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ON THE COVER: Early childhood education funding is critical to ensuring children across the nation receive the best possible start.

Contents

06 NEWS IN BRIEF
• Phonics review flawed
• Need for mental health support
• Call for equity in subject choice
• Global teaching benchmark

10 CANBERRA PAY YOUR SHARE
Delegations of AEU members are calling on the federal government to end the decade-long cycle of hand-to-mouth funding for four-year-old preschool.

14 SO MUCH ACHIEVED MUCH LEFT TO DO
Members and supporters have helped to change attitudes to fairness and the importance of high-quality, well-funded public education.

16 INCLUSION BY DESIGN
Flexible learning spaces are delivering new learning environments that support students of all abilities.

18 CALL FOR LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander educators say they lack role models and structured career support.

20 SCHOOL SUPPORTERS
We talk to the unsung heroes who play a vital role in well-functioning schools across the country.

24 READY FOR THE TASK AHEAD
This year’s crop of new teachers reveal their energy, ambition and a shared determination to make their mark.

30 STEPS TO SUSTAINABILITY
Changing community attitudes to waste will create a new generation of environmentally conscious students.

32 A LOST GENERATION
The international community has failed to protect the children of Yemen from the devastation of war.

34 FOSTERING CREATIVITY
Digital tools are helping students discover new ways of storytelling.

36 21ST CENTURY LEARNING
Policy and technology must work together to support education.

REGULARS
04 Know your union
05 From the president
38 Recess

A summary of the AEU financial statements for the year ending 31 December 2019 are available at aeufederal.org.au
As this edition of Educator was being put together, Australia was suffering through the worst bushfire season on record. My heart goes out to all the school communities that have been affected by the fires and who will be dealing with the effects for weeks and months to come.

There’s no doubt that students going back to school this year are going to need extensive support to get back to normal, whether they have been directly affected or upset by watching the events unfold on the television and social media. Being a counsellor may not be listed in our job description as teachers, but it will fall to us to provide wellbeing and emotional support to students – and this could be especially hard if you have been personally affected.

If your school hasn’t already been provided with specialists, Beyond Blue has created a dedicated resource pack to help teachers respond to the mental health impact of the bushfire crisis. It forms part of the Be You project, which it is rolling out to schools:

beyou.edu.au

The resources point out what to look out for in students’ behaviour, but the pack also provides a timely reminder for teachers to look after themselves. It’s easy for busy educators to ignore their own mental health needs when they are trying to remain upbeat and foster a sense of normality for students.

Getting back into the school routine is going to be an important step on the road to recovery, but we mustn’t let these unprecedented bushfires become “the new normal” for Australia. Though we know they are more likely to occur again if...
Education International has already mobilised and is running a global campaign calling on all education unions across the world to write to the Australian Government and call for action to reduce carbon emissions.

“...What you are enduring impacts us all and thus we must all take urgent action.”

Education International has already mobilised and is running a global campaign calling on all education unions across the world to write to the Australian government and call for action to reduce carbon emissions.

As part of the AEU’s urgent action we will continue to campaign with you for public schools, preschools and TAFE to be properly resourced to deal with the effects of climate change. We know that giving students the very best education possible will be our best hope in this future of environmental uncertainty.

Any members who are in need of support due to the bushfires are urged to contact their individual state and territory branch.

Correna Haythorpe AEU federal president
Phonics review flawed

Literacy educators have told federal Education Minister Dan Tehan that they are concerned about his new “expert task force” to advise on the teaching of phonics and reading.

More than 180 literacy educators signed a protest letter asking the minister to rethink his approach.

The taskforce was created to look at ways to include phonics in national accreditation standards for Initial Teacher Education, how to ensure graduate teachers can teach the fundamentals of literacy through learning, and how to teach the five essential elements of literacy – phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary development, reading fluency and comprehension.

“Literacy education consists of more than the five essential elements referred to,” the letter says. “The emphasis on reading and phonics appears to privilege one mode of language over others … and privileges only one aspect of reading (phonics), when NAPLAN data demonstrates that writing and higher-order comprehension in upper primary and secondary years require attention.”

And it is wrong to say that phonics is not taught in schools and universities, the letter says. The Australian National Curriculum includes phonics and the five essential elements of literacy.

The composition of the expert panel is also contentious. The letter says some panel members are clearly biased, have a conflict of interest, or no experience in the field.

The literacy educators say they share the minister’s aim to enhance literacy and acknowledge that all state and territory education ministers need to ensure continued professional development of graduate teachers.

Improve mental health support for students and teachers: report

A Productivity Commission report says the best way to improve health, social and economic outcomes is to identify risks as early as possible in children and provide better support for young people.

The Productivity Commission estimates that mental ill-health and suicide are costing Australia up to $180 billion per year, and treatment and services are not meeting community expectations.

“Young Australians with mental ill-health miss opportunities to develop the skills they need for long-term academic outcomes and post-school opportunities,” according to the Commission’s draft report on mental health.

The report says that preschools and schools play a big part in highlighting social and emotional development issues among children.

“Schools are already expected to play a major part in supporting children’s social and emotional wellbeing, and while most teachers are well able to identify behaviour that is atypical, we were advised that many teachers find that their training has generally not equipped them to either identify mental health risks or respond effectively,” the report says.

The commission recommends that both initial teacher education and continuing professional development for educators include training and practical tools to support students.

“Identification of children at risk is simply a starting point. Schools need to be effective gateways for students and their families to access help,” the report says.

The Commission recommends that all schools be required to provide a suitably trained full-time senior teacher with responsibility for the mental health and wellbeing of students.

The final report is expected to be handed to the Australian Government by April.
Call for equity in subject choice
A new study has proven the link between a student’s family and home, their ATAR and future study.

The NSW study, by the University of Canberra, found that more students from advantaged backgrounds study subjects that will get them a higher ATAR, while students from lower socio-economic families are overrepresented in subjects that contribute less to the score.

Associate Professor Philip Roberts, writing in The Conversation, says the study showed subjects such as advanced English (weighted 13 marks higher) were studied by students with an average higher socio-economic status than students studying standard English.

“If some subjects are more likely to get you into university, and these are not being accessed equally, we have an unequal system,” Roberts says.

“We need to look at the way subjects are arranged in the school curriculum, and ensure all students have genuine access to subjects that enhance their post-school options.”
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Education unions have taken the lead to set benchmarks for quality teaching worldwide in a move to promote quality education for all.

Education International (EI), the global federation of education unions, and UNESCO launched a joint framework that defines quality teaching to encourage all countries to either review their own standards or develop new ones.

EI president and AEU federal secretary Susan Hopgood says the Global Framework of Professional Teaching Standards is based on teachers’ experience of what constitutes effective and ethical practice in the profession.

“[Teachers] care deeply about the status of our profession and about the quality of the education provided to our students,” Hopgood said at the launch in Paris late last year, adding that it was essential educators were provided a seat at the table when policy decisions were made.

The framework aims to improve teacher quality, teaching and learning, and support the monitoring and implementation of the teacher target in the Education 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

**RAISING THE BAR**

Hopgood says that, apart from raising the teaching and learning bar in many countries, schools and classrooms, the new standards would also help strengthen teacher education and development programs.

But the framework should not be seen as a “managerial tool for controlling or punishing teachers”, says Hopgood.

“It’s a fireguard against deprofessionalisation and a catalyst for improving teacher professionalism and practice,” she says.

Professional teaching standards designed with the aim to define what quality teaching means for delivering quality education are a powerful instrument in the hands of educators.

**NO QUICK-FIXES**

Educators in Africa and Asia Pacific countries have warned about the “pressing need” to fight deprofessionalisation, EI general secretary David Edwards and UNESCO assistant director general for education Stefania Giannini write in a forward to the framework.

“Professional teaching standards designed with the aim to define what quality teaching means for delivering quality education are a powerful instrument in the hands of educators,” said Giannini at the framework launch.

Edwards and Giannini added that the development of a global framework of would mean that “teachers and their unions stand over their profession as guardians of ethics and the defenders of standards that work for teachers and their students.”
The Morrison government’s half-hearted approach to early childhood education defies belief – and the evidence.

CANBERRA:
Pay your share to support early learners

The Morrison government’s half-hearted approach to early childhood education defies belief – and the evidence.

BY NIC BARNARD
The case for preschool education has never been greater, but to those who are trying to plan and run services, it seems everyone is listening except the federal government.

Now AEU members are telling federal Coalition MPs that it’s time to step up and end the hand-to-mouth cycle of annual funding for four-year-old preschool.

It has been 10 years since universal access to 15 hours a week of preschool was introduced for every Australian child in the year before primary school, and seven years since the Coalition came to power, yet Canberra still funds its share just one year at a time.

The Commonwealth meets one third of the cost of the guarantee under the Universal Access National Partnership with the states and territories, but since the Coalition was elected in 2013, federal funding has rolled over only annually.

The AEU has joined forces with stakeholder groups across Australia to lobby the federal government for an ongoing commitment – armed with the recommendation of an official review that funding be guaranteed in five-year blocks – to give parents and providers the security to plan ahead.

Delegations of members across the country have begun meeting their MPs to lobby for ongoing funding and, in March, stakeholders will join AEU members at Parliament House in Canberra for a day of lobbying.

“At the moment, it’s Groundhog Day,” says AEU federal president Correna Haythorpe. “Each year has seen the federal budget announce a single year’s funding. We have funding to the end of 2020 and that’s it.”

“We have a national partnership; we’ve had over a decade of funding and we need the government to stump up the cash.”

December’s meeting of state, territory and federal education ministers again underlined the importance of preschool education.

The meeting’s communiqué described preschool as “critical in giving every child the best possible start in life”, while the Alice Springs (Mparntwe) Education Declaration recognised it as “the foundation for learning throughout school”.

The meeting received the interim findings of a review of preschool funding conducted for the council by the independent Nous Group.

According to Nine Media reports, the review warns of “annual drip-fed funding does not allow preschools to plan programs and resources for the future.”
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longer-term consequences” if the Commonwealth fails to move beyond its annual funding cycle.

Funding uncertainty was “real and important”, the report said. “The review’s overarching finding is that to sustain and further build on progress, funding should continue at a minimum of current levels.”

The Coalition has had to be dragged to the table on preschool funding since its election in 2013. At the five-year review of the national partnership in 2014, it complained that there was no strong evidence at the time of the benefits of universal access.

That argument can no longer be sustained – the Nous Group’s preliminary findings “suggest the [national partnership] has been successful in achieving its objectives,” according to the Education Council in its December communiqué.

However, providers and stakeholders now fear the Commonwealth is trying to shuck responsibility for funding onto the states and territories. After last year’s budget, Treasurer Josh Frydenberg argued that delivery was “primarily the responsibility of the states”.

The Government has also tried to divert attention with complaints of lower levels of participation among disadvantaged and Indigenous communities. The Liberals’ 2019 election manifesto claimed that 34 per cent of disadvantaged children and 41 per cent of Indigenous children were not accessing their 15-hour-a-week entitlement.

Funding uncertainty makes it harder for services to draw in harder-to-reach groups. The AEU says that it’s only the federal contribution that ensures a level playing field for every child.

Haythorpe says cutting funding would result in inequality of access and opportunity across the country, with communities and families divided into haves and have-nots of early learning.

“This is an issue that’s felt widely and deeply across the sector,” Haythorpe says. “Funding shouldn’t be left to the states and territories. It’s a joint responsibility of the Commonwealth and the Commonwealth must contribute its share.”

Despite the funding uncertainty, the federal government has approved full funding for the Australian Children’s Education and Care Quality Authority (ACECQA), and the Education Council is working on a new national workforce strategy and a review of the national quality framework – the architecture underpinning universal access.

Elizabeth Death, CEO of stakeholder group the Early Learning and Care Council of Australia, says those moves gave Education Minister Dan Tehan an opportunity to provide “long-term, sustainable funding for quality play-based learning” for every child.

That should include “significant new investment” to ensure every child could access two years of preschool better support for Indigenous and disadvantaged or vulnerable children to attend for the 600 hours a year to which they were entitled, and an improved child care subsidy to support access.

The Mparntwe Declaration says the 15-hour guarantee “provides a solid foundation for development and learning, and we need to build on the success of the collective efforts of governments and stakeholders to ensure sustainable ongoing outcomes”.

Another 12-month rollover of funding from Josh Frydenberg will directly undercut that commitment. The Coalition has happily shrugged its shoulders and washed its hands of issues from stagnant wages to climate change and bushfires. Will preschool education be next?

Correna Haythorpe
AEU federal president

Postcard action: Get involved!

This edition of Australian Educator includes a postcard to the Prime Minister calling on him to commit to funding early childhood education. Be sure to sign the postcard and encourage your colleagues to do the same, then drop it off at the local AEU branch or post them to the AEU Federal Office (addresses on page 4). The AEU will present the postcards to the Prime Minister in March – the more we receive the more impact it will have!

Nic Barnard is a freelance writer.
It’s impossible to talk about education in Australia without talking about equity and fairness.

Where once politicians and the vested interests running private school systems tried to frame any discussion around funding in terms of choice, a decade of campaigning by AEU members has reframed the issue into one of equity.

As AEU federal president Correna Haythorpe says, “this means a high-quality, well-funded public school in every community that can meet the needs of every student”.

By putting needs-based funding at the heart of the conversation, the questions now being asked are: Why are some of the biggest increases in funding going to the schools that need it least? Why does the Morrison Government think $14 billion in cuts is a fair go? Why are public schools missing out on billions that should have been delivered in 2018 and 2019?

Haythorpe adds that as we enter a new decade, but with the same old Coalition government, it’s time to reflect on how much campaigning has achieved – and what is needed next.

“We have achieved important policy change through campaigning together, change that we should be very proud of helping bring about. “We have shaped the public and political conversation on school funding over the past decades and fought off the worst of the Coalition’s policy agenda,” says Haythorpe.

The changed dynamic has been the result of sheer hard work by members and community supporters, who mobilised nationally in support of equitable funding.

HUGE WINS

Even in opposition, the Coalition was sceptical about the Review of Funding for Schooling led by businessman David Gonski that started this decade of change. Since the Liberals and Nationals came to power, there have been years of cynical attempts to backtrack or undermine the shift to fair funding.

On taking office, Tony Abbott was forced to pledge to “match Labor’s commitment dollar for dollar over the next four years” – only to attempt to rip up that pledge on taking power in 2013.

The enormous public outcry led by educators and parents forced him to honour his promise and agree to the first four years of Gonski funding just six days later. This money is now in our schools and is having a positive impact, proving that funding does make a difference when it is directed at the schools and students who need it most.

“Needs-based funding for schools touches on every challenge that teachers face – whether it is student engagement, workload, class sizes, lack of support staff, or the need for literacy and numeracy programs. It is the only way to ensure that every student has the chance to flourish,” Haythorpe says.

Members and community supporters have mobilised nationally to bring about change.

Attitudes are shifting – and it’s thanks to members and supporters.
Yet who could forget 2016, when Malcolm Turnbull actually tried to suggest that Canberra should stop funding public schools entirely? Again, AEU members took him on and won.

Over the last few years, under the Fair Funding Now! campaign, supporters have rallied against Treasurer Scott Morrison’s budget cuts of $22 billion over the 10 years from 2018-2027 and the ripping up of five signed state and territory agreements on school funding which has put an end to the final two years of promised funding.

When Prime Minister, Morrison announced there would be “no special deals” then announced a special deal to deliver $4.6 billion extra to private schools and not one cent to public schools, it was met by a storm of protest from Fair Funding Now! supporters and allies.

Thanks to this persistent campaigning, the Labor Party and the Australian Greens were in no doubt that public education was important to Australians and both parties shifted their education policies in line with the demands of Fair Funding Now!

**CHALLENGES AHEAD**

Supporters of fair funding are fighting hard for every win, but the challenge now is to make certain that all schools receive their full share of the fair funding they deserve.

Under current policy, 99 per cent of public schools will remain below the schooling resource standard by 2023 - the minimum amount of funding required to meet the educational needs of their students - while all private schools are on track to receive the full amount.

“Our goal must be to see every school funded at 100 per cent of the schooling resource standard. It is unacceptable in the country of the ‘fair go’ for public schools to rely on fundraising fetes, cake stalls and teachers dipping into their own pockets to prevent their students from missing out. Governments have a fundamental responsibility to fund our schools and must step up,” Haythorpe says.

Another priority will be to ensure public schools receive a dedicated Commonwealth capital fund for upgrading buildings and equipment.

This is becoming increasingly urgent as unprecedented numbers of students enter the public system.

Australia’s population is growing rapidly yet, as with so many challenges facing our nation, the Morrison Government has so far turned a blind eye.

Public school enrolment recorded a 76 per cent increase between 2014 and 2018. A massive national building program is needed to accommodate those new students and give them high-quality facilities to match the high-quality teaching our teachers and support staff provide.

Haythorpe believes that AEU members should take heart from the huge wins over the previous decades in the face of the challenges ahead.

“Giving up is not an option. We will never give up until our schools and students get the fair funding they deserve.”
Inclusion by design

Students with special and diverse needs are inspiring the creation of more flexible and useful learning spaces.

A rise in the number of students with special needs is delivering a new type of learning environment.

Governments are briefing architects for new public schools to provide “inclusive environments” to improve learning and behaviour management.

The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare estimates one in 10 school students in Australia have disability, and almost one in 20 have a severe or profound disability. Many others have additional learning needs.

Dr Ben Cleveland, a senior lecturer in the Faculty of Architecture, Building and Planning at the University of Melbourne, says Armstrong Creek School in Melbourne’s southwest is a flagship school for inclusive learning environments.

The school can accommodate up to 30 per cent of students with special needs, says Cleveland, who is also associate director of the Learning Environments Applied Research Network (LEaRN).

“It can be altered to be much more responsive to the different needs of student cohorts over time by creating different spaces,” he says.

“You can have a lot more connection or a lot more retreat, depending on the time of day or the students using the space. It’s designed to be an equitable and accessible learning environment for all students.”

Modern, inclusive school design is creating new ways of learning at Armstrong Creek School in Melbourne’s southwest (above and top right) and other Victorian schools in Officer and Whittlesea (opposite page). Architect: Clarke Hopkins Clarke

CREATING CONNECTIONS

New school architecture also takes account of the trend towards more community hubs and partnerships with local organisations.

Dr Adam Wood, a research fellow at the Centre for Teachers and Teaching Research in the UK, says it’s a trap to frame the design of schools wholly in terms of learning seen through the lens of NAPLAN, PISA and other standardised measures.

“It misses out a great deal of what schools actually do, not least the social and cultural role of schools as places to gain a sense of community and citizenship,” says Wood.

He likes to think of a school building as a “dignified workspace” rather than a “glamorous space”
that needs careful thought and planning on tight deadlines. “I appreciate everybody in education wants more time. But we forget sometimes that the schools that we’re building and the education that we’re providing are public goods and we need to have public conversations about them. And that includes teachers right from the very beginning,” Wood says.

Community and collaboration

Tulliallan Primary School principal Kathy Sharp declares she would never return to a school with individual classrooms after her experience at her school in Melbourne’s Cranbourne North.

Tulliallan, which opened in 2017, was designed as an open-plan school. Three main buildings house different age groups. They all look the same inside and out, but the furniture changes size to reflect the growing students.

It is a flexible learning approach that puts students in touch with a number of teachers during the day.

“It’s conducive to teacher collaboration and that means there is collaboration among students,” says Sharp.

Effectively, each building houses a “learning community” made up of a number of classes. It means that similar tasks must be carried out simultaneously across all classes.

“The open spaces mean that there can’t be one class writing and one class doing role play,” says Sharp.

While the open plan is a feature, there are some closed-off areas for special activities, including a rehearsal room, and a quiet area for students with special needs.

New graduates thrive in the environment, says Sharp. “They’re working alongside experienced teachers. They’re not in a single classroom on their own, sinking or swimming and trying to conduct lesson planning, student management and parent interactions. They can watch and learn as they go.

“Apart from the inductions that we give them, the speed of their growth is incredible,” she says.

The style of teaching and learning also creates a “real sense of community” among students, says Sharp.

Tulliallan has grown from 300 to 1100 students this year.
Taking the lead

Education departments are letting down Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander educators by failing to provide support for leadership development.

BY CYNDI TEBBEL

You can’t be what you can’t see. When that translates to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander careers in education, the result is a critical shortage of role models for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.

Before Jackie Barry took up her current role as principal at Onslow School, a remote K-12 school of around 130 students in Western Australia’s Pilbara, she spent a decade in small towns around the state and was frequently the only Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander teacher on staff.

It was often challenging. At her first posting in Mullewa, 450 kilometres north of Perth, she was introduced to the all-Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander student body as the “nice new Indian teacher”.

“People thought I was Indian because I had long dark hair and always wore it in a plait,” says Barry.

IN SHORT

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander educators need more role models and mentors.

A national program would help to drive government investment in leadership.

Teachers have long relied on one another to create professional networks.
There were other challenges at Mullewa. In 1997 there were still “clear distinctions about which side of the bar you could sit if you were a certain colour”. That, says Barry, made socialising with colleagues uncomfortable.

So she returned to her hometown of Geraldton to teach at her former secondary school, which she had left in Year 11.

Barry likes to share that experience with her students to show that even if you don’t finish secondary school, there are other options.

“I was the first of my mob to go to university and complete it. Now our next generations coming through are hopefully breaking through that cycle of unemployment,” she says.

KEY INFLUENCERS

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander educator Paul Bridge, who is senior vice-president of the State School Teachers’ Union of Western Australia (SSTUWA), says role models and mentors help develop leaders.

Bridge began teaching in the Kimberley, where he’d lived all his life. While there weren’t many other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander teachers, he credits his first principal and other colleagues with his early professional development. Others aren’t always so fortunate, he says.

“The cold, hard facts are that a lot of Aboriginal students live complex lives,” says Bridge, currently on leave from his role as principal of Derby District High School.

“There are cultural and family obligations placed on them, and at the same time the important work-related obligations from the education system.”

Managing those competing demands is key to ensuring they have an easier journey through secondary schooling, into higher education and a teaching career.

Bridge wants to see more commitment from governments “to empower Aboriginal people within school systems to be the future leaders”.

“We can’t rely on the system to actually make a change. It’s very much dependent on whether the leadership and director general of the day, care, and are prepared to drive the change.”

STATE STRATEGIES

The last successful program aimed at improving the numbers of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander educators in leadership – More Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Teachers Initiative (MATSITI) – ended in 2015.

None of its recommendations were adopted by federal, state or territory governments.

“Everyone dropped the ball on that one,” says Bridge. “There’s no accountability about implementing very proactive recommendations and that unfortunately had not been actioned.”

At a state level, however, things are moving ahead. The SSTUWA has been working with the education department to address the decline in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander teacher numbers and principal appointments to public schools.

“The department has put in place an aspirational leaders program, and Aboriginal principals and the union are involved in the implementation,” says Bridge. “It’s a really positive move in terms of identifying and supporting future Aboriginal leaders.”

Equally important will be the development of culturally appropriate reflective practices and support systems for people on the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leadership pathway.

“This proactive program has allowed experienced educators to share experiences of their leadership journey with others and let them know when they could face possible challenges.”

PAYING IT FORWARD

Dr John Davis, chief executive officer of the Stronger, Smarter Institute, agrees that since MATSITI there has been no national driver to ensure the substantial government investment necessary to embrace Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leadership.

“We need more than just piecemeal approaches,” he says.

Davis grew up in the Brisbane suburb of Logan, where strong ties with his family group exposed him to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander youth and support workers in the community. He was inspired by his older siblings and cousins who attended university.

Davis ended up being able to be what he saw, and now he’s excelling and paying it forward at a school and professional level. “You don’t realise how many amazing Indigenous thinkers are out there until you get to be embraced or supported by organisations like Stronger Smarter,” he says.

Barry also advocates maintaining tight Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander professional networks. “I used to know all the other Aboriginal teachers and leaders and where they worked,” she says. “But that’s gone now because we’ve lost numbers.”

“So we’re working with the department to make it happen again, because the kids in the classrooms need to see themselves reflected or in the leadership of the school. If they can see it, they’re more likely to aspire to it,” says Barry.

Cyndi Tebbel is a freelance writer.

Paul Bridge
SSTUWA senior vice-president

Indigenous leadership

There’s no accountability about implementing recommendations and that’s what always happens.
Trish Harrington
Business Manager, Carlton North Primary School, Victoria.
// 4 years

“I enjoy the variety. My primary responsibility is financial: I look after school revenue, expenditure and budgeting, so I need to make sure we’re staying within our means when I report to school council every month.

I also look after quite a bit on the HR side, and I coordinate the buildings and grounds. I worked in administration at another school for eight years.

One of the best things about my job is the camaraderie. You develop quite close relationships working with each other every day in an environment where everyone’s trying to do the best for the kids.

Fitting everything in is my biggest challenge. Sometimes it can really be quite overwhelming.

There’s definitely been a shift in the way we work in the last two or three years. The department has put in place more checks and balances, and they expect a lot more to be documented for audit purposes.

That’s all well and good, but I don’t feel they know a lot about how schools operate and how time-consuming that is. With only two of us in the office, it’s difficult to maintain the right balance and get everything done in a timely way, and not be too stressed about it.”
Unsung heroes

Education support personnel are vital to well-functioning school communities, but often feel “invisible and unappreciated”. We asked four ESP to talk about their careers.

BY CYNDI TEBBEL

ike many people in the sector, education support personnel (ESP) face ever bigger workloads and additional responsibilities, often without ongoing professional development, commensurate pay or job security.

It’s a global phenomenon, as research by Education International (EI) in 2018 confirms.

In Understanding the Invisible Workforce, published last year, ESPs from all over the world reported feeling “undervalued and unrecognised” for the important contributions they make to quality education. This highly-gendered workforce – most are women aged 40 to 60 – enjoy their jobs, but it’s not easy to come to the end of a busy term and wonder whether you’ll be rehired or not.

EI helps to raise awareness of the work of ESP with a celebration, ESP Day, on 16 May each year.

AEU federal president Correna Haythorpe supports the initiative. She says ESPs are widely respected and recognised in Australia at the local school level, but can be less so at a system level. “The education system has a responsibility to ensure they have good working conditions, the opportunity to undertake ongoing professional learning provided by their employer, and salary classification scales that recognise their skills and experience,” says Haythorpe.

ACCESS TO PERMANENCY

Haythorpe says that when offered a good career pathway, some ESP decide to become teachers.

“With the initial rollout of Gonski funding, many schools increased the hours of ESPs to assist student learning. This included ongoing training and development for personnel,” she says. Access to permanency is another issue. ESP rely on year-by-year funding, so most work on a casual basis.

“And if that funding is related to them working with a particular child with a high level of behavioural issues or disability, that can have an impact on a person’s working hours as well,” says Haythorpe.

You develop strong relationships in an environment where everyone’s trying to do the best for the kids.

Trish Harrington
Business Manager

Cyndi Tebbel is a freelance writer.
Tanya Adams  
Laboratory technician, Ulverstone Secondary College, Tasmania  
// 40 years

“I did my training straight out of high school and landed a job at Penguin High School, where I worked for 18 years. I’ve been at Ulverston for almost 20 years. I was full-time until recently, but I’m now on a nine-day fortnight. I love what I do. It’s challenging. If you’re inclined to like science, it’s a great job. A typical day is liaising with teachers and individual students on their investigation work, and prepping components for lessons: making up chemical solutions, preparing geology samples, physics equipment and picking up biological materials (hearts and eyeballs) from abattoirs for dissection. I also manage laboratory resources and work with suppliers and maintenance people who service gas and other equipment. This job has changed so much over the past 10 years. The increase in technology in the classroom and the focus on more individualised work through the Australian Curriculum has made it more dynamic. I’m not in the classroom a lot, but I might walk a new teacher through a demonstration. It’s rare to get a new graduate specifically science-trained. An understanding of science isn’t something you just pick up, so I think the government needs to focus more on what’s required in schools. As a woman, the workplace is a much more comfortable place now. I don’t know if that’s because I’m older and more confident. We never have enough resources. But I feel appreciated here. The teachers are very grateful when I help remove a sheep’s eyeball from the classroom ceiling or put out a fire in the bin.”

Jacqui Toohey  
Daily organiser and timetable, Kambrya College, Berwick, Victoria  
// 15 years

“It’s busy. I write the timetables for about 120 teachers and about 1600 students, and I find replacements for absent teachers every day, predominantly casual relief teachers. I love my job. The team I work with is great. The teachers are fabulous, motivated and genuinely there for the kids. It’s such a great environment. The ESPs here are the backbone of the school, they’d struggle without us. Workload is a challenge for everyone. There are just not enough hours in the day or enough resources or staff to achieve everything we’d love to achieve. My dream is to write the perfect timetable. It’s never going to happen because I simply don’t have the luxury to sit down and work out exactly the best place to put people, or where their planning time would sit best within their timetable.”

Karen Hamono  
Classroom Support, Prospect Primary School, South Australia  
// 15 years

“I started volunteering at Prospect when my children (now 24 and 27) were students. After six years, I was hired for 12-hours a week. This was perfect as I worked school hours and spent school holidays with my sons. I currently work 29 hours and 15 minutes a week and have been doing so for more than five years. My permanent hours are 15. I would love to have this increased, but it is based on funding and the needs of the school. I work with children with special needs which includes autism, hearing or vision impairment, Global Developmental Delay and trauma or under Guardianship of the Minister (GOM). Every day is different and rewarding. Most of my time is one-on-one with the children. It can be challenging, so I try to stay one step ahead. I use my experience and research interesting activities. Many of the children need to develop fine motor skills, so we draw upside down under a table: I call it doing a Michelangelo. Or I get them to squeeze water from a bottle to form letters or words. My greatest sense of achievement is seeing them progress.”
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Energetic new educators prepare to tackle the challenges and triumphs that lie ahead.

BY MARGARET PATON

REWARD FOR EFFORT

New graduate Ashleigh Leaver, 21, hasn’t had much time to reflect since securing a permanent full-time role teaching home economics in her hometown of Perth.

“I feel so guilty telling people I got this permanent position. It’s pretty unheard of for a grad to get that straight out of uni. I’m lucky with the opportunities I’ve been presented with, but I also worked hard throughout last year.”

Leaver spent the summer holidays preparing to teach a new home economics program for the Year 9s.

She is the only teacher in the subject at Aveley Secondary College and worked there on a temporary contract last term.

“It will be great to have input into what we teach to our new group of students. I had to do the budget for this year, too. We’re a new school and the home economics department was only half fitted out with equipment. They didn’t teach me how to do budgeting in my university degree, though,” she says.

For the final year of her teaching degree at Edith Cowan University last year, she completed her main practicum at Rossmoyne Senior High. That led to temporary work and meant she spent most of the year teaching off-campus. Leaver turned down a part-time contract because her uni advised her to aim higher.

The interview for Aveley was quite competitive. “The interview panel liked how I researched the school and explained how my skills and qualifications could link into the school plan and goals. They’re a STEM school so I talked about my science minor,” she says.
The interview panel liked how I researched the school and explained how my skills could link into its plan and goals.

Ashleigh Leaver
Aveley Secondary College, Ellenbrook, WA

on my feet because there are so many safety concerns.”

Her key goal in teaching Years 7, 8 and 9 students is to tackle her tendency for overthinking what she can do to improve her teaching.

“I need to learn how to switch off; that school is for school and when I go home, sure I’ll do some work, but I need a home life as well. I might just do social netball. I like to cook at home and I have plenty of friends, so I want to make sure I have a social life.”
Call for 2020 nominations

Rosemary Richards Scholarship

Rosemary Richards was a proud feminist, unionist and educator. A trailblazing leader, she was committed to advancing gender equality across the AEU. In her memory, the Rosemary Richards Scholarship continues her legacy by building the capacity of women as activist and leaders.

This is an opportunity for an AEU woman member with an idea for an innovative project, research or study experience that will increase her skills and experience in the union’s work at state/territory, national or international level. By extension, it should also support the AEU’s women members.

The Scholarship is valued at $10,000 and is intended to cover all project expenses including, but not limited to, travel, attendance at conferences, workplace visits, training and developmental opportunities, work-shadowing, research, project design and implementation.

All women AEU Branch or Associated Body members are strongly encouraged to apply. Contact your local Women’s Officer for more information.

Application forms and further information are available on the AEU website: aeufederal.org.au/noticeboard

The submission deadline for application forms is 1 May 2020.
A FOCUS ON RELATIONSHIPS
Phoebe Morris, 25, has notched up three years of teaching primary and early high schools in Central Queensland. This year, she takes on a year 6 class at Camira State School in Ipswich, her home town. Morris taught some of her students when she was a Year 5 teacher at the school last year – her first there.

“It’s pretty cool to have some of the same kids this year. My teaching philosophy is that there’s no learning unless you have built relationships with the kids and they feel comfortable and supported in the classroom. Building those was my highlight last year,” she says.

PROGRAMS OF COLLABORATION
Teachers from each stage collaboratively write the literacy, English and maths programs. Explicit instruction is one of the school’s signature pedagogies for what they call their literacy block.

“As much as the literacy block has been good, it was challenging to funnel everything I knew into the structure that my new school wanted us to deliver in literacy and English. I had support from really experienced colleagues to help me wrap my head around it.”

SPECIALISING ALLOWS MORE FOCUS
Morris says the school has specialist creative arts, PE, and STEM teachers.

“During the students’ STEM time, we have the opportunity to do some intervention with students who need more support. That, and being able to concentrate on literacy and numeracy, has been a really positive change for me.”

She’s keen to keep engaging her students. “I want to be able to see a huge development in their learning from term 1 to term 4 in Year 6,” she says.

WORK-LIFE BALANCE
Morris has achieved teaching proficiency. She did the paperwork once she’d completed 200 days of teaching, saying the process was “very simple”.

She keeps a work-life balance by making sure she knows her roles and responsibilities as a teacher. “Beyond that, I carefully consider if I have the time to take it on. I don’t want to miss out on experiences. It’s about working smarter not harder.”

Morris is a Queensland Teachers’ Union representative and was chuffed to be involved in the union’s “really fantastic work” in dealing with gender equality, part-time work, shared parental leave and a pay increase.

Last year she played competitive AFL and, despite only training for about an hour a week, was also a part of the Australian women’s roller derby team that scored a silver medal in Spain last July.

And her advice for new educators?

“Make sure you make time for yourself to do the things that you love because it comes through with the kids. My students love hearing me tell them about someone I tackled [at an AFL game] on the weekend or an awesome bruise from taekwondo” [She’s a black belt].

“Use that to build relationships with kids to show you have your own life so they can connect with that.”

PHOTOGRAPHY SUPPLIED
PHOEBE MORRIS
Camira State School, QLD

My teaching philosophy is that there’s no learning unless you have built relationships with the kids and they feel comfortable and supported in the classroom.
Over the last few years schools across Australia have embraced the ReaderPen as a valuable assistive technology tool that can help students with reading difficulties, including dyslexia. The ReaderPen and ExamReader C-Pens convert text to speech and read words aloud to struggling students. The use of earphones mean that other students are not disturbed.

The ExamReader has been evaluated by every Exam Board across Australia and all state boards will accept applications for its use in Year 12 exams on a case-by-case basis. The exception to this is SACE in South Australia which has approved the pen without the need to submit an application.

Scanning Pens has recently announced a range of enhancements for both the ReaderPen and ExamReader.

The new features include:
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PATH TO LEADERSHIP

Colin Kiel, 30, had ruled out a teaching career because he saw how hard his father worked as a principal.

Kiel's first job out of school was in marketing and then he studied fire technology. Later, a role as a school assistant sparked an interest in teaching and he left Melbourne to study in Ballarat.

Now he's settling into a new role he began in early 2019 at the helm of the very remote Alekarenge School in the Northern Territory, four hour’s drive north of Alice Springs.

“I knew pretty early that I wanted to work in senior leadership in teaching. When I was studying at uni I was told schools were desperate for male teachers in primary.

“But, when I got to my final year, we were told ‘a third of you won’t get a job next year’. I was thrown by that.”

Kiel missed out on permanent roles, earmarking him for leadership. As a graduate teacher, his passion and training in the visible learning technique, led him to become the school’s coach. He later acted as a principal many times and values the mentoring he received from managers Lynette English and Paula Ridge.

“I remember my first class. The students wouldn’t sit down. They’d been through three teachers in four weeks and later, at home, I fell asleep with my shoes still on. It took a long time to help them see I wasn’t going anywhere,” he recalls of the Transition-Grade 1 class.

“My family gave education a high priority. I’m dyslexic and overcame it with hard work and great teachers. I understand the struggle some students might have.”

Now as Alekarenge’s principal he can set his own vision. The school has removed an old building, plans to upgrade the preschool area, and set up an ICT hub.

“I manage by walking around including into classes four times a day and in the playground. I’m never too busy for the kids, staff or community. If they need me, I’d rather miss a report due date to help them. It’s important they’re feeling heard.

“The workload on principals is massive and I’ve learned not to stress about those deadlines quite as much. When I started, I worked to 10pm, but I’m much better at life balance now,” says Kiel.

He plans to roll out the NT-wide literacy program, Reading Write, at Alekarenge and boost student attendance, which fluctuates among the school’s 110 P-9 students.

“

I knew pretty early that I wanted to work in senior leadership in teaching.

Colin Kiel
Alekarenge School, Al Curung, NT

in his home state and didn’t want to do casual and relief teaching.

“"I wanted my own class to have that opportunity to work with a group of kids and see my impact. So, I went online applying to schools in the territory, had a chat with the principal at Alekarenge and two days later I was driving there,” he says.

In the six years since arriving in the NT, Kiel has temped for Alice Springs regional schools and volunteered for extra roles, earmarking him for leadership. As a graduate teacher, his passion and training in the visible learning technique, led him to become the school's coach. He later acted as a principal many times and values the mentoring he received from managers Lynette English and Paula Ridge.

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Margaret Paton is a freelance writer and casual K-12 teacher.
Sustainable from the start

A forward-thinking schools program is helping raise the next generation of environmentally conscious students.

BY CHARLOTTE BARKLA

Students in South Australia's Wipe Out Waste (WOW) Schools program are looking deeply into their daily waste habits. The WOW program has conducted around 700 bin materials audits in schools since it was introduced in 2006. WOW was developed by state government body Green Industries SA and is run by not-for-profit organisation, Kesab Environmental Solutions.

It aims to significantly reduce the amount of material headed to landfill in favour of composting, recycling or reusing. WOW education officer Jo Hendrikx says the program encourages a “whole of school community” approach to finding waste solutions and the bin audits are one of its most popular initiatives.

“The school collects the indoor and outdoor bin material from the previous day. Then, with the older students, we sort it into 15 categories to get the weight and volume,” says Hendrikx.

The waste is laid out for display to the community, to encourage a collective way of finding waste solutions.

“It’s a great way of benchmarking what is going into bins at the site and prioritising ways to reduce materials going to landfill. We provide education support and tools for all sites across the state, from preschools through to secondary schools.”

CURRICULUM CONNECTIONS

Kesab also runs professional development sessions for teachers, aimed at integrating waste management and resource learning into the school curriculum. This includes field trips to resource recovery sites, transfer stations, electronic recyclers and construction demolition recyclers. “It’s an eye-opening day for most people. Our focus is on showing teachers and educators what’s happening and letting them think about how best to link with curriculum topics,” says Hendrikx.

“We also offer professional learning at different sites, where we pick a school or site that’s done something interesting, such as removing their bins entirely, and ask them to host a learning session.”

TURNING THE TIDE AT TORRENSVILLE

Torrensville Primary School, west of Adelaide’s CBD, takes sustainability to heart. After a visit from WOW in 2016, the school established a sustainability committee that focused on improving the school’s recycling strategy.

Year 3/4 teacher David Peterson says the school began by collecting 10 cent recyclable containers. “Then they rolled out organics collection in each classroom, as well as paper and cardboard recycling.”

In the program’s first year, it achieved

Feedback from the frontline

What is sustainability?

Elsie, 6 years: “Sustainability means recycling things and reusing plastic instead of throwing it away.”

Jude, 6 years: “Sustainability means picking up rubbish and not letting the world down by using plastics.”

What is the best thing about being involved in your school’s sustainability program?

Elsie: “I liked collecting 10 cent bottles and containers and making produce bags out of old curtaining material.”

Jude: “I liked being a Sustainability Superhero and picking up rubbish. I liked collecting 10 cent containers and making parsley scones with the parsley we grew in our garden.”
The kids go around with their capes and collect rubbish at lunchtimes or do different jobs for the sustainability programs. It’s created a bit of a buzz.

David Peterson
Torrens Primary School

a 32 per cent reduction in the volume of material sent to landfill and was recognised at the 2017 WOW Awards.

The school has also created a kitchen garden, incorporating indigenous plants.

“Student representatives from each class met with the teachers and planned out the design of the garden and how to encourage bees and butterflies,” says Peterson.

“Now the produce is used at school and shared with the local community. The committee is also involving students in composting by gathering vegetable scraps. Kids have to be trained in how to do it and they get a composting licence too.”

One of the school’s signature initiatives is ‘Sustainability Superheroes’.

“The kids go around with their capes and collect rubbish at lunchtimes or do different jobs for the sustainability programs. It’s created a bit of a buzz,” says Peterson.

“It’s a really good place to work here because these things are genuinely ours.

“It’s not something that the department has asked us to do, but something we’ve chosen to do, so there’s investment in it. Over my nine years here I’ve really noticed that the kids coming up from the early years have more environmental awareness,” says Peterson.

“There is more initiative and motivation coming from the students, whereas previously we had to plant the seed for the idea in their heads. There’s been a big change in the attitude of the students.”

Charlotte Barkla is a freelance writer.

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"I want to tell you about the short and tortured childhoods in my country, and about a generation of students who are swept from their school desks to their coffins," says Yemeni teacher and trade unionist Yahya Al Yanaie. On the 30th anniversary of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, Al Yanaie writes about the right to education in wartime, and the "lost children of Yemen and the struggle to save them". More than 100,000 people, including 12,000 civilians, have been killed in Yemen since war broke out five years ago, according to the highly regarded Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project.
Millions of children live in this country. They are the children the international community has failed to protect. One million of them have been deprived of education, 1300 have been shot dead, 600 have been killed by cholera, 5000 have been abused, and 1.5 million have been displaced and become homeless. Two million children still live in conflict-ridden areas and suffer from malnutrition, poverty and disease.

Yet the protection of children during wartime is enshrined in international humanitarian law. The international community must intensify its efforts to create safe learning spaces in Yemen, in order to live up to the standards it has set for itself. Education cannot be postponed indefinitely by conflict. The new generation needs the tools that education provides so they can rebuild their communities and country.

Despite the years of disappointment, we, as an education union, have declared our full commitment to supporting international conventions on children’s rights, as a national and humanitarian duty. We have asked teachers to go to schools even though they are not being paid, as a way to protect this generation from loss, illiteracy and the point of no return. Lack of education, despair and hopelessness create the ideal conditions for extremism among children.

One of the disastrous consequences of the ongoing conflict is the generation of children without access to education. It raises the probability that they will be recruited to fight. This displaced generation of children holding rifles will be the tragedy of Yemen in the future. Education in Yemen has been used as a means to exert pressure by the warring factions. The continuous pursuit to politicise education poses both cultural and intellectual risks for students. The attempts to re-adjust the school curricula to serve a sectarian agenda will change the social fabric, deepen the country’s cultural and intellectual divide, and produce a generation of children trapped by sectarian and regional ideas. It will also create a culture of violence and hatred.

BUILDING PEACE AND STABILITY

Therefore, the international community must speak out against the politicisation of education. It must work to bring the warring parties together to agree that education must continue being civic and national in character, with a curriculum that builds peace and stability for future generations in Yemen.

At the same time, the protection and reconstruction of education in Yemen can only be achieved through a global and regional support system. Education has become a tool for sectarian mobilisation and an affluent tributary to war because thousands of children and boys in public education have been mobilised and recruited to fight. These children have exchanged libraries and classrooms for battlefronts. As things stand, the output of education is no longer concerned with life, work and peace; it is more about violence and hatred.

We, as the Yemeni Teachers Union and as members of Education International, are committed to defending the right to education in conflict zones and consider education as an essential building block in the recovery of Yemen. We have urged the international community to support this right as an integral component of humanitarian assistance. We have called on the parties to the war in Yemen to abide by international law and respect civilians and civilian institutions and not attack teachers, students and educational facilities. We have launched initiatives with a range of international and national organisations and local partners that aim to reach the children who are the most affected by the war in Yemen.

INTERNATIONAL APPEAL

As an institution, we seek to take concrete action to prevent attacks against education in Yemen, and to respond more effectively to such attacks, should they occur. We also seek to ensure access to education for all children, not only for the sake of education itself but for the full protection that safe schools can provide for children. Safe schools can protect them from recruitment and bring families and communities together. Going to school can help children withstand the daily stress of being exposed to armed violence.

We are making an international appeal for stronger legal protection with greater institutional cooperation, in the form of a network of solidarity among institutions around the world. Our goal is to deter the targeting of education and its institutions in Yemen.

We hope this humanitarian appeal will motivate governments to support the right of the child to education during crises and conflicts, as an integral component of humanitarian assistance.

Yahya Al Yanaie is the head of communications of the Yemeni Teachers Syndicate. This is an edited extract of an article first published at worldsofeducation.org
Fostering creativity

Digital resources are providing new ways of engaging learners and listeners in the ancient art of storytelling. From audio and video aids, to augmented reality and comic builder apps, we’ve rounded up some of the best free options.

BY CYNTHIA KARENA

Audio

30 Hands Storyteller
Students add narration to storyboard frames from photos, drawings or videoclips to tell their story or explain a concept. 30hands.com

Audacity
An easy-to-use, multi-track audio editor and recorder. A good way for students to get started in creating audio stories. They can make recordings, remove noise, cut and combine clips, and apply special effects. audacityteam.org

Books

Book Creator
Students can use the Book Creator app to put together different types of digital books including research journals, interactive stories, instruction manuals, science reports, poetry books and comic adventures. bookcreator.com

StoryJumper
Publishing a hard-copy version of a book can add an extra element for students. StoryJumper provides class management tools, lesson plans, templates and example books. storyjumper.com

Comics

Comic Creator
Students can choose backgrounds, characters, and props, and compose related dialogue. readwritethink.org

MakeBeliefsComix
A website that helps teachers and students create their own comics, with helpful hints and advice. MakeBeliefsComix.com

Pixton
Sign up with Google or Facebook for a free trial on this easy to use website. pixton.com

Bubblr
Allows users to create comic-strips using a sequence of pictures from flickr. pimpampum.net/en/content/bubblr

Autodesk Tinkercad
An app to help students design story elements in 3D. tinkercad.com/teach

Drawing

Fresco
Built for stylus and touch devices. An easy-to-use drawing and painting app. adobe.com/fresco

Substance
Integrate real-life 3D textures into stories to create a more realistic environment. adobe.com/products/substance

Maps

Storytellers use maps to give their narrative a stronger sense of place. These can be combined with text, photos, illustrations, video, and audio.

Esri story maps
Esri has a series of story map apps, from Story Map Tour, a linear storytelling app with captions, photos and videos linked to an interactive map, to a more immersive approach with Story Map Cascade, which blends narrative text, 3D scenes, images, videos, and map animations. esri.com

Videos

Movavi Video Editor
Students can skip the complexities of the video editing process and concentrate on storytelling with easy drag and drop. edu.movavi.com

Spark
Create videos with traditional storyboarding techniques to create slides with an image and text, then record a voiceover for each slide. spark.adobe.com/edu

SlideStory
Create a slideshow video with voice narration from photos or images. tinyurl.com/qtt5jhx

Video Games

ACMI GameBuilder
A step-by-step guide for students to create video games and tell a story. acmi.net.au

Other resources
• 3D storytelling tips for educators tinyurl.com/tc7gv2l
• Film it. The filmmaker’s toolkit. acmi.net.au
• Free PD resources edex.adobe.com/en
• Autodesk education community autodesk.com/education
• Create mathematical stories mathsthroughstories.org
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Michael D. Bayewitz et al.

**TO KNOW AND NURTURE A READER:**
Conferring with Confidence & Joy
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SHP8603 • $49.95
Kari Yates and Christina Nosek

**USING AND ANALYSING DATA IN AUSTRALIAN SCHOOLS:**
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As a new teacher starting out 40 years ago under the wing of a progressive educator, Professor Alan Reid remembers vigorous educational debates and professional recognition. “It was an intellectually stimulating environment, and the kids benefited.”

The past wasn’t perfect, Reid hastens to add, but he sees a sharp difference between then and now. Professional autonomy, creativity and collaboration have been progressively sidelined. “People move into education because it’s a fantastic career, but they’re becoming disillusioned pretty quickly,” says Reid.

The neoliberal “juggernaut” has invaded education, he says, turning it into a competitive marketplace of consumers and customers – rather than parents and students – which overuses standardised testing to measure school success and accountability. “Although a lot of good things still take place in Australian schools, these happen despite the policy direction, not because of it,” says Reid.

The consequences of following this neoliberal policy direction have been significant and damaging, he says. They include inequitable education outcomes, high teacher attrition, increasing social segregation and stratification of schools, and the residualisation of public education. “Our most educationally disadvantaged students are falling behind,” Reid says. “The proportion of students attending socially-mixed schools is lower in Australia than in most comparable countries, even though we’re becoming increasingly diverse as a community.”

Australia needs a significant change in education policy direction, starting with a rethink of the purposes of education, says Reid. “There needs to be discussion and debate among educators about what an education for the 21st century might look like.”

MASSIVE DISRUPTION

In his new book, Changing Australian Education, Reid describes the massive disruption that is looming with the fourth industrial revolution, Industry 4.0. Technological breakthroughs in artificial intelligence, biotechnology and robotics, for example, will change entire systems of work, governance and production in our society. “Education is key,” he says. “It is the only way we are going to be able to develop the capabilities to cope with, and productively shape, the direction in which society goes as a result of these changes.”

For many people, a broader view of the purpose of education – such as its contribution to society – is assumed, says Reid. Yet in practice, current education policy largely focuses on work readiness, ignoring the role of education in building ethical understanding, creating strong communities and strengthening democracy.

Reid believes we need to restate the purposes of education, which should then form the bedrock of a new educational narrative. [See far right]

“One of the big issues at the moment is the ethical questions around the development of artificial intelligence.
and machine learning,” says Reid. “There’s not one development in that area that doesn’t involve some key ethical considerations.”

“We should be having community debates about this, and [that needs] people who’ve got the capacity to engage.”

Equally, a 21st-century education must help young people develop their capacity for discernment and scepticism in the age of the 24/7 news cycle from a fragmented media, with “echo chambers” and fake news, all of which are having “a deleterious effect on our democratic life,” says Reid.

**CHALLENGE ASSUMPTIONS**

Changing Australia’s education narrative is complex and cannot happen overnight, Reid warns. What is important is that educators take the lead. “The [neoliberal] approach has been so dominant,” says Reid. “We need to keep pointing out the damage it is doing, and build and refine this alternative narrative.”

Importantly, this must involve challenging assumptions about the meaning and use of words and ideas. “Accountability”, for example, was one of the stated reasons for introducing standardised testing regimes such as NAPLAN, with critics therefore described as being opposed to accountability. And this is not true, says Reid. “Accountability is actually crucial in any education system. But if we’re interested in accountability, we want to make sure that it really is telling us about the quality of education in all its breadth and richness. This can’t be measured by simple standardised tests in a narrow range of areas.”

And what about personalised learning? The second Gonski Report describes personalised learning as the way of the future, which sounds impressive and progressive, says Reid. “But when I looked at it in detail, I saw it referred to progression levels - a grey, narrowly scripted and technologically based progression of learning - which is far removed from the kind of personalised learning that starts where students are at, and connects to their interests, experiences and background.”

**ENGAGE WITH SCHOOL COMMUNITIES**

Around the world, there are positive moves afoot to rewrite education policy. Finland, for example, clearly respects the voice of teachers and the expertise of the professional educators,” says Reid. “It is not obsessed with standardised testing.”

New Zealand has also moved away from standardised testing and is looking at including educators more in decision making, he says.

Reid urges Australian educators to engage with their school communities and discuss the damaging consequences of current policy, and the need for a new education narrative.

“Teachers are doing the most important job in our community. Collectively, we can exert pressure to change direction.”

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**A new narrative for education**

In his book *Changing Australian Education*, Professor Alan Reid argues for a new narrative for education that has three important elements. First, there must be clarity about the purposes of education. Reid proposes four broad purposes that must be taken seriously by policy makers.

1. **A democratic purpose**: preparing young people for society and democracy
2. **An economic purpose**: preparing young people for work, for labour market
3. **An individual purpose**: developing young people to their fullest potential
4. **A social and cultural purpose**: developing people with the capacities to work in different social and cultural communities.

The second element of a new education narrative involves achieving broad political and community agreement about the values and principles that should underpin our education systems. These would differ from those that inform the neoliberal narrative, by reflecting a commitment to the common good. It would include values such as care and compassion, empathy and collaboration, community and generosity.

In addition, agreement needs to be reached about a number of principles that are consistent with these values, and will inform policy and practice. Reid proposes principles such as achieving equitable educational outcomes, taking a broad approach to accountability, valuing the voice and expertise of educators, and ensuring that well-resourced, inclusive and non-segregated public schools are at the centre of our education system.

The third element is an agreed process for policy making that takes account of the broad societal trends that are shaping our society, and ensures the knowledge and experience of educators is used in the development of policy. Taken together, these three elements form the core of a new educational narrative. Reid argues that a well-developed education narrative suited to the challenges of the 21st century is the first step to loosening the iron grip of neoliberal policy, and repairing the damage it has done to Australian education.
Sliding doors
Rebecca West’s teaching career began almost by accident but weeks into her education degree, she knew it was right.

By Margaret Paton

A sliding doors moment for Rebecca West was missing out on getting into law degree by 0.35 of her Higher School Certificate mark. Her back-up plan was to do a year of an education degree, then transfer into military law.

But four weeks into her degree and while observing a kindergarten class, West decided she never wanted to leave teaching.

“As soon as I stepped into the room, something clicked and I haven’t looked back,” she says.

Almost two decades on, West has a bachelor’s and master’s in education and a postgraduate in special education.

After a role in a special needs school at the start of her career, West was keen to use her special education knowledge and skills in a mainstream school.

“My values and ethics aligned with the NSW public education system,” says West, who has a son on the autism spectrum and another child with a possible receptive/expressive language delay.

She says her own experiences help her work with families of children with additional needs: “I relate as a parent.”

West is now deputy principal – instructional leader – at Bonnyrigg Public School in southwest Sydney, a school with 300 students and many families who suffer disadvantage. She was previously at Memwa Central School near Dubbo in NSW.

Why teach?
West encourages teachers to understand why they want to teach and to decide the effect they would like to have on their students.

“Your own mission is to inspire young people to seize their opportunities to learn, grow and “be better people”.

“You don’t have to be the smartest kid in the crowd. It’s about having solid values of kindness, understanding and respect so you can contribute to society,” says West.

While the door to law didn’t open for her, West sees its relevance in her teaching practice.

“What drew me to law was the social justice aspect, the fight for human rights and equity. It’s essentially what we do in education. I work alongside caseworkers and support providers with kids and their families dealing with those issues. It’s useful to know how the law helps to support us in fighting for children’s rights.”

Margaret Paton is a freelance writer and casual K-12 teacher.

Rebecca West
Bonnyrigg Public School, Sydney

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