshops and producing factsheets, videos and a regular e-zine to update teachers and academics about the project. Visit iletc.com.au for more information.

Margaret Paton is a freelance journalist and casual primary school teacher.
This year has thrown up a host of unpredictable events for our group of new teachers but they have responded with flexibility and positivity.

BY ROMONY ROGERS

Thinking on their feet

When we last spoke to Sara Husi, she was relief teaching in Adelaide but she has since been given a contract with a Year 4/5 class at the city’s Sheidow Park Primary School. Although she welcomes the security of regular pay, the increased workload is exhausting.

“You feel like you’ve never done enough. You think you’re on top of things and then you go to a staff meeting and there’s something more.”

Meanwhile, Trish Chapman has returned to the Pilbara town of Tom Price after a year in Paraburdo. She changes year levels almost every day, starting the week working with 0-3 Year olds, moving to Year 4 on Wednesday and finishing the week with Year 1.

“I love it because my week is even more diverse. I have to be really on top of time management.”

Oliver Baumeister’s area of Senior IT and Business, which he teaches at Narangba Valley State High School, means he is constantly adapting.

“You definitely need to keep up-to-date and keep your teaching modern because the business and economic environment is always changing and students are really up-to-date with the latest elements in IT.”

Already at this early stage in her career, Hannah Papworth from St Marys in Tasmania is helping to mentor several first year teachers at her school.

“I remember my first year and how hard it was and I just don’t want them to feel alone or judged.”

Fighting floods

Unpredictable weather patterns have added to the need for our teachers to be flexible.

When we spoke to Baumeister, he was stuck at home surrounded by flood waters as a result of ex-tropical cyclone Debbie. The last two days of his school’s exam week were lost when the Premier was forced to close all schools across Queensland just before Easter.

Earlier in the term, Husi had to spend two days teaching in the library after her classroom was flooded, but the class responded to the chaos with good humour.

Papworth can relate, having been blocked off from her school by flooding last year, giving her “a couple of extra days at home to write report cards”. Meanwhile in the Pilbara, students at...
Chapman's school have been sent home early on a few occasions this term when higher than average rains threatened to flood the roads and cut off the school bus.

**Making progress**

Behaviour management is a challenging area for most new teachers, but our four feel they have made significant progress.

Baumeister says he's getting better at identifying the different strategies to use with each student.

“For some students a one-on-one conversation might work really well and for other students it might not work at all.”

But an increase in the number of class enrolments has posed new challenges for him.

“It can be quite easy to become really focused on one student's work, so I have to focus on constantly scanning what everyone’s doing. Sometimes it’s just not possible to get to every student, so getting peers to help each other out is really handy.”

Papworth has also been working on her ability to set clear boundaries.

“When you start out, you want to be kind and lenient but you often lose respect because you ultimately need to be in control and set the standard.”

Chapman says her experience last year in upper primary made her more comfortable being firm with students and she is looking forward to being part of her school’s new Positive Behaviour team.

“The dynamics between Husi’s students have been her main concern. ‘I’ve got a few challenging ones and then once they start acting up, the others become chatty. So just dealing with the noise level has been one of my issues,’” says Husi.

Husi has a background in Sport and Recreation Management and she is conscious of the need to take her class outside for physical activity when they're getting restless and giving them hands-on activities in the classroom.

**Highlights**

The new teachers are excited about their achievements so far this year.

Baumeister's students have been creating some innovative projects.

“There are students who’ve never used Photoshop before and this term they created iPhone app icons,” he says.

“I’ve had some really shining examples, some that you’d think would
One of the things I've learned is the importance of going out to the community to meet the parents.

Trish Chapman
Tom Price, Pilbara

be on the App Store because they're so professional.”

Meanwhile, Chapman is enjoying being back in her area of training – early childhood teaching – and is relishing learning about working with an Aboriginal community.

“It’s been a fantastic opportunity for me. One of the things I’ve learned is the importance of going out to the community to meet the parents and try and entice the children to come to school.”

Chapman has begun learning a few local Aboriginal language words, which she incorporates into her teaching, and she is able to recount with great enthusiasm many of the protocols she has to follow to show respect to local Aboriginal groups.

For Papworth, teaching a class in which the students have bonded well is enjoyable.

“I’ve had a really fun time with them and we’ve had opportunities to go and use the school pool or play sport together at lunch and I think we really feel like a team.”

Union involvement
The opportunity to attend union training conferences has also provided some positive learning experiences for the group.

“Sometimes you worry that you’re the only one with a particular challenge, but the training creates a community where you feel comfortable asking questions,” says Husi.

“It was fantastic. I met a big group of beginning teachers and we learned a lot including communication skills and conflict management,” says Baumeister.

Chapman has just been elected as a state council delegate and is looking forward to travelling to Perth for training and the state conference. After a motorbike accident in 2015, she says the union’s support has been invaluable.

“I think you would be crazy as a new educator not to join because sometimes you need answers that you can’t get from the department.”

Optimistic goals ahead
All four teachers are optimistic about the rest of the year. One of Baumeister’s primary goals is to ensure that the Year 11 Certificate class do better than previous cohorts.

“For the past few years, a number of the Year 11 students at the school have really struggled and they’ve had to complete two years of content in Year 12. Last year I managed to get them through, but this year I’m hoping to avoid that entirely since I’ve taken on one of the Year 11 classes.”

Papworth feels more confident teaching literacy and numeracy thanks to the Gonski-funded Raising the Bar program, so she wants to focus on the science curriculum.

“I like to pick something every term to focus on and get to know the curriculum much better.”

Husi is working on trying to be fair and giving her students choices and independence.

Chapman is trying to free up her Sundays by being more efficient with her non-contact time and planning in the holidays, having exhausted herself last year by working seven days a week.

With their energy and talent, our group of four look set to have a bumper 2017.

Romony Rogers is a freelance writer.
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“Absolutely loved the course and the way we “Learn Implement Share”! Richard is a fantastic teacher whose positive attributes are too many to list. He gave timely and helpful feedback and it was great sharing with other participants. I am now busy implementing my new strategies. Thank you”
Lesley Krajcer
Denison College of Secondary Education
Bathurst High Campus

“This was a fantastic course, it gave me a greater understanding of what life and learning is like for students with autism and some practical advice for how to meet the needs of students in the classroom.”
Elizabeth Clifford,
Murwillumbah High School

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The success of Cool Australia’s annual Enviroweek is proof that students around the country are passionate about how their actions affect the world around them, for better or worse. They’re growing food and eating the results, recycling waste, reducing energy and saving water.

The momentum is clear. 71 per cent of schools are now registered with Enviroweek, which now serves as a time to celebrate the work that students, teachers and school communities are doing year-round to support the natural world.

Linking environmental sustainability to curriculum helps students engage in experiential learning that gives relevance to their actions.

BY CYNDI TEBBEL

Completing the circle

Becoming fully environmentally aware, however, takes more than an afternoon a week in the kitchen garden. Sustainability activities need to be linked to the curriculum for students to really appreciate the meaning behind their actions.

That’s been the experience of teacher Olivia Morgan from Oatlands District High School in Tasmania, where a kitchen garden isn’t just an extra activity to get out of the classroom. It’s an opportunity to learn important lifelong skills.

For that reason, Oatlands is including the kitchen garden on the timetable, just like any other subject. Students from K-12 work in small groups for an hour each week, with either Morgan or fellow teacher Richard Brown-Price.

“At the moment, we’re sowing seeds and getting the brassicas in before the frost comes, but they do all sorts of activities from making planter pots to weeding and planning,” says Morgan.

“Then they go back to the classroom where everything practical they’ve done in the garden can be linked to some part of the curriculum, such as maths, science and English.”

Sustainable integration

As a result of this link to the classroom, students at Oatlands see being in the garden or kitchen as a lesson, something they need to learn.

“They’re taking ownership of it and realising there’s a reason for it,” says Morgan. “They can see the outcome when they grow something and then take it to the kitchen and cook with it.”

That’s exactly what the team at Cool Australia is looking for when it comes to school participation. Founder and CEO Jason Kimberley says linking veggie plots to, for example, maths activities is a useful way to bring hands-on experience to students.

Another way to engage students, he says, is by showing them how reducing waste or electricity usage can be calculated to demonstrate savings that can be reinvested in the school.

“When they can see they’ve created their own change,” says Kimberley, “it’s something they can celebrate.”

Teachers participating in Enviroweek – and programs throughout the year – tell Kimberley they love the activities and associated curriculum tools that Cool Australia provides for schools. (See Cool tools for the classroom)

It could be because the organisation’s curriculum team are current and former teachers themselves.
We’re very responsive to teachers. We want to know what they like and what works best for them.

Partner engagement
Schools can expand their eco-outreach by inviting community members to join in the serious fun of taking care of the planet. That intergenerational involvement can help lighten some of the practical work for teachers, and give students a different perspective.

Morgan recognises the benefits of community partnerships and is on the hunt for volunteers for the Oatlands kitchen garden.

“It’s so important to get the community involved,” she says, “because if they show a passion for it the kids will understand the meaning of it, and hopefully learn lifelong skills.”

Applying a historical lens can also be productive. Kimberley recalls a school that partnered with a local aged care home whose residents spoke to students about the ‘olden days’.

“The kids couldn’t believe that a fridge used to be just a block of ice, that you did your washing by hand, and a radio was the fanciest appliance you had apart from lights,” he says.

That kind of engagement is important because it can add a bit of levity to climate change, which can sometimes be a daunting topic for children. “We’re talking about our life support system; if we don’t have a healthy planet, we can’t survive here,” Kimberley says.

Eco tools for the classroom
Cool Australia has almost 1,000 free online curriculum-based units to assist teachers in developing lesson plans on environmental and social issues.

Topics are age-appropriate, from early learning through to Year 12, and offer a huge variety of short and in-depth exercises and supporting materials that can be used outdoors and in the classroom.

Themes include exploring the natural world, which can range from investigating a small corner of the schoolyard to the importance of bees in the ecosystem, and global issues such as the environmental impact of palm oil.

As well, there are lessons on storytelling using different types of media, such as the written word, public speaking, music and film, helping students connect with family and the wider community.

Find out more here: coolaustralia.org/curriculum-materials/

Cyndi Tebbel is a freelance writer.
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The Cool Australia Story

Jason Kimberley set off on an expedition to Antarctica in 2005 and returned with a new appreciation of how human activity can affect even the most remote eco-systems. He wanted to share that experience and so created an organisation dedicated to creating and sharing information about the natural world with teachers and students.

The result was Cool Australia, and since its founding in 2009 the organisation has achieved a number of awards and significant milestones:

• 71 per cent of schools across the country participate in Cool Australia activities, including 52,540 teacher members and more than a million students
• 140,000 classroom lessons on 18 major topics were downloaded in 2016
• More than 18,000 fans on Facebook
• 20,000 trees planted in Habitat 141, a forest regeneration project in Western Victoria

“We’re always busy on the next program and continually wanting to improve as an organisation,” says Kimberley.

“It’s amazing to see kids take pride in their school and the physical environment, and how they can make it more sustainable, more engaging. The outdoors is such a terrific place for learning.”

For more information go to enviroweek.org and coolaustralia.org

AT A GLANCE

71% of schools across the country participate in Cool Australia activities

52,540 teacher members

more than a million students

140,000 classroom lessons on 18 major topics were downloaded in 2016

more than 18,000 fans on Facebook

20,000 trees planted in Habitat 141, a forest regeneration project in Western Victoria

Professional development for teachers

Building teacher confidence is a big part of the Cool Australia world view. To that end, the organisation recently introduced online courses to facilitate professional development in different areas of climate change and sustainability.

“We’re always looking at how we can make teachers’ lives easier and help them create exceptional learnings for their students,” says Cool Australia founder Jason Kimberley.

There are currently more than 30 short online accredited courses available, ranging in price from free up to $29.95. Teachers can undertake study at their own pace and will receive a certificate upon course completion.

The courses link to curriculum subjects and encompass lessons on everything from achieving National Quality Standards and Analysing the Impact of Everyday Objects, to Using Secondary Maths to Measure Waste and how to Teach Indigenous Land Management Using Fire.

Find out more here: https://learn.coalaustralia.org/courses/
In the business of catastrophe

The Syrian conflict has caused a migration crisis of breathtaking scale. Turkey alone is playing host to almost 1.4 million refugee children and adolescents, where schools are having to operate in shifts despite only 40 per cent of those children having access to formal education.

In Turkey, Jordan and Lebanon combined, 900,000 Syrian children are going without schooling.

A flood of offers of aid has come from the private sector, raising questions about the tension between humanitarianism and profit, the best ways to support and educate refugee students, and the roles of the state and private sector in running school systems everywhere.

The size of private involvement in these three countries is highlighted in a new report, *Investing in the Crisis: Private participation in the education of Syrian refugees*, by University of Massachusetts researchers Francine Menashy and Zeena Zakharia.

The report was commissioned by Education International, which represents educators across the globe.

Education International's global response project director Angelo Gavrielatos says the report puts the spotlight on the serious ethical tensions between humanitarian support and the profit motivations of businesses.

The researchers found that 61 “private actors” – 46 businesses and 15 foundations – were among the 144 aid agencies and other non-state organisations working in education.

The report concludes that, in the face of declining aid budgets and one of the biggest refugee movements in living memory, money and support from businesses and foundations are desperately needed. But that comes with serious challenges.

Some IT firms view the refugee crisis as a good test site.

Much of the work is uncoordinated, some of it is duplicated, and some arguably fails to meet urgent needs by putting forward technological solutions unsuited to the refugee situation.

Teachers are often not consulted.

“If you don’t have the resources to build latrines or to pay teachers, I mean… investing in technology isn’t well placed,” said one interviewee from the United Nations High Commission for Refugees.

Mixed motives

Private involvement ranged from professional development, to school or tent construction, to health and advocacy services.

By far the most common involvement was funding (49 per cent of private bodies) and the development and distribution of educational technology (also 49 per cent). This included creating online digital learning platforms and courses, and developing portable wi-fi hubs for schools.

The private actors’ motives could be both humanitarian and profit-driven.

Private sector interviewees talked of “the right thing to do”.

But the Middle East also offers business opportunities. The report notes that the region is a large and growing market, and that, before the war, Syria was highly educated, with 94 per cent of K-12 children in school.

A high proportion of the Syrian refugee population is middle-class.

Some IT firms view the crisis as a good test site. “Sometimes an area in conflict might be the right environment to test out a [new] product or service,” one business interviewee said.

Disorganisation and duplication exist across the spectrum of private involvement. The report describes a “rush to involvement without careful consideration”.

This is partly due to the speed at which the crisis unfolded, but arguably also through a bandwagon effect, with firms eager to join their names to a high-profile cause. Other crises, such as sub-Saharan conflicts and famine, haven’t garnered nearly the same level of support, the authors note.

Policy clout

Together, these interventions represent a new form of aid: ‘philanthrocapitalism’. It’s led by firms such as Microsoft and Google, which have substantial clout in the policy areas of education and humanitarian aid.

“Members of the private sector have been embraced as core policymakers as well as funders,” Menashy and Zakharia note. Not least in the global Education Cannot Wait Fund, launched last year in response to a direct challenge by politicians to the private sector to play a part in meeting humanitarian needs.

The United States State Department held a forum that brought together Microsoft, Amazon, Google and others to workshop IT solutions to refugee crises.

Many private actors are partnered with non-profit organisations. Save the...
Children, which is working with Pearson Education, argues that IT can facilitate education “unrestricted by borders”, allowing continuity of learning. A lack of teachers is a problem in Turkey, Jordan and Lebanon. Menashy and Zakharia argue that technology can make a difference, but can’t replace teachers, particularly in such complex settings.

Others ask whether the private sector has the capacity to bring serious money to the table, while sceptical staff at non-government organisations question what strings are attached to its involvement. “We must never forget what their business is,” one said.

**Push to privatis**

Most worryingly, some private actors are said to be actively spruiking private schooling as a solution to the crisis, building on the sector’s track record in post-hurricane New Orleans, Haiti, Liberia and elsewhere. “Privatisation by way of catastrophe”, as it has been termed.

So far there is little sign of an increase in private schooling in response to the Syrian crisis, but the report’s authors say it has the potential to be fertile ground for this to happen.

Menashy and Zakharia conclude: “To profit fiscally from any humanitarian crisis is arguably exploitative. Some businesses have transparently entered this fragile context in order to create markets, increase brand recognition and thereby increase profits.” But with the Syrian crisis demanding a global response, they say the challenge must be to harness the expertise and funds of the private sector while ensuring that nation states retain their primary duty to provide quality education. They say the fundamental rights of refugees must always come first.

The report makes it obvious that countries must urgently fulfil their obligations to the refugees, including the provision of free, quality public education, says Angelo Gavrielatos.

“Beyond that, given the ethical tensions and contradictions of businesses profiting from the crisis, it’s essential that countries control business involvement through regulation and legislation,” he says. ●

Nic Barnard is a freelance writer.
Online professional development can help teachers understand new technology, brush up on their existing knowledge and find creative ideas to use in the classroom. It’s free and they can learn at their own pace.

One example is the Massively Open Online Courses (MOOCs) offered by the University of Adelaide’s Computer Science Education Research Group (CSER). The courses are designed to support teachers in implementing digital technologies in the Australian Curriculum, including practical examples for the classroom.

Carley Melbourne, a Year 5/6 teacher at Karama Primary School in Darwin, signed up for a CSER MOOC foundation course that required no prior knowledge. She learnt about algorithms, data representation and visual programming.

“At the start, I didn’t feel confident in digital technologies or in my knowledge of them to teach a class,” she says. “There’s always more to find out about technology because it’s so fast-changing. Digital technology will go over your head at some point.”

Melbourne says she knew nothing about visual programming (using graphics to represent computer programming processes), but discovered that it helps children with their oral language.

“Step-by-step instructions need to be clear enough to be followed by anyone regardless of prior knowledge. This is the basis of thinking behind programming computers and robotics.”

Subject unlimited
Melbourne picks up ideas from the modules, then tries them out in class.

“Technology can be integrated into subjects other than maths and science,” she says. “Algorithmic and logical thinking can be integrated into any subject. Here’s a problem – how do we solve it?”

After she introduced her students to collecting, sorting and analysing data, and how to best represent it, they imported data into Excel and charts, then discussed if the charts truly represented what they had collected.

“It’s all part of the students becoming digitally literate, with finding a job in the future in mind.”

Amid her busy teaching schedule, Melbourne found setting aside time...
to do the online modules a challenge, so she did them in her own time.

“You need about three hours a week, but you can work at your own pace. As I grew more digitally confident, I could do modules in two hours.”

Connecting to others doing the course provided further opportunities to learn and discuss ideas with fellow teachers. She joined a group that met every Monday afternoon at another school.

At the end of the course, teachers can download and print a certificate of completion.

Timesaving shortcuts

Apple Teacher is another free online professional learning program with self-paced modules (and quizzes) designed to support teachers in understanding how to get the most out of technology in the classroom.

Its courses are a good starting point for people who aren’t sure about what they are doing, says Alexandra Laurence, a Year 4/5 teacher at Gymea Bay Public School in Sydney.

“For me, it’s more about revision, but it has given me some great ideas of what to do in class and I have learnt how to do some things better,” she says.

“For example, sometimes I would go the long way around when using iPad features. I’d use Photoshop to help students put photos into iBook, but I’ve learnt that the inbuilt vector tool is quicker.”

“IT can be time consuming when you’re not aware of what’s available and how to use it.”

She did the course at night during the first few weeks of school.

“It has changed the way I teach by inspiring me to incorporate more ideas into the classroom. I guarantee that the students remember 100 per cent of what we’ve done.”

The quizzes are useful because they consolidate her learning. “I realise that I know more than I thought I did, which has given me more confidence.

“I only wish such a resource had been available when I started teaching and learning about technology.”

University rigour

Michelle Michael, acting principal at Gymea Bay Public School, is a fan of the Coursera platform, run by some of the world’s largest universities including Stanford, Michigan and London.

Each course is like an interactive textbook, featuring pre-recorded videos, podcasts, quizzes and projects. Help and support includes the opportunity to connect with thousands of other learners, debate ideas, discuss course material and get help with mastering concepts.

“You’re an online university student and it’s very rigorous,” says Michael, who has done several of the courses. “There are two to 12 hours of lectures on videos, which you can review at any time.”

“THE program is well thought out - and I love it!”

She watches videos on the train, listens to podcasts in the car and sits the exams when she feels ready.

“You also have to peer review, and there are strict rubrics on how to mark other students’ papers.”

Obtaining a certificate of accomplishment is free, but there is a fee for getting formal recognition towards credits for higher-level degrees.

Michael recently finished a six-week course on the future of education that looked at how to design a class to make better use of educational technology.

“The courses are so relevant to education,” she says. “Lectures are based on worldwide research, which is particularly useful if you’re in a leadership role. Otherwise, what are you basing your practices on?”

Teachers at Gymea Bay typically do online courses in their own time, but Michael gives them some allocated time off if they need it.

She puts aside two to three hours every Thursday night for her own study.

“The challenge is to be disciplined to make the time to do it and submit work every week. Sometimes the demands of school become too much, but you can drop out and do a course again.”

Cynthia Karena is a freelance writer.

Resources

coursera.org

csermoocs.adelaide.edu.au;
@cservAdelaide (Twitter)
teachersfirst.com/ok2ask

apple.com/au/education/apple-teacher
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**My best app**

**Hideout**  
(iOS, $4.49)  
Hideout teaches students how to read through a series of activities emphasising letter-sound association and word repetition.  
“It uses phonic patterns to help students with their spelling. I use it as a rotational activity once every two weeks in our word study program. I like it because it’s interactive and the students like it. They think they’re playing a game, but they’re not.”

**Puppet Pals 2**  
(iOS; $9.99)  
Puppet Pals 2 encourages students to create animated cartoons, design backdrops and narrate their own voice-overs for their characters. Butler has used this app in Positive Behaviour lessons where students created an anti-bullying digital story, and in English lessons to create their own short narratives.  
“This app has been especially useful for students who struggle to talk in front of the class to share their ideas and presentations. They practise talking into the iPad, boosting their confidence.”

**LEGO Education WeDo 2.0**  
(Android, iOS; free)  
LEGO Education WeDo 2.0 is designed to teach students about engineering, technology, and programming through a robot-based learning system. The school uses this app as well as WeDo 2.0 Robots for students in Years 1 to 5 in science, English, maths and STEM Club. Butler shows her students videos within the app that describe how a robot could map its movements down a mine or explore Mars. The app quizzes students on the information in the videos, and about how and why robots are used in real-life contexts.

**SHEVA BUTLER**  
Year 3, 4, 5, 6 teacher, Wondai State School in Wondai, Queensland about a three-hour drive north west of Brisbane.  
Sheva Butler sees technology as central to teaching and believes that apps, in particular, encourage independent thinking.  
“The student works at their own pace, and their learning and abilities are rewarded within apps,” says Butler who’s in her fourth year of teaching.  
“Apps work to the student’s level. If I can’t help a student, an app is like having another teacher on board.  
“As well as being engaging, apps also help students with logic and computational thinking,” she says.

**Butler’s tips**  
“Take the time to practise using apps. It can be time consuming but once you get the hang of them, apps are a time saver. And, don’t be afraid to learn the apps alongside the students. In this age of technology, we’re facilitators as much as teachers.”

**More apps to explore...**

**Apps for students with special needs**  
The website commonsensemedia.org/educators provides a comprehensive guide for many different apps that are well designed, fun and tested by experts in their fields. The apps cover different challenges - communication, social interaction, organisation, reading and writing, maths and motor skills - that are set at various levels of difficulty.

**SHARE YOUR SECRETS**  
Which apps do you find useful in the classroom? Let us know at educator@hardiegrant.com
True inclusion is the way to overcome the challenges of welcoming children with a disability into mainstream schools, says teacher, parent and author Nancy Gedge.

BY CYNDI TEBBEL

Seeing beyond labels in the classroom

As a former primary school teacher who is the mother of a child with Down syndrome, Nancy Gedge has a unique perspective on what works and what doesn’t when educating children with special needs.

She worked in British state primary schools for 17 years and explored a range of education options to find the best fit for her 12-year-old son Sam. These experiences have had a profound effect on her teaching philosophy. Gedge is an advocate of inclusivity. She believes in the right of every child to be prepared to take their place in mainstream society. “Children with special needs have as much right to this as anyone else,” she says.

Accommodating students with different levels of physical and intellectual ability can require structural changes to the school environment. Teachers may also need some additional training to recognise (not diagnose) learning difficulties.

In Gedge’s view, most teachers already have the skill set they need to create a successful inclusive classroom. The key is being a “reflective practitioner”.

“If you have big classes and a lot of pressure, it reduces the ability to reflect on the one or two children who are really complex,” she says.

“You need a strong understanding of where you are going, and where to go for help when it doesn’t work.”

Teachers need reassurance that, because a child has a learning difficulty, it will take longer to figure out what works best in the classroom for both the child and the teacher, she says.

Challenging stereotypes

In her book Inclusion for Primary School Teachers, Gedge shares tips and strategies for creating an inclusive classroom. There is no magic bullet.

Gedge says an inclusive classroom looks the same as any other: a ‘busy, purposeful environment’ where children are getting on with their work “as independently as they can”.

However, behind the book’s anecdotes and practical exercises lies a bigger picture: challenging the stereotypes that lead to disability being seen as something separate that we can screen out or get rid of.

Gedge provides a comprehensive chapter on the most common learning difficulties and how to deal with them, but it was something she struggled with. Firstly, because teachers are not in a position to diagnose, and secondly it perpetuates the notion that a special needs diagnosis “comes with a magic wand”.

Instead, diagnosis often becomes a label used to further exclude children, she says. She likens it to a plaster used to cover a wound.

“To help heal that wound, you have to take the plaster off. If you don’t, you end up teaching the label, not the child. You never get to know them and what they can and can’t do, and they never get to know you either.”

Empathy and sympathy

Another form of exclusion in mainstream schools is when busy teachers rely too heavily on teacher aids and paraprofessional assistants. While they perform a critical role in the inclusive classroom, Gedge strongly advocates that teachers should...
Nancy Gedge  
Teacher and mother of a child with Down syndrome

You need a strong understanding of where you are going, and where to go for help when it doesn’t work.

teach all of the children in the class. Dealing with the challenging behaviour of any child comes down to hard work and persistence, she says. “And, sometimes, which person is more bloody minded - the child or the adult?”

It means being firm but fair with everyone in the classroom and knowing the difference between empathy and sympathy.

“Empathy helps you understand what’s going on in a child’s life. But if you start to feel sorry for them and let them get away with things, that won’t help them when they’re an adult. When Sam was little, I’d say, ‘Down syndrome or no Down syndrome, bedtime is bedtime.’”

The same goes in the classroom, where the teacher is one of many responsible adults who help a child on their way to becoming an adult.

“Look for opportunities where you can help children be independent and stand on their own two feet, because that’s what you have to do when you’re grown up,” says Gedge. “Are you helping them learn to read, to handle money and tell the time, and control their behaviour and manage their peer relationships?”

Fostering those social relationships is as critical as the curriculum in an inclusive classroom; helping students make connections with children whose emotional or social development is different from theirs.

“We all have something we are good at, that is our special thing. Sometimes we find it straight away and sometimes it takes a while,” says Gedge. “It’s a powerful message to give, and children really relate to that.”

Emotional support

Relationships between teachers and parents of children with special needs is another area that needs to be nurtured for an inclusive classroom to work. Gedge says misunderstandings are common and communication has to improve.

“When you’re a parent with a challenging child, it’s very easy for things to fly out of your head. Many disabilities come with sleep deprivation. It’s like having a new baby, but it goes on for years and you’re excessively tired.”

Teachers, like parents, should seek emotional support. For Gedge it was visiting her deputy’s office to debrief after a difficult day.

“That decompressing is really important because it allows you to take a breath, get back on the treadmill and try again.”

Cyndi Tebbel is a freelance writer.
Four decades of teaching has only reinforced Dr Sue Bittner’s belief that she made the right career choice when she was 11 years old.

BY MARGARET PATON

From ABBA to the ABCs

DR SUE BITTNER

For the past 18 months, she and the school’s leadership team have been doing non-threatening, accountability-focused growth coaching. It has prompted key staff to work on a few issues at a time rather than try to tackle “the 14 things you know are wrong and take a scattergun approach”. “When we started to talk about data, people didn’t appreciate that it’s not necessarily a number. It’s an anecdote or strategy where you try to see what kids respond to. We’re moving towards being able to help more students and not be trying to fix everything at the same time.”

Bittner has taken her own education well beyond the norm. She has bachelor’s degrees in arts and education, a diploma in education, a master’s in educational administration and a PhD in education. Her PhD thesis looked at schools’ perceptions of how parents choose their children’s school. “My finding was that the most powerful tool is word of mouth,” she says. “It doesn’t matter how good the school website is, or how many parent-teacher evenings you have, or how much finger-food you put out for parents. Maybe it’s what parents say to each other in the shopping centre.”

She has also juggled contract work for Cambridge University Press, reviewing textbooks and writing online tests. She wrote the online practice literacy test that newly graduating teachers will have to pass before they can teach.

Her advice for new teachers is that they demonstrate “firmness, kindness, patience and a sense of humour”. “I find the kids work better if you walk the fine line between being the dragon and being the buddy.”

I find the kids work better if you walk the fine line between being the dragon and being the buddy.

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

Growth coaching

Coomabah High’s 1,200 students are generally classified as coming from low socioeconomic backgrounds. Bittner’s department is one of the school’s largest and she is responsible for about 20 staff, including their morale and wellbeing.
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