

**INSIDE**

# Teaching

THE PROFESSIONAL JOURNAL OF THE AUSTRALASIAN TEACHER REGULATORY AUTHORITIES

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# INSIDE Teaching

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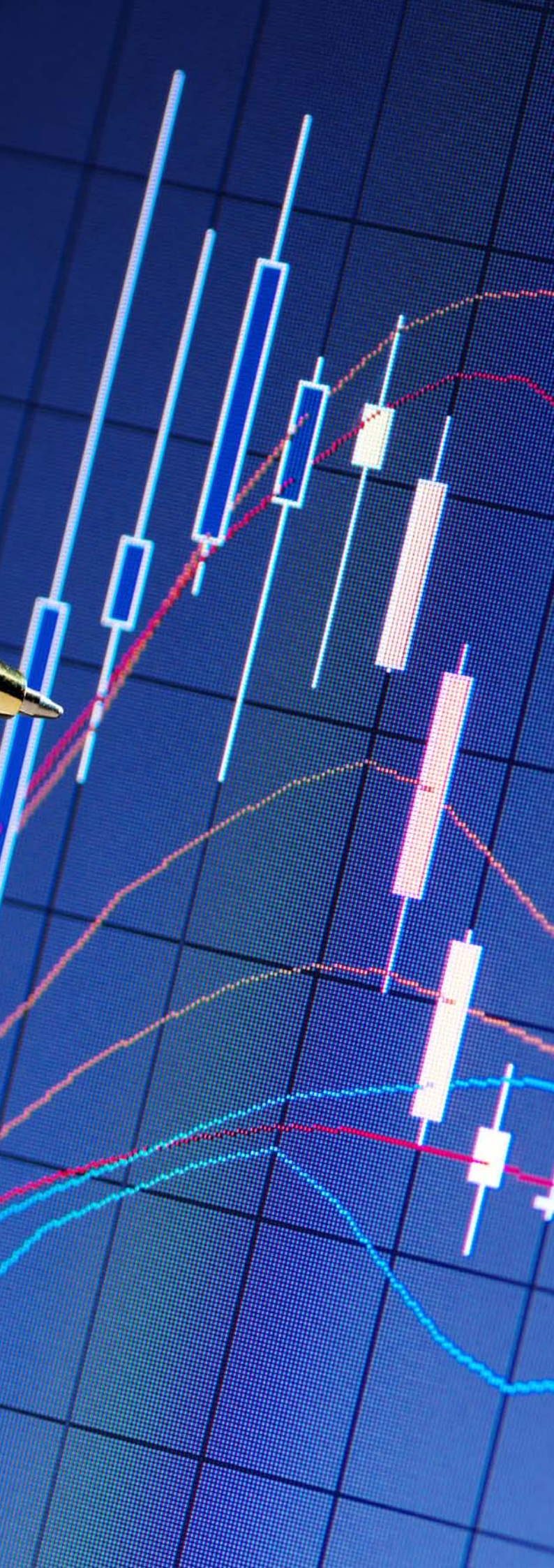
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## Editorial

*What can we expect from our new minority Commonwealth government, formed in September after a knife-edge election result in August? As Prime Minister Julia Gillard admitted at the Asia Europe Meeting in October, 'If I had a choice, I'd probably (rather) be in a school watching kids learn to read in Australia than here in Brussels at international meetings.' We can expect her ministers to pursue the national curriculum, assessment and transparency agenda, with the English, mathematics, science and history curriculum to Year 10 scheduled for implementation in 2011. According to Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority Chair Professor Barry McGaw, implementation from 2011 will be 'by those jurisdictions and schools wanting to commence.' And don't forget the regional agenda, which depends a bit on the independents, Rob Oakeshott, Tony Windsor and Andrew Wilkie.*

## State of the nation

World Teachers' Day on 29 October is your chance to 'celebrate teachers worldwide.., mobilise support for teachers and...ensure that the needs of future generations will continue to be met by teachers,' to use the words of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation, which began World Teachers' Day in 1994. The Western Australian College of Teaching has a Kinder to Year 3 drawing competition; a Year 4 to Year 7 limerick competition; a Year 8 to Year 10 literary composition competition; and a Years 11 and 12 artwork competition, with some fantastic prizes. The Teachers Registration Board of Tasmania invited students to create a digital image story to answer the question, 'What makes teachers in your school great?' with great prizes there, as well. The Queensland College of Teachers has provided a specially designed WTD poster to all schools in the state. The winners of the 2010 QCT Excellence in Teaching Awards will be announced at a ceremony hosted by the Queensland Governor at Government House on 29 October. Winners receive \$5,000 towards professional development. The Victorian Institute of Teaching invited people to nominate a teacher who has made a real difference with their students, colleagues or community, with 10 nominees to

receive a certificate of recognition plus an iPad and professional development to go with it. The Teachers Registration Board of South Australia will provide a poster to all education sites and daily media, and suggests celebrating great teachers in a variety of ways. The Northern Territory Department of Education and Training is coordinating functions in Darwin, Nhulunbuy, Katherine, Tennant Creek and Alice Springs.

Hedley Beare, one of Australia's leading educators, died of leukaemia at home in Melbourne last month. The Foundation Director of the Northern Territory Department of Education and Foundation Chief Education Officer of the Australian Capital Territory Schools Authority, he published many books and articles addressing education policy, curriculum, management, Indigenous education and remote education, and the profession of teaching and the professional development of teachers and school leaders.

Mary MacKillop was canonised on 17 October in Rome. Contractors were hurriedly repairing the schoolhouse where Mary MacKillop first taught in 1866 in preparation for celebrations of the canonisation. The roof of the schoolhouse, now the Mary MacKillop Centre, in Penola, South Australia, was ripped off during a storm in July.

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# Share and share alike

The benefits of sharing facilities





*There are plenty of benefits for three Adelaide schools that share facilities and retain their autonomy, as **WENDY BROOKS**, **REBECCA SINCLAIR** and **JEAN HAESE** explain.*

Beginning as an experiment in the late 1980s, the Golden Grove Secondary Schools Campus in Adelaide's north-eastern suburbs has matured into a successful, multifaceted 21st-century education hub.

The concept of shared facilities is about providing an opportunity for cooperative and collaborative teaching and learning between the three different school sectors, on the one site. More than 20 years later, the Golden Grove Campus is flourishing and the opportunities provided by shared facilities for senior school students has proved invaluable.

The Golden Grove area is a major urban development in Adelaide's north-east that has grown very rapidly. Given that rapid growth, there was an identified need for secondary schools in the area. The resulting shared-facilities model saw the establishment of three autonomous schools – Gleeson College, which is a Catholic school, Golden Grove High School, which is a government school, and Pedare Christian College, which

is an Anglican and Uniting school – on the one site. A central hub between the three schools is the location for a range of shared facilities.

The autonomous and shared-facilities model means each school maintains its own identity, ethos, traditions, manner of operation and facilities. At the same time, it means the three schools can share facilities, in terms of senior school specialised study in art, design and technology, drama, home economics and hospitality, information and communication technology (ICT), music, physical education and science. The three schools also share a senior resource centre.

Specialised teaching facilities include:

- physics, chemistry, biology and psychology laboratories
- four ICT laboratories
- a design and technology suite housing two computer-aided design (CAD) rooms, two electronics laboratories,

and wood, metal, plastic and automotive teaching areas

- a music suite housing a multi-media studio with recording and production facilities, a computer studio, keyboard laboratory, a music studio and a number of individual practice rooms
- a home economics suite housing food and textile rooms
- a recreation and arts centre with a first-class hockey pitch, three gymnasias, a theatre, a commercial kitchen and a dining room
- the Dame Roma Mitchell Centre – a flexible facility that can be divided into a series of smaller spaces to suit the needs of the schools at various times, including dance facilities, two lecture theatres seating approximately 150 people in each space, a stage with associated professional sound and lighting and a kitchen for catering, and
- a trade training centre – currently under construction – which will house four



***ONE OF THE MAJOR BENEFITS OF THE SHARED-FACILITIES MODEL AND THE COMBINED CAMPUS HAS BEEN THE SUCCESS OF JOINT FUNDING SUBMISSIONS.***

electronics laboratories, three CAD and programming rooms, a computer pod and print area, and an applied physics laboratory.

Each of the three schools operates on the same timetable and daily structure to facilitate cross-campus study at the senior levels. Students in Years 11 and 12 have access to a broader range of subjects than would normally be available in a stand-alone school. For example, there may be a cross-campus class in multimedia in which students from all three schools undertake studies, with the class taught by a specialist teacher from one of

the schools. It sometimes occurs that a student wants to study two subjects which are on at the same time, and the ability to study across campus opens up the opportunity to study both subjects but at different schools.

The cooperative nature of our shared site is also seen in events such as:

- the annual cross-campus assembly with dance, drama and musical performances which involve students from all three schools and which students from all three schools enjoy
- an afternoon tea at the beginning of each school year



for new staff from each school, which enables staff to meet the campus principals

- a seminar for students studying across campus at the beginning of the year, to support those students in their learning
- the campus open night, which is another opportunity to showcase the schools and their shared facilities, and
- the cross-campus faculty meeting, held every term so that staff from each school can meet together to share resources and ideas, as well as to provide an opportunity to invite outside speakers to share good practice.

From the beginning, the vision and outstanding leadership

of the campus principals has underpinned the success of the campus. The principals meet each fortnight to overview the operation of the shared-facilities model and to maximise the success of all three schools through collaboration.

The model works with a shared-facilities management group which consists of the deputy and assistant principals of each school, together with the shared-facilities professional coordinator. This group also meets fortnightly, to manage the day-to-day operations of the shared facilities. The three schools' business managers meet weekly to manage the financial aspects, while specialised school support officers assist in the

smooth, efficient running of the classrooms and specialist areas.

One of the major benefits of the shared-facilities model and the combined campus has been the success of joint funding submissions which have resulted in a number of new facilities for the campus.

Currently under construction is a \$4.1 million trade training centre to provide specialist electronics facilities to enable students to complete studies in both technical and further education, and to facilitate university pathways.

This innovative development has shown that significant benefits accrue to students when the public and private sectors work collaboratively. The needs of

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PRIVATE SECTORS WORK  
COLLABORATIVELY.**

our community require creative thinking, negotiation, cooperation and shared decision-making to facilitate social and learning outcomes for all students.

The Golden Grove Campus offers a broad range of opportunities and state-of-the-art facilities to facilitate better teaching and learning outcomes for the 21st century. ■

**Wendy Brooks** is the Coordinator of Marketing and Communications at Pedare Christian College, Adelaide.

**Rebecca Sinclair** is the Marketing Coordinator at Gleeson College, Adelaide.

**Jean Haese** is the Shared Facilities Professional Coordinator at Golden Grove High School, Adelaide.

*Pictured, page 6, students from Gleeson, Pedare and Golden Grove High School in the shared facilities courtyard at the Golden Grove Secondary Schools Campus; page 8, students are brought together by shared facilities while maintaining the identity, ethos and traditions of their individual schools; this page, Gleeson students timetabled in the shared design and technology suite. All photographs by John Hemmings courtesy Gleeson College.*



# Teachers - be part of the validation of the new National Professional Standards for Teachers

## ***What are the National Professional Standards for Teachers?***

The draft Standards set out what teachers across Australia should know and be able to do across the domains of professional knowledge, professional practice and professional engagement at four levels: Graduate, Proficient, Highly Accomplished and Lead Teacher.

The Standards will provide a continuum of capabilities and expectations for teachers. Initially they will guide ongoing professional learning and set a reliable, fair and nationally consistent basis for the accreditation of pre-service teacher education courses and teacher registration.

## ***What is validation?***

The development of the Standards commenced in January 2009 and has involved a rigorous process of drafting and consultation. The development of the draft Standards has also been informed by extensive research and analysis. The validation of the standards, of which teachers will be key contributors, will ensure that the standards reflect the views and aspirations of classroom teachers.

## ***Why is the involvement of the profession important?***

The validation process gives practising teachers and principals a direct say in determining the applicability and usefulness of the standards. By drawing on the views of teachers, the process also has the potential to provide new ways of recognising and celebrating high-quality teaching in Australian schools.

## ***How can you be involved?***

Any interested teachers, outside the schools that have been pre-selected to participate in the online surveys, can take part in study two.

Please go to the AITSL website at [www.aitsl.edu.au](http://www.aitsl.edu.au) between 4 October and 29 October 2010 for access to the online survey.

Should you require further information, please contact the AITSL Project Manager, Patrick Kennedy at [patrick.kennedy@aitsl.edu.au](mailto:patrick.kennedy@aitsl.edu.au) or phone (03) 8330-9485.





# What's it to you?

Attitude, and changing the status quo

*Our attitudes, and our actions in our classrooms, can maintain the status – quo but equally they can change it. JEANNIE HERBERT explains.*

Attitude – it’s a fascinating word, particularly in its current most common form, where it’s come to mean bad attitude.

We might refer to a student as having ‘attitude,’ but equally we should be mindful of our own attitude, and be alert to the things that stir our sensitivities. Most of us teachers are in control of our attitudes and behaviours – at least while engaged in activities that are aligned to our values and beliefs – but what about when we’re confronting people or behaviours that don’t reflect our cultural mores? Are we still able to maintain such control? Do we even want to?

The attitudes, and the values and beliefs that underpin them, that in colonial times guided the establishment of institutions like education, health, welfare and the law – and more often than not guided the exclusion of Indigenous people from those institutions – remain deeply embedded in the Australian psyche.

Imagine that you’ve been raised in a community where to be of white, Anglo-Saxon heritage is to occupy a privileged position. Your birthright entitles you to a good education that guarantees you the pick of the more highly paid, secure employment opportunities, a high socioeconomic status and the right to expect respect from others.

Of course, many teachers were not personally born into such privilege, but many of us have

long committed ourselves to the values, beliefs and attitudes that enable white, Anglo-Saxon privilege. Does this befit our role as members of a profession trained to help all students to take their rightful places in society?

Privilege matters because it influences classroom interaction, the engagement between student groups, and between students and teachers.

Imagine this scenario. A row erupts in your classroom to do with a local area history unit you’ve introduced. Last week, you’d invited some local traditional owners to share their stories. They recounted a story about a massacre that had happened near the creek, many years ago, in which local families, Indigenous and non-Indigenous, had been involved, and which resulted in a very high Indigenous death toll. The two male students involved in this row are from families who were involved. As you enter the classroom, the non-Indigenous student makes an extremely offensive and personal racist comment to the Indigenous student. While you don’t hear it, several nearby students do. As the Indigenous student yells a response, you move to calm the situation down. One student tells you what was said. ‘I didn’t think anybody used that sort of language anymore so keep it out of my classroom,’ you say. You also tell the Indigenous student you don’t appreciate his yelling in the classroom. You begin the lesson.

Imagine you’re that teacher. What did you just do? Who’s in control, and who isn’t? What have your actions just told your students about your attitudes? How has your decision to behave in the way you did contributed to changing the status quo in this country?

Imagine you’re the Indigenous student. How do you feel right now? How effectively is your teacher creating an inclusive learning environment that delivers on the promise of education for all students? What might your teacher have said to make you feel you ‘belonged’ in this classroom?

That scenario is based on the facts of real-life situations that I’ve increasingly been asked to respond to in recent years, and I believe it’s time for us, individually and as a profession, to engage in some deep reflection, to think about our personal attitude toward ‘difference’ and how that attitude might affect our capacity to close the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous educational achievement.

Every move you make can contribute to maintaining the status quo. Equally, though, every move you make can contribute to changing it. ■

**Professor Jeannie Herbert**  
*holds the Chair of Indigenous Studies at Charles Sturt University, New South Wales.*





Tell me? Show me?

# Involve me

As **LORRAINE HAMMOND** explains, professional development that leads to lasting change is brought about by modelling strategies in classrooms, coaching teachers, and providing ongoing and transparent feedback on instruction.

Professional development is essential if we're to support teachers in implementing literacy reforms, and ultimately in improving outcomes for children, but to be effective, it requires more than telling teachers what to do; it involves modelling strategies in classrooms, coaching teachers and providing feedback.

'Tell me, and I'll forget; show me, and I may remember; involve me, and I'll understand,' as the saying goes. It's ironic, then, that I should be writing this on a flight home from Sydney after delivering a keynote at a large conference.

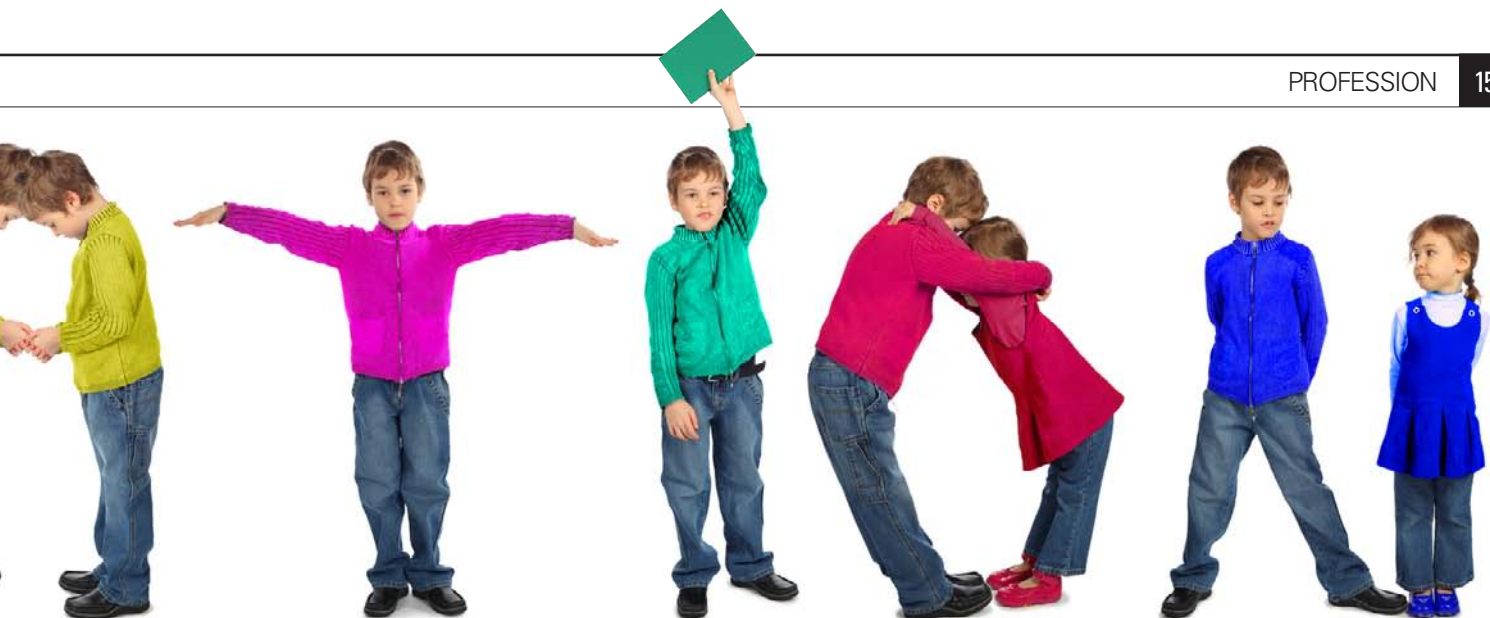
I'm always pleased to be asked to speak, but I sometimes wonder exactly what the participants take away, particularly when I'm condensing complex ideas – stuff I might otherwise address in a postgraduate unit at university – into the slot between registration and morning tea.

Over the years, the handouts have increased in size, peaking at the 12-page tome accompanying the eight pages of miniaturised PowerPoint slides that I've just entrusted to my most recent audience.

After years of talking about literacy instruction, though, I've come to the conclusion that it's simply not enough to tell teachers what the research says to do; you've got to be prepared to show them and involve them. In my case, I've got to illustrate the strategies on reading comprehension I've been advocating with scripted lesson plans. My rationale is simple: how else will busy teachers who have limited time to read articles and books translate these innovative strategies into daily classroom practice and get the kinds of results promised by researchers?

I've long suspected that the overviews I'm guilty of presenting, notwithstanding my efforts at being charismatic, have fallen short of the mark. Deborah Ball and David Cohen, in 'Developing practice, developing practitioners: Towards a practice-based theory of professional education,' have similarly observed that workshop handouts, ideas, and methods provide 'brief sparks of novelty and imagination,' but, as Willis Hawley and Linda Valli observe in 'The essentials of effective professional development,' usually result in most teachers going back to their regular ways of teaching.

This became glaringly obvious to me when I was asked to lead a research project in five Western Australian primary schools that were the recipients of an innovation grant provided by the WA Department of Education and Training to look at how well



the literacy practices of early childhood staff – Kindergarten to Year 2 teachers – aligned to current research on how the brain learns to read.

The design of the project was simple: to have the early childhood staff complete a teacher knowledge survey about teaching beginning reading and then deliver a series of sessions to address gaps in their understanding and present current research on effective instructional strategies. The results of the survey, however, changed the course of the project.

Based on American researcher Louisa Moat's work in the field, the teacher knowledge survey is designed to measure teachers' understanding of the nomenclature of early literacy concepts and their literacy skills, and, as in the example provided at right, to identify sounds in words.

Moats, in 'Knowledge foundations for teaching reading and spelling,' reports that even the most literate of teachers experience difficulty with these items because an understanding of terms like 'phoneme awareness,' 'segmentation' and 'syllable' is a prerequisite to complete the practical task, which in itself is

also tricky. The answer is a., because you must listen for the number of sounds or phonemes – the smallest units of sound – in each word, and not be distracted by their spelling.

Taken in the context of Ruth Fielding-Barnsley's recent findings, the survey results are further evidence of a worrying trend. While some participants demonstrated a high level of literacy knowledge and application, many of the participants – including new graduates and those with more than 30 years' experience – remained uncertain about the meanings of terms that now proliferate in beginning reading instruction.

Without a clear understanding of terms like 'phoneme segmentation,' ambiguity is rife. You only have to read the 2005 report of the National Inquiry into the Teaching of Literacy to see the emphasis that current research places on the importance of phonological awareness and synthetic phonics. Given that emphasis, I was left wondering what my surveyed teachers had made of the terminology-laden suggestions other good-intentioned folk before me had offered.

**How much do you know about teaching beginning reading?**

**Which set of words should a teacher select for a phoneme awareness activity to give children practice with segmentation of four phonemes in one-syllable words?**

- a. thrill, sting
- b. shark, string
- c. witch, dodge
- d. all of the above
- e. I'm not sure.



I didn't have to wonder for long. After explaining the nomenclature, I embarked on a review of research about the importance of teaching decoding when one teacher stopped me abruptly and said, 'Yes, I understand the terms now and I can see why I need to teach kids to decode, but you're going to have to show me how if you want me to do it properly.' It was my Damascus moment. As the words resonated in my head she added, 'And how about coming to my classroom with my kids to do this?'

Professional development with 30 participants followed, using Patricia Formentin's *Let's Decode*, an approach to teaching phoneme awareness and systematic decoding instruction that I've used in previous research. I conducted the practical course with students and followed up with regular visits to model lessons in teachers' classrooms.

*Let's Decode* is based on standard 'lesson formats' for teaching blending, rhyming, segmenting and decoding, or as one teacher put it 'the words I needed to teach these concepts.' Teachers are coached on how to engage all students and provide faultless instruction.

To measure gains in teacher efficacy, the 30 participants agreed, somewhat reluctantly, to let my research assistant and me watch them teach. One experienced teacher observed that not since the days of being

a prac student had she felt under so much pressure. Along with her colleagues, though, she acknowledged the benefit of receiving continuous feedback.

I developed a rubric based on the salient features of the instructional approach so that, after each observation, teachers were able to see how their performance in three areas had changed: analysis of knowledge, communication and behaviour.

I also began receiving emails from teachers that went something like, 'How many phonemes are there in "witch" and how would I clap it for segmentation?' The answer is three – w+i+ch – and, because of the stop sound at the beginning of the word, children are taught to blend the first two sounds and hold the vowel, resulting in wiiich. *Let's Decode*, like any new intervention, has a sophisticated set of rules and I began to marvel at how committed the teachers were to delivering the program well.

By far the greatest influence on the decisions teachers make about instruction is what they believe works. The gradual and supported introduction of *Let's Decode* certainly increased the likelihood that teachers would take on the strategies outside their involvement in the project. Put simply, teachers had the opportunity to master all aspects of the intervention, practise the formats over three terms and receive regular feedback on their performance. Consequently, the

new strategies they took on to teach beginning reading had every opportunity to be effective and yielded the expected results: children who teachers were initially concerned about, and who might otherwise have struggled, learned how to read. By far the most outstanding result was from the lowest socioeconomic school in the project, where all pre-primary students are now independently able to decode words such as strap, crush and plastic.

As one teacher summed up, 'I always knew I should be teaching these things, but I wasn't sure exactly how to do it. You've given me the words to use and, unlike other sessions I've been to where the strategies were only ever talked about, you were prepared to come to my classroom and show me how to do it with my students. It did wonders for your credibility.'

My involvement in this project has certainly enabled me to see learning through the eyes of the participants, but most importantly it's reminded me of the complexity of the role teachers perform and the demands on their energy and time. This project was but one of a long list of initiatives they're engaged with. I feel privileged to have been invited into their classrooms. ■

**Dr Lorraine Hammond** is a Senior Lecturer and Special Education Coordinator in the School of Education at Edith Cowan University, Perth.

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# Les Murray

## My best teacher

*STEVE HOLDEN talks with **LES MURRAY** about his best teachers, and learns much more than he expected.*

Sit down to talk with Australia's pre-eminent, award-winning, internationally acclaimed and prolific poet Les Murray and you expect to hear from 'one of the leading poets of his generation,' as John Tranter has described him, Australia's great literary statesman and the author of close to 30 volumes of poetry and two verse novels.

There's plenty otherwise, though, that I didn't expect to find.

There's the child who struggled through school as a result of

autism and depression, whose demons, in Murray's words, 'stay with you: when I'm really sick I'm 16 again and none of the good things have ever happened.'

There's the child who was bullied.

'The worst was the bullying by the opposite sex. There was nothing I could do about it. It contributed to the depressive illness that was latent in me anyway. Mind you, the kids who bullied me grew out of it at age 17, and I think I started tormenting them.'

There's the child for whom school was a sometimes occasional experience. Murray didn't attend school until he was nine. As he explains, 'In the 1930s there was a bit of a drought of babies' – he was born in 1938 in Nabiac on the New South Wales north coast – 'and there wasn't much call for a school. Bulby Brush Public School closed during the Second World War and reopened in 1948, so I just didn't go to school.'

'I just taught myself to read from golden syrup tins and the newspaper. My first words were probably "golden syrup." The war news was interesting.' As he told Dan Chiasson, writing in 'Fire down below' in the *New Yorker*, he took special delight, when he was three, in the phrase,

from the Lord's Prayer, 'trespass against us.'

Playing truant, Murray says, wasn't that hard. 'When they don't provide a school,' he explains, 'they don't come to check up on you.'

At Nabic Central School, which Murray attended after his mother's death, he was taught Social Studies by Lionel Gilbert – who now lives in Armidale. Most of his teachers, Murray observes, are still alive. 'He was humane,' Murray explains. 'His interest in us, and his subject, was communicable.'

Murray, in his words, 'dropped out' in Year 9, then attended Taree High School to complete his leaving certificate.

It was here that he met teachers Keith and Edie McLaughlin, and Les Lawrie. 'Keith had a good deal of nous and truly loved his subject. He introduced me to modern poetry. I think he had a feeling that he might distract me from the bullying with something he thought I'd love. It was a good piece of lateral thinking. Edie was more into the artistic lifestyle. She bought me my first cappuccino in 1956. In Taree, that was a remarkable achievement.'

'Les Lawrie was the sportsmaster at Taree. He introduced me to modern Australian poetry. I didn't know that existed before then. I think he thought I needed

rhythm. He was probably worried about me on the horse vault. I was a big boy, even then.'

Like school, Murray's experience of university was also occasional – he went to the University of Sydney in 1957 to study modern languages, left in 1960 without graduating, and returned in 1969. At the University of Sydney he met teachers Len McGlashan and Barry Blake.

'Len had energy and vim. He had humour, but he was jovially brutal in teaching German. He got your interest. Barry was one of those chaps who could make a subject perfectly clear to you.'

'At the University of Sydney, though, a kind of paralysis crept over me. I stopped attending and even started sleeping rough. I didn't realise at the time it was my first depressive breakdown.'

Murray married Valerie – they have five children – then found work as a translator at the Australian National University from 1963 to 1967, and briefly as a clerk in the Department of Prime Minister for John Gorton, before returning to university. 'I went back,' he explains, 'because it was a world that I knew. I knew I wouldn't be much good at a sit-down job.'

Murray's job, since 1971, has been poetry, and he's visited schools across the country since then to talk with teachers and students. 'Schools are always a

*'LES LAWRIE WAS THE SPORTSMASTER AT TAREE. HE INTRODUCED ME TO MODERN AUSTRALIAN POETRY.'*



*'I SUSPECT THE BEST WAY TO TEACH POETRY,' SAYS MURRAY, 'IS TO DISPLAY IT OR TO HOLD COMPETITIONS RATHER THAN GO INTO ANALYSIS. IF YOU WANT TO DESTROY A SUBJECT, ANALYSE IT: ROCK AND ROLL WOULD BE DEAD IN A WEEK.'*

bit scary,' he admits. 'You always wonder which kids are being tormented. All you can do is show the kids you're awake to what's gone on.'

His advice for teachers generally? 'Tell as much of the truth as is legal, and it's a mistake to use a persona – kids can spot a fake a mile off.'

Talk with the man who, according to Chiasson, is 'among the three or four leading English-language poets' in the world, and you ought to ask about poetry. 'I suspect the best way to teach poetry,' says Murray, 'is to display it or to hold competitions rather than go into analysis. If you want to destroy a subject, analyse it: rock and roll would be dead in a week.'

Murray, surprisingly, describes his poetry as pessimistic and says he is prone to dogmatism, notwithstanding the depth and breadth of the celebratory poetry he's written. 'Depression,' he says, 'has caused me to write a good narrative poem – *Freddy Neptune* – about a man who discovers how bad the world can be.'

How bad the world can be, it seems, lies at the heart of things for Murray. 'Mum died of her third miscarriage,' he says, 'and the impact was unsuspected, but profound. I had a leaning to depression anyway, but I think I had come

to the conclusion that it was my fault.'

The striking thing about our conversation, though, is that Murray speaks – of depression, autism, his mother's death – with immense candour, yet there's a lot more laughter than you might expect of a pessimist.

Murray counts himself lucky to have had a few good teachers, but there's one I haven't mentioned yet: poetry itself. 'The purpose of poetry,' says Murray, 'is to delight, but it's also to work things out, about the world, and life. It's a means of research, a way to understand things. I always found the world very mysterious.' ■

*Pictured, Les Murray at this year's Sydney Writers' Festival with facilitator Michael Duffy. Photograph by Prudence Upton courtesy of the Sydney Writers' Festival.*

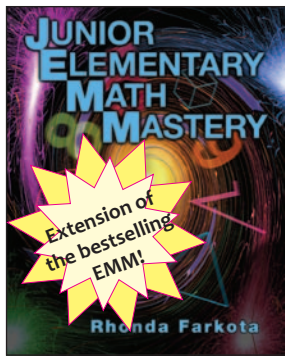
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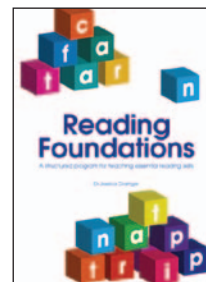
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# 10 things I've learned about teaching

*NEIL CRANSTON has learned that there's more he doesn't know than he does know and that he's at his best when he feels uncomfortable and challenged, and he's still prepared to explain 10 things he's learned about teaching.*

What are 10 things I've learned about teaching? What I offer here are 10 things that have 'bubbled up' from my experiences – both positive and negative. I'm not, I hasten to add, pretending here to reveal the 'holy grail' of teaching; nor am I attempting to be comprehensive in covering what is important for all educators.

**1 WHAT ONE ACHIEVES IS THE CULMINATION OF MANY EXPERIENCES, A WILLINGNESS TO LEARN AND THE INFLUENCES OF OTHERS IN AN ONGOING JOURNEY.**

Education is not a solo journey. Here, the key question is about how our learnings can contribute to improved practice, and the learning and growth of others.

Behind that question lies the belief that we need to be deeply committed to the learning of the young people in our care as the priority. I mean learning in a broad sense: academic, social, emotional, physical and spiritual, and I define that term very broadly. The learning of our students isn't our only focus. While that's a priority, we also need to continue our own professional and personal learning as a critical focus.

**2 A KEY ASPECT OF OUR CONTINUING PROFESSIONAL AND PERSONAL LEARNING IS MENTORING, FORMAL AND INFORMAL, PLANNED AND SERENDIPITOUS.**

A lot of good mentoring is the result of realising that you're with the right person in the right place at the right time. Be alert to opportunities and take them when they are offered.

**3 LEADING ON FROM THIS, LEARNING WITH, AND FROM, OTHERS IS A CRITICAL ELEMENT OF PROFESSIONAL GROWTH.**

An important aspect of learning as educational professionals is the art of asking questions – of others, and more critically, of ourselves, to do with what we're doing in our classrooms and what effects we might, or might not, have on the young people in our care.

#### **4 ENGAGE IN PROFESSIONAL CONVERSATIONS – BECAUSE YOUR SHARING OF PRACTICE AND IDEAS, SUCCESSES AND FAILURES, WILL LEAD TO ENHANCED TEACHING AND LEARNING.**

While it's important to engage deeply in the world of education and our professionalism as educators, it's also important to look outside our usual world, to be alert to what learnings we can take from other fields of endeavour and how we might embed these in our own practices to make us better at what we do. We have much to gain by looking outside our immediate world and seeing what other disciplines and experiences have to offer in terms of improving educational understandings and practices.

#### **5 IT'S OKAY TO FEEL UNCOMFORTABLE AND CHALLENGED BECAUSE THAT'S WHEN WE ARE OFTEN MOST RECEPTIVE TO NEW LEARNING.**

We don't know everything, and we'll never know everything, but we should strive to know and learn as much as we can in this rapidly changing world as we prepare young people for their roles in the community of tomorrow. There are two further related lessons to this one.

#### **6 THERE'S MORE YOU DON'T KNOW THAN**

#### **YOU DO KNOW OR, PUT OTHERWISE, YOU DON'T KNOW AS MUCH AS YOU THINK YOU DO!**

#### **7 STAY HUMBLE, KEEP ASKING QUESTIONS AND KEEP LEARNING.**

Of course, points 4, 5 and 6 need to be understood in the context of a rapidly changing world where education and schools face many challenges. New challenges seemingly emerge on a daily basis and many of these threaten us and make us uncomfortable. These are the realities of the world into which the young people in our classrooms are entering – uncertainty and difference are hallmarks of this world. On top of that, unfortunately, education has become a key player in the political 'wars,' where governments seek quick fixes to highly complex issues in schools. As educators, we need to help our politicians and policymakers to understand the things outlined below if we're to achieve real change and improvement in what we do.

#### **8 CHANGE IN EDUCATION IS COMPLEX; IT'S POTENTIALLY THREATENING FOR MANY; IT NEEDS TO BE RESOURCED; AND IT TAKES TIME.**

In engaging in change in schools we must never lose sight of the next thing I've learned about teaching and learning, a thing that is often overlooked in

debates about education that I've seen easily reduced to the trivial.

#### **9 EDUCATION IS THE KEY TO IMPROVING THE QUALITY OF LIFE OF INDIVIDUALS AND THE COMMUNITY GENERALLY.**

#### **10 REGULARLY ASK YOURSELF THIS QUESTION: WOULD I BE HAPPY FOR MY CHILD TO BE IN MY CLASS OR TO ATTEND MY SCHOOL?**

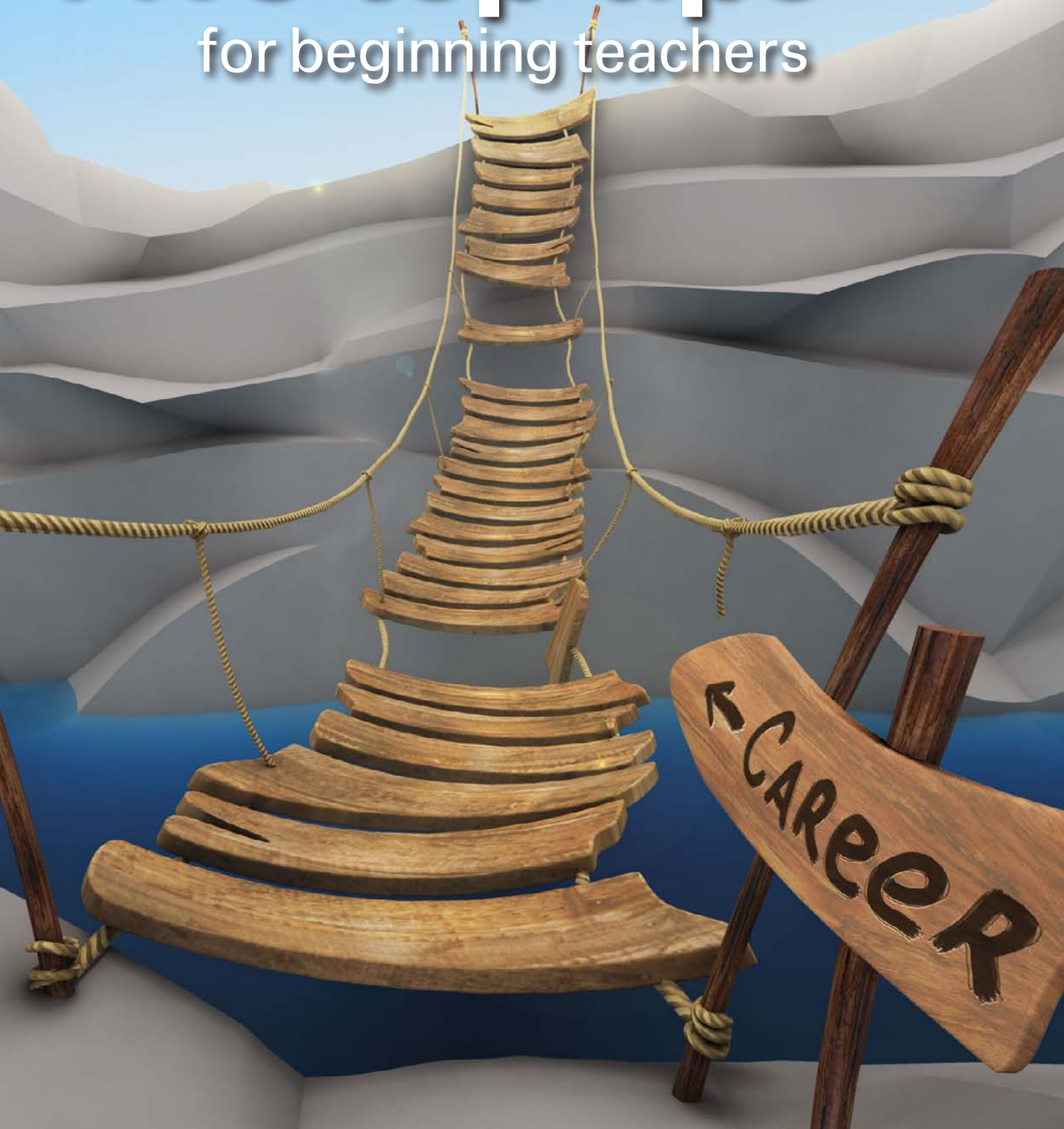
If the answer is no, you have a professional obligation and moral responsibility to do something about it because, as an educator, you have to take professional responsibility for your actions and do the best you can. You're likely to answer yes if, rather than asking your students what they are doing in your class, you ask them what they are learning. Learning, not 'busy work' or 'child minding' is what you are on about – and that learning refers not just to the young people in your class, it also refers to you as a professional educator. ■

**Neil Cranston** is Professor in Educational Leadership and Curriculum at the University of Tasmania, Honorary Professor at the University of Queensland and Adjunct Professor, Department of Education, at Unitec New Zealand. His most recent book, edited with Lisa Ehrich, is *Australian School Leadership Today*, published by Australian Academic Press.



# Five top tips

for beginning teachers



*Teachers in the early stages of their career face myriad challenges, and opportunities, as award-winning Queensland teacher **SANDRA QUINN** well knows.*

Back in 2009, a colleague with whom I'd worked since I began teaching nominated me for an excellence in beginning to teach award. I can hardly say I was confident about the idea, but a few months after the nominations closed I heard I'd been named as a finalist.

I thanked all my colleagues who'd contributed testimonials to the nomination, which really was the best possible acknowledgement I could hope for, and looked forward to attending the awards ceremony, to see which of the other finalists would win. To my astonishment, it turned out to be me.

My colleagues and principal, and my family were confident that I was a serious contender, but not me. I suspect my colleagues on the short list and all those impressive colleagues who'd been nominated felt the same lack of confidence. My lack of confidence in myself got me thinking. We teachers have a lack of confidence in ourselves that, I think, relates to the fact that we're rarely acknowledged in our work, which brings me to my first tip for beginning teachers.

## **Tip 1** **HANG IN THERE, AND ACCEPT WHATEVER ACKNOWLEDGEMENT COMES YOUR WAY**

It would be nice if our employers, colleagues or students and their parents or

caregivers always thanked and recognised us, but there's no financial bonus for ensuring your whole class achieves a pass level; there's no daily, 'Thanks Miss, that was a great lesson,' even if it took you two hours to plan and prepare; your inbox is not filled with emails from parents or caregivers saying their child is energised by your teaching, and progressing in leaps and bounds.

I've learnt that teaching is often thankless work, and you must have extremely high levels of resilience and persistence to make it through. It's through your relentless hard work as a beginning teacher to plan, prepare and research so that you're on par with your more experienced colleagues that you'll establish a strong foundation for teaching in your subject area. In these beginning years, there will be times when the growth shown by your students brings you satisfaction and hopefully leaves you with enthusiasm for a future in education.

When you are acknowledged by your peers or students, though, even in small ways, you should take a moment to reflect on what you've achieved. Every act of acknowledgement, even and maybe especially the very small one, is worth its weight in gold, so enjoy it when it happens, but remember that getting acknowledgement from people is

exactly like getting gold from the ground.

## **Tip 2** **GET TO KNOW YOUR STUDENTS, AND THEIR PARENTS OR CAREGIVERS**

It's important for beginning teachers to get to know their students and their students' parents or caregivers. I completed most of my primary schooling in small state schools in country Queensland, and after my family moved to Brisbane I attended an independent all-girls school.

Although I felt I'd experienced diversity in my own schooling, I came to realise in my first year of teaching that my own experience of schooling was a world away from the students I was to work with, and so were my beliefs about schooling.

I hadn't even heard of the suburb where my school was located. Not only was my first school placement a world away to me geographically, but so were the issues for my students. My greatest problems as a high school student revolved around ensuring I had the right colour ribbon in my hair and balancing as many extracurricular activities as possible.

Some students that I taught in my first year classes were balancing full-time study with part-time work to pay family bills, or studying while caring for ill parents. I was previously unaware of the complex challenges that many students face and was unprepared to accommodate these students.



In my first few years of teaching I launched myself into coaching a number of extracurricular sporting teams and took up many opportunities to attend camps and excursions. I found that by interacting with my students beyond the classroom I gained valuable knowledge about them. My better understanding of their cultural and spiritual beliefs, their family situations and backgrounds, their likes and dislikes heavily influenced my daily teaching practice. As a beginning teacher, this knowledge made a huge difference to my class teaching. Now, as a head of department, catering for students and those students' parents or caregivers at my school is a whole new ball game, but it can't be denied that at any level or position in education, this understanding is critical.

### **Tip 3** BE FAIR AND CONSISTENT

Throughout my own schooling and life experiences before I became a teacher, it became obvious to those around me that I was often ruffled by injustice or unfairness. I knew it was fundamental to me as a beginning teacher that I should endeavour to embed ideals of fairness and justice in my classroom. Instilling values of fairness in a very challenging Year 9 class, though, is harder than it sounds.

Being 'fair' in your dealings with students can mean so many different things: ensuring students are good sports when participating in physical activities; having clear rules so they know

why they may find themselves in trouble; giving them opportunities to learn essential skills to achieve in the subject.

You must assume as a beginning teacher that all students deserve a fair go, and all students want to learn regardless of the behaviours or levels of achievement they may show you on a weekly basis.

I came to realise fairly quickly, that being fair in your dealings with students isn't enough. As my father has told me many times in my first years of teaching, 'You must be fair *and consistent*.' I can now see that his 30-plus years in education were a valuable influence in my first few years of teaching, even if I didn't realise it at the time.

Every time I came home and told him about the woes of my difficult class he just repeated this same message and eventually – to my surprise, and his certainty – my challenging Year 9 class knew and respected me. I believe that the teachers who are most respected by students are those who are *fair and consistent*, and who quite often have been for many a semester.

### **Tip 4** YOUR JOB IS TO TEACH, AND THEN SOME

In only a few years of teaching, I found myself taking on coordination roles and soon enough a head of department position. I suspect such opportunities were offered to me because I was enthusiastic about taking on new tasks and roles through which I felt I could make an improvement of some kind for

my students, my department or my school.

In my first year, I found myself coaching and attempting to organise Year 7 weekly afternoon sport at my high school. I must admit, I experienced a steep learning curve as a teacher who was mainly concerned with surviving in the classroom. If I hadn't had the help of a few individuals with prior involvement in this weekly afternoon sport, there would've been some very unhappy Year 7s.

Later on, I was able to use the skills and knowledge I had gained from this experience to work in some whole-school coordination roles.

It's well worth taking on out-of-class duties for student and school improvement. Whether these be, say, curriculum writing, sports coordination or excursion preparation, don't be afraid to try your hand at an open opportunity. Back yourself, but remember to ask for help from colleagues with expertise in that particular area.

### **Tip 5** ASK FOR HELP

My fifth tip for beginning teachers is closely related to the previous one. In every school you'll find colleagues who have a wealth of knowledge and skills to help you in every facet of your practice. The trouble, however, is that your colleagues keep, develop and typically use their knowledge and skills for the benefit of the individuals they deal with directly. As a rule, though, I've found teachers want to help each other,

so it's worth taking the time to seek out staff outside your own teaching area or beyond your own staffroom. As you do, you'll build a network of experts you can consult for advice and support, and a bank of knowledge and skills on which you can rely. I'm yet to be turned away by a teacher who refused to share something at which they excelled. As a beginning teacher, who knows what challenges will be thrown at you on a daily basis?

However rocky the road, though, you must persist, and you'll be surprised how much you learn in the short space of a few years. ■

**Sandra Quinn** is Head of Department in health and physical education at Forest Lake State High School in Brisbane's southern suburbs and the 2009 winner of the Dr Roger Hunter Excellence in Beginning to Teach Award of the Queensland College of Teachers.

*I'M YET TO BE TURNED AWAY BY A TEACHER WHO REFUSED TO SHARE SOMETHING AT WHICH THEY EXCELLED.*



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# Turning NAPLAN to your advantage

## Using data to personalise learning

*The idea that testing somehow improves learning just by itself is misguided: testing usefully improves learning when it informs teaching.*

**JOHN DAVIDSON** explains.



Unless you've been living under a rock, there's a good chance you've seen and heard words like assessment, testing, NAPLAN, which stands for the National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy, just in case you didn't know, and My School.

They come up a lot in our popular media, but in our profession they can distort discussion about student learning, and our practice. Like many teachers, I see shortcomings in the media-driven view that testing somehow improves learning just by itself, and so, like many teachers, I'm constantly striving to find ways to use test results – NAPLAN and others – meaningfully and sensibly.

Back in 2009 I wrote a short article called 'NAPLAN or napalm?' about my school's response to the publication of the first national test results, from which I developed a one-hour workshop for Victoria's Teacher Learning Network and shared this innovative approach, focusing on the writing test, with other teachers.

### Response to the first NAPLAN results

When the first NAPLAN results were distributed to schools in September 2008 we at Fitzroy High School, Melbourne, were shocked by what we saw as low results from Year 9 students we knew to be literate. We were able to identify several students who

were writing above Level 5.50 of the state school curriculum – the Victorian Essential Learning Standards (VELS) – based on a thorough analysis of work samples, but whose NAPLAN test results put them around Level 4.50 – up to two years behind our own assessment.

In meetings with the principal and the Year 9 team we progressed through several stages – denial, pain and guilt, anger and rationalisation of the 'Yes, but...' variety, until we began a level-headed examination of the actual documents from the NAPLAN Data Service.

Using the full range of reports, from the school summary to the item analysis through to



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10. Managing Stress
11. Will we ever use this?
12. Using Classtime
13. Asking for Help
14. Dealing with Conflict
15. Groupwork Skills
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Figure 1. NAPLAN writing criteria

**Audience** – the writer’s capacity to orient, engage and affect the reader (6 marks)

**Text structure** – organising the story according to standard narrative structure (4 marks)

**Ideas** – covering both creativity and crafting of ideas (5 marks)

**Character and setting** – portrayal of the character, and establishment of a setting (4)

**Vocabulary** – the range and precision of the language (5)

**Cohesion** – controlling the text technically (4)

**Paragraphing** (2)

**Sentence structure** –

- grammatically correct, sound and meaningful sentences (6)
- use of correct punctuation (5)
- accuracy and range of spelling (6)

the student achievement-level report, we constructed an Excel spreadsheet listing student names down the left-hand column, then their actual marks on each of the 10 NAPLAN writing criteria, shown in Figure 1, their total marks, attributed VELS levels and also VELS-level results from the other NAPLAN tests of reading, language conventions and numeracy.

Thus each student’s scores were itemised and could be examined in detail. We also added data such as VELS levels for class assignments, essays and the like, as well as administrative details such as home group and class group.

We then manipulated the spreadsheet in various ways using the ‘sort’ command under ‘data’ on the menu bar to examine the spread of results. It was useful to compare different class groupings, gender differences and so on, although the real purpose was to find the things we could really focus on in the final term.

More than half of the cohort scored lower than we expected. We identified the criteria on which they’d score poorly, discussed them as a team, and constructed personalised English ‘toolbox’ classes for the final term.

This meant running several English classes simultaneously, focused on different aspects of writing. For example, one class looked at audience and vocabulary, another concentrated on punctuation, a third on text structure, and the fourth – students with high test scores – on extended narrative writing. Students were grouped according to their test results from five months earlier in the year.

#### Problems, as they emerged

Predictably, there were problems:

- In the five months since the test, many students had progressed with written literacy.
  - The test itself didn’t accurately measure the competence and capacity of some students, so they were placed in the wrong class.
  - Final term is crowded and short – not the best time to engage Year 9 students in innovative learning.
  - We didn’t have time to fully prepare our teaching team and two of the four class groups struggled to engage with the purpose of the exercise.
- So, a good idea – using the data to personalise the teaching – only partly succeeded in practice. In a perfect world this approach could have been carried over to the same cohort in Year 10, where the insights gleaned from the Year 9 data could have been systematically applied to English teaching from first term onwards. Unfortunately, though, changes in personnel, team structures, leadership and so on, as so often happens in schools, led to the whole project being temporarily shelved. The feedback I’ve had from teachers in my workshops has been similarly mixed – a good idea with a useful purpose is hobbled by time constraints, established class arrangements, inflexible timetables and, most crucially, the huge gap between
- Not all students had sat the test so which toolbox class should they attend?

Figure 2: Excel spreadsheet showing collected and comparable assessment data\*

| First Name | Jet Grp | Group | 07 READ | 07 WRITE | 07 SPL | ZINES | ASSIGNMTS | LIT CHALL | MORE | Fall Down | Global etc | Global Essay | 2 Fingers |
|------------|---------|-------|---------|----------|--------|-------|-----------|-----------|------|-----------|------------|--------------|-----------|
| Millicent  | Jet 3   | 9C    | 5.00    | 5.00     | 5.00   | 5.25  | 5.00      | 5.25      |      | 5.50      | 5.50       | 5.25         |           |
| Nyree      | Jet 3   | 9C    | 5.00    | 5.00     | 5.00   | 5.00  |           | 5.25      |      |           | 5.25       | 5.25         |           |
| Jake       | Jet 3   | 9C    | 3.75    | 4.00     | 4.00   | 5.00  |           |           |      |           | 5.00       | na           | 5.00      |
| Robert     | Jet 3   | 9C    | 5.50    | 5.25     | 5.25   | 5.25  | 5.50      | 6.00      | 6.00 |           |            | 6.25         | 5.75      |
| Olivia     | Jet 3   | 9C    | 4.75    | 4.75     | 4.75   | NS    | 5.00      |           |      | 4.75      | 5.00       | 5.00         | 5.00      |
| Remy       | Jet 3   | 9C    | 5.50    | 5.25     | 5.25   | 5.25  | 5.25      |           |      |           | 5.75       | 6.25         | 5.50      |
| Tara       | Jet 3   | 9C    |         |          |        | 5.75  |           | 5.25      | 5.50 |           | na         | na           | na        |
| Nikkola    | Jet 3   | 9C    | 5.75    | 6.00     | 5.25   | 5.75  |           | 5.75      |      |           | 6.00       | 6.75         |           |
| Matthew    | Jet 3   | 9C    | 4.50    | 4.50     | 4.50   | NS    |           |           |      |           | 5.25       | 5.50         |           |
| Mary       | Jet 3   | 9C    | 5.00    | 5.00     | 5.00   | 5.25  | 5.25      |           |      | 5.50      | 5.50       | 6.25         |           |
| Taliesin   | Jet 3   | 9C    | 4.75    | 4.75     | 4.75   | 5.25  |           |           |      | 5.00      | 5.25       | 5.00         |           |
| Angus      | Jet 3   | 9C    | 5.00    | 5.00     | 5.00   | 5.25  | 5.25      | 5.50      |      | 5.25      | 5.50       | 5.75         |           |
| Carl       | Jet 3   | 9C    | 5.25    | 4.75     | 5.00   | 5.00  | 5.00      |           | 5.25 |           | 5.25       | 5.75         |           |
| Matthew    | Jet 3   | 9C    | 5.00    | 5.00     | 5.00   | 5.25  | 5.25      |           | 5.50 | 5.50      | 5.50       | 5.50         | 5.25      |
| Kate       | Jet 1   | 9C    |         |          |        | 5.50  | 5.50      | 5.75      | 5.75 | 5.50      | 6.00       | 6.75         | 5.75      |
| Miles      | Jet 3   | 9C    | 4.75    | 4.75     | 5.00   | 4.50  | 5.25      |           |      |           | 5.25       | 5.25         |           |
| India      | Jet 3   | 9C    |         |          |        |       |           |           |      |           |            | na           | 5.25      |
| Phoebe     | Jet 3   | 9C    | 5.00    | 5.25     | 5.00   | 5.25  | 5.25      |           |      | 5.50      | 5.50       | 5.75         |           |

the test in May and the arrival of the results in September.

Interestingly, the Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority (VCAA) has now made available a guide to help teachers interpret their data

and use it diagnostically. This is available for download from their website and follows a broadly similar approach to ours. It's also noteworthy that a wider range of data reports are now available from the VCAA, making

it easier to use NAPLAN results diagnostically.

### Collecting and using data

In Victoria, the Department of Education and Early Childhood



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Figure 3: Diagnostic analysis of student performance\*

| Item Number  | 7 | 11 | 17 | 5 | 18 | 22 | 2 | 10 | 8 | 12 | 13 | 9 | 14 | 25 | 3 | 15 | 16 | 21 | 4 | 19 | 23 | 1 | 20 | 26 | 24 | 6 | 27 |
|--------------|---|----|----|---|----|----|---|----|---|----|----|---|----|----|---|----|----|----|---|----|----|---|----|----|----|---|----|
| Answer Key   | C | D  | B  | C | D  | BC | A | A  | D | C  | B  | B | C  | A  | C | D  | A  | B  | C | C  | D  | A | D  | C  | B  | B | D  |
| JENKS        | ✓ | ✓  | ✓  | ✓ | ✓  | ✓  | ✓ | ✓  | ✓ | ✓  | ✓  | ✓ | ✓  | ✓  | ✓ | ✓  | ✓  | ✓  | ✓ | ✓  | ✓  | ✓ | ✓  | ✓  | ✓  | ✓ | ✓  |
| REMPEL       | ✓ | ✓  | ✓  | ✓ | ✓  | ✓  | ✓ | ✓  | ✓ | ✓  | ✓  | ✓ | ✓  | ✓  | ✓ | ✓  | ✓  | ✓  | ✓ | ✓  | ✓  | ✓ | ✓  | ✓  | ✓  | ✓ | ✓  |
| BROUHARD     | ✓ | ✓  | ✓  | ✓ | ✓  | ✓  | ✓ | ✓  | ✓ | ✓  | ✓  | ✓ | ✓  | ✓  | ✓ | ✓  | ✓  | ✓  | ✓ | ✓  | ✓  | ✓ | ✓  | ✓  | ✓  | ✓ | ✓  |
| BLACKSHEAR   | ✓ | ✓  | ✓  | ✓ | ✓  | ✓  | ✓ | ✓  | ✓ | ✓  | ✓  | ✓ | ✓  | ✓  | ✓ | ✓  | ✓  | ✓  | ✓ | ✓  | ✓  | ✓ | ✓  | ✓  | ✓  | ✓ | ✓  |
| KITCHIN      | ✓ | ✓  | ✓  | ✓ | ✓  | ✓  | ✓ | ✓  | ✓ | ✓  | ✓  | ✓ | ✓  | ✓  | ✓ | ✓  | ✓  | ✓  | ✓ | ✓  | ✓  | ✓ | ✓  | ✓  | ✓  | ✓ | ✓  |
| LUBIN        | ✓ | ✓  | ✓  | ✓ | ✓  | ✓  | ✓ | ✓  | ✓ | ✓  | ✓  | ✓ | ✓  | ✓  | ✓ | ✓  | ✓  | ✓  | ✓ | ✓  | ✓  | ✓ | ✓  | ✓  | ✓  | ✓ | ✓  |
| STANDIFORD   | ✓ | ✓  | ✓  | ✓ | ✓  | ✓  | ✓ | ✓  | ✓ | ✓  | ✓  | ✓ | ✓  | ✓  | ✓ | ✓  | ✓  | ✓  | ✓ | ✓  | ✓  | ✓ | ✓  | ✓  | ✓  | ✓ | ✓  |
| KASER        | ✓ | ✓  | ✓  | ✓ | ✓  | ✓  | ✓ | ✓  | ✓ | ✓  | ✓  | ✓ | ✓  | ✓  | ✓ | ✓  | ✓  | ✓  | ✓ | ✓  | ✓  | ✓ | ✓  | ✓  | ✓  | ✓ | ✓  |
| RUGGIERI     | ✓ | ✓  | ✓  | ✓ | ✓  | ✓  | ✓ | ✓  | ✓ | ✓  | ✓  | ✓ | ✓  | ✓  | ✓ | ✓  | ✓  | ✓  | ✓ | ✓  | ✓  | ✓ | ✓  | ✓  | ✓  | ✓ | ✓  |
| STANLEY      | ✓ | ✓  | ✓  | ✓ | ✓  | ✓  | ✓ | ✓  | ✓ | ✓  | ✓  | ✓ | ✓  | ✓  | ✓ | ✓  | ✓  | ✓  | ✓ | ✓  | ✓  | ✓ | ✓  | ✓  | ✓  | ✓ | ✓  |
| BOSCHERT     | ✓ | ✓  | ✓  | ✓ | ✓  | ✓  | ✓ | ✓  | ✓ | ✓  | ✓  | ✓ | ✓  | ✓  | ✓ | ✓  | ✓  | ✓  | ✓ | ✓  | ✓  | ✓ | ✓  | ✓  | ✓  | ✓ | ✓  |
| WEATHERHOLT  | ✓ | ✓  | ✓  | ✓ | ✓  | ✓  | ✓ | ✓  | ✓ | ✓  | ✓  | ✓ | ✓  | ✓  | ✓ | ✓  | ✓  | ✓  | ✓ | ✓  | ✓  | ✓ | ✓  | ✓  | ✓  | ✓ | ✓  |
| GLOVER       | ✓ | ✓  | ✓  | ✓ | ✓  | ✓  | ✓ | ✓  | ✓ | ✓  | ✓  | ✓ | ✓  | ✓  | ✓ | ✓  | ✓  | ✓  | ✓ | ✓  | ✓  | ✓ | ✓  | ✓  | ✓  | ✓ | ✓  |
| LIPSKI       | ✓ | ✓  | ✓  | ✓ | ✓  | ✓  | ✓ | ✓  | ✓ | ✓  | ✓  | ✓ | ✓  | ✓  | ✓ | ✓  | ✓  | ✓  | ✓ | ✓  | ✓  | ✓ | ✓  | ✓  | ✓  | ✓ | ✓  |
| OLNEY        | ✓ | ✓  | ✓  | ✓ | ✓  | ✓  | ✓ | ✓  | ✓ | ✓  | ✓  | ✓ | ✓  | ✓  | ✓ | ✓  | ✓  | ✓  | ✓ | ✓  | ✓  | ✓ | ✓  | ✓  | ✓  | ✓ | ✓  |
| SCHILLING    | ✓ | ✓  | ✓  | ✓ | ✓  | ✓  | ✓ | ✓  | ✓ | ✓  | ✓  | ✓ | ✓  | ✓  | ✓ | ✓  | ✓  | ✓  | ✓ | ✓  | ✓  | ✓ | ✓  | ✓  | ✓  | ✓ | ✓  |
| BOTTOMLEY    | ✓ | ✓  | ✓  | ✓ | ✓  | ✓  | ✓ | ✓  | ✓ | ✓  | ✓  | ✓ | ✓  | ✓  | ✓ | ✓  | ✓  | ✓  | ✓ | ✓  | ✓  | ✓ | ✓  | ✓  | ✓  | ✓ | ✓  |
| EBY          | ✓ | ✓  | ✓  | ✓ | ✓  | ✓  | ✓ | ✓  | ✓ | ✓  | ✓  | ✓ | ✓  | ✓  | ✓ | ✓  | ✓  | ✓  | ✓ | ✓  | ✓  | ✓ | ✓  | ✓  | ✓  | ✓ | ✓  |
| BEDDINGFIELD | ✓ | ✓  | ✓  | ✓ | ✓  | ✓  | ✓ | ✓  | ✓ | ✓  | ✓  | ✓ | ✓  | ✓  | ✓ | ✓  | ✓  | ✓  | ✓ | ✓  | ✓  | ✓ | ✓  | ✓  | ✓  | ✓ | ✓  |
| BONHOMME     | ✓ | ✓  | ✓  | ✓ | ✓  | ✓  | ✓ | ✓  | ✓ | ✓  | ✓  | ✓ | ✓  | ✓  | ✓ | ✓  | ✓  | ✓  | ✓ | ✓  | ✓  | ✓ | ✓  | ✓  | ✓  | ✓ | ✓  |
| DUBEY        | ✓ | ✓  | ✓  | ✓ | ✓  | ✓  | ✓ | ✓  | ✓ | ✓  | ✓  | ✓ | ✓  | ✓  | ✓ | ✓  | ✓  | ✓  | ✓ | ✓  | ✓  | ✓ | ✓  | ✓  | ✓  | ✓ | ✓  |
| SABLAN       | ✓ | ✓  | ✓  | ✓ | ✓  | ✓  | ✓ | ✓  | ✓ | ✓  | ✓  | ✓ | ✓  | ✓  | ✓ | ✓  | ✓  | ✓  | ✓ | ✓  | ✓  | ✓ | ✓  | ✓  | ✓  | ✓ | ✓  |
| JARMAN       | ✓ | ✓  | ✓  | ✓ | ✓  | ✓  | ✓ | ✓  | ✓ | ✓  | ✓  | ✓ | ✓  | ✓  | ✓ | ✓  | ✓  | ✓  | ✓ | ✓  | ✓  | ✓ | ✓  | ✓  | ✓  | ✓ | ✓  |
| ALMOND       | ✓ | ✓  | ✓  | ✓ | ✓  | ✓  | ✓ | ✓  | ✓ | ✓  | ✓  | ✓ | ✓  | ✓  | ✓ | ✓  | ✓  | ✓  | ✓ | ✓  | ✓  | ✓ | ✓  | ✓  | ✓  | ✓ | ✓  |
| DAUGHTRY     | ✓ | ✓  | ✓  | ✓ | ✓  | ✓  | ✓ | ✓  | ✓ | ✓  | ✓  | ✓ | ✓  | ✓  | ✓ | ✓  | ✓  | ✓  | ✓ | ✓  | ✓  | ✓ | ✓  | ✓  | ✓  | ✓ | ✓  |
| HILTNER      | ✓ | ✓  | ✓  | ✓ | ✓  | ✓  | ✓ | ✓  | ✓ | ✓  | ✓  | ✓ | ✓  | ✓  | ✓ | ✓  | ✓  | ✓  | ✓ | ✓  | ✓  | ✓ | ✓  | ✓  | ✓  | ✓ | ✓  |
| REITZ        | ✓ | ✓  | ✓  | ✓ | ✓  | ✓  | ✓ | ✓  | ✓ | ✓  | ✓  | ✓ | ✓  | ✓  | ✓ | ✓  | ✓  | ✓  | ✓ | ✓  | ✓  | ✓ | ✓  | ✓  | ✓  | ✓ | ✓  |
| GILGOLLY     | ✓ | ✓  | ✓  | ✓ | ✓  | ✓  | ✓ | ✓  | ✓ | ✓  | ✓  | ✓ | ✓  | ✓  | ✓ | ✓  | ✓  | ✓  | ✓ | ✓  | ✓  | ✓ | ✓  | ✓  | ✓  | ✓ | ✓  |

Development (DEECD) has consistently been urging all schools to collect and maintain accessible databases with which to make informed decisions about curriculum, courses and individual students. In my work with teachers and other schools, though, I've been surprised by some inconsistent and ad hoc approaches to assessment data itself. Even if the school leadership has not established comprehensive

arrangements for the collection, sharing and use of assessment data, individual teachers can and should maintain coherent records. Better still, teams of teachers working with the same group of students can easily share their data in order to 'triangulate' their assessments and so make better judgements. The idea of triangulation comes from a measurement analogy – you can't tell how big or how

far away an object is unless you reference it from at least two different survey points. Without triangulation it's like trying to guess how high something is with one eye closed. We can extend this analogy to all forms of student assessment, for example the 2008 NAPLAN tests of my Year 9 students.

A student – let's call him Bobby – scored 4.76 equivalent VELs level on the writing test, but 5.46 on the spelling test and 5.54 on the grammar test. An examination of his mid-year writing class sample indicated a VELs of 5.75. By looking at all these markers together – several vantage points focused on the same student – we can make a balanced assessment of around 5.50: his low NAPLAN test score was clearly flawed in some way; the class item was possibly a one-off 'gem.'

In order to make these balanced or triangulated judgements, though, the teacher must have a collection of valid data. At my school we have several data collections, using either Excel spreadsheets on staff computers, or Googledocs up in 'the cloud.' The simplest version, for English writing, works like this:

- all assessed work is rated by VELs criteria, not by percentages or arbitrary scores
- a range of work samples – essays, notes, drafts, self-

evaluations, book reviews and so on – is collected

- a spreadsheet is created like the one in Figure 2
- the gaps indicate useful data too – was the student absent, or does he or she not complete work?
- the spreadsheet can be colour-coded using the 'conditional formatting' command; for example, all assessments below the expected level can be highlighted so student needs can be more easily recognised.

I keep an Excel spreadsheet like this for all the students and class groups that I teach, and as a team leader I expect and assist my colleagues to do the same. The next stage is to share our information, which can be done face to face at meetings, which is the best option as it involves actual discussion, but also remotely over the internet. We've been using Googledocs.

To do this, a team leader creates an online spreadsheet similar to the one above and 'invites' teachers to view it and contribute. In this way all data from a wider range of sources or classes can be entered and viewed, which makes the triangulation easier and also ensures that the data is still available if the key teacher is, say, on leave or sick, or has gone to another job. The

Googledocs spreadsheet can also be exported as an Excel and downloaded onto your own computer for offline work.

Victoria's DEECD is now rolling out the Ultraset with similar capacities, so all student data will soon be held online in a secure environment.

### Analysing the data

Having collected all this information about student performance, what do we do with it? We originally tried to personalise individual lessons to pick up on those aspects of writing that specific students seemed not to have learnt. This is the main purpose of collecting such data – to support further

learning – although it's also used to report on student progress.

Our school has spent considerable time and effort managing and analysing quite large amounts of student data, with one of our leading teachers developing several Excel-based instruments that can sort and highlight student performance in various ways. With exotic names like the Fitzlator and the Quokka, these instruments are stored on a central server and are basically sophisticated versions of the simple spreadsheet described above. Being school-wide data sets, they rely on input from individual teachers, as well as central data like

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*BY CONSULTING THE VARIOUS SPREADSHEETS, STUDENTS SHARE THE PROCESS OF ANALYSING THEIR OWN PROGRESS AND DECIDING WHERE THEIR LEARNING SHOULD GO NEXT.*

NAPLAN scores, VELs levels and attendance figures generated by roll-marking software.

All students at our school have a personal learning plan, with which they set goals and targets for their own learning. An important step in doing that is to identify their current standard of achievement by referring to the data held in the spreadsheets. By consulting the various spreadsheets, students share the process of analysing their own progress and deciding where their learning should go next.

At team meetings we also use student achievement data to decide on the course structure and lesson content.

### **Analysing student performance**

A new development in some Victorian regions has been the Student Performance Analyser (SPA), a commercial educational tool developed by Philip Holmes-Smith and currently being used by northern metropolitan schools. This tool uses data from the NAPLAN, teacher VELs judgements and on-demand testing to compile personalised profiles on each student. Holmes-Smith's website has a demo version of the SPA where you can get a feel for the way the data is used and presented. It would be a whole-school decision to buy this software, but even the demo website gives teachers,

especially those who work in teams, insights into how to use data intelligently.

You still might have problems like no time in fourth term and the gap between the May test and the September results, but this is where the SPA offers something new – by adapting Lev Vygotsky's concept of the zone of proximal development to help teachers to analyse and use the data. As Figure 3, from the SPA demo, shows, most students have answered the first 12 items correctly – the whole class grasps the concepts tested by those items – but many students have not correctly answered the last six or so items – they may be conceptually too advanced for most kids at this stage of their development. The middle range of items reveals a mix of correct and incorrect answers – this is likely to be the teaching zone, where concepts and skills are accessible and developmentally appropriate, but need further elaboration and explanation.

Using the item analysis report downloaded from the NAPLAN Data Service we can then identify the content of this proximal zone and devise lessons to engage our students in clearer exploration and instruction, rather than wasting time on content they already know or bamboozling them with concepts for which they're not ready.

Approaching the data in this way, whether with the SPA or

with our own school-based tools, enables us to turn the paradigm of personalisation towards something more like a differentiated curriculum. It also means we can identify common confusion and misconceptions that can be planned for across whole year levels. ■

**John Davidson** is the Teaching and Learning Leader at Fitzroy High School, Melbourne.

\* The names in Figures 2 and 3 are fictitious.

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Davidson, J. (2009). *NAPLAN or napalm? TLN Journal*. 16(1): 3-5.

NAPLAN Data Service. (2004). *Using NAPLAN data diagnostically: An introductory guide for classroom teachers*. Melbourne: Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority.

Available at [www.vcaa.vic.edu.au/vcaa/prep10/nAPLAN/schools/teachersguide-usingnaplandata.pdf](http://www.vcaa.vic.edu.au/vcaa/prep10/nAPLAN/schools/teachersguide-usingnaplandata.pdf)

#### LINKS

[www.tln.org.au](http://www.tln.org.au)

[www.naplan.edu.au](http://www.naplan.edu.au)

[www.vcaa.vic.edu.au](http://www.vcaa.vic.edu.au)

For more on Philip Holmes-Smith's Student Performance Analyser, visit [www.sreams.com.au](http://www.sreams.com.au)

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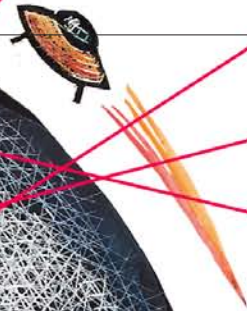
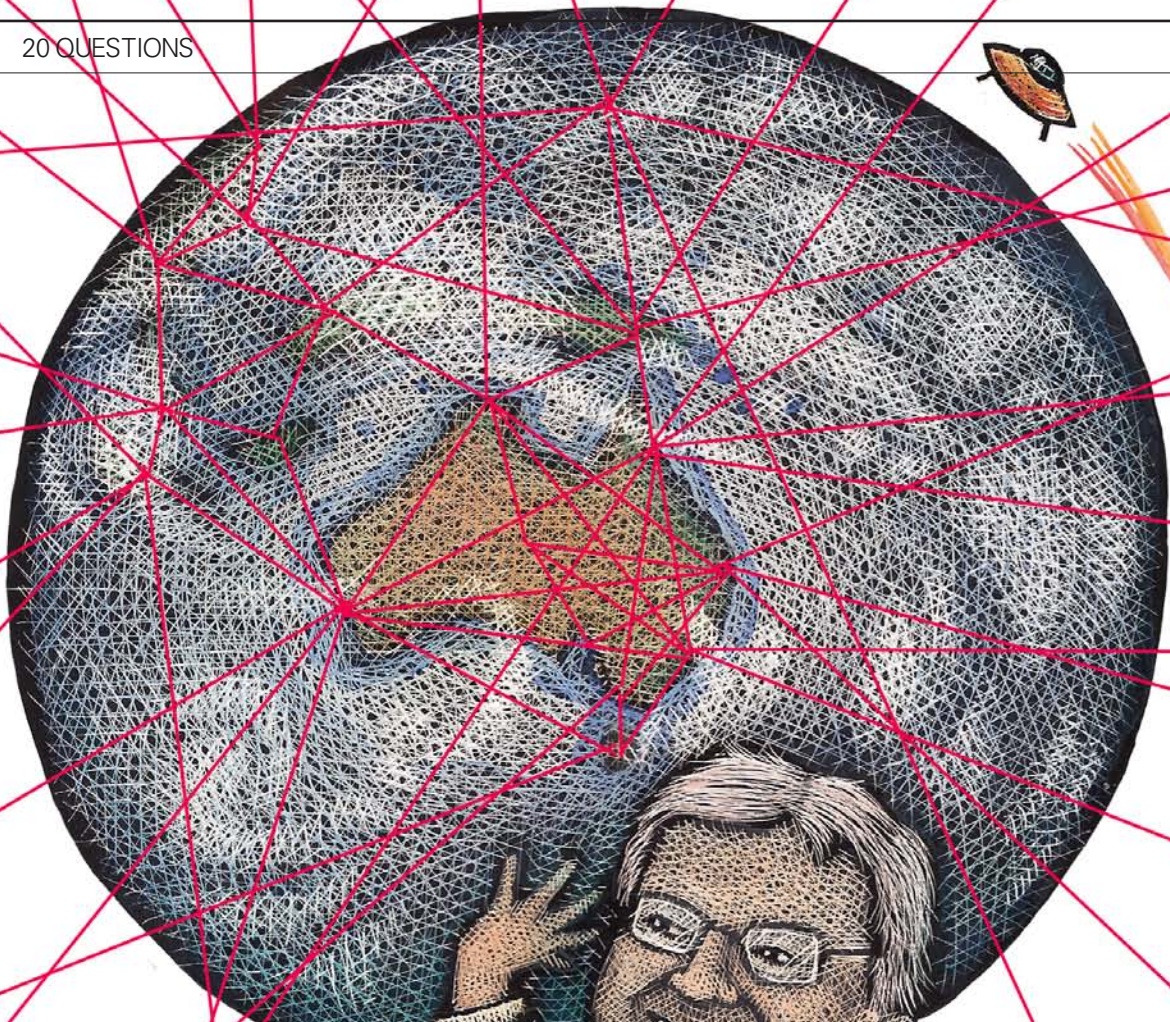
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# 20 questions\*

## with Brian Caldwell

*Exactly who was behind one of the most successful flying saucer hoaxes in Victoria? Who was a long distance runner inspired by the great John Landy? Who may single-handedly popularise curling? It's Brian Caldwell. **DAVID RISH** uncovers more about the man you thought you knew.*

*In your role as Managing Director of Educational Transformations, you're at the forefront of mapping the future directions of schooling in Australia. Just reading the list of seminars, lectures and so on you give each year makes me feel dizzy. We'll get back to the serious business later in the interview, but for my first question, with apologies, what's the worst hotel room you've ever stayed in?*

Once on a three week consultancy in a developing nation (unnamed!) I was to be accommodated in a newly built hotel. The walls and floor were concrete; that and a bed. On trying to sleep, I found cockroaches all over me.

*Have you ever done the rock star thing and, in frustration, tossed a television out of a hotel room window?*

Nothing like that, but out of the aforementioned hotel next

morning I went. So, I threw myself out.

*Before becoming an academic you were a classroom science teacher. How did you cope with those moments of frustration, annoyance, that occur, I assume, with even the best of teachers?*

Teaching between 1963 and 1968 in Victoria, conditions for teaching and relationships between teachers and students were different to those experienced now. I just loved classroom teaching. I taught in two schools, one metropolitan and one country high school, not disadvantaged but difficult. It was frustrating to coordinate a lab with 52 students, and no lab assistant. To organise experiments with safety in mind was very difficult.

*Why science for you?*

My father was a school principal, but he'd been a science and mathematics teacher and that

was one factor. My mother was also a teacher. At Geelong High School I had outstanding teachers and I had a propensity for maths which led me into the field. My high school education was balanced between science and the arts. My passions nowadays reflect that balance.

I didn't consider any field of work apart from teaching. With teaching, the department paid university fees and so on, so people of modest backgrounds could get there. Scholarships could be offered in a targeted way now, especially in the field of maths and science. HECS (Higher Education Contributions Scheme) fees could be waived for talented high school leavers, and a living and accommodation allowance paid.

*Can you recall something memorably naughty you did as a student?*

I helped organise one of the most successful flying saucer hoaxes in Victoria. In July of 1957 and



March of 1958 there were reports of flying saucers over Geelong and the surrounding area. This involved a large number of senior students. It became particularly 'naughty' when on the second night, a number of us used teachers' names when we phoned in our reports and the next morning they read of their 'misdeeds' in the *Geelong Advertiser*. We understood the air force base at nearby Avalon Airfield sent up a plane to check out the flying saucers. The hoax helped us develop planning skills, creative thinking, communication and media skills, but we do kind of regret using the teachers' names. It happens to be the 100th anniversary of the founding of Geelong High School and a journalist is chasing up the details now.

*There are sportspeople who are naturally talented, and others who work to achieve success: Is there such a thing as a naturally gifted teacher? What needs to be done to keep a teacher evolving and growing over a career?*

I don't think there are born teachers. The capacity one has in terms of teaching skills comes from your growing environment and preparation as well as support in the profession. This support can be ongoing learning and development. Also a teacher should have a wide range of experiences and have the

opportunity to teach in different settings.

International travel is important. I taught and studied in Canada for 13 years and that experience was transforming in terms of my future work and ideas with respect to teaching. A teacher should have a large range of interests and a willingness to work in different settings. Looking at folk going into teaching, a large percentage who have worked in other fields bring that life experience to their work. It is different for students who go straight from school into teaching.

*Is there a sports team you'd have loved to be a member of?*

My main sport was athletics. I dabbled in long-distance running and had aspirations to be a really good runner. I had inspirational folk around. In 1956, when I was in Year 11, the Geelong Guild Amateur Athletic Club had six members in the Olympic team, including Don Macmillan and John Landy. John Landy put it in my head that I could be a very good middle-distance runner. He was a fine role model, and a teacher at Geelong Grammar School. Don Macmillan was also a teacher and successful middle-distance runner. I dropped out at uni but later on became a very slow marathon runner.

*Can you come up with a slogan to spruik the profession?*

Change the world.

*What are two of your passions outside of education?*

Arts and sports. My wife and I are really avid theatre goers. Concerts of the classical kind, jazz, and visual things: all are really strong for me. With sport, aside from my long distance running, I'm a spectator. You can't afford not to be a Geelong Football Club supporter growing up in Geelong. We're also Melbourne Victory members – the whole family.

*Can you tell me about a teacher who really inspired you as a school boy?*

One outside my school was John Landy, previously mentioned, who was doing great things like breaking the four-minute mile. In Years 11 and 12 I had a gifted physics teacher, Alan Cracknell, and similarly gifted maths teacher, Ian Tyler. Without their quality teaching I don't think I could have succeeded at uni level. Their teaching was organised and well-planned. They explained things in simple terms. They set and expected high standards. Tom Moore was another; my history teacher at Geelong High School. He built for me a love of history. You can't do much in planning the future without a deep understanding of the past.

*Who was a particular mentor during your early teaching?*

Mentoring wasn't around even informally when I began

teaching. What I do recall is that I became a science and maths teacher when there was an acute shortage of maths and science teachers so there were close bonds with young peers who supported each other – collegial support.

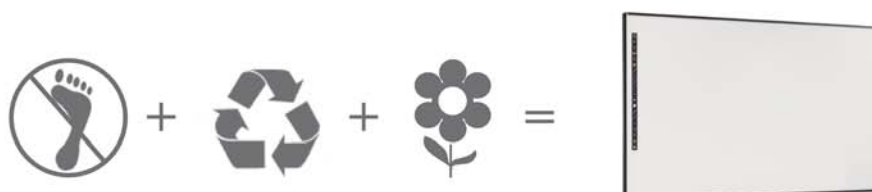
*What's something that happened from your days in front of the class that still makes you laugh?*

Outside the classroom it was the camaraderie of teachers, particularly in my first school in Melbourne and then later in Canada. There were wonderfully good times during the school day and outside. In Canada, I was invited to join a staff team to compete in curling, a kind of lawn bowls on ice. Our team did quite well but I caused a lot of mirth in my attempts to develop the basic skills. I may take it up again as there is an excellent ice facility here in Melbourne and we may form a family team.

*I mentioned earlier your role as Managing Director of Educational Transformations. One of the principal changes you see coming is schools becoming autonomous entities, making decisions about their direction themselves and building relationships with various bodies in their locale. In the autonomous school, will classroom teachers who are already stretched for time be expected to devote more time to council meetings, raising funds and so on?*

No, no, no, no! Your question is very 20th century. I've visited thousands of schools over 50 years all around the world and I've never come across two schools that were the same, whether public or private. Every child has different needs and aptitudes so learning experiences should be personalised. A school needs a mixture of staff skills, supplies and abilities in a unique mix.

*I BECAME A SCIENCE AND MATHS TEACHER WHEN THERE WAS AN ACUTE SHORTAGE OF MATHS AND SCIENCE TEACHERS SO THERE WERE CLOSE BONDS WITH YOUNG PEERS WHO SUPPORTED EACH OTHER – COLLEGIAL SUPPORT.*



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It should never be done from a centrally determined group. A high level of autonomy is needed if we are to personalise learning.

There has to be a partnership between schools and their community if schools are to be valued and thus get support and meaningful links with their communities.

My father was the principal of a technical school, a very good one, and back then all technical schools had to have a school council and had to have representatives of business and industry on board. Some very influential people, household names, served. My father was in control of his budget. An enormous amount was lost when technical schools were abolished. Schools all offered the same things afterwards. We recognise, 30 years later, that technical schools had it right.

All schools are different and central control stands in the way of schools delivering educational uniqueness. The driving force of a school should always be to achieve better outcomes for children.

*In a world where schools move ahead based on the strength of their partnerships, what happens to those students who, for whatever reasons, go to a school where meaningful partnerships don't happen?*

It is more difficult in small locations, rural and remote

areas. A one-size-fits-all approach doesn't work. What you can have, if you take a state like Tasmania, is partnerships with industries that are statewide which can support the smaller schools. In district high schools with a farm, such as Sheffield, there can be natural partnerships with the agricultural industry. Rosebery District High, when my co-author Jim Spinks was principal, had very close links with the mining industry. Key personnel from there were on the council. Rosebery's council became a model for school councils in New Zealand, England and other countries. Jim is currently in Finland teaching school leaders in that country's remarkable system.

*In a school operating 24 hours a day, what might be happening at 6pm? At 6am?*

It's not schools operating 24 hours a day but learning that can occur anytime, anywhere, 24 hours a day.

*People who don't approve of the move towards schools forming two-way beneficial relationships with outside organisations often cite the case of an organisation like McDonalds sponsoring a school. How might a partnership with a McDonalds work successfully for both parties?*

McDonalds complained once when I talked about this and two senior staff came out to

set me straight on the matter. One thing that is working is its program on mathematical skills for the 75,000 kids working for them. Secondary schools can access this program and the ratings by principals surveyed after doing this have generally been very positive. Half a million kids have learned from this. The other kind of partnership is local fundraising if you can advertise products in the school. Not too many schools do this and I'm not sure this is such a good thing compared to the former, which is a natural connection with a big employer of youth. Many civic leaders have built skills working for McDonalds. Ronald McDonald House provides a residence for families of young cancer sufferers, with an educational component that is very hard to match.

One of my roles is an associate director of the Specialist and Schools Academies Trust in England. Starting under Margaret Thatcher and continuing under Tony Blair, every school was encouraged to form partnerships with business and industry. More than 3,000 or 95 per cent of high schools have partnerships related to their specialisations. Schools address a national curriculum but have specialisations in 12 areas. For example, sport, music, technology, maths, science. Each school has a

mature partnership that makes sense: music specialisation with a symphony orchestra; drama with the Royal Shakespeare Company; sport with a local football or athletic club.

*Should a hard-working, dedicated teacher worry about the changes ahead in Australian schools?*

I'm not sure that 'worry' is the right word; 'be challenged' is better. My answer is that there will be continuous changes in the years ahead. The traditional school is being transformed. The challenge teachers face is to work in changing situations. There are lots of things presently forcing schools in one direction, such as national testing. I'm not opposed to national testing, but the focus shouldn't be on learning to pass tests. Entering the new workforce requires new ways of learning in a 21st-century framework.

I don't think teachers need to be scared about the future. It's daunting but exciting to think that children entering primary school this year will still be working in 2070. We have to shape attitudes and abilities to work in new settings, and we don't know what those settings will be like in 20 years, let alone 50.

*Professor Brian Caldwell, can I get back to you in 2070 for a progress report?*

(LAUGHS) Well, I'm only thinking of next year at the moment.

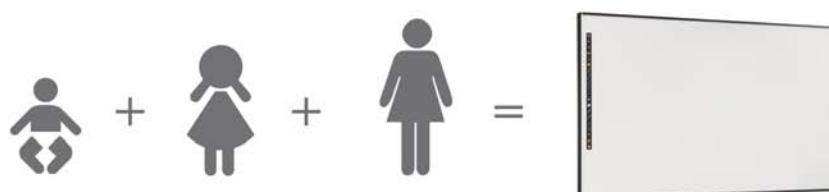
*Thank you very much. ■*

**David Rish** is an award-winning writer for children and a regular contributor to *Inside Teaching*.

*\* Okay, okay, if you counted the questions you'd know there are fewer than 20.*

*Image by Gregory Myer.*

***I'M NOT OPPOSED TO NATIONAL TESTING, BUT THE FOCUS SHOULDN'T BE ON LEARNING TO PASS TESTS. ENTERING THE NEW WORKFORCE REQUIRES NEW WAYS OF LEARNING IN A 21ST-CENTURY FRAMEWORK.***



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# Big fish, little pond

*Research indicates there are clear benefits to being the 'big fish in a little pond.'* **DANIELLE RODDICK** reports.

Is it better for a student to be a 'big fish in a little pond' and feel self-assured and comfortable with their abilities, or to be the 'little fish in a big pond' and continually be challenged and encouraged to improve?

This was the question at the back of Dr Marjorie Seaton's mind when she embarked on a University of Western Sydney (UWS) study, which included a review of the international research into the academic self-concepts of high-ability students.

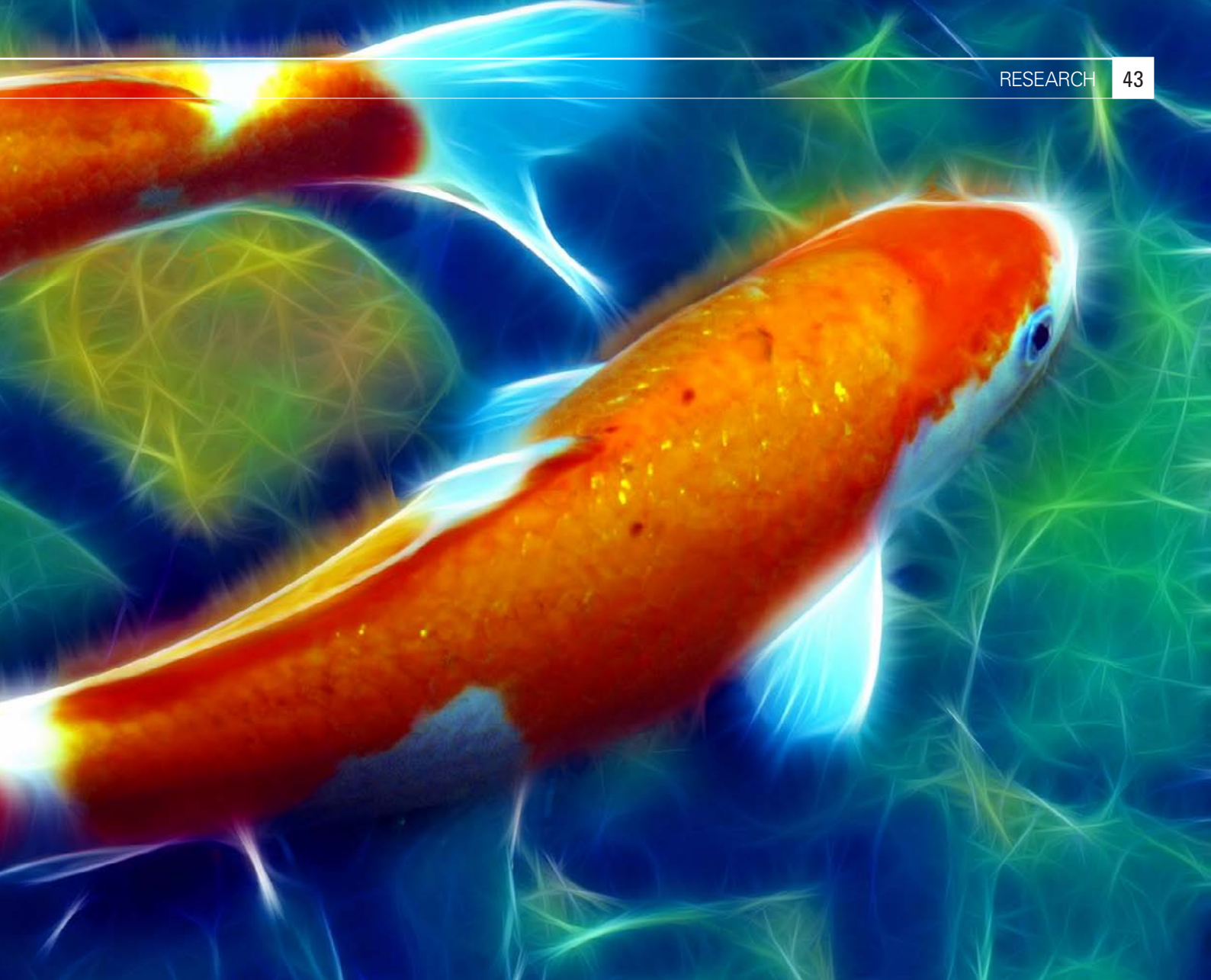
Dr Seaton says her review overwhelmingly demonstrates that a student's academic self-concept has a reciprocal relationship with their academic performance.

'A student's academic self-concept – that is, how they think and feel about their academic abilities – tends to grow in accordance with their academic results,' says Dr Seaton, who is based in the Educational Excellence and Equity Research Program within the UWS Centre for Educational Research.

'If their academic results improve, their perceptions of their abilities will also improve. And if their perceptions of their abilities improve, so too will their academic results.'

This reciprocal nature of academic performance and self-concept is great news for the 'big fish' of the classroom – those students who experience minimal competition from their peers and therefore have fewer opportunities for their confidence in their abilities to be challenged.

For the 'little fish,' however, the picture is not so positive. The threat is that, by continually comparing their performance



to the performance of their classmates, they may descend into a cycle in which their self-concept and their performance are continually impaired.

As part of her PhD study, Dr Seaton analysed the self-concepts of students in 41 countries. The findings revealed that, in 38 of the 41 countries, irrespective of culture or economic background:

- students in high-ability settings have lower academic self-concepts than students of similar ability in low- or average-ability settings, and
- the higher the average ability of the student cohort in a

school, the greater the negative influence on students' academic self-concept.

Dr Seaton's results raise important questions about the 'big-fish-little-pond-effect' and the suitability of the Australian selective school system for some students.

In Australia today, most students are educated within the comprehensive system, although a small number of selective schools are also in operation. New South Wales has the most selective schools, with 21 fully selective and 23 partially selective schools, while

Queensland and Victoria each have three.

Ability grouping also occurs at the class level in Australia. Within the comprehensive system, students are segregated or streamed according to ability – typically for maths and English and often for additional academic subjects – and, to combat the growing popularity of academically selective schools in NSW, some comprehensive high schools have introduced segregated classes for high-ability students.

'Consider,' says Dr Seaton, 'two equally able students who are in their first year of high school.



Both were at the top of their year group in primary school, having excelled in school-based tests, standardised state-wide tests, and external academic competitions.

'Since they both have high ability, their academic self-concepts are high; however, one student attends the local comprehensive high school, while the other attends an academically selective school in the next suburb.

'The student in the comprehensive high school is performing well academically, and so feels good about her abilities. Also, compared to the other students in the school, this student is among the most intelligent, being at the top of the year group – a big fish in a little pond.

'The student who attends the selective high school is performing around the middle of the year group. There are many other extremely intelligent students at this school, and competition for grades is fierce. Compared to these other students, this student feels that she's not very intelligent – a little fish in a big pond.'

Compared to the student who attends the local comprehensive school, Dr Seaton says the academic self-concept of the student who attends the selective school is lower, which can have a negative flow-on effect on the

other life choices that the student will make.

'International research shows that students in high-ability environments tend to have lower self-concepts, lower grades and lower ambitions than students of similar intelligence in less competitive environments,' says Dr Seaton. 'In effect, students with high self-concepts are more likely to aspire to attend university, and more likely to have high career aspirations.

'In the classroom, it can be all too easy to focus on your students' academic performance and improving grades – particularly when the threat of league tables looms; however, it's important for teachers to remind themselves that academic self-concept is also pivotal, and should have as much emphasis placed on it.'

Dr Seaton is now investigating the performance of high-ability students in selective and comprehensive schools in a four-year study, funded by the Australian Research Council (ARC). The research project, 'Realising gifted students' potential: Elucidating psychosocial determinants and the impact of different educational settings on educational outcomes and psychosocial wellbeing,' is expected to be completed in 2011.

'I believe there is a place for selective schools in Australia and that, for some students, they can

be of immense benefit,' says Dr Seaton.

'There has, however, been very little current research on the impact of academic segregation on students and yet, without concrete evidence, we continue to expand the selective school system and mainstream schools continue to group students together on the basis of ability.'

Her ARC-funded study is attempting to address the gaps in the research literature and develop knowledge by which educators can make informed decisions about the future of the education system in Australia, and parents can make informed decisions about the futures of their children.

For Dr Seaton, the important policy aim is to have an education system that allows every child to reach his or her full potential. As she explains, 'Every student – gifted and talented, struggling or average – should have the opportunity to reach the limits of their capacity.'

Dr Seaton's study was awarded the Australian Association for Research in Education's 2009 Doctoral Research in Education Award for most outstanding Australian doctoral dissertation in education. ■

**Danielle Roddick** is a Senior Media Officer in the Office of Public Affairs, International and Development Division, at the University of Western Sydney.

## PROFESSOR GUY CLAXTON

Professor of Learning Sciences, University of  
Winchester UK

## PROFESSOR HOWARD GARDNER

Hobbs Professor of Cognition and Education at the  
Harvard Graduate School of Education and Senior  
Director of Harvard Project Zero

### *Building Learning Power:*

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Learn how to build a powerful learning culture in your school.

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- Review what works (and what doesn't) in building students' learning power;
- Discover some of the smart things that schools are doing around the world; and
- Take away a dozen practical ideas for building powerful learning cultures in schools.

#### DATES

|                         |           |
|-------------------------|-----------|
| Tuesday 15 March 2011   | Brisbane  |
| Wednesday 16 March 2011 | Sydney    |
| Wednesday 23 March 2011 | Melbourne |
| Friday 25 March 2011    | Adelaide  |



Guy Claxton is Professor of Learning Sciences and Co-Director of the Centre for Real-World Learning at the UK's University of Winchester. His *Building Learning Power* programme has boosted young people's learning confidence and capacity in hundreds of schools across the UK, Australia and New Zealand. Guy has worked directly with teachers and policymakers in every state of

Australia. *What's the Point of School?*, his 2008 book, is highly praised by Howard Gardner, David Perkins, Susan Greenfield and Sir Ken Robinson.

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[www.acerinstitute.edu.au](http://www.acerinstitute.edu.au)  
or phone (03) 9277 5403**

Australian Council for Educational Research

### *The Disciplined Mind:*

#### **Educational Visions for the Future**

##### **Session 1:** Five Minds for the Future

In this seminar Gardner will discuss the developmental sequence of the five kinds of minds (disciplined; synthesizing; creating; respectful; and ethical). He will address the ways in which they may conflict with or complement one another and why they are important to the educational development of our students.

##### **Session 2:** Teaching for Understanding

In *The Disciplined Mind*, Gardner argues that K-12 education should strive for deep understanding of three classical realms: truth, beauty and goodness. Through powerful examples of his approach, Gardner describes an education that preserves the strengths of traditional humane education while preparing younger generations for the challenges of the future and the steps educators should take to preserve the vital core of these classical virtues.

#### DATES

|                       |           |
|-----------------------|-----------|
| Monday 16 May 2011    | Brisbane  |
| Tuesday 17 May 2011   | Sydney    |
| Thursday 19 May 2011  | Melbourne |
| Friday 20 May 2011    | Adelaide  |
| Monday 23 May 2011    | Perth     |
| Wednesday 25 May 2011 | Singapore |



The author of twenty-five books translated into twenty-nine languages, and several hundred articles, Howard Gardner is best known in educational circles for his theory of multiple intelligences, a critique of the notion that there exists but a single human intelligence that can be assessed by standard psychometric instruments. His latest book *Five Minds for the Future* was published in

April 2007. His latest co-authored book *Multiple Intelligences Around the World* was published mid 2009.



# News

## Minority rule

'It's going to be beautiful in its ugliness.' So said Rob Oakeshott, one of the key independents in the Commonwealth House of Representatives who, with Tony Windsor and Andrew Wilkie, and the Greens' Adam Bandt, finally backed Julia Gillard's Labor minority government in September.

Oakeshott and Windsor said their support was influenced by the likelihood of a stable Labor government that would be able to work with the Greens in the Senate, and by Labor's \$10 billion package for regional Australia that promises to address education as well as health and infrastructure, including broadband.

Simon Crean in the new Cabinet portfolio of Minister for Regional Australia has promised 'a bottom-up approach so that Canberra is not imposing top-down approaches.'

Critically, Oakeshott and Windsor have not promised to support Labor's policies, only 'confidence and supply,' so the chances that the minority Labor government might impose top-down approaches were pretty slim in the first place.

## Depression high for cyberbullied students

*New research suggests cyberbullied students are more likely to experience depression than the victims of face-to-face bullying, reports Steve Holden.*

Unlike traditional forms of bullying, students who are the targets of cyberbullying at school are at greater risk for depression than are the cyberbullies who victimise them, according to researchers at the United States National Institutes of Health.

'Cyberbully victims reported higher depression than cyberbullies or bully-victims, which was not found in any other form of bullying,' write Jing Wang, Tonja Nansel and Ronald Iannotti in the *Journal of Adolescent Health*.

'Unlike traditional bullying which usually involves a face-to-face confrontation, cyber victims may not see or identify their harasser; as such, cyber victims may be more likely to feel isolated, dehumanised or helpless at the time of the attack,' the researchers conclude.

According to an earlier study by Wang, Nansel and Iannotti published last year, the prevalence of bullying is high, with 20.8 per cent of US secondary school students reporting having been bullied

physically at least once in the previous two months, 53.6 per cent having been bullied verbally, 51.4 per cent having been ostracised and 13.6 per cent having been cyberbullied.

The researchers analysed data on US students collected in the 2005/2006 Health Behaviour in School-aged Children Study, an international study of adolescents in 43 countries.

For physical violence, no differences were found in depression scores among bullies, victims, or bully-victims. For verbal and relational bullying, victims and bully-victims reported higher levels of depression than bullies.

For cyberbullying, however, frequent victims reported significantly higher levels of depression than frequent bullies and marginally higher depression than frequent bully-victims. The researchers say the finding that victims of cyberbullying report higher depression scores than cyberbullies is distinct from traditional forms of bullying and merits further study.

## IN BRIEF

# New curriculum by December

*Minister for Schools Peter Garrett expects to burn the midnight oil to get the national curriculum ready by December, as **Steve Holden** reports.*

Prime Minister Julia Gillard appointed her new Commonwealth Minister for Schools, Early Childhood and Youth, Peter Garrett, in September, splitting school education from higher education. The PM announced that Chris Evans would be her Minister for Jobs, Skills and Workplace Relations, hurriedly adding Tertiary Education to the title after intense lobbying from the higher education sector.

Curiously, Evans is responsible for the Building the Education Revolution program, but explained, 'Peter Garrett's going to focus on schools because we have a very ambitious agenda there.'

That ambitious agenda includes the national curriculum, which Garrett says is expected to be ready by December. Education stakeholders have questioned the pace of the Commonwealth's reform. 'If we are up a little bit later and working a little bit harder on the way through, then that's not a bad thing, given how important it is,' Garrett told the *Sydney Morning Herald*.

According to the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority, the English, mathematics, science and history curriculum to Year 10, achievement standards, work samples and a range of information and curriculum planning resources will be available from December.

The Australian Council of the Deans of Science has written to Garrett, urging him to postpone implementation for up to 12 more months to allow for further revision of the science curriculum. In their letter, the deans also say there are not enough science teachers with the expertise needed to teach the new curriculum.

The deans also say the draft curriculum 'appears to have been driven more by expediency and the preconceived ideas of the writers. It does not set out a coherent scheme of interest drivers, engaging students in science, and in particular does not satisfactorily articulate the nature, scope and depth of scientific concepts that students are expected to have acquired.'

## Strong showing

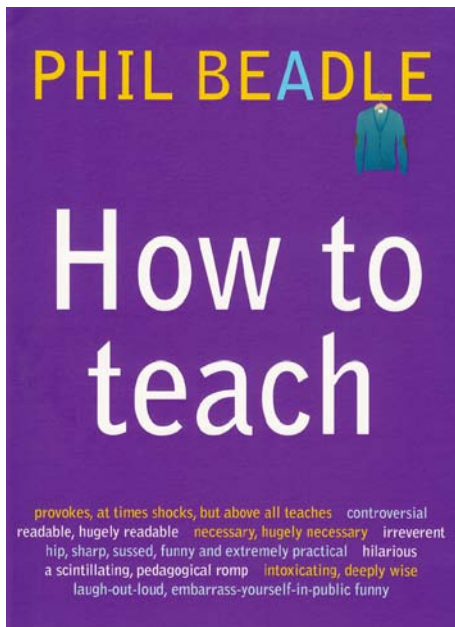
Australian students won the silver medal at this year's F1 in Schools Technology Challenge in Singapore last month. Zer0.9, a collaborative team with students from Pine Rivers State High School, Brisbane and the Indian School, Dubai, finished second, while Basilisk Performance, from Sebastopol College in Ballarat, Victoria, finished fifth.

## Hands down?

A 'remarkable experiment' at Hertswood School in Hertfordshire, Great Britain, requiring students to write answers on small whiteboards rather than put their hands up has found that students 'learned at twice the speed of peers not taking part,' according to London's *Daily Mail*. The hands-down approach, initiated by Deputy Director of the London University Institute for Education Dylan Wiliam for a BBC2 documentary called *The Classroom Experiment*, also required the 25-strong class of 13-year olds to participate in a physical education session at the beginning of each day. 'The changes we made gave the quieter children confidence, made all pupils know they are expected to participate and created a more supportive atmosphere,' Wiliam told the *Daily Mail*.



# Reviews



## How to Teach

By Phil Beadle

Published by Crown House

ISBN 9 781 845 903 930

RRP \$42.95

Reviewed by Steve Holden

Like Andrea Berkeley, who wrote the foreword to this book, reading *How to Teach* made me laugh out loud on a crowded train. Phil Beadle – one of the teachers on *The Unteachables* on ABC TV last year – works hard to make *How to Teach* a pleasurable read.

In a world where you can read any number of 'practical survival guides,' Beadle's practical focus is striking. As he observes, 'Unlike many experts in education I am still a serving schoolteacher. As such, (the insights in the book) are not something I once thought 15

years ago that no longer apply; I am using the techniques in this book, in a school toward the bottom of the league tables, on the day you are reading this.'

Beadle's emphasis on techniques to do with the management of students, subject knowledge, teaching methods and organisation, lesson planning and finally assessment, and his background discussion of these, is spot on.

Here's his first rule on the management of students: turn up. 'You may think you're...doing a crap job when you are in front of the class,' he observes, 'but you're worse when you're not there.... If you get a reputation with the children as a good attender, it will pay dividends in terms of behaviour.'

Not incidentally, Beadle begins this book with a vignette from his first class, En10a2, and points out, 'I was about their 15th English teacher in the space of a year' and they were 'all too used to adults letting them down.' The backhanded compliment from En10a2's 'Big Isaac': 'Christ! Beadleman. Don't you ever take any time off? When are we going to get a break from you?'

Beadle's section on discipline is fine indeed and worth more than the usual day's training – this is in Britain – 'that generally consists of sitting mute, watching Antipodean behavioural guru, Bill Rogers,

effortlessly controlling a class of miniature, compliant Aussies' who are 'clearly middle class and obviously easy to manage.'

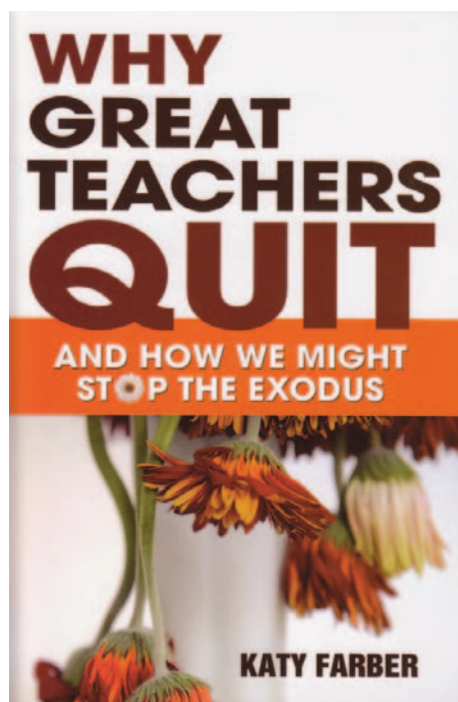
The first level in Beadle's 'gradational/assertive/non-confrontational' discipline involves "'body language" telling-off,' particularly proximity, or 'standing slightly too close' – powerful because students know it's a technique only used by teachers with a mature command of behaviour management.

There's much besides classroom management that's useful in this book that offers you useful rules and tools, but also gets you thinking about why you teach the way you do.

Beadle stresses the value of good assessment, which 'is the most important thing you do as a teacher.' Towards the end of the book, he takes us through the Year 10 work of one of his current Year 11 students, and in doing so tells a powerful story. I read this going home on the train – and nearly missed my station.

I'm not sure that Beadle's tendency to hammer at Britain's prescriptiveness is relevant to Australian readers, and there are errors which you'd usually hope to catch, but these are minor problems.

This is a valuable book for early career teachers.



### Why Great Teachers Quit

By Katy Farber

Published by Corwin

ISBN 9 781 412 972 451

RRP \$47.95

Reviewed by Steve Holden

One in five teachers in the United States leave the profession in their first year, while three in five teachers quit the profession in their first five years, according to page ix of *Why Great Teachers Quit*. Then again, apparently, one in three leave in their first three years, but only up to 50 per cent quit in their first five years, according to pages xiii and xvii.

The data, it seems, could bear a little analysis. The problem with *Why Great Teachers Quit*, though, is that, as Katy Farber

explains, 'This is not meant to be a research-laden, academic book. It is meant to be a fresh, in-the-trenches view.'

The in-the-trenches view is generally negative. Farber insists that she doesn't mean to generalise, but her insistence on creating 'composites taken from many communities, many experiences and many interviews' has the effect of creating a generalised, and negative, picture.

The benefit of this approach is that you do get unvarnished truths, but they come at a cost, since they suggest that over-worked teachers everywhere are pressured by standardised testing, poor working conditions, growing expectations, unhelpful parents, red tape and so on.

*Why Great Teachers Quit* shows that teaching is a very hard job, but it doesn't show why great teachers quit. Neither does it show whether the fact that teachers quit is a problem. To do that, you'd need some data addressing attrition in the profession and comparing teaching with other professions.

One of the virtues of *Why Great Teachers Quit* is that it addresses the stereotype that teachers have it easy. I'm not sure, though, that Farber gains much traction from vignettes that suggest that other professions have it easy. It's quite possible that,

in comparison, they do, but this book can't make that case unless it undertakes the comparisons.

The shame here is that this could have been a valuable book. Many of the recommendations of the self-help variety and many of those aimed at school leaders and policymakers are useful. Chapters likewise conclude with useful 'words of wisdom from veteran teachers,' 'success stories' and 'silver linings.'

That said, this book struggles. The default position is that every teacher who quits was a great teacher, and maybe they were, but Farber offers no evidence, beyond one tantalising reference to a review of the research by Cassandra Guarino, Lucrecia Santibañez, Glenn Daley and Dominic Brewer.

### REFERENCES

Guarino, C., Santibañez, L., Daley, G. & Brewer, D. (2004). *A review of the research literature on teacher recruitment and retention. Prepared by the RAND Corporation for the Education Commission of the States. Santa Monica, CA: RAND. Available at [http://rand.org/pubs/technical\\_reports/TR164/index.html](http://rand.org/pubs/technical_reports/TR164/index.html)*

**Steve Holden** is the Editor of *Inside Teaching*.



# Diary

## 29 OCTOBER

### World Teachers' Day

Inaugurated in 1994 by the United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organisation, World Teachers' Day is as good a day as any to acknowledge the efforts of your colleagues. The nation's various teacher registration or accreditation bodies have suggestions and competitions to help you celebrate. See the websites for details. In the crowded school diary, it's also National Bandanna Day, so maybe you'll be given a bandanna to wear to show young people living with cancer they are not alone.

**websites** [www.qct.edu.au/wtd](http://www.qct.edu.au/wtd)  
[www.schools.education.tas.gov.au/trb](http://www.schools.education.tas.gov.au/trb)  
[www.vit.vic.edu.au/wtd10](http://www.vit.vic.edu.au/wtd10)  
[www.wacot.wa.edu.au](http://www.wacot.wa.edu.au)

## 29 OCTOBER

### National Bandanna Day

National Bandanna Day is CanTeen's biggest annual fundraiser and awareness day. CanTeen's goal this year is to sell a million bandannas to support programs for young people who have been diagnosed with cancer or who have an immediate family member who has been diagnosed with cancer or has died as a result of cancer.

**website** [www.bandannaday.com.au](http://www.bandannaday.com.au)

## 8-14 NOVEMBER

### Planet Ark National Recycling Week

Get your school involved in the Big Aussie Swap during National Recycling Week. Bring along quality items you no longer want, exchange each item for a token then swap the token for items brought by others. On 12 November, declutter your filing cabinets to give used paper another life and raise office paper recycling rates in the Friday File Fling.

**phone** 1300 733 712  
**website** <http://recyclingweek.planetark.org>

## 25-27 NOVEMBER

### International Association for the Study of Cooperation in Education 2010 Conference: Cooperative Learning: Pedagogy, policy and practice

Find out about the latest research on cooperative learning, communities of practice, approaches to catering for diversity in classrooms and much more.  
**place** University of Queensland School of Education, Brisbane  
**email** [iasceconference@uq.edu.au](mailto:iasceconference@uq.edu.au)  
**website** [www.uq.edu.au/education/index.html?page=120110](http://www.uq.edu.au/education/index.html?page=120110)

## 28 NOVEMBER—2 DECEMBER

**Australian Association for Research in Education National Conference: Making a difference**  
 Researchers from Australia and overseas will address issues of inclusion and diversity in terms of new approaches to teaching and learning, and innovative forms of leadership and management  
**place** University of Melbourne  
**phone** 03 9417 3555  
**email** [info@ncsonline.com.au](mailto:info@ncsonline.com.au)  
**website** [www.aare.edu.au/AARE2010](http://www.aare.edu.au/AARE2010)

## 29–30 NOVEMBER

### The Victorian Information Technology Teachers Association Conference and Expo: Engaging generation now

Learning and teaching in the digital age offers multiple possibilities for teachers to reflect upon new ways of engaging students for effective learning, including: information and communication technology (ICT) and leadership, infrastructure, pedagogy and professional learning; national curriculum and interdisciplinary developments and their implications; digital learning; mobile devices in the curriculum; digital citizenship and collaborative learning. Register for a third full day, free, on 1 December to participate in an ICT Bus Tour,

particularly suited to regional educators.

**place** Caulfield Racecourse, Melbourne

**website** [www.vitta.org.au/conferenceinfo](http://www.vitta.org.au/conferenceinfo)

### 3 DECEMBER

**Has the ANZAC legend changed over 95 years? Simpson Prize**

The History Teachers' Association of Australia Simpson Prize is an opportunity for your Year 9 or 10 students to write an essay of 900 to 1200 words, or prepare an audio-visual presentation of not more than 15 minutes, that addresses the question, 'Has the ANZAC legend changed over 95 years?' Entries close 3 December.

**phone** 03 9417 3422

**email** [simpson@htav.asn.au](mailto:simpson@htav.asn.au)

**website** [www.simpsonprize.org](http://www.simpsonprize.org)

### 10–13 JANUARY

**Australian Geography Teachers' Association National Conference: Geography, going national**

With the introduction of the Australian Geography curriculum in 2012, this conference is expected to draw widespread interest from educators in all states and territories. The conference will provide an opportunity for educators to become familiar with the nature of the K-12 Australian Curriculum for geography and find out what resources and support are available for implementation

over coming years. Conference participants will receive free K-12 resources to support the implementation of geography.

**place** Scotch College, Adelaide

**email** [agta2011@scotch.sa.edu.au](mailto:agta2011@scotch.sa.edu.au)

**website** [www.agta.asn.au/conf2011](http://www.agta.asn.au/conf2011)

### 4 MARCH

**Schools Clean Up Day**

Clean Up Australia's Schools Clean Up Day on Friday, 4 March is about inspiring people in schools to care for their environment by working together to clean up a site that is special for them. Clean Up Australia Day follows on Sunday, 6 March. Register online for a schools clean up kit with practical advice to plan for the day and a schools climate kit to help you address relevant learning outcomes. There's also 'Clean Up the River,' an interactive recycling game for primary students.

**website** [www.cleanupaustraliaday.org.au/about/about-the-event/clean-up-for-schools](http://www.cleanupaustraliaday.org.au/about/about-the-event/clean-up-for-schools)

### 23 MARCH

**National Ride2School Day**

National Ride2School Day is a national behaviour change initiative which aims to increase the number of students riding, or walking, to school. Pioneered by Bicycle Victoria, National Ride2School Day is now, well, national.

**website** [www.bv.com.au/ride2school](http://www.bv.com.au/ride2school)

### 10-12 MAY

**NAPLAN**

National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy for students in Years 3, 5, 7 and 9 will be held on Tuesday 10, Wednesday 11 and Thursday 12 May. The genre of the writing task will change to a persuasive style of writing from 2011. Visit [www.naplan.edu.au/test\\_administration\\_authorities.html](http://www.naplan.edu.au/test_administration_authorities.html) to identify contacts for your jurisdiction.

**website** [www.naplan.edu.au](http://www.naplan.edu.au)

### 3-10 JULY

**NAIDOC Week**

Join the National Aboriginal Islander Day Observance Committee to celebrate NAIDOC week and promote a greater understanding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and our culture.

**website** [www.naidoc.org.au](http://www.naidoc.org.au)

### 4 AUGUST

**Australian Mathematics Competition**

The Australian Mathematics Competition, the largest single event on the Australian education calendar, aims to highlight the importance of mathematics, give students an opportunity to discover talent in mathematics and provide resources for the classroom and general discussion.

**email** [mail@amt.edu.au](mailto:mail@amt.edu.au)

**website** [www.amt.edu.au](http://www.amt.edu.au)





# Anonymity is not ignominy

**WENDY HARMER** explains why it's good to be one of the crowd.

There are some times when it's obvious that your darling child – the apple of your eye – is, after all, pretty bloody average.

When this blinding realisation occurs, it can come in a good or a bad way.

Let's start with the bad.

If your child has spent years perfecting the art of tempering chocolate and is beaten on *Junior Masterchef* by some jumped-up, bright-eyed mini-monster whose parents are obviously win-at-all-costs control freaks... it's bad.

When your freakishly-talented child-prodigy athlete is tripped just before they have the chance to score that truly extraordinary goal that would put them in the ranks of a junior Maradona, Rooney or Beckham... it's also bad. No. More than that. It's infuriating!

However, when you sit in the audience to watch a massed choir made up of students from some 40 public schools and, from where you are sitting, your kid's face is a tiny blob no bigger than your little fingernail, and you finally understand that she is, after all, just one note in all the music that has ever been played since time began... that's good.

More than that. It's exhilarating.

Has there ever been a sound more thrilling to the human ear than hundreds of children singing together as one? I doubt it.

Recently I was in the audience at the Sydney Opera House Concert Hall for a presentation by ArtsNorth, New South Wales. Some 700 kids from public schools took the stage for a choral presentation. And, just to make it even harder for us,

the proud parents, they all wore identical black t-shirts.

It took us a while to find our daughter up there in the back row, but after some urgent semaphore we identified her. It was like finding one grain in a bowl of rice.

We were, initially, disappointed. Why was she right up the back? It was the same bloody place she was last year! Why didn't the kids have different-coloured t-shirts so you could at least tell what school they were from? She was barely visible between the taller girls. Why hadn't someone thought to get her to stand down the front where everyone could see what a little star she is?

And then they started to sing, and, just like watching a flurry of rice pelted at a celebration, it wasn't about that single

grain, but the glorious effect of a handful of hope thrown into the breeze. It was a memorable gesture of pure, human joy.

I say 'memorable,' and of course we wanted to record the moment for posterity, but the bores at the Opera House said we couldn't use our cameras. Like most parents, we did anyway, but the more we tried to zoom in on our daughter, the more she disappeared into the mass of humanity on stage.

Right there was another lesson.

There are just some times when you can't record with any clarity what your child's presence offers to the greater good. You just have to take pleasure in the fact that she or he is there, anonymous.

Anonymity is an ignominy for this generation of children. With the rise and rise of social media comes the idea that every child, every human, can have some say and make their presence felt through blogging, posting and tweeting.

We blame this desire for stardom on our children, but c'mon, let's face it... it's us. We're the ones who are making the transition from the small suburbs and country towns where everyone knew each other by name to the internet revolution where there are a trillion videos on YouTube.

Kids know – probably now more than ever – how insignificant they are. Modern technology has taught them that. When I was a kid growing up in a one-service-station town, I believed I could conquer the world. My children now have some 2.9 billion other kids in their faces and know how daunting that dream is. There are any number of talent shows to tell them over and over that stardom is a one-in-a-billion chance.

So that's why I loved to see that massed choir. There was an affirmation there that being one of the crowd can still bring satisfaction and a sense of achievement.

I thank the teachers from ArtsNorth for giving all the children from our public schools the opportunity to come together and experience the thrill of cooperation and harmony for a greater purpose – although, I have to say, in all modesty, that my daughter was the best on the night! ■

**Wendy Harmer** is one of Australia's best known humourists and authors, and a regular columnist for Inside Teaching.

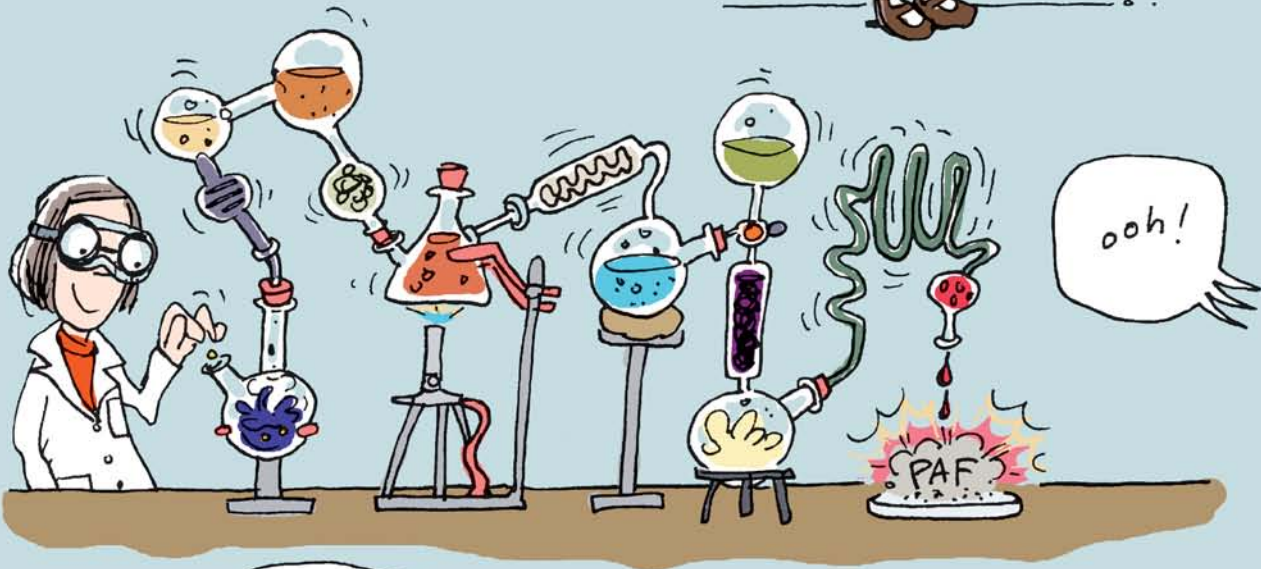
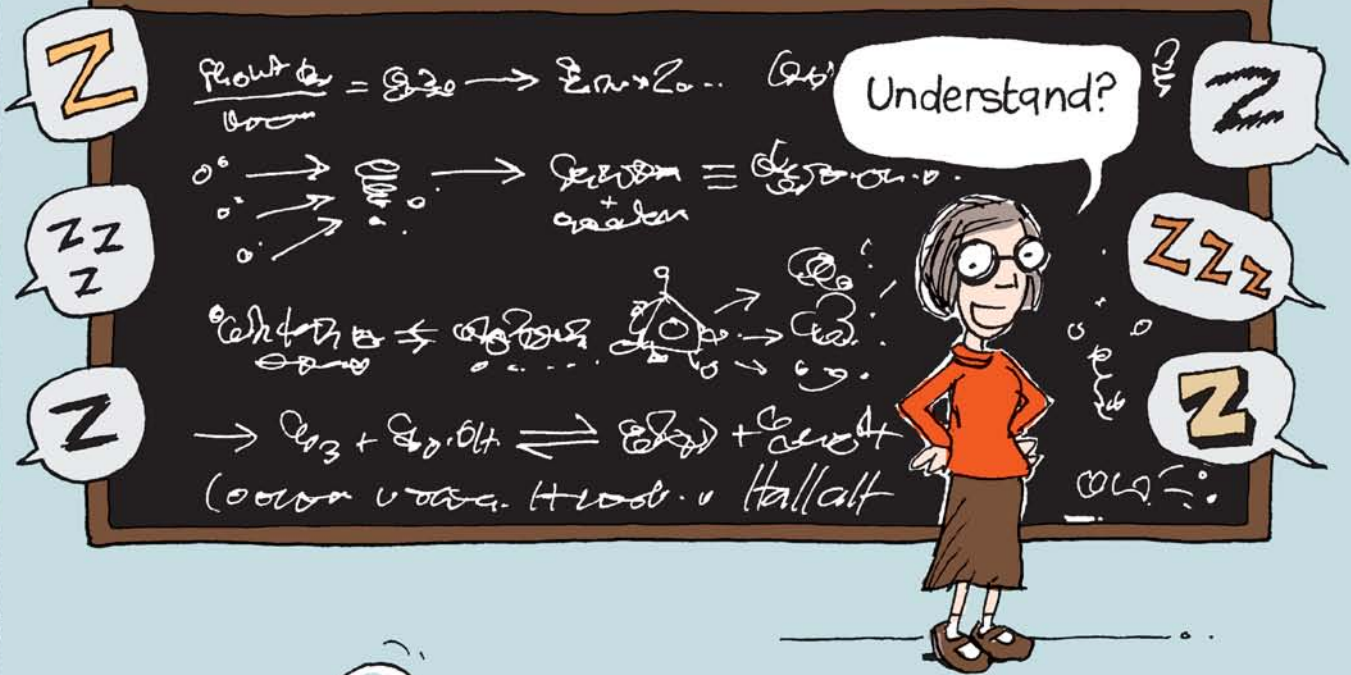
*Pictured, the ArtsNorth Primary Choral Concert at the Sydney Opera House in September. Photo by NSW Department of Education and Training courtesy of ArtsNorth.*

*THERE ARE JUST SOME TIMES WHEN YOU CAN'T RECORD WITH ANY CLARITY WHAT YOUR CHILD'S PRESENCE OFFERS TO THE GREATER GOOD. YOU JUST HAVE TO TAKE PLEASURE IN THE FACT THAT SHE OR HE IS THERE, ANONYMOUS.*



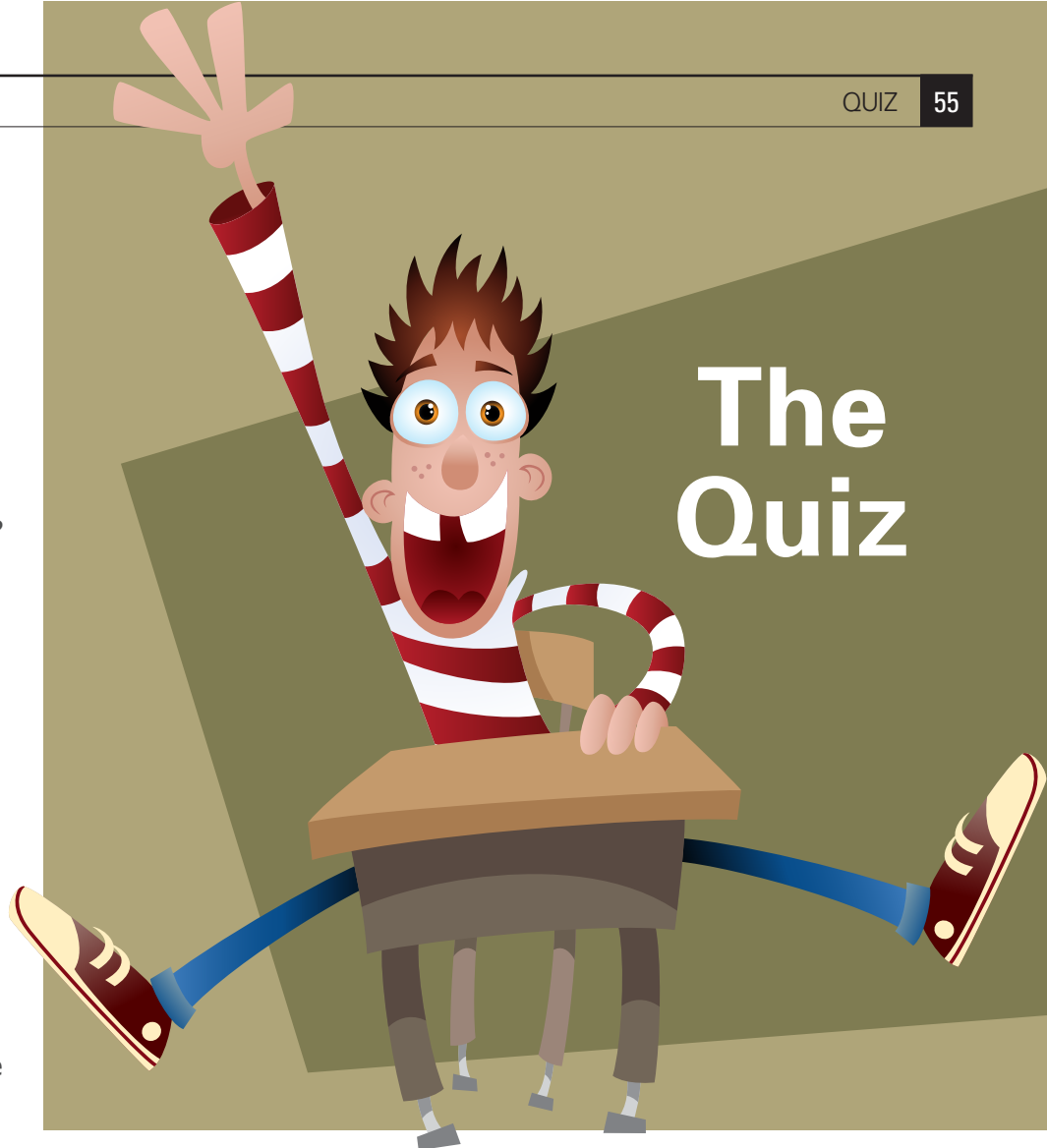
# Behind the lines

by Alex Hallatt





# The Quiz



**1** What national education reform will be delayed, from October until December this year?

**2** What new approach is being used in Western Australian schools to address illegal drug use by students?

**3** In August, a Tasmanian secondary school teacher conducted blood tests on her students as part of a science class; how many students did she test using just two unsterilised lancets?

**4** Students from which educational institution will soon have a paper on K 1-6, a rare type of planetary nebula, published by the Astronomical Society of Australia?

**5** National tax laws make it difficult for philanthropists to donate to government schools, while independent schools are able to gain 'charitable organisation' tax status and receive funds from alumni. Which Australian state has recently established a charitable foundation to facilitate philanthropic donations to government schools?

**6** How much money has that state government committed to match donations?

**7** According to the Australian Education Union, what should businesses and philanthropists who donate money to the charitable foundation be able to specify?

**8** What can't the donations be spent on?

**9** According to a study of more than 4,000 British children, how many genes does scientist Professor Robert Plomin believe control intelligence: two or three; about a hundred; or several thousand?

**10** How many of these have been identified?

**11** Approximately how many individual genes does a human have: 25,000; 250,000; or 2.5 million?

**12** Name the three top-performing states or territories, on average, in the 2010 National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN).

**13** Which two states or territories showed most improvement?

**14** Regarding NAPLAN, who said: 'It's far more beneficial for schools to just have students not turn up on the day.... Parents can request that their children are exempt from the test; more are now conscientiously objecting against the assessment'?

**15** Who said, of having educational posters on the walls during NAPLAN tests and teachers reading questions aloud to students: 'That's not cheating, that's just personal support'?

## ANSWERS

1. The release of the new national curriculum for years Kindergarten to Year 10 in English, maths, science and history; 2. locker and bag raids using police sniffer dogs; 3. 19; 4. Sydney Girls High School; 5. Victoria; 6. \$2 million; 7. which school the money should support; 8. teacher salaries or capital works; 9. several thousand; 10. 200; 11. 25,000; 12. the Australian Capital Territory, New South Wales and Victoria; 13. Queensland and the Northern Territory; 14. Australian Primary Principals Association president Leonie Trimper; 15. Queensland Teachers Union president Steve Ryan.